

## Above the Waterfall

*Ron Rash*

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Les, a long-time sheriff nearing retirement, contends with the ravages of poverty and crystal meth in his small Appalachian town. Nestled in a beautiful hollow of the Appalachians, his is a tight-knit community rife with secrets and suspicious of outsiders.

Becky, a park ranger, arrives in this remote patch of North Carolina hoping to ease the anguish of a harrowing past. Searching for tranquility amid the verdant stillness, she finds solace in poetry and the splendor of the land.

A vicious crime will plunge both sheriff and ranger into deep and murky waters, forging an unexpected bond between them. Caught in a vortex of duplicity, lies, and betrayal, they must navigate the dangerous currents of a tragedy that turns neighbor against neighbor—and threatens to sweep them all over the edge.

## Above the Waterfall Details


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# From Reader Review Above the Waterfall for online ebook

## Annet says

Beautiful gem of a book!

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## Esil says

Above the Waterfall was my first book by Ron Rash but it won't be my last. Reading other reviews, I see comments suggesting that readers familiar with Rash's other books liked this one but not as much as his other books. As a neophyte Rash reader what I read was a beautifully crafted story set in Appalachia reflecting the sadness, despair, brutality and bad decisions that come from deprivation and poverty, and the hope and will to live that come with human connection. This sparse short novel is told through the alternating points of view of Les -- a world weary sheriff on the verge of retirement -- and Becky -- a conservation officer with a love of nature that she expresses through lyrical language. Both Les and Becky come with weighty pasts that make them less than perfect, but arm them with lots of compassion and their own strong moral compasses. The story itself is simple. It's about tension between an old farmer Gerald and a neighbouring new fishing resort, and whether Gerald did or did not do something to sabotage the resort. But it's not the story that makes this book worth reading; it's the people, the world they inhabit and the way Rash weaves it together simply and beautifully conveying so much. If it's not Rash's best book, I'll definitely be looking for some of his other books. Thank you to the publisher and Edelweiss for an opportunity to read and advance copy.

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## Algernon says

I have to thank my Goodreads friends for suggesting to me Ron Rash. I'm not sure I would have taken the plunge on my own, as I am a bit wary of thrillers that open with transcendental meditations over a mountain sunset scene and use words like 'abeyant' in relation with ancient cave paintings at Lascaux. In the end, I am glad I went in without misconceptions or misplaced expectations, because I discovered a talented wordsmith, capable of uniting a lyricism and an empathy worthy of James Sallis with the clarity and sharpness of Daniel Woodrell in revealing the trauma and hardship of living in a close, impoverished community. I mentioned Sallis because Rash is also a poet, revealed here through the intimate journal of one of his POV characters - Becky, a park ranger. And I mentioned Woodrell because **Above the Waterfall** is set in the same disturbing yet fascinating Ozark Mountains, presented in detail by the other POV character - Len, the local Sheriff. I guess if I were the kind of reader who needs to find the correct genre for every novel he reads, this one would belong on the 'country-noir' shelf.

Looking at the main plot, the noir influences are dominant : a world-weary, deeply emotionally scarred Sheriff is retiring and wants to leave a clean plate for his successor, but a series of incidents crop up in his last week on the job, including trespassing, property damage and drug raids on improvised meth labs. Len likes to do things his own way, turning a blind eye on minor infractions as long as bigger troubles happen someplace else. Now he is caught between loyalty to an old school friend and friendship with a cranky old man, while trying to decide if there is any future in a personal liaison with a woman who hides scars as deep as his own.

*Man who encouraged clinically depressed wife to kill herself seeks woman, traumatized by school shooting, who later lived with ecoterrorist bomber.*

Going back to my comparison to Sallis and Woodrell, I am prompted to remark on another point in common in their oeuvre : social commitment, the ability to look at crime in the context of the larger picture, a picture that includes economic inequality, drug culture (" *Television glamorized meth, even when they tried not to.*" ), wars in foreign countries (and how they cause ripples thousands of miles away), environmental destruction and related protest movements, gun rights and the sick American fascination with violence and serial killers. All these hot button issues are mentioned more in relation to the way they influence the personality of the main actors rather than forming an integral part of the plot, but I found this approach more convincing than the preachy style of lesser writers.

*In a county this rural, everyone's connected, if not by blood, then in some other way. In the worst times, the county was like a huge web. The spider stirred and many linked strands vibrated.*

Having got the plot out the way (which merits a three star rating at best, the mystery and the identity of the perpetrators being rather obvious) I would like to talk now about the true strong points of the novel : the ways people deal with personal trauma and the ways nature manages to soothe and uplift our spirit. Sheriff Les feels guilty for not doing more to help his suicidal wife. Park Ranger Becky turns herself into an autistic wreck in the aftermath of a school shooting. Farmer Gerald lashes out at the world to ease the pain of losing his only son in a foreign war. Yet somehow they are brought together by their love of the open, vibrant spaces of the Appalachian countryside, by a stream filled with rainbow trout, by a field of wildflowers under the moonlight, by an Edward Hopper painting that captures the essence of loneliness ("Freight Car at Truro"). A local unorthodox preacher urges all of us to discover peace and understanding here on earth instead of waiting for hypothetical rewards in the next one:

*Ponder a pretty sunset or the dogwoods all ablossom. Every time you see such it's the hem of the robe of glory. Brothers and sisters, how do you expect to see what you don't seek? Some claim heaven has streets of gold and all such things, but I hold a different notion. When we're there, we'll say to the angels, why, a lot of heaven's glory was in the place we came from. And you know what the angels will say? They'll say yes, pilgrim, and how often did you notice? What did you seek?*

I will surely go back and read more of Ron Rash novels and, why not, explore some of his collections of poetry. Judging by the tidbits included here in the haiku-like musings of Becky, Rash is equally adept at prose and verse. He proves to me that **word and wonder and world could be one** :

*as the storm moves on  
rain trickles off  
the leaves  
like an afterthought*

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## **Zoeytron says**

Dueling POVs from Sheriff Les and Park Ranger Becky. The sheriff knows better than to put too much faith in justice, he's seen too much. Sometimes the right thing to do is in direct contradiction with what the law dictates. Becky is emotionally scarred from a traumatic childhood incident. She has a pure love of nature and

revels in being a part of it, it soothes her soul.

The end result for me came across as a tasty course of meat and potatoes that was inexplicably served with an exotic side dish of edible flowers. I get the ugliness of reality playing off the beauty of nature, but felt each diluted the other.

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### **Elyse Walters says**

Audiobook.....

It could be just me - probably is...but I was bored as often as I was interested-

The writing is beautiful- and often the dialogue kept me very interested- but other times I drifted away with the lovely descriptions themselves.

“ The sound of water moving over smooth stones”.....for example, is beautiful - yet I wasn't really feeling anything.

I knew the sheriffs ex-wife was depressed....but I never felt I knew her. I wanted to feel empathy.

Becky had a traumatic childhood experience, but I never felt I really knew her either.

Her poetry was beautiful- but again —? my problem is I didn't feel much intimacy.

The two different voices used in the audiobook were good —each very distinct....but mostly —? but I'm not convinced Ron Rash is an author for me.

I do own a few other of his books - The Risen- Serena- and The Cove ...( books given to me)....and I'll try one more....'sometime'.....but this novel was honestly just ok for me.

2.5 Stars. —?- sorry....I just was only so-so interested!

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### **Andrew Smith says**

Becky has mental scars. In her youth a man entered her Virginia school and went to work with a rifle. Amongst the victims was her teacher. Now she's a State Ranger at Locust Creek Park in the Appalachians, where she marvels at the nature that surrounds her every day and which sometimes inspires her to write poetry. She also tends for the needs of a septuagenarian named Gerald who owns a plot of land that abuts the park. Les has tragedy in his past too, in his case it was the loss of his son who went off to war and never came back. Then there's the local sheriff, Les, who is a few weeks from early retirement. He intends to live in a spot he's picked out for himself and paint the wonderful views he'll be afforded. Les fights his demons too, he believes he failed to understand his wife's depression and was responsible for her attempted suicide. And finally there is CJ, a boy who survived a tough upbringing and made good. He now works for the owner of the park. CJ saved Les from a serious accident with a baling machine many years back – an act Les feels he's never truly thanked him for.

Les and Becky have a relationship... of sorts. It's not fully bloomed and it's not clear that it ever will. There are tensions surrounding the park involving Gerald and the CJ's boss. Gerald has a habit of wandering onto park land and is suspected of poaching fish. CJ is tasked with resolving this issue and seeks support from his old pal, the sheriff. As the story plays out, old friendships and perceived debts battle with each other to gain prominence.

The narrative is laid out, alternately, from the perspective of Becky and Les. Becky's sections are poetic and sometimes fragmented. We get the story from Les in a more conventional way. I found this off-putting to start with but once I settled into the flow I found the contrast interesting and it really is all beautifully written. There's a lot here about the grimmer side of life in this unnamed town – it's a pretty dark tale. But soon there is also a mystery to be solved and the dramatic tension steadily increases.

It's a highly atmospheric piece and, in the end, totally absorbing. I'd been wanting to read a book by Ron Rash for some time and I'm pleased I tracked one down at last. He's certainly a class act and I'll spend time with more of his work sometime soon.

My thanks to Canongate Books and NetGalley for providing a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

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### **Diane S ? says**

A rather simple plot compared to many of Rash's other books but filled with memorable characters nevertheless. Becky, her story is written in a kind of surreal style. She has had a tragic past, but is now the ranger at the National Forest and is the friend of an old landowner. C. J. came back to town to take a job and now finds that the job has disappeared, leaving him without support for his wife and sons. Barry, a young police officer who quits after a nasty meth bust. Can no longer bear to look at the damage and the worst that people can do to each other. And a sheriff, good friends with Becky, due to retire in a matter of days.

Rash's real genius, however, is in painting a picture of the landscape that is both beautiful and poignant. Every little detail, nothing too small escapes his notice. The love of land that he imparts to many of his characters. Simply wonderful.

Alternately he wrote one of the most in your face view of a meth addict, how they live, how little they care about anything but the drug. Such a stark contrast to the beautiful setting of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

So many great quotes I could copy but this small line just touched me.

"As the storm moves on, rain trickles off the leaves like an afterthought." Simple but lovely.

ARC from publisher

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### **Cathrine ?? says**

**5★**

In an interview with Jack Shuler for the [South Carolina Review](#) Ron Rash was commenting on his two formats—prose and poetic, and stated “*When I write one, I can't do the other, explaining that the two forms seem to come to him on different frequencies. Yet One Foot in Eden began as a poem and just kept growing.*”

This one also must be considered a successful blend of the two and was sublime reading for me. I savored every page, truly. I think it was written for kindred spirits such as myself.

Also discussed, was a favorite theme of his—*“things that are vanishing or gone, southern lifestyles that are fading out of existence. To balance these themes of impermanence, Rash also uses natural metaphors, such as a blade of grass or a waterfall, things that will be understood by a reader two hundred years from now, because nature is universal.”*

From the body of his work, this one has garnered mostly less than enthusiastic reviews from my GR friends so I was not expecting my response. I can understand why some were not so smitten and even though I am besotted with his talent, I have previously bestowed 5 stars on his short story collections only—until now.

**“Last week I brought the children to the meadow. How many different things can you see? At first, only three—tree, grass, flower. Then as they moved around the meadow—actually seeing—over a hundred before they left.”**

I loved it so much I’m going to read it again because even though I tried to catch it all I know I missed hidden treasures. It can be read quickly on a superficial level or the depths can be explored and appreciated. I want to move again through the pages and find them—see more.

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## Connie says

Ron Rash has written an atmospheric novel of guilt and redemption set in the Appalachian Mountains of North Carolina. The sheriff, Les, is a bit of a loner haunted by his failed marriage to a woman he could not help. He has a relationship with Becky, a park ranger, who had been traumatized by a harrowing school shooting as a child as well as experiences with an eco-terrorist. Becky has found solace in the natural world and poetry. She is also close to an old farmer named Gerald who reminds Becky of her grandparents.

When someone poisons a trout stream at a fishing resort, fingers are pointed at Gerald. The environmentalist Becky feels in her heart that Gerald would never harm the fish. Les investigates the crime in the last few weeks before he retires as sheriff. The sheriff's office is also involved in hunting down another kind of poison--meth--and seeing the damage it has done to some of the town's younger citizens.

The mystery takes a back seat to the stories about Les, Becky, and Gerald--all complicated, flawed characters with good hearts. Les narrates his chapters with normal prose. Other chapters are narrated by Becky in very poetic prose filled with observations about nature. The wonder of the natural world is also expressed through Becky's poetry, and phrases from the poet G.M. Hopkins. Ron Rash's lyrical writing is beautiful as he weaves together a story about an Appalachian small town and the challenges faced by the people who populate it. It also reminds us to stop and open our eyes to the natural beauty in our world.

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## karen says

i was so excited to get this book at BEA - it was one of my four MUST-haves. while we were waiting in line for it, greg asked me what it was about. i just shrugged. "meth? appalachia? i don't care - it's ron rash!" and then i opened it up and hey! meth! appalachia!! who would have guessed!?

this is on my grit lit shelf, but it's on the end of the grit lit spectrum where there is little emphasis on the drugs and violence. the grit here doesn't scour, it just sort of buffs a little. very few grit lit novels will open

with such poetically alliterative descriptions:

*Though sunlight tinges the mountains, black leather-winged bodies swing low. First fireflies blink languidly. Beyond this meadow, cicadas rev and slow like sewing machines. All else ready for night except night itself. I watch last light lift off level land. Ground shadows seep and thicken. Circling trees form banks. The meadow itself becomes a pond filling, on its surface dozens of black-eyed susans.*

there are definitely scenes in which meth causes bad things to occur, but this is a more meditative book, as les, a north carolina sheriff in his last three weeks on the job, is confronted with just one more case. and you know how that always goes. it's never a parking ticket. this last case involves no car chases or shoot-em-ups; it concerns the poisoning of a trout population at a fishing resort. i know - michael bay says "pass." but there is also a meth bust, so there's still some action elements.

the story is told in alternating chapters between les and becky shytle, a park ranger who is also a poet (with a deep respect for gerard manley hopkins). becky's chapters are comprised of lyrical passages and bits of her poetry, usually celebrating nature and the land around her. her slower-paced chapters contrast with les' choppy, more dialogue-driven ones and provide a natural backdrop to the crime story in which she is tangentially involved. she is also tangentially involved with les himself, in a slow-burning courtship that their own personal damage has stalled with caution. the two of them have well-developed backstory, but it is becky's that stands out on account of how unusual it is and how scarring it has been for her.

les' backstory is more common, especially for men in his profession - a marriage failing in a horrible way. but his memories of the early years with his wife are beautifully written, which elevates it from most books about failed marriages. les is neither a perfect man nor a corrupt sheriff. he is completely human; he's made mistakes and has occasionally taken advantage of situations, but essentially he is a good man who wants the best for his community. having grown up in the town he now oversees, he knows these people and their pasts, he knows their weaknesses and when to let minor offenses slide. he is also subject to the pressures and obligations to people who were once friends and are now caught up in very bad things because of where circumstance have led them; circumstances in which les has unwittingly played a part.

les' struggle is with finding that middle ground between the law and ethics, when neither one of those value systems are capable of satisfying the nuanced and flexible factors of situational justice. it's about extenuating circumstances and atonement - les is not a man playing god, but a man who recognizes that some situations require solutions outside of the law or ordinary morality.

it's a quiet book, full of beautiful natural imagery and the sense of an ending - of tying up loose ends and setting things in order; leaving the campsite better than you found it before receding into a much-deserved retirement. in a way, it feels slight - more of a snack than a meal, but ron rash's snacks are incredibly satisfying. maybe not the best starting point into his oeuvre, but if you're already a fan, this will sustain your appreciation.

come to my blog!

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## **Margitte says**

Between heaven and hell on earth, the community of Mist Creek Valley battle out the challenges of everyday life.

**You can see heaven all around us, Preacher Waldrop claimed. But Mist Creek Valley would soon confirm that the same was true of hell.**

Les, the soon-to-be-retired sheriff, made two mistakes in his life that would drive him to do irrational things to make things right while time permits. He has three weeks before he retires and move into his new cabin where he will spend the rest of his his days growing his organic vegetables. There was no symbioses between himself and love for many years. If online honesty was paramount, he must brutally profess his biggest sin:

**" Man who encouraged clinically depressed wife to kill herself seeks woman, traumatized by school shooting, who later lived with ecoterrorist bomber.**

Becky Shytle lost her voice as a young girl during a school shooting in which her beloved teacher lost her life. She tried to act autistic until the wonder of nature ignited the meaning of life in her again.

In alternating chapters, these two main characters share their history with the readers, while their daily activities force them to fully participate in their community and make a difference. She works as a state ranger in Locust Creek. Les is tying up the lose ends of a long career. He is fifty-one-years-old. Becky is in her early forties. He paints, and she writes poetry. Both have a dedication to the third most important character in the book: the natural environment feeding the tourism industry in their town.

When integrity, loyalty, honor and reality collide, there is hardly any heaven to be found. Not when betrayal, lies and dysfunction force a community into disarray. Yet, the magic of their environment force them to acknowledge heaven on earth and do the right thing although it does not always comply with legislation.

The extensive blurb blow this novel into the literary genre and scare off many readers. That's my humble opinion. If I have read the blurb before reading it, I would probably not have done so. But the book came highly recommended and I wanted it to be a surprise. If you enjoyed Kent Haruf and Erskine Caldwell's masterful portrayal of American realism, you will enjoy Ron Rash as well. The blurb describes it as *a haunting tale set in contemporary Appalachia*. I agree.

A true masterpiece. Definitely one of the best reads this year.

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## **Camie says**

I debated about a rating for this book which is the rather simple story of a small town sheriff and a female park ranger who are struggling to put their past behind them. He's contemplating his looming retirement and she is a character mostly portrayed through written prose about the beautiful Appalachian countryside that she dearly loves. Short story short (you can read this book in a few hours) they both end up becoming entangled in a dispute between a longtime local man and an ambitious resort owner and have to work together to find a resolution. I've read several other books by Ron Rash an author who has been described as a gorgeous brutal writer. The lyrical quality of his writing is here but somehow there just doesn't seem to be enough at stake in this story. Overall I'd say it's much like getting vanilla when you ordered chocolate , it's still good but not what you had expected. 3 stars

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## **Sue says**

This is my first venture into Ron Rash territory. The combination of a plot composed of conflicted, damaged and well written characters, incredibly descriptive prose alternating with actual poetry, and a story that, though set in the American South, could be moved elsewhere with small changes...has made me an instant fan.

Rash has combined stories of small town corruptions--crystal meth's inroads and the crimes that come with it, the individual "turning of the head" of an otherwise seemingly honest public official, a local business man who surrounds himself with armed bodyguards--with stories of fragility--a woman survivor of a childhood nightmare, an old man struggling without the son he loved and ornery to the rest of the world. And behind and beyond them is the natural world, struggling to maintain itself in the face of man's onslaught.

Becky, the fragile survivor, tells her story partly in poetry and thinks frequently of the Lascaux cave paintings and Hopkins' poetry. She is a Park ranger and respects land and nature. Les, the Sheriff, about to retire, is not fragile, but has his own fault lines below the surface.

Into this stew there are crimes and insinuations, threats and promises. Through it all the writing is wonderful.

*A mown hay field appears, its blond stubble  
blackened by a flock of starlings. As I pass, the field  
seems to lift, peek to see what's under itself, then  
resettle. A pickup passes from the other direction.  
The flock lifts again and this time keeps rising, a  
narrow swirl as if sucked through a pipe and then an  
unfurl of rhythm sudden sprung, becoming one entity  
as it wrinkles, smooths out, drifts down like a  
snapped bedsheet. Then swerves and shifts, gathers and  
twists. Murmuration: ornithology's word-poem for what  
I see. Two hundred starlings at most, but in Europe  
sometimes ten thousand, enough to punctuate a sky.  
What might a child see? A magic carpet made suddenly real?  
Ocean fish-schools swimming air? The flock turns west and  
disappears. (p 104)*

Here are a couple of themes that recur throughout the book--observing the world of nature and seeing the world through the eyes of a child (while also perhaps trying to preserve some of it for future children).

I do recommend this book strongly.

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## **Will Byrnes says**

**All we seen is hard trials and sorrows. I'd not deny it. Burdens are plenty in this world and they can pull us down in the lamentation. But the good Lord knows we need to see at least the hem of the robe of glory, and we do. Ponder a pretty sunset or the dogwoods all ablossom. Every time you see such it's the hem of the robe of glory. Brothers and sisters, how do you expect to see what you don't seek? Some claim heaven has streets of gold and all such things, but I hold a different notion. When we're there, we'll say to the angels, why, a lot of heaven's glory was in the place we come from. And you know what them**

**angels will say? They'll say yes, pilgrim, and how often did you notice? What did you seek?**

How loud the sound of a fear-formed tear? How long the sorrow from a thoughtless wrong? The past. It informs, shapes, bolsters, damages, inspires, depresses and often defines who we are, who we become. In Ron Rash's latest novel, *Above the Waterfall*, characters struggle with their past. William Faulkner famously said, "The past is never dead. It's not even past." The past is indeed never finished with us until we're done. It can no more be finished than our blood. It picks up nutrients there, drops them here, carries disease and defense, history, legacy and possibility. Is the past a medium or a message, a means or a purpose? Maybe the past gathers until enough force has been amassed and it breaks through the dam that has governed its power, spilling into the present.

Becky Shytle is a forty-something with deep scars from a childhood trauma and a dodgy history of more recent vintage. She was only a school kid in Virginia when a shooter left a trail of carnage that included her teacher. Becky became mute for so long that her parents sent her away to stay with her grandparents. It was while there that she was introduced to the beauty of nature, seeing in the natural landscape a form of salvation from her terrors.

**I had not spoken since the day of the shooting. Then one day in July, my grandparents' neighbor nodded at the ridge gap and said watershed. I'd followed the creek upstream, thinking wood and tin over a spring, found instead a granite rock face shedding water. I'd touched the wet slow slide, touched the word itself, like the girl named Helen that Ms. Abernathy told us about, whose first word gushed from a well pump.**

And now, a state ranger at Locust Creek Park, she continues to find sustenance in nature, her spirit still trying to heal as it bonds with the beauty in the world. (*I'm not autistic*, she'd told me later, *I just spent a lot of my life trying to be*.) It is in Becky's portions of the novel that Rash best joins his prose with poetry to create an eyes-rolling-back-into-one's-head, toes-curling work of literary ecstasy.

**Freight Car at Truro** by Edward Hopper - from Wikiart

On first seeing this in Les's office Becky notes "Even Hopper's boxcars are alone"

Becky feels she can share what she sees in the woods and fields with Les, a kindred spirit. Les is the sheriff in a small Appalachian town, three weeks from trading his gold star for a gold watch after thirty years on the force. He's a decent man but carries the weight of a critical mistake he had made with his wife and a debt from his youth that he had never repaid. Becky and Les are friends, at least. They share an appreciation for the glory of nature. Les chose to build his retirement house where he did, for example, because of the view he expects to spend considerable time painting.

*Above the Waterfall* is organized into more or less alternating chapters, his and hers. Les's perspective is presented in a traditional narrative, but Becky's take on things is heavily poetic. She mentions early on favoring the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, a man who wrote much on the beauty to be found in nature. And while Hopkins may have been looking for Jesus in the natural world, Becky is looking for peace without, necessarily, Hopkins' religious associations.

The story centers on an assault, not on people, but on nature itself. At least in appearance. Gerald Blackwelder is in his 70s and owns a piece of land that abuts what is now a fishing resort that features a considerable stock of trout above the waterfall of the title. Someone dumped kerosene into the water, killing the fish, and harming business at the resort. The unpleasant owner of the complex is sure that old man Gerald

is to blame and pressures the sheriff to arrest him. Les is not so sure. And Becky, who feels for Gerald as if he were her own grandfather, is certain he is innocent.

## **Ron Rash**

CJ is a local from a particularly impoverished background who had toughed it out, gotten past his familial disadvantages to become a man of substance in town, working now as an assistant to the resort owner. He carries with him the scars of his past, physical as well as emotional. The past of all four characters threatens to come cascading down when a sequence of seemingly unrelated events brings them together.

The town is home to some folks in the meth production and consumption business, which gives the sheriff something to do and avenues to investigate for a rash of local crimes. The depiction of Appalachian meth users is chilling. Les does his investigative due diligence and the story of his figuring out just what is what is indeed interesting. But that is not where the glory in this book resides.

There are several items you might keep an eye on throughout the novel. Silence comes in for considerable attention. Not only Becky's muteness, but pondering what silence looks like, Les's silence in not speaking up to correct a costly error when he was young, among other mentions. Mental health issues recur a fair bit, from Becky's PTSD to Les's wife's depression, to whatever it is that makes a meth addict, to some household violence in Les's family tree. If you are a young shrink looking for plentiful business you could do worse than to set up shop here. Water references pervade. Sometimes it is just something wet, but more than likely, given the subtext, there is more to this water than something to drink, a pretty stream or a place to cast your line. Maybe a connection, a flow between being and not. And of course, there are trout.

**Trout have to live in a pure environment unlike human beings; they can't live in filth! And so I think there is a kind of wonder; to me, they're incredibly beautiful creatures. I can remember being only four or five and staring for long periods at them, just watching them swimming in the water. But also, like Faulkner in "The Bear," the idea that when such creatures disappear, we have lost something that cannot be brought back. And I think this is what McCarthy is getting at, at the end of *The Road*. They mean many things: beauty, wonder, and fragility, in the sense that they can be easily destroyed.** -  
from the Transatlantica interview

But the big catch here is the application of Gerard Manley Hopkins to contemporary Appalachia. His work pervades the novel. References to his poems are many, sometimes overt, sometimes popping up in the arcane words he favored. I would urge you to read this short novel through once, take a bit of a side trip to Hopkins, (I have provided tickets to that boat in EXTRA STUFF below) then read it again. There is a lot going on that may evade your hook on the first cast. But in case you opt to leave your tackle in the box, a bit of a short look.

You may have come across Hopkins's main chestnut, Spring and Fall, in an English class at some point in your elementary school education. A young girl is saddened by the fall of autumn leaves, seeing, but not understanding that she sees her own demise and the demise of all in nature's annual shedding. Hopkins, who not only converted to Catholicism, but became a Jesuit priest, looks through the tinted lens of nature in seeking the eternal. In a way this is what Becky does, and the language in which her chapters are written is suffused with the spirit, sound and feel of Hopkins's poetry. If methworld is a hellish place, the flight of birds, stars tacked in place in a light-pollution-free sky, sun setting and *a silver birch glows like a tuning fork struck* offer the opposite. Birds seem to pull Becky. One even alights on her. What does that portend? Here is a taste of a Becky chapter, in fact, the opening chapter of the book, using some of the forms Hopkins was

fond of.

**Though sunlight tinges the mountains, black leather-winged bodies swing low. First fireflies blink languidly. Beyond this meadow, cicadas rev and slow like sewing machines. All else ready for night except night itself. I watch last light lift off level land. Ground shadows seep and thicken. Circling trees form banks. The meadow itself becomes a pond filling, on its surface dozens of black-eyed susans.**

Ron Rash's novels have a fair bit of darkness to them. There is a fair bit of optimism here, despite the challenges his characters face, and some of the less appealing goings on in the setting.

**One thing I want to do is for landscape and my characters to be inextricably bound together. I believe the landscape people live in has to affect their psychology...This...novel is...about wonder, about how nature might sustain us. I wanted to look at the world a little more hopefully.** – from the Transatlantica interview

Most writers would be happy to have written one masterpiece in their career. Serena is certainly that. But, with *Above the Waterfall*, Ron Rash has produced a second. There is a golden inner glow to Ron Rash's literary world. He uses words to scrape away the covering crust so we can spy what lies inside. It is a beautiful landscape to behold.

Review posted – 9/4/15

Publication date – 9/8/15

=====EXTRA STUFF

Reviews of other Ron Rash books

-----Burning Bright

-----Nothing Gold Can Stay

-----The Cove

-----Serena

Rash does not, so far as I can tell, have a facebook page. But his son, James, set up a Fan Club FB page for him.

June 6, 2017 - I was alerted by GR friend Linda to the following from April 2017 - WCU's Ron Rash wins Guggenheim Fellowship - Rash deserves all the recognition there is, he is a national treasure.

Here is the Poetry Foundation's bio of Rash, who, after beginning his writing life with short stories, spent about ten years focusing on poetry, and has published several volumes. His skill as a poet is eminently clear in ... *Waterfall*

This is the Poetry Foundation's page for Gerard Manley Hopkins

A wonderful article that explains Hopkins' poem, The Windhover, which is mentioned in *Above the Waterfall*

There is a cornucopia of intel on Hopkins in this Sparknotes piece

Interviews with the author

-----TINGE Magazine – by Jeremy Hauck and Kevin Basl

-----SouthernScribe.com - by Pam Kingsbury

-----Transatlantica - by Frédérique Spill

-----Wall Street Journal - by Ellen Gamerman - Thanks to Linda for cluing us in to this one.

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## **Jennifer says**

Perhaps not my favorite Ron Rash, but that's kind of like saying "Well, it wasn't my favorite trip to Paris". It's still a trip to Paris, which means it's pretty damn good.

With themes of *The Secret Wisdom of the Earth* and *A Land More Kind Than Home*, Rash tells the tale of a local Sheriff on the verge of retirement, land rights, environmental damage, and the plague of drug addiction. Each character with a back story.

More than in any of his other books, he also writes so beautifully about the natural world, I just have to stop and catch my breath. It's all right there if you just stop and look.

*"Last week I brought the children to the meadow. How many different things can you see? At first, only three -- tree, grass, flower. Then as they moved around the meadow -- actually seeing -- over a hundred before they left. As I step out of the meadow after they leave I hear a crunch. Cicada sluff. What a gift! To shed one's old self so easily."*

3.5 stars

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