Start, Stops and Our Time Between the Two

Shannon Applegate and John C. Morrison to Read

The November Windfall reading takes a moment to consider the span of time we have on this planet. The event brings together a writer-historian who is also the caretaker of a rural cemetery and a Portland poet who seems to have a tentative connection to earth-bound matters.

Shannon Applegate lives on 110 acres in Yoncalla, Oregon, two hours away from Eugene. She writes that “Our old home is the oldest house in the State of Oregon still occupied by its original family.”

Some years ago, Applegate began to work as the sexton who runs and maintains the Applegate Pioneer Cemetery. Speaking in an interview with National Public Radio about her book, Living Among Headstones, she described the “feeling of shadow and light” that comes through the 200 year-old evergreen trees, and the view from the cemetery of the nearby hills and valleys. The cemetery inspires Applegate to think of the “stories under the stones,” but it is the stories of the people who come there, to bury and to mourn, that make Living Among Headstones the lively and appealing read that it is.

Though she barely tolerates the “industrial-strength colors” of the plastic flowers dotting the graves, Applegate takes delight in the poignant, ephemeral leavings, such as a sandwich bag of baseball cards that she finds left on a grave marked “Grandpa.”

Shannon Applegate is also the author of Skookum: An Oregon Pioneer Family’s History and Lore, which was a best-selling book throughout the Pacific Northwest and Oregon Book Award finalist in 1989. She has served as visiting lecturer at several universities around the country, including Princeton and Purdue. Earlier this year she received the Governor’s Arts Award, sponsored by the Oregon Arts Commission. You can hear her sing and yodel with the seven-member group of women known as the Slow Ponies.

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In John C. Morrison’s poems, gravity’s tug is fickle enough that the “heaven of the moment” might pull us up into the clouds at any time. There’s a sense of lightness, of drifting and surprise. In the poem “A New Patch of Sky,” “Light stands / stunned inside the drip line / that belonged to the spruce” that has just been cut down.

Morrison’s poem “My Memory Begins with Grass” tells of a man, “sick drunk,” who sleeps his sweetest sleep in brittle grass on an icy night, only to be saved from slipping into death by a passing policeman who gives “one good shake.” We hear the voice of a man who was fired on his first day of work at an ice plant, and someone who knows the moon well enough to play a game of shuffleboard with it “on the long / blond grain of a table milled from pine” in a corner pub (“Moon at Shuffleboard”).

Morrison earned his MFA from the University of Alabama and received the 2004 C. Hamilton Bailey Poetry Fellowship from Literary Arts. His poems have appeared in numerous journals including the Seattle Review, Tar River Poetry, Cimarron Review, Caffeine Destiny, and the Southern Poetry Review.

He directs the Writers in the Schools program for Literary Arts, in Portland, and teaches poetry at Washington State University in Vancouver.

His first collection of poetry, The Heaven of the Moment, received the 2006 Rhea and Seymour Gorsline prize for a first book of poetry and is being published by Bedbug Press in Brownsville, Oregon.

E-mails Bounced Back from LLG Website?

Some of you have recently mentioned that e-mails sent to The Writer’s Access via the LLG website have bounced back. And yet, sometimes the messages go through.

Mike Lee, our new webmaster, explains this has to do with the server we’re using not having a spam filter. We recognize this can be frustrating, but the alternative is a deluge of spam that we’d rather not have to deal with. If this happens to you, please use one of the e-mail addresses listed in the “LLG Contacts” and we’ll be sure to forward your message to the appropriate person.
There are good reasons why Bill Sweet’s poetry collection *Powder Monkey* should catch our attention. Bill, a Lane County native, is a founder of the Lane Literary Guild, a proprietor with his wife Myrna Peña-Reyes of one of Eugene’s once-upon-a-time independent bookstores, an editor of *Northwest Review,* and, as the sensitive introduction written by his friends Ingrid Wendt and Ralph Salisbury testifies, a trustworthy guide to a key era of our region’s story and, most important, a poet of “authentic Oregon writing.”

Here’s how Bill’s poem about the circumstances of his birth encapsulates an era:

**A Matter of Life and Death**

September 1, 1939: Birkenfeld
The country doctor got drunk on beer that hot, last day of August, so the following 5 a.m. a half-breed midwife pulled the baby free. The father picked up his ax in Oregon. Eagles on coins clamped their talons on spears.

Lucky Strike Greens went red for war.

The birth is small potatoes at this epic moment, a time of “we” not “I” and of mischance, even nonchalance, as Bill’s father heads right back to work. Bill’s poems stay alert to scale: the huge, ongoing background dotted with many small things beginning and ending. Bill’s land, for all the cutting and scratching, endures; even its ugliness becomes familiar: “Small streams struggled up under moss and ferns.” “Nothing but stumps and snags and downed trees not worth the hauling.” The names of places—Lookout Point, Pleasant Hill, Booth Kelly Camp out of Roseburg—mark sites of hard work, accident, embarrassment. Though surviving, the human element has been cut and clawed. Bill, as the child who is “hairless and small to the point of ridicule” and who freezes when he should be firing at the doe his family needs to pouch, knows the code he has to live. His father guides sternly, as when his arm swept across the logging show, and “his hand almost touched my shoulder.”

A practical sympathy and persistent dreaming leaven the harshness of these people. Those killed and distfigured in the woods are granted a respectful distance. Little Willy, Uncle Dick, Shorty, despite the casual monickers, are dreamers beneath their scars, believing “everything was possible,” “spring’s great green season” forever occurring, envisioning “impossible towns” where wood is milled safely away from the casualties of logging.

Bill Sweet, as a teacher and writer, has stepped away from the story of men in the woods, sensing an understory of limitation and resignation: men do what they must to make a buck, and, in the invention of Suppose, Oregon, Bill can theorize, “I suppose everything that happened/would have happened,” and conclude with relief, “I’m glad/I’m only visiting/your town.”

Bill’s skills with detail and narrative serve his total veracity. His poems—which his editors have thoughtfully selected and arranged—immerse us in the lives of people in the logging camps who struggle to remain whole physically and psychically. This is not Suppose, Oregon, but Actual—Authentic Oregon.

**Annual Potluck & Meeting**

Annual reports tend to emphasize whether an organization grew or shrank, what it has done with the members’ money, and whether any money is left. Review of “literary afternoons” tend to wax lyrical over the readers’ offerings. The Guild’s ’07 annual meeting included both a report and readings, but first mention goes to the FOOD. The potluck portion of our gathering lured some good writer-cooks. Tasty pastas, elegant salads, filling side dishes, and truly serious desserts, including a home-made plum kuchen big enough for the entire crowd from Ingrid Wendt. Toni Van Deusen presented the annual report, a brief, informative run-down of the Guild’s current financial status and membership (both are fine). We have a new web manager, Mike Lee, and a new newsletter designer, Mark Tritt. Many thanks to these “friends of writers.” Thanks to all the open mic readers for sharing your work. We were privileged to hear intriguing, original poetry and prose in the widest imaginable variety of substance and style.
The Writer's Access is published bimonthly by the Lane Literary Guild, a not-for-profit group dedicated to fostering appreciation of the written and spoken word, and providing workshops and support for writers in Lane County. Membership is open to anyone and annual fees range from $25 for individuals, $35 for families, $15 for low-income or students, and $50 or more for angels. To find out if you need to renew, look at the mailing label above. Checks can be mailed to the address above as well.

The LLG website is updated regularly. Visit www.laneliteraryguild.org to find links to Windfall readers and information about the guild. Send member news, calendar events, or announcements to:

Lane Literary Guild
PO Box 11035
Eugene OR 97440

Readings & Events

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<th>NOVEMBER 2007</th>
<th>DECEMBER 2007</th>
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| **Sunday 4 @ 4 pm**
Tsunami Books | **December 2007**
Sorry, no Windfall Readings scheduled this month. |
| **Thursday 8 @ 8 pm**
UO Knight Library: Browsing Room | **Friday 7 @ 8 pm**
Tsunami Books | Live Lit West: UO Creative Writing students read from works in progress. |
| Yvonne Young, DVD release party: “Storytelling for Adults”. | **Sunday 16 @ 4 pm**
| **Saturday 9 @ 11 am**
EMU Ben Linder Room |  |
Creative Writing Kidd Lecture. |  |
| **Saturday 10 @ 5 pm**
Eugene Public Library: Bascom-Tykeson |  |
Joan Dobbie’s poetry workshop reads. |  |
| **Thursday 15 @ 7:30 pm**
UO Campus Gerlinger Lounge |  |
Northwest Review celebrates 50 years of publication with a reading by Ursula K. Le Guin. |  |
| **Tuesday 20 @ 7 pm**
Eugene Public Library: Bascom-Tykeson |  |
Windfall presents Shannon Applegate and Portland poet John Morrison. |  |