

## WCU Literary Festival to feature rising talent

Thursday, 15 March 2012

### Promises raft of talented wordsmiths March 18-22

The Spring Literary Festival at Western Carolina University rings in a decade this year with two authors whose works have been tagged for the silver screen.

The festival will open the evening of Sunday, March 18, and run through Thursday, March 22. All events are in the A.K. Hinds University Center or the recital hall of the Coulter Building on the WCU campus. Events are free and open to the public, and authors will sign works after each reading.

Novelist, poet and short story writer Ron Rash, WCU's Parris Distinguished Professor of Appalachian Culture, will participate in a question-and-answer session with audience members beginning at 8 p.m. Tuesday, March 20, in the University Center theater. Rob Neufeld, who writes about books and local history for the Asheville Citizen-Times, will emcee the session. A film adaptation of Rash's "Serena," a 2008 novel about the ambitious wife of a timber baron set in Depression-era Western North Carolina, is set for release in 2014. Rash's newest novel, "The Cove," will be published in April.

Nick Flynn will close the festival with a reading at 7:30 p.m. March 22 in the recital hall of the Coulter Building. Flynn's 2004 memoir recounts the author's encounter with his longabsent father while working in a Boston homeless shelter. The work was adapted and recently released as the feature film "Being Flynn," directed by Paul Weitz and starring Robert De Niro, Paul Dano and Julianne Moore. Flynn authored a second memoir, "The Ticking Is the Bomb," which was published in 2010, and a companion collection of poems in 2011.

This year's festival also includes a performance of "The Becky Show," a multimedia exploration of a "white trash childhood" by Rebecca Hardin-Thrift, at noon March 22 in Illusions in the University Center. Hardin-Thrift, originally from Belmont, writes short stories and poetry and is an associate professor of English at Tougaloo College in Jackson, Miss.

Other featured authors this year are Mary Adams, Catherine Carter and Deidre Elliott, all of WCU's Department of English; and Shirlette Ammons, Darnell Arnoult, Joseph Bathanti, Stefan Merrill Block, David Joy, Jon Pineda and Glenis Redmond.



Best-selling author and North Carolina native Ron Rash will participate in a question-and-answer session at 8 p.m. Tuesday, March 20, at Western Carolina University as part of the 10th annual Spring Literary Festival.



Young memoirist Nick Flynn will close the 10th annual Spring Literary Festival at Western Carolina University with a reading at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, March 22.

WCU's Spring Literary Festival, directed this year by Pam Duncan of the Department of English, has a long tradition of bringing established and emerging literary talent to Western North Carolina. Again this year, with the help of a \$6,000 Arts and Audiences grant from the N.C. Arts Council, festival organizers donated copies of works by featured authors to the public libraries in Sylva, Franklin, Bryson City and Highlands.

Literary festival sponsors include WCU's Visiting Writers Series; the Department of English; the Arts and Cultural Events Series; the Office of the Chancellor; the Office of the Provost; the Division of Student Affairs; and the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching. The project also received support from the N.C. Arts Council, a division of the Department of Cultural Resources.

Visitors may park in any spaces not designated as special-use. For directions to campus, go online to [www.wcu.edu/545.asp](http://www.wcu.edu/545.asp).

More information about the festival is available by calling 828-227-7264 or emailing [info@litfestival.org](mailto:info@litfestival.org). Visit the festival website at [www.litfestival.org](http://www.litfestival.org).

### Full Festival Schedule

#### Sunday, March 18

7:30 p.m.: Poet Glenis Redmond (UC theater)

#### Monday, March 19

12 p.m.: Gilbert Chappell Distinguished Poetry Reading (student poets) featuring distinguished poet Joseph Bathanti (UC theater)

4 p.m.: Memoirist and poet Jon Pineda (UC theater)

7:30 p.m.: Novelist Stefan Merrill Block (UC theater)

#### Tuesday, March 20

4 p.m.: Poets Catherine Carter and Mary Adams (UC theater)

8 p.m.: Novelist Ron Rash in an emceed audience Q&A with Rob Neufeld of the Asheville Citizen-Times (UC theater)

#### Wednesday, March 21

4 p.m.: Fiction writer Darnell Arnoult (UC theater)

7:30 p.m.: Creative nonfiction writers Deidre Elliott and David Joy (UC theater)

#### Thursday, March 22

12 p.m.: Rebecca Hardin-Thrift's "The Becky Show" (UC Illusions)

4 p.m.: Poet Shirlette Ammons (recital hall, Coulter Building)

7:30 p.m.: Memoirist Nick Flynn (recital hall, Coulter Building)

## AUTHOR BIOS

### Mary Adams

Mary Adams is a child of the snow-and-steel belt, and she writes poetry and rescues dogs in Sylva, N.C. She earned her MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop and received her doctorate from the University of Houston. She also teaches Shakespeare and biblical literature. Her books include "Epistles from the Planet Photosynthesis" and "Commandment." Her poems have appeared in *Western Humanities Review*, *Asheville Poetry Review*, *Shenandoah*, *North American Review* and *Gulf Coast*, among others. Her honors include a Michener grant and a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. Her poems and materials are available on her website, [www.maryadams.net](http://www.maryadams.net).

### Shirlette Ammons

Shirlette Ammons is a poet, writer, musician and coordinator of an arts program for children. She is also a Cave Canem Fellow and a freelance writer. Her second collection of poetry, entitled "Matching Skin," was published by Carolina Wren Press in June 2008 and features an introduction by Nikky Finney, 2011 National Book Award Winner for Poetry. Ammons' first collection of poetry, titled "Stumphole: Anthology of Bakwoods Blood" (Big Drum Press) was published in September 2002. She also is vocalist/songwriter for hip-hop rock band Mosadi Music. Her poetry and essays appear in "The Ringing Ear: Black Poets Lean South" (University of Georgia Press), "What Your Mama Never Told You: True Stories about Love and Sex" (Houghton Mifflin), *The Asheville Review* and other publications. Her most recent musical collaboration with the Dynamite Brothers, called "And Lovers Like," is available at [www.mosadimusic.com](http://www.mosadimusic.com).

### Darnell Arnout

Darnell Arnout is writer-in-residence and assistant professor of English at Lincoln Memorial University in Harrogate, Tenn. She holds an MFA from University of Memphis and an MA from NC State University. Author of the prizewinning collection "What Travels With Us: Poems" (LSU Press) and the novel "Sufficient Grace" (Free Press), she is a regular faculty member of the Table Rock Writers Workshop, Tennessee Young Writers Workshop, John C. Campbell Folk School, Learning Events and the Appalachian Writers Workshop. Arnout has received the Weatherford Award for Appalachian Literature, SIBA Poetry Book of the Year and Mary Frances Hobson Medal for Arts and Letters and in 2007 was named Tennessee Writer of the Year by the Tennessee Writers Alliance. Look for her blog, "Dancing with the Gorilla," at [www.darnellarnout.com/wp/](http://www.darnellarnout.com/wp/). Arnout is married to metal artist William Brock.

### Joseph Bathanti

Joseph Bathanti, a native of Pittsburgh, Pa., is professor of creative writing at Appalachian State University in Boone, N.C., where he also is the writer-in-residence for the university's Watauga Global Community and director of Writing in the Field, a new site-based creative writing initiative. He was named the Gilbert-Chappell Distinguished Poet for the Western Region for the North Carolina Poetry Society for 2011-12. Bathanti is the author of six books of poetry, including "This Metal," which was nominated for the National Book Award, and "Restoring Sacred Art," winner of the 2010 Roanoke Chowan Award. Bathanti also is the author of the novels *East Liberty*, winner of the Carolina Novel Award, and "Coventry," winner of the 2006 Novello Literary Award. His collection of short stories, "The High Heart," won the 2006 Spokane Prize. He is the recipient of numerous other awards and honors, including literature fellowships from the North Carolina Arts Council.

### Stefan Merrill Block

Born in 1982, Stefan Merrill Block grew up in Plano, Texas. His first book, "The Story of Forgetting," was an international bestseller and the winner of Best First Fiction at the Rome International Festival of Literature, the 2008 Merck Serono Literature Prize and the 2009 Fiction Award from the Writers' League of Texas. It also was a finalist for the debut fiction awards from IndieBound, Salon du Livre and the Center for Fiction. Following the publication of his second novel, "The Storm at the Door," Block was awarded the University of Texas Dobie Paisano Fellowship and a fellowship at the Santa Maddalena Foundation in Italy. He lives in Brooklyn.

### Catherine Carter

Born on the eastern shore of Maryland and raised there by wolves and vultures, Catherine Carter now lives in Cullowhee with her husband near Western Carolina University, where she teaches in and coordinates the English education program. Her first full-length collection, "The Memory of Gills" (LSU, 2006) received the 2007 Roanoke-Chowan Award from the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association; her poem "Toast" won the 2009 North Carolina Writers' Network Randall Jarrell award. Her work also has appeared in *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *Orion* and *Best American Poetry 2009*, among others; her new book is "The Swamp Monster at Home" (LSU, 2012).

### Deidre Elliot

Raised in the Great Plains, Deidre Elliott lived in the Rocky Mountains, the Sonoran Desert and urban Guadalajara, Mexico, before moving to Western North Carolina. Her creative nonfiction appears in numerous journals as well as in the anthologies "Getting Over the Color Green: Contemporary Environmental Literature of the Southwest" (University of Arizona Press, 2001) and "Hell's Half-Mile: River Runners' Tales of Hilarity and Misadventure" (Breakaway Books, 2004). Her fiction appears in the anthology "Cold Flashes: Literary Snapshots of Alaska" (University of Alaska Press, 2010). She has recently completed a collection of essays, "Dry Eden: A Desert Commonplace Book." Currently, she coordinates the Professional Writing Program and teaches in the English Department at Western Carolina University.

### Nick Flynn

Nick Flynn's most recent book is "The Captain Asks for a Show of Hands" (2011), a collection of poems linked to his latest memoir, "The Ticking Is the Bomb" (2010), which the *Los Angeles Times* calls a "disquieting masterpiece." His previous memoir, "Another Bullshit Night in Suck City" (2004), won the PEN/Martha Albrand Award, was shortlisted for France's Prix Femina and has been translated into 14 languages. He also is the author of a play and two other books of poetry, "Some Ether" and "Blind Huber," for which he received fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the Library of Congress. His film credits include artistic collaborator and field poet on the film "Darwin's Nightmare" (nominated for an Academy Award for best feature documentary in 2006) as well as executive producer and artistic collaborator on "Being Flynn," the film version of "Another Bullshit Night in Suck City" (from Focus Features, directed by Paul Weitz and starring Robert De Niro, Paul Dano and Julianne Moore). A professor in the creative writing program at the University of Houston, where he teaches each spring, he spends the rest of the year in (or near) Brooklyn.

**Rebecca Hardin-Thrift**

Rebecca Hardin-Thrift is originally from Belmont, N.C., where she enjoyed a childhood full of squalor and bacon grease. In 2002 she wrote and performed her one-woman show, "The Becky Show," in Northampton, Mass., and at the New York International Fringe Festival. The show is a multimedia exploration of the aforementioned white trash childhood, chronicling the hard life and hard times of a Southern family. Her short stories and poetry have appeared in Washington Square, The Bellevue Literary Review, Karamu and others. Hardin-Thrift is an associate professor of English at Tougaloo College in Jackson, Miss., where she teaches creative writing and drama and directs a play each year. She is the editor of Tougaloo College's literary journal, *Between Two Rivers*, the co-editor of the online journal *27 rue de fleures* and serves on the board of directors for Binge Press.

**David Joy**

David Joy grew up in Charlotte, N.C., and moved to Appalachia in 2003 to study literature at Western Carolina University, where he earned a bachelor of arts in 2007 and a master's degree in professional writing in 2009. His first book, "Growing Gills: A Fly Fisherman's Journey," was published in 2011 by Bright Mountain Books and is a finalist for the SELC Reed Award for Outstanding Writing on the Southern Environment. Critics have compared the book to works such as David James Duncan's classic "The River Why" and praised Joy's "poetic romanticism" and "clear, clean prose," adding that the book is "a classic to which readers will keep returning." Joy is currently marketing a second work of narrative nonfiction titled "Ruth: A Beautiful Dismantling." His creative nonfiction has appeared in *Bird Watcher's Digest*, *The Wilderness House Literary Review* and *Smoky Mountain Living*. He currently lives in Glensville, N.C., where he works as a staff writer and columnist for *Crossroads Chronicle*.

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