

Views from the Rock

STRANGE LITERARY BEDFELLOWS

Philip Roth died in May at the age of 85, only a few months after the death of Ursula K. Le Guin, the former Cannon Beach resident and author of world acclaim.

Until their deaths, Roth and Le Guin had been the only living authors in the Library of America, a series “preserving the words that have shaped the American canon.”

Both Le Guin and Roth would likely be uncomfortable with their sudden literary synchronicity.

In so many ways they were polar opposites: Le Guin a product of the Pacific Northwest; Roth, of the East Coast.

Le Guin was the daughter of academics, raised in Berkeley, California; Roth, from a middle-class family in the shadow of Newark, New Jersey.

Roth’s fiction took place on earth; Le Guin’s in other worlds.

Le Guin spent a long domestic life with her husband Charles and raised a family. Roth’s serial relationships were fitful and occasionally troubled — his former wife, the actress Claire Bloom wrote a savage accounting of their years together. Roth had no children.

In many of Le Guin’s novels, she imagines a world without gender.

Philip Roth’s voice is fixated on the roots of his desire.

In later years, Le Guin confronted the divide between herself and Roth with a painful assessment: “He’s an awfully male writer,” she told Literary Hub, the Grove Atlantic literary news source. “It’s sort of like he doesn’t want me in his world.”

No labels

But it is their moment in time, in America, their passion for writing and uncanny ability to confound critics that ultimately make Roth and Le Guin part of a literary quilt.

Each found their voice and connected with the public in decades-long careers.

Their breakout novels — “Portnoy’s Complaint” and Le Guin’s “Left Hand of Darkness,” came out the same year, 1969.

Le Guin was an unfashionable outsider from the East Coast literary establishment; Both bristled at labels

“Don’t shove me into your pigeon-hole, where I don’t fit, because I’m all over,” she said in a 2014 interview.

Le Guin and Roth both viewed the art of storytelling with reverence, as prolific and highly regarded authors of essays and criticism.

The two authors each retreated from fashionable literary salons: Roth lived and wrote in a wooded rural town in Connecticut 100 miles from New



Ursula K. Le Guin

CANNON SHOTS
R.J. MARX

York; Le Guin, in Portland and Cannon Beach.

Each often used their remote locations as backdrops for their fiction: Roth painting bucolic New England; Le Guin, the grandeur of the Oregon Coast.

In a 1973 essay, Salman Rushdie ascribes to each a shared literary device, the power of allegory: Roth, in “The Great American Novel”; Le Guin in “The Left Hand of Darkness.”

Le Guin and Roth shared a kooky love of language and lingo, sometimes made up. Their love of words extended to tongues new and old: Le Guin’s Hainish and the Hardic tongue of Earthsea. “Have you no harekki on Gont?” asks a character in “A Wizard of Earthsea.”

Compare Roth’s Yiddish, “Kish mir in tuchis” — which means what it sounds like.

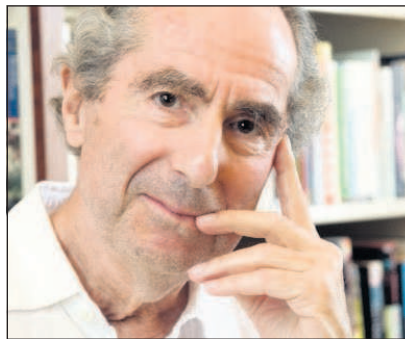
Voices for freedom

Le Guin and Roth came from a generation of progressive politics, secular outlook and rigid work ethic.

Intensely political, they pressed boundaries and hailed free expression.

Roth perceived the daily repression of Eastern European regimes, where writers feared for their safety and viewed their example as a cautionary tale, identifying abusive political power “as immoral coercion.” He helped bring writers like Milan Kundera and Bruno Schulz from behind the Iron Curtain to American readers.

Le Guin loathed intolerance, totalitarianism and repression. “Only fear rules men,” a Le Guin character



Author Philip Roth poses for a photo in the offices of his publisher, Houghton Mifflin, in 2008.

states in “The Left Hand of Darkness.” “Nothing else works. Nothing else lasts long enough.”

Le Guin’s greatest moments in public life came from the podium. At the 2014 National Book Awards, she delivered a speech that resonated to not only the world of publishing, but politics, society and letters.

She urged an ascendancy of writers who can “remember “freedom — poets, visionaries — realists of a larger reality.”

Both Le Guin and Roth were honored by the National Book Foundation with its Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters, an honor bestowed on Saul Bellow, Joan Didion, Toni Morrison, Ray Bradbury, John Updike and Stephen King.

Neither received the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Is there a nexus between them? Does there need to be one?

Roth supplies a better understanding of appreciating great authors in his essay, “Writing American Fiction”: “There seems to me little, in the end, to prove an assertion about the psychology of a nation’s writers, outside, that is, of their books themselves.”

Authors Haupt, Quinn at Beach Books

Writers add personal experiences to their characters’ voices

By Rebecca Herren
Seaside Signal

Novelists Jennifer Haupt and Anna Quinn love combining book tours, and their joint readings featured at Beach Books on June 22 was one of many they have collaborated with over the years.

Quinn, who is the author of “The Night Child,” and Haupt who penned “In The Shadow of 10,000 Hills,” first met at a Pacific Northwest Booksellers event. They hit it off and have been tour buddies ever since. “It was simpatico,” Haupt said.

Their book tours have taken them from coast to coast, together and individually. Whenever possible they combine tours, readings and workshops. When schedules align, their husbands accompany them for a weekend vacation.

Anna Quinn owns the Writers’ Workshop and Imprint Bookstore in Port Townsend, Washington. She is a published poet and essayist and has led writing workshops for more than 26 years.

“The Night Child” is a story of resilience. The novel explores the impact of traumatic childhood experiences and the line between the past and the present. Its main voice is Nora, a high school English teacher, who, as a child, told herself stories as a way to survive. It wasn’t



Authors Anna Quinn, standing, and Jennifer Haupt, seated, talk about what influences inspired the characters in their newest novels at the Lunch in the Loft author series at Beach Books.

until something disrupts her belief that Nora finds out the story she’d been telling herself might not be the true one.

Suffering her own childhood trauma, Quinn learned to tell herself stories; writing herself out of old stories and into new ones. Quinn also found an escape in music and learned to play the accordion.

“Music changes you viscerally,” she said, and looks for ways to recreate rhythm and passion in her writings. But it wasn’t until she discovered fiction that her whole world opened up. Like the characters in these stories, Quinn, too,

eventually found the language and her voice.

“In The Shadow of 10,000 Hills” is set against the backdrop of a country grieving 12 years post Rwandan genocide. It follows the intertwining stories of women who discover the connections between forgiveness and grief.

She specialized in writing about women who dealt with their own depression and grief by starting nonprofits for children and women around the world. She didn’t know how to start a nonprofit or how this would help heal one’s grief, but she kept asking. The answers she received were always the same: by helping people discover their voice and helping them deal with their grief was healing for the women who started the nonprofits. “I was just fascinated with that,” Haupt said.

She traveled to Rwanda in 2006, more than a decade after the Rwandan genocide. Her journey into the rural provinces to interview genocide survivors, aid workers and people who were starting nonprofits gave her a sense of connection, sharing similar trauma.

“There was a bridge of compassion I felt between me and the people whose stories and experiences that, of course, I couldn’t compare my experiences with, but I found this whole country was still grieving 12 years after the genocide and it was very much under the surface. I came back from Rwanda wanting to tell these stories but wanting to tell these stories in fiction.”



Whether future beauty queen or future scholars — or both — Miss Oregon Princesses strut their stuff.

The future of Miss America

A couple of Saturday’s ago, June 30, which would have been, were she alive, my mother’s 96th birthday, we happened to be in downtown Seaside just as the Miss Oregon parade was starting. Normally, I’m not much of a parade person, but this was different. That night 24 young ladies from all over the state would be competing for the title of Miss Oregon, the winner going on to compete for the crown of Miss America 2019 in Atlantic City on Sunday, Sept. 9. Along with a couple of hundred tourists

and bystanders and people rooting for their own favorites, I shouted encouragement to the amazing young women

competing for the Miss Oregon title from the sidewalks on Broadway, yelling extra loud and waving at Haylie Moon, Miss Clatsop County, who hails from Cannon Beach and Hannah Garhofer, Miss Lane County, a Seaside native.

The Miss America contest and pageant is a sentimental trip down memory lane for me. I grew up in Atlantic City, and when I was a kid, as a family, we went to convention hall to watch it live onstage. The night before the big show, which is nationally televised, contestants from all 50 states participated in a parade on the Atlantic City boardwalk. They wore evening gowns and tiaras and rode perched behind the back seat of Cadillac convertibles. (In Seaside, they ride in Corvettes.) I always enjoy the parade more than the actual show because you can get really close to the contestants.

On June 30, at the Seaside Convention Center, Taylor Ballard, 25, holder of the Miss Northwest Wonderland crown and from Portland, won the title of Miss Oregon. She holds a bachelor of science degree in communication and her platform issue is Confidence Under Construction. Her talent is dance. Kennedy Hjelte, of Tualatin, who competed as Three Rivers Outstanding Teen, won the title of Miss Oregon’s Outstanding Teen. She will also progress to Atlantic City.

Unsurprisingly, the 24 young women in Seaside competing for the title of Miss Oregon did a portion of the competition wearing a swimsuit. Perhaps by next year, that element of the contest will be eliminated, as several months ago, the Miss America corporation announced they were dropping the swimsuit competition from the program after making the decision to rebrand the competition around scholarship.

The swimsuit competition has always sat poorly with me.

What bothered me, even as a child, were the remarks people made, even my own mother, about the competitor’s bodies. (For some reason, during the evening gown competition, the remarks were all about the dress and whether or not it worked.) “She’s got no breasts,” my mother might say. Or, “Lucky she’s wearing heels — will you get a load of those stumpy legs.” Every remark passed about the contestant was a body judgment. My mother, God bless her, saw nothing wrong with that. What a dreadful message, I think to send the tiny girls and young teens, currently pageant princesses, growing up in pageant culture.

Taylor Ballard told the Oregon contest judges her platform of confidence and positive body image is particularly relevant. I think she’s on point. I applaud her success in Seaside, seizing the Miss Oregon crown. And I am personally delighted she won’t have to compete in a swimsuit in Atlantic City on Sept. 9.

VIEW FROM THE PORCH
EVE MARX



PUBLIC MEETINGS

MONDAY, July 16
Ecola Creek Watershed Committee, 4:30 p.m., City Hall, 163 E. Gower St.

TUESDAY, July 17
Cannon Beach Public Works Committee, 9 a.m., City Hall, 163 E. Gower St.

THURSDAY, July 19
Parks and Community Services Committee, 9 a.m., City Hall, 163 E. Gower St.

Cannon Beach Design Review Board Meeting, 6 p.m., City Hall, 163 E. Gower St.

THURSDAY, July 26
Cannon Beach Planning Commission, 6 p.m., City Hall, 163 E. Gower St.

TUESDAY, Aug. 7
Cannon Beach City Council, 7 p.m., City Hall, 163 E. Gower St.

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