

MYTHOSSIPPI: THE CALL TO ADVENTURE

A Thesis

by

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This thesis meets the standards for scope and quality of  
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and is hereby approved.

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## ABSTRACT

*Mythossippi: The Call to Adventure* is largely inspired by the rich tradition of folklore in the American South, where narration still holds strong social significance and is implemented to convey values, bring people together, and imbue life with art. Qualities of Old World folktales, such as the hero's journey, enchanted objects, and terrifying creatures are still utilized in storytelling throughout. Paying homage to this age-old tradition, Turner invites the viewer to explore Mythossippi — a fictional locale fabricated from a light-hearted critique of the contemporary American South using traditional folklore and personal narratives to weave a humorous tall tale.

This work creates an environmental installation utilizing a combination of sculptural forms, printmaking techniques, found objects, sound, smell, and light where the viewer can suspend disbelief and allow themselves to surrender to the whimsical, the comedic, the ominous, and the foreboding.

## DEDICATION

To my awesome wife, Sauce Mott; my incredible family; my favorite storyteller, Papaw;  
and to Dixie, with love.

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## PROLOGUE

Way down in a holler lies a humble community called Chicken Bone. The lazy waters of Moccasin Creek wind through this little patch of paradise on its way to the Mythissippi River. Live oaks grow along the banks and offer the perfect spot to nap in the shade. That's exactly what our boys happen to be doin'. His big ole bear paws dipped into the water, Pants is snorin' up a storm. Sprawled out on his belly lies a fox by the name of Bushel Britches. Stayin' up all night schemin' has these brothers plum tuckered out.

Head Hog Uncle Bluegill's been hittin' the campaign trail hard these days, talkin' about keepin' foreigners outta the Velvet Ditch. He don't want nobody havin' sex or sippin' whiskey, neither. Funny notion, comin' from the slobbery jowls of a philanderin' drunk. The Right Reverend Brother Buzzard has been on a tear, too. Hollerin' about hellfire and brimstone, that mean ole carcass- eatin' vulture has everybody in town worried after their immortal souls. Even the kudzu seems restless, growin' taller and thicker ever day as if it's tryin' to keep somethin' or someone out. All that mess don't sit right with Pants or Bushel Britches, so they reckon they need to do somethin' about it. They're just waitin' on a sign.

A rustlin' in the underbrush startles the brothers from their slumber, and they look up just in time to see a bolt of lightnin' strike the kudzu barrier on the other side of the creek. Out of the smoke comes a jackalope. With crystalline antlers and iridescent fur, she leaps Moccasin Creek in a single bound and strides confidently over to where the brothers sit.

Buzzards immediately begin to swarm overhead, searchin' for the cause of the disturbance. The kudzu tries to reach for her, tree limbs crack and pop under the strain.

Boars crash through the undergrowth, snortin' and squealin' and foamin' at the mouth with anger.

In that moment, our boys understand that a divine entity, takin' earthly form as a jackalope, has descended upon the Mythissippi forest. She aims to stir up the state of affairs. Always lookin' for a little mischief, our intrepid heroes join her quest and now travel down the dirt road of trials.

## FANCY BOOK LEARNIN

### Conceptual Investigation

*Mythossippi: The Call to Adventure* is largely inspired by the rich tradition of folklore in the American South, where narration still holds strong social significance and is implemented to convey values, bring people together, and imbue life with art.<sup>1</sup> Qualities of Old World folktales, such as the hero's journey, enchanted objects, and terrifying creatures are still utilized in storytelling throughout. Growing up in Mississippi, storytelling was at the core of almost every social gathering. Parables and Proverbs were recited at church and Sunday school to communicate a code of ethics. Playing with action figures or costumes gave us opportunities to craft our own adventures. Family reunions offered grandparents an opportunity to impart tall tales of their upbringing, and allowed siblings and cousins to laugh at each other over embarrassing anecdotes and share a sense of pride in familial accomplishments. At bedtime, my mother would read classic novels like *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and my father would tell personal narratives about heroic family dogs, strange neighbors with awesome names like Booger Red, humbling summer jobs, and baseball seasons ruined by broken arms. These individual storytelling techniques are historically linked to the very beginnings of Southern culture. Paying homage to this age-old tradition, the viewer is invited to explore Mythossippi — a fictional locale fabricated as a light-hearted critique of the contemporary American South using traditional folklore and personal narratives to weave a humorous tall tale.

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<sup>1</sup> Simon J Bronner, "Storytelling." In *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, edited by Charles Reagan Wilson and William Ferris, (The University of North Carolina Press, 1989) 488

Mythosissippi is presented as an installation to construct an aesthetic experience utilizing a combination of sculptural forms, printmaking techniques, found objects, sound, smell, and light to cultivate a mythical environment that presents the physical manifestation of my story. The conceptual framework for the exhibition is based on research of Joseph Campbell's monomyth theory, the tradition of narration in the American South, the collaborative experience of storytelling, art as experience, and installation art.

### **The Hero's Journey**

Joseph Campbell (March 26, 1904 – October 30, 1987) was an American comparative mythologist best known for his book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Studying hero myths and legends from around the world, Campbell discovered common patterns in these stories. Spanning human history, cultural groups from every corner of the globe rely on several basic stages to create their hero's quest<sup>2</sup>. Campbell refers to this shared configuration as "the monomyth." George Lucas (b. 1944) employed the monomyth theory when writing *Star Wars*, and the stages of the hero's journey are easily mapped in *Episode IV: A New Hope*.

- Status Quo (the Ordinary World): The protagonist exists in an uneventful world. Luke Skywalker lives a boring life as a moisture farmer on Tatooine. He longs for something more.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, (Princeton University Press, 2004), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 45.

- The Call to Adventure: Something forces the protagonist into action. R2D2 shows Skywalker a message from the stars and then leaves the farm. Luke follows him into the desert at great risk to his health.<sup>4</sup>
- Supernatural Aid: The hero receives help from someone with powers, often above the laws of physics. Old Ben Kenobi, the Jedi hermit, saves Luke from the dreaded Sand People. R2 plays the message for Kenobi, who asks Skywalker to join him on a mission to save the galaxy.<sup>5</sup>
- Talisman: Luke receives his father's lightsaber, a special item to help him on his quest.<sup>6</sup>
- Refusing the Call: Refusing the quest only results in disaster. This reinforces that the hero is chosen by the greater forces at work. Skywalker, though he wants to see the stars, tells Kenobi that he must stay to help on the farm. Only after discovering his aunt and uncle burned to a crisp does he decide to join the Jedi on his quest.
- Allies/Helpers: Han Solo and Chewbacca join Skywalker, Kenobi, C3PO and R2D2 on their quest.<sup>7</sup>
- Crossing the Threshold: The heroes enter a new world. Luke must learn to navigate this new reality. The bar in Mos Eisley, working with a smuggler and a Wookiee, being introduced to the nature of the Force, and navigating

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 65.

a conflict with the Empire all take Luke out of his comfort zone and he must adapt or die.<sup>8</sup>

- Tests & the Supreme Ordeal: Often referred to as the “road of trials,” the protagonist must progress through a series of trials which prepare them for the final conflict. Rescue Princess Leia, escape from the Death Star, destroy the ultimate battle station.<sup>9</sup>
- Reward and the Journey Home: The victorious heroes receive a reward for their endurance, bravery, and strength. Skywalker and his companions are honored by the Rebellion.<sup>10</sup>

These basic building blocks can be rearranged to best suit the needs of the author, some occurring simultaneously. *Mythosippi: the Call to Adventure* shows the protagonists answering the call, leaving the ordinary world, and proceeding down the dirt road of trials. The threshold is guarded, and here they encounter their first trial.

## **Southern Narration**

Long before the arrival of European migrants and enslaved Africans, Native Americans living in the Southeast such as the Cherokee and Choctaw employed oral tradition to share creation myths; personal, familial and collective history; and humorous tales — often including the adventures of animal tricksters.<sup>11</sup> These tricksters,

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Joyner, “Folklife.” In *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, edited by Charles Reagan Wilson and William Ferris, (The University of North Carolina Press, 1989) 477.

most frequently taking the form of a rabbit, were self-deprecating and often played the fool.

European settlers brought with them Gallic narratives such as “Beauty and the Beast,” English folktales like “Jack the Giant Killer,” and other Old World fairy tales such as those popularized by the Brothers Grimm. Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), in his article *The Storyteller*, refers to the fairy tale as the first tutor of children and therefore the first tutor of all mankind.

Whenever good counsel was at a premium, the fairytale had it, and where the need was greatest, its aid was nearest. This need was the need created by the myth. The fairy tale tells us of the earliest arrangements that mankind made to shake off the nightmare which the myth had placed upon its chest. In the figure of the fool, it shows us how mankind ‘acts dumb’ toward the myth; in the figure of the younger brother, it shows us how one’s chances increase as the mythical primitive times are left behind; in the figure of the man who sets out to learn what fear is, it shows us that the thing we are afraid of can be seen through... The wisest thing the fairy tale taught mankind in olden times, and teaches children to this day, is to meet the forces of the mystical world with cunning and with high spirits.<sup>12</sup>

Enslaved Africans from Senegal, the Gambia, Guinea, and Angola brought their traditions of storytelling with tales of animal tricksters who use wit and cunning to gain advantage over powerful adversaries.<sup>13</sup> It’s intriguing to note that the most popular African animal trickster was also the rabbit.

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<sup>12</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn, (New York: Schocken Books, 1968) 90.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Joyner, “Folklife.” In *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, edited by Charles Reagan Wilson and William Ferris, (The University of North Carolina Press, 1989) 477.

Colonization of the region resulted in a fascinating, albeit highly problematic, environment of cultural exchange in which the narrative traditions of Native Americans, Euro-Americans and African Americans were adapted and transformed by one another.

Pandering to European audiences' desire for the exotic, the strange, and the savage; New World explorers in the region developed the southern tall tale.<sup>14</sup> By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the tall tale had culminated in competitive liars' contests in which local storytellers would spin yarns about impossible weather, miraculous crop growth, indestructible beasts, and the heroes who vanquished them.<sup>15</sup>

Over time, the European fairy tales were shortened through retelling and re-presentation, often becoming humorous. Laughter became the veil through which one could speak about the "concerns and tensions of southern society."<sup>16</sup> However, due to its comedic nature, southern folklore is often dismissed as "peripheral entertainment."<sup>17</sup> While this narrative tradition often deals with star-crossed lovers, feuds, hauntings, and buried treasure; it also preserves traditions and continues to comment on social roles in contemporary settings.<sup>18</sup>

Historically, folk humor in this region typically relied on five character archetypes: the preacher, the planter, the politician, the poor white, and the Negro.<sup>19</sup> Often, these characters are used comically to highlight important social issues. For

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 478.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 478.

<sup>16</sup> Charles Joyner, "Folklife." In *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, edited by Charles Reagan Wilson and William Ferris, (The University of North Carolina Press, 1989) 477.

<sup>17</sup> Simon J Bronner, "Storytelling." In *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, edited by Charles Reagan Wilson and William Ferris, (The University of North Carolina Press, 1989) 488.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 488.

<sup>19</sup> Douglas Southall Freeman, *A Treasury of Southern Folklore: Stories, Ballads, Traditions, and Folkways of the People of the South*. (Crown Publishers, 1953) x.

instance, the preacher is utilized to caution against hypocrisy and highlight the imperfections of the clergy, using the veil of laughter.<sup>20</sup> For the purposes of this body of work, the “folktypes” are updated to eliminate the unnecessary and problematic racial distinction.<sup>21</sup> *Mythossippi* relies on the divine, the preacher, the planter, the politician, and the poor for its folktypes.

Additionally, southern storytellers often use the rule of threes to give their stories symmetry and order.<sup>22</sup> This rule is utilized to: create episodic narratives with a beginning, middle, and end; give the protagonist three tasks; or structure the story with three characters.<sup>23</sup> The narratives also employ binary forces such as good and evil, North and South, or urban and rural.<sup>24</sup> The story taking place in the gallery is modeled after tales of religious revelation:

The great range of personal experience narrative is apparent when viewing the mundane comic antics of local characters on one side and the scared spiritual quality of personal conversion stories on the other. The emphasis in southern Protestant fundamentalism on personal revelation, on being born again through a transcendent experience, results in a large body of traditional stories existing within this religious context. The stories are based on individual mystical experience, but they reflect traditional and communal patterns. Often people speak of visions and voices, of being in contact with angels, Christ, or God, of being outside of ordinary reality. These traits suggest a ritual process that is cross-cultural; there is a separation from everyday existence, and entering into a

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<sup>20</sup> Simon J Bronner, “Storytelling.” In *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, edited by Charles Reagan Wilson and William Ferris, (The University of North Carolina Press, 1989) 488.

<sup>21</sup> The only reason anyone in the South would distinguish between the poor white and the “negro” falls back on the racist notion, “well... at least I’m not black.” I don’t know how you cite that, but it’s real.

<sup>22</sup> Simon J Bronner, “Storytelling.” In *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, edited by Charles Reagan Wilson and William Ferris, (The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 488.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.,488.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.,488.

mystical state in which the person experiences oneness with God and all humanity, and then a return to structured society. The personal experience narrative acts as a means of reincorporating the mystical event into everyday reality, a structuring of an unstructured incident so that it can be shared with and perhaps inspire others.<sup>25</sup>

## **Storytelling as Experience**

Benjamin asserts the essential qualities that define storytelling are the characteristics which distinguish it from literature. Storytellers rely on experience passed on by word of mouth.<sup>26</sup> In contrast, the novel is born out of solitude and relies solely on the written word, which he defines as “information.”<sup>27</sup>

The value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new. It lives only at that moment; it has to surrender to it completely and explain itself to it without losing any time. A story is different. It does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time.<sup>28</sup>

When presenting or delivering a narrative, style is particularly important. Speech pattern and manipulation, descriptive dialogue, and expressive gestures are common among storytellers. The southern style is marked by a relaxed verbal performance, altering voices to differentiate between characters, onomatopoeia, localized vocabulary, and expressive hand gestures.<sup>29</sup> The storyteller draws from the wealth of communal experience passed on through oral tradition and creates an ephemeral experience for

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<sup>25</sup> Patrick B Mullen, “Personal Experience Narratives.” In *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, edited by Charles Reagan Wilson and William Ferris, (The University of North Carolina Press, 1989) 484.

<sup>26</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn, (New York: Schocken Books, 1968) 90.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 490.

their audience.<sup>30</sup> Each story is shaped by the intent of the narrator (to entertain or educate), by the composition of the audience with its real-time responses, and by the context under which it is told.<sup>31</sup> In this way, storytelling becomes a collaborative aesthetic experience.<sup>32</sup>

My personal storytelling style is an amalgam cherry picked from my favorite storytellers. My maternal grandfather, Bill Hales, has heavily influenced the humor in my work. Often laughing so hard he can barely finish his story, Papaw taught me to value comedy and to share it in a relatable way. I strive to recreate the sense of wonder I feel when reading Bill Watterson's *Calvin & Hobbes*, Mike Mignola's *Hellboy*, and the works of Mark Twain. My father's slow, methodical, and soft-spoken cadence finds its way into my work as I build tension in narrative and between characters. I'm also inspired by classic American tall tales like those surrounding larger-than-life figures such as Davy Crockett and John Henry.

Wayne White's (b. 1957) artistic practice inspired me to embrace the entertaining nature of storytelling. White considers his work to be a form of entertainment, but he is cognizant of the fact that the Western art world does not look fondly on art as pure entertainment:<sup>33</sup>

Entertainment is a dirty word in the art world. You're not supposed to entertain people. You're supposed to question their core values and make them re-evaluate their lives and give them a deep insight into blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, fucking blah.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 490.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 490.

<sup>32</sup> For this reason, I choose not to write the full story of Mythosippi in this text. It continues to develop as I tell it. I desire for this story to live in the moment, and to be passed on orally. In this way, the story does not become static but is transformed by each telling and each teller.

<sup>33</sup> White, *Beauty is Embarrassing*. 00:17:24 – 00:17:24

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 00:10:52 – 00:11:29

As a storyteller and an artist, my goal has always been to entertain. I often find myself struggling with the notion that my work needs to say something important, i.e. politically relevant. That's not my outright strength, and forcing myself to work specifically in that fashion is very dissatisfying. The only time I want to pound my fist on the table is when I'm laughing. If a composition doesn't make me laugh, it will remain unfinished. I need humor to survive, much less create. The problems addressed through *Mythosippi*, such as political and religious corruption, are very real, but only humor opens the door to address those issues.

### **Art as Experience**

Benjamin postulates in his article, *The Storyteller*, that the art of storytelling is waning as experience has fallen in value compared to the public interest to gather information, i.e. the written word.<sup>35</sup> He further suggests that the novel and its mass dissemination via the printing press is responsible for the devaluing of experience.<sup>36</sup> As the proliferation of twenty-four hour news networks and clickbait headlines bring their audiences an insurmountable amount of information and “alternative facts<sup>37</sup>,” one might concede Benjamin's point.

Considering Guy Debord's (1931-1994) *Society of the Spectacle* which argues that authenticity has been replaced with representation within contemporary society, the value of experience seems to remain on the decline.<sup>38</sup> He argues that social relationships

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>37</sup> Seriously, we are doomed.

<sup>38</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, (France: Black & Red, 1970) 5.

are now facilitated by images, which result in a lack of authenticity, perception, knowledge, and critical thought.<sup>39</sup> Image trumps experience.

However, contemporary art works largely negate these arguments by creating aesthetic experiences based on what Umberto Eco (b. 1932) describes as “open work.” Eco argues that open work, in all artistic endeavors, seeks to convey innumerable possible meanings to its viewer.<sup>40</sup> He states, “‘Openness’ ... is the guarantee of a particularly rich kind of pleasure that our civilization pursues as one of its most precious values, since every aspect of our culture invites us to conceive, feel and thus see the world as possibility.”<sup>41</sup> Eco believes that this has a profound effect on art by rejecting medium specificity in favor of a malleable field of possibilities.<sup>42</sup> Like many other fields of study, innovation in art occurs when preconceived limitations are tested. This openness, extending beyond the physical properties of any given discipline, also applies to the viewers’ experience with the work and recognizes that every viewer will interpret the work differently.<sup>43</sup>

By accepting infinite interpretations, the focus shifts from the art object to the aesthetic experience it creates.<sup>44</sup> This experience begins to break down the barrier between the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic and changes the patron’s position from

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>40</sup> Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. by Anna Cancogni, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) 94.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>43</sup> It’s like that cave on Dagobah. You know what’s in there? Only what you take with you.

<sup>44</sup> Julianne Rebentisch, “Participation in Art: 10 Theses,” trans. Gerrit Jackson. In *Contemporary Art: 1989 to the Present*, edited by Alexander Dumbadze and Suzanne Hudson, 267-276, (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013) 269.

passive observer to participating, activated viewer.<sup>45</sup> In *Mythossippi*, the viewer is invited to interpret how the scene in front of them came to be, and how it will play out. The prompts within the exhibition hint that the protagonists will emerge victorious, but there is no guarantee.

Nicolas Bourriaud (b. 1965) describes this postmodern aesthetic experience in his work, *Relational Aesthetics*.<sup>46</sup> Bourriaud believes that contemporary artistic practice focuses on inter-human relations, and concludes that the contemporary art experience is no longer one where a viewer simply walks through a space but comes into an experience that must be lived.<sup>47</sup>

All representation (though contemporary art *models* more than it represents, and fits into the social fabric more than it draws inspiration therefrom) refers to values that can be transposed into society. As a human activity based on commerce, art is, at once, the object and subject of an ethic. And this all the more so because, unlike other activities, *its sole function is to be exposed to this commerce*. Art is a state of encounter.<sup>48</sup>

The viewer is not alone in its activation in the contemporary aesthetic experience. As work is no longer self-contained, the non-aesthetic is also activated.<sup>49</sup> When pieces of reality are indistinguishable from the artwork, they become something more — neither reality nor unambiguous signs.<sup>50</sup> This ambivalence creates the potential for

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 269.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 269.

<sup>47</sup> Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. by Simon Pleasance & Fronza Woods, (France: Les Presses du Réel, 1998) 13.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>49</sup> Julianne Rebentisch, “Participation in Art: 10 Theses,” trans. Gerrit Jackson. In *Contemporary Art: 1989 to the Present*, edited by Alexander Dumbadze and Suzanne Hudson, 267-276, (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013) 269.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 269.

representation.<sup>40</sup> Juliane Rebentisch refers to this as “aesthetic play.”<sup>51</sup> Found and discarded items placed strategically throughout the installation follow this model.

Rebentisch builds on this concept with “aesthetic materiality.”<sup>52</sup> With the activation of “simple reality,” attention is drawn to the material nature of both the aesthetic and non-aesthetic, and tension arises as viewers attempt to decipher which elements should be regarded as artwork and which should not.<sup>53</sup> Participation comes from acting out that tension.<sup>44</sup> Within the scope of *Mythossippi* this tension presents itself through the implementation of found objects, looped sound, and smell.

This tension, per Rebentisch, has the capability to affect the “safety of the spectator’s position” as they become part of the artwork, referring to this process as “aesthetic subject.” Here, participation comes from emotional responses from the viewer.<sup>54</sup> Aesthetic Play and Materiality become even more important regarding this emotional dimension of the contemporary experience. Emotions are interwoven into our interactions and assumptions about the world.<sup>55</sup> Contemporary aesthetic experiences work with this understanding to activate the viewer/participant on an emotional level.<sup>56</sup>

By drawing an emotional response, our own normative orientations and social influences are re-presented to us.<sup>57</sup> To participate in an artwork in this way is to experience its infinite potential, as Eco states in *The Open Work*: “The viewer can either

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 269.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 272.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 272.

work toward the recognition of an intentional message or abandon himself to the vital and unchecked flux of his most unpredictable reactions.”<sup>58</sup> This concept is also reminiscent of Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* in which he calls for created moments that give the participant a sense of self-awareness in particular space or environment.<sup>59</sup>

## **Installation Art**

Contemporary artists often use a combination of these aesthetic experience practices, most successfully in installation art, which rose to prominence in the 1990s.<sup>60</sup> Over the last decade, the position of installation art has shifted from a relatively marginal practice to achieving mainstream status within contemporary visual culture.

Installation art creates experiences that are open for interpretation.<sup>61</sup> Additionally, it can create environments where the viewer is invited to participate.<sup>62</sup> Supporting Eco’s statement of Open Work, it defies medium-specific discourse by incorporating any number of traditional or nontraditional mediums.<sup>63</sup> Installation art, relying on the concept of aesthetic play, does not accept fixed boundaries.<sup>64</sup> This

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<sup>58</sup> Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. by Anna Cancogni, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) 100.

<sup>59</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, (France: Black & Red, 1970) 37.

<sup>60</sup> Nicolas De Oliveira, Nicola Oxley and Michael Petry. *Installation Art in the New Millennium*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003) 13.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 5.

experimentation is infectious and has encouraged artists to examine and challenge the boundaries of their chosen mediums.<sup>65</sup>

This notion has dramatically affected the way I perceive my “chosen medium,” printmaking. Often conceived as highly traditional, almost to a fault, and “perennially on the verge of obsolescence,” printmaking has been considered closer to craft than fine art: flat paper with clean edges, shown on the wall behind glass in a frame.<sup>66</sup> The discipline is experiencing significant change as it begins to incorporate mixed media, digital technology and photography.<sup>67</sup>

The contemporary artist makes use of traditional printmaking techniques to make work, which becomes 3D objects or installations and even moving image pieces and animations. Artists have allowed themselves to leave the conventions of printmaking behind and have dared to do the unthinkable to prints or to print on unconventional surfaces, which have resulted in their work developing in different ways.<sup>68</sup>

The original intent of printmaking, as seen in medieval woodcuts and engravings from the Renaissance, was to utilize the power of the multiple to convey narrative on a massive scale — to spread stories far and wide. As a narrative artwork based in traditional and contemporary printmaking methods, *Mythossippi* retains a strong connection to the origins of the medium while advancing the art form using new technologies and interdisciplinary practices.

Building on the tradition of southern narration, I have created a humorous tall tale which is an amalgam of personal experience and fabrication. This story remains

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>66</sup> Sarah Suzuki, "Print People: A Brief Taxonomy of -Contemporary Printmaking." *Art Journal* 70, no. 4 (Winter 2011): 6-25. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed February 22, 2015).

<sup>67</sup> Alexia Tala, *Installations and Experimental Printmaking*, (London: A&C Black, 2011) 101.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 8.

fluid, inviting others to share in its telling, and attempts to create an experience. That experience is presented as a spectacle and invites viewer participation and interpretation. Participation is achieved even without the viewer's knowledge as they navigate the installation and interpret meaning from the created works and altered reality. *Mythossippi* must be lived.

## **Material Investigation**

Material investigation for *Mythossippi* is heavily influenced by the sculptural works of Wayne White. White is an American artist originally from Chattanooga, Tennessee. Known largely for his word paintings, White began his career as puppet designer, set designer, and voice actor on Pee-Wee's Playhouse after moving to Manhattan during the 1980s.<sup>69</sup> Capitalizing on this experience, White creates oversized puppets and sculptural works that result in interactive installations and parades.<sup>70</sup> His site-specific installations are inspired by local historical facts, figures, and folktales:<sup>71</sup> White uses cardboard as his primary medium stating:

It's cheap and there's plenty of it. I like it because I can work fast... With a good blade and hot glue gun you can build something in space about as fast as you can draw it. It moves at a pace that captures your line and gesture. And it is easily ripped apart and changed so there is no anxiety about decisions – things can improve with trial and

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<sup>69</sup> Lori Zimmer, *The Art of Cardboard: Big Ideas for Creativity, Collaboration, Storytelling and Reuse*. (Massachusetts: Rockport Publishers, 2015) 90.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>71</sup> Lori Zimmer, *The Art of Cardboard: Big Ideas for Creativity, Collaboration, Storytelling and Reuse*. (Massachusetts: Rockport Publishers, 2015) 90.

error... [Cardboard] is and old friend from way back. I'm corrugated cardboard. As are you – non-archival, but full of everyday love and ready to make some cool shit.<sup>72</sup>

The nature of cardboard as described by White is synonymous to the ephemeral nature of hearing the storyteller live as opposed to published.

Cardboard first became a personal vehicle for expression when I had the fortune to work with artist Julian Curran. As part of a collaborative performance piece for her MFA thesis exhibition at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, I helped Julia create donkey masks out of cardboard that were painted and adorned with patterned prints (Fig 1). I was amazed at how quickly my sketch became a three-dimensional object. When working with cardboard, I experience little anxiety about my materials — there's always more. Experimentation does not have to be costly.

Building on this experience, I created a grackle mask in the same fashion. The form was assembled using cardboard attached to a hardhat using hot glue with hand-cut screenprints for feathers (Fig. 2).<sup>73</sup>

Influenced by this, a large majority of the printed materials in *Mythossippi* are presented in sculptural form. Mass amounts of screenprinted patterns on multiple colors of paper were laser-cut and reconfigured to create fur and feathers, expediting the fabrication process.

Through the posture and positioning of the sculptural works, accompanied by prints, the viewer is prompted to put the pieces together, creating their own version of the narrative playing out before them.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 92-93.

<sup>73</sup> Never ever want to do that again. Good God.

## Mythossippi

The modified folktypes from Southern storytelling, the tenets of Campbell's monomyth, and Relational Aesthetics underlie *Mythossippi: The Call to Adventure*. Presented as an installation, the viewer is invited into an aesthetic experience, a physical manifestation of a story.

Before entering the installation, viewers are introduced to Mythossippi by an image accompanied by an artist statement. *Call to Adventure* shows the three protagonists staring attentively down an overgrown and tangled pathway (Fig 3). Above the creeping vegetation, a buzzard sits atop a grain silo, watching and waiting. His congregation soars in the air around him, searching for fallen prey. This image builds on ominous tension while inviting the viewer to cross the threshold and enter Mythossippi.

Overgrown foliage — namely kudzu, looms over the installation. This clinging vine has a reputation for its contradictory will to survive and its destructive nature. Kudzu, known as “the vine that ate the South” was introduced to curb soil erosion.<sup>74</sup> But with no natural predators, the vine wraps its tendrils around everything in its path smothering local flora, bringing down powerlines, and swallowing structures whole. It can grow up to a foot per day and spreads at a rate of 150,000 acres annually.<sup>75</sup> Thus, this amorphous canopy represents the planter folktype, serving as a metaphor for man's paradoxical relationship with nature, the primary antagonist in this story, and the

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<sup>74</sup> James H Miller, Global Invasive Species Database (2016) Species profile: *Pueraria montana* var. *lobata*

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

supernatural opposite of the jackalope.<sup>76</sup> “The road to hell is paved with good intentions.”

Walking through the opening in the fence, the viewer is met with a forgotten corner of the Mythissippi wilderness — glowing with lightning bugs, the scent of soil and white oak, and a cacophony of sounds (Fig 3). Green laser lights mimic lightning bugs slowly dancing amongst the foliage.<sup>77</sup> Speakers placed in the installation play a recording of forest sounds at sunset. The call and answer of cicadas reach a fever pitch followed by silence. This repeats throughout the duration of the exhibition. Disheveled and discarded objects such as sun bleached plastic toys, a wheel barrow, and broken cinder blocks allude that the space is not new but has stagnated — not unlike tenants of contemporary southern society (Fig 4).

Enveloped by the kudzu and standing at a crossroad are five characters representing the remaining folktypes. Frozen in action, much like a scene in a history museum or a diorama, each sculptural figure strikes a demonstrative pose, revealing their character to the viewer. Our intrepid heroes — the bear, the fox, and the jackalope — stand at the ready, facing the villainous boar and vulture for the first time (Fig 5, 6).

While this is a climactic scene, it is not the final battle. The story suggests a continuing narrative, blending elements of the call to adventure, supernatural aid, allies/helpers and tests of Campbell’s monomyth. However, there is no clue as to how this situation will resolve itself. The result of this showdown on the forest floor is left to viewer interpretation, for now.

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<sup>76</sup> For the purposes of this show, the kudzu monster does not reveal itself but is presented in its natural state.

<sup>77</sup> A lot of folks call them “fireflies,” but that ain’t right.

The poor folktype is represented by the two main characters within the narrative: a black bear named Pants and his brother, a red fox named Bushel Britches. They are not presented as poor in an economic sense, but exist outside the power structure that governs the Mythissippi landscape. As this narrative unfolds, these characters act as the “animal tricksters” used to question and undermine the powers that be. The fox’s hair bristles along his spine making him appear apprehensive and curious while holding one front paw in the air signals he is poised for action (Fig 7). The bear stands on his hind legs; his front paws waving his opponents closer, as his posture suggests a boxer’s stance (Fig 8). Both figures reveal confident smirks, implying that they have been waiting for this moment. Like the animal tricksters from African tradition, these characters are resourceful and cunning. They are inspired in large part by the story of *Brer Rabbit and the Wonderful Tar- Baby*.<sup>78</sup>

The divine takes her earthly form as a jackalope leaping forward in full sprint, undaunted by the size of her opponents (Fig 9). With her opalescent freckles and crystalline antlers, this mythical creature stands out amongst the more “realistic” animal forms. Her iridescent fur glitters in the dim light of the forest floor. Small in stature, but bold beyond measure, the Mythissippi Goddess questions absolute authority, fearlessly fighting for what she believes to be right, and inspires those around her to do for those who cannot.<sup>79</sup>

The boar and vulture portray Mythissippi’s remaining antagonists. Uncle Bluegill plays the politician folktype, a pompous wild boar intoxicated by the sound of his own voice (Fig 10). Blocking their path, the boar turns up his nose at the three beasts before

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<sup>78</sup> Full story found in Appendix A on page

<sup>79</sup> This character is clearly modelled after my wife, Sauce. So, she probably has a potty mouth.

him. Certain in his convictions, he stands tall against attempts at progress. Uncle Bluegill's personality and mannerisms are modeled after John Goodman's character, Big Dan T, from *Oh Brother, Where Art Thou*. Southern politicians are notoriously cordial, slick talkers, and categorically untrustworthy. Uncle Bluegill presents himself with dignity and charm, but his true nature is revealed through violent outbursts when met with opposition. This nature is eluded by his attempts to alter a disheveled appearance and the disused mattress on which he stands. He slobbers and sweats. His tusks, though crooked and broken, are bleached white but reveal a rotten gum line- the fake smile. Uncle Bluegill is living proof that you can put lipstick on a pig, but it's still a pig.

Standing head and shoulders above the others, the preacher is embodied by a gluttonous, angry turkey vulture who represents an omen of misfortune and the hypocrisy encountered all too often within "the ministry." Colloquially referred to as a buzzard, The Reverend speaks of salvation and yet sustains himself on the fear of death.<sup>80</sup> The vile buzzard spits and screeches his warnings of hellfire and brimstone, promising certain death and eternal damnation (Fig 11).

The Reverend is inspired by the tale of *The Belled Buzzard*.<sup>81</sup> In this tale, hog farmers made a deal with this belled buzzard to save themselves, and in the end, it returned to profit from their passing. They created a harbinger of death.<sup>82</sup>

The preacher and divine folktypes often find themselves at odds. Southerners are often religious, but their stories caution against taking the clergy too seriously. Instead,

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<sup>80</sup> How you gonna collect a paycheck thanks to an incredibly convenient, consistent, weekly revelation from an omnipotent, invisible being? I find that to be highly problematic, and my family is bustin at the seams with preachers, each of whom I love dearly. Quandary...

<sup>81</sup> Full story found in Appendix B on page

<sup>82</sup> Damn, Momma!

they prefer personal revelation. In *Mythossippi*, the preacher not only fails to recognize the divine, but fights it tooth and claw.

Beyond our characters, lighting directs the viewers' attention toward two divergent paths leading to dead ends where the kudzu is pulled back to revealing two images, each printed onto plywood salvaged from an old treehouse. These images, along with the accompanying sculptural forms speak to the true nature of these individuals and provide a glimpse into the much wider narrative that stretches far beyond the scene on display.

*Propheteering* shows a group of buzzards devouring a carcass. This work is meant to bring into question the nature of religious professionals. Surrounded by kudzu and a broken Corinthian column, this image depicts the insatiable nature of the buzzard and his brethren. They subsist on death and the fear of death. The Reverend tosses the deceased congregation member's heart into the air, savoring his meal while two deacons stare in envy, devoid of remorse for the passing of this animal. His motivation is purely selfish. Within the installation, he stands atop two soapboxes, screaming down at the protagonists and attempting to block their path.

*Backdoor Dealings (Hog Heaven)* shows Uncle Bluegill in a compromising situation. His door-to-door campaign has resulted in sexual congress. While he and his constituent enjoy themselves on the banks of a small creek, a poor banjo-plucking frog is forced to listen. The swirling, muddy waters and overgrown vegetation show a general lack of care for the surroundings in favor of instant gratification. His sculptural form stands on an old mattress, pointing again to his motivation.

All three villains are driven by lust, power, greed, and personal gain. As agricultural, political and religious leaders, they sit in traditional positions of power,

positions that are frequently abused. Mega-farms abuse government subsidies, putting local, family-run farms out of business. Millionaire preachers simulcast sermons about modesty and charity from churches the size of basketball arenas. Joel Osteen is estimated to be worth \$40 million. Donald Trump has spent millions of taxpayer dollars visiting his own hotels and resorts. These are gross, despicable human beings taking advantage of the less fortunate.

In the South, despite historical and anecdotal evidence to the contrary, the huddled masses still trust people in these positions to speak truthfully, live honestly, and do what is best for the common good. It's laughable, and the stories we tell reflect that.

The themes presented in *Mythossippi* are neither new nor unique. There are countless stories about the little guy defeating the forces of evil. We keep telling new versions of the same myth, updated to resonate with a new audience based on their reality. Mythossippi, like so many of our favorite stories, takes the audience to a faraway place and holds up a mirror, providing an opportunity for reflection and growth.

## EPILOGUE

As the sun sets, the forest is buzzin' with the sounds of cicadas and crickets. The path before our three travelers is lit by lightnin' bugs. When they reach the crossroads on the edge of the kudzu forest, the path is blocked by their most despised adversaries: The Right Reverend Brother Buzzard and Head Hog Uncle Bluegill.

It ain't particularly surprisin' to run into them here. On this very spot, these pillars of the community swore a blood oath to the kudzu to destroy any threat to the ancient ways. Needless to say, these old timers don't care much for change, what with it bein' diametrically opposed to tradition and all. On this sacred ground, under the kudzu's entangled vines, these slanderous scoundrels prepare to fight to the death and decry our brave adventurers as miscreants and false prophets! (If that ain't the pot callin' the kettle black, I don't know what is.)

Our heroes are in a heap of trouble, and yet they face their opponents with a grin. These good ole boys always take things way too seriously. To our young heroes, they represent tradition that has outlived its meanin'. There ain't no room for separatism and religious oppression in the world they aim to create. The time has come to move forward. Change is comin' to Mythossippi, ready or not.

It's often said that old and treacherous beats young and virile ever' time. Pants, Bushel Britches, and the Mythossippi Goddess stride confidently to meet their opponents, nonetheless.

## Figures



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

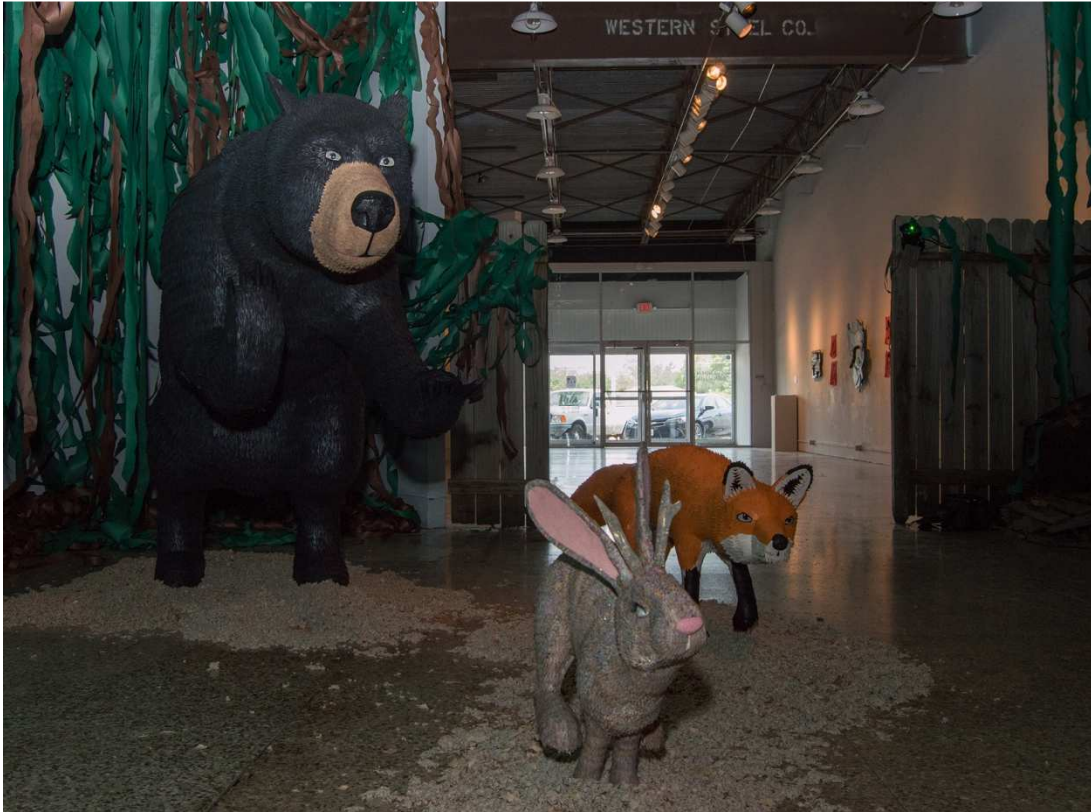


Figure 6

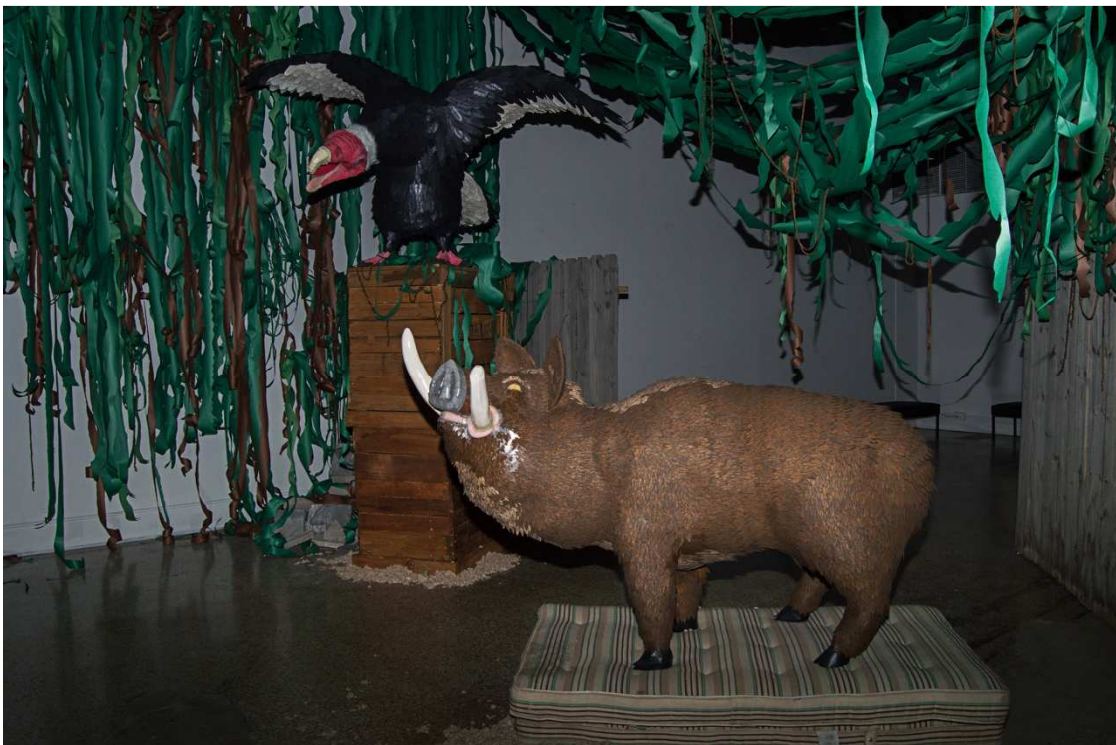


Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12

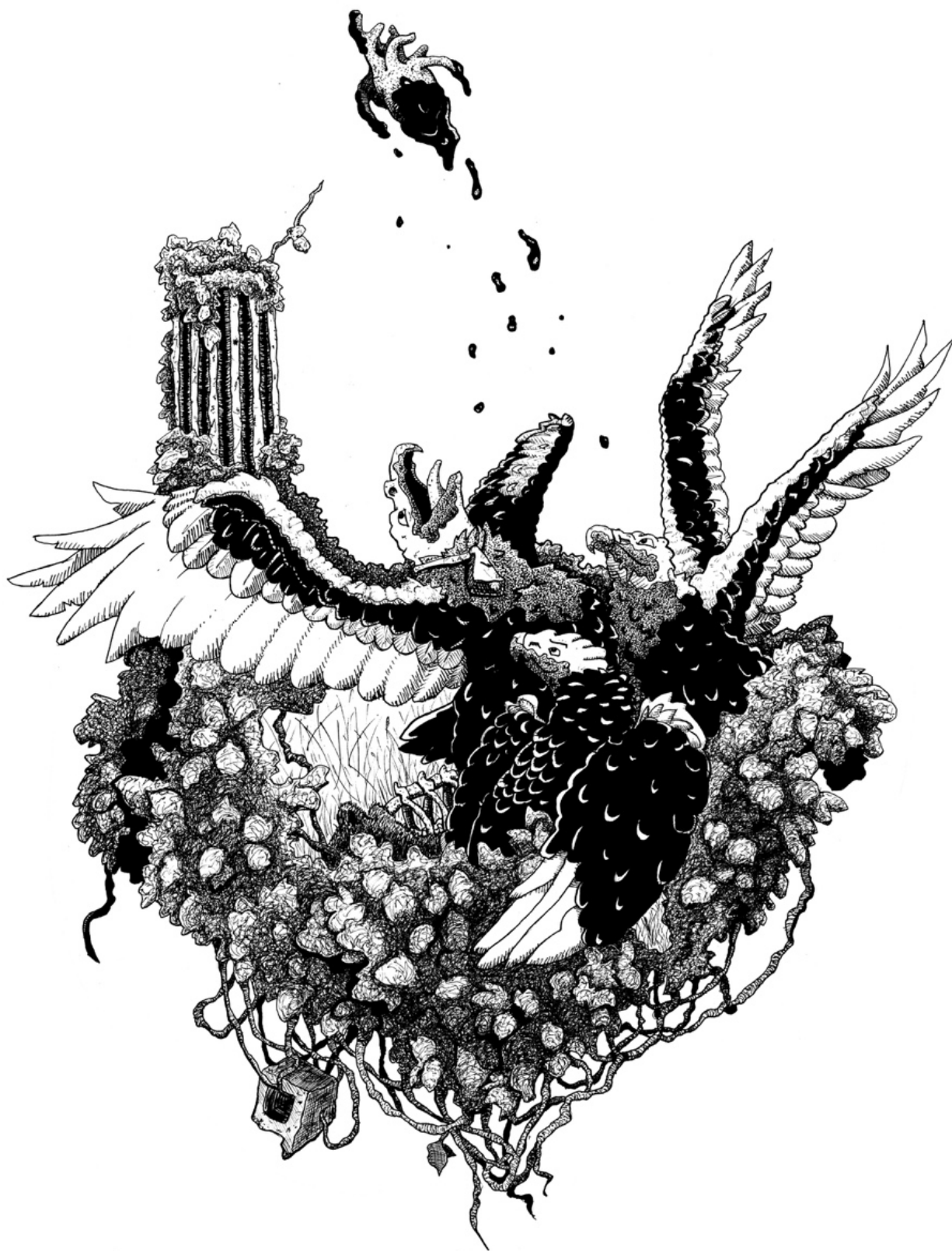


Figure 13

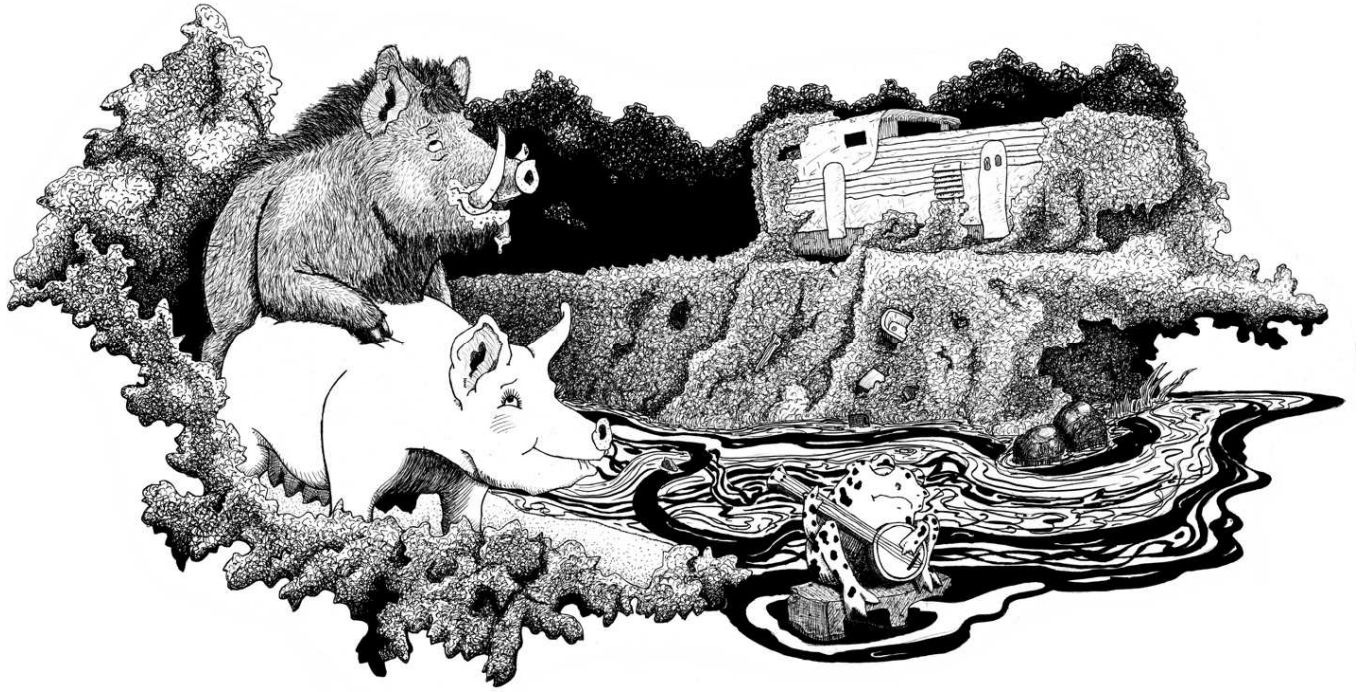


Figure 14

## Appendix A

### ***The Wonderful Tar-Baby* by Joel Chandler Harris**

One evening recently, the lady whom Uncle Remus calls “Miss Sally” missed her little seven-year-old. Making search for him through the house and through the yard, she heard the sound of voices in the old man’s cabin, and looking through the window, saw the child sitting by Uncle Remus. His head rested against the old man’s arm, and he was gazing with an expression of the most intense interest into the rough, weather-beaten face that beamed so kindly upon him. This is what “Miss Sally” heard:

“Bimeby, one day, after Brer Fox bin doin’ all dat he could fer ter ketch Brer Rabbit, en Brer Rabbit bin doin’ all he could fer ter keep ’im fum it, Brer Fox say to hisse’f dat he’d put up a game on Brer Rabbit, en he ain’t mo’n got de wuds out’n his mouf twel Brer Rabbit come a-lopin’ up de big road, lookin’ des ez plump en ez fat en ez sassy ez a Moggin hoss in a barley-patch.

“‘Hol’ on dar, Brer Rabbit,’ sez Brer Fox, sezee.

“‘I ain’t got time, Brer Fox,’ sez Brer Rabbit, sezee, sorter mendin’ his licks.

“‘I wanter have some confab wid you, Brer Rabbit,’ sez Brer Fox, sezee.

“‘All right, Brer Fox, but you better holler fum whar you stan’: I’m monstus full er fleas dis mawnin’,’ sez Brer Rabbit, sezee.

“‘I seed Brer B’ar yistiddy,’ sez Brer Fox, sezee, ‘en he sorter raked me over de coals kaze you en me ain’t make frends en live naberly, en I told him dat I’d see you.’

“Den Brer Rabbit scratch one year wid his off hine-foot sorter jub’usly, en den he ups en sez, sezee:

“All a-settin’, Brer Fox. S’posen you drap roun’ ter-morrer en take dinner wid me. We ain’t got no great doin’s at our house, but I speck de ole ’oman en de chilluns kin sort o’ scramble roun’ en git up sump’n fer ter stay yo’ stummuck.’

“I’m ’gree’ble, Brer Rabbit,’ sez Brer Fox, sezee.

“Den I’ll ’pen on you,’ says Brer Rabbit, sezee.

“Nex’ day, Mr. Rabbit an’ Miss Rabbit got up soon, ’fo day, en raided on a gyarden like Miss Sally’s out dar, en got some cabbiges, en some roas’n-years, en some sparrer-grass, en dey fix up a smashin’ dinner. Bimeby one er de little Rabbits, playin’ out in de backyard, come runnin’ in hollerin’, ‘Oh, ma! oh, ma! I seed Mr. Fox a-comin’!’ En den Brer Rabbit he tuck de chilluns by der years en make um set down, and den him en Miss Rabbit sorter dally roun’ waitin’ for Brer Fox. En dey keep on waitin’, but no Brer Fox ain’t come. Atter while Brer Rabbit goes to de do’, easy like, en peep out, en dar, stickin’ out fum behime de cornder, wuz de tip-een’ er Brer Fox’s tail. Den Brer Rabbit shot de do’ en sot down, en put his paws behime his years, en begin fer ter sing:

“De place wharbouts you spill de grease,

Right dar youer boun’ ter slide,

An’ whar you fine a bunch er ha’r,

You’ll sholy fine de hide!”

“Nex’ day Brer Fox sont word by Mr. Mink en skuze hisse’f kaze he wuz too sick fer ter come, en he ax Brer Rabbit fer ter come en take dinner wid him, en Brer Rabbit say he wuz ’gree’ble.

“Bimeby, w’en de shadders wuz at der shortes’, Brer Rabbit he sorter brush up en santer down ter Brer Fox’s house, en w’en he got dar he yer somebody groanin’, en he look in de do’, en dar he see Brer Fox settin’ up in a rockin’-cheer all wrop up wid flannil,

en he look mighty weak. Brer Rabbit look all roun', he did, but he ain't see no dinner. De dish-pan wuz settin' on de table, en close by wuz a kyarvinknife.

“Look like you gwineter have chicken fer dinner, Brer Fox,’ sez Brer Rabbit, sezee.

“Yes, Brer Rabbit, deyer nice en fresh en te nder,’ sez Brer Fox, sezee.

“Den Brer Rabbit sorter pull his mustarsh, en say, ‘You ain’t got no’ calamus-root, is you, Brer Fox? I done got so now dat I can’t eat no’ chicken ’ceppin’ she’s seasoned up wid calamus-root.’ En wid dat Brer Rabbit lipt out er de do’ and dodge ’mong de bushes, en sot dar watchin’ fer Brer Fox; en he ain’t watch long, nudder, kaze Brer Fox flung off de flannil en crope out er de house en got whar he could close in on Brer Rabbit, en bimeby Brer Rabbit holler out, ‘Oh, Brer Fox! I’ll des put yo’ calamus-root out yer on dis yer stump. Better come git it while hit’s fresh.’ And wid dat Brer Rabbit gallop off home. En Brer Fox ain’t never kotch ’im yit, en w’at’s mo’, honey, he ain’t gwineter.”

“Didn’t the fox never catch the rabbit, Uncle Remus?” asked the little boy the next evening.

“He come mighty nigh it, honey, sho’s you bawn—Brer Fox did. One day arter Brer Rabbit fool ’im wid dat calamus-root, Brer Fox went ter wuk en got ’im some tar, en mix it wid some turken-time, en fix up a contrapshun what he call a TarBaby, en he tuck dish yer Tar-Baby en he sot ’er in de big road, en den he lay off in de bushes fer ter see wat de news wuz gwineter be. En he didn’t hatter wait long, nudder, kaze bimeby here come Brer Rabbit pacin’ down de road—lippity- clippity, clippity-lippity—des ez sassy ez a jay-bird. Brer Fox he lay low. Brer Rabbit come prancin’ ’long twel he spy de Tar-Baby, en den he fotch up on his behime legs like he was ’stonished. De Tar-Baby she sot dar, she did, en Brer Fox he lay low.

“‘Mawnin’!’ sez Brer Rabbit, sezee; ‘nice wedder dis mawnin’,’ sezee.

“Tar-Baby ain’t sayin’ nuthin’ en Brer Fox he lay low.

“‘How duz yo’ sym’tums seem ter segashuate?’ sez Brer Rabbit, sezee.

“Brer Fox he wink his eye slow, en lay low, en de Tar-Baby she ain’t sayin’ nuthin’.

“‘How you come on, den? Is you deaf?’ sez Brer Rabbit, sezee. ‘Kaze if you is I kin holler louder,’ sezee.

“Tar-Baby lay still, en Brer Fox he lay low.

“‘Youer stuck up, dat’s w’at you is,’ says Brer Rabbit, sezee, ‘en I’m gwineter kyore you, dat’s w’at I’m a-gwineter do,’ sezee.

“Brer Fox he sorter chuckle in his stummuck, he did, but Tar-Baby ain’t sayin’ nuthin’.

“‘I’m gwineter larn you howter talk ter ’specttubble fokes ef hit’s de las ’ack,’ sez Brer Rabbit, sezee. ‘Ef you don’t take off dat hat en tell me howdy, I’m gwineter bus’ you wide open,’ sezee.

“Tar-Baby stay still, en Brer Fox he lay low.

“Brer Rabbit keep on axin’ ’im, en de Tar-Baby she keep on sayin’ nuthin’, twel present’y Brer Rabbit draw back wid his fis’, he did, en blip he tuck er side er de head. Right dar’s whar he broke his merlasses-jug. His fis’ stuck, en he can’t pull loose. De tar hilt him. But Tar-Baby she stay still, en Brer Fox he lay low.

“‘Ef you don’t lemme loose, I’ll knock you ag’in,’ sez Brer Rabbit, sezee; en wid dat he fotch ’er a wipe wid te udder han’, en dat stuck. Tar-Baby she ain’t sayin’ nuthin’, en Brer Fox he lay low.

“Tu’n me loose, of I kick de natal stuffin’ outen you,’ sez Brer Rabbit, sezee; but de Tar-Baby she ain’t sayin’ nuthin’. She des hilt on, en den Brer Rabbit lose de use er his feet in de same way. Brer Fox he lay low. Den Brer Rabbit squall out dat ef de Tar-Baby don’t tu’n ’im loose he butt ’er crank-sided. En den he butted, en his head got stuck. Den Brer Fox he santered fort’, lookin’ des ez innercent ez wunner yo’ mammy’s mockin’-birds.

“Howdy, Brer Rabbit?’ sez Brer Fox, sezee. ‘You look sorter stuck up dis mawnin’,’ sezee; en den he rolled on de groun’, en laft en laft twel he couldn’t laff no mo’. ‘I speck you’ll take dinner wid me dis time, Brer Rabbit. I done laid in some calamus-root, en I ain’t gwineter take no skuse,’ sez Brer Fox, sezee.”

Here Uncle Remus paused, and drew a two-pound yam out of the ashes.

“Did the fox eat the rabbit?” asked the little boy to whom the story had been told.

“Dat’s all de fur de tale goes,” replied the old man. “He mout, en den ag’in he moutent. Some say Jedge B’ar come ’long en loosed ’im; some say he didn’t. I hear Miss Sally callin’. You better run ’long.”...

“Uncle Remus,” said the little boy one evening, when he had found the old man with little or nothing to do, “did the fox kill and eat the rabbit when he caught him with the Tar-Baby?”

“Law, honey, ain’t I tell you ’bout dat?” replied the old darky, chuckling slyly. “I ’clar ter grashus I ought er tole you dat; but ole man Nod wuz ridin’ on my eyelids twel a leetle mo’n I’d ’a’ dis’member’d my own name, en den on to dat here come yo’ mammy hollerin’ atter you.

“W’at I tell you w’en I fus’ begin? I tole you Brer Rabbit wuz a monstus soon beas’; leas’ways dat’s w’at I laid out fer ter tell you. Well, den, honey, don’t you go en

make no udder kalkalashuns, kaze in dem days Brer Rabbit en his family wuz at de head er de gang w'en enny racket wuz on han', en dar dey stayed. 'Fo' you begins fer ter wipe yo' eyes 'bout Brer Rabbit, you wait en see whar'bouts Brer Rabbit gwineter fetch up at. But dat's needer yer ner dar.

"W'en Brer Fox fine Brer Rabbit mixt up wid de Tar-Baby, he feel mighty good, en he roll on de groun' en laff. Bimeby he up 'n' say, sezee:

"Well, I speck I got you dis time, Brer Rabbit,' sezee; 'maybe I ain't but I speck I is. You been runnin' roun' here sassin' atter me a mighty long time, but I speck you done come ter de een' er de row. You bin cuttin' up yo' capers en bouncin' roun' in dis naberhood ontwel you come ter b'leeve yo'se'f de boss er de whole gang. En den youer allers some'rs whar you got no bizness,' sez Brer Fox, sezee. 'Who ax you fer ter come en strike up a 'quaintence wid dish yer Tar-Baby? En who stuck you up dar whar you iz? Nobody in de roun' worril. You des tuck en jam yo'se'f on dat Tar-Baby widout waitin' fer enny invite,' sez Brer Fox, sezee— 'en dar you is, en dar you'll stay twel I fixes up a bresh-pile and fires her up, kaze I'm gwineter bobbycue you dis day, sho',' sez Brer Fox, sezee.

"Den Brer Rabbit talk mighty 'umble.

"I don't keer w'at you do wid me, Brer Fox,' sezee, 'so you don't fling me in dat brier-patch. Roas' me, Brer Fox,' sezee, 'but don't fling me in dat brier-patch,' sezee.

"Hit's so much trouble fer ter kindle a fier,' sez Brer Fox, sezee, 'dat I speck I'll hatter hang you,' sezee.

"Hang me des ez high ez you please, Brer Fox,' sez Brer Rabbit, sezee, 'but do fer de Lord's sake don't fling me in dat brier-patch,' sezee.

“‘I ain’t got no string,’ sez Brer Fox, sezee, ‘en now I speck I’ll hatter drown you,’ sezee.

“‘Drown me ez deep ez you please, Brer Fox,’ sez Brer Rabbit, sezee, ‘but don’t fling me in dat brier-patch,’ sezee. “‘Dey ain’t no water nigh,’ sez Brer Fox, sezee, ‘en now I speck I’ll hatter skin you,’ sezee. “‘Skin me, Brer Fox,’ sez Brer Rabbit, sezee, ‘snatch out my eyeballs, t’ar out my years by de roots, en cut off my legs,’ sezee, ‘but do please, Brer Fox, don’t fling me in dat brier-patch,’ sezee. “Co’s Brer Fox wanten hurt Brer Rabbit bad ez he kin, so he cotch him by de behime legs en slung ’im right in de middle er de brier-patch. Dar wuz a considerbul flutter whar Brer Rabbit struck de bushes, en Brer Fox sorter hung roun’ fer ter see what wuz gwineter happen. Bimeby he hear somebody call ’im, en way up de hill he see Brer Rabbit settin’ cross-legged on a chinkapin log koamin’ de pitch outen his har wid a chip. Den Brer Fox know dat he bin swop off mighty bad. Brer Rabbit wuz bleedzed fer ter fling back some er his sass, en he holler out: “‘Bred en bawn in a brier-patch, Brer Fox; bred en bawn in a brier-patch!’ en wid dat he skip out des ez lively ez a cricket in de embers.”<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Joel Chandler Harris, *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings*. (Grosset and Dunlap, 1985) 7-10, 16-19.

## **Appendix B**

### ***The Belled Buzzard***

The story concerns a settlement along a river bottom in the Ozark mountains. One bank of the river was bordered for miles by high unscalable bluffs crowned with scrub timber, the home and breeding place of thousands of buzzards.

Hog raising was the main source of income in the community. Mast from the acorn-bearing trees furnished food for the droves of hogs earmarked and turned into the woods each year, to be rounded up in the fall ready for market.

One summer, hog cholera broke out among the porkers. The buzzards, feasting on the dead carcasses, carried the disease from one section of the country to another. There was an unwritten law that these birds should not be killed, but the farmers were aware that, unless some action was taken to check the spread of the disease, their hogs, together with their incomes, will be wiped out entirely.

A meeting was called. It was decided to capture one of the birds and fasten a small sheep bell to it, in the hope that it would cause them to leave. One of the birds was accordingly trapped and belled. His arrival among the others created a great commotion and in a few days the flock of buzzards had disappeared, only the belled buzzard remaining. Finally, he too, took flight.

At the end of the summer there was an epidemic of typhoid fever in the community, many dying. About that time the belled buzzard appeared, the tinkle of his bell being plainly heard as he soared above the houses. He came and went time after time and always following his reappearance some sort of calamity happened. The return of the belled bird aroused apprehension in the minds of the more superstitious and his presence became associated with their misfortunes. They believed the repulsive fowl was

possessed of an evil spirit. Many believe he still roams the sky, as he has for more than 100 years, so that even today any report on the belled buzzard casts a spell of gloom over them.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> B. A. Botkin, *A Treasury of Southern Folklore: Stories, Ballads, Traditions, and Folkways of the People of the South*. (Crown Publishers, 1953) 474-475.

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