

SEVEN ISLANDS OF THE OCMULGEE

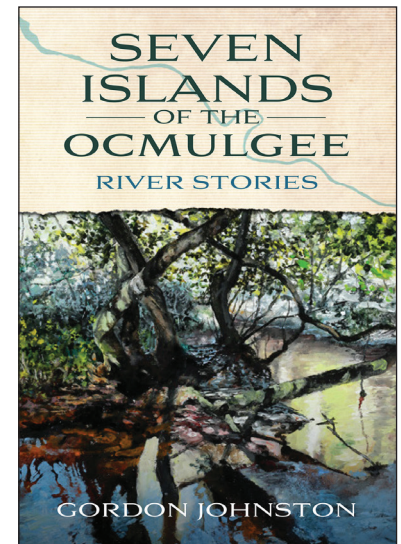
by *Gordon Johnston* [River Stories]

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Macon, Georgia—"Gordon Johnston's *SEVEN ISLANDS OF THE OCMULGEE* is not a quiet book of meditations on a river," says Robert Boswell, author of *TUMBLEDOWN* and *THE HEYDAY OF THE INSENSITIVE BASTARDS*. "Rather, it is a deeply engaging set of intertwined stories that feature the complexity of character one associates with literary fiction while also offering surprising, twisty plots that send the reader rocketing through the pages. This is a terrific book. I loved reading it."

These seven river stories, written after the author canoed the Ocmulgee and its tributaries, draw on European American, Native, and African American traditions and relationships with the upper river just below where the Yellow, Alcovy, and South Rivers come together to form the Ocmulgee. Set from the 1810s to the present, the stories follow characters as their inherited or adopted perspectives on the river—and their ignorance of it—are altered by their personal experience of the watershed's danger, power, and life. Each story engages a specific place, among them Pittman's Ferry, the Seven Islands, Smith Shoals, the levee in Macon, and the Ocmulgee Mounds of the Mississippian people.

A middle-aged woman who has lost her father and the pawn shop she inherited from him kayaks a wild Seven Islands rapid, looking for solace or self-destruction; an orphaned boy finds purpose and a path toward self-definition through borrowed Native culture and gar-fishing; the river baptism of a scarred, violent man tamed by a stroke revives a congregation even as it reopens old wounds; a long-exiled, past-her-prime call girl returns to Macon to uncover a surprising sense of belonging; Towaliga River memories carry a Navy sniper through his grim wartime duty.

Canoe-camping on the Ocmulgee, Gordon Johnston recovered a sense of time grounded in geology. "Humanity is small and new in the long life of the watershed," he says. "I wrote these stories with that humility in mind."

"Gordon Johnston writes these stories in sharp, terse sentences about the river he knows so well. With a knack for dialogue, he creates characters from the inside-out, making them absolutely real to the reader. Deep revelation into the minds and hearts of these Southerners combined fast-paced adventure makes *SEVEN ISLANDS OF THE OCMULGEE* a delightful read."

—*Melanie Sumner*, author of *HOW TO WRITE A NOVEL: A NOVEL*

"The river that runs through this book is made of Gordon Johnston's fine, musical prose, and the stories he tells are at once ancient and modern, as humans from our busy, self-satisfied world intersect with aspects of the past that haunt us still. Each story is finely wrought, complex, worth pondering for a goodly while. A reader can't ask for more. This is a fine book by one of Georgia's best writers."

—*Jim Grimsley*, author of *WINTER BIRDS*, *DREAM BOY*, and *THE DOVE IN THE BELLY*



Gordon Johnston is author of the award-winning poetry collection *SCARING THE BEARS* and of the poetry chapbooks *DURABLE GOODS* and *GRAVITY'S LIGHT GRIP*, and is coauthor, with Matthew Jennings, of *OCMULGEE NATIONAL MONUMENT: A BRIEF GUIDE WITH FIELD NOTES*. A former journalist with work in *The Georgia Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Susurrus*, and other journals, Johnston is professor of English at Mercer University. This fiction collection, his first, draws on fourteen years of canoeing Southern rivers.

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