



# SFU's David Chariandy wins prestigious 2019 Windham-Campbell Prize for excellence in writing

BY CINDY LI | March 13, 2019

**D**avid Chariandy, professor in the Department of English at Simon Fraser University and author of the critically acclaimed *Soucouyant* and *Brother*, has been awarded the 2019 Windham-Campbell Prize.

Established in 2013 at Yale University by American novelist Donald Windham in memory of his partner, Sandy Campbell, the prize celebrates writers who have achieved excellence in their literary works. Prize winners receive an unrestricted grant

of \$165,000 USD (approximately \$220,000 CAD) in addition to a citation and an award.

“It’s deeply humbling,” says Chariandy, of winning the Windham-Campbell prize. “It’s also a completely unanticipated experience. I remember the director of the prizes sending me an email to contact him ASAP and I thought, at first, that it was all just a nasty practical joke. I’m so honoured to be counted among the winners, and I’ll be using the prize to support my writing for years to come.”

Chariandy, no stranger to success, has authored three novels so far. His debut novel, *Soucouyant*, was nominated for 11 literary awards, including being shortlisted for the Governor General's Award and longlisted for the Scotiabank Giller Prize.

His second novel, *Brother*, won the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize, the Toronto Book Award, and the Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize. Named book of the year by numerous publications including *The Globe and Mail*, the *National Post*, and *Esquire Magazine*, it was optioned for film last year by Toronto production companies *Conquering Lion* and *Hawkeye Pictures*, with Canadian film writer and producer *Clement Virgo* helming the adaptation.

Last month, *Brother* was shortlisted for the US Aspen Words Literary Prize. Administered by Washington, D.C. think tank *The Aspen Institute*, the \$35,000 USD (approximately \$46,000 CAD) prize recognizes "an influential work of fiction that illuminates a vital contemporary issue and demonstrates the transformative power of literature on thought and culture."

*Brother* is also a finalist for CBC Canada Reads 2019. It will be defended by actor, model and TV personality *Lisa Ray* during the annual CBC Battle of the Books, which will air March 25-28.

*Brother*, at its essence a coming-of-age story, is set in the suburb of Scarborough, Ontario, in the neighbourhoods where Chariandy grew up. It follows the lives of brothers *Michael* and *Francis* as they experience growing up in the early 1990s as persons of colour, with their experiences reminiscent of Chariandy's own youth.

Born in Scarborough to Trinidadian immigrants, Chariandy completed his BA and MA in English at the University of Carleton and went on to complete his PhD in English at York University.

In those earlier days, and before his astronomical success, Chariandy wasn't as confident about his writing.

"I think every writer has to overcome a whole array of personal doubts," says Chariandy. "I know, too, that certain writers additionally have to overcome

oppressive societal notions of who should and should not have a voice. Ultimately, I feel I've been lucky. I had working-class, immigrant parents who worked tough jobs and did not have any real access to the world of books, but who were loving and supportive. I found crucial support from fellow Black and Caribbean writers, but also from people of many different backgrounds, including students and colleagues here at SFU."

Chariandy currently teaches in SFU's Department of English, with a special focus on contemporary fiction, as well as interdisciplinary theories of post-coloniality, diaspora and race.

When teaching, Chariandy tries as much as possible to demonstrate his own passion for books to his students.

"I encourage students to teach me—for I know I have so much to learn—and to recognize that reading, as well as writing, is a vital creative act."

The Windham-Campbell Prize winners were announced March 13 in London, UK. The announcement is available to view online at [windhamcampbell.org](http://windhamcampbell.org).