POMPA: Publications of the Mississippi Philological Association

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Table of Contents

Editor's Note

By Lorie Watkins

The editor's note for this, the thirty-ninth volume of the *Publications of the Mississippi Philological Association (POMPA)* marks a return to in-person conferences and the begin of our return to post-COVID normalcy. Blue Mountain College volunteered to host the 2021 conference, but as the date drew closer, COVID-19 made an in-person meeting impractical. We returned to Blue Mountain, and to a smaller gathering in 2022.

Conference organizer Dr. Mikki Galliher arranged a keynote talk featuring Dr. Robert Hamblin, Professor Emeritus at Southeast Missouri State University. A native of Mississippi, Hamblin read from his creative works that included stories of growing up in Brice's Crossroads, poems about losing his beloved wife Kay to Alzheimer's, and a moving tale of the integration of Ole Miss. Better known as a scholar of William Faulkner, Hamblin served as the founding director of the Center for Faulkner Studies at SEMO, led seminars for the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Missouri Humanities Council, participated as a leader in Oprah Winfrey's Summer of Faulkner, and lectured abroad on Faulkner's works.

His talk was preceded by a catered banquet. As usual, there were diverse panels devoted to academic, creative, and pedagogical writing. BMC's choice of a meeting date in March proved very timely as we gathered just days before Covid-19 made a comeback. In 2023, we will host what looks to be an even smaller conference at Mississippi Valley State University as we continue to try to return to our post-COVID routine.

Friday, March 18, 2022

Registration Opens 12:40 PM (Coward-Martin Lobby)

Session 1. 1:00 PM-2:15 PM

Exploring Genres (CM 117)
Moderator: Andrew Nelson, University of Arkansas at Monticello

- "Evaluating Writing in Composition Courses: Connecting the Disconnected Writers"—Shanell Bailey, Mississippi Valley State University
- "Exact Resemblance to Exact Resemblance: The Stolen Name in Autobiography"—Connor Fisher, Blue Mountain College
- "Ridley Scott's The Counselor: A Post-Modern Film Noir Awaiting an Audience" – Allen Berry

Creative Writing I: The Language of Mourning, Graduate Student Poetry Panel (CM 110)
Moderator: Elizabeth Trueblood, University of Southern Mississippi

- "our happy ending," Anna Bagoly, University of Southern Mississippi
- "Sunday" and "Zoloft," Tommy Thomas, University of Southern Mississippi
- "*Gone*, Gone," Elizabeth Trueblood, University of Southern Mississippi

Session 2. 2:20 PM -3:35 PM

Philosophy in Literature and Film (CM 117)
Moderator: Damon Franke, University of Southern Mississippi

- "David Benatar's Secret Optimism"—Ery Shin, University of Southern Mississippi
- "Joyce and the Philosophy of Becoming" – Damon Franke, University of Southern Mississippi
- "The Breakfast Club, and Eco-cosmopolitanism"—Andrew Nelson, University of Arkansas at Monticello
- "Fading From Life: Death and Its Desirability in 'Ode to a Nightingale' and 'Bilbo's Last Song'"—Addie Putnam, Blue Mountain College

Creative Writing II (CM 110)
Moderator: Connor Fisher, Blue Mountain College

- Excerpt from *A Spool of Thread* (novel)—Robert Hamblin, Southeast Missouri State University
- Poems—Frank Thurmond, University of Arkansas at Little Rock
- "Drive In" (fiction)—Cross Caldwell, Blue Mountain College

Session 3, 3:40 PM-4:55 PM

Hubert Creekmore: A Retrospective Part II (CM 117)
Moderator: Phillip "Pip" Gordon, University of Wisconsin Platteville

- *The Fingers of the Night* and Its Sources: Considering Hubert Creekmore's "First" Novel— Phillip "Pip" Gordon, University of Wisconsin Platteville
- "Don't take it Cereus": Hubert Creekmore and Eudora Welty's Appreciation of Plants and Humor"—Elizabeth Crews, Blue Mountain College
- Silence in the Archives: Examining the Life of Mississippi Author Hubert Creekmore in the Collections He Left Behind—Mary Stanton Knight, University of Mississippi

Creative Writing III (CM 110)
Moderator: Mikki Galliher, Blue Mountain College

- "Echoes" (Creative Non-Fiction)—Kendall Morgan, Independent Scholar

- "Dreamcatcher," "Haunts," "The Day the Earth Became a Punk" (Flash Fiction)—James Fowler, University of Central Arkansas
- "Unconsciousness" (Fiction)—Sarah Snyder, Blue Mountain College

Session 4, 5 PM-6:15 PM

Bad Mothers in Literature (CM 117)
Moderator: Rob Harland, Mississippi State University

- "The Evolution of La Llorona" –Alan Brown, University of West Alabama
- "The Terrible Mother Archetype and Its Effect on the Creation of Mamá Elena de la Garza in Como Agua para Chocolate, A Novel by Laura Esquivel" –Rosa Maria Stoops, University of Montevallo
- "Cry Me a Lerma: La Llorona Scares Mexico in 1960"—Rob Harland, Mississippi State University

Creative Writing IV: The Languages of Elegy, Graduate Student Poetry Panel (CM 110)
Moderator: Mary Christensen

- Tyler Smith, University of Southern Mississippi
- Mary Leauna Christensen, University of Southern Mississippi
- Katherine Gaffney, University of Southern Mississippi

6:30-8:30

MPA Dinner and Business Meeting Lorie Watkins presiding (Ray Dining Hall)

Keynote Speaker: Robert Hamblin
"Mississippi, Again"

Saturday, March 19, 2022

8:30 AM Registration Opens--Coffee and Continental Breakfast Available (Coward-Martin Lobby)

Session 5, 9 AM -10:15

Regionalism in Literature (CM 117)
Moderator: Kate Stewart, University of Arkansas at Monticello

- "Lewis Nordan's Delta"—Jeffrey Condran, University of Arkansas at Little Rock
- "Gunpowder, Historicity, and Masculinity in a Local Western Novel"-- Terry Nugent, University of Arkansas at Monticello
- "Ignorant, Violent, and Rowdy: Harold Bell Wright's Otherization of Ozarkers"—John Han, Missouri Baptist University

Creative Writing V (CM 110)
Moderator: Bill Hayes, University of Mississippi

- "Balanchine's Woman" (fiction)—Carrie Guimond, University of Arkansas
- "Cogitating; Existence; St. Columba; Dorian's Curse; Lifetime; And there's her face; Powerhouse"—Robert Harland, Mississippi State University
- "The Revenge of Jerameigh Marshall" (Fiction)—Todd Bunnell, Mississippi University for Women

Session 6, 10:20 AM – 11:35 AM

Potpourri (CM 117)
Moderator: Allan Brown, University of West Alabama

- "No Place Like Home: Paris as the Non-Place in Jean Rhys' Good Morning, Midnight"-- Ian Pittman, University of Southern Mississippi
- "Eugene Vodolazkin's *The Aviator*: A Work of Memory"—Olga Ponomareva, Mississippi Valley State University
- "Sacred Lies: Religious Parody, Hybridity, and Truth in *The Book of Mormon* and *Cat's Cradle*"—Mikki Galliher, Blue Mountain College

Creative Writing VI (CM 110)
Moderator: A.S. Lewis, University of Southern Mississippi

- "Kudzu" (fiction)– Tracy Pitts, Independent Scholar
- "Four Five Nine" (fiction)—Jamie Henderson, Blue Mountain College
- "The Wide World of YouTube" and Other Haibun—John Han, Missouri Baptist University

Session 7, 11:40 AM -12:55 PM

Gender and Performativity (CM 117)
Moderator: Nancy Kerns, Blue Mountain College

- "Internalized Misogyny and the Normalization of Femicide in La Ciudad Juárez"—Anne Gartman, Mississippi State University
- Jordan's Flaw: A Deconstruction of the Rape of Mat Cauthon in Book 7 of The Wheel of Time series—A.S. Lewis, University of Southern Mississippi
- "Swimming with Fins of Lead: Shakespeare's Coriolanus and the Crowd-Pleasing Culture of Display"—Nancy Kerns, Blue Mountain College

Creative Writing VII (CM 110)
Moderator: John Han, Missouri Baptist University

- "How to Read" (poetry)—Thomas Richardson, Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science
- "Emma and Mammaw: A Southern Grotesque Tale"—Kathy Pitts, Jackson State University
- "Pinball Machine"—Bill Hays, University of Mississippi

Session 8, 1 PM – 2:15 PM

Interpreting Faulkner (CM 117)
Moderator: Elizabeth Crews, Blue Mountain College

- " 'a debatable question': Religious and Biblical Influence on William Faulkner's Life and Fiction"—Lorie Watkins, William Carey University
- "Death Scenes in McCarthy and Faulkner: Nothing Ever Stops Moving" – J.B. Potts, Mississippi College
- "The Community in Tumult: Lessons from Faulkner's Knight's Gambit"—Kate Stewart, University of Arkansas at Monticello

Creative Writing VIII (CM 110)
Moderator: Thomas B. Richardson, Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science

- "The Isotope of I" (poetry)—Connor Fisher, Blue Mountain College

- “Deep End” (fiction)—A.S. Lewis, University of Southern Mississippi
- Various poems—Lewis Tate, Independent Scholar State University

Creative Works

what would a happy ending even have looked like? And Other Poems

By Anna Bagoly

what would a happy ending even have looked like?

apa was cremated
(I don't think it was a matter of choice
no body, no burial)
but there was a memorial

the whole time oscillating
between feeling brushed off
unasked whether or not I wanted to speak
and being absolutely sure
I could not say much good

is lying about the dead
more or less virtuous than speaking ill?

four of his kids present
me, my brother,
our half-siblings
none of us able to call him
a g o o d f a t h e r

should I miss him?

is it better to be silent?
let others assume
I am thinking all the appropriate thoughts
feeling the appropriate stages

instead of confusion
in that catholic church
where on sunday they would talk about suicide
a one-way opening to hell
no layovers
    of course
    this wasn't said during our service either

I sat in the pew
wondering where all these people had come from
why were they there?

no family
anyone who might've helped or comforted
being two continents and one ocean apart
a couple of old friends must've shown up
but their faces don't come forward

even if we could have gotten away
my mom my brother and I
gotten out from under his thumb
I always felt
deep inside me
he would find us
that I would never feel safe

I wondered who the ceremony was for
I did not want to sit there
to be expected to grieve
the loss of my f a t h e r
what I needed
was permission
to feel the relief

touch

I.
the only thing my father taught me
was how to eat with a fork and knife
        here, you often do not even receive a knife in restaurants

must be why I do so like a right-handed person
I was the only lefty in our family
        this must be different now
        my mom's generation was the last to be beaten
        in school for using the *wrong hand*

I am seated on his lap at the table
his hands enclosing the fork in my left
                and the knife in my right

így, he says to me. *like this.*

I watch my hands move
trying to memorize the feel
of metal against my palms

II.
I have two other memories of being touched by my father

my brother and I rode around on his back
        hands and knees on the carpet
        pony-time

and one night, after a fight extreme
enough to put my mother on the pull-out couch
márton managed to escape
to go be with anya
—our beds in the master bedroom at first

I saw the door open, white light
existing for a moment long enough to swallow him

left behind in the dark
knowing they waited on me at the couch
I snuck around the big bed
and shuffled along the wall
to get to the door
I pulled it open, light pouring from the cracks

and a hand grabbed
yanking my ponytail

I fell backwards as the door
closed
all light sealed out

I ran back to my bed
hid under the covers
and lay in the darkness
trying not to let
my breathing be heard

even the very land we were on was punishment to her

the dry desert sand was a grave
for my mother's memories of what life could be
we
    (my brother and I)
thought this was a touch dramatic
sure, the grains were annoying
and anytime it rained
I would throw myself outside
    to rejoice
    wet and dripping
    in the water

the yellowgolden sand
would shake with the heat
cactus-spotted fields
dust-devils blowing through schoolyards
the black volcanic rock
hardened, igneous
spewed from the bradshaw mountains, our backdrop

my mom's village
    much of hungary, really
is lush
flowering and coming alive in spring
not settling again until forced by the cool of winter

she grew up working the land
living by the harvest, the seasons
four cycles of the earth

cyclic

lodgepole pinecones need the rabid heat
of wildfires to release seeds
    a repetitive destruction
    counted on by the forest to survive
melting the sap which keeps them sealed
clearing underbrush growing in their way
death is welcomed
in exchange for continuance

do we enter the same agreement when we are born?
    if we might want to move forward
    everything we are given must be taken

I wonder if the pines know
fire is a time to rejoice
to sing that life is coming
or if they feel the terror
of deep uncertainty
wondering why the flames licking at their trunks
could ever be allowed to do so

“The Wide World of YouTube” and Other Haibun

By John J. Han

The Wide World of YouTube

Since the arrival of COVID-19 in March 2020, YouTube has become my best friend. In times of lockdown and solitude, the platform helps me learn, relax, and laugh. On YouTube, I listen to music, listen to audio books, visit faraway places, and watch the animal world. Magic tricks and slapstick comedy are my pastimes, too. What intrigues me is not only the resources of the service but also the viewer comments left by people all over the world. Some comments are in a foreign language, but the emoticons accompanying them make me smile or chuckle. I now feel close to people online as I do when meeting them in person. YouTube brings together people from different cultures, which is a silver lining of the pandemic.

reading a text message
my dog wonders
why I laugh

The Cat and I

My neighbor’s cat and I have become friends. At first, her glaring eyes frightened me. To alleviate my fear, she approached me, wagging her tail. Then, she brushed up against my leg. We are best friends now. I miss her on the rainy days when she stays indoors.

summer lake
a diving bird’s
tiny ripples

Going Overboard

A Korean maxim goes, "Startled by a turtle shell, then startled by a wok lid." It is another way of saying, "Once bitten, twice shy." The wok lids used in traditional Korean kitchens looked like those of many turtle shells—dark brown in color and uneven in texture. After getting cataract surgery and a retinal procedure a year ago, I have been guarding my right eye. Outdoors, I wear both blue-light glasses and UV sunglasses. Indoors, I wear blue-light and reading glasses, wearing blue-light glasses even in bed.

slowing down
where I got pulled over
no police today

Playing Spy

These days, my overall weight has increased a teeny-tiny bit due to wearing dark sunglasses (for eye protection), a face mask (for COVID), and a broad-brimmed hat (for skin care). When my colleagues see me enter the building with my head and face covered, they often wonder who I am. I oblige by removing my glasses, but their momentary confusion amuses me.

mask mandate
she's glad not to have to
wear makeup

A Satisfied Mind

One of my favorite songs is "Satisfied Mind," whose lyrics read in part, "it's so hard to find one rich man in ten with a satisfied mind." My younger brother in Korea, a high-ranking manager at a mega corporation, tells me that his eyes open automatically at 4:30 a.m. due to the huge amount of work to do. I make less money than he but can sleep as much as I want—even with my full-time work. At night or over the weekend, I eat, sit in the sofa, and fall asleep while reading a book. Although I love to read, books are some of the best sleep medicines. Nothing feels more pleasant than sitting by the window and dozing off in the warmth of home.

snowstorm
viewing condensation
inside my windows

Emma and Mammaw:
A Southern Grotesque Tale

By KathyR. Pitts

Emma suffered a literary block when the stove fell through the floor. Her brother Dexter discovered that the linoleum beside the stove had begun to pucker, and the floor was bouncy on Sunday when the family visited Mammaw on her 87th birthday. While Dexter sporadically watched Mammaw receive gifts from deep within her recliner, he focused much greater attention on pushing deep indentations into the floor surrounding the stove with his heel. Dexter wore big black conquistador boots with a steel half-moon reinforcement on each 2-inch heel, so he was able to do a lot of damage with little effort.

Unaware of what Dexter was up to in the kitchen, Emma's mother, Cora, was determined to make this birthday extra-special because, as she had repeated for the last thirteen birthdays: "This might just be Mammaw's last!" She would grimace with sad anticipation. "Mammaw, look; Emma's given you an imitation Dresden tea pot!" Cora held the vessel up for the rest of the family to admire, three large aunts and a small arthritic uncle who belonged to the largest aunt--all four huddled tightly together on a small loveseat. Cora had just noticed that Dexter, her youngest baby of thirty-four, was too quiet in the kitchen and may be messing with the store-bought petit-fours. Cora had purchased the next gift herself, but declared it were handpicked by Dexter: the paint-by-number set of a carousel. "Mammaw, l-o-o-o-k what Dexter got you!"

Mammaw turned it over in her lap and lashed out like she always did when confused, and she was confused a lot: "What the hell is it?" She was a little shaky for painting anyway.

"Why Momma, it's the present Dexter chose just for *you,"* Cora was craning around, hoping that Dexter would at least make a showing, but he didn't appear on cue, so Cora gave up and moved on to the next gift. Then there was the pink and green blanket with rabbit-skin pockets for Mammaw's cold and gnarly hands. The largest Aunt, and Cora's oldest sister, had given that. Cora did not announce this gift with as much flourish as Emma's and Dexter's. It was about this time that she left the room to find her baby boy.

The kitchen floor made a loud cracking sound just as she came in. The stove shifted slightly away from the wall as Cora hauled Dexter into the living room with the rest of the folks.

Emma's mother missed the smallest aunt's shy presentation of her own gift, the jelly-filled chocolates that Mammaw sprang on. Mammaw did not like to share, so she didn't: "After all, it's MY birthday!" Later, she offered half of one piece to the dog, despite the children's telling her not to. The dog lost his treat behind the bird bath.

Emma's dual associates degrees in Personal Hygiene and Dental Records from Panther Burn Junior College had not prepared her for her impending household disaster. She had heard of sunken tubs and conversation pits, but never a stove under the house.

The crisis began a week after the birthday party. As with every workday morning, Emma had rushed home from the Dollar Store to fix Mammaw her two soft-boiled eggs just before noon. Mammaw and Emma lived together alone in this ramshackle dwelling, and though Mammaw was fairly capable still, she would not get up before ten. She claimed her ankles would swell if she rose before then. Often the old lady would nurse her ankles right up through lunch. Emma had to bring soft-boiled eggs to her bed and set up the small TV in the doorway on a piano bench so Mammaw could watch the weather and *Market Basket.*

Mammaw kept a record of the temperature highs and lows each day in her journal. The rest of the journal was filled with fatty recipes and reminders of how different people had annoyed her. The day the stove fell, *Market Basket* was going to be all about winter squash. Mammaw groused about missing her program for weeks after that and noted the disappointment in her journal more than once. One time, Emma looked at Mammaw's journal. Her cheeks reddened with anger. Mammaw had gone on in the margins about all of the insults and ingratitudes that she had suffered from the family—even from Emma who had slaved hard and endured much for the old lady.

Emma slipped the journal back under Mammaw's sticky pillow, thinking that maybe she would have better luck maintaining a journal herself to help with her writing. It wasn't long though before Emma's journal took on a more sinister function.

Emma had timed the four-minute eggs long enough to kill samonella germs and make them chewy for Mammaw. Three minutes, and they were too runny, and past four, "you might as well make them into Easter eggs," Mammaw would snarl. Before Emma

could move the pot from the stove-top to a cold-water bath, she dropped her poem she planned to mail to the *New Yorker* on one of the cold burners, and with that, the stove dropped through the floor. A tan plumb of dusty soil billowed up into the kitchen as the stove crash-landed, the flame still going from the eggs when the gas line broke. Cooking egg smell was replaced with the gas smell, and immediately after, burning linoleum smell. Mammaw had to stand in the front yard by the tiger lilies while her ankles swelled to wait while the utility man turned off the gas and the firemen came to douse the charred floor. She missed her show, but she took that time to write furiously in her journal. Mammaw bemoaned her missed show, and wondered aloud if the squash recipes used grated cheese. Mammaw liked cheese on all her meals. She LOVED winter squash prepared with pork brains in milk gravy. Mammaw's arteries were more solid than the kitchen floor, it seemed.

When Emma came back inside to lay a few boards down in the kitchen so she could walk, the eggs looked up at her from under the house. Her poem was lost behind a damp joist from where the firemen had come and hosed the area that second time . . . just to be sure.

Emma retrieved her poem with a long stick. It was about Paris and roses and kissing under the Eiffel Tower. She had spelled it Eye-Full and was embarrassed later after she had already mailed it. When the poem was returned to her, she realized she had sent it with a streak of mud on the back. She winced. It was all so hopeless! Paris seemed a "hundred miles away" from Panther Burn, Mississippi.

Her bright cousin, Irwin, from Mobile, was more sophisticated than Emma. He smoked a pipe and visited Bellingrath Gardens every spring when the azaleas were in bloom. He told Emma to write about "Southern grotesque stuff." That was popular among the literary crowd, he had heard. Emma wasn't well-read like Irwin and wasn't sure what Southern grotesque was, but she would try. In the meantime, though, she better lay some vizqween over the stove top to keep the possums out of the house.

One evening in the middle of November, when the air in Panther Burn was finally growing chilly, Emma sat at the kitchen table trying to write. She had moved the table as far away from the hole in the floor as she could, but there was still a slope, and as she put pressure on her pencil, the table tipped and struck the wall. Mammaw was back in bed awaiting a sausage and grits casserole that Emma was trying to produce from the

microwave---with discouraging results.There was no telling, on their limited budget, when the floor and stove might be replaced. The entire kitchen smelled now of cold dirt and burned plastic. Something from under the house would eventually eat the eggs when marsupial courage took hold, but thus far the two eggs were still looking up at her. Emma was having trouble thinking since she was up every two minutes to stir the grits, and Mammaw had the movie *Robin Hood* blaring. She was a little deaf. The clattering of swords had ended, and as Olivia de Havilland and Errol Flynn were enjoying a romantic moment before the credits, Emma had an inspiration. Claude Rains glared at the lovers from beneath a silly medieval crown.

"I need someone to help with Mammaw so I can write!" she told the eggs on the sunken stovetop. There was no money to hire help, so Emma began to think of the most unlikely people, and as desperate late-night brainstorming so often does to us, Emma embraced the least promising idea of all. She convinced herself that *Dexter* could come live with them. Certainly Cora would be happy to take a break from Dexter and his favorite toy for a while, his ham radio set. He could deal with Mammaw while Emma wrote peacefully in the evenings. Sadly, the present condition of the kitchen, with those yellowing and knowing eyes staring up from the floor, was not a strong enough warning to abort this thought at its very conception.

Emma went to Cora's the following day to suggest that Mammaw might like a real chance to visit Dexter, and that it would be wonderful if Dexter stayed. After all, the two had a strange rapport; despite Dexter's tendency to irritate the common run of adults with his antics--like destroying kitchen floors, packing his cheeks with marbles and then leaving them in the sink for someone else to wash, climbing onto the roof to check the chimney for presents Santa forgot but then being unable to get himself down without the help of the fire-department (the authorities were called back ten minutes later when he did it again), and putting on six pairs of pants at a time on a bet--some his mother's. The fire-department was called to this emergency, too---which culminated in a disgraceful front yard scene that the neighbors thoroughly enjoyed. Even with all these free-spirited adventures, Mammaw and Dexter together seemed to function of a single mind.

Today, though, it was Emma's mind that was in serious question. Her deep concerns began when she noticed how quickly Cora volunteered Dexter. It took only seconds for

Cora to pack Dexter's marbles and clothes and throw them into Emma's trunk. Dexter carried his ham radio set on his lap, protectively. Cora bawled into Emma's backseat where Dexter sat tying both shoelaces together: "Bye, bye Baby. Make your momma proud. You're gonna help Mammaw. She asked *just* for my Dexter!" In truth, Mammaw had no idea that Dexter was coming, and Emma was beginning to feel serious dread.

Dexter was the youngest of the family, and Cora had babied him terribly. Emma delivered him to her home with few words shared between them. She alone pointed out scenery and remarked how excited Mammaw would be to have her only grandson there to help her—"a real man on the place" Emma emphasized, hoping to impress upon Dexter his serious responsibilities. Dexter stared determinedly at the back of her head. Emma's spirits sank.

When they pulled up to what was left of Emma's house following Dexter's recent birthday visit, it took some pleading to get him out of the backseat. When he did emerge, he carried under his arm the ham radio set with a large steel microphone, a Morse code key, and under the other arm, the radio itself in a pine frame. He then returned to the car to get his suitcase and an extendable metal rod with 200 feet of insulated wire. Emma had made up the couch for Dexter to sleep, but he never used it. On that first night instead, after Dexter had scrambled to Emma's roof and set up a make-shift antenna, he walked right into Mammaw's room without even knocking. When Emma ran up behind him to explain to Mammaw that Dexter was here to help, she realized that there was no need. Dexter sat on the bed by Mammaw's side, both looking straight ahead silently at a Blooper's program—people getting hurt in the crotch mostly--like a steadfast married couple who in fifty years had said all there was to say and communed instead with television.

Emma was ready to write while grandmother and grandson were quiet for a while, but nothing came. Panic filled her. The plan to have Dexter distract Mammaw was backfiring mercilessly. It started with TV shows about cats. Emma had cable installed when she first saw how both were taken with TV. The two would have a wide assortment of programs to choose from. Emma really needed them occupied, but except for *Market Basket,* the preferred programs were full-volume cat shows: white-coated veterinarians cured cats and sometimes had to euthanize them. Dexter and Mammaw cried—loudly at these times, but most of the shows were happy: cats being dressed up for Would-You-Believe shows,

cats being given luxurious spa days, cats being rescued from animal hoarders; a guitar-playing expert with carefully sculpted facial hair trained neurotic cats to feel better about themselves. All kinds of cats.

The fatal last straw was Dexter's ham radio. Each morning, Emma was awakened at 5 o'clock with an electronic screeching. That first day, she was alarmed, but as each morning passed, she grudgingly accepted that it was just Dexter's warming up his ham set. Then came the routine shouting: "W5RHG . . . Do you READ me, Honduras? W5RHG . . . Come in. Calling from Panther Burn . . .am awaiting your response . . . Over." What would follow, working into Emma's nightmares, were the incomprehensible chatter of overlapping frequencies, some Spanish, some English, blurred code signals, code key dots and dashes on Dexter's part, and finally the pleasant 73s sign-off. Emma was baffled, mostly because she never imagined that Dexter knew another language, nor Morse code. Was there more to Dexter? If so, he had hidden it well. She felt tricked and glared at the stove hole.

The day Dexter *and* Mammaw left was the day Emma came in from work and heard loud splashing in the tub. Mammaw was calling out from the bathroom, and Dexter, Emma assumed, was fooling with his radio behind the closed bedroom door. "I'll be right there! Dammit Dexter!" She knew the worst had happened, that Mammaw had fallen in the bathroom when Dexter was busy calling his friends in Central America. Emma burst the door open without knocking, sure to see Mammaw sprawled, or maybe even she and the tub under the house now with the stove. What she saw was more troubling than even that. Mammaw was standing, fully naked in the tub, dripping, holding a strawberry pudding cup to her mouth to scoop from it with her hands, wearing most of it, and calling out to Emma, whom she had heard enter the house, that she needed yet another pudding cup.

Dexter was sitting near her on the toilet lid with the ham radio set balanced on the lavatory and plugged into the light socket, shouting excitedly to Emma: "BRAZIL! I have someone from BRAZIL!" He glowed: *"South America!* I've reached the whole way to *South America!"* then tossed a towel at Mammaw and continued to yell into the machine.

Emma wrote fiercely for an hour into what had become her own ANGER journal. She then finally stood up for herself to Cora and told her that Dexter and Mammaw both needed to stay at Cora's house while Emma's own house was being repaired. Emma agreed,

in turn, to bring necessities by from the Dollar Store to help. Cora loved their mustard sardines the way Mammaw loved her squash and cheese.

Emma now had her evenings to write. Such quiet she had never known. She looked first at her slender stack of poems. Then she looked at her ANGER journal. It was bulging—just like Mammaw's. She would have to buy another at work the next day. It suddenly struck Emma strange that she had written so much when Mammaw and Dexter were sharing her home—but not poems about Paris. The words had flowed, where the poetry was a pathetic and uninspiring dribble.

Emma struggled to understand what her cousin Irwin had been trying to say about Southern Grotesque. She considered setting the Paris poems aside and taking up Irwin's suggestion, but what would she write about. Where to begin?

“Come To Be” and Other Poems

By Lewis Tate

Come to Be

Lessening, deafening, the ego of a lesser me.
A travesty, a marksman never shot the shot, to watch the walk of a master talk.
I spiraled a mile, from a distinguished man.
He gripped my hand firmer, my heart began to murmur. All I've learned never put to use, a procrastinating truce. Grits in the morning I never ate, a shake.
Awake, the time has come, to be in this day, and not another, as a brother, and a lover.
I love her, Earth, she's spherical.
A mystical land to be.
A treaty to her and her health.
Wealth comes from people.
A miracle today has been, fruitful, meaningful, and edifying.
I'm multiplying my days with ways I amaze myself, as we get along, through our songs of wondrous praise. Transparent in who we are,
with no bizarre twists, with fists of rage like you've been let out of a cage.
The abuser opens the door, what's in store?
Apologies heard, that were absurd.
I miss the days when rays of sunshine in the skyline opened up my mind.
Peace, in these moments of presents waiting to be opened from Santa.
Karma has finally caught up, with joy to bring, not a sting. You've found the essence of our presence in which to be. You were the key, and it is unlocked now.
Don't disavow, for you've found yourself.

Sails Full to Cadiz

Waves lapse into white caps, coming ashore as a bubbly pour.
Chardonnay on a crisp day, taking away the edge.
The sun shimmering off water, that once was in Rarotonga.
Samba in a seaside Ramba.
Ease at its finest,
A wine list of seas to see, on the bucket list, ice to chill.
An ocean pill,
unwinding stress to heal.
Hills to climb, bays to cut, with a hull's touch, and a Dutch.
Skies whispering a breeze, sails full to Cadiz.
Memories of albatross in flight, photographic sights.
Nights with tan skin, dreams to wake again.
A tilting tack,
on a seaway to no turning back.

Candelabra

Her candelabra flickers perfect flames.
Her reflection in the night reveals her age and regrets.
Her pearl necklace still lies in her own introspective
oyster.
Window panes only display darkness and her portrait below six candlesticks.
The culprit of her own power outage, she fears independence.

Mayall's Vector

May suns melt icy moons to living worlds?
A bottomless universe gives a way.
Wheels do turn as curiosity whorls,
When nebulae break the galaxy's day.

Existence beyond, perhaps life lives lost,
And reveals itself through newfound fairness.
So stars shine across cosmos to accost,
Through time elapsing in unawareness.

Though, light traverses for years a' million,
Even if ticks of hands grossly devour,
Even if prisms refract vaudevillian,
While rare forms hide in different hours.

For imagination unearths sectors,
For life discovered through Mayall's vector.

Six Poems

By Jianqing Zheng

Closed

—William Ferris's *Bus barn*

Please call 638-0101
if nobody's here

Our mission
is to provide safe
and efficient transportation

If nobody's here
call for the bus barn

The Day of Departure

—William Ferris's *Mailboxes, 11188 Fisher Ferry Road*

Two red mailboxes
stand side by side by the fence
seeing off the sun
    whose rays drag away slowly
    as if unwilling to leave

Summer Heat

—William Ferris's *Unidentified Rider and Pony*

A big black man rides
a small white horse on the street
this hot Delta day

Persistence

—Eudora Welty's *Day's End*

Deep autumn—
the weary way stretches
in the glitter of sunset.

The old woman
wearing a faded floral half apron
pauses a second,

but under her bucket hat
her eyes gleam,
looking straight ahead.

It's a day's end,
but her life goes on
in her well-worn cotton shoes.

Sunday Sunshine

—Eudora Welty's *Wildflowers*

A bunch of wild
flowers held up in the girl's
left hand also wears

a smile as broad as
the girl's while three younger girls,
though empty-handed,

look as charming as
the wildflowers, and their eyes
shine like spring sunshine.

Snapshot

—Eudora Welty's *Wildflowers*

Two girls pose
for picture-taking—

the one hugging
a bundle of wildflowers

in her arms
smiling shyly

and the one
standing behind

looking straight-faced,
without showing

a sliver of sun or rain
when the shutter click

Critical Essays

La Llorona: The Evolution of a Legend

By Alan Brown

Legends resonate with cultural significance. In his book *Aliens, Ghosts, and Cults: Legends We Live*, folklorist Bill Ellis says that legend telling "provides a safe way of questioning what important institutions define as 'real' and 'proper'" (12). As society changes, so does the way the legend is used and viewed. Such is the case with the enduring legend of "La Llorona," a tale that continues to be passed down in Mexico and the American Southwest.

"La Llorona" is Spanish for "Weeping Woman." "Llorar" means "to weep," and the suffix "on" means "a great deal." According to writer Docia Schulz Williams, the origin of "La Llorona" pre-dates the arrival of Hernando de Cortes and his conquistadors. The Aztec people were kept awake night after night by the soul-piercing screams of the Columbian earth-goddess Cihuacoatl, who ruled childbirth and death. Her ominous cries of "My children, we must flee!" echoed through the canyons of Tenochtitlan, chilling the hearts of all who heard them. The goddess's tragic prophecy became reality when Cortes arrived with his soldiers and La Malinche, his beautiful Indian interpreter and mistress. The story goes that one day, Cortes informed her that he was going to return to Spain with the young son they had had together, but she must remain behind. Incensed, Malinche stabbed her child and herself with an obsidian knife. In the minds of many Hispanic people of Aztec descent, "Malinche" and "La Llorona" are one and the same. (192)

One of the earliest Spanish variants of the legend was recorded in 1981 in Yuma, Arizona, from a 37-year-old informant whom collector Belinda Lopez described as a "half-Mexican-Mexican American and half white":

> There were men coming in from Spain who married Indian Women in Mexico. And at that time, there was a Spanish soldier who married an Indian girl by common-law. They were very much in love and had two children. And at that time, if you were married by common-law, you couldn't have any inheritance or rights to good jobs. You had to be married to a Spanish woman. So, he legally married a Spanish woman who came by ship from Spain. The Indian woman became angry, bitter, and jealous over the man having left her. She became temporarily insane, and she drowned her two children to get revenge. Later, she came to her senses and regretted that she had drowned them. She then actually became insane after realizing what she did. She was cursed to forever roam Mexico where there was a body of water to look for her children. And because of her sadness, she wails a long, sad cry. And to this day,, people say you can hear her wail, looking for her children. She is cursed to do this forever for what she did.

This variant is also unusual because of the motif of passing into, out of, and back into insanity.

Stories of La Llorona go back at least 300 years and are most prevalent in the United States in South Texas, although they have also been collected in New Mexico and other parts of the Southwest. Countless variants of the legend exist, but the standard version concerns a woman named Maria who married a wealthy vaquero. Over time, she gave birth to two children. One day, she came home and found him in bed with another woman. Consumed with rage, Maria dragged her children down to the nearby river and drowned them. Filled with regret, she attempted to kill herself but was unable to. Because Maria is

not allowed to enter the afterlife without her two children, she was doomed to wander the river where she drowned them, looking for their souls forever (Austinghosts.com).

In a variation of the legend, Maria becomes the mistress of a rich vaquero. Over time, she and her lover had several illegitimate children. One day, she asked the man to marry her. He flatly refused on the grounds that he did not want a wife who had children out of wedlock. With tears streaming down her face, Maria rushed out of the house with her children. She then led them down to the river and drowned them. Wracked by grief and guilt, Maria stabbed herself and, with her last bit of strength, staggered back to the house, where she confessed what she had done. In an alternate ending, an angry mob trussed her up and threw her into the Rio Grande (Austinghosts.com).

According to one of the most bizarre variants of the tale, Maria was allowed to hold her wedding in a grandiose Cathedral in Mexico free of charge, provided that she turn over her first-born son to the priesthood. She promised the priest that she would do as he requested, but as time passed, she continued reneging on her part of the bargain. She had several other children and refused to honor the agreement she had made with the priest. One night, her house was destroyed by fire. All of her children perished, and she was horribly disfigured. Some people said that her face resembled that of a horse, earning her the nickname "Donkey Woman" After her death, she wandered up and down the river bank calling "Mi Ninos! Mi Ninos!" ("My children! My Children!") (Austinghosts.com).

For generations, an Anglo version of the tale has existed alongside of the Hispanic version. In the early days of the Texas frontier, a pioneering family was living near what is now San Antonio. One day, her husband was attacked and murdered by a band of Comanche Indians. Watching from the window of the cabin with fear etched onto her face,

the woman pondered her next move. She hustled her children down to the creek, where they hid in the reeds. In desperation, she decided to save her children from being captured and abused by the Indians. One by one, she grabbed them and shoved their heads under the muddy eddies of the water until they stopped moving. Cautiously, the marauding Indians crept toward the reeds where the woman and her children had gone. Suddenly, she burst from the reeds, screaming and laughing hysterically. The terrified Indians turned and ran for their lives. For the remainder of her life, the woman wandered the banks of the river, searching for her lost children (Allen). In one of the variants, she is known as the "Hollering Woman" because this is how she called her children inside the house for mealtime (Austinghosts.com). In another version of the tale, the woman earns the nickname because she is "hollering" for help (Texas Escapes). The place where this incident is said to have occurred is now called "Woman Hollering Creek." Folklorist C.F. Eckhardt says that maps dating from the 1830s give the name "Arroyo de la Llorona" to the stream now known as Woman Hollering Creek. According to John Troesser, "Woman Hollering Creek" starts in back of Randolph Air Force Base near the golf course about two miles west of Schertz, Texas ("Woman Hollering Creek").

For generations, the legend of La Llorona served as a cautionary tale. Care-givers told it to their children to keep them inside at night and to prevent them from getting too close to the river. For adolescents, the tale was a warning against the dangers of men and of sex. Some variations highlight the consequences of crossing social class or racial lines when it comes to love and marriage. La Llorona was depicted as a demonic, vengeful figure who sought to murder other children or women out of envy and to seduce or kill men out of

spite. She tries to steal the souls of other mother's children to replace the lost souls of her own children. Other motives for La Llorona's heinous act include love, anger, or fear.

Most of the variants of the La Llorona legend contain types of narrative elements (i.e., motifs), including the white dress, the river, and the murder of her children. What tends to vary is the story of why and how she killed her children, as well as the actual appearance of La Llorona. While she seems innocent from far away, those who get too close will hear a deafening scream. Most eye-witnesses describe her as having a blank face with no features; others say that she has long, black hair that reaches down to her waist (Troesser). She places a curse on anyone unfortunate enough to actually see her. Eye-witnesses always suffer some type of personal calamity. Men, the cause of her misery, are driven mad when they see her, plunging into the river to their death (Christensen

A rich assortment of regional variants of the "La Llorona" tale can be found throughout Texas. In El Paso, La Llorona is a faceless wraith in a white dress. In other parts of Texas, she has the face of a bat or a horse. Some Texans say that she haunts forests and isolated roadways as well. In a few of the Texas variants, the La Llorona story has melded with the legend of the Phantom Hitchhiker, the tale of a young woman who was killed in a car wreck on prom night and whose ghost hitches a ride back home with male drivers. In the hybrid version, La Llorona climbs into the car and tells the driver about drowning her children before vanishing. In still other variants, children are not her only prey; she also lures young men to their death who have strayed from the "straight and narrow path" (Christensen 146).

In South Texas, the woman in white is said to have appeared along almost every river. In Victoria, people refer to her as the "Ghost of the Guadalupe." La Bahia is another

good source of La Llorona tales. Many people claim to have heard babies cry late at night at La Bahia. The November 10, 1992, edition of the *Victoria Advocate* included the following variant from La Bahia: "Jim Leos, Jr. saw the ghostly figure while working at night in the old fortress of La Bahia at Goliad as a security guard. Leos described voices of crying children coming from an unmarked grave, with a woman in a white layered wedding dress materializing in front of the grave near the presidio chapel, only later to drift off towards and over the back wall toward the old cemetery behind the presidio" (Williams 196). In her book *Ghosts along the Texas Coast*, author Docia Schultz Williams includes an interview with Victor and Joe Martinez, who spoke of their older brother's encounter with the lady in white near the presidio: The story takes place in the mid-1930s when the Civilian Conservation Corps was building the Goliad Auditorium across the river. The brother, who was working with the CCC at the time, often gathered with the other workers after work around the camp fire, where they told stories and sang songs. Their brother said that one night on the way home, he came to a big dip beside a creek called Sparrow Hollow when he saw La Llorona with her long hair. She was dressed all in white. The next night, Joe Martinez followed his brother to the spot where he had seen La Llorona. They did not see anything, but they heard a very large rock roll down the steep bank. They took this sound as a sign that they should end their search for La Llorona.

The legend of "La Llorona" is still used as a cautionary tale by parents in Mexico and the American Southwest to keep their children safe. On February 11, 2022, I asked a Hispanic student of mine named Dana Rodriguez Cruz, a freshman student from Florida, if she was familiar with the story of La Llorona. She said, "Oh yes, I have heard the story many times. My mother said that the story was passed down to her while she was living in

Mexico. She told me and my brothers and sisters about La Llorona so that we would stay away from the water. We couldn't swim very well, and she was afraid that we would drown if we got too close to the ocean or the rivers."

Ed Walraven, a researcher at Texas A & M University, believes that the cautionary function of the La Llorona tales has been adapted to urban settings, beginning in the late 20th century. Walraven has documented numerous sightings of La Llorona at city dumps, which are also dangerous places to play around. Henry Wolff Jr. a columnist for the *Victoria Advocate*, reported two sightings of La Llorona at landfills (Williams 198). In a column published on the website *Texas Escapes.com*, folklorist C. F. Eckhardt reports that in elementary school restrooms in Phoenix, Arizona, children stand in front of the mirrors and chant "La Llorona! La Llorona!" in the hope that her scary face will suddenly appear. This story seems to be a hybrid version of the old girls' restroom story of Bloody Mary. In the same column, Eckhardt says that La Llorona took the form of a weeping prostitute in a red dress on East 6th Street in Austin, Texas. When a young man approached her, the woman's pretty face instantly transformed into that of a horrific donkey.

Readings of the La Llorona tale in all of its variations reveal a number of different religious, social and political messages as well. According to author Shanna Grosse, the legend of La Llorona reflects the prescribed roles for women within a male-dominated culture: "The myth holds women responsible for the ultimate satisfaction of their men and proclaims the consequence of an eternal curse if these responsibilities will not be fulfilled" (Grosse). She goes on to say that in Mexican culture, women can derive their identity from "La Virgin de Guadalupe, the good mother who provides love, shelter and care; Malinche, the overtly sexual woman; or La Llorona, the "the terrible mother archetype."

The guilt that La Llorona experiences at the end of the legend rises from her failure to behave like the type of woman that men, the Holy Church, and society expect her to be. Placing her own selfish need for romantic love and vengeance above her children's need for nurturing condemns her to divine retribution for eternity.

Author Sandra Cisneros presents a more modern interpretation of the "La Llorona" legend in her short story "Woman Hollering Creek" (1991). In her version of the story, Cleofilas, a young woman living in Mexico, marries her boyfriend, Juan Pedro, and they move across the border to the United States. After the birth of her first child, her husband begins drinking and abusing her. Her dreams of a happy marriage, fueled by watching hours of telenovelas, begin to fade. One day, shortly after the birth of her first child, Cleofilas suddenly realizes that she is trapped "because the towns here are built so that you have to depend on husbands. Or you stay home, or you drive. If you're rich enough to own your own car." Fully aware that "there is no place to go," even if she does leave her husband, Cleofilas carries her baby down to a stream, "a thing with a voice all its own, … [a] high, silver voice. Is it La Llorona, the weeping woman? La Llorona, who drowned her own children. Perhaps La Llorona is the one they named the creek after, she thinks, remembering all of the stories she learned as a child. La Llorona is calling to her. She is sure of it." Cleofilas sets her baby down on a Donald Duck blanket. As the child pulls up handfuls of grass, Cleofilas "wonders if something as quiet as this drives a woman to the darkness under the trees" (Cisneros 51). At this point, she is empathizing with La Llorona, who was driven to desperate measures by her husband's heartlessness.

When she is pregnant with her second child, Cleofilas goes to a clinic for a check-up. The physician at the clinic, Graciela, realizes that Cleofilas needs help to escape her abusive

husband, so she and her friend, Felice, drive Cleofilas and her baby, Juan Perdito, to San Antonio, where she can take a bus back to her father in Mexico. Cleofilas is amazed to learn that Felice drives her own pickup truck and does not have a husband. Felice serves as a positive role model for Cleofilas by opposing the stereotypical image of women. As the three women ride in Felice's pickup on a bridge over Woman Hollering Creek, Felice says, "I like the name….Makes you want to holler like Tarzan, right?" (56). For Cleofias and Felice, hollering becomes a declaration of their freedom from the shackles of male domination. Cleofilas begins to identify with La Llorona, who transforms her into a new, strong version of herself. With the aid of her female friends, Cleofilas replaces her suffering weeping with the hollering of an emancipated woman. In an interview published in the book *Interviews with Writers of the Post-Colonial World,* Sandra Cisneros said, "There's a lot of victimization, but we [Mexican women] are also fierce. Our mothers had been fierce. Our women may be victimized, but they are still very, very fierce and very strong."

The iconic legend was first transferred to the silver screen in two Mexican Gothic films from the early 1960s. The first film, *La Llorona* (1960) is based on one of the variants of the legend. It focuses on a young woman named Margarita and Felipe, whose first-born child is threated by the ghost of Luisa, an Indian girl who stabs to death the two children she had by a conquistador named Don Nuno when he jilts her for a Spanish woman. Before she is executed, she curses Don Nuno and all of his first-born descendants, one of whom is Margarita. In the 1963 film *Curse of the Crying Woman* (*La Maldicion De La Llorona*), a young woman named Amelia travels by carriage with her husband to visit her aunt Selma. Amelia is unaware that her aunt has invited her to her gloomy mansion for the purpose of assisting her with resurrecting the corpse of a relative who was executed for the crime of witchcraft.

Except for the spectral wailing that echoes through the mansion, the "Crying Woman" bears little resemblance to the "Weeping Woman" of legend.

The "Weeping Woman" disappeared from the silver screen in Mexico until the release of Rigoberto Castaneda's *Kilometro 31* in 2006. It was followed by a number of similar films, including *The River: Legend of La Llorona* (2006), *Revenge of La Llorona* (2007), and an animated film titled L*a Leyanda de la Llorona* (2007). La Llorona's most high-profile appearance to-date was in *The Curse of Llorona* (2019), directed by Michael Chavez. It was the sixth installment in the *Conjuring* franchise, a series of horror films about real-life paranormal investigators Earl and Loraine Warren and a demonic doll, Annabelle, which they found in one of the houses they investigated. *The Curse of La Llorona* is set in 1970s Los Angeles, where a social worker named Anna Tate-Garcia investigates the truancy of two children, Carlos and Tomas, who have been locked in a closet by their mother, Patricia Alvarez. Anna takes them to a child services center, despite the protests of her own two sons, Chris and Sam, who beg her to keep the boys protected in the closet. During the night, Patricia Alvarez's sons are attacked by La Llorona while they are sleepwalking and drowned in the river. Afterward, she prays to La Llorona to return her boys and take Ana's sons instead. In the end, Anna stabs La Llorona in the chest with a cross from a Fire Tree given to her by a former priest.

This modern incarnation of "La Llorona" emphasizes her role as the "Bogeywoman" who snatches the souls of children. Unlike the victimized protagonist of Sandra Cisneros' short story, the film version of La Llorona is a monster who instills only fear in those who encounter her. Critics attacked Chavez's film for overlooking the social implications of the legend and going for "jump scares" instead. Conversely, one could also

argue that the film encourages general audiences to examine more deeply the lasting appeal of the legend that has meant so much to Hispanic people for over 300 years.

The question of "Who is La Llorona" has become more difficult to answer with the passing of time. For many children La Llorona is a nightmarish creature who will "get them" is they disobey their parents. To some adults, she is a self-centered woman who uses her children to get back at her husband. To others, she is a harlot who steps outside of the bounds of proper behavior and is punished by God Himself. For many women in the 21st century, La Llorona is a symbol of strength, a courageous figure who dares to rebel against male suppression. For moviegoers, she is a vengeful spirit, a nightmarish incarnation of our most deep-seated fears. The element that has remained constant in all of the variants and incarnations of the story is the destructive consequences of substituting hatred and betrayal for love, which brings us closer to each other and, ultimately, to God Himself.

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Unknown Informant. Recorded by Belinda Lopez IN 1981 from an unidentified " half Mexican-American and half white" male informant in Yuma, Arizona

Notes

[1] While stressing that he is an honest storyteller, Wright acknowledges that his understanding of the events may not always be correct: "I can only say again, the things I tell you in this book are true; I may or may not be right in my understanding of them" (Wright, *To My Sons* 74). Daniela Schiller, a Mount Sinai School of Medicine neuroscientist, explains, memories are untrustworthy and are liable to change as time lapses: "Each time you retrieve a memory[,] it undergoes this storage process.[…] We don't really remember the original; we remember the revised version" (qtd. in Rojahn). However, Wright's words should be taken as a gesture of humility that acknowledges a fuzzy memory, which happens in most memoirs.

[2] Some of the websites give the (perhaps unintended) impression that Wright attended Hiram College as an undergraduate student. For instance, the "Biographical Note" of the Arizona Archives Online states, "Wright attended Hiram College in Hiram, Ohio until the late 1890s when he was forced to leave school to combat a serious illness" ("Harold Bell Wright Papers").

[3] This number is based on Chapter 5 of *To My Sons*, which opens with the following statement: "Mother's illness began, so far as I knew anything about it, one wash day. I was in the kitchen with her when it happened. I was eleven years old. At that time nothing could have been farther from my thoughts than her death" (68). According to some biographers, his mother died when he was ten. In his 1916 biographical sketch of Wright,

Elsbery W. Reynolds—his publisher in Chicago—states that the author became motherless at the age of ten ("Harold Bell Wright"). In *The Old Shepherd of Branson*, Carroll F. Burcham notes, "When he was ten in 1882, his mother […] died, and the light of Harold Bell Wright's life almost went out" (23). Meanwhile, Arizona Archives Online states that she died when he was ten ("Harold Bell Wright Papers"). As quoted above, however, Wright recalls his mother becoming ill when he was eleven; without explaining exactly when she died, he then tells his sons that he worked as a farm boy in a neighboring farmhouse at age twelve. In his book *Harold Bell Wright: Storyteller to America* (1986), Lawrence V. Tagg states, "Her final illness began when Wright was 11," which is in line with the information in *To My Sons*.

Exact Resemblance to Exact Resemblance: The Stolen Name in Autobiography

By Connor Fisher

"What returns to your name, to the secret of your name, is the ability to disappear in your name."

--Jacques Derrida

"Exact resemblance to exact resemblance the exact resemblance as exact resemblance, exactly as resembling, exactly resembling, exactly in resemblance exactly and resemblance."

--Gertrude Stein

Michel de Montaigne opens his autobiographical essay "The Best Father That Ever Was" with anxiety about his name. "Montaigne," it seems, is a common enough name in the 16th century that, after he has died, he fears that his and his father's legacies will blur into those of other families with the same surname. His concern, then is to find that "handle" (his [translator's] word) that lets him grab ahold of some unique identity to preserve him in posterity. But the name fails. Montaigne laments that, "[N]ames are so many pen-scratches common to a thousand men. How many are there, in every family, of the same name and surname? And how many more in different families, centuries, and lands?" (1) His common first name is, he frets, even more given to slippage. Montaigne presents the problem as that of someone taking his name and using it as their own once he is no longer around to claim the name as his referential property, stating: "As for my given name, it belongs to anyone who wants to take it—"(1). This phrasing lends a physicality to the name and opens to the idea of the name being transferrable.

Similarly, Montaigne's family coat-of-arms ("an azure field sown with gold trefoils, and traversed by a lion's paw likewise in gold, armed with gules [the color red]" [1]) cannot remain as a signifier of his unique, nontransferable persona once he has passed away. After Montaigne's death someone could, for example, carry the seal off to their own house and say that the seal that once signified Montaigne now signifies a new family, a new house. Montaigne's imagined thief walking off with the family seal allows introduces questions that clearly made the essayist uncomfortable: is the thief the new Montaigne; does the thief's family become the new Montaigne family? Speaking about the transference of coats-of-arms, Montaigne confesses, "Nothing is more subject to change and confusion" (2).

In this light, both the proper name and the possessed coat-of-arms can slip and be stolen or given to another. Things prized for their ability to make a person unique can transfer to others, lose their distinction, be robbed or misplaced. The name and its counterpart—the signature—slip further by their replication. The same contradiction exists in legal discourse, where an individual's signature stands as a placeholder. By signing a document, the subject gives their current and ongoing approval, as if they were continually there and personally continued to affirm that they agree to the statements on the document. But most living individuals sign their names many times a day, and each signature carries the full weight of the proper name. While the embodied self does not multiply, the written self evidently does, since we leave our *selves* behind on sheets of paper and each creates a new iteration of me although "I" do not multiply. A paradox is formed which begs the question: if the name itself can be stripped from the subject or can fail to indicate a stable self during one's lifetime (to say nothing of time after one has died) what can give stability or lend permanent reference to the individual *qua* individual?

The transfer of the name undercuts its originality and its supposed singularity. Even the possibility of the name's transfer undercuts the ego of the named subject by pointing outward, pointing away, directing attention along vectors that do not return to the subject. Think of the tradition of naming children (typically male) after their fathers and of kings and popes taking the names of predecessors. It is a way of linking together two subjectivities and the authority that they contain via the name, but the name-bearing subject does not actually replicate the originally named subject … or it both does and does not. In Jacques Derrida's 1995 monograph *On the Name*, he problematizes the common conception of the proper name as it related to the authorship of texts. For Derrida, names are oblique signifiers that slant away from individual writers and instead create a redoubling or negation of those who seek to inscribe their name at the top of a written text. He writes,

> [S]uppose that X, something or someone … bears your name, that is to say, your title. The naïve rendering … is that you have given your name to X, thus all that returns to X … *returns* to you, as a profit for your narcissism.[But A]s you *are* not your name, nor your title, and given that as the name or the title, X does very well without you or your life, that is, without the place toward which something could *return* … so your narcissism is frustrated a priori by that from which it profits or hopes to profit. (12–13)

For Derrida, the proper name severs its own ties with the inherently narcissistic subject who allegedly bears it. The name moves on its own into the world without any obligation to return or refer back to the individual ("you" and "your" in Derrida's text) from whom it departed. The name does not need the presence of the self to which it once referred; it does not need the body, or it takes up residence in another body.

And a text that gives the name of its author to the text—that is, an autobiography—sets the name in a more fraught position than non-autobiographical texts that make no assertion of any identity between the *name of the protagonist* and the *name of the author* as a character consistently identified with the flesh-and-blood author. The autobiographical link is fraught; the name departs from but does not return to the author, the parent, the creator. The eponymous creation now owns the name as fully as the author and so, as Derrida indicated, does not return to any point of origin or subjective stability. As Robert Smith questions,

> … [I]s it possible to refer to an autobiography without presupposing an authorial name … ? But, if … author and text can always be sanctioned off from one another, then in the case of autobiography the author can become separated also from the name … which entitles the text. … Using one's *name* as a title is to use something one has already lost … . A further weakening of ownership ensues. (71)

By this understanding, autobiography is the genre farthest removed from its own author *vis a vis* identity. The text's author and the book's name coincide and in this coincidence, they eradicate one another. As the author sends his own name out into the world, it does not point back at him; the trace dissolves.

Charles Olson begins the *Maximus Poems*—monument to place that it is—with a name that both is and is not himself, or, that he both controls and does not control:

> Off-shore, by islands hidden in the blood
> jewels & miracles, I, Maximus,
> a metal hot from boiling water, tell you
> what is a lance, who obeys the figures of

the present dance (5).

Maximus of Tyre is the nominal Maximus. He is an ancient Greek philosopher, rhetorician, at once a naturalist and a metaphysician, concerned with conjoining the orders of plant and animal with humans, then linking humans to the Gods as if arranged in rungs on a ladder. The historical Maximus was concerned with accessing God through only reason, with living as an ascetic rather than a cynic or at least longing for a return to some Edenic garden-like state (Chisholm). But Olson translates Maximus to New England and blurs the figure with himself, taking the name of the ancient writer to address his own city: Gloucester, Massachusetts. Olson has done as Montaigne feared; he has snatched the name of Maximus and now there is not one Maximus but two: Maximus of Tyre and Olson-as-Maximus. Olson masquerades as the other with a poorly made mask, not intended to fully disguise his identity but to allow the poet to speak both as himself and as another: an open secret with rhetorical intent. This allows Olson to stand outside of Gloucester, speaking with the distance of second-century Athens and the force of the Eclectic philosopher as he looks to those Massachusetts small towns, fishing communities, writing letter after letter to them, both a member of the community and not. Olson diagnoses cultural ills that he himself both is and is not a part of. In doing so, Olson attempts to gain a kind of objectivity from what one can never be objective towards: the life, the *bios*; the thing that one is most intricately wrapped up in at any given moment, but Olson-as-Maximus transports himself into the past and across hemispheres, then looks back (or attempts to, claims to look back) at Gloucester to re-acquaint the land and people with its own history. And so "The drowned men are undrowned / in the eddies" and "The disaster / is undone" (157).

Earlier, Maximus turns his pen inward and writes, in "Maximus, to himself":

I have had to learn the simplest things

last. Which made for difficulties.

Even at sea I was slow, to get the hand out, or to cross

a wet deck.

…

But sitting here

I look out as a wind

and water man, testing

And missing

some proof (56).

Who is the "I" in the poem? Nominally the ancient philosopher, but Olson stands in the text, too: a massive presence who never quite vanishes behind the other whose name he has pilfered so that he also takes a position of simplicity, of naivety; he has "had to learn the simplest things last." He has missed "some proof"; "It is undone business / I speak of, this morning" (57).

But as the long poem unfolds, as *Maximus* progresses into the sections that Olson wrote and published in the middle of the 1960s, the proper name itself mutates. Olson-as-Maximus gives way to a less mediated version of the poet. Olson drops the pretense of speaking from historical antiquity and the veil of Maximus falls as Olson confronts one of the tensions of his (and of anyone's) life: the fact that what he considers *his life* in fact came from, was created by his father (and mother, although Olson barely mentions her). The poet understands that life is not his at all, but a gift that was given to him without his knowledge or consent and articulates that *life* is more like *lineage*; Olson's life carries on in the life of his

son and there is a necessary rupture, an impossible break when a new child emerges. Olson's transferable name has been given life from life, and the life is both the same and not the same as its parents. He writes in Maximus volume three:

> I have been an ability—a machine—up to
> now. An act of "history", my own, and my father's,
> together, a queer [Gloucester-sense] combination
> of completing something both visionary … & burning my
> nerves … . My own [father]
> was so loaded in his favor as in fact so patently
> against my mother that I have been like his stained shingle
> ever since or once or forever It doesn't matter the love I learned
> from my father has stood me in good stead
> —home stead—I maintained this "strand" to
> this very day. My father's. and now my own (495)

Without Maximus of Tyre to mask the poet's true face, Olson finds himself reduced to his own name, his own lineage, and he must speak to his own "strand" which paradoxically is and is not his own. It is also his father's "stained shingle," stained because the genealogy's trace cannot be removed. And time itself blurs as the life and the difference between father and self blurs as Olson admits that his life has been like his father's: "ever since or once or forever It doesn't matter."

The stolen name is a mask and a site of slippage. At this point, I would like to think about Gertrude Stein, whose *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* famously features Stein using Alice B. Toklas as a mouthpiece to, in fact, write her own autobiography. Toklas describes

the duo's Parisian visits with Matisse, Picasso, and other geniuses: a term which Stein does not shy away from using and which she liberally applies to herself. Toklas was Stein's typist and provided occasional commentary and corrections for the manuscript, so she would have seen many drafts of the *Autobiography* (Bloom 81). In these drafts, she (Toklas) does not have much of a personality and serves mostly to observe Stein, discuss their art speculation, and praise Stein's prescience concerning Cubism and literature. A relevant example occurs near the end of the section "Gertrude Stein in Paris—1903–1907," as Stein details her burgeoning writing career and the development of her legendary Paris art salon. She writes,

> The winter went on. Three Lives was written. Gertrude Stein asked her sister-in-law to come and read it. She did and was deeply moved. This pleased Gertrude Stein immensely, she did not believe that anyone could read anything she wrote and be interested. … Gertrude Stein had at time a wretched little portable typewriter which she never used. … Gertrude Stein tried to copy Three Lives on the typewriter but it was no use (712–713).

What does Stein accomplish by writing from Toklas's perspective and not her own? It is an open secret that Stein wrote the book; in fact, she confesses to it in the final paragraph of the *Autobiography* (Bloom 81). But standing behind Alice B. Toklas and speaking through her as a ventriloquist speaks through her puppet lets Stein (not entirely dissimilarly from Olson) speak about herself from outside of her own life and spread a veil of objectivity over the events that "Toklas" describes. Stein speaks through Toklas and gives readers a rendition of "Gertrude Stein" the character that feels unbiased because it comes from Toklas's pen. As Lynn Bloom points out in her 1978 study of the *Autobiography*, Stein's usage of Toklas to write an autobiography-by-*Doppelgänger* is apparently unprecedented in the scope of

American literature. The *Autobiography* titillates modern and contemporary readers by suspending the flat certainty associated with traditional narrative autobiographies by introducing elements of uncertainty. If Stein goes so far as to establish a ventriloquist narrator, readers may, wonder, what additional narrative norms is she inclined to subvert? Bloom writes that, "This unique form [a ventriloquist narrator] provides a persona—real or not…—to express the real Gertrude Stein's point of view. It allows the author much greater latitude of expression than she might have had if she'd been speaking in the first person, for she has two people speaking for one" (83). Although the *Autobiography* does follow a largely linear sequence of events, Stein's use of a *Doppelgänger* narrator permits expressive and stylistic freedoms that would be hard to achieve without the presence of Toklas.

As Montaigne warned, Stein has entered Toklas's house (with permission, we assume) and has carted off her name and adopted the other's voice. So, the name "Alice B. Toklas" is not unique; it's doubled although the text itself does not admit to this doubling. In some sections the pronoun "she" (referring to Stein but "written" by Toklas) seems a thinly veiled substitute for Stein's own "I," the unspoken "I" of the text's true author that has been covered over with a veil: "she." Consider:

> Life in California came to its end with Gertrude Stein was about seventeen years old. … She has never been able or had any desire to indulge in any of the arts. … She cannot draw anything. She feels no relation between the object and the sheet of paper. … She remembers when she was very small she was sent learn to draw and was sent to a class (736–737).

Had Stein dropped her mask and written, "I have never had any desire to indulge in any of the arts," the statement would feel inflated and pompous, but Toklas's "she" dulls the

impact. Stein presents the reader with Toklas-as-bystander; Toklas-as-journalist. The pseudo-documentary tone of the *Autobiography* grants readers both insider status to key moments in the development of visual and literary Modernism and a front-row seat to understanding the self-proclaimed genius of Gertrude Stein as (ostensibly) narrated by the bland, non-genius, and uninvolved "Toklas." [1]

The name stealing that Montaigne feared became something of a poetics for these Modernist writers. Both Olson and Stein take on the names of others (Maximus and Toklas) to speak into the past. The presence of the proper name brings an illusory vexed veil of stability and the implied directness of speech. The proper name allows a temporary point of artificial stability that threatens to—and does—collapse.

Critic Georges Gusdorf says as much, taking as his starting point the simultaneous naming and creation of the cosmos in the first chapter of *Genesis*.

> The naming of realities works to set these realities in place once they are called into being … . The imposition of the name seems the last moment, the completion of creation, a sort of second creation, capable of clearing the way for intelligibility in the midst of first reality's reign of confusion (281).

Gusdorf admits that reality, before its naming, is subject to a "reign of confusion," but the name creates a "second creation" that "clear[s] the way for intelligibility." In the same vein, Stein and Olson, by naming themselves as their alter egos, attempt to structure the chaos that is early American fishing history and salon culture in the 1900s; the chaos, that is, of existence in its unnamed state. *Maximus* and Stein's *Autobiography* create artificial (i.e., ordered) versions of the primary events, actual *events*. Or at least they create one possible version of those events; many forms of nominal secondary order can be created from the

primary events, each coming from the presumed mouth of the named author or an author who has disguised themself with a stolen name.

But the proper name never exists in isolation. Identity is not singular but multiple, and names and persons conflate, combine, or trace through history to find those with whom they echo and resonate. This concept can be traced further in the text of Korean American writer Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's hybrid collaged autobiography, *Dictee*. The text—part prose narrative, part experimental poem, part found text and image—is divided into a nine-part structure corresponding with the nine Greek muses. In the first section, titled "CLIO" after the muse of history, Cha invokes the image and the name of Yu Guan Soon: a Korean freedom-fighter and enemy of the occupying Japanese regime in the first decades of the twentieth century. After Soon was captured by the Japanese and before her death, Cha imagines that "She calls the name Jeanne d'Arc three times. She calls the name Ahn Joong Kun [another revolutionary] five times" (28). As the names are uttered the lives entwine, and Cha introduces her own mother (Hyung Soon Huo) and later, herself, into this line of activist women who were oppressed and—in some cases—killed by occupying powers. She writes: "I am in the same crowd, the same coupe, the same revolt, nothing has changed. I am inside the demonstration I am locked inside the crowd and carried in its movement" (81).

For Cha, the impulses of imperialism have conjoined trajectories of lives, and the repetitive echoes of events through time are conjoined by linked names. Cha becomes her mother, Joan of Arc, Yu Guan Soon; the proper names echo and reflect one another. And the name (which lives on after the person who once held it has passed) ensures against erasure, holds the life and keeps it from being erased out of time and memory. *Dictee* enacts

a similar preservation regarding the Korean language itself and the presentation of historical Korean efforts to resist colonization. During the Japanese occupation of Korean from 1910 to 1945, the imperialist nation to erase the Korean language and Korean cultural identity (Spahr 29). Juliana Spahr identifies Cha's hybrid novel as a text that creates a "multilingual, pidgin" site where language (French, English, Korean) can blend and mutually obfuscate and confound one another (26). In a moving passage invoking her mother, Cha writes,

> Her name. First the whole name. Then syllable by
> syllable counting each inside her mouth. Make them
> rise they rise repeatedly without ever making visible
> lips never open to utter them.
> Mere names only names without the image not hers
> hers alone not the whole of her and even the image
> would not be the entire
> her fraction her invalid that inhabits that rise
> voluntarily like flint
> pure hazard dead substance to fire (88).

Held in the mouth like a precious object, the mother's name, the saint's name, the resistance-fighter's name are metonymic fragments of fraught selfhood that must be remembered but can never be spoken aloud for fear of repression, of linguistic and nominal elimination. Cha admits that the name, like the image (a photograph?) of her mother is "not the whole of her" but the name still has power; it still "inhabits that rise / voluntarily like flint." She must preserve the name.

But as the proper name preserves, so it melds together with others. If the proper name is a way of shoring up the subject against the threat of colonial and linguistic erasure, Cha seems to say, then it does not happen on an individual basis; the name is not preserved outside of its linguistic, familial, and associative contexts. The name is always political, always under threat of erasure, so stealing the name of her mother, Joan of Arc, and Yu Guan Soon is not an aesthetic sleight of hand but a necessary act of political, cultural, ethical preservation. For Cha, the proper name is part of a matrilineal line: Joan of Arc was never a mother, but she set off this tradition of female disobedience, female rebellion; Cha uses the French woman's name to intertwine all four of the primary women in her text. Her insurgent re-inscription of the stolen name does not trace down through men (as it does for Olson) but through women whose lives are endangered, cut short: as displaced as their names. Cha does not deploy this matriarchal linkage to reinscribe a hereditary order or to uphold nationalist loyalties. Rather, Cha "emphasizes these women's resistances to cultural norms over their patriotism. … [T]he exchange of identity appears throughout *Dictee* but is most evident in Cha's concentration on female identity as a place of manipulation or even at times fraudulence" (Spahr 28). Like the mutable and transferable proper name, female identities blur and overlap to facilitate subjective exchange and strengthening. It is only by transferring into the strengths of Joan of Arc and Yu Guan Soon that Cha can resist occupying colonial powers, both on and off the page.

In a passage early in *Dictee*, which will conclude this essay, Cha presents a series of passages to be "Translate[d] into French." It is a colonial tool designed to teach French to the subjugated people of nations colonized by the European power, and most of the passages to be translated discuss French history or Catholicism. Passage 5 breaks from these

confines, though, to present a meditation on writing and the name. It forms a lament for the loss of linguistic and nominal identity that the colonized and the immigrant undergo. The lineated passage reads:

> she accept pages sent care of never to be seen
> never to be read never to be known if name if
> name be known if name only seen heard spoken
> read cannot be never she hide all essential
> words words link subject verb she writes hidden
> the essential words must be pretended invented
> she try on different images essential invisible (15)

By focusing on the unspoken name—"if name only seen heard spoken / read cannot be"—Cha herself hides the unspoken names and words. She covers them up and admitting that "the essential words must be pretended invented." For Cha, stealing the proper name, swapping the proper name, covering it up or misdirecting readers about where the name lies becomes part of her strategy. And this can only be done once the name has been stolen, once it has been severed from its original residence (a process that is always already in motion) and, freed, becomes a veil, a mask. To steal the proper name is to pretend that it is your own, even if the artifice is transparent. The stolen name reinvents itself or is reinvented by the autobiographer-as-thief. The stolen name is safe. The hidden name persists.

Notes

[1] It is also worth noting that the *Autobiography* always uses her full proper name, "Gertrude Stein," rather than just "Gertrude." The last name carries authority and using it in conjunction with the first keeps the reader from feeling too familiarly towards Gertrude Stein; Picasso is Picasso and Matisse is Matisse, but Gertrude Stein is Gertrude Stein. Lynn Bloom reads an additional layer of feminist critique into Stein's naming convention. She writes that, "The forms of these references to Gertrude Stein serve an honorific function as well, for they give her dignity and authority that the plain, familiar "Gertrude" or the flippant "Gerty" would not sustain. Stein, through Toklas, thereby flouts the convention that has persisted in women's biographies throughout the centuries, of addressing women subjects by their first names, regardless of their age, rank, or social status" (83).

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The Perception and Reality of the Ozarks as "Holy Hills": Insights from Harold Bell Wright's Fiction

By John J. Han

Introduction

In *Holy Hills of the Ozarks* (2007), Aaron K. Ketchell offers a sociological analysis of the relationship between religion and tourism in Branson, Missouri, noting that Harold Bell Wright "embrac[ed] the sanctity of the Ozarks" (xi). In her article "Missouri: An Ozarks Native Crosses the Show Me State," Rachel McBride Lindsey—a professor of theological studies at St. Louis University—also refers to Interstate 44 as a road that connects "the holy hills of the Ozarks" and "the red bricks of St. Louis" (para. 3). Fervent, conservative faith—Lindsey calls it "Holy Ghost religion" (para. 2)—dominates the Ozarks.

Yet, Harold Bell Wright's fiction reveals that the appearance of holiness among the Ozarkers can be deceptive. In his Ozarks-based novels, Wright acknowledges the profound place of religion in the lives of the residents while pointing out that they also are guilty of the same transgressions Christians in other regions commit, especially hypocrisy, unkindness, and excessive pietism. Before he came to the Ozarks, Wright lived in Ohio, where he sensed the same shortcomings of the church, for several years. In his autobiography, *To My Sons*, Wright records how he felt during his stay in Ohio:

> There is no word in our language more abused, misunderstood and misapplied than the word "Christian." […] I heard all sorts of hypocrites,

> charlatans, and crooks calling themselves and each other by this noblest of titles; […] I have witnessed the sickening deeds of selfishness, injustice, intolerance, and downright cruelty that are committed in the name of Christianity. (175)

Throughout his autobiography and fiction, Wright asks a key question "What does it mean to be a Christian?" He advocates a simple, practically oriented Christianity, instead of denominational Christianity: "My proposition is simply that we come together to worship God and to learn the plain, simple truths that Jesus taught, in order that we may apply them to ourselves and live them" (Wright, *To My Sons* 201). Based on Wright's ambivalent view of the religious landscape of the Ozarks, this essay examines the appearance and reality of the region in three of Wright's novels: *That Printer of Udell's* (1903), *The Shepherd of the Hills* (1907), and *The Calling of Dan Matthews* (1909).

That Printer of Udell's

That Printer of Udell's is the author's first-ever novel for which he chose the Ozarks as its setting. He wrote it while serving as the pastor of the Christian Church in Pittsburg, Kansas. He read one chapter of his manuscript to his congregation during each Sunday evening worship service and later published the series as a book. *That Printer of Udell's* is a melodramatic story that includes crime, intrigues, pursuits, a love triangle, and a predictably happy ending. At the same time, the novel reflects the author's harsh criticism of the spiritual maladies of so-called Christians in the Ozarks.

The story traces the life and ministry of Dick Falkner. At the beginning of the story, he appears as a young tramp from a broken family, which is reminiscent of the unfortunate early life of the author himself. He drifts to a Midwestern town called Boyd City, which is modeled after Pittsburg, Kansas, then a mining town located on the northwestern edge of the Ozarks. Believing that Christians in town will help him overcome hunger, he seeks employment there. However, Dick's hope is dashed when he attends worship service at a local church. The minister and church members barely recognize his presence, greet him as a token gesture, wish him well as he enquires about an employment opportunity, and move on with their lives. When "one good old mother in Israel" learns that Dick is not a Christian, she exhorts him to accept God and pray to him: "Well, don't get discouraged; look to God; he can help you; and we'll all pray for you. […] Good night" (Wright, *Printer* 32). She does not understand that Dick is a starving, homeless man who desperately needs to work for food. Demoralized, Dick looks at the church building in darkness: "[T]he house of God stood silent, dark and cold, with the figure of Christ upon the window and the spire, like a giant hand, pointing upward" (Wright, *Printer* 33).

Ironically, a printer named George Udell—a non-Christian known as an "infidel" (Wright, *Printer* 37) among local Christians—hires Dick, who proves to be a man of diligence and integrity. In the meantime, Dick ponders the problems with modern Christianity, wondering how practical Christianity can flourish within a church. One of the biggest problems he sees in modern churches is denominationalism, which leads to doctrinal hair-splitting and factionalism among Christians. Following the vision embodied in Charles M. Sheldon's novel *In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do?* (1896), Dick leads a social gospel movement in town, serving as a catalyst for transforming the moral fabric of Boyd City. In

this way, *That Printer of Udell's* is both a melodramatic story but also a thesis novel directed against modern Christianity that, in the author's view, has lost its way.

The Shepherd of the Hills

Wright began taking notes for *The Shepherd of the Hills* in 1904 and published it in 1907 while serving as the pastor of Redlands Christian Church in California. Set in Branson, Missouri, the story revolves around Dad Howitt, a respected pastor in Chicago, who comes to the Ozarks for peace and quiet and then becomes a minister for mountain people. Until the end of the story, residents do not know that the reason for his moving to the Ozarks was to expiate his son's sin of impregnating a local girl, deserting her, and leading her to death during childbirth.

When Dad Howitt sets foot in the Ozarks, the region impresses him as an area of peace and tranquility suitable for weary souls like his. He says the scenery is "good for [him]; it somehow seems to help [him] know how big God is" (Wright, *Shepherd* 29). Soon, however, the main character finds out that the natural beauty and tranquility do not mean that Ozark Christians are any better than those outside the region. Unlike *That Printer of Udell's*, *The Shepherd of the Hills* does not offer extensive criticism of Christianity in the Ozarks. However, there is an implicit criticism of overt emotionalism and religious hypocrisy in the novel. In chapter 12, for example, Dad Howitt preaches at a church when the regular pastor happens to be absent. The sermon impresses his audience with its convincing yet calm and lucid style:

> At the occasional religious meetings in the school house at the Forks, Mr. Howitt was always present, an attentive listener to the sermons of the backwoods preacher. And then, seeing his interest, they asked him to talk to them one day when Parson Bigelow failed to make his appointment. "He don't holler so much as a regular parson," said Uncle Josh Hensley, "but he sure talks so we'uns can understand." From that time they always called upon him at their public gatherings. (66)

Meanwhile, in Chapter 36, Dad Howitt is commended for avoiding pretentiousness Ozarkians are used to observing in their pastors: "The big man [Old Matt] answered with still more warmth, 'You ought to hear how he [Dad Howitt] talks to us folks when we have meetin's at the Cove school house. He's as good as any preacher you ever heard; except that he don't put on as much, maybe." (160).[1]

Interestingly, it is Dad Howitt, an outsider, who truly transforms the Ozarks spiritually. The novel also implies that Sammy and Young Matt, two local youths whom Dad Howitt takes under his wings, will serve as change-makers for the Ozarks. Indeed, in all of Wright's Ozark novels, social and religion reform takes place through the leadership of outsiders or those who have been mentored by outsiders. They enlighten the Ozarkians on their way to a true religion—a lived Christianity,[2] not what Wright calls "churchanity" (Wright, *To My Sons* 211).

The Calling of Dan Matthews

The title character of *The Calling of Dan Matthews* is Young Matt, whose romance with Sammy Lane forms a subplot of *The Shepherd of the Hills*. However, *The Calling of Dan Matthews* is more like *That Printer of Udell's* than *The Shepherd of the Hills* in its outright attack on religious hypocrisy and unkindness among the Ozarkians. The novel chronicles the title character's newfound "calling" (Wright, *Calling* 230) as a Christian man: he resigns his pastoral position at the Strong Memorial Church in Corinth (modeled after Lebanon, Missouri), instead going into business so that he can make money for a social ministry. As in Wright's other Christian novels, *The Calling of Dan Matthews* is characterized by wooden characters, an exaggerated plot development, and a preachy tone. Nevertheless, Wright's sincere criticism of the problems within organized Christianity in his time is unmistakable.

The first impression from the Memorial Church congregation is that many of the members are "earnest souls [who] depend upon the church as the only source of their life's inspiration and strength" (236). However, their faith in action is not exemplary. The two main antagonists in this novel are elders in Dan's local church; they are mean, sneaky, uncharitable, and greedy. Instead of supporting their pastor, they try to control him so that they can hear the kind of sermons they want to hear—not what Dan's Christian conscience compels him to say—from the pulpit. In chapter 10 of the novel, Wright censures churches of his day through the mouth of Miss Farwell, who will later marry Dan:

> This selfish, wasteful, cruel, heartless thing that men have built up around their opinions, and whims, and ambitions, has so come between the people

> and the Christianity of the Christ, that they are beginning to question if, indeed, there is anywhere such a thing as the true church. (252)

In chapter 25, Dan himself recognizes in his congregation "meanness, shameful littleness—actual, repulsive, shocking" (321). To Dan, the "Elders and ruling classes" (322) within the church are especially troublesome, as well as unwholesome.

As Elsbery W. Reynolds, Wright's publisher, comments, "[T]he church and its problems were weighing on the author and affecting his life no less than when he was in the ministry and it was only natural that he should give to the world 'a picture that is true to the four corners of the earth'" (11). *The Calling of Dan Matthew* appeared a year after Wright stepped down from his pulpit ministry in 1908. He wanted to reach a bigger audience through his writing, which he considered a Christian ministry, and this novel is the first product of his post-pastoral writing career.

Conclusion

Despite his love for the Ozarks, Harold Bell Wright recognizes the discrepancy between the appearance and reality in religious life of some residents. The Ozark region has always been fertile soil for Christianity, but religious zeal sometimes led to hypocrisy, unkindness, and religious emotionalism. In *To My Sons*, Harold Bell Wright recalls the time when he first visited Pittsburg, Kansas: "There were fourteen denominational churches and [there was] not a place except saloons, gambling houses, and houses of prostitution where a man might spend a leisure hour" (208). Meanwhile, in *Pioneers of the Ozarks* (2008), Lennis Leonard Broadfoot introduces Preacher John F. Lewis, the type of anti-intellectual preacher

Wright encountered in the Ozarks many times.[3] Lewis never went to school but read the Bible so much that he became a popular, compelling minister who could "preach a sermon that makes the congregation bile over with that ol' hot religion that makes 'em scramble, an' love each other" (58). Lewis despises "high-hat, high-priced preachers" who do not know the Bible as much as he does: "Boy, them kind ov preachers won't debate the question with ol' John F. Lewis! When I get hold ov 'em, I make the smoke fly, get 'em cornered, an' make 'em take a tree" (58).

As many critics have pointed out, Wright tends to exaggerate the moral decay and religious hypocrisy of some Christians. In an effort to promote the social gospel, Wright unconvincingly condemns institutional Christianity, portraying many of the church-going Christians as evildoers. In *That Printer of Udell's*, for instance, they appear as snobs, gamblers, drunks, and adulterers; one married churchgoer impregnates an innocent woman and then deserts her. It seems that, in Wright's view, following Christ's command to love our neighbors outside the church is more ethical than trying to follow Christ's teachings within the church, which is corrupt and hypocritical anyway. *That Printer of Udell's* was a life-changing text for Ronald Reagan when he read it a young boy, but its artistic flaws lie in its improbable plot and unrealistic characterization.

As stated earlier, Wright tends to use many cardboard characters to drive his message home, thereby undercutting the reliability of his fiction. His artistic aim is noble, his descriptions of the Ozark beauty are admirable, but his art is weak in plot and characterization, two of the most important elements in fiction writing. He is a romance writer who uses fiction as a tool for a religious agenda. Not surprisingly, Wright became, in the words of Lawrence V. Tagg, "the most ridiculed writer of his generation" (73). As Irvin

Harlow Hart noted in 1946, "To the student of the phenomena of the popularity of fiction, Harold Bell Wright supplies more negative data on the literary quality of the taste of the fiction reading public than any other author. No critic has ever damned Wright with even the faintest of praise" (287). Wright has always been popular among readers, especially those who appreciate clean, uplifting stories, but it is easy to notice the formulaic, preachy, and predictable nature of his fiction.

Notes

[1] Similar to Dad Howitt, Wright tried to avoid appearing and sounding grandiose in his ministry. During his pastorate in Pierce City, Missouri, he "wore no garb" and "abhorred being called 'reverend'" (Wright, *To My Sons* 207). Wright adds, "I refused to take advantage of clergy credentials and half-fare rates, ten per cent off, and all other forms of special privilege which the professionals claim as their rights" (207).

[2] In *To My Sons*, Wright calls it *applied Christianity* (209).

[3] In *To My Sons*, Wright recalls encountering a fiery but misinformed preacher in the Ozarks:

> He thundered at [the congregation] the most horrible conglomeration imaginable of misquotations, with confused, involved, and impossible interpretations of the simple utterances of Jesus. His weird and terrible doctrines of hellfire and damnation, starry crowns and golden streets, blood and sacrifice, were revolting. To me, it was profane. I burned with shame that in a Christian country such things could be; and that, too, in the name of Jesus whose simple eternal truths meant so much to me. (199-200)

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Cry me a Lerma: Mexico's 1960 *Llorona* Movie

By Robert Harland

In 1960 Mexican cinema was on the decline, facing competition from television, US technological innovation, and markets disrupted by the Cold War conflicts in Latin America. The response was often to make small budget genre films, or recycle the same old formulas which had made Mexico a regional film superpower in the 30s, 40s and 50s. So, in addition to hackneyed melodramas and the 1960s gave fans of campy science fiction and horror the era of the masked wrestler, recycled Universal Studios monsters and alien invasions (Mora 105-109).

However, the industry was not done yet. Mexico's Golden Age of Cinema had given the country a strong legacy of talented actors, directors and technical crews. They typically lacked colour film, stereo sound and gimmicks such as 3-D stereoscopy, and never managed to go down fighting with quite the same panache as cult horror specialists of the likes of Britain's Hammer and Amicus studios, but if the pictures had gotten smaller, they could change to suit and still make quality films (or it has to be said, very mediocre films) on a reduced budget in a genre which could still work well within those confines. And here make use of a local heroine to do so: la Llorona, the child-murdering weeping woman who had been scaring Mexicans for centuries. A good cast in a good location (Guanajuato) make an intriguing if not quite great movie, which defies the economics of its time and gives us an anti-heroine monster caught between the legend from the first colonization and the changes of the early 60s.

The basic story of La Llorona is that of a wronged Native American or Mestiza (half-caste) lady who was the mistress of an aspiring Spanish knight or viceregal courtier in early colonial Mexico. Some versions even make her la Malinche, the interpreter and mistress of the first major conquistador, Hernán Cortés – the classic 1933 Mexican adaptation of the story has it both ways by retelling the two versions. It was one of the first fantasy horror movies made anywhere with sound, and the first in Mexico (Wilt 22; García Riera vol. 1 81-82). It was and is a story both compelling and familiar, thus having the same problems and advantages of e.g. a Dracula or Frankenstein's monster adaptation: everyone knows the basic story going into the film. It is at once a well-defined role and selling point, yet also a challenge for any director, screenwriter and cast. Telling it in an original and interesting manner is tough precisely for it being so well-known.

That said, as a plotline it beats repeating the same tired tropes out of imported stories made famous (and profitable) by Universal in the early talkie era. For a contrast, Mexico also tried an equivalent local monster franchise with varying success in the same period e.g. the *Momia Azteca / Aztec Mummy* trilogy of 1957, *Las Luchadoras contra la Momia Azteca The Wrestling Women vs. The Aztec Mummy* of 1964 or *Santo en la Venganza de la Momia / Santo in the Vengeance of the (Aztec) Mummy* of 1971. They may superficially seem to be an indigenous monster, but they really aren't that much different from the plotlines of any film stemming from the Boris Karloff / Universal tradition, nor occasionally the "Scooby Doo" style of fake ghost script stretching back to *The Cat and the Canary*. Ditto the *Momias de Guanajuato* movies and its derivatives, which throw in more Zombie-like monsters. In real life the Mummies of Guanajuato are a macabre tourist attraction of genuine corpses put on public display when the families of the respective cadavers could no longer afford the burial plot

fees (Goran). The movies are basically camp silliness, usually with wrestlers or in the case of the 1957 trilogy, even an attack robot. They are fun on the level of e.g. the US's late 1960s Batman TV series, but hardly attempt to be serious (Cotter 35-38, 78-80, 105-106, 116; Greene 125-143), although Doyle Greene makes a sincere intellectual stab at *Las Luchadoras contra la Momia Azteca* (125-143) by René Cardona, who helmed the Llorona movie we consider here. They do not draw on Aztec nor other local legends beyond what you could see in a museum glass case without bothering to read the explanatory card. And René Cardona had learned his lesson by 1964: go for full on outrageous camp. His earlier Llorona movie is an unsatisfactory halfway house.

While *La Llorona* did get the masked wrestler treatment in another campy classic, *Santo y Mantequilla Nápoles en La Venganza de la Llorona* (1974), that was at the very end of the Silver Age of Mexican movies and its low budget horror era. As we shall see, she is a substantial figure who transcends cinema.

In the basic, original Llorona legend, an upwardly mobile Spanish courtier unceremoniously dumps his native or mestiza (half-caste) lover, and their children together, for a "pure" wife of European descent more in line with his political and personal ambitions. The wronged Native wreaks an horrific revenge, both internal and external: she kills her children by him (at least two), and is herself executed. Now her supernaturally powerful and vengeful revenant returns with each generation to kill the firstborn children of her erstwhile lover and his descendants, with the wail of "¡Ay, mis hijos! / Oh, my children!" on the wind or night air. In addition to links with La Malinche, she even has roots stretching into the pagan goddesses of Mexico's Aztec past (Zamorano Rojas 1269-1273; León 6-9). A sort of female Dracula then, but with touches of Medea and the

overwhelming, contradictory, violent emotions of a mother's decidedly misplaced and insane love, allied to hints of an older divine power. She can have similar properties to the Night Hag of British folklore (Carson Powell), the equally screaming Irish Banshee (González Manrique 543) or the Santa Compaña of Galicia in Northwestern Spain (Rodríguez López, 129-132), portents of death or apparitions which will (eventually) kill you.

The Llorona has added pathos compared to more anonymous monsters: she has a name (even if only a nickname; her "real" name can change with the telling), a backstory which is to an extent sympathetic even as it is tragic, and the overwhelming sadness of a mother who has murdered her own children to be ever burdened by regret. She is a driven murderess with a reason for her acts, however sad and desperate. As Ortiz Bullé-Goyre (220) notes, there is a strong similarity to the Medea of Greek myth and the stage, particularly in Toscano's play where she is (for most of the work) incarnated as a human. In a more general sense, González Manrique observes her similarity to the more supernatural Greco Roman Monster Lamia, with her children (fathered by Zeus) murdered by Hera; and as González Manrique indicates in his title, she also bears the "stigma of Eve". Add the possibilities of the Biblical Rachel weeping for her children, and the Aztec heritage of goddesses such as Cihuacóatl, Avicanime, Xonaxi Queculla and Xtabay (543-545), and rarely can a monster of any gender had so many potential intertexts and ancestors.

The Greco-Roman comparison leaves her relatively hard done by. For a male example, Hercules achieved redemption for murdering his own children by his 12 labours, which tested his strength, courage and intelligence. Eventually he attained godhood. Contrastingly, the Llorona is bound up with the painful legacy of the Conquista, made an

emotionally tortured sinner by the arrival of Christianity: pagan in spirit, the inverse reflection of a Native saint, Mexico's Christian heritage keeps her at the level of a folkloric demon. She is capable of inspiring folk tale visions and interactions among Mexican communities to this day (Beatty & García Kraul). She also is a spirit of such depth and dark cultural resonance that future Nobel laureate Octavio Paz mentions her in his *El laberinto de la soledad* as symbolizing the *chingada*, the fucked woman (I translate the level of crudeness), the wronged and suffering mother which lurks in the Mexican collective unconscious as a humiliation at the hands of their Spanish colonial overlords and forefathers, with a parallel in their sense of cultural inferiority relative to Europe or the US (98-99).

Even if in the adaptations she can be defeated, in the folklore she simply exists (although she is not simple herself), a sad beautiful undead mother, a hag, a ball of fire, who haunts Hispanoamerica from Woman Hollering Creek in Texas down through Central American to Venezuela, adapted to local conditions. A bogeywoman for children's horror stories and a monster whose film adaptations have grown ebbed and flowed since the dawn of sound cinema.

Our 1960 adaptation has a problem. The basic story had a grain of truth: it serves as a retroactive explanation for one of the great horrors prior to modern medicine, frequent child death in large families. Yet this is 1960s Mexico, still in the relatively fortunate throes of the Mexican Economic Miracle which lasted from World War II to around 1970. The birth rate rose and the death rate dropped (Shorris 571-2). Few Latin American countries developed as fast, if unevenly, as Mexico, and a middle- or upper-class family (the Montes are visibly well-off old money) in a city could expect medical care which approached that of Europe or the US and Canada. Even if Earl Shorris is correct about the stubborn persistence

among Mexicans for large families into the period of our film and beyond, here we have only a single adult daughter. A Llorona solely driven by vengeance on her lover's progeny down the generations would risk running out of babies to kill. One likely reason why other more modern adaptations often have her more generally monstrous, murderous and vengeful – as a trope it has not withstood the test of time.

As such the movie is caught between two very different ages: we have the traditional explanation for her madness and cursed supernatural powers; when translated to the present, she has to contend with the modern context of (in this case) a city far removed in time from the early Mexican Viceroyalty, and a lone female descendant of her old enemy who within the confines of our film gives birth to one son.

One good choice is to send this Llorona to Guanajuato, home of Mexico's notorious (and non-supernatural) mummies. Mexico's film studios traditionally sat on the banks of the Churubusco River in Mexico City, that waterway being about as close an equivalent name to Hollywood as the local film industry had. Here we are transported to a fair sized but still relatively small urban space compared to the country's capital (the modern population of Guanajuato city is c. 200 000) with plenty of story-appropriate colonial architecture. We do not see much of it –the film is only one hour and 15 minutes long– but city on the banks of the Lerma River is a welcome break from the familiar views of the Distrito Federal and the same old props and façades of the Churubusco studios. As such, it has a leg up other Llorona movies, be they the generic hacienda in the family melodrama of *La Herencia de la Llorona* (1947 – a temporarily insane human has a bit-part as a relatively helpful Llorona) or the plaster over chicken wire fake caves and Scooby Doo plotline of the admittedly colour stock Western, Fernando Méndez's *El Grito de la Muerte* (1959). Ditto Rafael Baledón's *La*

Maldición de la Llorona / *The Curse of the Llorona* (1963) which blatantly steals its aesthetic (although not the plot) of Mario Bava's Italian classic *Black Sunday* (1960), but with shoddier sets, special effects and makeup e.g. what look like sunglasses lenses over the eyes when the Llorona fully transforms into her monstrous incarnation. In the middle section of our *La Llorona*, the city is a standout star. Old Guanajuato is one of the few aspects of the movie that betters the original 1933 *La Llorona*, which also has a contrast between old colonial Mexico and a modern well-to-do family dealing with the weeping woman's legacy.

We start with a POV drive through the older cityscape combined with an evocative, almost camply gothic, Romantic narration remind the audience of what the Llorona is all about, priming a target audience who already would have known the story from childhood. And it also defines the problem which this movie seeks to solve: how to deal with this ever-returning spirit in "pleno siglo veinte / in the middle of the 20th century". It is a big help that they were working with a proven product: the script was the adaptation of an already successful stage play from Carmen Toscano, one of the greats of Spanish movie-writers, a doctor in literature, and who, thanks to her father Salvador had a lifelong apprenticeship in cinema – he was arguably the first importer, producer and director of movies in Mexico (Wood). It is a shame that Toscano wasn't hired to adapt her own work instead of Adolfo Torres Portillo, who at around the same time was scripting such timeless campy stinkers as *Santa Claus* (1959) with this film's director René Cardona, or *Tom Thumb and Little Red Riding Hood* / *Caperucita y Pulgarcito contra los monstruos* (1962) and later, several masked wrestler pics.

At least Torres Portillo seems to have left a little of the power of the original intact, and we are treated to what remains of its maternal horrors. This does set up a conflict

between the framing story and what is left of the Toscano play: the B-movie aesthetic of a UK Hammer film or what in the US would have been a low budget drive-in movie horror which would later play on TV horror late shows, and a high quality, serious, colonial-era treatment which has something important to say about gender relations and ethnicity in viceregal, colonial Mexico, and which is far more subtle in its supernatural vengeance than the B-movie which crudely surrounds it.

After the initial narration, credits shot atmospherically over what looks like Guanajuato City cathedral at midnight (including a drawn out "¡Ay, mis hijos!" and creepily typefaced *La Llorona* title), we get a veiled Luisa leaving the building at around midday in modern dress stalking outside and towards the camera, all shot at the cemetery end, appropriately enough. And the basic story as retold to the Margarita (Luz María Montes) by her father don Gerardo Montes who tries to convince her not to marry. It is a major plus that the latter is played by Carlos López Moctezuma, a supremely gifted character actor who more often than not played anti-heroes and villains rather than square-cut leads, but who usually turns in great or at least engaging performances even as "the pictures got smaller" and he was reduced to such trashy fare as *The Night of the Bloody Apes / La Horripilante Bestia Humana* (1969) –René Cardona again, who must have considered Moctezuma a trusted actor by then– or *Satanás de Todos los Horrores* (1974). Something he does here. The talent which won him the deserved Ariel for *Rio Escondido* (1947) was still there, and in essence having three aspects of his personality on show: jealous father, sympathetic storyteller, mystery solver and saviour. He thus embodies the definition of EM Forster for a "round" (or 3-dimensional) character: you cannot sum him up in a sentence (81-85).

A nervous, near-tearful Margarita is not dissuaded by her father's stern warning about the results of marriage and how her own brother met his doom at the hands of our titular vengeance demon. Margarita is a dye-blonde "chica moderna" in a knee-length (maybe cinched?) dress and pearls, of the sort played by Silvia Pinal in better movies (Mera), defying parental authority to marry. While it begs the question, why not use contraceptives or adopt if you know what's coming?, we now have the setup for the Llorona to wreak her generational vengeance and also the clash of cultures. Llorona is attacking a modern marriage. But it also has the possible resolution: this cycle of infanticide will continue "until the fire consumes the hatred which has become fused with metal, and she achieves forgiveness" / "hasta el fuego consuma el odio que se ha fundido con el metal, y ella alcance el perdón", as prophesied in the family books. It is just as well López Moctezuma is saying this, as he can spout gothic hooey with real emotive force that rivals that of Tom Baker in his classic years as *Doctor Who* the talent for speaking "complete gobbledygook with conviction" (Baker 202). We now know the cure; we await the outcome. It also helps that Margarita points out "Vivimos en el siglo veinte – eso es estúpido" / "We live in the 20th century – that's stupid". If you have what could be a ridiculous conceit, undercut it. Especially when the audience grew up hearing this story at their mother's knee and you need to reinvent the framework. This is played with again when some truly hoary old gothic tropes reappear: billowing curtains, a mysterious appearing-disappearing black cat and lights turning off (plus the obligatory "¡ay, mis hijos!"), when Felipe the husband responds with some cod-Freudian analysis even as he acknowledges it has happened.

A little less tearfully, and with the support of a resolute fiancé Felipe in the form of Mauricio Garcés before he was typecast as a middle-aged lothario, Margarita defies her

father (no mother is present) and the couple are married, an intermediate stage between the arranged marriage and free choice of modernity. Felipe even threw in formally asking for Margarita's hand and talks about consulting with his parents. However, Margarita makes her modern choice. And Mexico's past nearly costs her dearly.

We have a solid cinematographer too, the veteran Jack Draper, who shows he can atmospherically shoot a period horror as well as he does in a fast-paced Mexico City comedy such as *¡A toda máquina!* / *Full Speed Ahead*, although the modern-era studio scenes are far less good. One of the film's weak spots is its attempts at special effects, as we shall see; the "straight" non-effects scenes are well-filmed, aside from the slightly blurred POV narration sequence, which could be a producer's addition stuck on before the opening credits. In fact, signs of this being a low-budget quickie appear in its use of stock footage, from the wedding (no close-up) to honeymoon flights and cruises to the Manhattan skyline and Cuba to going loco in Acapulco. For the period section shots Draper is reasonably in command; the stock shots look like padding stuffed in by the director of producers, although the anonymous tourism footage smooths over any 1960s prudery about sex. When they return, Margarita almost falls over with her first pregnant kicks after arriving home.

Some more clichéd stock footage, alternately bare and leafy trees plus flicking calendars, and we have what looks like a little boy of around 3 or 4, Jorgito (actually a girl, Marina Banquells, but at this age it doesn't matter). And some strain on the marriage as Felipe and Margarita clash over the latter's motherly over-protectiveness and Felipe's own selfish desire for marital attention. Her father did have some influence on her after all. He even gives her an ultimatum: be the wife he wants or he divorces her. Not even a mistress

on the side. Such are the perils of being a modern wife in Mexico. His insistent nastiness at this point helps make the film: these are fortunately not a pair of "Mary Sues".

And part of his proposed solution is how the Llorona inserts herself into their life: he insists on looking for a top-notch nanny. Which will be Luisa. But before Felipe can storm off for his night out, without his wife, don Montes gives him the backstory of his ancestor Nuño de Montesclaros and the Llorona to be, Luisa del Carmen, daughter of an Aztec princess and conquistador. This is when the film begins to come into its own. Nuño's seduction and cynical dumping of Luisa takes place with the backdrop of Guanajuato's finest "found sets" i.e. period buildings as well as period dress and voseo (a bit like using thou and thee in English as regards Mexican Spanish). In fact, given they had the actors, costumes (black and white can cover up the imperfections and fake-looking dyes of modern fabrics) it seems odd that they didn't stretch out this section. It does a good job of looking old and even sumptuous on what must have been a minimal budget. Emilio García Riera is right to call out the middle section being so short as showing that this film was "realizada con evidentes pruritos de ahorro / made with obvious penny pinching in mind" (vol. 10, 115), but this is also what makes it so frustrating: they clearly had the actors, costumes and sets, and a script which had opened to good notices and packed houses just the year before in the live theatre (de María y Campos; Solana; Ortiz Bullé-Goyri 221). This in addition from an Ariel / Mexican Oscar winner whose *Memorias de un Mexicano* documentary had given her some long term cultural credit with the ruling PRI party establishment (Wood), which could have provided useful leverage in promoting the film if they had dared to make it a quality prestige production. She may have been busy putting her energies elsewhere: she founded a film archive with private monies (Mora 105), which opened in 1963 as the

Cinemeteca. Minus much government help, it was forced to move in late 1964, although her Fundación Carmen Toscano proved a little more enduring, able to publish 4 editions in the 1990s of a very detailed screenplay and history written in 1976 *Memorias de un mexicano*, from her own monumental and award-winning documentary tribute to her father Salvador.

Minus the energies of the play's original author, it is hacked to bits and sandwiched between a more conventional modern story. When you already have enough to purchase or hire much of the expensive end of the budget, this looks like marketing considerations were also at play: they might well have been afraid that a straight period piece wouldn't sell, and so dressed it up with a modern framing story. This did allow them to give a starring role to López Moctezuma, one of Mexican cinema's greatest character villain actors, yet now too idle aged and portly to play the cynical Spanish lover, Nuño. Moctezuma becomes Nuño's descendant instead – a bit like building a low budget movie around a Christopher Lee appearance.

Nuño's disappointment with "Se parece a vos" i.e. he looks like the half-caste Luisa, on seeing his newly-born son, is a well-observed piece of period racism. A daughter follows, but Luisa is increasingly stern and embittered, even wearing one of the classic dresses of Mexican period fantasy and horror: the black farthingale dress (later the black crinoline or even Edwardian dress minus the skirt hoops) with the puff sleeves, which can be found on the supernatural mother in *Como agua para chocolate* (1992) and is practically a uniform for many a nasty witch of señora de llaves / housekeeper.

Nuño cannot even be bothered to dump her in person, and sends round his manservant who tries to seduce Luisa in his turn while she uses her own armas de mujer or feminine wiles to trick him into leading him to her errant lover. This is wonderful

melodrama, complete with courtly dancing, Aztec dancing and a confrontation not just with Nuño but with the rubia (pale-skinned, fair or blonde), obviously European Ana (his future wife) and Luisa. The mutual contempt and cynicism between the Spaniards and Luisa. As González Manrique (554) observes:

> Aquí vemos representada la "afrenta" nacionalista decimonónica del Español vs Mestizo, y la reafirmación del mestizo con una autodestrucción muy heredera de la tendencia que subrayaría Octavio Paz, "los hijos son un accidente en vuestra aventura" le dice Doña Ana. Here we see portrayed the 19th century nationalist "shaming confrontation" of the Spaniard vs the Half Caste, and the reaffirmation of the half caste with a self-destruction bearing the strong inheritance of what Octavio Paz observes, "children are an accident in your adventure [of life]" Doña Ana tells her.

Driven mad, Luisa rejects the Jesus of her conquerors and in vengeance reverts to the worst of her Native ancestry, murdering her own children to present her ex-lover with their (and by extension, his) blood on the dagger. The disgust and assault on her in the streets by the enraged townsfolk and her execution is classic imagery, proving that you don't have to walk naked through the streets Cersei Lannister-style in *Game of Thrones* for such scenes to be affecting. She becomes (we don't see this yet) the first-born killing La Llorona, to which Felipe responds with a 20th century cynicism worthy of Dana Scully in the *X-Files.* Gerardo Montes and Margarita's assurances that the Llorona is real and as Nuño de Montesclaro's descendants, they and Jorgito are vulnerable, don't dissuade Felipe. But it does bump us on to the final act of the film.

Things become clearer if you cross-reference all this temporal back and forth with Toscano's original play. No mere pastiche, it goes through the Llorona story with the style of a more restrained and subtle José Zorrilla (19th century author of *Don Juan Tenorio,* the most widely performed adaptation of the eponymous hero's story), the Llorona Luisa returning as a ghost, killing him with a paralysing fear while his more "worthy" European lover looks on helpless and his little treasure chest of newly-acquired wealth burns his hands, a more minimal version of what the Comendador makes don Juan suffer before dragging him to Hell. It also has a lot more to say and more understanding to show about Aztecs and sexual politics, from polygamy to native religion versus the new Catholic ascendancy and even basic sexual violence: at one point a Spanish soldier is shown pursuing a Native woman as if it were an everyday occurrence to punctuate a conversation (Toscano 37). At the other end of the scale, there is liberal use of Nahuatl / Aztec, and religious-inspired streetfights and killings in addition to Luisa's execution and return as the Llorona to wreak vengeance. It is a deep work on multiple levels.

As Ortiz Bullé-Goyri (224) points out:

> en efecto, el caso de La Llorona es muy particular, no solo por su paralelismo y a veces suplantación; también porque a todas luces se trata en general de una suerte de trasposición del mito de Medea al ámbito de la conquista de México-Tenochtitlán (216). In effect, the case of the Llorona is highly unusual, not just for its parallelism and occasional usurpation [of the original myth]; also because at the end of the day it is overall about a relocation of the Medea myth to the conquest of México-Tenochtitlán [the original Aztec capital, Mexico City].

Alas, this film imprisons the undercooked leftovers of Toscano's work within the framing confines of a horror B-flick.

Back in the present the B-movie mechanics click back into place. Luisa appears at the house as the nanny Felipe was looking for, along with some witty lines and an altered name: Carmen Asiul (her name Luisa reversed, as in the classic vampire story "Carmilla" by Sheridan LeFanu, or Mexico's own smash movie hit, the "Dracula on a hacienda" *El Vampiro* of 1957). When Margarita observes that she seems very young. Luisa replies that she is "solo bien conservada" / only well preserved, nice pun. So now we have our final problem. How to scare an audience when there are almost zero special effects? Well not with her transformations into La Llorona. This is done with a series of unsubtle cuts and extreme close-ups from normal to vaguely older and dishevelled but with *conventional* makeup and changed lighting. A mere bad hair day when placed alongside the very early latex of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931), or for a Mexican comparison, the contemporary classic female werewolf in *La Loba* (1965), who, while hardly perfect herself with her fake fur and body stocking, proved that even in that era a makeup which enhanced the character without being laughable was possible. Here, Luisa is about as scary as a pastel de tres leches. No, what scares in the second half is Luisa's continual attempts at killing the young Jorgito. Child murder is still scary now, even if the 1960 style can seem campy. Thus Jorgito almost drowns in the bath, falls from a balcony and even runs into traffic after Luisa throws a ball for him to chase after, even if Luisa's transformative makeup jobs just make her look like a goth that has been caught in the rain. Emilio García Riera found the repeated failed murder attempts reminded him of Wile E. Coyote's failures to kill the Road Runner bird in the Warner Brothers' cartoon (vol. 10, 115).

The choice to use conventional makeup is a bit more understandable when you ever see the alternative: poorly applied putty. At least it allows her to use her facial expressions, and María Elena Marqués makes the best of it with her scenery-chewing grimaces and Draper's overused close-up shots of her eyes. Rafael Baledón's Frankenstein movie of the same year, *Orlak*, had a monster whose face was frozen in place. The pre-latex era gave actors one extreme or the other in terms of makeup, but the transformations here become tiresome even after making allowances.

Luckily, López Moctezuma in his role as grandfather Gerardo Montes is now on the case. He doesn't trust Luisa, fortunate as Jorgito's parents now enjoy couple's nights on the town with their nanny to "look after" the boy. Don Montes finally realizes Luisa is the Llorona after some nagging doubts, when a likeness falls from his treasured family history books. And the fatal dagger is missing. That last point is particularly hard to swallow. When earlier in the movie Gerardo Montes pointed out the dagger on the wall as the one with which Luisa had done the deed 4 centuries earlier, the audience knows it will be used again, as surely as Chekhov's famous gun (Berlin). And with more modern cynicism, the viewer will likely ask "why keep such a revolting murder weapon in the family and on display all these years?".

The ending might appear anticlimactic, with Luisa, now badly made up on purpose as the Llorona, almost stabbing Jorgito only to listen to Gerardo Montes's entreaty and disappear with a final "Ay mis hijos" while the dagger goes point down into the floor. It is helped by López Moctezuma putting in his great performance. With the burning of the Toledo dagger and the family books, the curse is undone. In her final line, an unknowing

Margarita says "ojalá ella vuelva" – "May she (Luisa the Llorona) come back". Her father does not reveal what has just happened.

This film does not deserve to be remembered as an A-lister in Mexico's horror and thrillers or weird cinema e.g. Luis Buñuel's *El angel exterminador* and *Ensayo de un crimen* or the B. Traven adaptation *Macario*. Its odd mix of over-edited period piece and modern family horror melodrama would make it hard to compare to even e.g. Hammer Films or Mexican B-listers such as its horror contemporaries *La Loba* (1966), *El Vampiro* (1957), or *Muñecos Infernales* (1961). It could use a fan edit cutting most of the stock footage, and if not as good as the aforementioned low-budget classics, you can wish that Carmen Toscano had had more control over her original creation. A classic period feminist horror of the stage was only half translated to the screen here in what finished as a very short film, with many cuts from the exceptional plot and dialogue.

We have what little of Toscano's wit and storytelling is left on screen, and a strong ensemble performance: Eduardo Fajardo is also excellent as Nuño in the 1500s sequences, and it is a shame we don't see more of him nor of old Guanajuato, which Draper shoots far better than María Elena Marqués's transformations from Luisa into the Llorona. The film unfortunately illustrates the dichotomy which Octavio Paz pointed out in his essay on "Los hijos de la Malinche", where he dismisses modern terror as a concept. Terror currently resides in a world of tools and things, mere objects and extensions; to move beyond the basics you need something indefinable and mysterious, beyond our control (92-93). In going for the money here and consigning the bulk of Toscano's work to the trashcan, the produces and director do a great disservice to her original play's power and, arguably, to the Llorona

herself. Instead of fighting to be alongside *Macario* of the same year –a Mexican rival to Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*– it became just another B-flick, a mere tool for making money.

As it is this also foreshadowed Mexican cinema's often still beloved era of decadence till it all but died around 1977 (Ramírez Berg 50-54), soap opera production values grafted on to low budget horrors and knockabout masked wrestler films which, however entertaining or counterculture they may be, are only entertaining as outrageous camp rather than conventionally well-crafted cinematic art. The sort of movies René Cardona and Adolfo Torres Portillo worked on until they retired.

Toscano's play has never fully gone away, enjoying a reissue in 1985 from Mexico's cultural powerhouse El Fondo de la Cultura Económica, and was even revived on stage in 2002 in Mexico City, directed by Arturo Castillo. It has also proven an important touchstone for researchers on the Llorona as a more generalized cultural phenomenon e.g. cited by Domino Renée Pérez in *There Was a Woman* (37, 42), where Toscano's words lead into what the Llorona means in a modern Chican@ (sic) studies context. As Ortiz Bullé-Goyri indicates (229), it goes beyond trashy entertainment to be a work:

> "en que reprodujeron ideas y concepciones que el espectador asume como propias. El teatro no solo representa acciones humanas, sino sobre todo reproduce y modeliza ideales de cultura. Where ideas and concepts are portrayed which the spectator takes up as their own. The theatre does not just represent human actions , but also reproduces and sculpts cultural ideas.

Toscano's play deserves a study by itself and more stage revivals: even Ortiz Bullé-Goyri splits his article on it with another work. Like our 1960 film, the play is often found sandwiched in other academic analyses alongside other Lloronas, drowned out by their

mutual wails. The cinematic Llorona would reincarnate repeatedly down the years (even with long cinematic drought from c. 1974-2004 – Zamorano Rojas 1274), but rarely with the flashes of wit and good dialogue and maternal guilt which survived the editing of Toscano's play with an axe, and better yet in its full script where the Llorona is given space to breathe as a fully-formed character, rather than live as part of the cheaper thrills provided by a formulaic B-pic horror which squanders some good ideas, saved by a cast better than the material, and the basic fact that child murderers are scary in whatever era. The Llorona fortunately did return, and not just in low-budget quickies. Mexican cinema has recovered from its collapse of c. 1977, and the world beyond Mexico has rediscovered the possibilities of the Llorona as a truly frightening creature. Thus you have Jayro Bustamante's acclaimed *La Llorona* of 2019 made in Guatemala, or *The Curse of La Llorona* (also 2019) done as a 1970s period piece as part of *The Conjuring* franchise in Hollywood. The greatest native Mexican horror legend has had many more hijos, several which have escaped the straitjacket of this split-personality curio whose sum of its parts is interesting even if the whole is less than fascinating.

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The Aviator: A Work of Memory

By Olga Ponomareva

Eugene Germanovich Vodolazkin is a Russian scholar and writer. He is a globally celebrated author known for blending past and present with a unique writing style that pulls from Russian cultural history and spirituality. Vodolazkin is considered to be the most important among contemporary Russian writers; his books are translated into many languages and receive international recognition. His most famous novel, Laurus (2012), made a huge impact in the literary world, both domestically and internationally. The story, set in the 15th and 16th centuries in Russia, follows a young healer on a redemption journey across Europe to Jerusalem during the time of the plague. The book is particularly interesting because Vodolazkin wrote with a mix of modern Russian and Old Church Slavonic, an unusual technique.

Vodolazkin's work was heavily influenced by the studies of Dmitry Sergeyevich Likhachev. He was a Russian medievalist, linguist, and a prisoner of the labor camp Solovki which is mentioned in the novel *The Aviator*. Some of his most famous quotes are always in a Russian person's mind. "No memory, no conscience." We need the past to guide us, to recognize between good and evil, and to be able to make right choices. This quote is particularly important as it represents the major theme of the book by Vodolazkin *The Aviator*.

Eugene Vodolazkin's engaging novel opens with a mystery. The main character - Innokenty Petrovich Platonov—wakes up in a hospital ward in 1999 with no memory of who he is or how he came to be there. "Was I in an accident?" he asks. "One might say

that," the doctor, named Geiger, answers carefully in response. Having been encouraged to use a journal to jot down the details of his personal past, Platonov begins a journey of self-discovery. Memories of the summers in a countryside cottage when he was a child, the death of his father, deprivation, arrests, and a terrible place of confinement in the far north of the country are returning to him jumbled and out of sequence. Although he looks no more than thirty, he is, he gradually realizes, as old as a century, a real Robinson Crusoe, cast ashore in a bizarre modern world that he does not understand and, as a result, feels completely isolated from. And yet how exactly did he find himself in the post-Soviet era, transported apparently straight from the 1920s?

Platonov survives the Bolshevik Revolution and Civil War, but is swept up in the repressions during Stalin's government. As a result, he is interned on the gulag archipelago of Solovki, where he is given a choice between execution and participation in a scientific experiment of medical-grade full-body freezing. Having opted for the latter, he sleeps through the rest of Soviet history and wakes up in post-Soviet 1999. In fact, *The Aviator* is a work of memory, linking together a hundred years in Russian history which seem so flawed and terrible. The novel asks what the connection between individual and collective memory is. What matters more: the major historical events or the small details of a private daily life?

Those familiar with twentieth-century Russian history will gladly find themselves in the swirl of memories that emerge over the course of the narrative. The reader clearly sees places and moments in time that matter profoundly in Russian cultural memory, including Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary Petrograd (the former capital Saint Petersburg) and the Soviet Union's most notorious labor camp, Solovki. Platonov's unique, temporally fractured biography provides a broad perspective on Russian life: just as an aviator might

observe from above, his memory provides a bridge from the early Soviet period to the end of the twentieth century.

The novel is written in the form of the main character's diary entries. Platonov's first memories are about the woman he loved. It is no coincidence as love plays a significant role in his life. Its importance outweighs time and space. The name of the beloved is Anastasia. Anastasia lived before Platonov, and will live after him as Nastya, her granddaughter, perhaps even later as Platonov's daughter and granddaughter. A wonderful unity between Platonov and the object of his love becomes obvious: "I felt happiness as I sensed the inflammation creeping along my throat with every passing hour. Anastasia and I had one illness for two people" (Vodolazkin 75). What is most peculiar is that Anastasia becomes not only a symbol of love, but also that of life: "Her existence on earth is evidence that my previous life was not just a dream," (Vodolazkin 170) says Platonov, learning that Anastasia is still alive after his defrosting. Thus, love in the novel becomes inseparable from life.

However, love is not central in the novel, the key point of the narrative is the memories. Multiple scraps, thin threads, eventually knit into a solid fabric of the character's life. As a result, the separate links of events finally add up to a single chain and the reader can clearly see what the most important thing is: the meaning of life is in the life itself. After all, it is not the man who disappears with death, but all his memories do. The memories which are so important and necessary for further generations. The novel explores the indeed subjective experience of history through the main character’s descriptions of the sounds, smells and sensations from his previous life, therefore emphasizing how important it is to value each individual’s perception of any given situation.

Geiger, Platonov's doctor, said, "There is no inseparability in events. They do not compose a part of a person: to the contrary, a person becomes part of them. A person falls into them as people fall under a train..." (Vodolazkin 359). Big events are also shared. The author through the eyes of the hero looks at the whole 20th century, reflected in these "common events". The terror of Stalin, the camps, the denunciations, St. Petersburg which became Petrograd, the war, the siege, the invention of ballpoint pens, the first man in space, even the absurd talk shows on television. And through this gaze we look, too. And all these memories belong to us, too.

Every detail is important. An insignificant detail: the broken scales, become part of the tragedy of an entire family. One event leads to an incredible chain: if Zaretsky had not denounced Voronin, he would not have been killed, if Platonov had not killed him- he would not have been sent to Solovki, would not have been frozen, would not have met with Nastya later, would not have had a successful experiment and an amazing story. And then Platonov's daughter Anna would say: "...I wouldn't be alive either". By killing Zaretsky, Platonov wanted to restore justice - which is why the image of Themis in the hands of the killer became so pivotal. But Themis is without scales. And the scales were broken off by Platonov himself as a child, not suspecting what a symbol this would turn out to be for justice, which in the end is done not by a person, but by history itself.

Mercy can be more important than justice. The detail of the statuette appears early on in the book and then again, from time to time, until the very end. For the author, it was a way to think through the idea of justice, which is so strong in many minds right now. Justice is not so bad if we consider it in the abstract, but it never really stays that way. There are situations where justice is more terrible than any punishment.

Other themes of the utmost importance in the novel are science and faith. Platonov and Nastya are extremely religious, and the images of the church and cemetery often appear in the novel, with frequent references to a prayer. Especially important is the legend of the resurrection of Lazarus. Platonov is a "Lazarus" himself (the name given in the labour camp to those taken away for experiments). The author thus refers the reader to the idea that Platonov's awakening was a "resurrection" and that it was not without the intervention of God. In the end, the scientific gives way to the divine. It becomes apparent that it was God's will all along to give Platonov a second chance, to make the right choice and be forgiven. Although a considerable amount of detail is put into the description of the scientific experiment of the preserving the body, God remains the only power that allowed this to happen in the first place.

The main character develops greatly as the narrative goes. By the end of the novel, it is becoming more and more obvious that Platonov is not as pure and innocent as he seemed in the beginning. That Platonov, who with such humility endured all the hardships of the camp, endured the deaths of the loved ones and separation. A man who only observes but does not commit sins cannot reason so philosophically - it is unlikely that Platonov remained sinless in the camp. He himself, after a time, observes the events of his life from above not only as an aviator, but also as God. In this way the divine and the basic merge in the hero. In his second life, Platonov is given an opportunity to ask for Zaretsky's forgiveness in order to redeem himself and die in peace.

Ironically, at the end of the novel, the hero turns out to be the aviator Frolov, who had once died before his own eyes. He looks down on St. Petersburg and on his whole life. The finale of the novel is open: the narrative breaks off at the fact that Platonov is flying in a

plane that cannot come in for a landing and may crash. And most likely will crash. In the end, the hero fails to unite the past and the present and he must perish.

Platonov is an aviator because in his flight he looks down on everything. He sees the whole picture of the world in front of him.The wording "picture of the world" is not accidental - Platonov studied to be an artist at the Academy of Fine Arts. Thus he strongly feels what harmony (and therefore - justice) and beauty is. The author puts the hero in such unusual conditions of simultaneous life in the past and in the present (practically in the future) so he could have the full picture of a whole century in front of his eyes.

The subject of memory is a potent one in Russia today. As the Soviet Union collapsed, various museums were established that documented the history of the Gulag system; fittingly, the first was at Solovki, the victims of Stalin's repressions, persecutions of the Orthodox Church, publishing bans. In this climate, to remember is an act of protest. In that sense *The Aviator* is a radical novel. It offers an extremely valuable and unique perspective into Russian culture, and would be an essential part of any bookshelf for those wishing to learn more about Russia.

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