Haricombe Takes Over as New Director

Lorraine J. Haricombe has been selected as the new vice provost and director of libraries at The University of Texas at Austin. She comes to the Libraries from the University of Kansas where she's served as dean of the libraries since 2006.

“Dr. Haricombe brings to UT Austin critical expertise on the evolving role of libraries in advancing teaching and research at top universities. She also is an international leader in improving access to scholarly publications. I’m proud she’s coming to UT Austin,” said UT Austin President Bill Powers.

During her tenure at KU, Haricombe oversaw the enhancement of several library facilities across campus. She was instrumental in implementing a faculty-led open access policy at

“She has a vision for how to enhance learning communities for students and scholars and understands the importance of creating better digital access to original materials.”

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KU — the first public institution in the U.S. with such a policy — which ensured an increase in visibility for KU research and scholarship. Open access reduces barriers to scholarly output to create faster, wider sharing of knowledge and increases the return on research investment.

“I am honored and humbled by this appointment to lead the libraries at a world-class research university,” said Haricombe. “The University of Texas Libraries provides an exciting opportunity to elevate the role of libraries as an integral partner in the higher education ecosystem, while advancing new strategic directions in support of teaching, learning and research.”

Haricombe was selected through a national search to fill the position.

“Given her extensive experience as a director of a major research library system at an institution that is a member of Association of American Universities, Lorraine has much to offer UT,” said UT Provost Gregory L. Fenves. “She has a vision for how to enhance learning communities for students and scholars and understands the importance of creating better digital access to original materials.”

Haricombe will oversee one of the nation’s largest academic research library systems, which annually serves more than 2.5 million visitors and 11 million online visitors with collections in excess of 10 million volumes. The library system includes the flagship Perry-Castañeda Library, nine specialized branch libraries and world-class special collections (Alexander Architectural Archive, Benson Latin American Collection and the PCL Map Collection).

Along with those core units, the library system also maintains numerous digital-native collections, including the Human Rights Documentation Initiative and the University of Texas Digital Repository. UT Libraries are founding members and hosts of the statewide Texas Digital Library.

Haricombe will replace Fred Heath, who retired this year after 11 years in the position.

In addition to her university experience, Haricombe is a co-founder of the Coalition of Open Access Policy Institutions in North America, an international advocacy group for institutions with open access policies. She also has served for the past seven years as a mentor to junior librarians from underrepresented areas as part of the Association of Research Libraries Leadership Career Development Program.

Haricombe earned her bachelor’s degree in psychology, sociology and library and information science at the University of the Western Cape in South Africa, and her master’s degree and Ph.D. in library and information science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. In her new role at UT Austin,
Make it New: 
Building a Modern Space for the Modern Student

“A real building is one on which the eye can light and stay lit,” exorted poet Ezra Pound, commenting on the need for architecture to be visually engaging in order to stimulate the mind — a thought that could just as easily apply to that which occurs within a given structure. With the Perry-Castañeda Library’s (PCL) recent entry in the Austin Chronicle’s “Best of 2014” issue with the dubious distinction of “Best Brutalist Architecture,” there’s little promise that the edifice of the 70’s-era building would meet Pound’s condition for generating intellectual inspiration, so the Libraries must instead focus on that which occurs within the walls of its spaces to spark creativity and innovation.

To that end, the Libraries is undertaking its largest transformation of space since the PCL’s construction in an effort to adapt to the changing needs and practices of its users, as well as to the expectations of the larger campus community. This semester, construction is beginning on phase one of a project to create a cross-campus collaborative space in the Libraries’ flagship branch where student learning at the university will enter a new era. The University of Texas Libraries Learning Commons has been in development over the past 18 months through engagement with campus stakeholders and discussions with university administrators to envision the transformation of outmoded library space into a place where active learning and modern scholarship can occur.

“Libraries have learned from recent paradigm shifts to be more...”
agile than they were traditionally,” says Assistant Director Catherine Hamer. “While shrinking budgets compound the difficulty of making wholesale changes to how we operate, we’ve continued planning and executing on efforts that are known needs for students, faculty and researchers. We’ve been developing the Learning Commons as a major strategic goal behind the scenes for some time, and I’m gratified that we’re finally able to announce it as a reality.”

The 20,000 square-foot renovation on the entry-level of PCL will include new technology-rich classrooms built for 21st century learning, consultation spaces and meeting areas. It will boast a modern media lab with high-end software and support for digital media creation that will be available to every student on campus — regardless of college or school — as well as support for faculty who want to incorporate digital literacy into their courses. The Learning Commons will also serve as the new home for the University Writing Center (UWC), the first-of-its-kind partnership between the Libraries and another campus service unit devised to streamline resources for students at UT by locating specialized service at the point of need.

The vision of the Learning Commons is to create a one-stop-shop for student research and productivity, making various opportunities for intellectual growth possible in a single place. A range of services will be available in the transformed space, including the continuation of current offerings like instruction and research consultations, and the addition of new options like writing assistance from trained UWC staff and assistance with digital media projects with trained staff using enhanced media lab hardware and software. The Libraries also hope to introduce additional services as part of future expansion of the Learning Commons, including oral communication consultations for presentations, drop-in tutoring sessions with staff from the Sanger Learning Center and help with statistical analysis using specialized software available in the Learning Commons.

Beyond the physical changes, a major component of the transformation will focus on the types of activities taking place in the space. The Libraries will work with campus partners to develop

Modern Space: continued from Page 2

Example library space designed by Gensler.
a rich array of programming including workshops on research, writing, public speaking, career exploration, digital media tools and more aimed at both undergraduate and graduate audiences, with a focus on highlighting faculty and student research from across the Forty Acres.

Michele Ostrow, head of Libraries’ Teaching and Learning Services and a driving force behind the project, sees great promise in joining efforts with other members of the campus community. “The Learning Commons is about space but it is also about the mission to deepen academic support for all students regardless of college or school,” says Ostrow. “We have already started new collaborations between academic support units on campus and will expand our partnerships so that students will be seamlessly supported through every phase of their academic work, from exploration through creation.”

The overall cost for the first phase of the project — roughly $4.5 million — has been shouldered with the help of the Office of the Provost ($2 million), the College of Liberal Arts ($500,000), and the Libraries ($1.5 million). The Libraries will still need to raise roughly $500,000 in order to fund the technology needs — one of, if not the most critical of components — for the Learning Commons. Additional phases of the project would further develop spaces with even greater learning potential and more robust technology, and the possible incorporation of creative or maker spaces that are becoming the norm in modern libraries.

Architectural design firm Gensler was retained last summer, and has since worked with staff and campus partners to build plans for the Learning Commons that meet the guidelines of budget considerations and varying interests. Gensler has spent several years gathering and distilling data on modern academic library usage patterns, and has worked previously on projects at NYU, MIT and UC-Berkeley.

Construction of the Learning Commons is projected for completion by August 2015.
Center for Verse Opens in PCL

Even modern moves towards ever more transitory forms of communication – from Facebook to Twitter to Instagram – draw on a long history of poetry as community.

The University of Texas Libraries continue to weave together new media with books on the shelves with the opening of the new UT Poetry Center in the Perry-Castañeda Library.

The Center was developed through a partnership with the Department of English, the New Writers Project, and the Michener Center for Writers to highlight the Libraries’ significant holdings in poetry — much of which was founded upon a collection donated and funded by editor, poet and publisher Ruth Stephan in 1965 — and to encourage an ongoing interest in reading, writing and presenting the art in its myriad forms.

Though the UT Poetry Center has its roots in collections that have been with the university for a number of years, the prospect of reinvigorating the form through efforts to establish a new space have already resulted in development of new materials. The Stephan Poetry Collection contains over 4500 volumes of poetry; now, a recent gift from local poet Ken Fontenot as well as a major collection rebuild funded by the English Department, the New Writers Project and the Michener Center for Writers pushed the total to over 6000 volumes in the new space. The growth of the collection focuses on contemporary university and local poetry with a special focus on building dialogue with poets of color and LGBTQ poets.

The UT Poetry Center will also have relevancy to numerous writing programs across the university — both long-standing and recently developed. The Michener Center for Writers lures some of the top creative writing talents from around the world, many of whom are prolific poets themselves and will benefit from an enhanced and centralized collection. The Department of English recently established the New Writers Project MFA program, which has already gained a national reputation, and will be able to use the Center as a reading space for fiction and creative non-fiction. MFA programs in the Department of Theatre and Dance draw on poetry and poetics for multiple genres and audiences. And faculty poets with ties to the local and state poetry communities — including Texas Laureate Dean Young, New Writers Project Assistant Director Lisa Olstein and CantoMundo co-founder Deborah Paredez — have voiced excitement about the Center and the potential impact it will have on their students and the larger poetry community.

The Center will further help to highlight the importance of humanitites-based education through its incorporation into the larger Learning Commons project set to begin construction early next year. More information about the development of the Learning Commons will be presented in the coming months.

The UT Poetry Center held an opening celebration on Wednesday, September 3, which featured readings from the collection and discussion with a bevy of poets and writers from the campus and local community, including Ariana Brown, Celeste Guzmán Mendoza, Dean Young, Devon Howard, Drea Brown, José Casas, Layne Ransom, Lisa Olstein, Matt Richardson and Meg Freitag.

Writers Project Assistant Director Lisa Olstein and CantoMundo co-founder Deborah Paredez — have voiced excitement about the Center and the potential impact it will have on their students and the larger poetry community.

The event was co-sponsored by the Center for Mexican American Studies, the Center for Women’s & Gender Studies, Drama and Theatre for Youth and Communities, the English Department, LILAS Benson: Latin American Studies and Collections, the Michener Center for Writers, the New Writers Project and the Warfield Center for African and African American Studies.
Pre-Mod, Pre-Med

Typhus, Bloodletting and Sasparilla

With the Dell Medical School’s inaugural class set to arrive in 2016, it’s only fitting that one of our most innovative archiving projects should get a notable addition from the field of medicine.

The international partners of the digital Primeros Libros project have incorporated the first medical text printed in the New World, Francisco Bravo’s Opera Medicinalia.

The volume — which was printed in 1570, thirty short years after the arrival of the first printing press in the western hemisphere — is composed of four treatises, covering medical topics such as epidemiology (an entire treatise on “tabardete,” thought to be an antecedent of typhus), archaic treatments (bloodletting) and medicinal herbs (the last chapter focuses on Smilax aspera or Sasparilla root, which was proliferate in Mexico and North America), and features remarkable engravings, including a rudimentary diagram of the human circulatory system.

The digital iteration of Opera Medicinalia resulted from the only known copy of the original printing still in existence, housed in La Biblioteca José María Lafragua at the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla in Mexico.

The Primeros Libros project — of which the University of Texas Libraries and Benson Latin American Collection are founding members — seeks to digitize the first books published in the Americas, focusing initially on works published in Mexico in the 16th century. Each participating member library is entitled to a full set of the digitized exemplars of all partners as part of the project’s innovative preservation and access strategy. The project inventory currently includes over 349 exemplars — contributed by 21 partner institutions — of the 136 titles that are known to have survived to the present day.

The National Institutes of Health’s blog at the U. S. National Library of Medicine has more information on the history and importance of this volume.
The Libraries’ Closet

Like so many leather skirts, go-go boots and seersucker jackets that need to be carefully stowed in the interim between their respective periods in vogue, these great buildings of books, too, need to occasionally clear space for more useful, timely purposes.

To that end, the Libraries have thus far accommodated a need for additional “closet space” through the construction of off-site warehouses much reminiscent of the one imagined in the closing scene of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, seemingly endless rows of shelving stretched from concrete floor to stories-tall rafter, where once-prized tomes and formerly-current periodicals can reside until such time as they are once again called upon to provide the critical information needed to complete some important research or solve some lingering question.

These library storage facilities (LSFs) house those low-circulation items and fragile materials that might be considered complementary resources for collections from across the campus of The University of Texas at Austin and beyond. Both the Harry Ransom Center and the Briscoe Center for American History are reliant upon this remote storage in order to free up room for the more high-value, high-use items in their ever-growing collections of cultural artifacts. Likewise, as parts of the Libraries’ valuable print collection are accessed less frequently than in the past, it’s logical to move those volumes into a high-quality storage environment and establish systems for retrieving books as scholars request them from storage. The migration creates space that can be repurposed for student use and newer technologies to facilitate a more productive, modern learning environment.

The Libraries also enjoined sibling rivals at College Station in two of the ventures thus far — the second of two facilities at the Pickle Research campus in North Austin, and a joint library facility (JLF) at Texas A&M’s Riverside campus outside of Bryan, Texas. In a collaboration that seeks to minimize the physical presence of materials while still availing the needs of institutions across the state, UT and A&M have pared some of their collections to a single-copy that is then shared cross-organizationally through a delivery system coordinated by the principals. The Austin unit constructed in 2010 is already at capacity, and the Riverside unit, which opened in 2013, has incorporated nearly half a million volumes to date. Given the successful outcomes of the partnership, there are already considerations for the development of further partnerships.

Beyond the space-saving functionality of the LSFs, there is a compelling financial reason for moving low-use items off-site. A 2010 study showed the cost of storing a single volume in an open library stacks facility is $4.26 per year, taking into account personnel, lighting, maintenance and heating and cooling costs. The cost is pegged at 86 cents per volume for storage at a facility such as the Riverside unit jointly operated by the Texas A&M and University of Texas Systems — representing a savings of $3.40 per volume.

The Libraries learned recently that it had received approval from the Board of Regents to begin construction on a third unit at the Pickle campus, which is necessitated by the Dell Medical School’s future plans to build where the Collections Deposit Library currently stands. CDL has long served as a storage facility on campus for permanent collections, as well as a holding space for unprocessed materials, but due to its age and lack of available space, the building has just about outlived its utility. The new construction at the north Austin campus will allow significant additional materials from other campus locations, as well.

The coming facility will, like its predecessors, be climate controlled, and will hold roughly one million additional volumes, bringing the Libraries over halfway to completing a stated goal of removing two million books from campus locations to off-site storage. Construction on the $8 million building will begin in 2016 and is expected to open in late summer of 2017.
Distinguished Author Dinner Recap

In October, the Libraries hosted a Pulitzer Prize finalist for its third annual Distinguished Author Dinner.

Jaqueline Jones — who has earned accolades for her book A Dreadful Deceit: The Myth of Race from the Colonial Era to Obama's America, — spent the evening before a rapt full house of University of Texas Libraries supporters discussing her ideas on race as a social construct.

The Distinguished Author Dinner is an invitation-only event to acknowledge and thank major donors, advisory council members and friends for their support and interest in the Libraries. In addition, it provides an opportunity to reinforce the Libraries role in teaching, learning and research, and to promote the outstanding research of world-class faculty on the campus of The University of Texas at Austin.

Past events have featured Hamilton Book Award winner for Scripting Jesus: The Gospels in Rewrite Dr. L. Michael White, and acclaimed author, library advocate and Texas favorite, Sarah Bird.

To receive invitations to events like this one, please become a Libraries donor by giving online at the Libraries website.
What brought you to UT Libraries?

I was involved in the undergraduate curriculum reform process that began in 2004—first as a student, then as an administrator, and now as an alumnus. Early in that process, we identified the Libraries as a central focus because one of our goals was to expose undergraduate students to what we called the campus “gems”—the things that made UT a world-class research institution. The Libraries are clearly one of those gems. So I took an early interest through our curriculum reform effort and was so impressed with what we are doing in the Libraries that I wanted to continue my involvement.

What did you find so valuable about the Libraries?

I think the role of the Libraries has changed a lot in recent years. As information migrates online and into electronic formats, students are finding it in different ways. So in many ways the role of the librarian has changed, but I think there is also a lot of continuity in that the Libraries continue to help students identify, organize, and evaluate the quality of information. That’s more important than ever.

President Powers has really emphasized the role of research in the undergraduate experience, and rightly so. After all, research is our competitive advantage. I think we’ve been more successful than most large universities at involving undergraduates in the research mission of the University. The Libraries and their information literacy initiatives are central to that. Hopefully, students will learn from what they’ve found in the Libraries and will ultimately use the tools they have learned to play their own role in expanding human knowledge.

What is the most interesting thing that you have learned about UT Libraries since joining the Advisory Council?

I am always impressed with the scope and the breadth of the Libraries. The diversity of both the collections and the physical spaces on campus is impressive—from the big circulating libraries like the PCL to the special collections like the Benson that are truly world renowned. Being involved with the Libraries has been a process of constant rediscovery for me.

I served on a search committee for a senior UT administrator not long ago, and we had a candidate from an Ivy League school we were trying attract to campus for an interview. She happened to be a really distinguished scholar in Latin American Studies, so we told her that if she came to campus for an interview we would take her on a tour of the Benson. She agreed. It was a huge selling point for her. It is easy to forget how special these gems are when you are in close proximity, but people across the country and around the world know. So that is something I am constantly reminded of when I am on campus.

How do you think UT Libraries adds value to the student experience?

I think the physical space component of the Libraries is really important. Again, there is a lot of diversity. You have the modern, flexible spaces in the PCL, but you also have these really extraordinary spaces like the Architecture and Planning Library or the Life Science Library. You walk into a space like that and feel a connection to the lifeblood of the institution and to its...
You read the quotes on the ceiling in the Life Science Library, and you get a sense of the University's high aspirations. I think that's a really significant part of a student's experience. It's one of many important things that our libraries do.

I think that's a really significant part of a student's experience. It's one of many important things that our libraries do.

What do you think the difference is between the Student Activity Center and the PCL as far as studying? I think as libraries shift in the ways that they serve their constituents, it's kind of difficult not to become just the second student union.

Well, I think the Libraries have done a really good job of making library spaces comfortable, which is more of a recent trend, and that's important. Students are going to look for comfort, but the Libraries offer things that the Union doesn't. One, the perceived connection to the intellectual community of the University, and two, the services. You have librarians there who understand how to do the research you need to do. Our most successful students know that there are people in the Libraries who can help them find materials. With the broad availability of information on the Internet, there's a lot of quantity, but it is not always easy to sift through it and find the quality. Our librarians are experts at that, and learning from them should be a big part of an undergraduate's education at UT.

I know from my research that you are a very busy person, so what inspired you to participate on the search committee for the new Vice Provost and Director for UT Libraries?

The Libraries, like most of higher education are in an important transitional phase, and I think leadership is really important. When the Provost asked me if I would serve on the search committee, it was an easy decision. I think the Vice Provost and Director of UT Libraries is a really important job on our campus, so I wanted to help in any way that I could. It will not be easy for a new Director to fill Fred Heath's shoes, but we have found an outstanding new leader for the Libraries in Lorraine Haricombe.

I agree. Where did you like to study as a student?

You know the nature of a business student's life is group projects and group presentations, so we spent a lot time in the PCL in the presentation practice rooms. We needed big flexible spaces and access to IT equipment. It was later on when I became more interested in books.

Ah, as working professional—when you had more free time…?

Yeah.

Yeah, I think that is how many of us are.

(laughing) Yeah, it is funny how that works.
The University of Texas at Austin Libraries would like to thank alumni, friends, foundations and businesses for contributing over $7.6 million to the Libraries during the Campaign for Texas.

Your support provided funds for the purchase of significant items like the Carmen Lomas Garza Print Collection and the KUT Music Collection. You helped us renovate and create new spaces for students like the Roberts Reading Room in the Fine Arts Library; the UFCU Student Learning Commons in Perry Castaneda Library and new presentation practice rooms in the Mallet Chemistry Library.

Your gifts created 11 new endowments that will transform the Libraries for decades to come. Most notably are Blake Alexander Architectural Library Endowment, Holsey Literary Collection Endowment, and the Heath Libraries Tomorrow Fund.

We have made world-class acquisitions like the archive of Chicana author and cultural theorist Gloria Anzaldua; the papers of human rights activities Charles and Joyce Horman; the collection of architects, Herbert Miller Greene and Karl Kamrath; and the Romo Collection of Mexican American Art Prints.

Contributions have also created world-changing projects like the Human Rights Documentation Initiative and Primeros Libros. With more than 3,300 gifts and nearly half of them from UT alumni, the Libraries have enhanced its collections, services, space and value to our university community. Thank you!
New Media Labs Open

The Libraries recently opened two new spaces that will meet the technology needs of students working on projects in multimedia environments.

The Perry-Castañeda Library (PCL) and the Fine Arts Library now host spaces that feature upgraded technologies used for the creation of audio, video, animation and digital photography, illustration and design.

The addition of new equipment and software was necessary to provide options for library users that could not be accommodated by standard general use technologies.

Hardware available includes a combined 25 Apple iMac workstations built for intensive graphics processing alongside book, film and slide scanners, viewing and listening stations, and stations for audio and video capture.

The labs provide the latest releases of software design and creativity suites, including Final Cut Pro, After Effects, Adobe Creative Suite, Pro Tools, Autodesk Maya and Adobe Fireworks.

Both labs are open during regular library hours and available to students, faculty and staff on a first-come basis, with limited support available from skilled staff.

The media labs will also serve as testing grounds for technology offerings to be incorporated into an expanded learning commons that has been funded by the university, the Libraries and the College of Liberal Arts, and is being slated for development in the PCL beginning this fall.
A Poet in the Stacks

One wouldn’t necessarily expect to find a poet in the stacks of a science library, but then again, creativity often occurs in the least anticipated of places.

The Life Science Library boasts among its staff a prize-winning poet, as Library Specialist Harold Whit Williams has garnered praise for his work, which is both a catalog of his experience as a musician, and reflective of his southern heritage. His most recent collection of poems, *Backmasking*, earned Williams the 2013 Robert Phillips Chapman Poetry Chapbook Prize from Texas Review Press, and his poem “Blues Dreams,” received the 2014 Mississippi Review Poetry Prize.

In some ways, it would seem to make perfect sense that Williams would understand the finer points of cadence and pentameter — he’s also the guitarist for notable Austin pop band Cotton Mather. Williams’ first collection of poetry, *Waiting For The Fire To Go Out*, was published by Finishing Line Press, and his work has appeared in numerous literary journals.

Whit kindly indulged a line of questioning about his poetry, his music and his life at the Libraries.

*When did you start writing poetry? Was it an outcropping of your music?*

Harold Whit Williams: I’ve been writing poetry off and on since college days, but started giving serious attention to it, and publishing, now for about seven years.

Strange, but poetry is a totally separate thing to me from song-writing. As a guitarist first, my songs, or the guitar parts I play in Cotton Mather, happen musically first. Then lyrics come later. But with poetry, it’s all wordplay from the get-go, and the musicality in the words themselves tend to direct where I go in a poem.

*Does the inspiration for poetry and music come from the same place, even though the jumping off point is different? Or are they driven by different urges?*

HWW: Good question. What makes me plug in an electric guitar and make loud horrendous noise has to come from a much different urge than the one making me get to a quiet place, alone, to jot down a poem.

*Well, that makes sense. Speaking of contrasts, how did you wind up at the Life Science Library? We’ve had a lot of musicians employed at the Libraries over the years...maybe you can shed some light on why that particular artistic temperament gravitates toward libraries?*

HWW: I wound up at Life Science after working off and on for various Austin Public Library branches over the years. I wanted a change of pace, from a public setting to an academic one. I also worked part-time at a public library in Alabama, when I was attending college.

I’m not exactly sure why certain creative types gravitate towards library jobs. For me, early on, it was simply a wonder to
be surrounded by shelves and shelves of great books I’d never read, books that I would hopefully get a chance to read, and be inspired by – whether fiction, nonfiction, or poetry.

I haven’t seen your first book, but “Backmasking” has a very distinctive voice to it. It’s almost like half road-weary musician diary, half reflections on rural southern life with a little spiritual sparring sprinkled in for good measure. I know that’s probably a ridiculous simplification, but as a Texan with rural roots, there’s a familiarity to the subject matter that I find really compelling. Any idea where that comes from?

HWW: Not a ridiculous simplification at all – that’s it in a nutshell. That should’ve been a backcover blurb.

A few years back, I attended the Sewanee Writers’ Conference in Sewanee, Tennessee. A fantastic experience. I got to attend lectures and readings by poets such as Mark Strand, Mary Jo Salter, and others. The poet Andrew Hudgins was leading my workshop, and his main criticism of my writing, at that time, was that I was just too “southern”, that I should try harder, dig a little deeper past the kudzu and wisteria and granddaddy working the coalmines, etc. He was right, and I’ve since tried to delve deeper into my gray matter, to get past the easy imagery, to get at something unique, maybe something not said yet.

But for anyone writing, whether poetry or short stories or whatever, you of course draw heavily on past experiences – traumatic, peaceful, enlightening. For poetry, this usually gets filtered through language and imagery that is more dream-like, which makes it even more personal. And because of my upbringing in small town and rural Alabama, and being involved in music, both sacred and secular, my poetry is, for better or worse, infected with this “southernness”.

Tell me a little about “Blues Dreams,” your poem that earned the Mississippi Review Prize. The tone of the poem almost had me believing that Hazel Motes was going to tap me on the shoulder when I was reading it. What was the inspiration?

HWW: I’m honored that it made you think of Flannery O’Connor. But I would say that the inspiration for the writing style of “Blues Dreams” came from the stream-of-consciousness ramblings of the late Arkansas poet Frank Stanford. He was a tragic figure, taking his own life at an early age. He’s now a pretty well-known and influential poet, but during his life he was fairly obscure.

As a rock and roll guitarist, I’m a huge fan of the Delta blues, of course. I spent countless hours in my youth playing along and listening to Muddy Waters and Robert Johnson records. So as far as the inspiration for the theme of the poem, I guess I wanted to tap into a voice that was one part me, and one part some old gut-bucket bluesman. Also, I’d noticed that I had not yet written a longer poem, or a poem presented in multiple sections, like this one. And so I challenged myself to do that. Nowadays, it seems like almost everything I’m writing is a part of some larger piece. I find it harder now to just sit and write a single poem that’s unconnected to something bigger. It’s just a phase, I’m sure.

A Southern Gothic influence is definitely apparent in your work, but certainly any musician worth their salt has to tip a hat to Robert Johnson and his successors, so why not do it both in your music and writing?

Now that you’ve had success in both of those pursuits, what’s next for you?

HWW: My next poetry collection, Lost in the Telling, will be out summer of 2015 from FutureCycle Press, and I’m currently shopping around a newer poetry manuscript, hopefully for 2016 or so.

As for music, Cotton Mather has a stockpile of new material recorded, so we should have a record out next year, hopefully. Also, I play solo acoustic sets on occasion, as a duo with multi-instrumentalist Jon Bookout. In fact, we recently played a few songs alongside a poetry reading I gave at the super-cool local literary shop Malvern Books. I’d like to do more of that in the future, combine my songs and poetry in one event.

Tell me a little about “Blues Dreams,” your poem that earned the Mississippi Review Prize. The tone of the poem almost had me believing that Hazel Motes was going to tap me on the shoulder when I was reading it. What was the inspiration?