Robert Morgan

Robert Morgan grew up in a small town in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina. He attended the University of North Carolina at both Chapel Hill and Greensboro, where he studied with the poet Fred Chappell. After working as a salesman, house-painter, and farmer, he joined the faculty of Cornell University where he teaches English and creative Both descriptively and musically, Morgan's poetry is wonderfully tactile; his writing has the consonantal roughness and density of Hopkins, a quality which makes it seem to partake of the natural textures it evokes. His poems form an extended portrait of the region in which he grew up, its ways of life, its dedication to labour and the earth. Despite this deliberate restriction of subject-matter, Morgan is able to move effortlessly when he wants to from particular events and objects to the universals they embody. The real strength and originality of his work, however, comes from his refusal to universalize too quickly or too often; from his insistence on the value of story-telling for its own sake, and on the virtues of simple, physical experience untethered to abstractions. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that he has recently turned increasingly to the short story as a medium, while continuing to produce his concrete, strongly crafted poems as well. Morgan's most recent books of poems are At the Edge of the Orchard Country (Middletown, Conn., 1987) and Sigodlin (Middletown, 1990). from The Oxford Companion to Twentieth-century Poetry in English. Ed. Ian Hamilton. Oxford: Oxford UP. Copyright © Oxford UP. Although some consider Morgan an Appalachian regional writer (a title he does not find pejorative), Morgan has lived for most of his adult life in central New York State, where he has taught at Cornell University since the early 1970s. In both his poetry and prose, Morgan explores Appalachian culture, often drawing on strange and haunting family legends (passed down from his Welsh immigrant ancestors) as a starting point. His work avoids condescension or caricature as it portrays the lives of poor families in the Blue Ridge Mountains. In recent years Morgan has gained wide recognition as a prose writer, in large part due to the fact that Oprah Winfrey selected his novel Gap Creek for her book club in 2000. His fiction aesthetic is deliberately antipoetic: He prefers a lean style that allows him to focus on narrative conflict. Morgan's novels are also notable for the fact that he usually chooses to write from the voice of a female protagonist. Morgan married Nancy K. Bullock in 1965; they have one son and two daughters. (Poetry Foundation, 2006)