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## Bookshelf: 3 new books from small Southern presses

New releases include an anthology of short stories, a novel and a collection of poems.



Credit: Livingston Press/Regal House/Mercer University Press

### [THINGS TO DO](#)

By Suzanne Van Atten

Sept 15, 2023

This week's Bookshelf takes a look at three new books from small presses across the South.

Caption



# The Best of the Shortest

a Southern Writers Reading reunion

edited by Suzanne Hudson

with Joe Formichella and Mandy Haynes



Credit: Livingston Press

Fast read. Fairhope, Alabama, is a bucolic little town on Mobile Bay that has a long, fruitful history as an enclave for Southern writers including, at one time or another, the likes of Rick Bragg, Fannie Flagg, Mark Childers and Winston Groom.

For a decade beginning in 1998, a group of like-minded, West Alabama writers and their friends began to congregate there once a year for a literary event they called Southern Writers Reading. Sonny Brewer, author of “The Poet of Tolstoy Park” and founder of the Fairhope Center for the Writing Arts, started the event, which he reportedly referred to as a “literary slugfest.” Far removed from academic influences and the publishing industry, Southern Writers Reading had a singular focus: good Southern storytelling.

Now, 15 years after its last hurrah, Southern Writers Reading is having a reunion. The public portion of the event will be a series of panel discussions on Nov. 18. Panelists include Rick Bragg, Beth Anne Fennelly, Tom Franklin, Suzanne Kingsbury, Patricia Foster and Marlin Barton, among others. It will be held at Centennial Hall on the Fairhope campus of Coastal Community College. Admission is free, but donations to the Fairhope Center for the Writing Arts are requested.

To mark the occasion, an anthology of short stories will be published. “The Best of the Shortest: A Southern Writers Reading Reunion” (Livingston Press, \$19.95) edited by Suzanne Hudson, Mandy Haynes and Joe Formichella features dozens of short-short stories (around 1,500 words in most cases) by authors associated with the event. Pieces include new work, previously published work and excerpts of longer works. The book is dedicated to the late William Gay, who inspired the inaugural Southern Writers Reading event, and proceeds go to the Fairhope Center for the Writing Arts.

Among the highlights is “White Trash Fishing” by Ron Rash. To be clear, he’s not talking about casting a lure “midstream as if on the cover of an L.L. Bean catalog” or angling for largemouth bass on “boats swift as some airplanes.” No, he’s talking about threading a nightcrawler on a hook and snagging a catfish, “the aquatic equivalent to a possum.” He’s talking about “killing what you catch and eating it right there on the riverbank,” and it’s a pure pleasure accompanying him on the adventure.

Beth Ann Fennelly’s account of a late-night, slightly drunken, curse-laden assault on a battalion of slugs determined to strip her vegetable garden bare is both horrifying and hilarious. Having placed a beer trap in the garden, she sets her alarm for 4:30 a.m. to gauge its effectiveness. “With my flashlight I returned. Six or seven gray bloated bodies lolled in their Bud Light Jacuzzi. But angling my phone I could see slugs still chomping. Not 30, but 30 times 30 times 30...”

“Teach Me,” David Wright Faladé’s lament, after the death of Georgia Floyd, about being expected to educate his white friends on the realities of being Black in America is

a sobering call to action. In light of the deaths of Tamir Rice, Breonna Taylor, Elijah McClain, etc., etc., he observes that “African Americans and other people of color are the obvious victims. But all Americans are victimized because the promise of ‘America’ dies a little more with each new death.”

Other contributors include Cassandra King, Daren Wang, Tom Franklin, Joshilyn Jackson, George Singleton, Rick Bragg and Daniel Wallace among many others. It’s a terrific collection, especially for those who don’t have the time or attention span for a longer read. But don’t be surprised if you have trouble stopping. It’s hard to read just to one.

Caption

"A book you won't want to miss."

- Gale Massey, author, *The Girl From  
Blind River*



Snakes

of St. Augustine

Ginger Pinholster

Credit: Regal House Publishing

**Happy pub day:** In St. Augustine, Florida, the owner of a serpentarium is desperately searching for three stolen snakes — a python named Banana Splits, a king snake named Bandit and a rare indigo named Unicorn. Meanwhile, a young woman is searching for her missing neurodiverse brother and in the process becomes entangled with a charming homeless man who wants to help. Publishing on Sept. 12, “Snakes of St. Augustine” (Regal House Publishing, \$19.95) by Atlanta native Ginger Pinholster is a compassionate, darkly comic novel about a group of alienated Floridians in search of their tribe. “Her Florida reflects both the weirdness and beauty of her unforgettable characters,” says Mickey Dubrow, author of “Always Agnes.”





OLD  
GODS

POEMS

CLIFFORD BROOKS

Credit: Mercer University Press

**Blue Ridge bard:** North Georgia poet Clifford Brooks is founder of the Southern Collective Experience, a collective of artists, writers and musicians that produces the podcast Dante's Old South Radio Show and publishes the Blue Mountain Review. This month he publishes a new collection of poems, "Old Gods" (Mercer University Press, \$20), that ponders love, loss, family, art, nature, mythology and more. Here's a little taste, the starkly beautiful poem "On You": "I shine the sun / and polish the moon / to focus all light / on you."

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About the Author

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