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## Understanding Ron Rash

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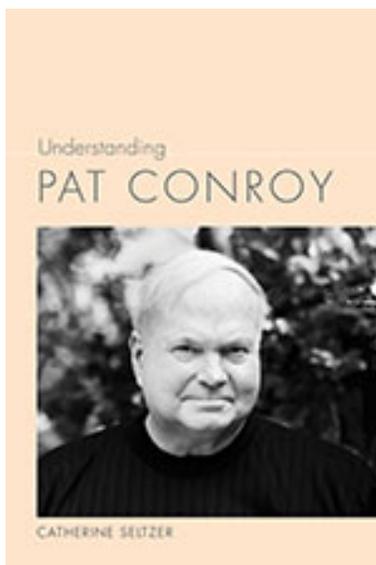
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“The Rememberer”, an interview by Katherine Clark. The conversational style is intriguing and deeply moving as family members interact with each other—one saying “It was worse than Pat says it was”. Nikky Finney closed the book with her synopsis, “Translating Love”.

A wonderful selection of black and white original photographs, featuring scenes across the years from Pat’s baby photos to full family depictions. They bring the conversations to life. A book well worth collecting for a personal library and having in a public and academic library collection.

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**Understanding Pat Conroy.** Catherine Seltzer. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2015. ISBN 978-1-61117-516-5. 160 p. \$39.95.



Catherine Seltzer introduces us to young Pat Conroy: As a high school student Conroy accompanies his teacher, Eugene Norris, to Thomas Wolfe’s home in Asheville, North Carolina. Seltzer recounts the story that Norris took an apple from one of the trees on the grounds and said, “Eat it boy.” (p.1) Reflecting on taking the first bite, Conroy said, “I was given the keys to go out and try to write.” Conroy’s explanation of Norris’ comment goes on to show how “from the very beginning I wrote to explain my own life to myself”. From uncovering Conroy’s tree of knowledge and his tree of life, Seltzer recounts the many ways in which Conroy has brought sensitive and intellectual inspirations to his writings.

Through five novels and five books, Seltzer says Conroy returns to his life experiences and says “Only rarely have I drifted far from the bed where I was conceived.” (p.2) His comments on his family life that appear in his writings includes this comment, “One of the greatest gifts you can

get as a writer is to be born into an unhappy family I could not have been born into a better one.” (p.2)

Reading Seltzer’s book, I am reminded of the one bit of advice any student hears from a mentor or teacher, “write what you know about, write what you have experienced.” I don’t think many English teachers are so clever as to give an apple to a talented student but I thank Catherine Seltzer for recounting the tale.

For students and faculty who might want to recommend Seltzer’s book for a reference or for supplemental reading, the author provides Chapters 2-8 as an individual commentary on “The Water is Wide”, “The Great Santini”, “The Lords of Discipline”, “The Prince of Tides”, “Beach Music”, “My Losing Season”, and “South of Broad”. Notes, Bibliography and Index cover pages 119 to 135.

Recommended for school and college libraries.

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**Understanding Ron Rash.** John Lang. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2014. ISBN 978-1-61117-411-3. 152 p. \$39.95



My search for understanding Ron Rash began a few months ago when someone said, “You know Ron’s first writings were funny, not so filled with “depressed and depressing characters living depressing lives and rarely inspiring laughter” (my colleague’s description). My colleague went on to say, “You should read those first stories, “The Night the New Jesus Fell to Earth” or “Badeye”.

Going from reading and having heard Ron read from “Saints at the River”, “Serena” and “The Cove”, I was eager to take the journey into those short stories that might provide laughter and clever twists in the characters—away from “evil Serena”( Serena) and into “hustler Larry (The

Night the New Jesus Fell to Earth)”. I did not believe I was being disloyal but I was eager to see writings Ron created that my colleague described as filled with humor.

While looking for a resource that might give a comparative analysis of Ron’s writings from poetry to short stories to novels, John Lang’s “Understanding Ron Rash” appeared on my Must Read Amazon Book List. Yes, I was hooked.

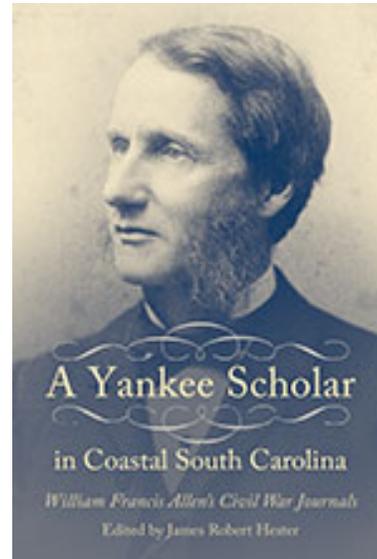
Lang’s introductory chapter provides an inside look at Ron and the history of his family with particular attention to the love he developed for the Appalachian foothills and “the mountains of North Carolina” (p.2 URR). Rash is quoted as saying “home was always the mountains of North Carolina” (p.2 URR). Lang acknowledges that Rash may be known to those of us who think of him as a southern writer but explains that Ron’s appeal as a writer (author) is strong in the south but flowed to the world stage with his writings appearing in more than a dozen languages (p.2 URR).

The highest compliment I believe John Lang gave Ron Rash was his acknowledgement, “my principle indebtedness is to the subject of this study, Ron Rash, whose fiction and poetry have earned my respect and admiration for nearly two decades”. My thanks to John Lang comes after I read the book and highly recommend it as a must collect book for any public and academic library. The notes section is fascinating as it relates terms and individuals to each of the reviewed writings and the bibliography and index are well organized around the writings and significant places and reviews of Rash’s writings.

Yes, I later thanked my colleague for introducing me to Ron’s short stories, particularly the collection, “The Night The New Jesus Fell to Earth and Other Stories From Cliffside, North Carolina”, Ron Rash, 1994, The University of South Carolina Press. Yes, I laughed and smiled with the characters, their adventures, and with Ron who created them.

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**A Yankee Scholar in Coastal South Carolina: William Francis Allen’s Civil War Journals.** Edited by James Robert Hester. Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 2015. ISBN 978-1-61117-496-0. 344 p. \$49.95.



James Robert Hester’s edited edition of “A Yankee Scholar in Coastal South Carolina, William Francis Allen’s Civil War Journals” appealed to me as I am fascinated by the idea of Northeastern educators, ministers, military men, teachers and abolitionists joining together and arriving on St. Helena Island in the 1860s with the intent of providing the former slaves living there with tutoring in reading and writing.

William Francis Allen, a talented and exceptionally well education historian, arrived in South Carolina in 1863 with his wife and her niece to join the group hoping to go to St. Helena’s Island. Allen was a respected historian and talented musician and his immediate attraction upon arriving on St. Helena was to the former slaves and to their music and songs.

As an elementary school student in Kings Mountain, North Carolina, I eagerly awaited Thursdays since that was the day we had a visit from our music teacher. I loved to sing and most especially loved to sing the songs she described as “rounds”. When the class of fifteen was divided into three groups, we were given a quick lesson in the lyrics and then the first group began singing the lyrics with the second and the third group joining in sequence... she called this type of singing a “round”. One round we sang each Thursday was the “Boat Song”. Many times we repeated the lyrics five, six or eight times, we didn’t know who wrote it or where it began. Looking over Allen’s collection of “Slave Songs, 1867”, I saw that spiritual we sang each week in third grade:

Michael row the boat ashore, Hallelujah  
Jordan bank de bank I stan’; Hallelujah (p. 106)