

## INTRODUCTION

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### Grand Schemes

“Louie may have told you of his Grand Scheme for licking the jinx that hovers over me. As a result, I’m now writing a ‘deliberately unambitious divertissement,’ a thriller. The critics won’t know what to make of it. Neither will I, for that matter.”

—Donald Harington, 1973

**A**S IT TURNED OUT, both critics and fans of Donald Harington’s work would have to wait almost half a century before getting a chance to make something of the diverting thriller in question. Harington wrote *Double Toil and Trouble* during the first few months of 1973 in response to a vague but compelling request by Llewellyn “Louie” Howland III, his still rather new editor at Little, Brown, for a “novel that quite deliberately adheres to the traditional modes of conventional fiction . . . a neatly plotted, tightly drawn divertissement.”<sup>1</sup> That last word, *divertissement*, shows up several more times in Harington’s subsequent letters of 1973, when he refers (with ironic self-deprecation) to the story of Hock Tuttle and the mysterious Mrs. Wilson, a woman “just this side of middle-aged” who is “dressed city-style but not expensively” when she shows up in the first chapter at the train station in Hock’s hometown of Pettigrew, Arkansas. As Mrs. Wilson soon learns, Pettigrew is as close as she can get by rail to her intended destination, the remote, rugged, and entirely fictional Ozark village of Stay More, which Harington had first created a few years earlier for his 1970 novel, *Lightning Bug*, and which would provide the setting for (or figure prominently in) the subsequent twelve novels he would publish over the ensuing four decades. Mrs. Wilson’s errand to Stay More seems as unsettling as it is urgent, revolving

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1. From Louie Howland’s January 5, 1973, letter to Harington. For more information about this letter and other contexts for *Double Toil and Trouble*, please see the appendix below, “A Deliberately Unambitious Divertissement.”

around a pair of large oblong pine boxes that are “tapered out to their widest point at the place where a body’s shoulders might be” and marked with but a single letter each. With no other wheeled transport available, Hock offers his wagon and mules for the final leg of Mrs. Wilson’s journey, innocently entangling himself in what will turn out to be a mystery unlike any other in the Stay More canon.

At just under 37,000 words, *Double Toil and Trouble* (or *DUB*, following Harington’s custom of using handy three-letter abbreviations for his books) is easily the shortest of the Stay More novels. *DUB* stands out in Harington’s work in other ways as well: the unusual Shakespearean title, the relatively strict third-person perspective, and—perhaps most curiously—the lack of any verb tense shifts in the concluding chapters.<sup>2</sup> Harington wrote *DUB* in the midst of his work on what he would come to call “the Bible of Stay More,” his 1975 novel, *The Architecture of the Arkansas Ozarks* (or *TAOTAO*), which devotes several chapters to the third generation of Ingledews (Stay More’s founding family), which *DUB* focuses its entirety on. But where *TAOTAO* takes a macroscopic view of the history of Stay More, covering some 160 years in the course of its twenty chapters, *DUB* contents itself with a comparative microcosm, devoting its thirteen chapters to the span of about a week.

To learn more about the backstory of this previously unpublished installment in the Stay More saga, please see the appendix below, “A Deliberately Unambitious Divertissement,” where selections from Harington’s correspondence from the period clearly demonstrate the author’s disappointment that it was not published at the time. In fact, as his letters to *DUB*’s dedicatee, Dick McDonough, particularly make clear, Harington envisaged the novel’s publication someday even after Howland had declined it. The publisher’s grand scheme had worked for the author, at any rate.

If *DUB* itself represents the grandest of the grand schemes presented in this volume, the stories that follow it—spanning some three decades of Harington’s career—spring no less eagerly from the same hope for a

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2. All of Harington’s other books (including his 1986 nonfiction novel, *Let Us Build Us a City*) shift from the past to the present and, finally, to the future tense to (in effect) conclude the book without ending the story. (See *The Guestroom Novelist: A Donald Harington Miscellany*, especially pp. 132 and 173, for Harington’s explanation of his signature narrative strategy; see also the final paragraphs of his final novel, 2009’s *Enduring*.)

wider readership. The first two represent Harington's "Esquire period," the middle to late 1960s—between his first published novel, *The Cherry Pit* (1965), and *Lightning Bug*—when his agent managed to place several stories in *Esquire*. Known for its complicated prescription of masculine lifestyles in midcentury America, the magazine had published Arthur Schlesinger's famous essay "The Crisis of American Masculinity" in the November 1958 issue and featured numerous writers—from Ernest Hemingway to Norman Mailer—whose work, often notoriously, spoke to both men's aspirations and their fears.<sup>3</sup> But regardless of their gender-inflected elements, both of the *Esquire* stories included here preview important themes and effects in Harington's later novels.

"A Second Career" offers Harington's take on an instructively standard figure in American literature: the man of the cloth who fails to practice what he preaches. Ambitious but unimaginative, especially in his interactions with women, Reverend Winstead displays unhealthy, even immature preoccupations that do not augur well for his calling. Similar traits mark out the preachers who will soon begin to show up in Harington's *Stay More*, including the ardent Every Dill in *Lightning Bug*, the magical Long Jack Stapleton (an unmistakable Harington avatar) in *The Architecture of the Arkansas Ozarks*, the uproariously hypocritical roosterroach Reverend Chiddiok Tichborne in *The Cockroaches of Stay More* (1989), and the obsessive, mean-spirited Emmett Binns of *The Pitcher Shower* (2005). But if Reverend Winstead seems like a mere stripling (both as an actor within his fictional world and as a character in Harington's pantheon) next to these more imposing successors, the efforts of this early story's would-be fictionist to ground his work in real, lived experience still allow the metafictionist in Harington to evoke the inevitable subjectivity of art, the inability of the final work *not* to embed a self-portrait of the artist. The struggling, self-obsessed young minister strives to blend reality meaningfully and essentially into his fictions, a key theme for Harington that would grow only more urgent as he elaborated it through his subsequent novels.

"Down in the Dumps" also makes itself an ironic heir to an important American literary tradition: the disillusioned insider's critique of

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3. For a much fuller picture of *Esquire's* complicated contributions to twentieth-century images and conventions of masculinity, see Brad Congdon's *Leading with the Chin: Writing American Masculinities in Esquire, 1960–1989* (University of Toronto Press, 2018).

soul-killing materialism. Attorney Russell Thornhill gradually but decisively grows more alienated from his career and his marriage in a scenario that could easily turn tragic. But in Harington's hands, Thornhill's fall works just as well as a comedic ascent to unexpected moral and philosophical freedoms. In fact, within the unlikely bromance that takes bloom in the local junkyard, Harington conjures a possibility perhaps unique in all of his fiction: a happy ending that does not spring from a hopeful coupling between man and woman.

The other two stories selected for this collection jump forward a few decades to the mid-1990s, when our author was facing the prospect of losing his longtime publisher, Harcourt Brace & Company.<sup>4</sup> In a letter to his editor dated June 22, 1995, Harington explained that he was enclosing several slightly modified chapters from his forthcoming novel, *Butterfly Weed* (1996), for submission to mainstream literary magazines and that, with a "rekindled interest in the short story as a form," he intended "to spend the rest of the summer trying to write a few new ones." The effort didn't entirely work, at least not as the author had hoped; none of the stories were accepted at those literary magazines, and *Butterfly Weed* would, in fact, prove the last Harington novel that Harcourt would publish. But these labors did result in a pair of delightful stories, "Telling Time" and "The Freehand Heart," that both underscore the importance of Stay More to Harington's gifts as a creator of narrative fiction and show how lovingly Harington had broadened the imaginative possibilities for his Gentle Reader over his decades of novelist's work.

"Telling Time" tells the story of storytelling in Stay More, the child Dawny from *Lightning Bug* (and, eventually, from Harington's 1998 novel, *When Angels Rest*) sharing a winning tale of rival yarn spinners Lion (or, really, Lyin') Jude and Harry Tongue (the first name a creative anagram of "Donald" and the second a close reconfiguration of "Harington"). The narrator of "Telling Time" is a classic Harington avatar, an aged, scholarly version of the ardent young Dawny remembering how, as a child, he ate up the very different types of stories that the rivals produced (Lion Jude conjures fantastical fairy tales while Harry Tongue sticks to factual historical creations). When Dawny declares a winner (or at least his personal favorite) and proceeds to explain why, the child's innocent comparison

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4. Beginning with his 1986 nonfiction novel, *Let Us Build Us a City*, Harington published five consecutive books with Harcourt, his longest continuous run with any of his publishers.

of the storytellers' respective merits conveys some of the aged novelist's cleverest (and most wistful) commentary on his own work. Harington also uses the story to pay tribute to Mary Celestia Parler, a beloved folklorist and his predecessor as a member of the University of Arkansas faculty.<sup>5</sup> Within this clever scenario, "Telling Time" touches deftly on the deepest, most heartfelt themes of the world of *Stay More*: the hungry imagination; the bountiful, complex relationship among language, nature, and identity; and the yearning for love and human connection.

The final entry of the volume, "The Freehand Heart," perhaps surpasses even "Telling Time" in its masterful layering of signature Harington themes. If, at first, the relationship that develops between the two protagonists, Richard "Dick" Roe and Omega "Meg" Koontz, seems like little more than a sweet coming-of-age romance between a clumsy country bumpkin and a lonely urban sophisticate transplanted to the hinterlands, Harington subtly builds it into something much more resonant by the end of the story. Bonded initially by their mockable names, Dick Roe and Meg Koontz find *Stay More* both bringing them together and testing their relationship in ways that they could never have anticipated. The title of this cleverly deromanticized romance by itself suggests Harington's munificent loneliness as an artist, and the story it heads cleverly realizes the ambition of inscribing one's name into nature. The story ends with a revelation that may seem like a mistake but that finally helps "The Freehand Heart" to conjure an unusual vision of the fiercely independent artist—no matter how lonely the work.

### Note on the Texts

As in the Harington-authored texts featured in *The Guestroom Novelist: A Donald Harington Miscellany* (University of Arkansas Press, 2019), I have tried to keep my editorial intrusions to a minimum in this volume, mostly correcting typos (and other obvious errors) and regularizing punctuation throughout. But where, in *The Guestroom Novelist*, the latter

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5. Parler's students nicknamed her "Mrs. Chaucer" for her love of the medieval English poet whose inspired comedic treatment of vernacular speech serves as a precursor to Harington's own fascination, some six centuries later, with the inexhaustible delights of dialect. See "Mary Celestia Parler (1904–81)," CALS Encyclopedia of Arkansas, Central Arkansas Library System, last modified May 10, 2018, <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/mary-celestia-parler-3616/>.

effort mostly involved the addition of Oxford commas that Harington sometimes left out, here in *DUB*, it has required the much more frequent excision of grammatically superfluous commas, particularly those that Harington oddly insisted on inserting between the elements of simple compound verbs. (Let me take a moment here to offer special thanks to copy editor Katie Herman for her diligent efforts to regularize the punctuation of this volume—at least to the degree that seemed safe in light of Harington’s many creative idiosyncrasies as a writer.) Readers who would like to track the evolution of Harington’s usage practices across the decades are strongly encouraged to go through the original typescript of *DUB*, which is available in the Harington archive maintained by the University of Arkansas’s Special Collections.

The original typescript of *DUB* should also prove a boon to anyone interested in Harington’s always-complicated relationship with editors and the publishing business. The typescript retains editor Louie Howland’s often detailed critiques, suggestions, and corrections penciled into the margins and within the text itself. Initially, I planned to include these annotations in footnotes, but I soon abandoned the idea, primarily because Harington’s ghost almost immediately forsook its cozy haunts in Stay More to charge my desk chair in St. Louis and howl in protest at the outrageous idea of intruding on the reader’s experience with such needless, distracting trivia. So, while it seems likely (had they ended up seeing *DUB* into print together) that Harington would have accepted several of the more minor edits that Howland suggested, it also seemed best in this case to present a version that sticks as faithfully to the author’s original vision as possible.