

POETRY CORNER

Ides of April

By Seth Kaplan
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If you step outside
as the light is being born
on the Ides of April
the spirits will speak

If you walk in silence and with purpose
the trees will whisper ancient stories
from the beginning
when humans knew the magic

If you explore with the eyes of your soul
and the ears of your heart
the wizards and witches in your fields
will show themselves and greet you

If you step into the raging wind
you will learn the source of its anger
and raise your arms and howl
like the animal you are

“Ides of April” is among poems included in “Penned Up,” a collection of poems by the Applegate Poets. Applegate Valley resident Seth Kaplan is executive director of A Greater Applegate. Copies of “Penned Up” are available online at applegater.org. All proceeds support the Applegate.

Have a submission for Poetry Corner,
either by an Applegate resident
or about the Applegate? Email it to *Applegater*
poetry editor Paul Tipton at ptipton4u2c@gmail.com.

Free anti-overdose drugs available

Free distribution of life-saving overdose medication and HIV tests is set for 10:30 am to 1:30 pm Sunday, March 6, at the Sugarloaf Center, 206 Tetherow Road, in Williams. Park in the parking lot and take a short walk to the center, which is at the end of the gated driveway.

Volunteers from the nonprofit group Rogue Harm Reduction will offer free doses of naloxone to take home, along with instructions for use. They’ll also give out free fentanyl test strips, take-home HIV tests, and condoms and lube.

Free overdose response training takes about 20 minutes. Walk-ins are welcome.

Please wear a mask, regardless of vaccination status.

Rogue Harm Reduction, a volunteer-run, nonprofit health collective, promotes community wellness and harm reduction strategies in response to substance use disorders and other community health concerns. The events are held the first Sunday of each month.

For more information, email rogueharmreduction@gmail.com.

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BOOK REVIEW

Bewilderment

Richard Powers
W.W. Norton & Company
New York 2021

BY CHRISTIN LORE WEBER

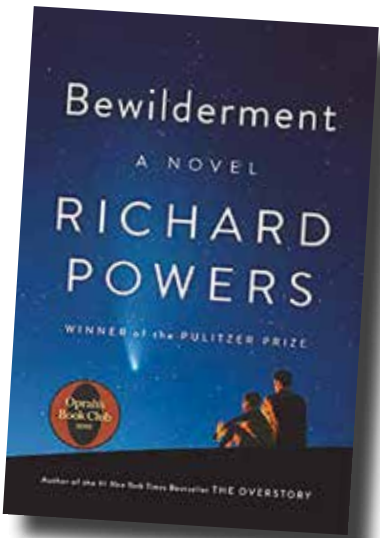
“Astronomy and Childhood. Both are voyages across huge distances. Both search for facts beyond their grasp. Both theorize wildly and let possibilities multiply without limits. Both are humbled every few weeks. Both operate out of ignorance. Both are mystified by time. Both are forever starting out.” (*Bewilderment*, page 64.)

Since I reviewed Richard Powers’ *The Overstory*, I’ve anticipated his next book, and here it is. The title alone was sufficient to draw me in, but once I finished the first scene, the book had magnetized me. I did nothing but read it for two days. I’m not a fast reader; I tend to linger over words and phrases that delight or intrigue me. Also, this is a relatively short novel at 278 pages. And it is almost magnificent. He disappointed me only once, like a famous tenor faltering on the high note.

Whatever his topic, Powers seems to know a whole lot more about it than most people, and this fascinates me. In *Overstory* he taught me about trees. In *Orfeo*, I learned about music and found myself checking in with YouTube to hear performances of the classic symphonies he described. I have his *Echo Maker* still unread in my collection, but not for long. In *Bewilderment* Powers ventures into the intricacies of the cosmos and the creative human mind.

The story is about a child, a boy named Robin, diagnosed on the autism spectrum. Both his parents are scientists who never expected to have children, but as Bobbie Burns reminds us, “The best-laid plans... gang aft a-gley.” When Robin’s mother is killed in a car accident, his father takes on the full responsibility of parenting. He’s mystified. Bewildered. His son lives in a completely foreign mental and sensual universe from his own or from that of the educational institutions available. What will Robin’s father choose as a means of education for his son? He rejects the whole notion of categorizing a child as “on the spectrum.” He tells the reader, “I wanted to tell the man that life itself is a spectrum disorder, where each of us vibrated at some unique frequency in the continuous rainbow. Then I wanted to punch him. I suppose there’s a name for that, too.”

At that point early in the narrative the reader is cast upon the yet more



bewildering but fascinating currents of astrobiology and experimental psychology. We already know from Robin’s father, right from page one, that “I always tried to tell (Robin) the truth, if I knew it and it wasn’t lethal. He knew when I lied, anyway.”

What is and is not possible? It is a question that haunts most humans regardless of our sphere of consciousness or “unique frequency in the continuous rainbow” of being. What is possible for Robin in a world on the verge of mind-blowing breakthroughs in the sciences of astronomy and of the human brain? What of this science does Richard Powers know and imagine into the lives of his characters in this new novel? Is he willing to leave his readers in a state of bewilderment? Or will he break through our barriers of what is possible and transfix our minds with wholly new understanding?

He held me suspended for two days on the edge of wonderment. If, in fact, his writer’s voice did crack on a high note, he recovered with a bit of literary scat which is as popular in music these days as in Ella Fitzgerald’s and can still make fans cheer. It is so human to trip and then to rise again. We’ve all done it. It brings us back to earth, our home.

And as Robin’s dad alerts us in the beginning of this stunning tale, “Life is something we need to stop correcting. My boy was a pocket universe I could never hope to fathom. Every one of us is an experiment, and we don’t even know what the experiment is testing. My wife would have known how to talk to the doctors. Nobody’s perfect, she liked to say. But, man, we all fall short so beautifully” (page 5).

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