



## El cantante de gospel (Acuarela & A. Machado n° 35)

*Harry Crews , José Elías Rodríguez Cañas (Translator)*

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Coincidiendo con la llegada de un circo de freaks, un joven con voz de ángel, convertido en un próspero cantante de gospel, regresa a su pueblo, Enigma, donde están a punto de linchar a un negro por matar y violar a la que fuera su novia.

Los lugareños lo idolatran de un modo absurdo y le atribuyen poderes curativos que no posee. Él, atormentado por la dramatización de su farsa, no quiere que la verdad salga a la luz, pues teme que la magnitud de la decepción pueda resultar calamitosa.

Como afirma Kiko Amat en el prólogo, «Enigma es un pueblo lleno de retraso, burricie, violencia, racismo e, inevitablemente, fanatismo religioso, rama cristiana sureña extrema. Palurdos locos y creyentes: una eterna receta para la catástrofe».

### El cantante de gospel (Acuarela & A. Machado nº 35) Details

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## From Reader Review El cantante de gospel (Acuarela & A. Machado nº 35) for online ebook

### Paul Bryant says

This is a fabulous but really quite insane novel about a guy who lives in the South of the USA and has a golden voice which he puts to good use doing the Lord's work. Well, yeah, that's a little tiny part of the story. The rest is pure mayhem, people doing dreadful things to each other and what's worse, to animals too, there ought to be a law. Although the way Harry Crews tells it, down there it's illegal NOT to do these things. Which I am not about to describe cause you may be at work reading this and your colleague may be looking idly at your screen and should I be typing up some of the stuff in these pages, that colleague will surely never say yes if you ask him or her out for a Bacardi Breezer next Saturday. He or she will think you're a tragic weirdo, and however much you say "it's just a book review site", your moment will have gone forever and word will go round your office like wildfire.

So I'm not going to describe any of the things that happen in this novel.

But it does contain amidst the wreckage a very profound truth about Elvis Presley, the obvious real world version of The Gospel Singer in the novel. It's along the lines that people began to think Elvis was a kind of magical being with special powers, and he couldn't stop them thinking and feeling that, and the intensity of their projections on him actually did make a kind of shared hallucinatory magic, and he couldn't control it. He made the amber and he was the fly that got stuck in it. It makes the argument that Elvis (who I stress is not named in this novel nor alluded to, this is a book about a gospel singer and Elvis only sang gospel on two albums) was engaged in this hideous inner conflict with himself, his power, his talent, his popularity – that he could see clearly that it could be a terrible murderous thing and that's why he buried himself for ten of his prime years, and that's why he self-destructed and died aged 42. I think it's a theory with a great deal of merit – you could write a thick long list of the stuff Elvis SHOULD have done, and COULD SO VERY EASILY have done in those crap years from 1960 to 1967 and he did nary a one of them. The Colonel Tom Parker Brainwashed the Poor Ignorant Bastard theory is quite funny but hardly credible. Elvis could have crushed the Colonel with the raising of his left eyebrow.

So anyway, Harry Crews is a crazy guy and this was a novel which twanged round my head for months. Still does. I wanna reread it!

Also - what a cover.

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### Guille says

Estamos en el sur americano y con un ritmo algo lento en sus principios los acontecimientos se van sucediendo de forma cada vez más angustiosa.

Poco a poco, vamos conociendo la vida y los personajes que rodean dramática y literalmente a este cantante de gospel, a este mesías irreconciliable con su causa, atormentado por su farsa ante la multitud de impedidos o deformes, física o espiritualmente, que van tras sus pasos. Un mesías que quiere huir de sus orígenes, de esa gente que gusta de refocilarse en su barbarie, que renuncia a cualquier clase de ayuda como si ello significara reconocer su fracaso, exponer sus taras al mundo. Un mesías que quiere huir de su María Magdalena a base de profanar su capilla una y otra vez en una viciosa escalada sin salida.

Y frente a este mesías de alma atormentada que encarna ese ser sobresaliente de voz divina, tenemos al otro,

que, procedente de lo más selecto de la ciudadanía americana y con una deformidad ridícula, posee unas enormes ganas de disfrutar de la vida y la sabiduría más que suficiente para conseguirlo, por muy grotesco que sea el camino.

Puede que no sea un libro perfecto (no hay que olvidar que es una primera novela) pero suena a verdad este sencillo relato que Crews nos regala sobre la culpa y la necesidad de esperanza o de justificación del fracaso.

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## **Dustincecil says**

a goddam gem!!!

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## **LouLou says**

Crews' first novel published in 1968, the story centres around a gifted, deified singer returning to his poor hometown and a life and family he is so far removed from he now holds in contempt. The novel is as relevant today as when it was published, *The Gospel Singer* reveals the absurd blind faith of those who follow religion and idol worship, and the hypocrisy that results when sex and money are offered, its a vicious chain of flesh eating off flesh. The main protagonist is the aforementioned Gospel Singer, other characters include his manager, a dead girl awaiting his melodic eulogy, his dysfunctional family of swamp dwelling pig loving simpletons, a murderer, the fevered townsfolk and the ever present shadow of a travelling freak show. It's a highly enjoyable book that covers the two day visit of the Gospel Singer, stepping back in places to divulge the secrets of each character, and as such confusing judgements of empathy and disdain.

If you like Southern Gothic loaded with sex, death, religion and freaks then i cant recommend this highly enough ....

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## **Judi says**

This Southern Grotesque gem has all the elements needed to qualify for my "favorites" list. A miserable, poor, small, rustic southern town as the setting. Enigma, Georgia. Couldn't have a better name. A gifted, handsome singer from modest Enigma roots. *The Gospel Singer*. His fame and reputation are beyond imagining, in an Elvis Presley sort of way. Beyond even his own imagining. The story wends it's way around his reluctant revisit to his hometown for a performance. The icing on the cake in this tale is that *The Gospel Singer* is being followed around on his singing tours by a Freak Show that benefits from the crowds drawn by the singer. The downside of *The Gospel Singer* by Harry Crews is that it is difficult and pricey to find a copy of this book. It is worth the search and price though.

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## **Camie says**

A great precautionary tale about *The Gospel Singer* , who with both physical beauty and the grandeur of his

voice is able to rise high above the status of his poor pig farming past. But there is trouble looming when after becoming wildly famous he returns to his hometown and people have come to expect miracles and healing from him. A case where the illusion is far different than the man, and he knows and suffers for it. Third and best book yet I've read by Harry Crews.

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## Jamie says

I'm debunking the theory that your first Crews is your favorite. Or, at the very least, I'm proving myself the exception to the rule. Every Crews I've read has been a steady hike uphill, starting with *A Feast of Snakes*, on to *A Childhood*, and now, the latest but certainly not last: *The Gospel Singer*.

It's *A Feast of Snakes* meets Darin Morgan's "Humbug" meets *The Apostle*, and that's just where I'm trying to come up with a sentence that, had I told it to myself before I ever opened the cover, would have given me a hint of just how much I might love this. It still falls woefully short of doing the book justice. It's a mix of freaks and geeks and saints and sinners that only Harry Crews can write.

And that's leaving out the part where it's my favorite story structure, too. Where you take pass after pass at the story, and each pass through a different character's eyes adds layers you couldn't have imagined at first. Shapes you wouldn't think possible, until they're only the shapes that make profound and perfect sense.

At this rate, the only thing I'm wary of is how much I might like which Crews I read next.

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## Ned says

I'm a fan of Crews, frustrated by how hard it is to acquire his books (why don't they get reprinted?). I fear he will be lost to history and as his memory is erased so goes my existence. As his first book, the un-named gospel singer is morally repugnant yet treated as holy by the hordes who see his beauty and godliness in his voice. People are saved on the spot and he merely takes advantage of his pickings, burying himself in lust. Everyone wants a piece of him, even the killer of his sexual nemesis. This novel is aswath in deep southern poverty-stricken pathos. The writing is sharp and the moralism exudes in spite of itself. Crews is shocking today, beyond O'Connor and Welty, and goes deep into pathopsychology. The writing is sharp, and the characters memorable. Deep racism, so far beyond normal is nearly un-recognizable in this scramble. Even the black man in a small southern prison, fearing his own lynching, is seduced (p. 11): "...the Gospel Singer's voice slipped out into his cabin, it was balm poured into a wound. Nothing mattered. The world dropped down a great big hole. Everything- whether it was a razor cut, or a tar-scalded eye, or a burning case of clap off a Tifton high-yellow whore- everything quit but that voice and it went in his head and down his flesh to where his soul slept. And he could stand whatever it was for another week."

You'll find freaks galore, hogs in homes, tobacco sucking women, seductive nymphets, a crazed religious manager and all manner of people in this book. The protagonist is touched by god, or so all the supplicants believe in spite of his protestations. He can't escape, the will is on him and he must pursue his fate and the end will always be shatteringly cruel (thank you Harry). (p. 53) "...the people would stand nervously about, secretly touching him, whispering impossible requests in his ears, always there at his back like hungry dogs over red meat. He would be forced to stand in their midst, impotent, castrated by his inability to relieve their suffering. All he could do was bleed for them, bleed for their ignorance and the condition of their world."

Through these misanthropes somehow a dialectic arises (p. 82) "...If evil gave the opportunity for good, it

ceased to be evil; if evil set into motion a chain of events that caused an eventual good, larger than the original evil, then it ceased to be evil. He had seen the logic of that once. And from that logic he had concluded that pain and suffering was God's greatest gift to man... His mother, of course, had confirmed the reasoning. As she pointed out, without suffering there can be no hope for martyrdom." Nietzsche would be proud.

The fine writing and the writhing of this sadly beautiful boy are but tragedy of the highest order. I'll keep Crews on my top shelf.

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## **Michael Whitaker says**

I've read a lot of Harry Crews. I started with "Celebration" and I loved it. I had never read anything so wildly Southern and strange. I knew I had to trace him down, finding used copies wherever I could. Since then, there's been plenty of disappointments, but this morning, finishing "The Gospel Singer," I know Crews will always be near the top of my list of favorite authors. God rest his soul.

I don't even know what to write in my review without giving spoilers. Suffice it to say, The Gospel Singer has left Enigma, GA for a life of luxury and silk drawers and nice hotels and hot, hot women and he can't stop coming back to the sick, strange place from whence he came.

He is plagued by sexuality and self doubt and sickened by all those that love him so much, especially those from his hometown, those that want his touch, his healing, his voice to bring them salvation.

He can't meet their expectation. Or can he?

One of my favorite scene's in the book takes place in the funeral parlor where the keeper's daughter is blind and is under the impression from her father that if she touches the Gospel Singer's face and truly believes she will see again, she will, in fact, see. She's heard her whole life how beautiful he is, how perfect he is, how he is God-in-flesh-in-Enigma. She pinches his face, pulls his cheeks, hurts him, and says, more or less, he aint nothin special. And yet, they have this moment. While the Gospel Singer is struggling with his morality and the girl is struggling with her blindness and accused lack of faith, the girl says "It's awful hard to believe... You don't know how to try." It's the perfect picture. The Gospel Singer, sinner of all long blond haired, honey-voiced, Cadillac escorted sinners, wants to be something else. He wants to believe in God as more than some silly superstition. He wants to behave. He wants to be good. He wants to do something more for the swarms of people that look to him. But he doesn't know how. He is what he is and he's likely to be doing the no-pants dance with any woman who has a religious experience at his show.

How do we try? Is it even worth while?

To me, that's the crux of this story. What good is trying to be good? No one is good at it. The little blind girl can't even be kind about it, pinching the Gospel Singer's face. She says he's more ordinary than anything else.

We're all so ordinary.

There's a lot to love about this story and, with time, and another reading which I am sure I'll do, this may become one of my favorite novels. There's mania. The dependency. The town of Enigma and the world as a whole latching on to whatever salvation that comes their way. The zeal.

And I haven't even mentioned the freak show, Foot and his namesake. I haven't mentioned Didymus and his Dream Book. I haven't mentioned the ghost that haunts the Gospel Singer, a white man who hounds him for healing, wasting away in his clothes, his skin somehow black. I haven't mentioned the Gospel Singer's parents who light their million dollar homes with lamps and remove the fuses when he's gone. They just like to see him plug them back in and ooh and aaah when the lights come on. I haven't mentioned the brothers and sisters. I haven't mentioned Willalee Bookatee or MaryBell Carter. I haven't mentioned the completely off the walls, bonkers out of this world CHURCH they founded. I haven't mentioned much.

In a lot of ways, this story reminds me of "Celebration." The tent revival brings to mind the maypole.

No one catches fervor the way Harry Crews does.

And anyone that uses the line "she smelled like something shot in the woods" will keep me combing through used bookstores for any old thing I can find.

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### **Charles White says**

I used to think FEAST OF SNAKES was his best novel. I don't think that anymore.

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### **Laura says**

What a book! It's one of those books that I would use some caution as to whom I may recommend. Ummm, I probably missed something but I never saw "that" ending coming. Crews is an amazing writer and exposes you to some interesting (to put it mildly) characters. I think I was expecting less from Crews because it was his debut novel, however I was completely blown away and should have never passed that judgement. "Judgement".....hmmm that could be the word to explain(if it can be explained) this entire book.

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### **Greg says**

There is something about the book that didn't quite grab me. This is Harry Crews first novel, and it's something of a mix between Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor. I felt like I had read this story before. If I wasn't so lazy I'd add the edition that I read, and put up the lurid 1968 mass market cover on it which looks like something a romance novel would have on it. The cover says it's a torrid novel, and the in big letters on the back the word SEX is written, with And Salvation a bit smaller. This book was obviously being sold as a cheap read, and maybe it's reading the book in this format instead of with the dark cover I see above these words for a later edition that makes me not able to stop thinking of the book as a pulp, sex and violence version of Faulkner, sort of like when Faulkner attempted to dive into the cheap thrills market with *Soldier's Pay*. Knowing that Crews later became a respected writer adds something to the quality of this book, but I'm not sure if I would think much of it if I didn't already have his name attached to it. Lots of sex is mentioned (not actually written about as it's happening), freaks, violence and degenerate backwoods Southerners. A fun read but too close to the cookie cutter form of the lurid pulp novel to make it much more than fun for me.

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## Mariano Hortal says

Immense macarrada with sense la de Crews in the one that was his debut novel and that has constituted my baptism of fire by the author. A messianic story that acquires epic proportions in the end and in which there is no lack of good humor in weaving a gospel singer with a circus of freaks and a people of superstitious paletos from the middle west of North America. An explosive cocktail that pretends to reflect in some way the North American society and its disintegration in a way that is at least amusing and that you can read without apparent effort. Until next time in the rule.

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## Cody says

*The Gospel Singer* is a veritable case study in Southern Gothic. All the usual suspects are present and accounted for: crown of thorn-twisted religiosity, atrocious subjugation of Blacks, fucking in the outdoors, et. al. What distinguishes Crews' first novel is his idiosyncratic voice—even here in its nascent form, you sense that you're reading an original with something special about the eyes. If Flannery O'Connor had picked up a bottle of Early Times instead of a fatal case of lupus, she might have written a not dissimilar book. As it happens, ye Gods had other plans for the Madame, and, in my unqualified opinion, Crews was the only author who had any rightful claim to her throne. Though he never attained it (no one has), he came mighty goddamn close here and in a few other bright spots in his career.

Side note: this review is a case study all its own in why you should write your reviews as fast to finishing a book as possible. With Leon Forrest and no less than Herman Fucking Melville (what a middle name!) having clogged my brainpipe since finishing this, I can't think of a proper way to sing the substantial praises it entirely deserves. Let it be said that this book is a whole backseat's bonk of immoral fun with some imagistic flashes of brilliance. Crews, to me, is a great cleanser in between heavier fare. If that makes him sound like a laxative, then I say *poo*—I'm taking my ball and going home.

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## Kirk Smith says

I propose this book as the canon of Southern Grotesque. The best I've read from Crews. Everything I want in one book, a joy and a pleasure to read!! I was surprised to see it was released in 1968. The addition of 1994's *Where Does One Go When There's No Place Left To Go?* was a wonderful and hilarious bonus!

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