



Books & Writers



William Wright: poet, editor & educator, is spreading the good news about poetry

By David R. Altman
Books & Writers Editor

“Reading poetry is intense. I can do it in about 30 minute pulses and then I have to stop.”

--William Wright, award-winning Georgia author & poet

What’s next for a prolific young poet who has already authored or edited twenty-three books, won several prestigious awards and served as the Poet in Residence at the University of Tennessee?

If you’re William Wright, you’ve always got something on the burner.

In this case, the 37-year-old Marietta resident has just finished his latest work, a collaboration with poet Amy Wright (no relation) called *Creeks of the Upper South* (jointly published by Jacar Press and Unicorn Press, 2016) and already has advances on two other works.

Besides four full-length poetry collections, the soft-spoken and affable Wright has also gained prominence as an editor.

He has co-edited eight volumes of *The Southern Poetry*



William Wright, 37 of Marietta, has written or edited more than 20 books of poetry.

Anthology; each volume includes poetry from one of seven states (including Georgia) with one edition focusing solely on Appalachia.

Wright’s poems are often autobiographical, about his life growing up in South Carolina. His Appalachian-inspired verse, rich with natural imagery, is always spirited. While stunning in his descriptions of the natural world, Wright’s poems are often as ominous as they are memorable.

His book *Bledsoe* (Texas Review Press, 2011), a narrative poem of 86 pages, is about Durant Bledsoe, a

young mute boy in Appalachia whose mother is dying of brain cancer. It evolves into extraordinary race against time and nature, combined forcefully with the son’s confused and complex love for his mother.

Wright sets the tone, “The faucet ticked on like a tally, reckoning the days Bledsoe struggled to cultivate, the world his father began, a force uncontainable, too wild to tame.”

The intensity builds, ultimately collapsing Bledsoe’s senses-packed but unspoken world into a conclusion that you knew was inevitable but hoped it was not. If you think an 86-page poem would be hard to read, you’ve not read *Bledsoe*. It is a riveting tale!

Wright also co-edited *Hard Lines: Rough Southern Poetry*, which captures both the beautiful honesty and sometimes graphic brutality that lurks in so much of our Southern verse. It is a collection of great reading, but not for the faint of heart.

Wright’s most recent full length collection of poems is *Tree Heresies* (Mercer University Press, 2015) and it begins like this: “You have taken a road into a place you do not know, off the cusp of mountains, or up from the sandstung marshes, you are here.”

While this impressive young author has published in such prestigious publications as the *Oxford American* and led workshops and given lectures at places like Furman, Washington & Lee and the University of Virginia, he also enjoys the role of

teacher.

He was one of the featured poets in Reinhardt University’s Masters of Fine Arts (MFA) visiting faculty last year, and is continuing to mentor many aspiring poets.

“I’m working with people of all ages,” said Wright. He said the average age of some of his private students would be “...a person in their late fifties and early sixties.” Adds Wright, “I have also tutored a precocious sixteen-year-old and a ninety-year-old scholar of Chinese history. A huge gamut!”

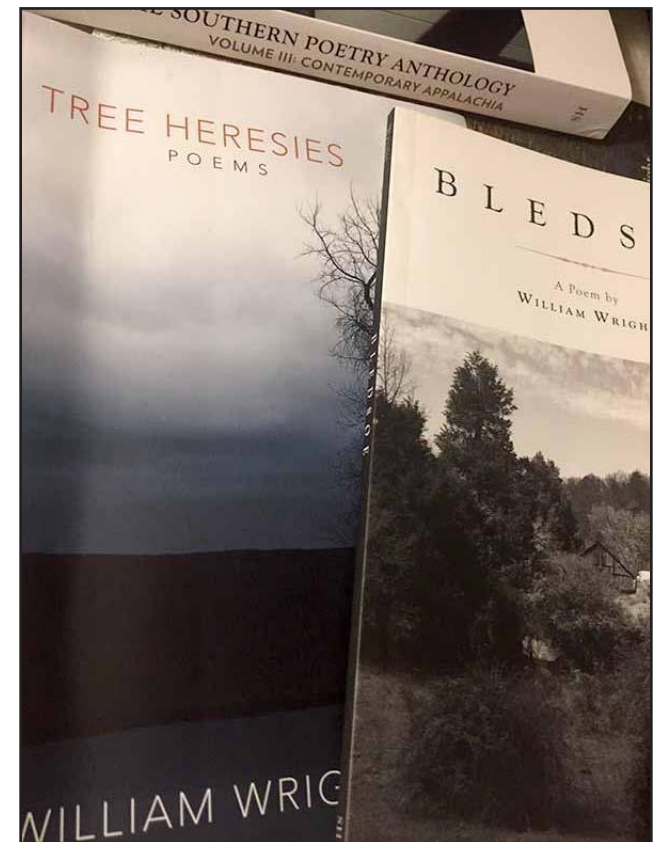
“Will is a born teacher,” said Jennifer Dracos-Tice, a teacher in the Upper English School at Atlanta’s prestigious Westminster. “He has a keen ear and eye for his students’ strengths and he builds upon them.”

Wright even works with one of his colleagues at Reinhardt.

Dr. Theresa Ast, a full history professor at Reinhardt who continues to work privately with Wright on her writing said “poems once considered your best work emerge stronger, deeper, more beautiful.”

Like most great writers, Wright reads far more than he writes, enjoying James Wright, A.R. Ammons, David Bottoms, James Dickey, Theodore Roethke, Ellen Bryant Voigt and Robert Penn Warren, among others.

As for the classic poets, Wright said “...Gerard Manley Hopkins is, for me, the only Victorian poet who has a direct influence on contem-



Excerpt from *Tree Heresies*, William Wright’s latest book
“Red as a cardinal, it leans ruined in winter’s gray field form falling against a sycamore, it’s older, wiser wife.”

--From “The Red Barn”

porary poets. His way of writing was 50-60 years ahead of its time.”

Wright, who grew up in Edgefield, South Carolina, doesn’t have to go far to find a great editor. He is married to the fiction writer Michelle Wright, who besides being a published author herself, has helped her husband and his co-editors pull together *The Southern Poetry Anthology* series. Michelle, who like her husband earned a Ph.D. at the University of Southern Mississippi, has also been a guest lecturer at the college level.

William Wright, who is also fluent in French and German, is an academic who doesn’t take his impressive, well-earned credentials too seriously.

Wright’s quiet humility masks a fierce and passionate commitment to his craft. His contributions are unselfishly manifested by recognizing and encouraging the works of others.

Asked whether poetry can maintain its relevance in a world driven by technology and a 24-hour news cycle, he was adamant.

“Poetry is relevant and it will forever be relevant. And even if the end of times comes and there are survivors, it will become even more relevant.”

If you’ve not read any of Wright’s poetry, you’re missing out on the opportunity to read a poet destined for literary greatness.

Wright can be reached at williamwright.net or via email at vercinder@hotmail.com.

[David R. Altman writes about books and writers for the *Progress*. His first book of poetry “*Death in the Foyer*” was published in 2014, when he was nominated for Georgia Author of the Year. He can be reached at davidraltman.com or altmandavidr@gmail.com.]