

Prestigious writers share for Authors' Night

JEREMY STALLWOOD
Feature Editor

Three multi-award-winning authors shared their work last Wednesday evening in the Gregory Forum for this term's Authors' Night entitled "War and its Fallout."

Milena McGraw's *After Dunkirk* has received national attention for the story of an eighteen year old who joins the Royal Air Force during WWII. McGraw, an Oregon City resident who works at the Multnomah County Library, drew from her experiences while living under Communist rule in Czechoslovakia.

Last week in the Oregonian, Milena was misquoted. She said, "If it wasn't for the second World War, I might have been a pacifist." The Oregonian quoted her saying, "If it wasn't for the second World War, I might have been a fascist."

The Oregonian will run a retraction.

Tracy Daugherty, who teaches at OSU, read from his book, *What Falls Away*, a look into the impact of an economic structure whose dependencies revolve around the Cold War. During the Cold War, the past decade has been prosperous for the small town in Nevada. The Cold War ends, and the town's resources are threatened. If the defense industry departs, the economic backbone of the town departs as well. Complete with a strong central character and poetic descriptions of the effects of radiation, Daugherty's reading was touching.

Marilyn Bowering's *The Visible World*, was a character-based novel which backtracks through the 30's, 40's and 50's, but she said that "it's not terribly directed to war."

Bowering has also written a play, *Grandfather was a Soldier*,



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Marilyn Bowering, left, answers the audience's questions after reading during last week's Authors' Night. Tracy Daugherty, fellow Northwest author, looks on.

which was produced on BBC radio and acted by the Royal Shakespeare Company in London. In addition to her plays and novels, Bowering has plans to release two volumes of soon.

"I love changing genres," Bowering said. Writing with tunnel vision can be "the kiss of death to creativity."

An interested audience noticed that both of the female authors

wrote from a man's point of view. "The character came to me," McGraw explained. "It depends on who is in my head."

Added Bowering, "Characters set their own agenda."

Beauty in Oregon's 'ordinary' foliage in the Native Garden



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A serene red alder towers near the pond in the Native Garden.

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There are many plants in nature for which most of us pass by everyday without even a second glance. Mainly, they are the ones without vibrant blooms and simply lack any interesting or unusual qualities. It is for these very reasons that we often go about our lives blind to the incredible-obvious, and the spectacular-common that are all around us. It's not for lack of sight that we do not see these things; it's for lack of understanding that we do not recognize them.

What am I getting at here? Well, Red Alder, *Alnus rubra*, is one such wondrous plant that is all too often ignored and disregarded as just another ordinary Oregon tree.

Red Alders can grow quickly, up to 20 feet in their first five years.

They usually only live to be around 50 years old though, and so rarely exceed 75 feet in height. In the Native Garden we only have one Red Alder, and it's not too terribly difficult to locate. It's the large tree with smooth, gray bark growing directly alongside the pond.

Before European settlers arrived, Red Alders only grew along stream banks and in other very moist, non-heavily-wooded areas. Logging, and the overall clearing of land, has given the Red Alder a new niche and expanded its range and habitat in recent times.

Red Alders are very important plants to the environment in general, and specifically to their own eco-systems. The main reason for this is that they fix nitrogen, and lots of it! To be more exact, Alders themselves do not actually fix nitrogen; microscopic bacteria, called "frankia", live in their root systems and do all of the nitrogen fixing. The Alders simply provide a home for these little buggers.

Now why is this so important to the environment? Well, for starters, all plants require nitrogen to live. Without it they absolutely will not grow. Luckily, nitrogen is the most abundant element in our atmosphere. Unluckily, plants cannot access or metabolize atmospheric nitrogen; they can only access nitrogen through the soil via their root systems. Here is where Alders and their little bacterial houseguests come into play. The bacteria take the nitrogen from the atmosphere and process it into a form that is accessible to all the surrounding plants, including the Alders themselves.

Red Alders are the first stage in the long and purposeful cycle of natural succession that we should all learn to recognize. Red Alders can be equated to the paramedics that fly in to repair the damage after a disaster has occurred. Alder colonies hold and repair the soil and allow for other plants to get established.

These plants are followed by

sapling trees such as Douglas Firs, which are able to tolerate some exposure and sunlight. As these trees grow up and succeed the Alders, a denser layer of shade is provided. Trees such as Western Hemlock and Western Red Cedar, which will not germinate and grow in direct sunlight, can then become established. This takes hundreds of years to unfold and is an intricately evolved system that is in dire need of our understanding.

This isn't the end of the story though. Red Alder has an amazing inventory of historical and modern uses. The name Red Alder is derived from one of the ways in which Native Americans used this plant. The bark is gray on the outside, but is blood-red on the inside and was frequently used as a dye. The dye was made by boiling the bark in water, which was primarily used for coloring fish nets, making the nets "invisible" to fish. Red Alder wood was, and still is, used for fish smoking, and it was also used in the carving of eating utensils, ceremonial masks and other crafts.

The bark of Red Alder serves a number of medicinal purposes on top of everything else. Taking it internally, Native Americans used a bark solution as a general tonic. More specifically, the bark was said to be a very strong and reliable form of medicine for any type of respiratory distress. Also, a bark and leaf "tea" was used as a skin wash for cuts, burns, inflammations, rashes (poison oak) and insect bites. *Betulin* and *Lupeol* are two of the compounds found in the bark and have shown to be promising in recent studies for suppressing the growth of cancerous tumors.

This is truly a tree that deserves more recognition and respect from us. Have a look at our garden's Red Alder before fall sheds all of its leaves and puts it to sleep. It may not wow your eyes, but hopefully, after reading this little tale, it will wow your mind. Enjoy.

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