

Arcades Project, Finger Lakes Literary Festival promotes the written word

By Luke Z. Fenchel | Posted: Wednesday, May 4, 2011 11:56 am

Despite critic Roland Barthes' 1967 assertion that the author is dead, it turns out that the author is alive, well and living in Ithaca, New York. And thanks a new venture called the Arcades Project which is part of Spring Writes, the annual Finger Lakes Literary Festival which runs from Friday, May 6 through Sunday, May 8, the bound book may survive extinction as well. The festival arrives at a time in which a handful of talented locals are working to ensure that Ithaca remains the creative capital of New York.

It's well known that Tompkins County is no literary backwoods, having been home to among many other authors such as A.R. Ammons, Farina, Nabokov, Pynchon, Vonnegut and Foster Wallace. A brief stop at the Friends of the Library Book Sale alone speaks volumes: with more than a quarter of a million items, the sale is one of the largest in the country and draws thousands of bibliophiles from New York State and around the country.

This year's transformation of Buffalo Street Books into a co-operative with 600 owners, including New York State Assembly Member Barbara Lifton, Cornell President David Skorton and a local church, strongly suggests that Ithaca is an environment friendly to the book business. Spearheaded by Bob Proehl, who is now the director of operations of the new entity, Buffalo Street Books is the only consumer co-operative in New York State, and among a handful across the country. Our public library is nothing to sniff at either.

And a quick glance at the roster of writers who live and work locally - flash-fiction writer and novelist J. Robert Lennon, poet and National Book Award Nominee Lyrae van Clief-Stefanon, Rachel Dickinson, and more recently Téa Obreht, Cara Hoffman, Stewart O'Nan and Leslie Daniels to name but a handful - underscores the fact that Ithaca holds its own as a literary town.

Unfortunately, reading, writing and even browsing can generally be a solitary pursuit. Spring Writes promises to bring literature to life with a constellation of 21 literary-themed events, from workshops and panel discussions for writers to readings and performances by local poets, playwrights, songwriters, essayists, novelists and visual artists. Events will be held at the Kitchen Theatre, the Tompkins County Public Library, Buffalo Street Books, Finger Lakes Wine Center, the Friends of the Library Book Sale, and more. Almost all events are free: each of the six workshops cost \$10. For more information, visit artspartner.org, arcadesprojectithaca.wordpress.com, or Ticket Center Ithaca.

Arcades Project