

*POMPA: Publications of the Mississippi  
Philological Association*

---



Editor, Lorie Watkins

Volume 42  
2025

# Table of Contents

---

*Editor's Note*

*Critical Essays*

*Creative Works*

# Editor's Note

---

*By Lorie Watkins*

The editor's note for this, the forty-second volume of the *Publications of the Mississippi Philological Association (POMPA)* represents a return to our origins. The University of Mississippi hosted, where Mississippi Philological Association and *POMPA* originated, hosted for the first time in many, and we are grateful for their hospitality.

The conference organizer was Phillip "Pip" Gordon, a long-time MPA member. As usual, there were diverse panels devoted to academic, creative, and pedagogical writing. It was a much larger conference than we've had since the pre-Covid era, and we were excited to return to Ole Miss, the home of long-time POMPA editor Benjamin F. Fisher. Fittingly, the conference theme was "Legacies and Futures." We celebrated both.



In addition to a theme, the organizers featured two dedicated panels. Fisher was the namesake of the scholarly southern literature panel, and Robert "Bob" Hamilton was the namesake a creative panel. MPA plans to continue both traditions next year when I host the conference at William Carey University.

**MISSISSIPPI**  
*Philological Association*



**2025 ANNUAL MEETING**

*Legacies & Futures*

**FEB 28 - MAR 1 • OXFORD, MS**

# WELCOME

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the Oxford campus of The University of Mississippi for the 2025 Annual Meeting of the Mississippi Philological Association. The annual meeting returns to UM after a long hiatus, and it is an honor to host you in this beautiful and historic place that we call home.

This year's meeting continues the legacy of MPA and its annual gathering as a space for fostering academic and creative engagement with fellow scholars from around the state and region. Panels on literature, language, and creative writing bring together a multitude of voices to share in the "love of words" at the heart of any philological association. We also want to use this annual meeting to turn towards the future and consider how to grow MPA into a future that continues to foster the sense of community that draws so many of us to this meeting each year.

We are also pleased to host two keynote presentations. The first, on Friday evening, features Exodus Oktavia Brownlow sharing her creative works; the second, on Saturday at lunch, features Ralph Eubanks discussing current motifs in literature from Mississippi as a regional space and as connected to a global South. The Friday keynote is free and open to the public thanks to a grant from Visit Oxford.

We have selected from the many wonderful proposals this year works to feature on two honorary panels: The Robert Hamblin Creative Writing panel on Friday afternoon and the Benjamin F. Fisher American Literature panel as the final panel on Saturday.

The UM campus occupies land that was part of the ancestral home of the Chickasaw people before their removal in 1837. The construction of the original campus included the labor of enslaved Black people; their labor extended into



other roles in the maintenance of the campus and lives of students and administrators through the first decade of UM's existence. We acknowledge this history and invite attendees to remember this history while on campus for the two days of our annual meeting. We also invite attendees to participate in a guided tour of campus on Saturday to learn more about the legacies of enslavement in our campus space.

We hope all attendees have a wonderful weekend in Oxford. Oxford is renowned as an artistic and cultural center and a foodie's paradise. Of note, the Oxford Film Festival coincides with our annual meeting. You can't consider that you've really been to Oxford unless you make time to go out, relax, and explore a bit (there's even a very nice house near campus where a world-famous writer used to live).

Please enjoy your stay in Oxford, and, of course, Hotty Toddy!

Phillip "Pip" Gordon,  
Visiting Assistant Professor of Gender Studies  
The University of Mississippi

# SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE

## Friday, February 28

*Registration: 10 am - 6 pm  
Ford Balroom Lobby*

11:30 am - 12:50 pm - Session A

1 - 2:20 pm - Session B

2:30 - 3:50 pm - Session C

4 - 5:30 pm - Session D  
Robert Hamblin Creative Writing Panel  
*Location: Ford B/C*

5:30 pm - Break

6 - 8 pm - Dinner and Creative Keynote with  
Exodus Oktavia Brownlow  
*Location: Ford B/C/D*

*The keynote and dinner are sponsored by the Center for  
the Study of Southern Culture and Visit Oxford*

## Saturday, March 1

8 - 9:20 am - Session E

9:30 - 10:50 am - Session F

11 am - Business Meeting  
*Location: Ford B/C*

11:30 am - 12:50 pm - Session G  
Lunch and Keynote with W. Ralph Eubanks  
*Location: Ford B/C*

1 - 2 pm - Break or Campus Slavery Tour  
*Tour will depart from Ford Balroom Lobby*

2 - 3:20 pm - Session H

3:30 - 5:00 pm - Session I  
Benjamin F. Fisher American Literature Panel  
*Location: Ford B/C*

5:30 - Closing Reception / Cocktail Party  
*McCormick's - on your own*

## About the Slavery History Tour

For several years, members of University of Mississippi Slavery Research Group have been offering campus slavery tours to their own students, to visiting scholars, and on request. These tours, which can vary between 45 minutes and an hour and a half in length, seek to make the UMSRG's findings publicly available in an easily digestible format. The tours we've been giving vary from guide to guide, but generally include information about:

- the development of the antebellum campus the centrality of enslaved laborers in the construction and daily operation of the antebellum campus
- the conditions under which enslaved people worked on campus
- the slaveholdings of early UM students, faculty, and trustees, as well as their ideological commitments to slavery
- slavery's role as the central cause of the Civil War
- slavery's relationship to Confederate iconography and memorialization



# FRIDAY

Registration: 10 am - 6 pm

## 11:30 am - 12:50 pm - Session A

### Panel 1: Metaphysics, Mechanics, and Mystery: Cormac McCarthy's Last Two Novels

Moderator: Jay Watson (Faculty, UM)

Location: Ford B

- Potts, James (Independent Scholar) • "The Fallen Angels of Cormac McCarthy's *The Passenger* and *Stella Maris*"
- Kirkland, Terra (Independent Scholar) • "Alicia Western's Spiritual and Philosophical Associations"
- Yeates, Rebecca (Graduate Student) • "From Whence Cometh McCarthy's Thalidomide Kid?"

### Panel 2: Creative Writing I

Moderator: Kellene O'Hara (Faculty, UM)

Location: Ford C

- Clark, Larry (Graduate Student, JSU) • "Not While I'm Around"
- Pitts, Kathy R. (Faculty, JSU) • "An Object of Longing"
- Vergara, Reyna (Faculty, MUW) • "Camino in Shadows"

## 1:00 pm - 2:20 pm - Session B

### Panel 1: Gossip and Forms of Community in Southern Literature

Moderator: Ted Atkinson (Faculty, MSU)

Location: Ford B

- Agyapong, Portia (Graduate Student, MSU) • "Gossip as Social Currency in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*"
- Hanegan, Josephine (Graduate Student, MSU) • "Out of the Mouths of Babes: Gossip as Rearing in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Intruder in the Dust*"
- Stevens, Layla (Graduate Student, MSU) • "Witches and Conjurers: Examining the Contexts of Mystic Women in Lee Smith's *Oral History* and Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*"

### Panel 2: Creative Writing II

Moderator: Madison Brown (Faculty, USM)

Location: Ford C

- Condran, Jeffrey (Faculty, UA - Little Rock) • "The Promise"
- Denham, Dawn (Faculty, UM) • "The Animal Kingdom" from *SPIN*, a memoir.
- Zheng, John (Faculty, MVSU) • "Poems after Jazz Photographs by Leo Touchet"

### Panel 3: Language and Linguistics I

Moderator: Daniel O'Sullivan (Faculty, UM)

Location: Ford D

- Covarrubias, Janie (Faculty, William Carey) • "The Llorona of Gloria Anzaldúa"
- Harland, Robert (Faculty, MSU) • "Foxy Gentleman: Where Isabel Allende's Zorro Comes From"
- Stoops, Rosa María (Faculty, University of Montevallo) • "From Wolves to Werewolves, Chacales, and Nahuales: The Representation of the Lycanthrope in Literature"

## 2:30 pm - 3:50 pm - Session C:

### Panel 1: Race and Mississippi Writers

Moderator: Pip Gordon (Faculty, UM)

Location: Ford B

- Khan, Almas (Faculty, UM) • "Mississippi Judges and the African American Literary Tradition in the Black Lives Matter Era"
- Gordon, Pip (Faculty, UM) • "Narratives of Race and Reproductive Healthcare from Faulkner to *Dobbs*"
- Wiltshire, Allison (Faculty, MVSU) • "Mississippi Masochism: Agentic Pain in Claude Wilkinson's *World Without End* and Jesmyn Ward's *Where the Line Bleeds*"

### Panel 2: Creative Writing III

Moderator: John Han (Faculty, MBU)

Location: Ford C

- Eanes, Josie (Undergraduate Student, UA - Little Rock) • "Lost Things"
- Kinder, Alice (Undergraduate Student, UA Little Rock) • ".357 Magnum"
- Thomas, Joseph (Undergraduate Student, UA - Little Rock) • "Fixed Match"
- Wagoner, Kylie (Undergraduate Student, UA - Little Rock) • "The Pre-Dream Condition"

**Panel 3: Language and Linguistics II**  
Moderator: Kellene O'Hara (Faculty, UM)  
Location: Ford D

- Castro, Cristine (Faculty, MVSU) • "Translating Japanese Poetry into Spanish: Visual Language into Words"
- Condran, Jeffrey & Melnic, Svetlana (Faculty, UA - Little Rock) • "Legacies of the Communist Detention Diary: Translating Alexei Marinat"
- O'Sullivan, Daniel (Faculty, UM) • "The Many Faces of the Troubadour Pistolet"

**4:00 pm - 5:30 pm - Session D: Robert Hamblin Creative Writing Panel**

Moderator: Bill Hays (Faculty, UM)  
Location: Ford B/C

- Albin, Craig (Faculty, MoSU - West Plains) • "Artifacts of Absence: Poems"
- Aryal, Khem (Faculty, ASU) • "The Troubleson"
- McCaulay, M. Caroline (Faculty, UM) • "regarding my absence"

**6 - 8 pm- Dinner & Creative Keynote with Exodus Oktavia Brownlow: "Legacies and Futures: Why We Must Optimistically Look Back Upon Our Legacies To Lean Forward Optimistically Into Our Futures"**

*Sponsored by the Center for the Study of Southern Culture and Visit Oxford*

### *Institutional Abbreviations:*

ASU - Arkansas State University  
DSU - Delta State University  
JSU - Jackson State University  
MSMS - Mississippi School for  
Mathematics and Science  
MSU - Mississippi State University  
MUW - Mississippi University for Women  
MTSU - Middle Tennessee State University  
MVSU- Mississippi Valley State University  
UM - The University of Mississippi  
USM - University of Southern Mississippi

# SATURDAY

**8:00 am - 9:20 am - Session E:**

**Panel 1: Gothic and Speculative Fiction**  
Moderator: Melanie Anderson (Faculty, DSU)  
Location: Ford B

- Bowen-Sweet, Sydney (Undergraduate Student, MSU) • "Lucy Snowe's Compromised Pleasure: In Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*"
- Quinn, Erin (Undergraduate Student, MSU) • "Karmically Challenged Apartment Buildings" and "Undefined Anarchism of Cyberspace": Thomas Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge* as Gothic Novel"
- Norris, Anndria (Graduate Student, JSU) • "Horror vs Speculative Literature: Exploring Processed Traumas within the Black Novel in *America: Mother Daughter* edition."
- Smith-Spears, RaShell (Faculty, JSU) • "When I think of home, I think of a resting place: Horror and the Search for Belonging in HBO's *Lovecraft Country*"

**Panel 2: Creative Writing IV**  
Moderator: M. Caroline McCauley (Faculty, UM)  
Location: Ford C

- Hanley, Brett (Faculty, MSU) • "Selected Poems from Small Fabric"
- Moniz, Matthew (Faculty, MUW) • "Poems"
- Richardson, Thomas (Faculty, MSMS) • "'Breaking' and Other Poems"

**Panel 3: Creative Writing V**  
Moderator: Kellene O'Hara (Faculty, UM)  
Location: Ford D

- Han, John (Faculty, MBU) • "Winter Twilight: Micro Poems"
- Hays, Bill (Faculty, UM) • "The High Price of Dancing"
- Vaughan, Makyla (Undergraduate Student, UA - Little Rock) • "Dickson Street"

**9:30 am - 10:50 am - Session F:**

**Panel 1: Creative Writing VI**

Moderator: Thomas Richardson (Faculty, MSMS)

Location: Ford C

- Kelley, Inkera (Graduate Student, JSU) • "No Mother of Mine" • "A Love Lost, A Love Gained"
- McDuffey, Jeremy (Graduate Student, JSU) • "The South"
- Redmond Morgan, Vergie (Graduate Student, JSU) • "A Swipe with Death"

**Panel 2: Language and Linguistics III - Transgressive Territories: Bodies, Spaces, and Alternative Identities in Latin American Literature**

Moderator: Diane Marting (Faculty, UM)

Location: Ford C

- Coral Patiño, Daniela (Faculty, MSU) • "The Representation of Femininity in Nature in 'The Shrouded Woman' by Maria Luisa Bombal"
- Herrada Rios, Marcela (Graduate Student, MSU) • "'Las malas' and Travesti Motherhood as Resistance against Abjection"
- Lozano, Johana (Graduate Student, MSU) • "Bodies in Resistance: Transphobic Violence and Support Networks in Sosa Villada's 'Las Malas'"
- Charry, Sharel (Graduate Student, MSU) • "Intersectionality and Resistance: The Construction of Alternative Identities in Mariana Rondón's 'Pelo Malo'"

**Panel 3: Creative Writing VII**

Moderator: Bill Hays (Faculty, UM)

Location: Ford A

- Brown, Madison (Graduate Student, USM) • "The Box Turtle Swims Upstream in Frick Park"
- Jackson, Laney (Undergraduate Student, UA - Little Rock) • "Short Fiction: We are The Moles"
- Thurmond, Frank (Faculty, UA - Little Rock) • "Travels With Ellie"

**11 am - Business Meeting**

Location: Ford B/C

**11:30 am - 12:50 pm - Session G:**

**Lunch & Keynote with W. Ralph Eubanks: "Geography, Place, and Southern Literature"**

Location: Ford B/C

**1 - 2 pm - Slavery History Tour/Break**

Gather in the ballroom lobby by 1 pm

**2 - 3:20 pm - Session H:**

**Panel 1: 20th-Century American Literature**

Moderator: Pip Gordon (Faculty, UM)

Location: Ford B

- Ramsey, C. Earl (Faculty, UA - Little Rock) • "Lonesome Dove Is Even More Lonesome than I Thought"
- Nugent, Terry (Faculty, UA - Monticello) • "Faith and Pragmatism: A Comparative Study of Windham and Bogan Murdock in Robert Penn Warren's 'At Heaven's Gate'"
- Tebbetts, Terrell (Faculty, Lyon College) • "Claude Wheeler's Mistaken Church: A Tacit Allusion in Willa Cather's *One of Ours*"

**Panel 2: Creative Writing VII**

Moderator: Kellene O'Hara (Faculty, UM)

Location: Ford C

- Taylor, Anastasia (Graduate Student, JSU) • "Urban Blight"
- Haraway, Britt (Faculty, UT - Rio Grande Valley) • "All That Hotty Toddy"
- Perez, Emmy (Faculty, UT - Rio Grande Valley) • "It's Not the Cotton's Fault"

**Panel 3: Legacies**

Moderator: Almas Khan (Faculty, UM)

Location: Ford D

- Han, John (Faculty, MBU) • "The Blind Side of the Social Gospel: Blacks in Harold Bell Wright's Ozarks Fiction"
- Petersen, Robert (Independent Scholar, MTSU) • "Notes on the Natchez Slave Trade: Joseph Holt Ingraham's *The South-West by a Yankee*" (1835)
- Stewart, Kate (Faculty, UA - Monticello) • "Is There a Decline in the Southern Dialect? Sho'ly Not!"

3:30 - 5 pm - Session I: Benjamin F. Fisher  
American Literature Panel

5:30 pm - Closing Reception / Cocktail Party  
Location: McCormick's and Ford D

Moderator: Melanie Anderson (Faculty, DSU)  
Location: Ford B/C

- Hawkins, Ph.D., Cassandra (Graduate Student, UM) • "Resilient Voices and Southern Identity in the Works of Mississippi Writers"
- Williams, Diane (Independent Scholar) • "A Discussion of Mississippi Writers Included in Mississippi Museums"
- Zheng, John (Faculty, MVSU) • "River and Land: Poetic Voices of the Mississippi Delta"

## ABOUT OUR SPEAKERS:

### *Exodus Oktavia Brownlow*

Exodus Oktavia Brownlow is a writer, sewist, and editor currently residing in the enchanting pine tree forest of Blackhawk, MS. She is a budding beekeeper, a rising seamstress who has perfected the French Seam by hand, and the author of two book collections—a debut fiction chapbook called "Look at All the Little Hurts of These Newly-Broken Lives and The Bittersweet, Sweet and Bitter Loves" with Ethel Zine and Press and a debut book collection of essays called "I'm Afraid That I Know Too Much About Myself Now, To Go Back to Who I Knew Before, And Oh Lord, Who Will I Be After I've Known All That I Can?" with ELJ Editions. Exodus's favorite color is green.




### *W. Ralph Eubanks*

Ralph Eubanks is Black Power at Ole Miss Faculty Fellow and the author of *The House at the End of the Road: The Story of Three Generations of an Interracial Family in the American South* and *Ever Is a Long Time: A Journey into Mississippi's Dark Past*, which *Washington Post* book critic Jonathan Yardley named as one of the best nonfiction books of the year. He has contributed articles to the *Washington Post* Outlook and Style sections, the *Wall Street Journal*, *WIRED*, the *New Yorker*, and National Public Radio. He is a recipient of a 2007 Guggenheim Fellowship from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation and has been a fellow at the New America Foundation. He is the former editor of the *Virginia Quarterly Review* at the University of Virginia and served as director of publishing at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., from 1995 to 2013.

# SPONSORS:

Center for Community Engagement  
Center for the Study of Southern Culture  
Department of English  
Department of Modern Languages  
Department of Writing and Rhetoric  
Mississippi Philological Association  
Sarah Isom Center for Women and Gender Studies  
Visit Oxford

*2025 Annual Meeting*  
**MISSISSIPPI**  
**PHILOLOGICAL**  
**ASSOCIATION**  
THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

The logo features a stylized five-petaled flower, likely the Mississippi state flower, rendered in a light, glowing white color. The petals are layered, creating a sense of depth and texture. The flower is positioned to the right of the text, partially overlapping the word 'ASSOCIATION'.

# Critical Essays

---

# The Blind Side of the Social Gospel: Blacks in Harold Bell Wright's Ozarks Fiction

---

*By John J. Han*

Harold Bell Wright (1872–1944), a bestselling novelist, embraced the Social Gospel, a progressive Protestant movement that flourished at the turn of the twentieth century. Led by ministers and theologians like Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch, the movement strove to address social problems through Christian ethics, particularly Jesus' teachings on helping one's neighbors. Its goal was to ensure the poor could live with dignity.

In novels such as *That Printer of Udell's* (1903), *The Calling of Dan Matthews* (1909), *God and the Groceryman* (1927), and other works set in the Ozarks, Wright championed “applied Christianity” over institutional or denominational Christianity to aid the needy (*To My Sons* 209). As a committed Social Gospel Christian, he believed many churches of his time had misplaced priorities, focusing too much on the afterlife and doctrinal debates rather than addressing social needs. In *To My Sons*, he acknowledged that the inspiration for his first novel—*That Printer of Udell's*—came from Charles Monroe Sheldon's *In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do?* (1896), a fictional embodiment of the Social Gospel (211).

However, the Social Gospel was predominantly Eurocentric and focused on white communities. While Washington Gladden was one of the few leaders who explicitly promoted racial equality, most Social Gospel proponents concentrated on the struggles of white communities—poverty, poor labor conditions, and urbanization. Josiah Strong, a

prominent advocate, argued in *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis* (1885) that “a Christian civilization” was essential for social regeneration, with Anglo-Saxons positioned as global spiritual leaders (14). He claimed that the Anglo-Saxon “sustains peculiar relations to the world’s future [and] is divinely commissioned to be, in a peculiar sense, his brother’s keeper” (161). His belief that the world’s hope depended on the Christianization and civilization of supposedly inferior races reflects the white supremacist ideology of his time, which viewed white people as having a duty to enlighten others through Christianity. In his view, non-whites deserved salvation from eternal damnation, yet they remained inferior to their white counterparts in the great chain of being.

Likewise, Wright’s fiction centered largely on Eurocentric and white perspectives, with minimal focus on the struggles of non-white characters. The absence of Black figures in *The Shepherd of the Hills*, his most celebrated Ozarks novel, is particularly notable. One possible explanation is that Black people constituted a small portion of the Ozark population in the early twentieth century. The hilly terrain was unsuitable for plantations, job opportunities were scarce, and some residents were openly hostile to Black people, as seen in the 1906 lynching of three Black men in Springfield, Missouri. Such racial violence, combined with economic limitations, discouraged Black migration to the region and reinforced its overwhelmingly white demographic.

Although Wright includes Black characters in other Ozarks novels, they are often portrayed in problematic ways. They are often depicted as physically imposing yet intellectually inferior, relegated to second-class status and considered unworthy of meaningful interaction, or as happy slaves—a stereotype rooted in antebellum pro-slavery ideology that portrays them as submissive, contented figures eager to please white characters. This paper will examine how Wright’s marginalization of Black characters

shapes his Christian moral vision, focusing on their depiction in *That Printer of Udell's*, *The Calling of Dan Matthews*, and *God and the Groceryman*.



*Harold Bell Wright owned this popular portrait depicting Jesus and Peter. In this visual representation of a biblical scene, both figures are portrayed as Caucasian. Wright stated, "I liked the picture of Simon (called Peter) being saved by Jesus because it reminded me in my dark moments that He is always there to help us." Photo taken by John J. Han at the Harold Bell Wright Museum, Branson, MO.*

## **Physically Imposing, Yet Lacking Intelligence: *That Printer of Udell's***

*That Printer of Udell's* explores redemption, faith, and social responsibility through its protagonist, Dick Falkner, a printer who left Kansas City to find employment in a small town. Though hardworking and honest, he is shunned by townspeople who, despite professing Christian faith, refuse to help him. He eventually finds work with Udell, whom the Christian community considers a Gentile. Dick comes under the influence of a Social Gospel pastor who emphasizes service to the downtrodden and underprivileged. As he grows spiritually, he uplifts those in need and risks his life to rescue a young woman, Amy Goodrich, from a predator. True to Wright's melodramatic style, Dick and Amy marry and live happily ever after.

*That Printer of Udell's* primarily portrays a white community, but a large Black man appears in Chapter 21. Hired by the criminal Jim Whitley to harm the protagonist, Dick, this character is initially depicted as physically intimidating. However, his intellectual vulnerability soon becomes evident. Dick uses his quick thinking and resourcefulness to outsmart him, highlighting his bravery and ingenuity in a moment of danger.

In a pivotal scene, the man, armed with a revolver, demands that Dick open a safe. Dick remains calm, feigning confusion about the location of the documents the man seeks. As the assailant moves to investigate, Dick seizes the opportunity and knocks him out with a glass paperweight. When the man regains consciousness, Dick holds him at gunpoint, relying on his wits to maintain control of the situation. The scene includes the following lines:

[...] With the quickness of a serpent, Dick's hand shot out, and the heavy weight caught the negro above the right ear, and with a groan he slid from the chair to the floor.

When the black ruffian regained consciousness, Dick was still sitting on the edge of the table, calmly swinging his feet, but in his hand was his visitor's weapon.

“Well,” he said, quietly, “you’ve had quite a nap. Do you feel better? Or do you think one of these pills would help you?” He slowly cocked and raised the revolver.

“Don’t shoot. Don’t shoot, sah.”

“Why not?” said Dick, coldly, but with the smile still on his face.

That smile did the business. Oaths and threats the black man could understand; but a man who looked deliberately along a cocked revolver, with a smile on his face, was too much for him. He begged and pleaded for his life.

The portrayal of the Black character in this scene exemplifies a common stereotype in 19th- and 20th-century American literature: the strong but intellectually gullible Black man. The use of the terms “black ruffian” and “sah,” as well as the depiction of the man’s inability to understand Dick’s calculated demeanor, highlight his perceived lack of sophistication and intelligence. This is a recurring trope, as seen in Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) through the character of Jim. Jim’s physical strength contrasts with his intellectual limitations, making him vulnerable to exploitation and reinforcing the stereotype of Black men as strong yet mentally inferior.

In both instances, these characters are rendered as tools to emphasize the intellectual superiority of the white protagonists, and the lack of depth in these Black characters serves to justify the racial hierarchy of the time. These portrayals reflect the pervasive racial stereotypes of the era and underscore the cultural marginalization of Black people in American literature.



*A ChatGPT-generated image inspired by the description of the Black hitman hired to threaten Dick in That Printer of Udell's.*

### **Untouchable: *The Calling of Dan Matthews***

In *The Calling of Dan Matthews*, the title character appears as a young, idealistic minister assigned to a struggling church in the rough, industrial town of Corinth in the Ozarks. Initially faced with skepticism and resistance from the community, Dan strives to live out his Christian faith by engaging with the town's working-class inhabitants, offering

them spiritual guidance, and addressing their material needs. Throughout the novel, Dan grapples with personal doubts and the complexities of reconciling his ideals with the harsh realities of the world around him. As he earns the respect and trust of the people, Dan learns that true Christian leadership requires not only preaching but also tangible acts of compassion and service. As in *That Printer of Udell's*, Dan's story highlights Wright's advocacy for practical Christianity, where faith and good works intersect to uplift society.

One of the minor characters in the story is Grace Conner, whose father killed a law enforcement officer. As a result, she is cast out by society and driven to despair, judged even by Christians who ought to show compassion. Deeply moved by her suffering, the title character comes to understand that Christian ministry is not merely about lofty ideals but about responding to real human pain. This realization prompts him to discard his prepared sermon on "The Christian Ministry." He also quietly helps Grace by sending her a note and money, choosing to remain anonymous.

Hope Farwell, a compassionate nurse and Dan's romantic interest, cares for Grace, who has lost faith in both people and God. Hope rekindles Grace's will to live through gentle reassurance, showing her that someone truly cares. Grace's story exemplifies the power of compassionate Christian care, which the Social Gospel advocates.

However, from a modern perspective, Dan's reaction to Grace's living situation is troubling. He is less concerned with the conditions of the Black community than with the fact that a white woman is living among them. In Chapter 17, the narrator states:

In the privacy of his little study the boy said, "Doctor, you had a reason for telling me to ask Miss Farwell if the church could do anything for—for that poor girl. And the nurse told me to ask you about the case. I want you to tell

me about her—all about her. Why is she living in that wretched place with those negroes? Why did she attempt to kill herself? I want to know about this girl as you know her—as Miss Farwell knows.”

While Matthews advocates the Social Gospel, his vision remains largely confined to white society. Harold Bell Wright, by extension, uses Grace’s presence among Black characters to highlight how far a white person could fall due to social neglect, yet he pays little attention to the struggles of the Black community itself, thereby reinforcing the racial limitations of his era’s social consciousness.



*A ChatGPT-generated image inspired by the description of Grace Conner wearing a shabby dress in The Calling of Dan Matthews.*

## **Pleasing Whites: *God and the Groceryman***

Harold Bell Wright's most propagandistic Christian novel is *God and the Groceryman*, a sequel to *The Calling of Dan Matthews*. The story follows Dan Matthews, a former pastor turned wealthy businessman, who strives to live out the ideals of practical Christianity in a college town in the Ozarks. His goal is to improve the lives of those around him, particularly through his interactions with a groceryman, a character symbolizing the struggles of everyday workers. Through Dan's business ministry, family relationships are healed, faith is restored, and sexual morality is revitalized in the community. The novel examines the tension between wealth, power, and Christian ethics, advocating for a Christianity rooted in real-world action and social responsibility.

At the novel's beginning, Wright introduces Uncle Zac, a Black man and an elderly housekeeper, as a harmless sidekick. Serving as a sort of Uncle Tom figure, Zac lightens the mood, easing the seriousness of the situation. As he begins work, he hears the distant rumble of an approaching storm and remarks that he is safe inside, beyond its reach. At that moment, his boss, Mr. Matthews, enters unexpectedly. Uncle Zac, surprised, questions why Matthews is still at the office so late, urging him to go home due to the storm. Matthews explains that he has much work to do, to which Uncle Zac replies that he, too, has tasks to complete. Zac continues encouraging Matthews to go home, offering the same advice for himself. Matthews, acknowledging Zac's work ethic, praises him, saying he has "one of the cleanest, truest, whitest souls" (*God* 412). Uncle Zac, startled by the remark, questions its meaning.

He is portrayed as cheerful and seemingly oblivious to racial inequality—content with his lot, eager to please his master, and hopeful for a better afterlife. He even sees

himself as inferior to whites, asking, “Yo’ reckon ol’ negro man like me can hab white soul?” (412). Conditioned to believe in white superiority, he embodies the happy-go-lucky stereotype, frequently singing: “Suddenly the old negro ceased his crooning song,” and adopting a posture that makes him resemble “much like a good pointer dog” (409). As thunder rumbles, he murmurs nervously, “Look lak de jedgment day” (410). These descriptions reinforce classic Black caricatures—singing, animal-like imagery, and deep religious devotion.

Uncle Zac resembles the Black men Richard Wright encountered among his childhood friends in *Black Boy* (1945)—lacking critical thought, ambition, and self-respect, they exemplify the damaging effects of racial subjugation.<sup>1</sup> Harold Bell Wright’s demeaning portrayal of Uncle Zac reflects the internalized inferiority prevalent among Black individuals of his time, a mindset that, as a white-centric Social Gospel proponent, he fails to recognize as flawed.



*A ChatGPT-generated image inspired by the description of Uncle Zac in God and the Groceryman.*

## Conclusion

An examination of Wright's Ozarks fiction reveals that, despite his good intentions, his works reflect the racial biases of his time, relegating non-white characters to insignificant roles. Wright's stories center on heroic white men and women, embodying what he considered ideal manhood and womanhood. Their virtues are often highlighted by less exemplary white characters, portrayed as uneducated, uncultured, and hypocritical. In contrast, Blacks appear only occasionally, serving as tension-relieving sidekicks, reinforcing stereotypes of gullibility, highlighting the misery of life, or pleasing their white masters.

As noted earlier, Blacks are either absent or marginalized in Wright's stories, a stark contrast to early twentieth-century Black novels that frequently featured significant white characters. Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929) contrasts two Black women—one who embraces her racial identity and another who passes as white—illuminating the privileges afforded to whites in American society. Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940) exposes systemic racism through the interactions between Bigger Thomas and white characters like Mary Dalton. Black authors, acutely aware of the impact of the white majority on Black lives, made a point of addressing these realities. In contrast, many white authors, including Harold Bell Wright, often included few or no Black characters, suggesting either a lack of awareness or a deliberate disregard. This exclusion mirrors the white-centric focus of the Social Gospel movement, which primarily addressed issues affecting white communities. Wright's Ozarks stories serve as important social documents illuminating the racial and class dynamics of his era.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> Even as a young boy, Wright had enough self-respect to refuse to use the back door of a house in a white neighborhood, as was expected at the time. Below is an excerpt from Chapter 2 of *Black Boy*:

One afternoon hunger haunted me so acutely that I decided to try to sell my dog Betsy and buy some food. Betsy was a tiny, white, fluffy poodle and when I had washed, dried, and combed her, she looked like a toy. I tucked her under my arm and went for the first time alone into a white neighborhood where there were wide clean streets and big white houses. I went from door to door, ringing the bells. Some white people slammed the door in my face. Others told me to come to the rear of the house, but pride would never let me do that. (78-79)

This passage highlights Wright's determination to maintain dignity in a world that demanded his submission.

## Works Cited

Strong, Josiah. *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis*. Baker & Taylor, 1885.

Wright, Harold Bell. *The Calling of Dan Matthews*. 1935. *A Harold Bell Wright Trilogy: The Shepherd of the Hills, The Calling of Dan Matthew, God and the Groceryman*. Pelican, 2007. 193-401.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Shepherd of the Hills. A Harold Bell Wright Trilogy: The Shepherd of the Hills, The Calling of Dan Matthews, God and the Groceryman*. Pelican, 2007, pp. 19-191.

\_\_\_\_\_. *That Printer of Udell's*. 1903. Pelican, 2011.

\_\_\_\_\_. *To My Sons*. Harper, 1934.

Wright, Richard. *Black Boy: A Record of Childhood and Youth*. Harper Perennial, 1945.

# The Fallen Angels of Cormac McCarthy's *The Passenger* and *Stella Maris*

---

*By Terra Kirkland*

Cormac McCarthy's interest in eccentric characters exists throughout his work. John Grady Cole of *The Border Trilogy* is viewed as crazed over his love of unruly horses and unattainable women. On the darker side of McCarthy's spectrum of madness lives Lester Ballard, a criminally insane necrophiliac. McCarthy adds the brilliant yet tormented Alicia Western to his oeuvre in *The Passenger* and *Stella Maris*, where he ventures into an in-depth exploration of her soul. She is a child of the atom bomb who is not only suicidal but also experiences hallucinations. Although her psychic struggles appear pathological, the novels suggest that they cannot be explained through psychiatry alone. What appears to be madness on the surface is instead a narrative portrayal of Alicia's angelic soul deteriorating under her world's demonic assaults.

*The Passenger* characterizes Alicia as angelic while she is living in Chicago. One day, she receives a color television from her brother that she does not need, and Alicia thinks of her sickly, older neighbor, Mrs. Grimley, whose name speaks to the woman's "grim" state. Alicia then goes to her neighbor's room with the television and gifts it to her, telling her that she does not know from where it came, and that Mrs. Grimley must have won it. The woman's demeanor quickly transforms from depressed to overjoyed, saying to Alicia, "You are just a angel," and later adding: "You just do not know what the day will bring . . . this

calls for a drink” (TP 291). In this scene, Alicia is compared with an angel who bestows a miracle of unexpected goodness on the life of a suffering soul.

The novel also glosses ideas of madness, angels, and demons central to its plot in Alicia’s brother Bobby’s relationship with Borman, his friend from the Louisiana swamplands. For example, Bobby is worried about his companion’s well-being, so he travels to his home “on an errand of mercy” (TP 223). As Bobby approaches Borman, he notices a “deranged-looking man in a beard” standing “spraddlelegged in the doorway with a shotgun leveled at his waist” (223). But as soon as Borman sees Bobby’s angelic face, he softens, saying: “Get in this house you son of a bitch. You’re goodern ary angel” (223). In the Bible, angels are sometimes described as warriors who serve as agents of God’s wrath against the wicked, and Borman himself is akin to an angel in this regard. He has prepared his trailer for a siege, with a trapdoor, crates of MREs, and dried food, saying: “It’s war, Bobby. I take no prisoners” (225). When Bobby tells him that mental health professionals will be taking him away because of his insanity, Borman counters: “Do you really think they’re not coming anyway? You say we cant see into the future? We dont have to. It’s here” (226). He ends his conversation with Bobby with a final reference to war between good and evil, while also pointing out which side his heart is on: “Burst of glory, Bobby. The final option. That’s all there is” (TP 227). Borman may seem crazy, but he recognizes the dark demons of his world seeking to destroy him.

For example, *The Passenger* stages the United States’ atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as engineering the beginning of a modern apocalypse. The novel associates the bombs with angels of death, created by Bobby’s father, Robert Western:

His father. Who had created out of the absolute dust of the earth an evil sun by whose light men saw like some hideous adumbration of their own ends through cloth and flesh the bones in one another's bodies (TP 368).

The description of nuclear explosion as an "evil sun" causing horrifying death and destruction echoes angelic imagery from the Book of Revelation. Angels are typically viewed as beautiful, merciful creatures, but they can be terrifying orchestrators of calamity against humanity to enact God's justice. One of their roles involves destroying unrepentant humanity. In Revelation 16, seven angels release God's wrath upon man during the end of the world. One in particular burns humanity with the sun's scorching heat: "And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun: and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat . . ." (Revelation 16.8-9).

*The Passenger* suggests that to its victims, the atomic bombs seemed like punishments from an apocalyptic angel: "Burning people crawled among the corpses like some horror in a vast crematorium. They simply thought the world had ended (TP 116). *The Passenger* also equates the bomb's incinerating mushroom-cloud with ". . . some sea thing. Wobbling slightly on the near horizon" (116). The comparison is synonymous with the sea monster John identifies as the Antichrist, known as the epitome of evil: "Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name" (Revelation 13.1). *The Passenger's* equation between Christian eschatology and atomic warfare depicts the bomb as the crime that created its world of fallen angels.

It is not long after the nuclear event that its atomic angels of death release demons upon their makers, beginning with the elder Robert Western and his family. As Mary

Shelley's monster in *Frankenstein* seeks to ruin his creator, so, too, does Robert's subversive invention precipitate his tragic fall from grace. According to Bobby, Robert was once an angelic physicist, who graduated from Princeton and persistently sought elegant truths in theoretical physics and quantum mechanics (TP 154). But when Robert chooses to become the Satanic architect of demonic bombs for the government in return for fame and fortune, he is chastised, and his life detonates with his bombs. He descends into the depths of hell, becoming a disgraced criminal who "attempted to destroy the universe" (TP 139) by developing "enormous bombs for the purpose of incinerating whole citiesful of innocent people as they slept in their bed" (TP 30). Bobby observes the demonic state of his father's soul just before Robert's death by explaining that although his father was amidst glorious mountains and lakes brimming with golden trout, he "had no reason to be hopeful about anything" (TP 153). Though Robert was in paradise, his psyche occupied hellish despair, echoing Milton's Satan's negative psychological experiences in the Garden of Eden.

Robert's daughter, Alicia, is born with similar gifts to her once angelic father, as well as a similar curse. She is a great mind, a visionary, and a math prodigy. Her pursuit of mathematical understanding reveals an ardent search for truth similar to her father's pursuit of physics. She approaches the subject from childhood with religious devotion, pondering the many questions the subject poses and fervently discussing mathematical ideas with other scholars, including her brother. She also develops her academic skills at the university, attending graduate school and ultimately becoming a mathematician.

Alicia divulges to her therapist in *Stella Maris* that she finds spiritual fulfillment in her math studies, saying: "The only social entity I was ever a part of was the world of mathematics. I always knew that was where I belonged. I even believed it took precedence

over the universe. I do now” (SM 26). When her therapist asks her, “Is  $E = mc^2$  a thing of beauty?,” she responds: “You should see it in color” (SM 69). Alicia finds Platonic truth and beauty in her pursuit of math, and she also identifies with Plato’s ultimate reality of the Form<sup>1</sup> through her mathematical Platonism. Mortimer Adler offers several Platonic interpretations of the idea of angels, which he defines as “minds without bodies” who love the divine madly (Adler 122). They are in constant flight toward divine oneness, which includes ever-growing, intimate knowledge of its heavenly Forms and their wonders (Adler). Though Alicia is embodied, she connects with the Forms through mathematics, linking her with Plato’s angelic souls. However, her knowledge of her father’s profane creation often obstructs her search for that sublime reality.

After Alicia’s father dies, his angels of death procreate, spawning a demon of guilt into her angelic soul by the time she reaches puberty. Once she is old enough to grasp the gravity of her father’s crime, she soaks up his guilt over the bomb’s mass destruction like a sponge. Alicia’s hallucinations are narrative representations of her remorse over her father’s sin, and they dramatize its demonic effects on her angelic soul. The hallucination in which she speaks to most is the Thalidomide Kid. The kid’s appearance mirrors Alicia’s father’s atomic demon in that he is evocative of the bomb’s incinerating mushroom-cloud as “some sea thing. Wobbling on the near horizon” (TP 116). He is a dwarfish monstrosity with flippers for hands, a scarred head, no ears or hair, and associated with both water and hell fire. He is also described as a djinn, which is a supernatural spirit from Muslim mythology that is often depicted as a demon (Mundik). His demonic nature is also indicated by his self-description as “*the small gowned person of unflappable demeanor*” (190). Demons are believed to be fallen angels in Christian angelology (Adler 83), and the kid seems to fit that reading.

Though I acknowledge Russell Hiller's interpretation of the kid as a good angel (148), I see the kid as predominately malevolent and thus as a fallen angel.

For example, when the kid links with Alicia's angel, he scorches it with pain. During one of their conversations, he reminds Alicia of her father's guilt for "blowing up the world" and calls him "odd" and "defective" (TP 126-127). Similarly, he calls Alicia a nut, a one-off, and odd. The link here represents her psyche as it links the "odd" situation of her father's creation of the bomb with herself. In turn, she draws the conclusion that she is just like her father: a defective, and even a monster. Ultimately, her soul traverses into religious realms with this assumption, believing that she does not deserve grace. Bobby recalls an intimate conversation with his sister, thinking: "He had asked her if she believed in an afterlife and she said that she did not discount such a thing. That it could be. She just doubted that it could be for her. If there was a heaven, was it not founded upon the writhing bodies of the damned?" (TP 116). Although she longs for the Forms, Alicia does not view herself as angelic. Instead, she sees herself as a devil: "*On the nature of that which God might flee or God abandon there was only silence, but she thought that she and the visitors to her attic might well be candidates*" (TP 188-189). She thinks if she is an angel at all, she must be fallen.

In the *Phaedrus*, Plato describes the angel as a spiritual entity with wings and portrays it as a small but intrinsic part of the divine. In the same dialogue, Plato explains that the angel exists in human bodies but has transubstantiated. It lost its wings, falling to the earth and becoming imprisoned in the human body (Seeskin). Adler explains that this "angel-like being" is Plato's conception of the human soul. In his interpretation of Plato's *Phaedo*, Adler further discusses the angelic soul's entrapment, saying: "The soul is not just united with the body. It is imprisoned there. The incarnation of the angel-like being of a human soul is a

penal incarceration of it” (164). In his famous allegory of the cave in the *Republic* 514a-521a, Plato depicts the world of sense as yet another prison for man’s angelic soul. However, most humans are too concerned with material interests to notice the angels within them. But some do see, and Plato equates these special beings with the “philosopher-kings” of the *Republic*. He adds in the *Phaedrus* that it is only the madness of love for the beautiful that can resprout the soul’s wings (Seeskin).

As discussed, Alicia is an angel, more specifically a Platonic angel. *The Passenger* offers readers a glimpse into her beautiful psyche before it was contaminated by her father’s child-demon. In the scene where the kid shows Alicia a film of her life, she sees herself “*Turning on pointe in her costume at a ballet recital in a church basement in Clinton Tennessee in October of 1961*” (TP 194). Alicia’s soul is as beautiful, delicate, and powerful as a ballerina. As shown by her brief apprehensions of divine forms via her math studies, Alicia’s wings are even still intact, and she tries to ascend often. But she always seems to be shot down by evil forces of her world haunting her: “*She spoke her virgin sins through the wicket. Once. Again. And then no more. Hell hung on longer . . . She woke from dreams of struggle. Of leaden flight*” (TP 188). Even in her dreams, she tries to flap her wings, but her impish Kid renders them too heavy to move.

*The Passenger* later reveals that Alicia finds in her “kid” something more sinister than her father’s guilt. She views him as a Gnostic archon-ruler meant to ensure her angel remains trapped in this prison-world.<sup>2</sup> As The kid observes, Alicia sees him not as a “*fearful delirium*” but “*a small latterday autoarchon out of the high clavens of dingbatry flapping about*” (TP 51). His comment that his visitations to Alicia are part of a “*dawn raid*” (190) on her

“*poultryhouse*” (190) portray Alicia as a bird whose flight the kid intends to impede, a metaphor for the archon’s goal in oppressing Alicia’s angel.

That Alicia has begun to recognize her angel infuriates the kid. As he tells her: “. . . *you been peekin under the door, Doris, and we dont have much of a file on that*” (52). Evidence from *Stella Maris* also suggests that Alicia has apprehended the very essence of evil, the Gnostic demiurge (56). But the warrior angel in Alicia opposes that evil, evidenced by her violent retorts toward the kid and her efforts to extinguish him with electroshock therapy. *The Passenger* paints a heroic picture of Alicia’s stand against the demonic forces wanting to subjugate her angel: “*Something on the road. Something coming . . . Just the faintest movement of the air like a gradient of ill come unshelved and drifting toward her lonely outpost*” (TP 188).

Still, Alicia’s evil djinn will not leave. And he attracts other demons. Men possessed with deadly sins of lust seek to feed on the broken place in her soul in the same way that flies feed on rotting flesh. For example, Alicia’s Uncle Royal, who is married to her grandmother, tries to rape her. Alicia tells her psychiatrist in *Stella Maris* that he climbed into bed with her when she was a child (32). She fought back and did not sleep with him, but certainly the experience affected her at the level of the soul (SM 138-139). Her doctors also violate her sexually. Arguing with the kid that she does not really have a problem with her doctors, Alicia says:

*They seemed a harmless lot. Except possibly for the groping. I was never sure what it was that everybody was supposed to get out of it. Not sure what it was they saw standing there. Young girl with an edge to her. Nightbites and a nervous cough. Cute though. Possibly bangable. This last one had scary teeth . . .”* (TP 292).

Her discussion with her inner self shows that her carnal abuses further pollute her angel. Would she see herself as “possibly bangable” had she not faced sexual assault by her uncle and doctors? I believe the answer to that question is a resounding no. Sadly, it is not long before she comes to wear her scarred soul on her face. This fearful reality becomes apparent as she observes her reflection in the mirror. Next to her face, she sees a frightening image of The kid, noticing his “*small figure framed in the last light. Watching her*” (TP 113). Her image in the mirror with The kid next to her is a symbolic reflection of her now fallen soul. The world’s fiends have devolved it from an angel into no more than a pestilent fly. The fly symbolizes the demonic throughout literature, especially in Emily Dickinson’s poem, “I heard a Fly buzz / when I died.”

Alicia’s sexual escapades and incestuous lust for her brother further indicate the deterioration of her angel under the pressures of her demonic reality. Alicia is now the one who feeds on others. The prey becomes the predator, and the angel becomes a demon. For instance, one night she goes out dancing with her brother. Alicia returns to her room dressed as seductively as Lilith, a dangerous and wanton demon of the night according to Jewish mythology. She wears “*a silver lame top and tight blue silk miniskirt. Black stockings and three-inch heels, with her lipstick smeared*” (129). The kid inquires of her activities, and she responds that “maybe” she went for “a late snack after the clubs closed,” when Bobby went home to sleep (128-129). In other words, she had a one-night stand; likely, she has had many. She also sleeps with her psychiatrist, Dr. Hardwick, who the kid refers to as “*Doctor Hard-Dick*” (TP 107).

Alicia’s lust, combined with her Satanic-like desire for her lost light, creates in her an unnatural longing for sex with her brother. He is attractive, intelligent, and virtuous, so she

wants to consume what she sees as an enlightened body and soul. In *Stella Maris*, Alicia relates her ravenous concupiscence for Bobby in graphic detail, discussing her wet dream of them together in a cabin in the woods at length (TP 167). She even acts as a succubus, tempting Bobby through one of his dreams (184). Fortunately for the both of them, Bobby resists her; he will not sleep with her despite her attempts to seduce him.

Evil witches—the pharmaceutical industry—debilitate Alicia further, making her appear as eerie and disfigured as the kid. The medicine she takes to subdue her hallucinations cause horrific side effects, making her look like a zombie: “*She stood at the bathroom sink and studied herself in the mirror. Gaunt and haunted. Her clavicle bones all but through the skin. She’d set out her bottles of pills on the counter. Valium. Amitriptyline*” (TP 291). When Alicia looks in the mirror, she finds an angel of death instead of an angel of beauty. And her prescribed antipsychotics have the potential to further defile her lovely face, making it appear monstrous: “*They had put her on antipsychotics and she took them for a couple of days until she got a chance to read the literature. When she got to Tardive Dyskinesia she flushed everything down the toilet*” (TP 125). Tardive Dyskinesia causes grotesque, involuntary movements of the face, including grimacing, lip smacking, and eye blinking. Alicia’s toxic medications and their vile effects on her body make her look like a living dead girl. What is worse is that the poisonous substances likely creep deeply into her soul, making it feel as freakish as the kid of her hallucinations.

In the end, though, Alicia’s fallen angel is redeemed by the selfless love of her brother, Bobby. Bobby first witnesses the angel within his sister when she was thirteen years old, while he was home from college visiting his family. He sees her true nature as she performs *Medea* in an amphitheater shaped rock quarry in the woods. He remembers her

white gown and the “crown of woodbine” in her hair, along with the leaves trembling above her and the trees bowing to her. And in this special moment, he remembers falling in love with her: “. . . watching her that summer evening he knew that he was lost. His heart in his throat. His life no longer his” (TP 178-179). Conversely, Bobby also recognizes the dark world into which she was born, foreseeing its power to overshadow and pollute her angelic nature. As Euripides’ Medea became a monster and killed her children because of her true love Jason’s betrayal, Bobby sees that it is likely that the world will betray and transform his sister in the same way. After watching Alicia perform, he applauds her but also mourns what he knows is her perfect soul’s tragic condition in her demonic world: sitting on the cold stones with his face in his hands, Bobby says: “I’m sorry, Baby. I’m sorry. It’s all just darkness. I’m sorry” (TP 178).

Bobby therefore does what he can to nurture and protect his beautiful and vulnerable sister. He secures a room for her in their grandmother’s home and takes her shopping after their mother dies. He protects her, and he also assists in her education by listening attentively to her thoughts and helping her formulate her often mysterious ideas so other academics can understand them. He also gifts Alicia with a stereo to show her the ethereal joys of music (TP 29). When she asks Bobby to unearth their inheritance buried by their father beneath their old house in Tennessee, he does so not because he wants the money but because Alicia requests it (TP 124). Alicia uses the money to purchase the antique Amati violin that she has long dreamed of. She takes the violin back to her room and plays Bach’s *Chaconne*, a hauntingly beautiful piece about a man’s love of his dead wife. The song reminds Alicia of Bobby’s love for her, who she recognizes as a woman transformed by the evil world into a member of the living dead.

As the music plays, the holy fire within her angelic soul begins to burn the trash that the world's demons have heaped upon it, and endless tears stream down her face and onto the violin as she reflects on Prince Hamlet's soliloquy in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: "What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason / how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! / in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world!" (665). Her mystical enlightenment is further reflected in the overpowering beauty she feels through the violin's song: "Sitting there on the bed holding the Amati, which was so beautiful it hardly seemed real. It was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen and I couldn't understand how such a thing could even be possible" (SM 59). Through her vision, she comes to see herself as Bobby saw her on that day in her youth when she was performing *Medea* in the forest of her home. She sees her lovely, childlike, and wondrous angelic essence before the world's demons polluted it. She sees her soul as Bobby saw it when she was a child, and it is unspeakably pure, unbelievably powerful, and inexpressibly beautiful. Also she sees the angels within the living beings of all the earth, and, for the first time in her lonely life, she feels at one with a beautiful and perfect world. Alicia's redemption suggests that even a fallen angel can be restored to its original divinity by the power of love.

Having seen her angel and known the heart of the divine world, Alicia feels she must preserve her soul from evil at all costs, even if that cost is death. There are many theories on the reasons behind her suicide, but I believe it is her final revolt against the world's relentless assaults upon her angel. She understands that her demonic oppression would likely continue in the same cycle had she decided to remain alive, especially since she believes Bobby, her beloved knight and rescuer, to be deceased. She sees death as the only way that she can

ensure her newly resurrected winged soul remains liberated, and one might imagine Alicia today flying unhindered in the divine realm and reveling in its eternal glory.

That does not mean her suicide is not disturbing. The gruesome image of this beautiful woman hanging from a tree testifies to the fact that the angel cannot protect itself from the overpowering demons of the world without eternal separation from it in death. The modern world is in fact so wicked that it destroys its good angels or transforms them into fallen ones. It is wholly inhospitable to Alicia and to all of the angels within this world.

After Alicia dies, Bobby becomes her lifelong worshipper, and he comes to understand important truths about his sister and those like her:

In the spring of the year birds began to arrive on the beach from across the gulf. Weary passerines. Vireos. Kingbirds and grosbeaks. Too exhausted to move. You could pick them up out of the sand and hold them trembling in your palm. Their small hearts beating and their eyes shuttering. He walked the beach with his flashlight the whole of the night to fend away predators and toward the dawn he slept with them in the sand. That none disturb these passengers. (TP 283).

The birds here are symbols of the beaten-down angels imprisoned within the corporeal forms of this world. Bobby understands that his sister and all broken angels like her need to be nurtured with selfless care, protection, and understanding to fly. Guided by his sister as his muse, Bobby devotes the remainder of his life to preserving the divine beauty of the angel: “He knew that on the day of his death he would see her face and he could hope to carry that beauty into the darkness with him, the last pagan on earth, singing softly upon his pallet in an unknown tongue” (382). Bobby bears witness to Alicia’s angelic nature even after her death, honoring her soul’s beauty in the face of a demonic world.

## Works Cited

- Adler, Mortimer. *The Angels and Us*. MacMillan, 1982.
- Dickinson, Emily. "I heard a Fly buzz—when I died--." *Poetry Foundation*, www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45703/i-heard-a-fly-buzz-when-i-died-591.
- Hillier, Russell M. "Nothing's Forever': Destruction, Creation, Connection, and Miltonic Influence in Cormac McCarthy's *The Passenger* and *Stella Maris*." *English Studies*, vol. 105, no. 1, 2024, pp. 142-172. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0013838C.2023.2291913>.
- "Little Boy-Hiroshima." *National History and Heritage Command*, history.navy.mil. 5 May 2025.
- McCarthy, Cormac. *The Passenger*, Kindle ed., Vintage Books, 2022.
- . *Stella Maris*, Kindle ed., Vintage Books, 2022.
- Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*. Edited by John Leonard, Penguin Classics, 2003.
- Mundik, Petra. *A Bloody and Barbarous God: The Metaphysics of Cormac McCarthy*. University of New Mexico Press, 2016.
- Plato. *The Republic*. Translated by Richard Sterling and William Scott, Norton & Company, 1996.
- Seeskin, Kenneth. "Platonism, Mysticism, and Madness." *The Monist*, vol. 59, no. 4, Oct. 1976, pp. 574-586. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org.
- Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*, Kindle ed., Grapevine Publishers, 2019.
- Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*. Dover Publications, 1994.
- The Bible*. The Baptist Study Edition, edited by W.A. Criswell and Paige Patterson, Thomas Nelson, 2001.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Petra Mundik has observed McCarthy's focus in his novels on divine reality as Platonic in nature, "where the ultimate Reality is held to be the Good, or the Absolute. She references Huston Smith to explain that the Form of the Good is the greatest of the Forms (2). Forms include ideals like truth and beauty, and all share in the Supreme Good's nature and in the nature of reality.

<sup>2</sup>Archons are wicked angels who serve the Gnostic demiurge, a malevolent god who created the cosmos to entrap the soul's divine spark in the evil material world. The demiurge and archons are known to conceal the divine spark in human beings from self-knowledge and knowledge of the divine (Mundik 35). The divine spark Mundik discusses is generally synonymous with my conception of the Platonic angel.

# Museums Referencing Mississippi Writers

---

*By Diane Williams*

My goal in presenting to you today is to discuss, (1) why are museums important: what are their benefits and assets, (2) to point you in the direction of museums who celebrate our state's prolific writers and to reference which historical and genealogical societies function as museums of sorts and include written information about Mississippi writers and the people that live in their communities, (3) to reference a few of the nationally known figures such as presidents and our state's governors (in regards to what is written about them in our museums), as well as a mention of the local/lesser-known writers, and others whose writings and tentacles have been rooted in Mississippi, and (4) to give you a sense of the importance of museums as a resource to writers. I'll start by mentioning:

- What Museums Do beyond art/craft:
  - Museums help preserve Mississippi's literary heritage by collecting rare manuscripts, letters, and historical documents related to notable authors and writers.
  - They teach and educate the public and future generations about the state's rich literary history and provide insight into the lives and achievements of Mississippi writers.
  - They motivate us to learn more about current issues and challenges and help us to think in new ways.
- Importance of Museums:

- Museums contribute to the quality of life in communities by showcasing diversity and engaging visitors in deep and personal ways.
- They connect the past to the present, allowing for exploration and questions.
- They host special events, exhibitions, and programs that connect people with content and enrich their knowledge.
- In What Ways Do Museums Provide Personal Benefit?
  - Spark creativity, improve critical thinking, create greater cultural literacy
  - Encourage greater empathy through engagement and collaboration
  - They provide intellectual stimulation and facilitate conversations on issues affecting our region
  - and, in my opinion, they help develop new artists, critical thinkers, and trendsetters.

This presentation provides insight into how museums in Mississippi play a crucial role in preserving the state's literary heritage and honors the contributions of notable writers. By exploring these museums, visitors can gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of Mississippi's diverse voices that have shaped the state's cultural and literary landscape. But let me detour for just a moment.

- Notable Mississippi Writers: (of mentionable note)
  - Greenville Writers Garden and the Percy Library Writer's Exhibit
    - The library is home to original manuscripts of writers such as William Alexander Percy, Beverly Lowry, and Shelby Foote (1916-2005),

William Hodding Carter III (1935-2023) and Ellen Douglas (1921-2012) also come to mind – all from Greenville. They have all made significant contributions to Mississippi Literature.

- Greenville, known for its high number of authors per capita, they also celebrate figures like Myrlie Evers-Williams, (1933-), wife of Medgar Evers.
- The Greenville Writer’s Garden is located in the Fanny Arnold Park and features quotes from authors such as William Alexander Percy.
- Okolona Authors
  - William Raspberry (1935-2012) is honored for his contributions to the literary world. Among other things, he wrote for the Washington Post, and his accolades are too numerous to name here.
  - Raspberry's recognition at the University of Mississippi Overby Center underscores his impact as a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist.
- Literary Icons
  - Eudora Welty, William Faulkner, Richard Wright, Willie Morris, Margaret Walker Alexander, (William) Larry Brown, Barry Hannah, Greg Iles, Tennessee Williams, and John Grisham are among the well-known authors associated with Mississippi's literary heritage.. and I think Jesmyn Ward, Ellen Douglas,
- I also think of writers such as Thad Cochran, attorney and former U.S. Senator, he wrote a memoir about his life in politics. And former governor, Haley Barbour’s “America’s Great Storm” and “Agenda for America” comes

to mind. There may be something in the museum in the San Olsen Museum in Yazoo City about him. I also think of the William Faulkner Foundation Study Center in Oxford.

- Author Walker Percy was a writer from Alabama who spent time in MS, but his uncle William Alexander Percy, (1885-1942) was a lawyer, poet and patron of the arts from Greenville. His father was LeRoy Percy, a MS State Senator. I believe it is William Alexander Percy's original manuscripts that are housed at Mississippi Department of Archives and History and the Greenville Library is named in his honor.

*Mississippi Writers Trail* – Is a laudable initiative that the state has taken on naming writers. I believe Jesmyn Ward may have one of the first markers and I'll be talking about others later. I call it a museum without walls. Much like the Blues Trail Markers, the Civil Rights Trail Markers, and the Country Music Trail Markers, there are markers rising up around the state that celebrate our state's prolific authors/writers. And you may be able to research and see all of them on the internet. I certainly have done my share of online research for the Blues Trail markers.

Now let's look at specific cultural organizations that house information about Mississippi writers:

*Black History Gallery in McComb*, stores and preserves, newspaper, articles, photos, school yearbooks, magazines, and more, and contains the most extensive, comprehensive,

collection of black history in the region, complete with personal narratives. Here visitors explore and learn about the black history of McComb and Pike County. The local author section of books and artwork provides native perspectives about the community.

*Canton Convention and Visitors Bureau* has about five or six museums and the Canton Movie Museum, which is run by the visitor center, is called the My Dog Skip Museum. You may recall that was the title of a book written by author Willie Morris. One of the museums run by the visitor's center office highlights one of their well-known locals, Sister Thea Bowman, who was an author and others local authors have written about her as well.

*Century of History Museum at the Hebrew Union Temple* in Greenville is where you can find information on William Hodding Carter II (1907-1972), journalist, author, a Nieman Fellow and Pulitzer Prize winner who bought out his rival and merged the two papers into the *Delta Democrat-Times*, which served as the base for his broadsides against reactionary politicians and the White Citizens' Council. Carter won a Pulitzer Prize in 1946 for editorial commentary that attacked the racist Sen. Theodore G. Bilbo of Mississippi and upbraided the U.S. government for its treatment of Japanese Americans. He fought against intolerance.

*Charles W. Capps Archive & Museum at Delta State University* is a depository for historical, political, social and geographical documents and artifacts vital to the Delta area and Mississippi. They have over four hundred oral history interviews covering a wide range

of subjects concerning the history and culture of the Mississippi Delta. Charles Wilson Capps was a Mississippi State Representative.

If you want to know about ragtime music and you want to look at some of the sheet music from the popular ragtime era, you can go to the *Charles H. Templeton, Sr. Music Museum located on the fourth floor of the Mitchell Memorial Library at Mississippi State University*. Templeton was a Starkville businessman and graduated from Mississippi State University. The museum produces, preserves, and provides access to digital collections that support teaching and research through sheet music and other materials through its digital collections. Sometimes referred to as jig piano or piano thumping, ragtime originated in African American communities in the Mississippi Valley. I included this listing because writers, in my opinion, include literary genres and writers of music and song.

*Chickasaw County Heritage Museum in Houston Mississippi* is managed by the Heritage and Geological Society with the purpose of showcasing their collection and promoting research. They have a research library and a genealogy center for the study of the folk life of the people from the surrounding area, and you can learn about the family histories of the community through documents and contributions local citizens have made. The museum preserves the history of the city, county, and the South with artifacts and memorabilia highlighting everything from war heroes to culture. There is a genealogy center and research library for the study of folklife relating to the contributions of citizens both past and present where visitors can uncover family history through documents, records and photographs. A

blues trail marker outside highlights the life of “Bukka” T. Washington White. He was born in Houston and was a singer-songwriter, as well as a relative of B.B. King.

*deGrummond Children’s Literary Collection at the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg* is one of the North America’s leading research centers in the field of children’s literature. It focuses on American and British children’s literature, historical and contemporary literature. Dr. Lena deGrummond taught literature at the school of Library Sciences in 1966 and founded the library that same year. The collection includes original manuscripts, illustrations, and the works of more than 1,300 authors and illustrators. It also professes to have more than 180,000 published books dating from 1530 to the present.

*Delta Blues Museum in Clarksdale, B.B. King Museum in Indianola, and Highway 61 Blues in Leland, Gateway to the Blues Museum in Tunica*, all highlights the blues musicians of old such as B.B. King, Muddy Waters, Howlin’ Wolf, and they have books related to these musicians, some of which may be autobiographies.

*De Soto County Museum in Hernando* preserves the county’s history from 1541, during the time of Hernando de Soto’s exploration and information about the Jewish culture.

*Eudora Welty House and Welcome Center* in Jackson celebrates the life of the acclaimed international award-winning author Eudora Welty (1909-2001). Her life’s literary works are on display at the Welcome Center next door to the house and they have copies of her complete collection, which can be found at the Mississippi Department of Archives and

History. She was a Pulitzer Prize winner who authored novels, short stories, and essays and is also known for her realistic portrayals of the South. Her works are some of the most significant amongst significant among writers of the 20th and 21st centuries. Some of her titles includes: *The Optimist's Daughter*, *One Writer's Beginning*, *The Ponder Heart*, *The Bride of the Innisfallen*, *Delta Wedding: A Novel*, *The Eye of the Story*, and *the Robber Bridegroom*.

The *Frank and Virginia Williams Collection of Lincoliana Gallery at the Mitchell Memorial Library at Mississippi State University* is home to the largest repository of privately held materials of Abraham Lincoln 16th president of the United States, as well as Frank J. Williams 's collection of books that he wrote on the life of Abraham Lincoln and Ulysses S. Grant. Frank Williams was a chief justice in Rhode Island and a recipient of the prestigious jurist of the year award. Newspaper articles, magazines, journals, original letters and legal documents that reference Lincoln are catalogued and available for research.

*Greenville History Museum* has a copy of Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow's letter that they wrote after traveling through the state, and they house memorabilia related to life in Greenville, artifacts, photos, and newspaper clippings from 1800-1970.

The *John Grisham Room at Mississippi State* is host to the literary papers John Grisham donated to the university, along with personal correspondence, books, manuscripts, screenplays and recordings, newspapers, and magazines, clippings, the breath of which expands his illustrious career. The space also includes reflections from his time

working with the legislature such as correspondence to constituents and colleagues. The John Grisham Room can also be thought of as an inspiration for upcoming writers to learn from the bestselling author about his writing, research, books, designs, publicity, interviews, reviews, and the process of turning books into film and much more. Grisham, author, lawyer, and former member of the Mississippi House of Representatives. He is best known for his best-selling legal thrillers.

*Historic Natchez Foundation* preserve historic homes and buildings, and they could possibly have connections to notable writers such as Jefferson Davis. Davis was the first and only president of the Confederate States of America during the American Civil War. He was also a U.S. Senator, Mexican War hero, and a plantation owner. One of the goals of the Historic Natchez Foundation is to transform the institute into a museum and archival center.

The *Laurence C. Jones Museum located at the Piney-Woods School in Rankin County on Highway 49 South* was founded by Laurence Clifton Jones in 1929. Jones was a noted educational innovator, who spent his adult life supporting the educational advancement of rural African American students in the segregated south. Local writer Alferdteen Harris wrote about the history of the school. Harris was a professor of history and former director of the Margaret Walker Alexander National Research Center on the campus of Jackson State University. She has authored numerous books. Jones also wrote about the school. Even former students wrote about the school which started with two dollars and three students over one hundred years ago.

Beginning in the 1920s Jones County became an important location for the arts in 1923. The *Lauren Rogers Museum of Art is located in Laurel, Mississippi*. It featured an exciting combination of American, European, and Japanese art and is currently the state's oldest art museum. In 1922, Laurel teacher Ernestine Clayton Deavours edited and published Mississippi poets, the first substantial literary anthology of Mississippi writers. The Lauren Rogers Museum was originally both a museum and it had an its own library, but most library holdings not related to art were transferred to the Jones County Library, but the museum still has a large selection of books.

*Margaret Walker Alexander National Research Center, Jackson State University* - The Margaret Walker Center is an archive and museum dedicated to the preservation, interpretation, and dissemination of African American history and culture. Founded as the Institute for the Study of the History, Life, and Culture of Black People by Margaret Walker (1915-1998) in 1968, the Center seeks to honor her academic, artistic, and activist legacy through its archival collections, exhibits, and public programs. Her papers are now stored there. Walker was part of the African American literary movement in Chicago known as the Chicago Black Renaissance. Known for her novel Jubilee (1966) and For My People (1942), she was inducted into the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame in 2014. She is included on a marker on the Mississippi Literary Trail.

*Marshall County Historical Museum in Holly Springs* has a collection of antique books and they have the papers of Kate Freeman who was a visual artist (painter) from Holly Springs.

*Martin & Sue King Railroad Heritage Museum in Cleveland* has documents, photos, and memorabilia, along with information on the rail industry.

*Merrill Museum in Carrollton* highlights Senator John McCain's family who were early settlers to the community. The family donated treasured memorabilia. Author Elizabeth Spencer (1921-2019) is celebrated in this museum. She was a five-time recipient of the O. Henry Award for short stories. Carrollton was her home. She wrote nine novels, seven collections of short stories, and a memoir. Her first novel was *Fire in the Morning* published in 1948. Her novella was adapted for the screen and became a Broadway musical. The museum was formerly a grocery store. A trail marker outside the museum recognizing Elizabeth Spencer. and there is also one that recognizes Narmour & Smith, (Fiddler William Thomas Narmour and guitarist Shellie W. Smith) a popular old-time string band who, I believe, wrote their own music.

*Mississippi Department of Archives and History in Jackson* has a wealth of information on state history and Mississippi authors. There are archives, depositories, and archives throughout the state that strive to preserve and serve as a resource through historical and genealogical societies.

*Museum of Jewish Experience in Natchez.* The congregation B'nai Israel was founded in 1840. The first synagogue built in 1867-1872, then burned by fire. In 1992, the congregation entered an agreement with the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience to share the space and then later conveyed the building to the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life (ISJL), which maintains it as part of the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience. And may have written information about the history and culture of the Jewish community.

*Natchez Museum of African American History and Culture in Natchez* exhibits selected literary works of Natchez native and esteemed author Richard Nathaniel Wright and the freed slave and businessman William Johnson (known as The Barber of Natchez).

*Oaks African American Cultural Center in Yazoo City*, celebrates African American arts and crafts, by showcasing people who work with art, photography, wood sculpture basketry, and quilts, and it also highlights the achievements of local doctors, writers, musicians, and other African Americans. The story about the owner's history is African American history at its best.

*Old Tishamongo County Courthouse and Museum in Iuka* is a place where you can find documents, memorabilia, and county archives. They have the John Marshall Stone Research Library in that old courthouse building which I personally think is a treasure.

The *Old Courthouse Museum in Vicksburg manages the McCardle Research Library*, which is housed inside the building. The library contains local history relating to families and contain cemetery records, census and marriage records, tax record, Civil War manuscripts, maps and other historical documentation. I think the McCardle Research Library is a treasure. There is history in the walls of this courthouse. It hosted famous speakers like Jefferson Davis, Ulysses S. Grant, William McKinley, Teddy Roosevelt and Booker T. Washington. It is known as the Crown Jewel of Vicksburg. Vicksburg's history centered around the civil war can be found in manuscripts, newspaper articles, etc.

*River Road Queen Welcome Center, Museum of the Delta in Greenville* on the second floor includes information on writers and musicians, and the history of the Delta community especially history centered around the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927. They have information on Jim Henson's Kermit, the Frog, as well.

*Rowan Oak in Oxford* is the home of William Cuthbert Faulkner, recipient of a Nobel Prize, Pulitzer Prize, and National Book Award and that is where you will find a library, Faulkner's writing room, and a lot of information about him as a writer. The University of Mississippi maintains the home. The home is where Faulkner did much of his writing until 1962. Now the house is a National Literary Landmark.

*Roy Wilkins Collection at the Leontyne Price Library at Rust College in Holly Springs* has exhibitions on Roy Ottaway Wilkins. He was the former executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. He's not from Holly

Springs nor did he attend college there, but his family had a connection and so he gave Rust College his collection of papers, awards, memorabilia, and Civil Rights materials before he died in 1981, and that material can be used for research study and well as for its historic value.

*Sam B. Olden Yazoo Historic Society Museum in Yazoo City* is named after historian and author and worldwide traveler Sam Olden who was an art collector and some of his collection of ancient Andean cultures are on display at the Mississippi Museum of Art. The museum also references stories about Willie Morris, author of *My Dog Skip*. In 1967-1971, Morris was the editor of Harper's Magazine. He published more than twenty novels, both fiction and nonfiction. The museum may have information on Governor Haley Barbour (I mentioned his books earlier). He was from the area.

*Smith Robertson Museum & Cultural Center in Jackson* celebrates the life of Richard Wright, a contemporary of Eudora Welty, William Faulkner and Margaret Walker Alexander. He was from Natchez. They have or have had exhibits of local and award-winning authors in their gift shop, as do many of the Mississippi museums.

*Tennessee Williams Rectory Museum in Clarksdale* celebrates the life of Thomas Lanier "Tennessee" Williams (1911-1983), the author and playwright was born in Columbus, Mississippi. His books are unforgettable: *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *A Glass Menagerie*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *The Night of the Iguana*, and more. He is one of the most renowned playwrights of the twentieth century.

*Tennessee Williams House and Welcome Center, Museum in Columbus* is an 1875 Victorian home, which was once a rectory, and the house later became the Columbus Welcome Center and is a National Literary Landmark and recognizes Thomas Lanier “Tennessee” Williams who was born in that house and lived there three years.

*Tippah County Historical Museum in Ripley* preserves information about the county’s past and it’s journey into the future, and it references some of the legends who once lived in the area like John Grisham, opera and movie star Ruby Elzy, the father of Bluegrass - Bill Monroe, William Faulkner, as well as William Faulkner’s great grandfather, Colonel William Falkner, who has a different spelling for his last name.

*Old Courthouse Museum in Vicksburg manages the McCardle Research Library*, which is housed inside the building. The library contains local history relating to the county, family histories, and contains cemetery records, census and marriage records, tax record, Civil War manuscripts, maps, and other historical documentation. If you are a writer, historian, folk life scholar, and researcher, this is valuable information.

*Union County Historical Society and Heritage Museum in New Albany* has a library and the literary garden celebrates the life of Mississippi writer William Faulkner who lived one block away. The museum has gathered information on the pre-civil rights history of the African American business district. This museum aided the African American community in documenting the history of the black church in that county.

*USM Museum of Art at the University of Southern MS in Hattiesburg*, the Gallery of Art and Design exhibits and has the works of Margaret Livingstone, a Harvard professor and author of *Vision and Art: the Biology of Seeing*. I believe they have some of the work of Faith Ringo in their collection. She was a visual artist and children's book author.

*Utica Institute Museum at Hinds Community College* (formerly Utica Junior College) opened in 2022 and it tells the story of William Holtzclaw, founder of the Utica Institute. The museum displays images of the torchbearers: Dr. Rod Paige, former U.S. secretary of education; Dr. Walter Washington, former president of Alcorn, Dr. Laurence Clifton Jones, founder of Piney Woods Country Life School, Congressman Bennie Thompson, and more. Some of the aforementioned are published authors.

*Waveland Museum Ground Zero Hurricane Museum* – I would be surprised if they did not have copies of local authors book relating to Hurricane Katrina, etc.

*William Johnson House Museum, Natchez*, which is run by the National Park Service, has Johnson's diaries from 1830 to 1851. There are fourteen leather bound volumes of William Johnson's diaries that detail his life and the era in which he lived. The diaries are a critical resource for the study of free blacks, African American history, and American history. Johnson, born in 1809-1851 is prominently known as The Barber of Natchez. He became a prosperous black businessman, and his house stands as a testament to his achievements against adversity.

Keep reading stories, researching, writing, telling our/your stories, and you will have created one of the most amazing legacies ever. We are the keepers of the cultures.

\*Note: Most of the information gathered in this article has been gathered from the book *A Guide to Mississippi Museums* by Richelle Putnam and Diane Williams with a foreword by Malcom White.

# Creative Works

---

# Spring Snow: Eighty-Two Micro Poems

---

*By John J. Han*

## HAIKU



Photo by the author, 2024

(Spring)

coming of spring  
a cat clears the fence  
in two steps

canola in bloom  
the farmer watches  
from the gate

spring fever  
shoppers drive around  
mating geese

silence broken  
a pine emerges  
from a split rock

starting fresh  
a robin builds a nest  
near the old one

spring snow  
the fleeting urge  
to sing carols

spring  
a goose's beak ripples  
the still lake

Children's Day  
the flutter  
of carp streamers

(Summer)

summer siesta  
a swallow wakes  
the pond

sweltering sun  
I escape to  
Christmas songs

lingering heat  
the silence of  
the wind chimes

spot shower  
the open field  
still sunny

rain over  
the river reflects  
a full moon

long-awaited rain  
a letter from someone  
estranged

Great Plains  
air masses from  
four directions

cockatiel's wings  
the cat tracks  
every motion

rice season  
in the canal  
the sway of weeds

high-speed ferry  
seagulls shrink  
to dots

summer rain  
the worms going  
for a swim

summer morning  
a daylily opens  
to a bee's arrival

summer evening  
the golf ball takes on  
a green hue

summer breeze  
twirling the hem  
of her skirt

(Autumn)

a squirrel's somersault  
Shih Tzus tumble  
in pursuit

tranquil sunset  
the rabbit's tail  
fluffs in the breeze

(Winter)

returning home...  
even these birds  
sound foreign

winter windowsill  
a chickadee chitters  
at my delay

bare windowsill  
how quickly  
the seeds disappear

icicles hang  
from the eaves  
deepening silence

cold wind rattles  
the branches  
vanishing footsteps

heavy snowfall  
without a sound  
a cat slips in

winter moon  
through bare branches  
an owl calls

holly berries  
bright against the snow  
flitting sparrows

pine tree  
heavy with snow  
solo living

cooking noodles alone  
the echo of  
a New Year's bell

still alive  
bright flowers  
of an old cherry tree

taking pictures  
of a distant home  
winter dream

everywhere except  
the red barn—  
snow

(Non-seasonal)

on business  
a single leaf clings  
to the window

toward enlightenment  
with laughter...  
Rakan figures

cool dudes on the beach—  
a gull flaunts  
its black hood

rumors of war  
in the dark woods  
swirling shadows

darkening woods  
startled by the echo  
of my own steps

paparazzi  
mother goose whisks  
her young away

parrot song  
the cat lifts then  
lowers its head

looking for  
something good today  
a sun halo

deluge—  
a tiny bug clings  
to the sink

brittle bonsai...  
calling the dental office  
for a filling

deathbed window  
a wisp of cloud  
veils the Milky Way

## SENRYU



Photo by the author, 2018

still with me  
four decades later—  
the immigration bag

forty years later  
my once-shy bride  
growing vocal

Year of the Monkey—  
I begin by watching  
monkeys dance

early spring—  
the dreaded task  
of lawn mowing

sleep music  
drifting toward  
its stillness

near Seoul Station  
a sign makes me pause:  
*Chanese Restaurant*

rest stop relief—  
I press the button twice  
but no coffee

his car sticker says:  
I LOVE violence  
I change lanes

missing the street again—

the GPS lady  
sounds annoyed

cheap motel—  
for ten minutes  
no sign of the clerk

taking a selfie—  
at least I step in mud  
not off a cliff

late for hotel breakfast  
all of the bacon  
gone

in Tokyo—  
after I pay  
I become a king

missed connection—  
some take a nap,  
others sigh

a long trip over—  
free soap and shampoo  
piled at home

unable to match names  
the blurry faces of  
childhood friends

looking older than I—  
my student from  
the 1980s

nearing seventy—  
each day I discard something  
from my office

a poor man's Lexus—  
its taillight held  
by duct tape

imminent deadline  
standing at the cliff's edge,  
time slipping away

adrift in midlife  
clouds rushing by  
this way and that

non-moving scarecrow  
birds' fear turns  
into contempt

my adopted dog  
first, he pees  
on the bed leg

disrupted by  
a wagging tail  
my weekend nap

contrail—  
a fresh mole trail  
across the yard

nursing home  
the persistent shadow  
of memories

nursing home  
the ceiling holds  
her silent gaze

his aging steps...  
no complaints from  
the old dog

the news of his passing—  
outside, the grill crackles  
amid chatter

funeral—  
an old man whispers  
to the widow

funeral service  
someone in the pew  
lets out a score

at a funeral—  
no one knows I buried  
my own last month

after so many funerals—  
death no longer  
a surprise

obituary  
some have died  
at my age

# An Object of Longing

---

*By Kathy Root Pitts*

On the insignificant occasion of Nathan Frieze's death, his son was nowhere near his father's bedside. Jude didn't realize that his father was failing, though such knowledge would have changed nothing. For nearly a decade, Nathan's son had nursed a creeping disgust for that sickly man, for the incessant whining and pettiness which drained strength from others without ever fortifying himself. Of that emotional treasure which family is supposed to provide: happiness in love, or at least a sort of security maintained in pretense of love, Nathan was indigent. He demanded affection desperately, yet accepted it with morose anger, as if he were still smarting from some ancient hurt. Jude himself had struggled for years to shelter from further harm what was left of his stunted small boy's heart, until deciding: No more. No more relentless castigation from a withered man who, in the midst of a pointless quarrel, would stop and look past the boy, as if the person he were really shouting at had just walked out of the room.

There had often been periods of days when the two spoke not a single word to each other, and though these prolonged silences were bitterly tense, they were preferable to the conversations. The content of these talks was actually quite mundane: "Add milk to the grocery list." "Pay the gas bill." It was the strangely eager, solicitous tone of Jude's father's voice that was startling. For, in the course of these exchanges, while the subject matter would remain un compelling, the manner of the old man's speech could twist into raging disappointment—but disappointment always over trivialities. At times, he would seem to

lose his senses entirely and begin shouting, "Give it to me!" and Jude was helpless to quiet him, as the object of his longing was, to his son, an unknown.

Jude came to realize, gradually, and with much sorrow, that he and his father would never get along, that Jude's very presence had become painful to him in some profound way that Jude could not understand, let alone heal. No stranger--to Jude's recollection--had ever affected his father so violently, though the old man was fully capable of displaying his anger with Jude in public. These fits of discomposure, occurring more often as his son grew older, had been mortifying. Nathan would grow upset at Jude for no reason, then cling to his son, plead that he loved him, and beg that "she"--whomever she was--not ever make Jude hate him. It seemed that the situation could only worsen, so on making certain that his father would be well looked after by Luther, a constant family friend, Jude said his goodbyes.

Nathan was entirely detached from events as his son walked out of the house for that last time. His eyes were red, presumably from crying, but his attention was directed, instead, out the window to a particular spot of road at the end of the driveway. Jude glanced through the curtains, but saw only the red tail-lights of a passing car. Reading some vague regret into this vigil, that perhaps, in his confusion, Nathan thought his boy had already begun his journey, Jude was moved to stroke his father's arm. There was no response, rewarding nor otherwise, so Jude let his hand drop. Nathan Frieze had nothing to give. Jude looked again to the empty road and thought how they had both aged. In less than a month, Jude would turn twenty-one. His initiation into adulthood had been cheerless and unaided. His father would die in the same bed that Jude's mother had died in.

Jude traveled from Hollandale to Greenville to be with his uncle, Martin Frieze, his father's younger brother and only other living relative. Uncle Martin manned a small radio

station close to the Mississippi River, and Jude was put in charge of powering up the transmitter at five o'clock in the mornings, as well as maintaining the three towers. Uncle Martin had his nephew check daily the guy lines stabilizing the tower closest to the house. Fearing how saturating storms coming off the river might cause the mast to lean on unfirm soil, he would take Jude to the tower field often. A few discouraged okra plants with their cream-colored flowers remained long after the field was replanted with glowing towers. Uncle and nephew would stand in the dark and damp, peering up at the nearest tower with its blinking red light, like a drunkard's eye, while Martin questioned: "Jude, does that look straight to you? It's hard for me to tell with the clouds moving behind." After staring long into the night, even Jude would hallucinate that the red eye had begun to sway.

One anxious evening, upon returning from the field, the two sat at the gray kitchen table. Uncle Martin drank coffee and tried to calm himself, but with each powerful gust of wind, Martin flinched to hear the groan of metal. The red glow blinked steadily on the windowsill. Uncle Martin fiddled with the amber-colored cup until a crack of thunder brought him to his feet.

When Martin recovered his nerves, uncle and nephew talked about Jude's mother, a wheelchair-bound invalid. "No one really knew why she was handicapped—not even her doctor. Soon after you were born, she became weak," according to Martin. This was news to Jude. His father wouldn't discuss her at all after her death.

"Did it have something to do with my birth?" Jude asked. His uncle shook his head and twirled the cold grounds in the bottom of his cup.

"Nathan asked her and asked her doctor." Martin shrugged: "She stopped all housework when you were around five, and then stayed to her bed most of the time once

you were teenaged.” He went on, “There’s something that didn’t make sense, though.” Jude looked up from his bowl of rice-crispies, listening and chewing, but at that moment, his uncle startled again at a burst of thunder.

Jude remembered visiting his mother in her bedroom, bringing her meals prepared by Nathan, and setting full trays on a low table next to the bed: meat, vegetables, sweets, all the foods one should eat to get their strength back—canned soup sometimes, and always a glass of milk with two tablespoons of sugar stirred in. She would devour all of her dessert and maybe have some of the milk, but she hardly touched the grown-up fare. And always, at the side of her bed, Jude observed that she was missing the pinky-finger on her right hand. He had been told that she was born that way. It didn’t stop her from lifting a fork, nor playing Chinese checkers, nor ringing the bell if she needed something. “I don’t think I ever remember her walking much,” Jude considered. “She just moved enough to get to the chair and then the bathroom and back.”

Jude thought of the strength in her arms. If he tried to leave her room before she were ready, she would grip him hard and invent a reason why Jude must stay, like a little child in her neediness and her interests: “Jude, bring the colors and some paper.” She released him and clapped her hands together lightly. “Let’s draw Christmas pictures!” Even in summer--months before Christmas--Jude would do as she asked, or in the near-dark winter evenings they would sit coloring spring flowers. All the while, they could smell dinner boiling on the stove. Nathan’s specialties were stew, gizzards, corned beef with cabbage, and spaghetti.

Both father and son had noticed that Jude’s mother was making Jude into more of a

playmate than a son, and then there was that irresponsible brattiness about her. One late afternoon, Jude smelled cabbage and asked his mother, “You think he’s making cornbread, too?” She sniffed the air and spoke matter-of-factly: “I can’t eat that.”

“Can’t, or won’t?” Her stubbornness angered him.

“Won’t!” she smirked in the direction of the kitchen.

A potlid dropped, and Nathan called, “Jude, come get this tray. Got to mop a mess in here.” Nathan seldom brought the food himself and avoided looking at his wife since she took to her bed.

It was towards the end of Jude’s mother’s life when Nathan Frieze hinted to Jude that her decline would not be easy. Nathan himself did not frequently enter her room, but rather, remained just in the doorway. Jude dealt with her instead. Once, when the boy was about to deliver a tropical fruit salad to her bedside, Nathan refused to release the tray to his son until he was sure Jude heard him: “Don’t stay in there too long, Jude.” He wiped spilled pineapple syrup from the tray-handle. “Come on out when you’ve got her set up.”

Jude couldn’t understand this at all. “We were going to make swans from two bars of soap.”

Nathan considered: “Make them quick, and best not give her a saw-knife.” He reached into the dish drain, “Here, let her use this butter-knife.” Nathan continued while studying a nail in the wall: “There’s something about your mother . . . I don’t like to say.” Then Nathan blurted, as if trying to disclose a terrible truth before he changed his mind: “She’s always been a little girl.” Nathan spoke painfully, “The doctor can’t fix this.”

“Why shouldn’t I be in there; do you mean she’s contagious?” Jude looked at the closed door between them and his mother, and fumbled with the saltines on the tray.

In a show of agitation, shocking to his son at that moment but only the first of many outbursts Jude would witness as his father gave way to derangement: “You know your mother would do anything--even hurt herself--to make me suffer!” As his panicked words surfaced forcibly from what seemed to have been a dark place, Nathan backed away, until stopped by the kitchen counter.

Nathan stepped outside for a cigarette, and Jude brought his mother her dinner. He studied her for some clue about her unique trouble and stayed to carve the bars of soap for most of the afternoon. There was no way to do otherwise without awkwardness. When Jude returned the tray, Nathan hunched his shoulders and stood staring at the sticky, soapy mess.

It was at this period in their lives when Nathan would listen to his brother’s radio station on Sunday mornings: First the farm report, then the many sermons. Jude’s daddy wasn’t particular about denomination— and not passionate about religion as long as the preacher had something comforting to say, but if the preacher talked about hell, Nathan would concentrate, holding acutely still, with only his jaw working.

The really bad times that Nathan had forecasted started one afternoon when Jude came in from school and found his mother trying to push herself off the edge of the bed onto her thin, pigeon-toed feet. She fell back, sniffing. “I broke myself—Dr. Pinch warned me to get up! I want to go fishing like I used to with my daddy!” Jude calmed her by coloring fish with her until spaghetti. She had not called her husband into the room even then, and she never tried to get out of bed on her own again. Not long after, Jude’s mother died. She was ninety pounds; her legs would not hold her up. If it were some crazy self-destructive

stubbornness that drove her to her bed and wheelchair in the early days, it was for certain disability that later kept her there.

Jude questioned his uncle further, and Martin offered: “She seemed jealous for your attention. Once, when you were just a baby, she got really angry after Nathan tried to change you.”

“Seems that she would have wanted the help, especially with the missing finger.” Jude pondered aloud.

Martin volunteered: “Oh, that was before . . .” then winced and stopped.

“Before what?” Jude had never seen them argue. They mostly ignored each other.

“Never mind. I got my time wrong.” Jude could not get his uncle to revisit his aborted story.

Uncle and nephew talked quietly about less intimate matters while lavender lightning flashes appeared seldom and far off. There was no longer the sound of wind, rain, nor thunder. The red light against the sill was steady, regular, and comforting. Uncle Martin was finally able to sleep in his worn armchair where he had spent an anxious night, as much fixated on the tower light as Jude’s father had been with the end of his driveway. Now, with a real touch of homesickness, Jude wondered how his father was faring with Luther. He stood, stretched, and thought of the distance---in miles this time—between himself and his father. Then he lay on the plaid living room couch and began to doze, but not for long.

With a buzzing in his head like the sound of a radio jammed between stations, Jude awoke. The radio, which sat on top of the icebox to monitor the transmitter station across the road gave off a muffled voice, then a whispered whining like a frightened child, but the

station was not running this late at night. Rain blew hard, driving diagonal streaks across the window in a northerly direction, puddling in the hollow of the sill and pouring into the base of a soggy gardenia. The red light captured and bent by the drops seemed as if the window were weeping blood. Jude looked up from the shrub to the tower, expecting to see its leaning northward, away from the house as the rising wind should have blown it, but to his disquiet, it was twisting to the south, directly towards the window in a purposeful, lunging swoop—defying any logic of motion.

Jude bolted out the screened door. It banged behind. Common sense warned him that a tornado may be hidden in a low cloud, but a more unreasonable fear, fear that he knew would last a lifetime, had to be quelled if he were ever to live quietly within himself. Jude pictured his father and uncle, and for the first time felt something of their same inexpressible terrors.

Uncle Martin followed Jude outside. Lightning revealed that the wind and the tower had settled. All at once and strangely, with no wind, and with the red flashing on the low clouds, the tower seemed to lift up, and then plunge northward away from the house and massively into the field. The ground shook, and the red glow failed like a closing eye.

Then came another electronic whine, although they were far out of range of the kitchen radio. With a fresh flash of lightning, what they discovered startled Jude, but did not seem to give his uncle concern at all. In fact, Jude was astounded by his uncle's face now instead of the tower, absently munching on a dill pickle while nudging with his soaked bedroom slipper a clod of dirt at the base of the tall tower that had collapsed northward. It lay partly buried in mud, its peak crashed through a white wooden fence and blocking the station's access road. Everything was silent.

The two slopped back into the house, leaving their wet shoes just outside. Jude checked the radio; it had been off. He asked Martin; the radio had been off all along. Martin took off his wet socks. The phone rang, and Jude answered.

“I’m sorry to wake you with bad news.” The voice was Luther’s, that ancient friend who knew Nathan when he was a child, and remembered the man before his marriage: “It had been a different time, more gentle,” Luther had once described it. Jude thought of this remark while guessing Luther’s news now.

“We were awake because of the storm. Is Daddy okay?” Jude popped his knuckles and glanced back at the radio.

“Jude,” Luther said. “Your daddy passed away about half an hour ago.”

“I see.” Jude faced his uncle and shook his head. Martin nodded peacefully, focusing on the wet sock he held between his knees. Jude felt his own heart beating, and yielded to an unexpected sorrow. “Was it a stroke?” He had imagined his father’s collapse from anger someday, but not so soon.

“Your daddy gave us a hell of a time, today. He was out of bed and just ripping through your mother’s chest-of-drawers after something.” Jude thought of his father’s demand before Jude left his home, “Give it to me!” though he never ceased wondering why Nathan had said it to the window.

More curious now than bereaved, Jude questioned: “What was he looking for?”

Luther backtracked his story to the late morning: “It all started before that. I woke to him yelling at the window, sitting up and pointing. At first, I thought he was talking to me, but it was the window. He yelled ‘Look! She’s standing!’ over and over again, but no one

was outside. I checked. I went outside; checked all around the back porch. There was no one.”

Jude moved the phone to his other ear, his chest tight: “Maybe it was dark, and he just thought there was someone. A bag outside blowing in this storm?”

Luther came back with, “There wasn’t anything or anybody, and what storm? We haven’t had a storm in a week.”

Jude interrupted, “Maybe it was just here along the river.”

But Luther continued, “No! No storm anywhere. It’s been dry in the Delta for more than a week, not even rain along the river. I saw the weather report when I was waiting on the doctor.” Jude heard Luther swallow on the other end of the phone. “He was shouting at whoever he thought was standing in the window to give him something, and then Nathan screamed, ‘Don’t take him!’”

“Take who?” Jude glanced out the door at the broken tower thrown mysteriously away from the house.

Luther puzzled, “Can’t guess. He jumped out of your mom’s bed and started that crazy search. You know, he was a strong man, even in sickness; I couldn’t get him to be still. Jude?” Luther hung fire on his last words.

“Yes, Luther? What is it?”

“It’s just, well, you’ll hear about it, so I got to tell you.” Jude felt cold. Luther continued:

“Don’t show Jude,” your daddy said, but I didn’t know what he was meaning. Then he said—and this didn’t make sense to me at all—I didn’t do it, but she wants him to find it and think I’m evil like that!”

“Show me what, Luther; do you know now?”

“I think, maybe,” Luther pushed through, “When your father died, he just slumped in the bed. One eye all red and looking at the curtains, the other at his closed hand—but dead. He was smiling, kind of. Maybe that’s what happened—maybe the stroke twisted his face, but when we opened his hand to place him more settled like on your mom’s bed, what looked like a finger-bone dropped out of his hand.”

Martin showered, then started packing for the short trip to his dead brother’s house. Martin said that he knew nothing about the finger--but suspiciously--he also didn’t look shocked to hear about it. Jude thought about the finger bone, stood slowly, and walked outside, over the wet field to the top of the tower lying in a marshy area beyond the road. The red light that had drawn so much attention was in shiny fragments on the ground. Jude picked up a piece of the broken red glass and felt he was looking into his father’s watchful eye.

# Poems

---

*By John Zheng*

## **Deltascapes**

irregular wind...  
egg price  
goes up  
each week  
in the chain store

~

ghost town  
cemetery...  
gravestones  
play hide  
in knee-high grass

~

downtown street  
too empty  
to deserve  
a sweep  
of autumn wind

~

leaning  
in a sagging porch sofa  
the old man  
waves now and then  
to passersby

## Recess

after Eudora Welty's photograph Tomato-packers' Recess

The lighthearted  
folk music  
fingerpicked  
on the guitar

sounds like  
a Ferris wheel  
rotating a circle  
of laughers

of tomato packers  
sitting leaning or  
standing around

till the singer  
ends breaktime  
in one breath.

## The Inevitability of Moments

pear petals  
in flight to boughs  
drifting snow

howling wind  
the pitapat of pecan nuts  
on the toolshed

broken branch  
the squirrel squirms  
on the ground

lap walking  
every five minutes  
moon's pale face

that loony mocker  
swoops and squawks as if  
I trespass her yard

gurgling creek  
the sitting Buddha's  
belly laughter

## Flashbacks

grandma's  
smile lines

shining sunrays

weaving  
my memory

~

as grandma tells  
a ghost story

my heart tick-tocks

against the singing  
cuckoo clock

~

curtains  
begin to billow

as grandma

finishes  
the mermaid tale

~

grandma's  
grief hymn

her alone time

with my dead  
grandpa

~

grandfather's  
grave

the proximity

of cordilleras  
so far away

~

old days refresh  
my mind

granny's veiny hands

a pair of  
bitter melons

## Environment Issues

clearcutting  
a forest

reduced from woods

to trees  
to no trees

~

towns  
bulge into cities

economic boom

turns croplands  
into chain plants

~

sunbeams  
through smog

plumes of smoke

spiral to reshape  
the cityscape

~

skyscrapers  
of the city

smog-wrapped

into wheezing  
apparitions

~

urban sprawl

unoccupied  
buildings

each like a giant  
skeleton

Special thanks to the faculty, administration, and staff  
of the University of Mississippi for hosting the 2025  
Conference.