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Photo of Dr. Michele Harper included

**Michele Harper's *The Beauty in Breaking* wins The Athenaeum of Philadelphia
2020 Literary Award**

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA—April 12, 2021—The Athenaeum of Philadelphia, among the nation's oldest membership libraries, presented its 2020 Literary Award to Michele Harper's *The Beauty in Breaking* at its Annual Shareholder's Meeting this evening. The Literary Award honors the year's most outstanding literary work by a Philadelphia-area author or a work that is about Philadelphia. Harper's book shared the short-list with works by celebrated Philadelphia writers Susan Abulhawa and Kiley Reid. *The Beauty in Breaking* is published by Riverhead Books, an imprint of Penguin Books.

For the first time, the award comes with a \$1,000 cash prize as well as the traditional public lecture and reception sponsored by the Charles Wharton Stork Fund. Established in 1949, the Athenaeum Literary Award recognizes books of outstanding literary merit by Philadelphia area authors as well as books whose subject matter focus upon the city of Philadelphia. Winners are chosen by a panel of Athenaeum shareholders, avid readers who serve voluntarily.

Dr. Harper gave a stirring reading from the introduction to her book, which charts her own emotional and spiritual growth as she details with pathos and compassion the lives of many who have passed through the various emergency rooms where she has worked as a physician.

Dr. William Jantsch held the honor of introducing Dr. Harper on behalf of the awards panel. He stated that the Literary Award jury found *The Beauty in Breaking* "a memoir that is a courageous, beautifully written, and powerfully uplifting." The Annual Meeting occurred virtually to comply with covid-19 safety guidelines.

The Athenaeum of Philadelphia will schedule Dr. Harper's public lecture for Fall 2021. Executive Director Beth Hessel said that she hopes the event will be in-person with a live-streamed option. In recognition of his role in establishing the Literary Award, presentations are usually part of the Charles Wharton Stork Memorial Lecture program which was endowed in 1983 by his children. Dr. Stork (1881-1971) was a member of the board of directors of the Athenaeum from 1919 until 1968.

Of her win, Dr. Harper said, "There is a magical quality about being recognized by an establishment that is both a museum and a library-- art and the written word are two of my

favorite things. And, yes, I recognize the redundancy in that statement. The enchantment of this award is deepened by the fact that it is from an institution in Philadelphia. As I discuss in my book, my time in Philadelphia began when I was at a new juncture: starting over in a new job, in a new city, on the heels of a divorce. I had no idea at that time that my spiritual journey would include this book or recognition from The Athenaeum. This distinction feels like a sign that I have answered the call of my work here. Which is to say, this feels like sweet completion and the release to exciting, fresh paths ahead.”

Previous recipients have included many of the region’s most celebrated authors and thinkers, including Catherine Drinker Bowen; Edmund N. Bacon; Chaim Potok; E. Digby Baltzell; John A. Lukacs; Roland M. Frye; Camille Paglia; Steve Lopez; Stephen Fried; Steven Ujifusa; Liz Moore; Erica Armstrong Dunbar; Patrick Spero; and Madeline Miller.

The other short-listed and highly recommended books for the 2020 Literary Award were Susan Abulhawa’s *Against the Loveless World* (Simon & Schuster) and Kiley Reid’s *Such a Fun Age* (G.P. Putnam’s Sons).

At the Annual Meeting, the Art & Architecture Literary Award also announced its 2020 winner. The award went to Lynn Miller and Therese Dolan for their book, *Salut!: France Meets Philadelphia* (Temple University Press), which celebrates the French influence on Philadelphia’s artistic, social, and political culture.

The Athenaeum of Philadelphia has multiple copies of the short-listed and winning books in its circulating library for member check-out. The Literary Awards committee also encourages the public to obtain copies from area independent bookstores.

The Athenaeum of Philadelphia, founded in 1814, is a vibrant, Philadelphia-centered and member-supported circulating library, research archive and cultural forum housed in a National Historic Landmark building on Washington Square. Much of its programming is open to the public, and new members are always welcome.

For more information about The Athenaeum or to donate to its Literary Award endowment, please contact Beth Hessel at bhessel@philaathenaeum.org.



Dr. Michele Harper. Photo credit to LaTosha Oglesby