

WCU Literary Festival set for March 30-April 2

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CULLOWHEE – Nature essayist and environmental activist Jan DeBlieu, national best-seller Jeffrey Lent and newspaperman and National Public Radio contributor Scott Huler will be among the panel of noted authors featured at Western Carolina University's seventh annual Spring Literary Festival March 30-April 2.

Over the years, the festival has included authors Pat Conroy, Lee Smith, Rick Bragg, Silas House and Kathryn Stripling Byer.

"This widely imitated festival has put WCU on the region's literary map while giving our students the chance to meet living, working writers who appeal to real Americans," said Mary Adams, festival director and WCU English professor. "This year's writers get to the heart of the issues their readers really care about."

DeBlieu, who will read at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, April 2, in the auditorium of the Coulter Building, is the author of four books and dozens of articles and essays about people and nature. Her first book, "Hatteras Journal," is considered a regional classic on the Outer Banks where DeBlieu's activism helped form a group that successfully kept oil companies from drilling off the North Carolina coast.



Robert Conley



Scott Huler

"The stories I tell are true; I write nonfiction because I keep coming across stories that are more interesting, complex and surprising than anything I could make up on my own," DeBlieu said. "More than anything, I'm trying to make connections that haven't been made before—often between parts of the world that don't seem to fit together."

Interweaving personal observation with facts about nature is what creates successful environmental literature. "I write about subjects and situations that interest me as a way of figuring out how I feel about them. At a deep level my writing is an act of exploring my own mind. The best essays—mine and others—are always a personal exploration," DeBlieu said.

Writers such as DeBlieu are finding new interest in their works as the public becomes more aware of its integral role in the natural world. "The public at large is very much aware that environmental problems like global climate change have the capacity to change the course of our lives. So there's a lot more reason for the general public to sit up and take notice of environmental literature," DeBlieu said.

Author Jeffrey Lent's novel "In The Fall" was a national bestseller and New York Times Book Review notable book for 2000. His follow-up, "Lost Nation," was a summer reading pick for the Washington Post and USA Today. Both novels are under film option. His latest work is "After You've Gone."

With a diverse background, Scott Huler has written on everything from the death penalty to bikini waxing, NASCAR to the stealth bomber. His work has appeared in The New York Times, The Washington Post, Los Angeles Times and Fortune magazine, among others. His fifth book is "No-Man's Lands."

WCU's new Sequoyah Distinguished Professor of Cherokee Studies, Robert Conley, will read from his body of work that includes more than 80 books, many about Cherokee people. Conley has received the Western Writers of America Spur three times and earned the Cherokee Medal of Honor in 2000.

Pamela Duncan, a new member of WCU's creative writing faculty, joins fellow professors and writers Ron Rash and Catherine Carter in presenting their recent work. Duncan was the 2007 recipient of the James Still Award for Writing about the Appalachian South.

Carter is the mentor for the western division of the Gilbert Chappell Distinguished Poets Series, which was created to foster the reading, writing, and enjoyment of poetry across the state. Her full-length book of poems "The Memory of Gills" won the Roanoke-Chowan Award for Poetry, and one of her poems was selected for the 2009 edition of "Best American Poetry." She will host a reading by competitively selected student poets from the western part of the state.



Ron Rash

Rash is enjoying the success of his fourth novel, "Serena," which has been named to the Publishers Weekly "Best Books of the Year" list. His multitude of awards includes the O. Henry Prize. He has written three collections of poems and three collections of stories in addition to his three previous novels, "One Foot in Eden," "Saints at the River" and "The World Made Straight."

Also as part of the festival, poets Brian Brodeur and C.S. Carrier will hold a joint reading. Brodeur's work has appeared or is forthcoming in Gettysburg Review, Margie, The Missouri Review, River Styx and Verse Daily. Carrier, a WCU graduate, has published poems in Pleiades, Verse, Redactions, LIT, Castagraf and Good Foot.



Steve Yarbrough

Oprah Winfrey chose festival participant A. Manette Ansay's first novel "Vinegar Hill" as her November 1999 book club selection. Ansay has gone on to publish five additional works and win a Pushcart Prize. Her forthcoming novel, "Good Things I Wish You," will be published this summer.

Steve Yarbrough comes with a Southern Renaissance man's upbringing. His father was an auto mechanic, cotton farmer, gin operator and technician at a TV station while his mother was a store clerk. Yarbrough was an all-state football lineman and played in various country and rock bands before becoming a professor of creative writing. His novel "Prisoners of War" was a finalist for the PEN/Faulkner award.

Jewell Parker Rhodes is the author of five historical novels, often centered around free-born Creole Voodoo Priestess Marie Laveau: "Voodoo Dreams," "Magic City," "Douglass' Women," "Voodoo Season" and "Yellow Moon," as well as a memoir, "Porch Stories: A Grandmother's Guide to Happiness." Her sixth novel, "Hurricane Levee Blues," is forthcoming, as is a young adult novel titled "Ninth Ward."

All readings, except the event featuring DeBlieu, will be held in the theater of WCU's A.K. Hinds University Center. The reading with DeBlieu will be in Coulter auditorium. All events are free and open to the public. Authors will sign their works after each reading.

Events are scheduled as follows:

- Monday, March 30 – Robert Conley at noon, Brian Brodeur and C.S. Carrier at 4 p.m., A. Manette Ansay at 7:30 p.m.
- Tuesday, March 31 – Jeffrey Lent at 4 p.m., Steve Yarbrough at 7:30 p.m.
- Wednesday, April 1 – Scott Huler at 4 p.m., Jewell Parker Rhodes at 7:30 p.m.
- Thursday, April 2 – Gilbert Chappell Distinguished Poets Series at noon, Pamela Duncan and Ron Rash at 4 p.m., Jan DeBlieu at 7:30 p.m.

The WCU Visiting Writers Series; Visiting Scholars Fund; English department; Lectures, Concerts and Exhibition Series; and Office of the Chancellor sponsor the Spring Literary Festival.

For more information, call (828)227-3265, e-mail info@litfestival.org or visit www.LitFestival.org. Directions and a campus map may be found at www.wcu.edu.

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