

Rash's new book of poems stands out

In his new book, "Waking" (Hub City Press), Ron Rash reveals his childhood, place on Earth and religion. The volume of poems — Rash's fourth — emerges as a major work of literature.



Rash's return to poetry after his best-selling novel, "Serena," and his Frank O'Connor award-winning volume of stories, "Burning Bright," has enabled him to fashion a personal masterpiece.

Mythic dream

He has his own syntax — "the late summer came, the pool a thin clear" — phrases trimmed to have words float in a sound chamber.

"Floor" should rise to the top of our attention because rivers and pools are two of Rash's main metaphors. "First Memory," the opening poem in the first of five sections of "Waking," focuses on a pond's deep end:

"A green smell simmers shallows, / where tadpoles flow like black tears. / Minnows lengthen their shadows. / Something unseen stirs the weeds."

If you read Rash's fiction, you will enjoy think-

ing about certain recurring elements — such as fish stories. The fish takes a new turn in the next poem, "The Trout in the Springhouse," in which a trout in the springhouse placed in the springhouse stream becomes the agent of the young narrator's communion with nature and place.

"I swirled the water / up in my palm cup," the poem goes, "tasted its quickness / swimming inside me."

The poetic person of Rash — the "I" relating his impressions in Watauga County, Rash's childhood summer home — is a sleepwalker and someone who comes to see the world as a mythic dream, with ancestors holding hands.

Section 2 looks at ancestors and related people, including Daniel Boone's wife, Rebecca, left alone while Daniel goes on a long hunt and is presumed dead.

The mystical world that Rash senses is rooted by mountain folks' hard times. "The Wallet," a poem in the first section, tells how the poet's father rescues his younger son from drowning and comes up minus his wallet.

"This is October," the poet notes. "My father / believes he'll be fired soon, / will face winter's cold coming / without



Ron Rash SPECIAL TO THE CITIZEN-TIMES

MEET RON RASH

» Ron Rash speaks about "Serena," and about the love of words and reading at the Literacy Council of Buncombe County's annual fundraiser, Authors for Literacy, 6-9:30 p.m. Friday at the Crowne Plaza Resort, Asheville. Call 254-3442, ext. 205.

» Rash is the keynote speaker at the Sept. 10 banquet at the Carolina Mountains Literary Festival in Burnsville, Sept. 8-10. The festival features many great authors, programs, and opportunities and the showing of the new Bonesteel Films documentary, "The Day Carl Sandburg Died." Visit www.cmlifest.org.

» Rash launches his book "Waking" at Malaprop's Bookstore/Café, 55 Haywood St., Asheville, on Oct. 3.

» The connection between Rash's fiction and poetry is explored in a reading guide for the WNC Community Read of "Serena." Visit "The Read on WNC" at TheReadonWNC.org.

his love of sound and sense.

In one poem, "Sat-inback," he tells you exactly how the sounds in that word come alive.

Section 4, which begins with "Genealogy," spells out how the verbal spark had gotten passed along. As far as Welshmen go, there was Dylan Thomas, whose lines rang with "cynghanedd" — the composition of lines with arranged sounds.

The heritage section also takes us to the American land of legends — such as the fantastic "When Serpents Came: Whiterock Mountain, 1912" — and the all-too-real

grave of David Shelton, the 13-year-old shot in the face by a Civil War firing squad.

Mountain Baptist, Celtic and literary strains mix.

"In a Deerstand above Goshen Creek," a poem in Section 5, we find the poet on a kind of raft in a tree, swaying and closing his eyes. He did not wake

"until darkness settled like rain, stars / emerged like mayflies to depth the night / as I dreamed between earth and sky, / of falling away from earth, toward heaven."

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smartest man stupid / makes him see nothing beyond / a short term gain, which is why / I know more likely than not / I'll be arriving too late."

On the drive, he goes into one of Rash's dream states.

"So make the driving the good part," he tells himself, "turn off / my radio, let the dark / close around until I know / a kind of loneliness that / doesn't feel sad."

The ending is perfect, casting thought back on what came before.

Harmonies

Rash's Celtic and Southern Appalachian heritage are big factors in

ers. "The Reaping" breaks your heart.

With all those gems, I turn to another poem.

"Three A.M. and the Stars Were Out," to hold up an example of the story-poem at its very finest.

A country veterinarian begins narrating it as he ponders not taking a phone call at 3 a.m. The poem moves along both as story (he goes, of course, thinking of other such calls) and as a flow of mental associations.

He has a personality and a set of opinions. "It's not / all his own fault," he says about the farmer who risks his animal's life to save the cost of a visit.

"Poor too long / turns the

thirty-four washed-away dollars."

Stories

As in his fiction, Rash packs drama. A good handful of his poems are story-poems, including some anthology-worthy standouts in Section 3.

In "Tobacco," a farmer relates, with edifying specifics, how agribusiness had transformed a way of life. In "White Wings," a man who has lost his wife and infant in childbirth stands by their graves outside his church, listening to the congregation sing hymns.

"Bloodroot" is the monologue of a man who catches snakes for preach-