
Senior Projects Spring 2019

Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects

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Fly Not Hence

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Fly Not Hence

Senior Project Delivered to the Division of the Arts of Bard College

by

Brandt Rohde

Annandale on Hudson, New York

2019

Fly Not Hence

2 years ago, I visited the Museum of Jurassic Technology in Culver City, California. Inside the museum was an exhibit that displayed a number of superstitions and old wives' tales, each accompanied by a visual representation. Laryngitis in children used to be treated by serving an entire dead mouse on toast. Bringing shears to a wedding, opening them and calling out the groom's name and, if he reacted and turned in your direction, closing them would cause him to be unable to consummate (a project I would also like to try my hand at). The centerpiece of the exhibit was a beehive wrapped in canvas with a long hose apparatus attached to it. The placard described a practice among beekeepers, where upon a death in the family, the youngest child was sent out to inform the bees of the passing. If they did not, the bees would not properly engage in mourning, and they would go silent, fly the hive or die.

I was struck by the intense visual associations that these legends and superstitions evoke, that nearly all of them included a physical gesture to complete the ritual. They encompass a kind of storytelling that interests and inspires me deeply, the application of story to the world as we know it. The process of mourning is a burden left to the living, and the narrativization of the mourning process allows it to come to a satisfying conclusion. The bees are brought into the family's mourning, and by their inclusion the family and the bees mourn together, each contributing to the other. The mourning process is, therefore, shared between the family and the parallel family structure of the beehive, and each complete the other's mourning in that inclusion. Failure to inform the bees, to express the grief that death brings, results in more death. The bees are imbued with an extrasensory knowledge, that a death has occurred and that they were not properly informed, and the stress caused by this disconnect takes its toll on both communities. When the burden of mourning is not shared, it crumbles the mourners. In addition, I was struck by the prescription that the youngest child was to do the telling. No sources give a clear indication of why this is, only that tradition demands it. My own reading is that perhaps for a child to be given such a vital role in the moments after a death exposes them to the far-reaching effects that a death may bring, and gives them a role to fulfill within, a kind of role that grants a child strength in a time of uncertainty, and a symbolic closing of the period of mourning opened upon death. It teaches a child that acceptance is the first step in finding comfort in death, and gives them a way to achieve that acceptance. It serves as well to create a narrative that the child may follow (My grandfather died, because of my grandfather's death I must tell the bees, because I tell the bees they will be able to properly mourn, because they are able to properly mourn I am able to properly mourn, because the bees have not flown the hive, or died, they have accepted the death, and because the bees have accepted the death, perhaps I can as well).

My film is less of a story of familial grief than it is an exploration of the kind of storytelling and narrativization of action that superstitions follow. This is a kind of storytelling that I am interested in pursuing, exploring and crafting.