The Architecture of the Arkansas Ozarks Short Guide

The Architecture of the Arkansas Ozarks by Donald Harington

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Characters

Because The Architecture of the Arkansas Ozarks spans six generations of Ingledews, detailing the founding, the rise, and the decline of Stay More, its characters tend to be less complex than those in other Harington novels. The novel's emphasis on humor accounts for some of this simplicity of character.

Given the duality implicit in the theme of bigeminality, the novel has two major characters, although not a man and a woman, as one might expect.

The novel's first major character is Jacob Ingledew, who is, like all Ingledew men, shy and taciturn in the presence of women. Yet, he is the first Ingledew in Stay More to marry. Their shyness is so acute that only one Ingledew male in each generation, except the last, will marry. As founder, Jacob performs many "firsts," including being the first to perform almost all of the activities associated with Ozark folk tradition. He even helps inaugurate the first baseball game.

As in the founding of baseball, Jacob's activities mirror events that actually occurred and people who existed.

He represents Newton County in the convention to secede from the Union and becomes, as Isaac Murphy, an Ozarker, actually did, the only man in Arkansas to vote against secession.

When the Civil War finally comes to Stay More, Jacob and Noah literally enact the war that pitted brother against brother. Much to his great sorrow, Jacob accidently kills Noah.

After the war, the people of Arkansas elect Jacob Governor of Arkansas, as they actually did Isaac Murphy. Some of Jacob's activities and statements as Governor are those of Isaac Murphy.

One activity not based on those of Murphy's is Jacob's love relationship with a Little Rock woman who also became the best friend of Jacob. This woman whom the narrator cannot name because she is a member of a prominent Little Rock family came to Stay More with Jacob and his wife at the end of his term as Governor. She lived the rest of her life in Stay More, at least twenty years beyond the deaths of Jacob and his wife. As Jacob's marriage led to Stay More's first bigeminal house, his new domestic situation led to Jacob building Stay More's grandest dwelling: a tri-geminal. This building marks the end of Jacob's generation and the beginning of the twentieth century, a century characterized by the idea of progress.

The major character who complements Jacob Ingledew is the Yankee peddlar Eli Willard, the novel's purveyor of the products of progress. He keeps Stay More changing. By bringing his manufactured, commercial products from the East, he encourages Stay More's consumer growth and brings it news from the outside world. Eli appears in Stay

More as soon as Jacob and Noah finish building their cabin, and the first item he sells them is, significantly, a wooden clock, which runs too fast. When he returns the next year, he sells them a brass clock, which "compensated for the old one by being as slow as the old one was fast."

Eli Willard compensates for those like Noah who want no change. For over ninety years, Eli returns to Stay More. Even when he is away, travelling around the world, Eli affects life in Stay More. His post cards help bring a post office to Stay More, and, consequently, more exposure to the mainstream culture. His acceptance of money and not barter for his products means that the residents of Stay More cannot maintain a self-sufficient economy. Although not an Ozarker, Eli Willard is as integral to the history of Stay More as any of its residents. He embodies the changes that time shapes in Stay More. The first and last objects he brings to Stay More — the clock and a surreal golden chronometer — solidify this connection with time. His story is a smaller version of the story told in The Architecture of the Arkansas Ozarks, that is, the story of all history, the story "about time in general, time passing, time coming and staying awhile and going away not ever to come back anymore."

Social Concerns

The most prominent concern of The Architecture of the Arkansas Ozarks is the tory of the founding, the rise, and the fall of a community, in this case, of Stay More, Arkansas. The narrator, an architectural historian, apparently wants his story to focus on a history of Stay More's vernacular architecture. He begins each of the chapters with an illustration of one of Stay More's buildings but quickly digresses into telling the stories about the people who founded and lived in Stay More, primarily the brothers Jacob and Noah Ingledew and their male descendants.

The heart of the male Ingledew story is generation — their acts of making love, families, and dwellings — and, ultimately, decline, until there is only one male Ingledew living, and he will have no offspring. This attention to generation and decline reflects an elemental human concern with the experience of time. The people in Stay More tend to think of time as linear, as their singing of the hymn "Farther Along" suggests. Connected to the idea of linear time is the idea of progress, the belief that human making increases, without loss, the quality of human life, that every new product is better than the old one.

The novel's blending of fact and fiction by placing the fictional community of Stay More in an actual Arkansas county, by mostly using illustrations of actual buildings in the Arkansas Ozarks, and by having the people of Stay More reenact events that actual Arkansas Ozarkers performed calls into question the nature of history and of fiction, of what is factual and speculative, of what people assume to be "real."

Techniques

An important technique in the novel is one of distancing the reader from both the narrator and the characters.

The characters lack the depth and complexity of such characters as Latha Bourne or Daniel Montross, and the narrator, who appears to be once again the same as Dawny/Donald in Lightning Bug (1970) and "G" in Some Other Place. The Right Place. (1972) is so distant that the reader never learns his name. Such distancing permits a broad scope — in this case a history of a family and a community that spans over 130 years. It encourages comic distortion by emphasizing one distinct trait to distinguish character. Harington's use of Ozark folklore, especially that associated with the tall tale adds another element to the comic effect of distancing.

The use of the Ozark tall tale leads to other effects. One is implied in the quotation from Frank Lloyd Wright that Harington uses as the novel's epigraph: "The true basis for any serious study of the art of architecture still lies in those indigenous, more humble buildings everywhere that are to architecture what folklore is to literature." It suggests that there is a dependency between folk art and the so-called "high art," as there is a dependency between beginnings and endings, or, in the case of The Architecture of the Arkansas Ozarks between its illustrations and its text.

Much of the first half of the novel makes use of the fantastic, exaggerated, and magical quality of the folk tall tale.

In the last half, the magic turns surreal.

The best example of the surreal is the golden chronometer Eli Willard gives to the ten-year-old Hank Ingledew to give to the son he will have. When Hank presents the watch to his sixteenyear-old son, Vernon, he winds it, and the tense of the novel changes from past to present. The next time the watch is wound, the tense changes to the future, where this novel, like all the Stay More novels, will conclude.

The golden chronometer also has properties associated with self-reflexive art. When Vernon puts the watch on, he becomes aware of the novel's readers. Self-conscious and embarrassed by the reader's voyeuristic presence, Vernon removes the watch, only to put it on in the middle of the night, "to see," as the narrator says, "if we are still here. We still are."

Still another method of making the reader aware of the act of reading is when Vernon will search the book to find his lost love Jelena. As Vernon searches the book, page by page, "he will call our attention," the narrator tells us, "to the architecture of the book itself ... , showing how the base is heavier, the upper part lighter, and how the roof is pitched." This metaphor connects the book to its architect and to all the acts of making The Architecture of the Arkansas Ozarks so aptly illustrates.

Themes

Harington's play on the homonyms "ark" and "arc" expresses three major themes that relate to the concerns of generation, refuge, stasis, progress, and nature's entropy or the decline inherent in nature's processes. "Arc, and also ark," the narrator explains, "comes from an Indo-European word root, arkw, which means bow or arrow (it is uncertain which, perhaps both together as a unit, since one is no good without the other) ... Arc is also an obsolete form of ark, which meant originally a chest, box, coffer, and hence a place of refuge, as in the Biblical Noah's vessel and as in all over this present book."

The ark that is the two-in-one, like the bow and the arrow, "both together as a unit," the narrator calls "bigeminality." It represents generation, the coming together that produces a new identity. Its model, seen in the first of the chapter illustrations, is the dwelling of Fanshaw, the Osage Indian Jacob and Noah meet when they arrive at what will become Stay More. Fanshaw's dwelling consists of two conjoined paraboloids. Ironically, because Fanshaw is impotent, his dwelling houses no offspring until after Jacob arrives. Humiliated by his own impotence, Fanshaw takes his pregnant wife and leaves his home to Jacob and Noah.

Neither will reside in it, although they will copy it. When Jacob builds his dogtrot house for his new wife, he explains to her that it is "like the Bible said about a man and a woman become one flesh but they're still two people...

one part is you and one part is me," and the breezeway is the two of them together. Although Jacob continues the bigeminality of Fanshaw's dwelling, he will replace its parabolic structure with that of the box.

The first dwelling Jacob and Noah build (the book's second illustration) represents the idea of the ark as box and refuge. Box-shaped and with no windows, it provides a psychological comfort against the wilderness. When Jacob is gone for a long period and Noah becomes sick, Noah is "aware of how he was sheltered, of how his ark was a refuge, snug, cozy, restful. It was home." The box structure also has negative connotations, as the novel's first paragraph indicates when Jacob wakes from a dream, stares at "the four-cornered ceiling," and thinks "box." He wakes his wife and declares, "That's the trouble, Sarey! We've done went and boxed ourselves in.'" Their pleasure in the safety of the box has kept them from being open to the possibilities inherent in the arciform structure.

The plot of the novel — the founding, rise, and decline of Stay More — illustrates the curvilinear structure of the arc. Not only does the text, the story told in The Architecture of the Arkansas Ozarks illustrate this theme, but the book's twenty drawings of buildings in Stay More reinforce it.

Only in the last chapter, as its text and illustration suggest, does the arciform structure return to Stay More. By then, however, the Ingledew male line, as well as the book, has come to its conclusion.

This return to the beginning exemplifies the theme of the connection between beginning and endings. It implies that this ending is, like all endings, a beginning. Fanshaw's dwelling, "the last arciform architecture in the Arkansas Ozarks," symbolizes the end of the Osage Indian culture that existed in the Ozark region for hundreds of years before the arrival of the transplanted Europeans like Jacob and Noah. The narrator's first words announce this theme. "We begin," he says, "with an ending," and because readers are so intent on getting into the story they ignore the loss on which Stay More and the book begin. The relationship between endings and beginnings reflects the theme of dependence — that one cannot exist by oneself; the pattern of loss and gain inherent in natural processes; and a motive for humans to make products and progeny.

Key Questions

Because The Architecture of the Arkansas Ozarks describes the history of a small, rural community in the Ozarks of Arkansas, it raises questions about the idea of "regionalism" in literature.

What constitutes a "regional" work?

Are all of William Faulkner's novels that occur in a single county in the state of Mississippi "regional"? If not, why not? Are the novels of Philip Roth that deal mostly with American Jews who live in the northeastern states "regional" because they concentrate on the customs and language of a particular group of people as do Harington's novels?

What did you know about the Ozarks and the people who live there before you read one of Harington's novels? How do his works confirm or refute your knowledge of the area and its people? Is it significant that, for the most part, Harington's novels are set in a time before World War II?

1. How would you describe the humor of The Architecture of the Arkansas Ozarks? Does its humor make you laugh with or at the characters' actions?

2. Although there are scant references to large historical events such as World Wars, does the novel provide a pattern that mirrors the course of the history of the United States?

3. Doubleness and pairing play significant roles in the actions and themes of the novel as Harington's coined word, "bigeminality," implies. It literally means two-twins. What are some reasons for the use of the concept of doubling in the novel?

4. Does Jacob's having a mistress and a wife reflect the novel's use of bigeminality? Is there some significance in his mistress being his wife's best friend?

5. What seems to be the attitude of the novel issues of gender? Why, for example, do only men suffer from the frakes? Does the story focus on the male Ingledew line because of the novel's focus on architecture, i.e. men traditionally have been the builders of houses? What other possibilities might account for the focus on the male Ingledew line? Interestingly, the one Ingledew ancestor who has played major roles in The Cockroaches of Stay More and Ekaterina is not Vernon but his sister Sharon, who is little more than mentioned in The Architecture of the Arkansas Ozarks.

6. What stance does the novel seem to take toward the idea of progress?

Does the novel promote nostalgia? Or does the novel suggest that all living things are subject to the fate of the pattern of birth, growth, decline, and death and that our ideas of progress and nostalgia are illusions?

7. Because the novel depicts the founding of a town, the concept of genesis becomes significant. How does the novel compare with other works that employ or depict the concept of genesis? Is there a significant connection between the concept of pairing or doubling and that of genesis?

8. What seems to be the author's attitude toward the characters he depicts in this novel? Which of the characters do you think the author seems closest too, cares the most about?

Which do you think he likes the least?

Do you have a favorite character in the novel?

9. How might the illustrations of the buildings enhance both the reader's understanding and enjoyment of the novel? Why are there no human figures in the illustrations? Do the illustrations help to make Stay More more believable? Are their other ways Harington uses to make his story seem believable?

10. What might be some reason for some of the novel's characters seeming larger than life and capable of feats beyond mere humans?

11. Earlier in the novel, Jacob and Fanshaw debate whether it is better to feel importance or to feel joy. Does the subject of this debate continue through the novel, and does the novel itself argue for joy or importance?

12. What might be the significance of the narrator of Architecture reminding his readers about things he does not know? As a the reader do you want to know "everything" about a character or would you like to not be able to know "everything."

Literary Precedents

As a fictional history, the novel, like all other histories, rises out of other texts, out of stories passed down through generations, and out of the author's personal experience. Some of the texts that play a role in the novel include Walter F. Lackey's History of Newton County, Arkansas (1950) and almost all of Vance Randolph's books on the Ozarks, but especially his Ozarks: An American Survival of Primitive Society and Down in the Holler: A Gallery of Ozark Folk Speech. In Lackey's history, one can see a photograph of the members of a Masonic lodge that is very much like the photograph Eli Willard took of members of Stay More's "The Grinning and Ogling Tipplers' Union." In his interview with Douglas Wood, Harington said that "The denizens of Stay More derive from the many, many books of the beloved folklorist, Vance Randolph."

But the most obvious literary precedent and the model in its own way for is, as Harington has acknowledged on many occasions, the Nobel Prize winner Gabriel Garcia Marquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude (1967, translated 1970). Marquez's novel relates the story of a founding of a town, Macondo, the founding family, the Buendias, and their house. Macondo and the Buendias prosper, decline, and disappear together. This cyclical pattern is also that of Harington's work, and the six generations of Ingledews share some of the characteristics of the six generations of Buendias. The gypsy Melquiades who makes annual visits to Macondo and introduces new inventions is, of course, a model for Harington's Yankee peddlar, Eli Willard. Harington makes use of source material similar to that of Marquez's such as folklore and surrealism. His novel is self-reflexive like Marquez's. One might say that Harington moved Marquez's Macondo, lock, stock, and barrel, to the Arkansas Ozarks and called it Stay More, except that Stay More existed in Lightning Bug three or four years before Harington ever knew Macondo. Although the Ingledew's story may be that of the Buendias, and their stories every family's story, two major differences stand out. One is the idea of bigeminality — the two-in-one that is not the same as the concept of the double, and another is use of the illustrations and the way they are interlaced with the written text.

Although The Architecture of the Arkansas Ozarks shares many characteristics with all of Donald Harington's Stay More novels, there is an element about it that makes it seem quite different.

Some of this difference is attributable to the literary methods used to delineate the subject; another may be the absence of a dominant focus such as Latha Bourne or Daniel Montross or Tish Dingletoon and Sam Ingledew in The Cockroaches of Stay More (1989), or Kim in Let Us Build Us a City (1986), or Viridis and Nail and Latha in The Choiring of the Trees (1991), or Daniel and Ekaterina in Ekaterina (1993).

A good possibility for this difference is an element of disillusionment that, according to Regina Janes, inhabits Garcia Marquez's novel. She sees a pattern of initial promise followed by disillusionment repeated in almost every character and, consequently, in the life of Macondo. In Harington's novel the experience of disillusionment takes the form of a disease called the frakes. This disease results from hard work, and it leaves the

sufferer "feeling that there is nothing worth doing, that all labor is vain, that life is a bad and pointless joke."

Related Titles

Whether or not The Architecture of the Arkansas Ozarks is really that different from the other Stay More novels can be debated, but the conclusion of that novel almost marked the end of Harington's Stay More. For over ten years after the publication of that novel, Harington would not, for whatever reason, be able to write and publish another book. Then, in 1986, he published Let Us Build Us a City, which shares many characteristics with The Architecture of the Arkansas Ozarks.

Let Us Build Us a City uses illustrations to head each of its chapters, but the illustrations are multiple, not single, and are photographs rather than pencil drawings. These photographs, like the drawings, reflect the story of the written text. Let Us Build Us a City is a work of history and a work of fiction; it has a character, Kim, who, like Vernon, searches for another character. Kim's search takes her around Arkansas visiting "lost" towns in the hope of finding another character named "Harrigan," a name that Harington has described as "a handy disguise."

At the beginning of the story, Harrigan is in South Dakota where every night he meditates upon the ruin that is his life. Like the "lost" cities in Arkansas who proclaimed in their names their dreams of becoming prosperous cities and now find themselves on the road to nowhere, Harrigan almost believes that his career as a writer and the "dream of a small but unlost town," of Stay More, are now all but defunct. His meditation on ruins reflects the despair and disillusionment that an Ingledew male might experience from a horrendous case of the frakes. But the story of Kim and Harrigan is one of hope and, as Let Us Build Us a City witnesses, of restoration.

Significantly the last of the "lost" towns Kim visits is Y City where she finds the narrator of her search. Here, rather than dividing, as the town's name might suggest, Kim's and Harrigan's lives join. Let Us Build Us a City is, indeed, a story of building a love, a book, a marriage. In the "Epilogue and Acknowledgements," the reader learns "the climax of this story": "the nuptials of Don and Kim."

Renewed by the love of Kim and the publication of a book, Harington revived both the world of Stay More and the Ingledews in his novel, The Cockroaches of Stay More. Its perspective is quite different from and even more fantastic than that of The Architecture of the Arkansas Ozarks. It is a fable that shows how pride and fear that bring division in the world can be resolved.

Only two humans — Sharon Ingledew, one of Latha's granddaughters, and Larry Brace, her former lover who has come to Stay More to work on a literary analysis of Daniel Montross's Selected Poems — reside in what was Stay More. They not only live at opposite ends of the main street — Sharon in living quarters of her grandmother's general store and Larry in Jacob Ingledew's tri-geminal — but they do not even talk with each other. At their feet, however, the cockroaches, or roosterroaches, as the more modest Ozarkers called them, are acting out their own story.

The story of the Stay More roosterroaches, like that of The Architecture of the Arkansas Ozarks, has strong literary precedents. Among these are references to incidents or characters in Franz Kafka's Metamorphosis, Don Marquis's archy and mehitabel, Herman Melville's Moby Dick, and, most significantly, Thomas Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles. A good part of the plot involving the roosterroaches centers on the lowly Carlotter, Tish Dingletoon, going to claim kin with the high and powerful Ingledews, Hank and Sam, father and son.

Central to this plot is the love relationship that develops between Tish and Sam. At first, communication between them is difficult because of Tish's self-consciousness about her social position, and because Sam not only exhibits the human Ingledew trait of experiencing overwhelming shyness in the presence of females but he is also deaf. Their strong attraction for each other leads to their devising "a kind of sign language" that enables them to converse, to participate in social and eventually sexual intercourse. Their act of love, which impregnates Tish, joins both personal and social opposites; it harmonizes the discords of difference and division. It is another expression of marriage, like the dogtrot Jacob Ingledew built for his wife in The Architecture of the Arkansas Ozarks.

The often detested cockroach provides the "different perspective" that enables the reader to realize how dependent all life forms are. Consequently, the story of the Stay More roosterroaches and that of the Stay More humans intersect. Their lives become dependent upon each other.

Nearly every night Larry gets drunk and begins shooting cockroaches, which is one reason the roosterroaches think he is God — He kills them for His sport. One night, however, he misfires, shoots himself in the foot, and passes out. The roosterroaches, including Sam and his father, try to help Larry but realize, finally, that only another human can help him. So the roosterroaches band together to take a message to the nearest human by shaping themselves into an arrow that points toward Larry's. When Sharon sees the horde of cockroaches, she thinks she is having a bad dream, but, at last, recognizes the meaning of this wondrous message and goes to Larry's aid.

The novel also demonstrates that this dependency works both ways. Just as Sharon understands the cockroaches' message to help Larry, she is able, when she sees two roaches — Sam and Tish — floating in the bowl of her toilet, to understand enough of the message that Sam tries to convey to know that these living creatures, as different as they are from her, deserve to share life with her. The Cockroaches of Stay More is a charming fable that advocates tolerance and respect for all living creatures.

Copyright Information

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults
Includes bibliographical references.
Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.
Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.
1. Young adults□Books and reading. 2.Young adult literature□History and criticism. 3. Young adult literature□Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography□Bio-bibliography.
[1. Literature□History and criticism. 2. Literature□Bio-bibliography]
I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952
Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048ISBN 0-933833-32-6

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994