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Book buzz

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Book buzz

Singleton's latest short-story collection garnering attention, accolades

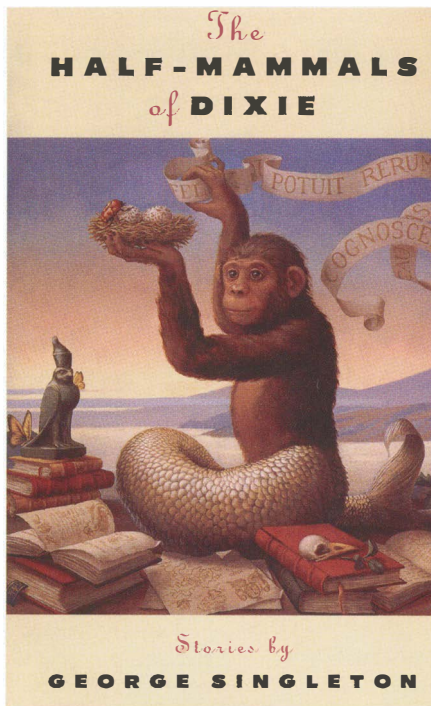
Earlier this year, *Book* magazine featured George Singleton as one of America's up-and-coming writers. In August 2001, National Public Radio's "Morning Edition" profiled him in its "Artists of the New South" series.

And his second collection of short stories, *The Half-Mammals of Dixie*, was so eagerly anticipated that its publisher, Algonquin, ordered a second printing before the book was even released late this summer.

The word is buzz, and Singleton is generating plenty of it. This fall, he embarked on a 30-city tour to promote *Half-Mammals* and Harcourt's paperback release of his first book, *These People Are Us*, published originally in 2001.

Singleton, a 1980 Furman graduate who teaches creative writing at the South Carolina Governor's School for the Arts and Humanities in Greenville, is not exactly a newcomer to the literary landscape. He's been around for a while, winning regional awards and publishing in a variety of "year's best" collections and noteworthy journals, ranging from *The Georgia Review* and *Atlantic Monthly* to *Playboy* and *Harper's*.

But the stories in *Half-Mammals*, punctuated with all the Singleton trademarks — quirky characters, bizarrely



humorous situations and a decidedly off-center (and yet dead-on accurate) view of life and living — have ratcheted up the attention. And who wouldn't be intrigued by a story titled "Richard Petty Accepts National Book Award," or by a protagonist

whose claim to fame is starring in a film about head lice?

Book magazine awards *Half-Mammals* 4.5 stars (out of 5) and says, "Character is at the heart of Singleton's work, and the people who live in his stories reflect his affection for the seldom-examined corners of modern America."

Booklist says, "To some readers, the mere threat of 15 stories about lovable Southern eccentrics is enough to prompt a quick retreat north. Fortunately, Singleton's quick wit, keen intelligence, and empathy for his characters mean we can issue an 'all clear' rather than a hurricane warning. . . . This fine collection reveals an author who, despite his penchant for evolution, has a gift for the act of creation."

Gilbert Allen, the Furman English professor who is no stranger to award-winning prose (see page 29), says of his friend and former student, "In my judgment, George is one of the funniest short-story writers in America. I particularly enjoy his ability to combine hilarious entertainment with social satire that somehow manages to be both wicked and humane."

And while it's a year or two away from publication, Singleton has already put together a third collection of stories — with a fourth in the works.

'76 grads earning high praise for their faith-informed fiction

Robert E. Whitlow and Gary E. Parker, both members of Furman's Class of '76, continue to make their marks in the world of religious fiction.

Whitlow's third novel in the last three years, *The Sacrifice* (W Publishing Group), was released this spring, following on the heels of his 2001 Christy Award-winning work, *The Trial*. The Christy Awards recognize "Christian novels of exceptional quality and impact."

An attorney in Charlotte, N.C., Whitlow has found an avid audience with his suspenseful legal thrillers. *Publishers Weekly* has taken a shine to his work, describing *The Sacrifice* as "an excellent novel" in which Whitlow "makes a solid case for positioning himself as the John Grisham of the Christian market."

The Sacrifice, set near Charlotte, tells the story of attorney Scott Ellis, who agrees to defend a teen-age racist charged in a

local shooting. As Ellis works on his defense, he is drawn into advising a mock trial team at the local high school. There he rekindles an old flame — and discovers even darker forces at work.

While praising Whitlow's "dry humor" and strong sense of character development, *Publishers Weekly* says readers attracted by the book's spiritual message "will appreciate the recurrent motifs of the power of prayer and the social cost of absent parents and fragmented families."

The prolific Parker, senior minister at First Baptist Church in Decatur, Ga., has published a novel a year since 1994. He wrote about the growth in popularity of faith-informed fiction in an article titled "Holy Ink" in the Fall 1999 issue of *Furman*, in which he said, "From whatever their perspective, be it Baptist, Catholic, Jewish or other, those whose writings are faith-informed inevitably hope their readers

become more open to the God they have trusted as real and relevant to life."

His latest book, *Highland Mercies*, was published this summer by Bethany House. The second volume in a series called the "Blue Ridge Legacy," *Highland Mercies* is the follow-up to *Highland Hopes*, a 2002 Christy Award nominee. It continues the story of Abigail Porter Waterbury and takes her through the Depression, recounting her struggles with motherhood, the collapse of her husband's law practice and the demons haunting her brother Daniel.

Rendezvous says that the book "brilliantly portrays the Great Depression era," and the publisher says that the author "renders a portrait of a distinctive era through hard-to-forget characters." The third and final installment in the Blue Ridge Legacy series is scheduled for release next year.