

JOHN WILLIAM CORRINGTON

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John William Corrington was born in 1932 and moved with his family to Shreveport, Louisiana at age ten. It seems to have been a propitious move; the family prospered and Bill Corrington developed a love for Shreveport that would figure prominently in his life and his writing. He stayed on in Shreveport to attend Centenary College where he was befriended by a small cadre of professors whom he would always regard with something akin to reverence. Corrington finally moved on, but Shreveport was often on his mind. If there was a single unfulfilled dream in his life, it was the hope he might return to Shreveport, write, fish, teach at Centenary College and live out his days in a place he adamantly called home.

Corrington began his intellectual journey as a college student—reading widely, engaging his teachers in philosophical discussions, learning the arts of prose and the language of poetry. It seemed obvious to those who knew him that he would become an academic. Corrington, however, had in mind becoming a musician and he majored in music. An accomplished trumpet player, he ultimately decided that he would never be a first-class trumpet man (a self-assessment his friends dispute). So, as his teachers assumed, he decided to become an academic. After Centenary College, Corrington did graduate work in English at Rice University from 1956 to 1960 and obtained a Master's degree from Rice in 1960. His first teaching position was at Louisiana State University. He took a leave from teaching and obtained his D.Phil. in 1965 from the University of Sussex (England) and in 1966 moved to Loyola University (New Orleans) as Associate Professor of English and chair of the English Department.

During the 1960s, Corrington taught English, wrote poetry, and published various academic papers. His first poetry was published in 1958 and his first collection of poetry, *Where We Are* appeared in 1962. Three more collections would soon follow: *The Anatomy of Love and Other Poems* (1964); *Mr Clean and Other Poems* (1964); and *Lines to the South* (1965), all while Corrington was teaching at LSU and working on his doctorate. During his early years as a poet, Corrington discovered the work of Charles Bukowski, whose poetry he admired, and they carried on an extensive correspondence spanning much of the 1960s. Bukowski, always a difficult man, and no more so than with his friends, eventually fell-out with Corrington and they went their separate ways.

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Corrington might well have become an acclaimed poet had he stayed the course but what he most wanted was to write big novels. Graced with substantial talent, discipline, and a Southerner's affinity for dramatic stories, Corrington published his first novel, *And Wait for the Night*, in 1964 and while teaching at Loyola-New Orleans, two more followed as the decade ended—*The Upper Hand* (1967) and *The Bombardiers* (1970).

Between publication of the two late 1960s novels, Corrington was invited to lecture and teach at the University of California, Berkeley in the spring of 1968. His impressions of California figure significantly in a story entitled, "Nothing Succeeds," published over a decade after his California visit. (The story appears in a 1981 collection titled *The Southern Reporter Stories*.)

Corrington was an energetic and adventurous writer, and when he was approached by the film director/producer Roger Corman to write a screenplay about the German WW I pilot, Manfred von Richthofen ("The Red Baron"), he was ready to try a new form of writing, especially one which provided the kind of remuneration he knew he would not receive from his novels. By some means, Corrington got his wife, Joyce Corrington, a chemistry professor, involved in his scriptwriting and they produced, in 1969, a script for Corman titled, *Von Richthofen and Brown*. The script, retitled *The Red Baron*, was filmed by Corman and released through United Artists in 1971.

Corrington, with his new involvement as a screenwriter, had now moved from his double life as teacher and writer, to something still more complicated. From all appearances, the perfect embodiment of an English professor and academic, Corrington's real commitment was always to his "serious" writing (his fiction and his philosophical essays). In addition to his 1960s novels, four collections of poetry, a collection of short stories, *The Lonesome Traveler and Other Stories* (1968), and the first Corman film script (with Joyce Corrington), there was a steady flow of academic articles.

Corrington, an intellectual adventurer, never afraid to put his writing skills to new use and to experiment with new genres, followed up the *Von Richthofen and Brown* film script, for Corman, with: *The Omega Man* (1970), *Boxcar Bertha* (1971), and *The Arena* (1972) (all written with Joyce Corrington). With their new "media" writing providing money of the likes Corrington had never come close to seeing from his novels and teaching, he was able to afford still another new intellectual venture: Bill Corrington decided to go to law school.

In the early 1970s Corrington has now completed three novels, published his poetry, and working with Joyce, written a Roger Corman film script each year. But he has grown increasingly disaffected with

academic life, and after a bruising battle with the Jesuits at Loyola-New Orleans over tenure decisions in the English Department, decides to move on. Joyce and Bill Corrington had alternately supported each other during prolonged periods of schooling; Joyce during the early years of the marriage supported Bill's doctorate studies, and he supported the family while Joyce obtained her M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in Chemistry. And they continued this pattern when Bill attended law school. Joyce teaches chemistry at Xavier University while Bill goes back to school.

When Bill Corrington started Tulane Law School in 1972, he was forty years old. And he was a rather unusual law student, not because of his age but his accomplishments: a well-published poet, novelist, and literary critic, he had chaired an English department during the tumultuous years of the late 1960s and early 70s, all the while becoming become engaged in the screenwriting. So one isn't surprised to learn that Bill Corrington didn't confine himself to the study of law when he was at Tulane. During law school, the Corringtons wrote film scripts for *The Battle for the Planet of the Apes* (1973) and *The Killer Bees* (1974).

Corrington graduated from Tulane in 1975 and joined a small New Orleans personal injury law firm, Plotkin & Bradley, and spend the next three years practicing law. The move from academic life was now final and he would never return.

Corrington's work as a novice lawyer kept him sufficiently busy that he gave up his script writing (*The Killer Bees*, written in 1974 would be the Corringtons' last film), but Corrington always managed to find time for his fiction. Lawyers first began appearing in his fiction in 1975, the year he finished law school. "The Actes and Monuments" was published in 1975 by *Sewanee Review* and a second lawyer story, "Pleadings," appeared in 1976 in the *Southern Review* while Corrington was in his first year as a practicing lawyer. A third story, "Every Act Whatever of Man," followed in 1978, also in the *Southern Review*, this one in the final year of his law practice. In these stories, and those that would follow in the 1980s, most importantly the two novellas collected in *All My Trials*, Corrington discovered, in law's promise and failure, and in the lives of lawyers and judges, a new focus for his fiction.

Corrington, by all accounts, was a good lawyer. But there was something about the day-to-day tasks of litigation that didn't agree with him. He had already begin to think about the possibilities of devoting himself to appellate work but before he could get re-oriented, the Corringtons were offered head writer positions for the TV daytime drama, *Search for Tomorrow* (CBS). Bill decided, in 1978, to give up the practice of law and work full-time with, Joyce, on the *Search for Tomorrow* scripts and it was the TV drama writing that he would continue for the rest of his life.

From 1978 to 1988, the Corringtons wrote some of the most popular TV daytime drama series of the day, and anyone familiar with daytime television will recognize them: *Search for Tomorrow* (CBS) in 1978-80 (477 episodes); *Another World* (NBC) in 1980 (23 episodes); *Texas*, a series they created and wrote, which appeared on NBC from 1980 to 1982 (147 episodes); *General Hospital* in 1982 for ABC (54 episodes); *Capitol* at CBS from 1982 to 1983 (167 episodes); *One Life to Live* for ABC in 1984 (98 episodes); and finally, *Superior Court*, a syndicated series, which ran for 238 episodes from 1986 to 1989. The Corringtons, as head writers for these series dramas, were responsible for creating story-lines, writing and editing scripts, and supervising a writing staff. Bill and Joyce Corrington, working together, in ten years, produced some 1,404 episodes for daytime TV.

Corrington's "day work" during the last decade of his life—writing daytime TV dramas—would have robbed most men of their creative energies. But Corrington never let the fast and furious pace of his day writing divert him totally from "serious" fiction and his life-long study of philosophy. During the ten years he devoted his salaried career to TV writing, Corrington wrote another novel, *Shad Sentell* (1984), a third collection of short stories, *The Southern Reporter* (1981), and two lawyer novellas collected under the title *All My Trials* (1987). Corrington continued, even after he left teaching, to study philosophy and write academic papers, although most of his scholarly essays remained unpublished.

Corrington had no desire to establish a particular style for his writing or to stay within a particular genre. He had long been interested in the detective genre, and by drawing on his early work as a police reporter and a "better style," he thought he write as well as Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. With a contract from Viking Press, the Corringtons, working together as they had on their film scripts and TV writing, begin a series of books about a New Orleans police detective, Ralph "Rat" Trapp, a reporter, Wesley Colvin, and Denise Lemoyne, who begins as an relatively insignificant character but over the course of the series, becomes Colvin's lover and an Assistant District Attorney. *So Small a Carnival* appeared in 1986, *A Project Named Desire* and *A Civil Death* in 1987, and the fourth and final of the series, *The White Zone* was published in 1990 (after Bill Corrington's death in 1988).

If the stories of film director/writer David Lynch are to be described as "cosmic detective stories" (as they were recently), then perhaps we can think of Bill Corrington's law inspired stories as "cosmic lawyer stories." Corrington is undoubtedly less quirky than Lynch, and his sense of the cosmic more solidly philosophical and theological in its

impact. Reading a Corrington story entangles a reader in a world, an order, a Tale with sufficient gravity to pull you down low and close to things unknown. One gets the sense that Bill Corrington knows things most men don't know. The pleasure in reading Bill Corrington is not a pleasant passing of time (absorbed in secure genre conventions), but of being thrown into the vortex of time, leaving us with the sense that we have glimpsed the always and the forever, that larger mystery in which we live. Corrington writes like a man who has God looking over his shoulder and the Devil knocking at his door. In Corrington's fiction, we are reminded, as we are with Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Walker Percy's *The Second Coming*, Pete Dexter's *Paris Trout*, Albert Camus's *The Fall*, Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, that we are enveloped in mystery and myth, deny it as we may. Reading Bill Corrington's fiction is like entering the ring with a highly-trained Thai kick-boxer; we are, most of us, not trained for this kind of encounter. Corrington knew well what the big-fight was all about (and what the enemy was); he never underestimated the stakes. He wanted his stories intense, bone-rattling, searching, reaching for "a larger conception of things"; he wanted them to be fast, intense, and good—a shot straight to the heart. Reading Corrington, we see the world anew by seeing what is old and implacable, we realize how arrogance and willfulness stand in the way of grace, and we learn that we know far less about the ultimate order of things than we thought we do. This is big stuff, Corrington knew it, so does the reader.

A Note About Publishing Bill Corrington's Work

In the summer of 2000 I discovered John William Corrington's legal fiction and realized immediately that I had stumbled onto one of the finest legal fiction writers of our time. Corrington, notwithstanding his substantial "media" and "entertainment" writing, was a "learned man," sufficiently so that his old friend and colleague, William Mills, called him a "Southern man of letters." Corrington was, of course, Southern through and through. He quite rightly deserves a place among the South's finest writers. Corrington, drawing on the Southern heritage he absorbed as a young boy (and would persistently defend), was a masterful artist of the story (in many different genres), and had the ability to sketch fictional characters both true to and larger than life, creating fiction with a *gravitas* that leaves the reader at once, stunted, sad, and hopeful.

With the encouragement of Joyce Corrington, we decided first to republish Bill Corrington's legal fiction. As we began to learn more about Corrington, and to consider his dazzling abilities as a storyteller

and the intellectual depth and philosophical savyness of his stories, we decided to expand the project and to publish a collection of essays to further honor Bill Corrington's work. Since so few legal academic colleagues were familiar with Corrington's writing, we turned to a published collection of essays collected by William Mills, *John William Corrington: Southern Man of Letters*. We found, in the Mills' collection of essays, an essay by William Domnarski, one of the first of the few legal scholars, to recognize and appreciate Corrington's legal fiction. Domnarski argues persuasively that Corrington's lawyer stories are of lasting interest to lawyers.

The best source on John William Corrington is undoubtedly Corrington himself; his correspondence, autobiographical essays, interviews, and journals kept during the final eight years of his life provide the best guide to Corrington's concerns and preoccupations, and his commitment to fiction and various philosophical pursuits. Corrington's journals have already provided the basis for several essays about his life. Joyce Corrington draws on her husband's journals in an essay entitled, "The Evolution of Bill Corrington's Metaphysics," which first appeared in *Southern Man of Letters* and is reprinted here. With the permission and assistance of Joyce Corrington, we are now publishing, an extensive selection from Bill Corrington's journal entries from his 1980s journals.

After Corrington left teaching, he continued, as time permitted, to give scholarly presentations but he made little effort to publish the essays he wrote for these presentations. Many of these essays were not directed to legal audiences, and thus, do not address legal themes. Although the essays do not focus on subjects one expects to find addressed in a law journal, we have decided to publish them in the *Legal Studies Forum* because they were integral to Bill Corrington's thinking, and are important in understanding Corrington's lawyer stories. While these essays would have the typical legal reader venture rather far afield, the spirit of that kind of venturing is one that has always been part of the *Legal Studies Forum*.

Bill Corrington produced a relatively small, but impressive body of legal fiction and we have republished it, along with a previous unpublished Corrington story in a companion issue of the *Legal Studies Forum*. Corrington began his writing career as an academic, and while he found, regrettably, few occasions to write about law and jurisprudence other than in his fiction, there are two essays, of note. The first, "The Law and the Prophets," appeared in a Tulane law school magazine when Corrington was a 2nd year law student. (Corrington wrote a second law student work, "To Maintain the Lessee in Peaceful Possession," which appeared in the Tulane Civil Law Forum (1975);

assuming that few readers would have an interest in Louisiana landlord-tenant law, we have not republished it.) A second essay, "Logos, Lex, and Law," was prepared for a January, 1985 presentation at the University of Oklahoma School of Law and Corrington hoped it might eventually be part of a larger philosophical work. The larger work was never attempted and Corrington made no effort to publish the Oklahoma essay.

A number of colleagues were approached about writing new critical essays on Corrington's work and while a number of those efforts faltered, we eventually secured a brilliant reading of Corrington's "The Risi's Wife" from Louise Harmon, whose short stories have appeared, with some regularity, in the *Legal Studies Forum* in recent years.

Editing Bill Corrington's Work

Bill Corrington was a master of the English language; he used his talents as a writer to make his living and to craft some truly fine fiction. Editing the work of a talented writer can be tricky business. And no editor can be assured that any author will approve, even the most minor changes, in a text carefully constructed. Since the general policy at the *Legal Studies Forum* is to edit carefully everything we publish, we found no reason not to do so with Corrington's work. The difference being that in Corrington's case, there were so few occasions to quarrel with his prose and never anything remotely resembling a temptation to reconstruct arguments poorly presented. Corrington was not a writer who wrote to find out what he wanted to say. He always wrote because he had something to say and said it only when he was assured he knew how to say it. Corrington had the talent, skill, and discipline to do what few academic writers these days seem to know how to do—write clear-headed, accessible prose, unlittered by jargon and pretense, even when writing about complex subjects. Editing Corrington's essays, we found strikingly few instances in which there could be any notion of trying to say better what Corrington had already said well.

There were, however, more difficult problems in dealing with the many and varied quotations and textual references in his essays. Corrington sometimes provided sufficient footnote references to track down his sources, but he was also fond of using quotes which he assumed literary, educated people would recognize, and thus required no citation. When we could not, in some instances, locate translations of Corrington's quoted material we replaced the quotation from a source that we could footnote (and in doing so we tried to be mindful of Corrington's general preferences). Corrington was a consummate prose artist but we did find in his use of quoted material, minor variations

from the original text which required correction. For both Corrington's unpublished and published essays, we have made all copy-editing corrections we thought necessary. For the most part, we refrained from appending footnotes to previously published articles and added notes to published work only to clarify some significant matter.

Bill Corrington never adopted the habit (a rather perverse addiction as some see it) of legal writers in the use of extensive footnotes. When he had something to say, he had the skill and authorial voice to develop an essay without resort to the sub-text writing found in contemporary legal scholarship. If there was something to be said or explained, some exhortation to be delivered, Bill Corrington managed to do it in the text and with minimal reliance on footnotes. Consequently, it was, with something akin to trepidation, that we began to annotate and footnote Corrington's essays. Trepidation, because we assume Corrington might well have disapproved of making a perfectly good essay bottom-heavy with footnotes. Ultimately, we decided to provide citations for literary references and bibliographical and biographical references of the sort that might be helpful to readers. We decided not to attempt to "update" the essays, or to provide references to relevant material that appeared after Corrington wrote the essays. Even so, the final result is essays with far more sub-textual references than Corrington himself would have provided, and perhaps, an essay aesthetic that Corrington would not have approved. There certainly would have been no disgrace to Bill Corrington's reputation as a scholar to have published the essays *exactly* as he left them. We trust, however, that given the academic publication in which the essays now appear, Corrington might have grudgingly approved this shoring up the sub-textual foundation of his essays. We make no claim that the addition of the footnotes provides added value to Corrington's ideas; the value of the essays lie in the original text and it is that text that we have published with only minor copy-editing changes.

Finally, no one knows Bill Corrington's work as intimately and thoroughly as does his wife, Joyce Corrington, who co-authored film scripts, daytime TV dramas, and four detective mysteries with Bill and was an active partner in his various intellectual ventures, enough so that she has described living with Bill Corrington and their marriage as a "thirty-year seminar." Joyce Corrington provided early encouragement for this project at a time when I knew little about Bill Corrington, and during the course of this publication project has responded promptly and faithfully to my persistent pleas for information about Bill and his various endeavors. Only weeks after reading Bill Corrington's lawyer novellas, "Decoration Day" and "The Risi's Wife," William Mills

suggested I call Joyce and talk with her about my interest in her husband's work. To my surprise, and eternal gratitude, Joyce was not only willing to talk with me, but decided to allow the *Legal Studies Forum* to reprint Bill's lawyer stories. After a trip to Shreveport, and an examination of Bill Corrington's papers which are archived at Centenary College, we approached Joyce about the possibility of republishing not only her husband's law stories and novellas, but some of his unpublished essays and poetry. The Corrington poetry must await another day, but we could not pass up the opportunity to see Bill Corrington's unpublished essays in print, albeit so many years after he wrote them.

The visit to Centenary College was made all the more pleasurable by the assistance of Margery Wright, the Centenary College archivist who catalogued the Corrington papers, and Roger Becker, Director of Centenary's Magale Library who made various library resources available for my use. To both Margery and Roger, I again offer thanks for the memorable days I spent at Centenary College.

