

News Release: Empathy, Art, and the Fiction of Marie Manilla, West Virginia's 2021 Common Read Author

Teachers across the state will be able to hear WV Common Read author Marie Manilla, whose *The Patron Saint of Ugly* is the 2021 One Book One West Virginia selection. Manilla has served all this year as the state author, working with a Heritage Committee made up of representatives from the WV Library Commission, WV Center for the Book, and Shepherd University and teacher scholars who created resources and tools for teachers across the state who will teach or talk about Marie Manilla. Manilla also participated in the WV Fiction Competition, selecting the winners.

Marie Manilla will be in Shepherdstown participating in a series of events connected to her 2021 Common Read theme, "Other People's Shoes: Empathy, Art and Fiction." Teachers can join zoom to meet Manilla for a reading from *The Patron Saint of Ugly* and Q&A by accessing <https://zoom.us/j/6031914077> on **Wednesday at 9:30 a.m. and on Thursday at 8:00 a.m.** Other programs for the Appalachian Heritage series **September 24-October 1** are located at the website, as well as resources and teaching tools: <https://www.shepherd.edu/ahwirweb/manilla/schedule>. Manilla will receive the Appalachian Heritage Writer's Award on September 30, accessed through the Shepherd University YouTube Channel.

Marie Manilla grew up in Huntington, West Virginia, and like many young people yearned to see the world beyond Appalachia. After college, she moved to Texas, for what she thought would be another culture and another life, working seven years as a graphic designer and artist. She found that even half a continent away from West Virginia's country roads, people were more alike than different. After returning to West Virginia and getting her MFA, she began to write seriously, initially considering herself a short story writer and publishing in a range of journals, exploring what she calls "those pivotal moments in characters' lives that forever change them for better or worse."

Like author Silas House, characterization is Manilla's true forte, though her writing also possesses a wonderful *joie de vivre* and energy that allows her to entertain even as she tackles the thorniest of issues and profoundest of themes. Manilla is a product of the prestigious Iowa Writers' Workshop and has evinced a prodigious talent over the years. Her short story collection, *Still Life with Plums*, was finalist for both the Weatherford Award and ForeWord Reviews Book of the Year.

Manilla's novel *Shrapnel* (2012) takes us into the consciousness of a transplanted old Texan, Bing Butler, whom Manilla somehow makes endearing for her readers despite a contentious and narrow-minded mindset. Despite his intolerant attitudes, Bing discovers when he moves from Texas to West Virginia both the importance of family and the necessity of tempering his judgement of those he finds different from himself. *Shrapnel* won the Fred Bonnie Award for Best First Novel and allowed Manilla to explore the journey of the hero which raises the level of the story to archetype inspired by Joseph Campbell.

The extraordinary success and rave reviews of Manilla's third book, *The Patron Saint of Ugly*, established her as a literary force to be reckoned with and won for her the Weatherford Award in 2014. Exploring her Italian roots, *The Patron Saint of Ugly* has been called a "blend of magical realism, Southern Gothic, and Sicilian malocchio." The book investigates ideas about prejudice, "othering," and the "beauty myth" which is another kind of stereotyping.

The Marie Manilla Appalachian Heritage events are supported by the WV Humanities Council, the WV Center for the Book, the WV Library Commission, the Shepherd University Foundation, and the Center for Appalachian Studies and Communities and Shepherd Foundation. For details about the free Appalachian Heritage Festival events on Saturday September 25, go to <https://www.shepherd.edu/pass>.

WV Common Read Author Marie Manilla

2021 Appalachian Heritage Writer-in-Residence Schedule

Masks Required for All Indoor Events; All Events Are Free

Events Available Across the State at https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQa2Ejpd2_Kh9ojCYSguvnQ

- **March 1 through August 1, 2021:** AHWIR Marie Manilla selects winners of WV Fiction Competition, writes reviews for winners and finalists which appear in the anthology, participates in gathering resources, webpage construction, and an interview to be posted on the website and to go in the new anthology;
- **September 1-30: Photographic Art Exhibit, Images of Appalachia** from the *Anthology of Appalachian Writers Dorothy Allison Volume*, Curator Mike Mendez, Scarborough Library, see link at <https://www.shepherd.edu/ahwirweb/manilla/schedule>;
- **Friday, September 24: 7:00 p.m., Stories from West Virginia**, with Shepherd University Storyteller in Residence Adam Booth, Byrd CHE and streamed live across the state at Shepherd University YouTube Channel at https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQa2Ejpd2_Kh9ojCYSguvnQ.
- **Saturday, September 25: Heritage Festival Events**
2:00 Carter Legacy Workshop, with Linda Lay, Reynolds Hall;
3:30 Conversation with NEA National Heritage Award Recipient John Morris, Reynolds;
7:00 Concert Freedom Songs with Dana Foddrell and Bluegrass with Linda Lay and Springfield Exit, Frank/Butcher Patio, see <https://www.shepherd.edu/pass>.
- **Monday, September 27: 7:00 p.m., “Mother Jones and Transformation through Suffering,”** with novelist Karen Spears Zacharias, Byrd CHE, streaming at https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQa2Ejpd2_Kh9ojCYSguvnQ.
- **Tuesday, September 28: 7:00 p.m. A Celebration of Appalachian Storytellers, Anthology of Appalachian Writers, Dorothy Allison Volume XIII**, with WV Poet Laureate Marc Harshman and Friends, Byrd CHE and streamed live at https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQa2Ejpd2_Kh9ojCYSguvnQ.
- **Wednesday, September 29:**
9:30 a.m. Marie Manilla Reading from *The Patron Saint of Ugly*, Spring Mills High School and Martinsburg Public Library, Byrd 165 and zooming across the state at <https://zoom.us/j/6031914077>;
12:30 p.m. Luncheon with Shepherdstown Library Nourishing Literacy Giving Circle, Bavarian Inn;
7:00 p.m. *The Writing Life*, with Marie Manilla and Reception, Byrd CHE and streaming live at https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQa2Ejpd2_Kh9ojCYSguvnQ.
- **Thursday, September 30: 8:00 a.m. Marie Manilla Byrd 165 Reading from *The Patron Saint of Ugly***, Washington High and Martinsburg High honors students and zooming across the state at <https://zoom.us/j/6031914077>;
3:00-4:30 p.m., *Writers Master Class with Marie Manilla, Byrd CHE and Zoomed across the State*, livestreamed at https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQa2Ejpd2_Kh9ojCYSguvnQ;
7:00 p.m. Scarborough Society Keynote with Marie Manilla and AHWIR Awards Ceremony and 8:00 p.m. Reception, Byrd CHE and livestreamed at https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQa2Ejpd2_Kh9ojCYSguvnQ.
- **Friday, October 1: Morning Interview with *Inside Appalachia*, WV Public Radio;**
7:00 p.m., *Fried Green Tomatoes* Screening and Film Discussion, with Dr. Benjamin Bankhurst at Byrd CHE, Shepherdstown Film Society, Life Long Learners, and Shepherd Students, a story of redemption and forgiveness; livestreamed at https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQa2Ejpd2_Kh9ojCYSguvnQ.
- **November-December 2020:** Construction of *Anthology of Appalachian Writers, Manilla Volume XIV*

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