

Robert Ray Morgan
Doctor of Letters

Robert Ray Morgan is Kappa Alpha Professor of English at Cornell University. A native of Hendersonville, North Carolina, Morgan earned his bachelor's degree at Carolina in 1965 followed by a master of fine arts at UNC-Greensboro in 1968. He has been on the Cornell faculty since 1971. Morgan dates his career as a writer from a formative sixth-grade experience when, lacking the \$3 he needed to accompany his classmates on a trip to Biltmore House, he spent the day writing a story about how a man lost in the Canadian Rockies, without gun or knife, made his way back to civilization. Morgan's earliest works were short stories, but beginning in 1969, he has published ten books of poems and several chapbooks. Morgan's poems speak of the landscape, the people, and the things of the North Carolina mountains, earning for him the tag "Poet Laureate of Appalachia." Readers have described his poetic language as exhilarating in its display of imagistic and verbal concentration and its surprisingly insightful metaphors. In the 1980s Morgan returned to fiction. His published work in this genre includes several collections of short stories and five full-length novels. Morgan's novel *The Truest Pleasure* was listed by *Publisher's Weekly* as one of the notable books of 1995; *The Balm of Gilead Tree*, a collection of short stories, was included in the 1997 O. Henry awards anthology; and *Gap Creek* (1999) won the Southern Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction for 2000, was recognized by the *New York Times* as a Notable Book, and was an Oprah Book Club selection. One reviewer said that Morgan writes with an authority usually associated with the great novelists of the nineteenth century, and the *New York Times* compared his stripped-down, almost primitive style with the raw, lonesome pathos of Hank Williams' best songs. Some have said Morgan is the best writer to graduate from Carolina since Thomas Wolfe, whose birthday, October 3, Morgan happens to share. His honors include invitations as a distinguished visiting writer by Davidson College, Appalachian State University, Furman University, Duke University, and East Carolina University.