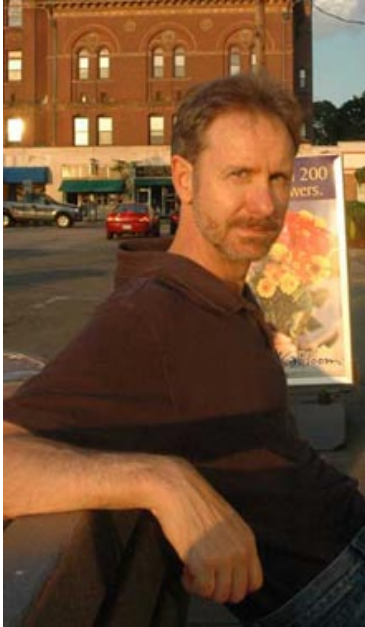


Ron Rash and the Southern Voice

Written by Ryan Copeland

Tuesday, 14 August 2012 15:40 - Last Updated Wednesday, 15 August 2012 10:10



A southern lit fan meets one of his heroes, thanks to USCB's Lunch with Author Series.

It was my wife who alerted me to the press release regarding author Ron Rash's visit to Hilton Head as part of USCB's "Lunch With Author" series. It was an early birthday gift that she even told me about it, much less that she agreed to go with me.

I could, and do, go on incessantly about the importance of not only the preservation but continual creation of authentic Southern literature. I do this in my own home, mostly, because my long-suffering wife has nowhere to run and our marriage included a contract stating that she at least pretend to listen faithfully to my droning.

She should be used to it – as fellow students in Shirley Tuttle’s English and Journalism classes at Beaufort High sometime last century, we were both introduced to the power of published words. Mrs. Tuttle should be proud of the foundation she set. Several of her former students and my former classmates (from little old Beaufort) have gone on to major in Journalism and English at schools in South Carolina, Illinois, and Missouri. At the very least, she taught us to think critically and open-mindedly, such as when my complaints about the works of Joan Didion and Herman Melville were met with a succinct “suck it up and read them anyway, you might learn something.”

My earnest devotion, however, began during a Southern Literature class at Clemson, where my professor brought to life the wonder of southern works of fiction by peppering his lectures with anecdotes about the authors, many of whom he knew personally. It’s one thing to listen to a discussion about gothic prevalence in works by O’Connor or Faulkner. It’s quite another to hear your professor say, “and when I was drinking with Truman Capote in the late 70’s, *he told me...*”

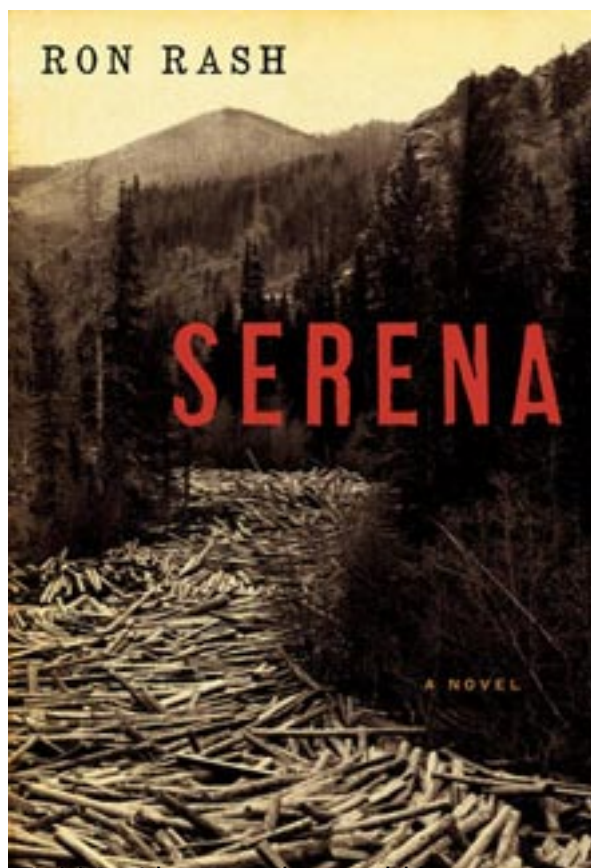
So I ate it up – that delicious bit of Lee Smith and Ernest Gaines and Carson McCullers and Harper Lee that is common to those of us native to the south. The settings and the people, whether the bayous of Louisiana or the courtrooms of Alabama, were familiar and comfortable. As another titan, Eudora Welty, said, “one place better understood helps us understand all other places better.”

It was after getting my feet wet with those foundational authors that I discovered, almost by

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