

THE HISTORY OF THAT  
INGENIOUS COWPOKE  
DAN K. HONKEY  
OF THE PANHANDLE

(A reflection on bilingualism in the Southwest)

By Heath Wing

In a small podunk town in the West Texas Panhandle (I won't bother you with its name) there lived, not too long ago, one of those rednecks who keep a shotgun in the gun-rack, an old spit can, a broken down truck, and a mangy old cow dog. Most of his income went into his bowl of chili (which contained a good bit more beans than meat), the old stale beef jerky he ate most nights, Friday's baked beans and cornbread with Saturday's leftovers, and at times a skinny old dove left from the previous year's hunting season. All the rest was used for his plaid western shirts, and wrangler breeches he wore out on the town (with ostrich skin boots to match). He lived with a housekeeper, who was forty, and a niece who was still under the legal drinking age, plus a neighbor boy who ran errands for him and spent more time fixing his old truck than he did driving it. Our cowpoke was reaching the ripe old age of fifty, and was just about as skinny as a bean pole, with a face lean and withered like the leather of an old boot accented by a poor excuse for a handle bar mustache. It's said his family name was really Hockley, or possibly Hinckley depending on the writer who discusses the matter. Yet more than likely his name was Hoskley. Not that this really makes that much of a difference in

our story; it's just more noble to tell things as straightforward as you can.

Now you've got to realize that the hitherto mentioned cowpoke spent much of his time (and by much is meant all the time) reading stories of cowboys in the Wild West. He did so with such passion and "gusto", that he almost forgot to go hunting, not to mention take care of his old country home. Thus his curiosity and foolishness took him so far as to sell acre after acre of good cotton farming land in order to buy books (and paraphernalia) of these tales. He brought home as many as he could get his hands on and would devour them from cover to cover, yet none captivated his attention like those hundreds of novels written by the famous Lois L'Amour, which he cherished for the solitary yet unbendable grougness of the cowboys, shootouts between sheriffs and outlaws, gun-slinging draws, and the chivalrous treatment that the cowboys showed to even the saloon girls.

Plots like these rob poor old cowpokes of their sanity. He'd lie awake at night imagining himself at the O.K. Corral side by side with Wyatt Earp in a hailstorm of gunfire, and in short, he so buried himself in these books and fantasies from dusk till dawn that the poor old guy completely lost his marbles. His imagination was so bursting with what he read, from stage coach chases to love affairs that these sensational scenes and dreams became the complete and utter truth. In fact, as far as he was concerned there was no more accurate history of the Southwest than that presented in these stories of the Wild West. And so it was that his mind became so tattered and torn that, finally, it produced the strangest inkling that any madman had ever concocted, and then considered it not just appropriate but his inevitable duty. For the sake of his own honor and duty towards his beloved Texas, he decided to turn himself into a gun-slinging cowboy, traveling all over the West with his horse and six shooter, seeking adventures and propagating his "bravado" while righting every manner of wrong. Indeed, like

a bull out of a shoot with such pleasant ideas, he was carried away with excitement as he hurried off to turn them into a reality.

It roughly took our scrawny hero a week's time to gather what he considered to be the "necessities" of a chivalrous cowboy. He first went to work on his attire, searching throughout the house to find what he needed, and in the end (unbeknownst to himself) he turned out looking like the most ridiculous cowboy West of the Mississippi. Upon his head sat an old worn out ten-gallon cowboy hat he had found in the attic full of holes, (where mice had gnawed through it) allowing his grey straw like hair to poke through. Further down hanging around his neck was a purple bandana embroidered with white lace that had once belonged to his niece, and would now serve him to keep that West Texas dust out of his cracked leathery face and misty blue eyes. He further adorned himself with his favorite (and most tacky) plaid pearl snap shirt, the colorful kind that make women more inclined to run than to have the desire to rip it off. This was followed by his customary skin tight pair of wrangler jeans and his ostrich skin boots, which were now fitted by a dusty old pair of broken spurs he found in the barn and had to duck tape to his boots in order for them to be halfway functional. Having been unsuccessful in finding a pair of chaps to protect him from "saddle rub", our cowboy fashioned a pair made out of cardboard (after several hours of arduous painstaking cutting and taping). Finally, knowing every cowboy protects himself with only the finest of guns, Dan K. Honkey had to settle for a rusted old .22 caliber pistol (instead of the traditional colt .45) that once fired would probably cause more injury to himself than to others.

So in his new getup, with his hat on his head and his pistol at his side, Dan k. Honkey set out to saddle his trusted steed and only horse left in his corral. If ever there was such a sad half-starved boney creature on God's green Earth it was this poor nag, who in horse years should have been dead yesterday. Yet

which had belonged to the Lone Ranger. In his blind pride he named his horse, "Nagford", because according to him, "thar ain't never been a nag quite like eem b'fore", and having said this, to the best of his ability he combined the words "nag" and "b'fore" to produce Nagford.

Now Dan K. Honkey realized that every good cowboy had two important people in their lives. First, a saloon girl to whom he could devote his love, fight for, and defend her honor, proclaiming that she was simply a misunderstood woman finding herself mistreated and unappreciated by lesser cowboys due to circumstances out of her control. Luckily, for the past three years he had frequented the local saloon (which was really a bar named *Saloon*) and in the process became infatuated with a waitress by the name of Suzy Ann May Da'Bois. He considered her to be the most beautiful virtuous embodiment of a woman, whereas everyone else knew she wasn't fit to be hog tied. She was about as round as she was tall from eating left over chicken wings off her customer's plates, and was the only waitress required to wear a jump suite instead of the traditional "scantily clad garb". He always tipped her more than she was worth, yet was too afraid to say more than three words to her (which was usually just his order). However, he knew that he loved her and devoted his heart and future good doings and wrong rightings solely to her.

With that out of the way Dan K. Honkey only needed that second vital person to begin his Wild West adventures...a Mexican sidekick. One he could fully trust and confide in, someone to follow him around on a donkey, carry his bedroll, and put a pot of coffee on the fire while out on the lonely Texas prairie. His only hiccup was he didn't know such a person let alone a Mexican. So with that in mind he set out on his horse Nagford to roam the dusty sun parched farm roads of West Texas, scanning the cotton fields for just such a compadre. After a full afternoon of unsuccessful searching, and an utter lack of preparation (he hadn't even brought a canteen), Dan K.

Honkey found himself caked in dust and dehydrated with the worst case of cotton mouth known to man. As fate would have it, (and it usually does in such epic tales) at the point of surrender there it was...out across the cotton field, barely visible through the heat's mirage was a sombrero, and in the shade of that sombrero was a migrant worker, hoeing the weed infested crops. As Dan K. Honkey drew closer he could see that this man had lived a life of hard labor. His calloused hands were supported by two rock solid arms carved from the constant movement of hoeing weeds. He wasn't any taller than the hoe he bore, and his arms flowed into broad shoulders. All these features seemed to be accentuated by his beer gut, the result of too many cervezas from too few cantinas. His face was rugged and worn from the West Texas wind, and a squat nose sat between his coal black eyes. His mouth was hidden by a long full mustache, and his face covered by untrimmed whiskers peppered with hints of grey against the black, like the screen of a TV without reception. Taking this all in, Dan K. Honkey felt as if he already knew him, and was sure that this would be a companionship that would be talked about through the ages.

"S'cuse me senor, tha name's Dan K Honkey" were the first unexpected words of introduction that startled the Mexican's ears, "I'm a chivalrous cowboy set out to tame the West and persecute any man on tha wrong side of tha law" were the second set of words that drew this frightened man's eyes to behold who was addressing him. What he saw left him completely and utterly dumbfounded, there before him was just about the skinniest withered up old gringo on the planet, who appeared to be a ragged poorly dressed cowboy, sitting on an even skinnier half dead horse. "So" continued Dan K. Honkey totally oblivious to the man's mixed expression of fear and confusion, "I'm out enlistin' a sidekick, and as everyone knows, thar ain't none better'n a Mexican." Receiving no response from the man with whom he was speaking Dan K Honkey thought he'd try a more personal approach, dismounting from

his horse he extended his hand, "So I told ya mine, what's yer name senior?"

There was a long awkward silence as Dan K. Honkey's only response came in the form of a blank stare and no concurring handshake, so he tried it again only louder and more drawn out, "WHAT'S YER NAME AMIGO?" ... after a brief pause and building frustration, the migrant worker finally managed to answer as he stuttered, "eh... mi n-n-naime ees sa-sa- Sanchito sa- sa – Sánchez". "Wait hold up", replied Dan K. Honkey "that's way too many S's, tell me again, WHAT'S YER NAME?".

Already recovered from his initial shock and becoming completely annoyed Sanchito explained, "ya te dije, mi nombre es Sanchito Sánchez, y por favor huero, déjame solo. Estoy en la chamba y si mi jefe ve que no estoy trabajando corro el riesgo de ser despedido, ¡YO NO HABLO INGLES CABRON!, y hablarme más despacio y fuerte no ayuda para nada."

"What?!" was about all Dan K. Honkey could muster for a response, "ya mean ya don't speak English?" Now almost to the point of frustrated panic he continued, "How on Earth are we gunna become the two greatest sidekicks known to man if YOU can't speak English?" "How are we gunna to bring about one of the world's greatest pieces of literature ever written if we can't even understand each other?"

Then suddenly, upon hitting his breaking point Dan K. Honkey completely breaks character, "Wait hold up time out! This is ridiculous, what moron is narrating this?...HEY YOU! MR. NARRATOR! STOP WRITING FOR A SEC!"

“Um excuse me sorry to lose it back there, but why did everything just go blank?” sheepishly chimes Dan K. Honkey.

*Well you told me to stop writing...*

“I didn’t mean literally you idiot of a narrator! I just need to figure this out, what’s your name?”

*Uh, my name’s Heath Wing.*

“OK Heath...or is it you prefer Mr. Wing?” Asked Dan K. Honkey

*Oh Heath is fine.*

“Ok then Heath”, he continued, “I just need to know why he speaks Spanish?”

*Well you went looking for a Mexican sidekick and you got one. You do know Mexicans speak Spanish right?*

Annoyed Dan K. Honkey retorted, “well I would assume you would create a character that spoke English so we could at least understand each other!”

De repente, Sanchito Sánchez quien había presenciado el diálogo entero entre el narrador y Dan K. Honkey sin entender nada, piensa que la voz del narrador viene de Dios mismo, e interrumpiendo la discusión, cae al suelo y exclama de miedo, “¡Ay Dios mío y la Santa Virgen María de Guadalupe! No sé de dónde viene este gringo diabólico quien está invocando tu ira, pero si me salvas de él, te juro que no tocaré otra botella de mezcal, y llevaré a mi familia a misa cada domingo sin faltar.”

“HEY HEY HEY! Hold up!” burst Dan K. Honkey, “first Sanchito only speaks Spanish, and now even the narration is reverting to Spanish! This will never work! What the hell did he just say? And what did you just narrate?”

*To be quite honest I have no clue, I don't speak Spanish, his character just requires a Spanish introspective point of view.*

“That’s ridiculous and impossible!” cried Dan K. Honkey, “you’re the narrator and writer, so fix this! Either give me a new sidekick that speaks English or make Sanchito Sanchez speak English!”



*Um I can't do that, due to Sanchito's circumstance of migrating to the U.S. and working his whole life in the fields, he never had a proper chance to learn English. Kind of like how you lived your life avoiding everything "Spanish" and never learned to speak it either, except he didn't do it by choice. Furthermore, I can't change who your sidekick is, you chose him not me.*

"Hey! Don't reason the un-reason with me pal! You're in control of this story", yelled Dan K. Honkey.

*Well your reason presumes that because I write it you do it, but the un-reason that is true reason says that because you do it I narrate it. Therefore, you chose Sanchito Sanchez to be your sidekick, not me, further suggesting that your actions alone are solely responsible for your predicament. So Dan, is my un-reason sapping your ability to reason? Because quite frankly I have no control over what language my characters speak, they do.*

"Shut up narrator!"

Mientras tanto, Sanchito se había aprovechado de la situación y mientras los dos estaban distraídos, dejó su azada en el suelo y secretamente salió hacia su casa completamente convencido de que había conocido al Diablo mismo y, a la vez escuchado la voz de Dios.

"There it is again! Spanish! I can't believe it, I'm stuck in a story that's turning Spanish! We're in America, I'm American, and we speak English here...Hey wait a sec, where did Sanchito go?" questioned Dan K. Honkey.

*Well if you had paid attention you would have realized that he was scared half to death and fled...or if you spoke Spanish I bet the narration would have just told you that. Plus just so you know, the United States has no official language, and this whole region was once predominated by Spanish.*

“Don’t get smart with me man”, accused Dan K. Honkey,  
“that’s it, you say you have no control over the story then fine I  
quit! done! Finished! Capiche? I’m headed home to forget that I  
ever started this ridiculous quest and there’s nothing you can do  
about it.”

Upon having said this Dan K. Honkey turned to his valiant  
steed Nagford only to realize he was gone, the only remaining  
evidence being a dusty set of hoof prints leading towards Dan’s  
house.

“What?! you’ve got to be kidding me! You did this you stupid  
narrator! Oh wait sorry, I suppose my actions are responsible  
for my horse running off on me” spat Dan K. Honkey  
sarcastically.

*Well you didn’t tie him up, what did you think would happen?*

“Oh shut it, I’ll just walk” injected Dan K. Honkey.

With that the old cowpuncher pointed his boots toward home  
and trudged off into a pristine Texas sunset that streaked all  
manner of reds, pinks, and purples across the sky, as if water  
colors had been splashed across a backdrop. The only remains  
of the day’s exploits were the scars left in the earth from  
Sanchito’s hoe, and a set of diverging foot prints. The first set  
would lead Sanchito Sanchez to become a devoted father and  
husband, as well as to learn English, a result of having been  
erroneously convinced it is the language spoken by God. The  
other set of tracks followed a miserable and bitter Dan K.  
Honkey right to his death bed, he never learned Spanish or  
spoke with another Mexican again. Above all, his story never  
became one of Western Civilization’s greatest literary works as  
it was destined to be, all due to a seemingly incompetent  
narrator, and a language barrier.