



Copper Queen Library's April Literary Series kicks off with a bang

By Leah Mueller Special to the Herald

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BISBEE — The Copper Queen Library's annual celebration of April's National Poetry Month kicked off Tuesday, April 2, with a reading by Kate Flannery from her 2023 book "Strip Tees," published by Henry Holt and Company.

The book's cover describes the story as "a memoir of millennial Los Angeles."

This year, the CQL is expanding its program to include more prose. Words are poetry, after all. Flannery's words rolled off her tongue, mesmerizing the audience with two chapters from a hilarious, but poignant description of her employment at American Apparel during the '90s.

Flannery, a recent Bisbee transplant, is an East Coaster by birth, a Bryn Mawr graduate and an utterly engaging writer. She always knew that she'd write about her American Apparel gig, taking notes during especially strange on-the-job experiences.

It took her quite a few years to tell her story, but the finished product is impressive.

Seated inside the library's conference room, Flannery opened one of her books and began to read: "I was in Los Angeles for less than a month before I got scouted by a cult. It was autumn of 2004, and I was twenty-three—prime cult age...."

Afterward, Flannery hung around to answer questions and sign copies. Audience members eagerly purchased the hardcover volumes. Everyone wanted to find out more.

Flannery lists her literary influences as Aldous Huxley, Sylvia Plath, Eve Babitz, Emma Klein and Melissa Febos.

She harbors a special fondness for Southern California-based writers, however.

“There’s just this great sect of hard-boiled writers trying to make it in Hollywood,” she said. “But Aldous Huxley is a little bit weirder.”

When she’s not flexing her literary muscles, Flannery works for RuPaul’s Drag Race, a gig she has held for a decade. Though her job is now virtual, she fondly recalls when it wasn’t.

“I never met RuPaul,” she confessed. “It was exciting working there pre-pandemic, because the headquarters are in this incredible, old, art deco building, right in the middle of Hollywood, on Hollywood Boulevard. So, you’d walk in, and Jay Alexander, who is a famous drag personality, would be sitting at the reception desk.

“It was just a really magical place to work.”

Flannery is now writing her second memoir, another coming-of-age story about the Satanic Panic era and heavy metal music. The book promises to be another highly original, engaging page-turner.

Next up on CQL’s April schedule is Leah Mueller’s “Diving Deep, a Tarot Journey”, which will happen on Tuesday, April 16, from 4-7 p.m.

Mueller is a 35-year tarot professional, memoirist, and poet (as well as the author of this article). She has published 13 books with various indie presses, including Alien Buddha, Garden Party, Dumpster Fire, Anxiety Press, and Crisis Chronicles. Her work can be found online in Rattle, Nonbinary Review, Brilliant Flash Fiction, Citron Review, Your Impossible Voice and many other publications.

Mueller’s work has also been nominated for Pushcart, Best of the Net and 2024’s upcoming Best Small Fictions. Her Bisbee-inspired piece, “Land of Eternal Thirst” appears in the 2022 edition of Best Small Fictions.

The format will include a two-hour workshop. Mueller will encourage participants to draw cards from tarot decks, then use them as a springboard for creating original poems. All attendees will have the chance to share their work if they wish.

“The tarot is a powerful tool for unlocking imagery from deep within your psyche,” she explained. “Each card contains an image that resonates with your collective unconscious, as well as your personal emotions and past experiences.”

Afterwards, Mueller will do a spoken word presentation of her original poetry, reading primarily from her recently published chapbook, "The Failure of Photography."

Be prepared for some surprises along the way.

On Tuesday, April 23, from 4-6 p.m., Ken Lamberton will conduct a classic creative writing workshop and critique. Lamberton, author of "Wilderness" and the award-winning "Razor Wire" (Mercury House) is an experienced teacher and presenter. He has led workshops at the Poetry Center in Tucson for nearly 22 years.

Not a poet? Don’t despair. All forms of writing are allowed and encouraged.

“Participants will bring their work in any genre — poetry or prose (fiction and nonfiction) and share it with the group with copies and by reading it aloud,” Lamberton explained.

“The group will then comment on the writing, paying particular attention to its craft: Is the writing vivid, employing multiple senses? Does it offer fresh and interesting language? Does the writing move the reader emotionally?”

“The aim here is to make the writing better, something publishable in contemporary literary magazines.”

At 6 p.m. Lamberton will read some of his original work aloud, including work from his Substack blog, “The Big Yard.”

This don’t-miss event will give attendees a chance to experience a workshop and reading with a writer who has been published in such venues as the Los Angeles Times, Orion and the Gettysburg Review.

The library’s series will draw to a triumphant close on Tuesday, April 30, at 5:30 p.m. with a reading by Michael Gregory.

Gregory is the author of the book-length poem, "Pound Laundry." He describes his book as a “multi-faceted genealogy of Pound the man and the 20th-century modernism he played a major role in producing.”

Gregory doesn’t hesitate to acknowledge Pound’s flaws, of which there were many.

In his event description, he writes, “Poets on the left (Sandburg, Zukofsky, Carruth, Ginsberg and Bernstein, among others) have spoken highly of Pound's accomplishment and have recognized *The Cantos* as a seminal text for modernist and postmodernist poetics.

“In *Pound Laundry*, keeping one eye on the easy embrace of anti-Semitism, fascism and the like by Pound and other intellectuals and artists of his time, and the other eye on our own era's surge to the right, Gregory sees Pound in the context of contemporary, historical and mythical sources that inform (and deform) his writing — times and places, people and languages, images and ideas, passions and larks — bringing some old chestnuts into new light and some latter-day notions into relation.”

In addition to being co-founder of the Bisbee Poetry Festival, Gregory holds a interdepartmental BA in history, English, and philosophy, and has done post-graduate work at UC Irvine and the UCLA Center for the Study of Comparative Folklore. He has also authored several books, including "Mr. America Drives His Car" and "The Valley Floor."

Pre-registration is highly advised for all three of these events, as they tend to fill up quickly. Contact the library at 520-432-4232, or just drop by the building at 6 Main St. in Old Bisbee.