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The perils and empowerments of mountain literacies: reading loss and shifting identities in Appalachian memoirs and novels

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THE PERILS AND EMPOWERMENTS
OF MOUNTAIN LITERACIES:
READING LOSS AND SHIFTING IDENTITIES IN
APPALACHIAN MEMOIRS AND NOVELS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

Erica Abrams Locklear
A.B., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2000
M.S., Utah State University, 2002
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to my father, Bert Abrams, my mother, Darlene Abrams, and my husband, Mark Locklear. Without the love and support of my parents and spouse, this project and doctoral degree would not have been possible. I am blessed to have these people in my life, and I am forever grateful for their constant encouragement and involvement in my journey to obtaining a Ph.D.

Throughout my adolescent years my father continually told me, “You can do anything you want to do.” With that kind of positive attitude surrounding me at home, I often took on difficult challenges both in academia and in life that I would have not otherwise undertaken. Words cannot express how thankful I am for my father’s steady belief in me and my abilities. He taught me to believe in myself in ways that have carried me through some of the darkest times of self doubt that this Ph.D. process can create.

Like my father, my mother offered me (and continues to offer) constant love and support. She has patiently listened to endless accounts of what I perceived to be some academic crisis in my work or teaching. From my earliest days of girlhood until now she has always wanted the best for me, and I am so grateful that my mother is also my friend.

Although my parents gave me life and raised me with love and care, my husband had to live with me while I completed this degree. He is undoubtedly the most patient, even-keeled person I have ever encountered. When I had a bad teaching day or was struggling to complete a chapter of this dissertation, Mark helped me work through those difficulties by making me laugh, going to the store for an emergency supply of Famous Amos cookies, or by loving me in his own quiet, special way. For all of those things from all of these people, I am thankful.

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I am also fortunate to have a truly exceptional dissertation committee. During my five years at LSU I have repeatedly gone to each of them with different questions or problems; their combined wealth of knowledge never fails to astound me. My director, Dr. Katherine R. Henninger, unfailingly provided careful, precise critical commentary on each chapter draft. Despite a year-long sabbatical that took her away from Baton Rouge, we still managed to communicate frequently and effectively. I am most grateful to her because she pushed me to recognize important conceptual facets of my project that I might have otherwise overlooked. She held me accountable for my arguments, and her high standards of academic integrity helped ensure that I created a worthwhile, quality project.

When I needed help conceiving of myself as a scholar—not a struggling student—I sought the advice of Dr. Lillian Bridwell-Bowles. Since Lilly and I first worked together during the summer of 2004, I have turned to her as a mentor and as a friend. Regardless of how many appointments she might have, or how many students were waiting to see her, Lilly always made time for me and my questions. She continually provided guidance as I learned the proper

conventions for writing a dissertation, she repeatedly read and commented on chapter drafts, and she helped me wade through the stresses inherent in the academic job search. For that I am grateful.

Dr. Richard Moreland was my Rock of Gibraltar in a sea of uncertainty. On multiple occasions I called on him for help with formulating a chapter argument. When we met to discuss my chapter on Harriette Simpson Arnow, in one afternoon he helped me see my project in a new and important way. Without his guidance I would not have seen the theoretical connections that bind that chapter and my project together. Equally important, when I had a dire question about the project, the degree, or Graduate School requirements, I could always count on Rick for help. I sincerely appreciate his willingness to answer questions, read chapter drafts, and discuss those drafts in a friendly, calm manner.

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I had the unusual good fortune to interview all of the living authors considered in my dissertation. Words cannot express how grateful I am to Linda Scott DeRosier, Denise Giardina, and Lee Smith for taking time out of their busy schedules to talk with me. In addition to interviewing with me for over three hours, Linda has also served as a mentor to me as I entered the academic job market; I am so grateful for her interest in me and my work. The

correspondence I had with Denise Giardina shed new light on my analysis of her work, and I sincerely appreciate her willingness to communicate with me. Even though Lee Smith has been interviewed many, many times (literary scholar Linda Tate even edited a collection of some of those interviews), she agreed to speak with me about her work. What we discussed during that interview allowed me to re-formulate my arguments about her novels, and it helped me re-shape the project's focus on Appalachian women in particular. I am greatly indebted to her for making time in her busy life for a graduate student's questions.

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A host of good, loving friends have also made this project possible. During four-mile walks around the lakes I talked relentlessly about my project to my dear friend, Kirstin Squint. She helped me think about my project in new ways, and she also read many of its early drafts. To

my soul sister, friend, and partner in crime: thank you. My friend of over a decade, Jessica Lambert, has also supported me throughout this process with many conversations, and for that I am grateful. My dear friends Judy and Randall Kolb have heard their fair share of academic angst in these past five years, and words can scarcely express how much I cherish their genuine friendship. Ilana Xinos and I entered LSU together, two uncertain women trying to forge a path into the intimating world of academia. Throughout it all she has listened to my neuroses and obsessions with kindness and patience, for which I am thankful. Courtney George read many of my early drafts, and I sincerely appreciate her help and her friendship, particularly during the difficult days of MLA. Jennifer Ellis West made me beautiful home-cooked meals, baked me cookies, and sustained my faith in myself through thoughtful emails. I am lucky to know her. Likewise, Casey Keyser has listened to my rants and worries as I finished this work. To all of these wonderful people: thank you.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyzes the literary portrayal of literacy events in memoirs and novels written by Appalachian women during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Drawing from contemporary literacy scholarship, my project engages several definitions of the term “literacy,” including theories defining it as a technical skill, a social act, cultural knowledge, or a potent form of ideological power. In a region historically (and often inaccurately) stigmatized as illiterate, “literacy” is a loaded term, a concept doubly associated with cultural pride and with cultural loss. By applying literacy theories to Appalachian literature, I analyze the identity conflicts literacy attainment causes for several female Appalachian authors and characters. Ethnographic research concludes that some Appalachians think of reading, as well as other literate practices, as woman’s work. This feminized domestication of literacy functions as an important theme in the works this project considers since female characters and authors inevitably face more literacy-initiated dilemmas. I pay special attention to scenes in which literacy acquisition (whether technical, social, or cultural) causes characters to become aware that their way of speaking, acting, and thinking is at odds with that of mainstream society and the gender expectations of their home discourse communities. In doing so, I discuss the resulting negotiations authors and characters encounter regarding their discourse community affiliation, arguing that such literary exploration adds to, and even revises, contemporary literacy theories.

Chapter one discusses Appalachian illiteracy stereotypes, moving into a discussion about literacy definitions and how they operate for the authors in this project. Chapter two argues that in *The Dollmaker*, Harriette Simpson Arnow issues a warning to readers to maintain flexibility when negotiating discourse community divides caused by literacy attainment. Chapter three explores how in *Creeker: A Woman’s Journey* and *Songs of Life and Grace* Linda Scott

DeRosier negotiates the same dilemmas Arnow's characters face, both in her life and through memoir writing. Chapter four interrogates how reading initially discourages writing in Denise Giardina's *The Unquiet Earth*, signaling the sometimes negative influence of technical literacy. Chapter five explores the literacy-initiated path from silence to voicing in Lee Smith's *Oral History* and *Fair and Tender Ladies*.

CHAPTER ONE
APPALACHIA ON OUR PAGES: SITUATING APPALACHIAN LITERACY AND LITERARY ANALYSIS

‘Solitude,’ said Emma Bell Miles in *The Spirit of the Mountains*, is ‘deep water, and small boats do not ride well in it.’ No one who has lived for long in these [Appalachian] mountains can doubt the power of that solitude. It can cause a woman to sink into its depths and never rise again [. . .] The worst thing that icy blue water can do to a woman is to render her silent. Resigned to its hold, she becomes mute when she ought to be singing [. . .] To the women living in these mountains years ago, singing must have seemed the only way they could travel. Though their men might hightail it to Texas or spend weeks away on hunting forays [. . .] they remained. They knew their place. (“Deep Water” 63)

The place to which North Carolina poet laureate Kathryn Stripling Byer refers in the above passage is sometimes a submissive one, dominated by the patriarchal system that governed—and to some extent still governs—the Appalachian mountains. Yet in other instances, a woman’s knowledge about her home, and her place within it, operates as a source of strength, granting her a rooted sense of cultural identity from which she can draw during conflict. In the same way that singing provides an outlet for Byer’s mountain women to travel beyond their own lives, so too does literacy, both for past and present, real and fictional Appalachian women. Lee Smith firmly establishes this connection when she writes to Byer and asks to include Byer’s poem, “Weep-Willow,” in the beginning of *Fair and Tender Ladies*, since the poem “is exactly what my new novel is about. Except that my character [Ivy Rowe] doesn’t sing to get through the night, she writes letters” (“Deep Water” 70). As with many characters and authors considered in this study, Ivy benefits from learning new technical, social, and cultural literacies, because these literacies allow her to conceive of her world in different and interesting ways. Clearly, had Smith made Ivy illiterate in a technical sense, Smith’s premise of an epistolary novel written from Ivy’s perspective would not have been possible. Yet Smith’s depiction of Ivy’s acquiring new literacies also highlights what proponents of literacy sometimes ignore: in learning the skills

necessary to write her letters, Ivy encounters a host of identity-based conflicts ranging from a strained relationship with her “less educated” relatives to a bittersweet estrangement from her own “more literate” daughter. Smith’s treatment of these conflicts reflects literacy scholars Janet Carey Eldred’s and Peter Mortensen’s assertion that “questions of identity are closely bound to acquisition of literacy” (519). Literacy, it seems, can be both empowering and perilous in the cultural process of self-making.

In the last decade literacy researchers have begun exploring the effects of literacy acquisition¹ for Appalachian residents, and their findings revealed a consistent concern among mountain people that too much education would result in “getting above their raising,” causing them consequently to lose cherished ties with their mountain communities and families. Studies like Katherine Kelleher Sohn’s nevertheless conclude that despite these fears, the “acquisition of academic literacy did not destroy family or community” (44). Sohn’s findings rely on ethnographic data gathered from people who understood that their responses would be analyzed by a scholar and subsequently published. While conducting her research, Sohn decided to “deflect attention away from these women’s exact language patterns” and “settled on a lightly edited version of their speech” (35). After transcribing each session, Sohn asked participants to review the interviews. She explains that she was surprised when one woman, Jean, “edited her transcript even further, saying that she did not want to sound like a ‘hillbilly’ to anyone else reading the transcript” (36). As evidenced by Jean’s concern that someone reading Sohn’s work might make unfair judgments about the region and the people living there based on Jean’s mountain speech patterns, respondents in Sohn’s study were aware of century-old stereotypes equating Appalachians with illiteracy, ignorance, and laziness.² Consequently, their responses may have glossed over some of the more painful consequences—including a loss of connection

with their primary Appalachian discourse—of literacy acquisition, since openly discussing those costs would only bolster existing stereotypes. Conversely, the literary genres of memoir and fiction grant Appalachian authors a certain sense of freedom in exploring these identity-based dilemmas, especially as they relate to mountain women. The female Appalachian authors examined in this study respond to these identity conflicts in their writing using multiple strategies, ranging from Harriette Simpson Arnow’s rhetorical warning to readers to maintain a flexible approach when navigating different discursive worlds; to Linda Scott DeRosier’s decision to write in memoir and creative non-fiction form, both of which function as a hybrid of the literacy narrative and narrative of socialization, rhetorically spanning the gap between the two discursive worlds DeRosier struggles to negotiate in her own life through literate activity; to Denise Giardina’s portrayal of how in certain instances, the technical act of reading discourages writing, especially in Appalachia, making it difficult for mountain women to become authors; to Lee Smith’s message that while painful, literacy acquisition (technical, social, and cultural), remains absolutely necessary for the public voicing of Appalachian women’s stories. This dissertation analyzes these multiple strategies using the insights of literacy theory and cultural studies to show that while fiction and memoir writing provide spaces in which authors can discuss the cost of multiple literacy acquisition, the Appalachian women considered in this study also benefit from the often painful process of gaining new literacies. This project works to reveal the dualistic nature of literacy attainment as both empowering and perilous, ultimately concluding that the process of becoming literate (technically, socially, and culturally) grants the authors and characters in this study the ability to publically voice their stories of literacy-initiated conflict.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century the Appalachian region has been associated with illiteracy, and the longevity of that association still influences contemporary mountain authors. In an interview published in *Appalachian Journal*, Appalachian writer Ron Rash discusses the thematic emphasis of his latest novel (*The World Made Straight*) on education, explaining that “education’s the way you get out. Any minority culture knows that” (Bjerre 220). His deceptively simple statement encapsulates much about what lies at the heart of this project; for those doing the “getting out” that Rash references, education oftentimes results in a loss of acceptance within one’s home community. In recognizing Appalachian people as a minority culture, Rash highlights differences between people of the mountain South and other Americans that seem obvious to most Appalachians but perhaps not to non-Appalachians. Education can bring these differences to the forefront, resulting in difficult identity decisions on the part of the educated. Of course literacy—most commonly defined as the ability to read and write, though as this project works to illustrate, it is never that simple—undergirds the kind of education Rash references, and he notes that with “Appalachia in particular, there are pervasive stereotypes about no one being able to read, no one having an education, and that’s obviously not true” (Bjerre 220-21). Certainly illiteracy exists in some parts of Appalachia (Rash even refers to his paternal grandfather who could not read or write), but for a number of historical and political reasons discussed later in this chapter, many Americans regard Appalachia as the most illiterate region in America. Rash even recalls an instance when a non-Appalachian asked him whether his family read his writing, and he reflects that “the assumption was that they couldn’t read, or even if they could, that they would not be remotely interested in it. And that struck me as remarkable, particularly from someone who would probably have considered himself very liberal and open-minded. I was kind of stunned, really, that someone would make that kind of broad assumption”

(Bjerre 221). These types of judgments are commonplace among many Americans, and they produce a host of beliefs that influence the way the rest of the nation conceives of Appalachia, as well as the ways in which Appalachian people conceive of themselves. One of the most interesting manifestations of the effect of such stereotyping occurs in the region's literature: by considering how authors from an area historically, and often inaccurately, represented as illiterate portray literate events in their writing, we can begin to understand the varying definitions of the loaded term literacy, as well as the ways literacy attainment can be both perilous and empowering for the region's authors and the characters they create.

Literary representations of Appalachia date back to the early part of the twentieth century, when local color writers, missionaries, and education officials were deeply invested in securing the image of Appalachia as a fixed entity, one to be kept in its place as a politically useful repository of social aide. Many education officials and missionary organizations deemed earlier reform efforts in the Deep South unsuccessful and hoped for less racial tension in the Appalachian mountains. America's first major exposure to literature set in the mountain South became popular during the Local Color Movement thanks to writers like Mary Noailles Murfree and John Fox Jr, who according to Appalachian scholar Henry Shapiro helped secure "the otherness of the southern mountain region [. . .] as fact in the American consciousness" (18). As with other travel writing commonly read during that time, the vast majority of stories written about Appalachian people during the late 1800s and early 1900s exoticized mountaineers, while virtually no fictionalized accounts by native Appalachians were published or read on a large scale.³ Consequently, America's initial encounter with fictionalized accounts of the mountain South portrayed it as quaint, violent, and most importantly for this project, illiterate.⁴ As memoirist John O'Brien explains, for readers of magazines like *Atlantic Monthly*, *Lippincott's*,

and others which published local color writing, “contrasting an imagined Victorian world, of which [readers] believed themselves to be a part, with an imagined hillbilly world helped convince middle-class Americans that they had indeed reached the peak of Western civilization” (173). Unfortunately, many readers assumed that the stories of wild hillbillies that populated local color writing were true, reading “the books as journalism” while “reviewers gave them the status of sociology” (O’Brien 173). Shapiro even points out that “the short stories of Mary Noailles Murfree’s *In the Tennessee Mountains* (1884) remained the principal text used to understand the peculiarities of mountain life” (xv).⁵ As such, the region seemed especially susceptible to literary mythmaking, and many of the stories about illiterate, filthy, degenerate mountaineers written to entertain actually “educated” the reading public about the assumed ways of Appalachian people.

As the twentieth century progressed, Appalachian writers slowly started publishing their own work, as when in 1940 James Still published *River of Earth*, a text many scholars consider one of the most important works of Appalachian fiction. Roughly twenty years later native Appalachian Cratis Williams wrote the first dissertation about Appalachian literature, and since then new mountain writing and criticism have continued to flourish. These writers have often focused on literacy in their writing, but women writers in particular have repeatedly depicted the consequences of literacy attainment in their stories and memoirs, signaling a persistent anxiety over literacy tropes. The authors considered in this study continually return to scenes in which characters gain new literacies, scenes in which those literacies produce significant internal and external conflict. When we pair these portrayals with various literacy theories, it becomes clear that important identity negotiations are at work in these literary literacy accounts, and analysis of these dilemmas reveals what literacy theorists have begun to identify: while positive in some

ways, literacy acquisition can be perilous in others, especially for the identities of women from a marginalized and supposedly illiterate region like Appalachia.

To illustrate the kinds of conflicts inherent in literacy attainment, this project begins its literary analysis by considering one of the most devastating accounts of literacy acquisition in Appalachian literature: Kentucky-born Harriette Simpson Arnow's *The Dollmaker*. In this work, Arnow painstakingly renders how the Nevels family copes with a drastic change in their discourse community when they move from a rural life in Kentucky to an urban, proletarian existence in Detroit. Literacy theorists Paulo Freire and James Paul Gee assert that transitioning from one discourse community to another via literate practice results in nuanced, identity-based negotiations between those discourse communities, and by leaving no room for that kind of negotiation between her characters' Appalachian and Detroit-based identities, Arnow presents remarkably rigid characters incapable of simultaneously existing in both worlds. This rigidity extends to the submissively feminine role that Arnow's main character Gertie assumes in following her husband to Detroit against her better judgment, and Arnow's portrayal of these "either/or" situations revolving around a gendered literacy sends a rhetorical warning to readers to avoid such rigidity in their own lives. Even so, Arnow's repeated emphasis on the literate skills of her mountain characters reveals a steady attention to mountain literacy that helps overturn stereotypes of Appalachian illiteracy; as with the other authors considered in this project, Arnow demonstrates an obvious thematic preoccupation with literacy, illiteracy, and representations of both.

The following chapter explores two works by eastern Kentucky-born writer Linda Scott DeRosier: her memoir, *Creeker: A Woman's Journey*, and her work of creative non-fiction, *Songs of Life and Grace*. In each of these accounts DeRosier emphasizes the importance of

setting down an accurate written record of Appalachia and its people. In doing so, she frequently returns to themes of literacy and illiteracy, and she carefully depicts the costs associated with becoming socialized from her home community of Two-Mile Creek into the new discourse community of academia. Despite the difficult nature of such a transition, she largely accepts these changes, managing to negotiate her identity between two disparate discursive worlds. Unlike *The Dollmaker*'s Gertie Nevels, DeRosier resists limiting gender expectations by extending her education beyond what was once considered appropriate for women, and she consequently achieves the kind of identity compromise Arnow's characters never attain. In both works DeRosier portrays what it means for a mountain woman to leave home and also be able to return home changed but still able to function acceptably among loved ones. Her decision to write in memoir and creative non-fiction form bridges the space between Appalachian and non-Appalachian audiences, and each of her works operates as a hybrid of the literacy narrative and narrative of socialization.

The fourth chapter considers West Virginia writer Denise Giardina's novel, *The Unquiet Earth*. Media images of Appalachia made popular since the War on Poverty figure prominently in this novel, and Giardina's characters generally learn about outsiders' perceptions of them through classroom situations in which literacy acquisition plays a crucial role. Ironically, for Giardina's main character Jackie (a biographical representation of Giardina), gaining the technical ability to read discourages writing, since Jackie either encounters a complete absence of Appalachian representation or negative portrayals of the region. In both Giardina's life and in the novel, exposure to traditional literary conventions and settings results in the idea that "real" writers do not come from Appalachia, but this notion changes as Jackie acquires new literacies by mastering other non-Appalachian secondary discourses, which in turn results in a loss of

connection with her mountain home. Giardina's thematic preoccupation with loss stems from her own life, and fiction writing operates as an outlet through which Giardina can write about those experiences while also transmitting her political messages about the destruction and devastation unethical coal mining practices inflict upon mountain environments and communities.

Chapter five investigates *Oral History* and *Fair and Tender Ladies*, two novels by Virginia-born writer Lee Smith in which literacy acquisition continues to introduce difficult identity situations, especially for female characters. By considering these novels together, readers can trace the path from oppressive silence to public voicing, from Dory Cantrell to Sally Cantrell to the Cline Sisters, to Ivy Rowe, to Ivy's daughter Joli. When considering this progression, audiences understand that the painful distancing Joli endures remains necessary for the public voicing of Appalachian women's stories. Relying on a popular trope established during the Local Color Movement, Smith introduces a teacher from outside each of the main characters' respective communities (Richard Burlage in *Oral History* and Miss Torrington in *Fair and Tender Ladies*). Even though in some ways these teachers offer intellectual freedom from the sometimes stifling mountains in which the female protagonists of both works (Dory Cantrell in *Oral History* and Ivy Rowe in *Fair and Tender Ladies*) live, each teacher also functions as an authority figure whose literate teachings cause Dory and Ivy to question their allegiance to their mountain-based identities. Smith's portrayal of Burlage's and Torrington's entrance into each novel's mountain community casts the Appalachian region as a feminized, womb-like space which outside interests (whether timber and coal companies or teachers like Richard Burlage and Gertrude Torrington) invade, often with dire consequences. Smith's focus on private writing and public authorship in both novels also draws readers' attention to issues of audience access, a

clever rhetorical strategy that causes readers to question what they know about Appalachia and how they know it.

The tradition of Otherness from which these authors work provides an important backdrop for my purposes in revealing the identity conflicts that literacy attainment often causes for Appalachians. The notion of Appalachia began well over a century ago, and a number of scholars have posited varying theories about the events that led to the conception of Appalachia as markedly different from the rest of the American South.⁶ Perhaps the most ubiquitous and most often challenged idea argues that as industrialization crept its way southward during the Reconstruction years, the majority of mountainous regions in the South remained agricultural, if only because the steep hillsides and deep valleys of Appalachia did not readily lend themselves to the kind of frequent travel that characterizes industry and commerce. Reason would follow (though certainly not all Appalachian scholars agree on this point) that as the rest of the nation became modernized, the people living in these remote areas continued with their isolated existence, and their relative geographic seclusion stymied the kinds of economic, cultural, and intellectual advances other Americans were making.⁷ Around the turn of the century, this vein of logic—whether imagined or real—characterized most speeches and essays written to promote Appalachian spiritual and educational uplift, and mission and education groups generally portrayed mountaineers as homogeneously violent, ignorant people worthy of pity and outreach.

Politically influential individuals like Berea College president William Goodell Frost frequently described mountain people as remnants of a simpler, purer time in American society, and as such they showed great hope for the rest of the nation. In his 1899 essay entitled “Our Contemporary Ancestors,” Frost claims that mountaineers were “in the pioneer stage of development,” and that “Appalachian America may be useful as furnishing a fixed point which

enables us to measure the progress of the moving world!” (8). As scholar Tommy Thompson notes, “Frost saw the mountaineers as terribly backward and wanted to reshape them into the mold of what he considered mainstream American life” (181). Thompson explains that Frost initiated a Bible reading program in which a woman deemed appropriately qualified and educated rode through the mountains teaching “correct” Bible interpretations (181).⁸ Frost fancied that he knew Appalachian people and what was best for them better than they could possibly know themselves, and as such, he went about systematically publicizing their every flaw nationwide to attract financial and moral support for his efforts at bringing civility to mountaineers. His campaigns contributed to the permanent image of an illiterate Appalachia, and his strategically romantic portrayals of mountain people objectified them, making their illiteracy a useful deficiency that missionaries and educators could work to solve.

Appalachia’s portrayal as Other has been compared with the dominance of Western hegemony over the Orient that Edward Said sets forth in *Orientalism*, and several scholars have noted similarities between Appalachia and other colonized regions.⁹ Discussing similarities between Appalachianism and Orientalism, Rodger Cunningham notes that “The exteriority of the representation is always governed by some version of the truism that if the Orient could represent itself, it would; since it cannot, the representation does the job” (21). Frost helped perpetuate this kind of mythic representation, and it had long lasting effects for the Appalachian region and its people, especially the notion that the region teemed with illiterate mountaineers. Literacy scholar Peter Mortensen notes that his own conclusion about the impact of such depictions is “ironically resonant” with Harvey Graff’s literacy myth¹⁰ that “illiteracy enabled the social advancement of those willing to use it as the conceptual capital to their turn-of-the-century charitable and professional enterprises. Gleaning the fields of rustic illiteracy has left a

legacy no less devastating to rural livelihood than blight or drought” (“Figuring Illiteracy” 163). The legacy of devastating Appalachian stereotypes Mortensen notes has continually influenced the region’s writers, and although the female authors considered in this project respond to it in various ways—ranging from rhetorical warnings to readers to flexibly negotiate new discursive worlds to depictions of the identity dilemmas that result from literacy acquisition—literary treatments of literacy remain a central thread in the works discussed in this project. In some instances these fictionalized portrayals align with literacy theories based on case studies of real people, but on other occasions authors exaggerate or extend characters’ struggles against literacy attainment, suggesting an almost heroic resistance that could only occur in fiction but not in reality.

The reality for some Appalachian women is that literacy attainment seems impossibly out of reach for a number of reasons, including the isolated areas in which they live and the patriarchal systems that govern their lives. In my interview with Lee Smith she discussed the time she spent working with adult students in the literacy program at the Hindman Settlement School in Kentucky, and she noted that all of her students were women. She went on to comment that her students were only able to attend those literacy classes if they could “get away from their husbands who didn’t want them to learn how to read or parents who didn’t want them to learn how to read” or children who demanded all of their attention and time (interview). Even after overcoming these obstacles, some of Smith’s students, like Kentucky ballad singer Florida Slone, abruptly stopped attending the classes since the dominating men in their lives believed “all a woman needed to read was the Bible” (interview).¹¹ Although literacy researchers like Anita Puckett conclude that literate activity functions as a more acceptable part of a woman’s life than a man’s, Smith’s discussion also illustrates that literate activity must be kept in check so

that women do not find escape from their often oppressive roles as wives and mothers through literacy.¹² The authors considered in this project continually depict women who seek and sometimes achieve such escape, only to find that along with substantial benefits, the new literacies they sought also introduce identity-based conflicts into their lives.

In the same way that mountain women are sometimes trapped within gendered roles, Lee Smith notes that the Appalachian mountains serve a dually feminized function: in one sense they geographically enclose and entrap the women that live therein, but in another sense the mountains themselves operate as a feminized metaphor. In an interview with Rebecca Smith, Lee Smith notes that females are “bound by family. They’re bound by biology. And they’re bound by place. Somehow, when I think about that, I think about the mountains, the mountains as womb. I think about geography and physiology together” (22). Similarly, Appalachian scholar Danny Miller has noted the prolonged feminization of the Appalachian region, particularly female Appalachian characters’ “close, almost mythic, relationship with the natural world” (3). If we consider Appalachia as a feminized metaphor, then the connections become increasingly clear between Appalachia and Edward Said’s statement that “women [and the Orient] are usually the creatures of a male power-fantasy [because] they express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing” (207). Just as male forces dominate the feminine in Said’s description, so too have greedy corporations entering the Appalachian mountains with the assumption that they could make business deals with “more or less stupid” hillbillies. Moreover, the ideologically dominant literacies that characters in this project obtain place learners in an automatically subjugated position from which identity negotiation becomes increasingly difficult.

Juxtaposing the difference between feminized and masculine power structures, Said goes on to note that “the male conception of the world, in its effect upon the practicing Orientalist, tends to be static, frozen, fixed eternally. The very possibility of development, transformation, human movement—in the deepest sense of the word—is denied the Orient and the Oriental” (208). Local color depictions of Appalachia have long portrayed the region as a static and unchanging entity denied the possibility of development. Such views permeated (and still permeate) media depictions of the region, as evidenced by Dan Rather’s comment from a 1989 *48 Hours* episode that despite the federal government’s spending of over three billion dollars to improve the roads leading into and out of Appalachian Kentucky in the 1960s, “like a lot of things in the hills, it didn’t change much.” While some residents of Appalachia appear to hold the same beliefs, as when one of the Bowling children in Rory Kennedy’s 1999 HBO documentary of an Eastern Kentucky laments that he does not have running water, and it “seems like it just never changes,” as DeRosier points out in her writing, this hardly presents a complete picture of Appalachia. Literacy scholar Katherine Kelleher Sohn notes that “no place is monolithic,” and as DeRosier illustrates, media images of the mountains have always favored depictions of the socially disadvantaged, oftentimes glossing over middle and upper class Appalachians (3).¹³ Similarly, O’Brien reflects that “Reporters and writers come [to Appalachia] expecting hillbilly squalor and they find it at the exclusion of everything else” (113). Despite the prevalent belief that Appalachia never changes, the female authors considered in this study work to subvert the notion of a docile, unchanging Appalachia through their poignant depictions of identity change wrought through literacy acquisition.

Like characterizations portraying Appalachia as a fixed and stagnant region, even more convenient for Frost and other social groups, mountaineers were thought to be “the purest Anglo-Saxon stock in all the United States,” a reassuring racial heritage when scores of European immigrants were entering the country in record numbers and many Americans feared national racial degradation (Semple 150). O’Brien explains that the American Missionary Association (AMA) first focused their efforts on Southern African Americans in the years following the end of the Civil War.¹⁴ These missionary attempts ultimately failed because even though African Americans were attending services in droves, white members of those same communities became increasingly suspicious of the AMA, and missionaries worried about losing white souls to other religions, especially Mormonism (152-53). As a consequence, the AMA re-focused their missionary energies, and O’Brien explains that “The AMA believed that if it could successfully launch an extensive recruiting effort in the Appalachians, where only whites lived, their missionaries might gain new life in the South” (153). Of course this assumption obscured the fact that other racial groups also lived in the mountains, and as historian Theda Perdue notes in the PBS documentary *The Appalachians*, “original Appalachians are in fact Native Americans.” Additionally, as European settlers populated the region they brought with them African American slaves, and although the mountains never resembled the plantation culture of the lowland South, Appalachian scholar John Alexander Williams points out that in 1860 there “was only one county in Appalachia with no slaves” (*The Appalachians*). In the early part of the twentieth century, as coal mining began to expand, large numbers of European and Asian immigrants also entered Appalachia, as well as more African Americans from the southern lowlands looking to find work and hopefully escape the repressive Jim Crow-governed Deep

South. Despite this mix of people, in order to adhere to AMA bylaws declaring that missionaries only minister to exceptional populations (such as racial minorities), O'Brien notes that "the AMA officially declared residents of Appalachia as an 'exceptional population of unchurched mountain whites,' and with this invented a new American minority" (153-54).¹⁵ O'Brien emphasizes that "people in the Appalachians may well have been among the most 'churched' people in America at the time," but because their worship services were not part of the AMA, missionaries deemed them bound for hell (154). Some Appalachian residents resented the presence of the missionaries, as evidenced by one West Virginia man's comment that "there's been too damn many missionaries in this part of the country. We've been damn near saved to death" (O'Brien 152). As a result of such ministry, missionaries succeeded in setting mountain people apart as a separate race. Combined with the literary Othering of Appalachia that resulted from the Local Color Movement, this racialized tactic made the label of illiterate more believable to a national public given to racist tendencies.

The racial designation of "mountain white" proved long lasting, as evidenced by Victor Villanueva's forward to Katherine Kelleher Sohn's 2006 publication of *Whistlin' and Crowin' Women of Appalachia: Literacy Practices since College* where he writes, "Appalachian is a color, even if not recognized as such [. . .] There's a racialization to Appalachia, something more than a class reference, something akin to 'ethnicity'" (xiv-xv). Mortensen lends further understanding to Villanueva's point when explaining that at the turn of the century, social scientists expected illiteracy in the African American population and in European immigrant groups, but "they were alarmed [. . .] by their discovery of degeneration in white native-born rural populations" ("Figuring Illiteracy" 144). As such, the classification of "mountain white" separated white Appalachians from other white American citizens, and the difference in racial

designation placed them firmly in the realm of Other. James Klotter even argues that “the stereotyped black reappeared in the Appalachian white,” yet unlike with African Americans, missionaries and educators believed that with the mountain white, these stereotypes were solvable through enough outreach and monetary support (52).¹⁶ Although Frost promoted the supposedly complimentary idea that mountaineers resembled pioneers, like the AMA, he was also careful to describe mountain people as in great need of social and moral uplift—Appalachian illiteracy rates provided the perfect avenue for such representations.

A cursory examination of literacy trends in the early part of the twentieth century does indicate high illiteracy rates in the Appalachian mountains, but considering the history of one specific adult literacy program reveals the politically loaded debates surrounding definitions of literacy, definitions that are crucial to this project. Kentucky resident Cora Wilson Stewart began the Moonlight Schools project in 1921 with the goal of eliminating adult illiteracy by 1930 across the state. Her campaign garnered national attention, and numerous other states adopted her program and its materials before she founded the National Illiteracy Crusade in 1926 (Baldwin). Her highly visible efforts at eradicating adult illiteracy cast Kentucky and much of the Appalachian region as unable to read and write. As historian Yvonne Honeycutt Baldwin notes in her biography of Stewart, “by calling attention to widespread illiteracy in the Kentucky mountains and elsewhere, [Stewart] held the commonwealth up to a national scrutiny that many politicians and school leaders at home [in Kentucky] found uncomfortable,” since her campaign further highlighted negative portrayals of the mountains (117). Despite growing assumptions that connected the mountains with illiteracy, Baldwin emphasizes that in the early 1920s, “illiteracy existed everywhere [in America], not just in the South. According to a 1921 NEA study, 389,000 illiterates lived in Georgia, but New York recorded 406,000. Pennsylvania at 354,000 had more

illiterates than Alabama with 352,000, and illiterates in Illinois, Ohio, and New Jersey exceeded the numbers in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas” (134). Although this data shows similar numbers of illiterates nationally, these numbers prove problematic for a few reasons. Since Baldwin does not outline total population numbers for each state she mentions, per capita ratios of illiteracy remain unclear. Equally troubling, statistical data collection relied upon the admitted inability to read and write, and many individuals no doubt lied about their literacy skills to avoid the shame and humiliation associated with illiteracy. In keeping with the ongoing social concern over illiteracy, writers during this time focused many of their stories on themes of literacy and illiteracy, and as Mortensen contends, “to put it oversimply, northern writers claimed that the South was illiterate, and southern writers claimed southern illiteracy (at least among white males of voting age) was confined largely to the mountains” (“Literacy and Regional Difference” 5). Writers in the early part of the century usefully contained illiteracy in the mountains, but in the works considered in this project, Appalachian writers unsettle the historical transference of illiteracy to the mountains, instead investigating the nuanced effects literacy has on identity.

Regardless of whether the mountains had a higher percentage of illiterates than other regions in the nation, Baldwin makes clear that rates of rural illiteracy far outweighed those of urban illiteracy. Stewart thus focused her energies on the rural populations of her home state of Kentucky. Unfortunately, she relied on the increasingly popular stereotypes set forth by writers of the Local Color Movement and missionary groups to raise funds for her illiteracy campaign. Stewart hailed from Rowan County, Kentucky, the home of the infamous Hatfield and McCoy feud, and as Baldwin observes, “like Berea college president William Goodell Frost and other purveyors of missionary education in the mountains, Cora used that notoriety to further the campaign against illiteracy” (15).¹⁷ In purposely playing into the stereotypes Local Color

writers and missionaries used to characterize the region as drastically different and as “a strange land and a peculiar people,” Stewart’s campaigning techniques conflated fact with fiction, and Baldwin notes that “the romanticization and overstatement of [Appalachians’] condition was part of the rhetoric of the crusade, meant to entice financial and moral support from the educated community and to play on public sympathy for the benighted mountaineers, worthy whites more deserving of uplift than blacks and immigrants” (48).¹⁸ As a native Appalachian, Stewart strategically continued stereotypes marking Appalachians as illiterate, since this marking was meant to garner much needed financial support for her Moonlight School project. For her purposes, relying on labels of Appalachian illiteracy was worth the financial rewards reaped by her campaign.

In addition to making emotionally-charged patriotic appeals to the Kentucky public (like emphasizing soldiers’ need for literacy so that they could read and write letters home while serving their country in foreign locations), Stewart also relied on a simplistic definition of literacy to further her cause, something that the authors considered in this project avoid. Shunning the practice of using grade-level reading proficiency to gauge literate ability, Stewart devised her own teaching materials geared towards a rural-based adult audience: once students completed the second set of materials, which as Baldwin notes, “could be accomplished in two six-week sessions of night school,” Stewart declared pupils literate (137). This system produced a remarkable rise in Kentucky literacy rates thanks to the Moonlight School program, but Stewart encountered trouble with her methods when she entered the national literacy crusade arena. Around this time New Deal politicians were committed to establishing a sixth-grade reading level as the standard for literacy, which would deem most Moonlight School graduates illiterate, a fact that greatly concerned Stewart since this move would significantly diminish the

perceived success of her project. Perhaps even more remarkable, even though politicians were pushing for the sixth-grade reading standard as the new hallmark of literacy, “crusade rhetoric masked the fact that illiteracy lacked a public policy definition [. . .] no one had identified the stage at which an individual passed from illiteracy to literacy. The standard varied from state to state,” and these levels ranged from completion of second grade to sixth grade (Baldwin 137). This quandary continues to create conflict among educators, politicians, and policymakers, and deciding when an individual becomes literate—and indeed, what literacy means—remains hugely important for both historical and contemporary portrayals of Appalachia.

Since the 1970s literacy theorists have expounded on the meaning of literacy including its consequences, its definition, and its importance in making socially constructed knowledge. Although definitions vary, in recent years literacy researchers have made clear that literacy reaches far beyond the strong-text literacy definitions established in the 1970s by literacy researchers like Walter Ong, Jack Goody, and Ian Watt that classified literacy as an autonomous skill set that individuals use to decode meaning from printed text and inscribe meaning onto paper through writing.¹⁹ In the late 1980s and early 1990s, New Literacy Scholars including Shirley Brice Heath, Deborah Brandt, Brian Street, and others focused much of their work on the social situations surrounding literacy acquisition, investigating how family structures, home-based language practices, and a host of other factors influence an individual’s literate ability. Brandt notes that “with the growing textualization of knowledge in advanced literate cultures has come a growing textualization of our definitions of literacy” (“Literacy and Knowledge” 189). She takes issue with this textualization, arguing for the recognition of the social processes that surround literate activity, and in the same collection in which Brandt’s essay appears, Charles Schuster writes that discussions of literacy should encompass more than conversations about

reading and writing, since “literacy also has something to do with intuitive understanding [and] with shared boundaries of meaning, with making sense of each other through verbal and written interaction—factors that are too often ignored in discussions of literacy” (225). Both scholars, as well as numerous others in the aforementioned collection and elsewhere, work to revise the strong-text literacy definitions established in the 1970s, as when Schuster explains that “literacy [. . .] does not consist exclusively of the ability to encode and decode written texts, although that is certainly part of its meaning” (226). He goes on to claim that in the view of literacy he promotes, “literacy is the power to be able to make oneself heard and felt, to signify. Literacy is the way in which we make ourselves meaningful not only to others but through others to ourselves” (227). Certainly Appalachian authors have had difficulty working within and out of a tradition of assumed mountain illiteracy, and one of the ways in which they make themselves heard is through the written depiction of mountain literacies and their effects, both positive and negative.

Despite this move away from strong-text theories, throughout the last four decades literacy definitions (whether strong-text or not) have primarily described literacy as the ability to code and encode textual information based upon a system of symbols. Yet when the phrase “cultural literacy” became popular with E.D. Hirsch’s now famous 1987 publication of *Cultural Literacy* that explained “what every American needs to know,” the line between literacy and something else blurred: did simply knowing the story of Romeo and Juliet (even if no reading had taken place) qualify as a type of literacy? Hirsch’s title suggests as much, and just as his concept asks readers to think beyond traditional definitions of literacy, so too do the authors considered in this project when they push readers to notice and interpret the acquisition of new

cultural knowledge as a potent type of literacy that has the potential to create identity-based conflicts.

Most recently scholars like James Collins and Richard Blot have found both strong-text theories and social theories espoused by New Literacy Scholars lacking; instead, they argue for a blending of the two in which “literacies as communicative practices are inseparable from values, senses of self, and forms of regulation and power” (xviii). In a twist that verges on ironic, the Appalachian authors considered in this project use their own abilities to read and write (traditionally defined literacy) to portray other closely related events—including the acquisition of social and cultural literacies, as well as the transition between discourse communities—as various types of literacies; this practice aligns with Collins’ and Blot’s observation that “it seems that there is no single literacy, instead a multiplicity of practices and values get the same label. Indeed, the label ‘literacy’ can be and is extended to areas that have no or little connection to text, or at least to processes of decoding entextualized information” (3). This conclusion drawn from both theoretical analysis and case studies of real people also applies to the multiplicity of literacies depicted by the authors considered in this project: when characters learn (often through the technical act of reading or writing) that their way of speaking, dressing, and behaving is at odds with mainstream discourse communities, they have acquired a new type of literacy, one that often prompts identity dilemmas.

Similar to the ideologically defined terms of literacy espoused by Collins and Blot, this project also relies heavily on sociolinguist James Paul Gee’s assertion that learning the requirements necessary to transition from one discourse community to another qualifies as a type of literacy. In his introduction to *Social Linguistics and Literacies*, Gee explains that “Discourses are ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and

writing that are accepted as instantiations of particular roles (or ‘types of people’) by specific *groups of people* [. . .] they are [. . .] always and everywhere *social* and products of social histories” (viii). More specifically, he writes,

Discourses are ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes. A Discourse is a sort of identity kit which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognize.²⁰ (127)

As such, he argues that “language makes no sense outside of Discourses, and the same is true for literacy” (viii). The Appalachian authors considered in this study repeatedly depict distinct mountain discourse communities in which language, reading and writing practices, and social behavioral codes function in specific ways, much like the communities observed and chronicled in Shirley Brice Heath’s ground-breaking work, *Ways with Words*. Similar to the people of Roadville and Trackton that Heath writes about, when the characters considered in this project leave their primary discourse communities (whether literally or figuratively) and learn to transition to a new one—often through reading and writing activities perpetuated in a classroom—they gain a new type of literacy in reading their new community. Literacy theorist Paulo Freire writes that “reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world” (“Importance” 10). Certainly characters considered in this study know much about their worlds before they read the word, but since literacy attainment operates as the catalyst for many of the discourse community transitions considered in this project, the authors in this study also suggest that when moving from one discourse community to another, Freire’s order is reversed. That is, texts analyzed in this study reveal that literacy attainment initiates dire identity crises, and learning to “read the word” (whether

technically, socially, culturally, or discursively) causes characters to read their worlds in entirely new and sometimes painful ways.

The American image of Appalachia was created largely by non-Appalachians, and it has been marginalized since its conception. Media portrayals of southern mountaineers throughout the last century have capitalized on the image of the poor hillbilly, and since the onslaught of radio and television in the latter part of the twentieth century, mountain people have been continually bombarded with images of degenerate mountaineers. It is out of this discursive tradition that Appalachian authors must create. Citing the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault, Gee posits that “Discourses create ‘social positions’ (perspectives) from which people are ‘invited’ (summoned) to speak, listen, act, read and write, think, feel, believe and value in certain characteristic, historically recognizable ways, combined with their own individual styles and creativity” (128). Many Americans, including critics, expect mountain authors to write from a social position that has historically been viewed as inferior, though that elitist perception is slowly beginning to change, thanks to the dedicated work of Appalachian literary scholars beginning with Cratis Williams’ 1961 dissertation, “The Southern Mountaineer in Fact and Fiction.”²¹ Despite these gestures to move towards a more inclusive canon that considers Appalachian writing, roughly fifty years of scholarship can hardly erase over a hundred years of strong cultural messages declaring mountaineers illiterate, among other things. The social position from which mountain writers speak is reflected in the social positions of the characters they create, and when those characters enter into new discursive arenas via literate practices, conflict almost inevitably occurs.

The most volatile site of that conflict occurs in the space between an individual’s primary and secondary discourse. Gee explains that primary discourses are those that individuals are born

into; thus they first learn the language and social practices of their family and home community. Once people move outside of this realm, they necessarily enter into secondary discourses, and Gee writes that “[Secondary] Discourses beyond the primary Discourse are developed in association with, and by having access to and practice with (apprenticeships in), these secondary institutions [such as schools and workplaces]” (142). Most pivotal for this project is Gee’s assertion “that any socially useful definition of literacy must be couched in terms of these notions of primary and secondary Discourses. Thus, [he defines] literacy as *mastery of a secondary Discourse*” (143).²² As literacy scholar Janet Carey Eldred points out when referring to the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, “mastery or familiarity with various discourse communities [. . .] is a matter of accepting values and culture” (695). For the characters and authors discussed in this study, the acceptance of values and culture of a secondary discourse is routinely the most difficult aspect of transitioning from one discourse community into another. In general these decisions cause emotional strife and subsequent identity conflicts that some characters resolve while others do not. In many of the scenes discussed later in this project, authors rely on traditional notions of literacy to catalyze literacy events as Gee defines them: in other words, authors portray characters reading or writing a text that often results in an awareness of difference between the character’s primary discourse of home (for our purposes, a mountain home) and the secondary discourse of school. The discursive world of school generally adheres to the rest of the nation’s judgment of all things Appalachian as illiterate, thus setting the stage for painful identity conflict and negotiation on the part of the learner when accepting the values and culture to which Eldred alludes.

Gee discusses the kind of conflict such literacy acquisition can entail, and he asserts that “the conflicts are real and cannot simply be wished away. They are the site of very real struggle

and resistance” (ix). Similarly, in his introduction to Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo’s

Literacy: Reading the Word and the World, Henry Giroux reflects,

It is also important to stress once again that as an act of resistance, the refusal to be literate may constitute less an act of ignorance on the part of subordinate groups than an act of resistance. That is, members of the working class and other oppressed groups [like Appalachia] may consciously or unconsciously refuse to learn the specific cultural codes and competencies authorized by the dominant culture’s view of literacy. (13)

Just as Ron Rash’s comment about education being the way minority cultures “get out” provides an important foundation for this project, so too do Gee’s and Giroux’s observations about struggle and resistance. When writing about narratives of socialization, Janet Carey Eldred notes that the stories she considers “highlight conflicts [that are] stilled and magnified so that the final image is one of battles internal as well as external” (696). Literacy acquisition creates similar external and internal battles for the female mountain authors and characters discussed in this study, and authors’ portrayals of those decisions reflect the sometimes dire consequences of cultural Othering, a phenomenon Appalachia has been familiar with for more than a century.

In her study chronicling the stories of Appalachian women who enter college as non-traditional students, Katherine Kelleher Sohn presents a revealing account of the kinds of “real-life” identity dilemmas literacy-initiated discourse transitioning can cause for mountain women.²³ Similar to anthropologist Anita Puckett’s observation that in the Appalachian community she studied, people who spent a lot of time reading and writing were regarded with suspicion, concluding that “these individuals occupy statuses which are acceptable, but usually marginal, to community life,” the participants in Sohn’s study express anxiety over entering college for fear that their home communities will reject them (141). One of the things these women worry about most is losing their mountain accent and vernacular speech patterns, and Sohn reflects that “the students in [her Eastern Kentucky] classroom worry about losing their

family connections if they ‘get above their raisings’ by speaking in what they call a ‘citified speech’” (35). Although researchers do not connect dialect with intelligence levels (no doubt because dialect more accurately indicates cultural capital than intellectual ability), even when mountain students do begin to change their speech patterns to align with those taught in classrooms, Sohn observes that “some teachers rarely change attitudes about such students, and those students begin to internalize self-hate, try to speak the dominant discourse, and downgrade themselves in the process” (152). Hence for many mountain people, conscious attempts to speak differently unfortunately result in decreased self esteem and pride in their home culture and community. Decades earlier Cora Wilson Stewart encountered the same quandary when promoting her adult literacy education program, and as Baldwin explains, “in Stewart’s part of the country [Rowan County Kentucky], there was a distinctive prohibition against ‘getting above one’s raising,’ a nebulous and difficult-to-define injunction that did not necessarily preclude success but meant that one should never forget his or her roots” (118). One of the authors considered in this project, Linda Scott DeRosier, struggles with this dilemma repeatedly when moving between her home community of Two-Mile Creek, Kentucky and the larger discursive world of academia. In most university arenas academic discourse favors a more homogenized speech that does not carry markers of a regional identity, yet as discussed in Chapter Three, DeRosier stubbornly refuses to consciously alter the way she speaks, because as Sohn notes, “language is closely tied to the way women define themselves and create community, and changing that language is a method of erasing culture” (37). Although DeRosier acquires what Gee would call a secondary discourse in her academic endeavors, she remains tied to and proud of her home community of Two-Mile Creek.

Sohn explains that losing their mountain accents comprises just one of many worries her participants have about entering college and consequently gaining new literacies through mastering secondary discourses. At one point, Sohn reflects that “in spite of its promises that I had bought into, literacy can be a two-edged sword,” particularly for Appalachian women since they are marginalized both by region and by gender (76). Making a similar observation, researcher Janice Lauer notes that the literacy attainment process “generates increasing tension between husband and wife, within families, and between friends, as gender roles are unmasked in their grimness, and as alternatives are highlighted in literature and theory” (xii). Linda Scott DeRosier chronicles her exposure to these alternatives in her memoir, and even though her first husband does not oppose her continued education (in fact, he encourages it), her educational path combines with a host of other factors to permanently change the dynamics of their relationship, and her first marriage eventually ends in an amiable divorce. A similar tension exists between first cousins Rachel and Dillon in Denise Giardina’s *The Unquiet Earth*, and in Lee Smith’s *Fair and Tender Ladies* readers cannot help but notice that Ivy Rowe’s mother shows little excitement over the educational achievements Ivy makes while under Miss Torrington’s direction. Ivy’s mother senses the increased strain Ivy’s education places on their relationship, and Sohn notes that some parents “have unrealistic expectations that their children will return to them unchanged by education,” which explains “the fear [Sohn’s] students often communicate to [her] of becoming alienated from their families” (128).²⁴ Yet despite these fears, the women Sohn studies do enter college, and she reports that “going to college assisted the women in the Preston County study to become somebody and make their voices heard” (38). Furthermore, she asserts that the women’s “acquisition of academic literacy did not destroy family or community” (44).

When considering the types of resistance identified by Gee, Giroux, Freire, and others, it seems surprising that Sohn does not uncover that kind of resistance with the participants in her study once they begin college; instead, the majority of their fear of alienation manifests before actual schooling begins. Yet as noted earlier, the women's reluctance to discuss the costs of literacy attainment is closely bound with stereotypes of mountain illiteracy: discussing those fears before going to school might be acceptable, but chronicling the costs of literacy attainment once they finished their studies would only support the fixed image of an illiterate, ignorant Appalachia, a perception native Appalachians would probably prefer to avoid. Linda Scott DeRosier's personal reflections about her own literacy attainment seem similarly divided: during our interview she did not discuss a tangible sense of loss resulting from her education, though sections of *Creeker: A Woman's Journey* and *Songs of Life and Grace* imply otherwise, once again suggesting that written works provide crucial, if ironic, a space in which authors can consider the cost of literacy attainment. The fictionalized accounts of literacy acquisition considered in later chapters depict struggle, resistance, and loss at almost every turn. Two of Harriette Simpson Arnow's characters (Reuben and Cassie) stubbornly refuse to forsake any facet of their Appalachian identities in favor of city-approved behaviors; Denise Giardina laments that losing ties with her home has permanently marked her; and one of Lee Smith's characters (Ivy Rowe) claims that her daughter (Joli) has "fair broke [her] heart" and has "travelled far beyond [her]" in becoming an author and moving away from home (*Fair and Tender Ladies* 268, 271). At the same time, these authors painstakingly devote pages of their works to describing the literate abilities of their characters. In many cases, these female Appalachian authors seem caught between overturning stereotypes of illiteracy by portraying

literate characters and revealing the various kinds of painful identity negotiations that literacy attainment often requires for Appalachians.

While Sohn presents a remarkably optimistic view of literacy acquisition, literacy scholar Andrea Fishman theorizes perhaps more accurately about the costs incurred by literacy attainment in her study of Amish literacy practices. At odds with both Sohn's and DeRosier's conclusions, Fishman states,

we need to realize that our role may not be to prepare our students to enter mainstream society but, rather, to help them see what mainstream society offers and what it takes away, what they may gain by assimilating and what they may lose in that process. Through understanding their worlds, their definitions of literacy, and their dilemmas, not only will we better help them make important literacy-related decisions, but we will better help ourselves to do the same. (38)

Similarly, Janet Carey Eldred argues that we can teach “what [Patricia] Bizell calls ‘rhetorical literacy’; that is, we can deemphasize *failure* to enter successfully some new world, and instead emphasize analysis of discursive arenas, of the difficulty of choice, and of possibilities for new or reformed cultural and discursive spaces” (697-98). Yet in a region like Appalachia—one that Frost described as slumbering in a “Rip Van Winkle sleep”—the sort of opportunity for resistance Fishman encourages seems unlikely at best if Appalachian people ever hope to change their negative image (6). No doubt such resistance would only be viewed by many Americans as obstinate, stubborn, and further proof of backward hillbilly culture.²⁵ In an effort to remedy such perceived traits of mountain people, during the Progressive Era in which Stewart championed her literacy campaigns, she “saw the public schools as socializing agents, teaching the norms necessary to adjust the young to society's more modern values and to its changing economic systems” (Baldwin 41). Thus Stewart's students and the women Sohn chronicles become socialized thanks in large part to literacy acquisition, and all of these portrayals emerge as

positive. Conversely, Appalachian memoirs about and fictional portrayals of such acquisition depict both the gains and the losses associated with literacy attainment.²⁶ Literacy scholar Miles

Myers writes that

literacy is not a neutral activity. It does change self-identity, family relations, and politics. Resistance to literacy may be for many students an intuitive effort to preserve culture, self, and family and is *not* then a simple matter of anti-intellectual or remedial behavior. It may be, from one point of view, a heroic defense of another form of literacy valued by one's family and community. (35)

Considering the historic portrayal of Appalachia as the epitome of anti-intellectual and remedial culture, fiction and memoir writing provide a venue in which Appalachian authors can chronicle the costs of gaining new literacies. Any overt and repeated admission of loss or pain in studies like Sohn's would only further support the majority of Americans' conception of the mountain South as a haven for lazy, uneducated people who care nothing about changing their situation. Conversely, Appalachian authors have more leeway in exerting creative license in the construction of their characters and stories. In DeRosier's case, she has more control over the ways in which she tells her literacy narrative. Her authorship allows her to rhetorically situate her story so that it does not bolster the stereotypes she works against, but the people researched in literacy studies do not wield that kind of authorial power. Instead, their stories are transcribed and reinterpreted by a literacy scholar who may or may not understand their explanations of literacy-initiated losses. When participating in a study, subjects understand that these complex dynamics are at work and may give researchers generally positive reports about their journeys to literacy.

Despite the freedom that fiction and memoir writing grant writers in depicting the costs of literacy attainment, as demonstrated by the impact of the Local Color movement, stories can be dangerous in shaping national perceptions of an area and its people. No doubt aware of this

possibility, the Appalachian authors considered in this study deal with that potential pitfall in interesting and varied ways. Denise Giardina places the novel's hope in Jackie, a formally educated woman who has left the mountains of West Virginia and then returned to help salvage the area from the destruction of strip mining; Lee Smith relies on stereotypes of mountain women in her depiction of *Oral History*'s Dory Cantrell as the essence of a mountain flower but then creates an articulate and intellectually curious character in *Fair and Tender Ladies*' Ivy Rowe; Harriette Simpson Arnow exerts much energy describing the resistance of her characters, but her portrayal also concedes the necessity of conforming to some degree, and despite the stark division between resistant or pliable portrayals, she depicts all of her characters as aware of the difficult identity choice at stake. Unfortunately, as Douglas Reichert Powell observes, artistic portrayals of mountain people are "caught in the irony that they need the legibility, the recognizability of the stereotypes they propose to undermine in order to get the audience [or readers] undermining the stereotypes along with them" (212).

In recent years literacy scholars have begun to trace autobiographical accounts of literacy acquisition, and as Janet Carey Eldred and Peter Mortensen note, "literacy narratives [. . .] play a part in how we view our artists and how they construct and tell their stories as artists" (530). Certainly both the autobiographical and fictional literacy narratives considered in this study contribute to how we view Appalachian women writers. As Morris Young notes, "the literacy narrative has emerged in many instances when marginalized peoples have been forced to prove their legitimacy as citizens or potential citizens through a demonstration of their literacy, education, and often a (cultivated) desire to join a dominant culture" (34). Although Appalachians have always been conceived of as American, as the 1989 CBS *48 Hours* broadcast proved with its title—"Another America"—even in the latter part of the twentieth century,

Appalachian people were (and still are) considered deviant from mainstream American society. Moreover, as Peter Mortensen notes when writing about the Hindman Settlement School in Kentucky, “children and adults throughout the southern mountains, like those at Hindman, were schooled to accept their otherness precisely as it was understood by those [namely missionaries] who had invented it” (“Representations of Literacy” 110).²⁷ Writing out of and within that tradition of otherness, the women writers and the characters they envision analyzed in this study create literacy narratives that “act to confirm, transform, or even reject [authorial and character] participation in culture, raise questions about community identity and membership, or encourage participation of not only the writer but also the reader in making meaning from the narrative” (Young 35). As noted with the Local Color Movement, the meaning that readers take away from these stories influence public perception in addition to individual conclusions about the region and its people. Edward Said provides a particularly illuminating example of how this phenomenon works, and it is worth quoting at length:

There is a rather complex dialectic of reinforcement by which the experiences of readers in reality are determined by what they have read, and this in turn influences writers to take up subjects defined in advance by readers' experiences. A book on how to handle a fierce lion might then cause a series of books to be produced on such subjects as the fierceness of lions, the origins of fierceness, and so forth. Similarly, as the focus of the text centers more narrowly on the subject—no longer lions but their fierceness—we might expect that the ways by which it is recommended that lion's fierceness be handled will actually *increase* its fierceness, force it to be fierce since that is what it is, and that is what in essence we know or can *only* know about it. (*Orientalism* 94)

If we replace the notion of a fierce lion with that of illiterate Appalachia, then we see not only how the idea was created at the beginning of the twentieth century, but we also realize the political weight contemporary depictions carry for Appalachia. Thanks to the long tradition of the illiterate mountaineer, readers expect to encounter that sort of character in Appalachian literature. In some cases even contemporary Appalachian authors rely on these well established

tropes (as with Lee Smith's characterization of Dory Cantrell, which actually operates as clever rhetorical commentary on caricatures of mountain women), but more often than not, the writers considered in this project use their autobiographical and fictional representations to turn away from what readers expect. Not only are the majority of characters considered in this study literate, but they are also the bearers of multiple literacies that produce both joyous and tragic consequences, particularly where identity issues reside.

Literary critic Casey Clabough asks, "How much does contemporary literary regionalism reveal the true essence of a distinctive place and its people? How much is merely an act—a formulated drama unfolding on a set, draped partially in nostalgia, that no longer exists save within the confines of the writer's mind?" (301). Whereas Local Color writers sustained American readers' nostalgic longing for romanticized representations of a simultaneously exotic, noble, degenerate, and illiterate Appalachia, contemporary mountain writers like the ones considered in this project work against the seemingly fixed notion of "Another America." Instead of crumbling under the oppressive weight of Otherness so long projected onto the Appalachian region, the native Appalachian women authors considered in this project use that tradition to inform their work in exciting and interesting ways. As Edward Said points out, "we can better understand the persistence and the durability of saturating hegemonic systems like culture when we realize that their internal constraints upon writers and thinkers [are] *productive*, not unilaterally inhibiting" (14). Through analyzing the ways in which Appalachian women authors write about literacy acquisition, including the identity-related dilemmas of that acquisition, we can better understand the saturation of illiteracy stereotypes, the effects of those misconceptions on Appalachian people, and the subsequent empowerments and perils mountain women encounter when gaining new literacies.

End Notes

¹ Throughout this project I use the terms literacy attainment and literacy acquisition interchangeably. Both terms reference instances when authors or characters acquire a new type of literacy. In some cases that literacy may be traditionally defined as the ability to read and write textually encoded information, while in other instances literacy acquisition or literacy attainment may refer to the gaining of a new social or cultural literacy. Theorist James Paul Gee discusses the admittedly malleable lines distinguishing literacy from learning a new type of knowledge. His work is discussed at length later in this chapter. For more information about his theories, see *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses*.

² These traits are all key identifiers of the hillbilly stereotype. To learn more, see Anthony Harkins' *Hillbilly: The Cultural History of an American Icon*.

³ Scholar Stephen Hanna takes issue with Shapiro's (and other Appalachian scholars') claims that local color writing began the depiction of Appalachia as Other, arguing instead that "The idea that mountains are home to barbarous peoples can be traced back for millennia and [local color writers'] descriptions of the wild mountains were informed by the romantics of the early 1800's" (188). While this may be true, Shapiro's point still applies, since local color writing provided the first comprehensive literary treatment of the Appalachian mountains.

Hanna also notes that some mountain residents did produce their own written accounts about the region, including Samuel Johnson's 1908 "Life in the Kentucky Mountains, by a Mountaineer." Even so, such pieces were uncommon and rarely reached a wide reading audience. For more, see Hanna's article, "Representation and the Reproduction of Appalachian Space: A History of Contested Signs and Meanings."

⁴ Literacy scholar Peter Mortensen has written extensively about illiteracy, Appalachia, and the portrayal of both in the early twentieth century. For a sampling of his work, see his chapter entitled "Representations of Literacy and Region: Narrating 'Another America,'" his conference paper "Illiterate Sorrows: Misrepresenting Literacy and Intelligence," and his chapter entitled "Figuring Illiteracy: Rustic Bodies and Unlettered Minds in Rural America." Mortensen is currently at work on a book-length project tentatively titled *Manufacturing Illiteracy in the United States*, which according to his curriculum vita is "a study of representations of illiteracy in turn-of-the-century literary, popular, academic, and bureaucratic discourse."

⁵ Appalachian literary scholar Elizabeth Engelhardt takes issue with the way Murfree's work has been used, "taken as fact by her contemporaries and later scholars, generalized to apply to all of Appalachia, and reduced to one or two repeatedly anthologized stories" (103). Engelhardt argues that while Murfree's stories do produce some regional stereotypes, they also help overturn those same notions, especially in her later work, which Engelhardt claims scholars often dismiss. To learn more, see her chapter entitled "Mary Noailles Murfree and Effie Waller Smith: Ecological Feminism's Roots, Part I" in *The Tangled Roots of Feminism, Environmentalism, and Appalachian Literature*.

⁶ For accounts of how people living outside the region created the idea of Appalachia, see Henry Shapiro's *Appalachia On Our Minds: the Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920* and Allen Batteau's *The Invention of Appalachia*. For a comprehensive history of the region, see John Alexander Williams' *Appalachia: A History*.

⁷ To read an account that disputes this claim of isolation, see David Hsiung's article, "How Isolated Was Appalachia?: Upper East Tennessee, 1780-1835," where Hsiung notes that "A Greeneville [Tennessee] merchant in 1813 provided a surprising variety of necessities and luxuries, ranging from muslin to black silk bonnets and Morocco leather, from stirrups and saddle tacks to slippers, rose soap, and an artificial flower" (345).

⁸ Kimberly K. Donehower explores the literacy narratives of people from a rural Southern Appalachian community in her article entitled "Literacy Choices in an Appalachian Community," and she determines that the people she spoke with had three types of literacy sponsors: religious, academic, and government-based. She notes that the religious sponsors (mainly Presbyterian missionaries) were particularly influential in people's lives and their conceptions of literacy.

⁹ For the most comprehensive study exploring these connections see Helen Matthews Lewis' *Colonialism in Modern America: The Appalachian Case*. Also see Rodger Cunningham's "Appalachianism and Orientalism: Reflections on Reading Edward Said," pages 298-99 in John O'Brien's *At Home in the Heart of Appalachia*, and Denise Giardina's comment about this issue on page 165 in *Back Talk from Appalachia: Confronting Stereotypes*.

¹⁰ Harvey Graff conducted a sociological study of the effects of literacy for industrialized workers in nineteenth century Canada, concluding that workers oftentimes did not need to know how to read and write to complete job tasks; furthermore, learning to read and write generally failed to make any noticeable impact in workers' socio-economic standing. For more, see *The Literacy Myth: Literacy and Social Structure in the 19th Century City* and *The Labyrinths of Literacy: Reflections of Literacy Past and Present*.

¹¹ Florida Slone is a locally well known ballad singer and storyteller from Knott County, Kentucky. The Appalshop group filmed a documentary about her life entitled *Homemade Tales: Songs and Sayings of Florida Slone*. To read a description or to order a copy, visit http://appalshop.org/store/index.php?main_page=product_info&products_id=256.

¹² For more information about the ethnographic data used to make this claim, see Anita Puckett's article, "Let the Girls Do the Spelling and Dan Will Do the Shooting:" Literacy, the Division of Labor, and Identity in a Rural Appalachian Community."

¹³ A particularly revealing instance of this trend appears in Jack Weller's *Yesterday's People: Life in Contemporary Appalachia*. In his introduction he acknowledges that "there is a middle class as well as a professional class in the mountains," but since people in those classes are generally not a part of the stereotypical "folk culture" which he seeks to document, "one might

even go so far as to say that any Appalachian person who is willing to read such a study as this hardly qualifies to be included in it” (5,7).

¹⁴ Henry Shapiro discusses the history of protestant missions in the mountains (as well as their initial work with African Americans) at length in his chapter entitled “Protestant Home Missions and the Institutionalization of Appalachian Otherness,” 32-58, in *Appalachian On Our Minds*. David Whisnant also discusses these issues in his introduction: for more information, see *All That is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region*.

¹⁵ In his upcoming book project tentatively titled *The Social Life of Poetry: American Pluralism and Appalachia, 1880-1950*, literary critic Chris Green notes that Ellen Myers, an American Missionary Association worker, first coined the term “mountain white,” writing that it “first appeared in *The American Missionary*, the organ of the AMA, in October 1883 in reference to the Bureau of Woman’s Work.”

¹⁶ Klotter goes on to explain that Frost “descended from two generations of antislavery advocates,” and although Berea began as a state-supported school that would admit African American students, public support for such an initiative was low (58). As such, Frost shifted the focus of the university to mountain whites, a more acceptable group for uplift in the eyes of a racist public (59).

¹⁷ For more information about the feud, see Altina Waller’s *Feud: Hatfields and McCoys, and Social Change in Appalachia, 1860-1900*. For a brief overview of Waller’s argument, see Mary Anglin’s “A Question of Loyalty: National and Regional Identity in Narratives of Appalachia.”

John O’Brien argues that a “real” feud between the Hatfields and McCoys never existed and was instead created as a lucrative political stunt by Kentucky governor Simon Buckner. For more information, see pages 131-34 of *At Home in the Heart of Appalachia*.

¹⁸ “A Strange Land and a Peculiar People” is the title of Will Wallace Harney’s accounts of his journey through parts of Appalachia during the Civil War. The piece was published in 1873 in *Lippincott’s Magazine*, and Appalachian scholar Henry Shapiro begins his discussion of the Local Color Movement and its impact on Appalachia with Harney’s piece. For more information, see *Appalachia On Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920*, especially his chapter on the Local Color Movement, pages 3-31.

¹⁹ See Walter Ong’s *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word*, Jack Goody and Ian Watt’s “The Consequences of Literacy,” and Jack Goody’s *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*. For a comprehensive overview of strong-text theories in general, see James Collins and Richard Blot’s *Literacy and Literacies: Texts, Power, and Identity*.

²⁰ Thus Gee distinguishes between Discourses (as previously defined) with a capital D throughout the text and uses discourse (with a lower-case d) “for connected stretches of language that make sense, like conversations, stories, reports, arguments, essays, and so forth. So, ‘discourse’ is part of ‘Discourse’—‘Discourse’ is always more than just language” (127). I agree

with his distinction but also believe that given the wide range of scholarship that followed Gee's discourse theories, the term discourse (with a lower case d) now encompasses both definitions, and I do not distinguish between the two through capitalization.

²¹ Casey Clabough writes that southern literary criticism has been guilty of "wholesale neglect of the entire southern Appalachian region [. . .] for decades, accounting for it only rarely" (303).

²² To further support his definition, Gee goes on to assert, "Therefore, literacy is always plural: *literacies* (there are many of them, since there are many secondary Discourses, and we all have some and fail to have others). If one wanted to be pedantic and literalistic, then we could define literacy as *mastery of a secondary Discourse involving print* (which is almost all of them in modern society). And one can substitute for 'print' various other sorts of text and technologies [. . .] But I see no gain from the addition of the phrase 'involving print', other than to assuage the feelings of people committed (as I am not) to reading and writing as decontextualized and isolable skills. In addition, it is clear that many so-called non-literate cultures have secondary Discourses which, while they do not involve print, involve a great many of the same skills, behaviors, and ways of thinking that we associate with literacy" (143-44).

²³ To learn more about this study, visit Sohn's web site at www.kathysohn.com, and see Erica Abrams Locklear's review of *Whistlin' and Crowin' Women of Appalachia: Literacy Practices since College*.

²⁴ Marcia Egan notes the same phenomenon in her study, when she reports that the family of one of her subjects "feared that by going to school, she was choosing school over her family" (272). For more see "Appalachian Women: The Path from the 'Hollows' to Higher Education."

The same is true for working class parents, as noted by Carolyn Leste Law when she explains the message working class parents send to their college-bound sons and daughters: "Go to college, they said, learn to do less back-breaking, soul-breaking work than we have had to suffer, learn to wear white collars. Be better off than your drop-out cousins, live easier lives overall, but come home to us essentially the same. In their heart of hearts, these parents wanted their children to return home to them virtually unchanged by their sojourn in the academy, so mysterious and impenetrable a place they might as well have sent their kids up the Amazon. These parents gave their children mixed messages about school and learning (do well but don't get too smart; succeed but don't make us look stupid; pursue your lofty goals with enthusiasm but don't become one of 'them') that reflected their own mixed feelings" (4-5).

²⁵ To learn more about the history of the hillbilly stereotype, see Anthony Harkins' *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon*, J.W. Williamson's *Hillbillyland: What the Movies Did to the Mountains and What the Mountains Did to the Movies*, and for a documentary that juxtaposes historical portrayals of hillbillies with reflections by mountain people, see *Strangers and Kin: A History of the Hillbilly Image*.

²⁶ A Certainly works in other disciplines, especially working class studies, have identified first-person accounts of the losses connected with continued education and literacy. To learn more

about these accounts, see C.L Barney Dews and Carolyn Leste Law's *This Fine Place So Far From Home: Voices of Academics from the Working Class*, bell hooks' *Where We Stand: Class Matters*, Alfred Lubrano's *Limbo: Blue-Collar Roots, White Collar Dreams*, Richard Rodriguez's *The Hunger for Memory: the Education of Richard Rodriguez*. Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary*, Jake Ryan and Charles Sackrey's *Strangers in Paradise: Academics from the Working Class*, Alan Shephard, John McMillan, and Gary Tate's *Coming to Class: Pedagogy and the Social Class of Teachers*, and Victor Villanueva's *Bootstraps: from an American Academic of Color*.

²⁷ To learn more about the school and its history see Jess Stoddart's *Challenge and Change in Appalachia: The Story of Hindman Settlement School* and David Whisnant's *All That is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region*.

CHAPTER TWO
SHAPING BISCUIT DOUGH AND ROLLING OUT STEEL: RESPONDING TO LITERACY COMMODIFICATION IN *THE DOLLMAKER*

I suppose it was because I was young with a rather stupid look. I don't know why, but this woman with an accent very different from the ones I knew, more like those of our teachers at Berea, was watching the work. She came around and watched me for a while and then she said, 'Can either of your parents read or write?' My reaction was violent. I didn't move. I just tried to imagine my parents, my home, my grandparents, my great-grandparents, both great-grandfathers—there were stories of their books and their books still around—without books and newspapers like those poor, pitiful people unable to read who would come to get my mother to write letters—but I only had one wish: to get that woman away from me and I felt that if I said, 'Of course they can read,' she might ask more questions, so I said, 'No, neither can read or write.' She was satisfied. She had guessed correctly. (Eckley 33)

In this interview excerpt from Wilton Eckley's study on Harriette Simpson Arnow, Arnow retells an incident that occurred during her years as a student at Berea College in the mid-1920s. While acknowledging the existence of illiteracy in Appalachia by referring to "those poor, pitiful people unable to read," Arnow pointedly rejects generalizations that cast the region as wholly illiterate. Arnow describes her understandable reaction to the woman's casual assumption of illiterate lineage as "violent," since Arnow's family had an established tradition of literacy. Even so, she hides her feelings from her observer, and in doing so she avoids explaining the supposed anomaly of literacy in an Appalachian place. After finishing her studies at Berea, Arnow briefly taught junior high and high school but quit teaching to devote as much time as possible to writing in the mid 1930s, temporarily working as a waitress to support herself. Over the next thirty years Arnow published two novels (*Mountain Path* and *Hunter's Horn*), wrote another novel (*Between the Flowers*), published several short stories, and in 1954—roughly three decades after her experience at Berea—Arnow published *The Dollmaker*. The novel won wide critical acclaim during its time and was nominated for the National Book Award in 1955, losing only to William Faulkner's *The Fable* (Eckley 44). Critic William Schafer insists that the book is

“too big and too serious to ignore,” and Tillie Olsen laments that as a woman’s “book of great worth [*The Dollmaker* suffers] the death of being unknown, or at best a peculiar eclipsing” (50, 40). Set during the Second World War, the novel portrays the painful relocation of Clovis and Gertie Nevels, along with their five children, from a relatively happy (if poor) life in the Kentucky mountains to a depressingly bleak existence in Detroit. As with other texts in this project, literacy operates as a central theme in *The Dollmaker*, and Arnow painstakingly describes the family’s Kentucky-based literacies, as well as the new literacies they must attain to survive in Detroit. In doing so, readers begin to understand, along with the Nevels family, that adopting a new set of values (oftentimes values perpetuated through literate activity in a city classroom) results in a tangible sense of loss for characters who reject many aspects of their Appalachian identities in favor of city-approved behaviors, speech, and familial codes. Critical consideration of this novel further identifies what this project works to establish: traditional literacy attainment for Appalachian characters can be both perilous and empowering.

Although the novel provides a moving account of discourse community transition, in critiquing the kinds of literacies valued by an urban environ Arnow sets up unrealistic binaries that result in “all or nothing” decisions for her characters. Unlike the dialectical learning process theorized by literacy scholars like Deborah Brandt, Paulo Freire, and James Paul Gee, in which literacy acquisition results in some negotiation between primary and secondary discourses, Arnow fails to describe any sort of compromise between mountain and city-based literacies. Instead, she depicts either pliable people who completely accept their new community’s requirements and consequently bear no signs of their previous mountain lives, or she describes stubbornly resistant characters that are unwilling to negotiate between the competing discursive worlds of Appalachia and Detroit. Arnow’s portrayal of the novel’s protagonist (Gertie) as

someone who desperately wants to return to Kentucky but instead remains in Detroit to care for her family verges on sentimentalizing the Appalachian region, as well as Gertie's longing for it. Certainly Gertie's desire to return home deserves attention, but Arnow gives Gertie's sadness such heaviness that it crushes the potential for any positive spin on the family's relocation. Gertie's husband Clovis must make a similarly dichotomous choice between Appalachia and Detroit, and although Arnow sets up a viable avenue for discourse community negotiation through Clovis' union activity—a space in which he could potentially gain some sense of agency in the alienating world of Detroit—he fails to pursue it. In these ways Arnow presents the Nevels family as incapable of negotiating the demands necessitated by literacy acquisition, and she also connects this rigidity to characters' perceptions of gender boundaries demarcating socially acceptable roles for women and men. By granting Gertie traditionally feminine as well as masculine characteristics, Arnow suggests the flexibility of Gertie's gender identity, yet Gertie continues to assume the role of submissive female, and this decision has dire consequences. Although none of the novel's characters recognize the literacy-based and gendered negotiations available to them, the novel encourages readers to notice these options, as well as the ways in which Arnow's characters seem blind to them. As such, the novel sends an important rhetorical message to readers, enjoining them to avoid such rigidity in their own lives. Ultimately the novel offers a cautionary tale warning readers away from the plight of Arnow's characters, who are trapped in an “adjust or abandon” situation that is anything but dialectical.

Early in the novel Arnow makes clear that the ability to read and write plays an important role in the lives of Gertie and her children. Gertie makes daily treks to the post office to deliver and receive letters, she holds regular reading sessions with her school age children, and all but one (Cassie) can read and write before moving to Detroit. This attention to literate activity

quickly overturns notions equating Appalachia with illiteracy, and Arnow portrays reading and writing as normal events in the Nevels household. In conjunction with her treatment of traditional types of literacy, Arnow parallels Gertie's ability to whittle with the act of reading and writing. Since Gertie eventually uses her whittling for profit in Detroit, this metaphor becomes significant when the Nevels children must adapt to Detroit; to use Paulo Freire's terminology, they must learn to read their new world. This new type of reading results in difficult choices about personal identity, and Arnow gives her characters little opportunity to resolve the differences between home and Detroit in any productive way. Those characters who abandon their Appalachian identity (namely Clytie and Enoch) are primed for later commodification as factory workers, mirroring Gertie's role as doll producer in their cramped city apartment. When writing about his childhood experiences in Brazil, Freire recalls what it was like to read his world: "The *texts*, the *words*, the *letters* of that context were incarnated in a series of things, objects, signs" ("Importance" 6). The things, objects, and signs that the Nevels children encounter in Detroit require observation and interpretation, and in this way they learn to read the city. While not print-based, this literacy relies on a system of social symbols to communicate meaning, and the children comprehend this system quickly and efficiently, but for those choosing to adapt to the city's requirements, this comprehension proves detrimental to their Appalachian identities. By portraying the children's ability to read the city, Arnow schools her readership to conceive of literacy as more than the technical skill of reading and writing. This reader education presages literacy scholarship that defines literacy in social or cultural terms, and thanks to Arnow's expanded model of literacy, readers can identify how the city of Detroit attempts to commodify and control character literacies.

As readers might expect, not all characters readily submit to this commodification, and while some characters accept the drastic identity changes necessitated by Detroit, others refuse. Arnow's characters remain blind to the possibility that they might be able to keep certain elements of their mountain identities while also functioning (and possibly even thriving) within Detroit. Two of the Nevels children (Reuben and Cassie) resist these shifts, and even though Reuben's resistance results in a return to Kentucky, and Cassie's defiance ends in death, Arnow portrays Gertie as supportive of Reuben and Cassie's decisions. Although Gertie clearly does not celebrate the death of her daughter, before Cassie's deadly encounter with the train Arnow hints at the possibility of a negotiation between Appalachia and Detroit when Gertie decides that Cassie can "keep" her imaginary friend, Callie Lou. Since Callie Lou operates as the Appalachian representation of Cassie, Gertie's acknowledgement of her implies the beginnings of some resolution between the disparate worlds of Kentucky and Detroit. Yet when Cassie dies before ever learning about Gertie's decision, Arnow emphasizes the dire divide between old and new, between home-based and secondary literacies. Literacy scholars including Gee, Freire, and Mike Rose have identified these kinds of dilemmas inherent in discourse community transitions, and their research reveals that many people struggling with literacy-initiated identity conflicts eventually find some element of resolution. Conversely, Arnow's fictionalization portrays the opposite outcome, and her gut-wrenching depictions rhetorically admonish readers against such rigidity when faced with a similar conflict.

One popular interpretation of *The Dollmaker* identifies it as "one of the great proletarian novels of the age" (Denning 264). Representing this tradition, Cratis Williams writes that as a proletarian novel, *The Dollmaker* should be "on the list of required reading for the social worker

who seeks to understand the problems of the mountain migrants in adjusting to civilization in contemporary America” (349). With its focus on lower working class characters and the powerfully negative effects of industrialization for the Nevels family, the proletarian label does seem to fit: Clovis works in a factory plagued with strikes, Gertie reluctantly uses unfamiliar tools to produce and sell more of her dolls, and the family constantly struggles to buy an ever-increasing number of products purchased on payment plans. However, the novel lacks the sense of collaborative revolution that has often been considered the hallmark of proletarian fiction. Although literary critic Barbara Foley writes that 1930s Marxist critics responsible for defining proletarian literature cited no formula for the proletarian novel, they also believed “proletarian literature, as a ‘weapon,’ should be revolutionary rather than reformist,” and “proletarian texts should convey ideas and attitudes that would impel readers to take action against existing social conditions—that is move them leftward” (118). Although *The Dollmaker* teems with capitalistic injustice, the novel lacks the sort of didacticism that might qualify it as a weapon. Arnow’s biographer also comments on Arnow’s negative reaction to issues of *Masses* and *Daily Worker*, proletarian literature she explored while living in Cincinnati: “What she found [. . .] disappointed her. Or perhaps it would be better to say what she did not find: she did not find people treated as individuals, only faceless masses. Her own background in the hills had taught her that even illiterate humble people could carry on an organized and meaningful life and that such people were not without insight or emotion” (Eckley 37). Even though the novel does not have revolutionary implications, it does send an important social message that revolves around literacy: while the adults of the novel become urbanized, industrialized, and homogenized through physical acts of labor, the same process occurs for their children through exposure to dominant, school-based literacies. More specifically, the literacies Arnow presents operate

within two parallel factory models that function as sites of both resistance and loss: the Nevels children attend schools that operate as factories of homogenization and “adjustment,” which some (Reuben and Cassie) resist, while the others (Clytie, Enoch, and Amos) conform, and Gertie loses her only source of enjoyment when she stops whittling in order to produce identical dolls in the factory-like space of their apartment. In repeatedly focusing on the losses incurred as a result of Detroit-based literacy attainment, Arnow criticizes the kind of literacy (and the identity choices it entails) valued by an urban environment.

Near the novel’s beginning Arnow establishes many of her characters as literate, especially Gertie. After forcefully stopping a car carrying army officials, Gertie demands that they help save Amos (her sick and choking baby) by driving him to the nearest doctor. As Gertie convinces the army officer and soldier to help her, an important conversation emerges. While performing an emergency tracheotomy on Amos, Gertie talks about her whittling talent with the army officer, and she tells him about her intention of someday carving a man from her prized block of wild cherry wood. She goes on to name several biblical characters that might serve as models for her piece, and the officer comments that she seems “to be quite a student of the Bible” (18). When Gertie explains, “Th Bible’s about th only thing I’ve ever read,” readers know it is her most familiar text and later realize that Gertie has also read the Constitution (when she quotes it in an argument with her mother), as well as a variety of poems and other literature (18, 59, 130). Arnow returns to Gertie’s literate ability frequently, but by presenting it as a normal—and even expected—part of Gertie’s repertoire, Arnow succeeds in depicting Gertie’s literacy as a typical mountain skill.

Although the setting of Detroit, and its effects on the Nevels family, operates as a central feature of the novel, Arnow begins the novel in Appalachia. She highlights the frequency at

which literate events occur, and her continued focus on literate events in an Appalachian setting configures literacy as a normal, if not universal, part of mountain life. The emphasis that the Nevels family and much of the surrounding community place on the daily arrival of mail, especially letters from those writing home about their war experiences abroad, showcases the centrality of literate activity for many of Arnow's characters. Genuinely interested in placing the physical location of her loved ones, one community woman, Mrs. Hull, orders a world map and hangs it at the joint store and post office location. Although some of the women speak fearfully of these foreign places in "horse whispers" because of their unwillingness or inability to conceptualize the vast geographic distance between themselves and those at war, others speak "casually, as they had used to speak of the next creek or hill, of the Aleutians, New York, Paris, Calcutta, Hampton Roads, Okinawa, Louisville, London, Cincinnati, Kelly Field, Oak Ridge" (114).¹ In scenes such as this, Arnow emphasizes both the literate ability and the intellectual curiosity of this Appalachian community. In not representing literacy as an unexpected fluke, Arnow rejects common assumptions connecting Appalachia with illiteracy, like those of the woman observing students at Berea.

Building upon these representations of traditional types of literacy, Arnow also develops several scenes in which Gertie conducts reading lessons with her children, particularly her daughter Cassie, in their Kentucky cabin.² Even though five-year-old Cassie lacks the technical ability to read and write, she demonstrates her familiarity with narrative conventions. As such, Arnow highlights this skill as something outside the technical realm of reading and writing and foregrounds literacy as a fluid term that resists definition without contextualization. During one reading session, Cassie plays with Gyp (the family dog), instead of reading. When Gertie scolds her, Cassie replies, "Where's Gyp? This is a lion. He's about to choke to death on gingerbread"

(88). Cassie's older sister, Clytie, corrects Cassie, saying, "You're all mixed up [. . .] The lion I've been a readen to you uns in that old language book had a thorn in its paw" (89). In this instance Cassie has devised a new version of one of Aesop's fables with a more familiar, personal tone that results in a sense of ownership over the story, its characters, and its outcome. Even when Clytie challenges Cassie's story, Cassie responds undaunted, "My lion [. . .] is choked on gingerbread" (89). In the same way that Cassie retells a classic fable, Arnow redefines traditional definitions of literacy. In this seemingly innocuous scene, Arnow lays the groundwork for the ways in which we can read her treatment of literate practices throughout the remainder of the novel. Like Gertie's description of whittling, Cassie demands ownership over her version of the fable, and through these juxtaposed episodes, Arnow prepares her readers to consider the children's later non-print-based reading of Detroit as a type of literacy. Arnow's constant attention to the literate practices of her characters provides a much different response to the Berea woman's question, "Can either of your parents read or write?" than the one Arnow actually gave. In speech Arnow allowed the woman's misperceptions to continue, but she challenges these notions in literary form. Even though Arnow's characters ignore the nuanced negotiations involved in literacy-initiated discourse community transition, she still devotes much of her six-hundred-page novel to correcting the woman's derogatory assumptions, both about the illiteracy of mountain people and the meaning of literacy itself.

To even better prepare readers to think about her non-traditional treatment of literacy, Arnow grants Cassie similar creative license when Cassie reads an entire story to Gertie based on a book's pictures, instead of its printed words. Gertie asks Cassie to read from her primer, and without looking at the book's text, Cassie recounts the story's events. However, when Gertie points to a word and asks Cassie to read it, Cassie cannot. Cassie's lack of one-to-one

correspondence illustrates a cognitive gap between the printed letters of a word and its meaning, and Cassie bridges this non-communicative space by memorizing and retelling the story, complete with her own unique twists and turns. Cassie's technical inability to read allows a creative narrative redirection, and this shift parallels the transition Arnow demands of her readers when defining literacy. Just as Cassie's verbal telling of the story operates as a viable form of literacy, so too does the children's ability to read the Detroit school system. Thus Arnow's departure from traditional definitions of literacy foreshadows the various literacies characters must rely on in order to read, and in fact survive within, the city of Detroit.

Before the family moves to the city, Arnow depicts most literacy events as shared experiences, often highlighting the cognitive connections between the Nevels children, as when Clytie and Cassie debate the "correct" version of a fable. In discussing the content of a story, an interpretive space opens, and what transpires within that intellectual arena can only be described as a social act. Unlike the strong-text theories of literacy made popular by early scholars like Jack Goody and Ian Watt, the act of reading, writing, and learning in the Nevels household is anything but autonomous. Literacy scholar Deborah Brandt insists that we should "see a text not as a fixed artifact but as the public social reality (the public context) in which writing and reading unfold," and as readers become aware of the importance of shared learning for the Nevels children, Arnow prepares her audience to notice the drastic shift in literate activity once the family moves to Detroit, where such activity stops being dialectical (39). While in Kentucky, Gertie's household work allows her to engage in the social activity of reading with her children: they feel comfortable participating in these literacy events in their home environment, and the work of both mother and child is accomplished. However, once the family moves, the children's family-based literacy events cease as the family struggles to adjust to their new, unwelcoming

environment. This struggle results in a reliance on different types of literacies, ones that involve difficult decisions about keeping or abandoning Appalachian identity within the new and threatening context of Detroit.

In Kentucky Gertie assumes the majority of responsibility for ensuring that her children learn to read and write, and her role as matriarchal educator aligns with gendered literacy trends noted by literacy and Appalachian scholars. Shirley Brice Heath writes that in the white mill town of Roadville, “Mothers take more interest in their children being good students than do fathers,” presumably because compared with the men of the community, Roadville women have higher levels of formal education (45). Similarly, Victoria Purcell-Gates writes about her experiences working with an illiterate urban-Appalachian mother (Jenny), who desperately wants her son (Donny) to become literate, even though Donny’s father seems unconcerned about his son’s battle with illiteracy.³ Arnow presents a similarly involved parent in Gertie when the narrator explains that the Nevels children attended a summer school taught by a young teacher from Lexington, and after those sessions ended, they “played school” at home. Gertie usually supervises these activities as she completes domestic labor tasks, like churning butter or cleaning. At home the oldest Nevels child, Reuben, appears to participate willingly in literacy events along with the two middle children, Enoch and Clytie, but the youngest child, Cassie, has more difficulty learning than the other children, and Gertie reassures her: “You’ll learn, honey; you’re kindly little yit; jist five a goen on six, and you ain’t had no schoolen, but you’re a doen fine” (90). In this particular instance, Gertie carries on the necessary tasks of life in Kentucky, and her children simultaneously labor to learn in the security of their home, complete with motherly encouragement. Since Gertie’s tasks allow her to combine the work of the farm alongside that of teaching her children, she finds time to comfort Cassie, reassuring her that she

will eventually learn, like her older siblings. Like the women Heath and Purcell-Gates write about, Gertie purposefully concerns herself with the education of her children. Arnow not only makes Gertie literate, but she also endows Gertie with both the desire and the ability to teach her own children in a mountain setting. Arnow's fictional portrayal of Gertie's combination of motherly duty with pedagogical responsibility pre-dates the later identification of gendered literacy trends by literacy scholars, similar to the way Arnow encourages readers to think about literacy as more than the ability to read and write decades before this idea becomes popular in literacy studies.

In the same way that Arnow pushes readers to conceive of literacy as more than the act of reading and writing, she does the same for the concept of illiteracy. In an early episode, Gertie's gullible willingness to believe misleading "Help Wanted" signs posted in Kentucky reveals that the act of reading alone does not suffice as an adequate form of literacy. After Gertie and the children arrive in Detroit, Gertie has a conversation with another traveler at the train station. Gertie soon learns about the woman's plans to leave Detroit for her original home in west Tennessee, because she refuses to tolerate the living conditions near Willow Run, a Michigan-based airplane plant opened by the Ford motor company during World War II. When Gertie learns that the woman's husband spends many of his work hours "jist a standen till they needed [him]" so the company can "make more plus," Gertie asks the woman what she means by "plus" (154). The woman explains that by hiring more workers, companies can claim increased costs in making a particular product. The government gives the companies more profit when production costs increase, and consequently the woman reasons, "Th more men, th more plus fer th owners, th more money an more men fer them unions" (154). Thanks to the woman's explanation, Gertie revises her earlier understanding in light of a new, contextual literacy when she exclaims: "Th

county paper and the radio and the signs on the trees all said these men were badly needed at Willer Run—to win the war” (154). In this scene Gertie learns the fallibility of printed materials; before coming to Detroit she accepted the message of those materials as true, and she (along with much of her community) genuinely believed that all workers who went North were desperately needed in the war effort. Arnow’s decision to insert this scene in the Detroit train station, upon the family’s arrival, forecasts that similar situations await the Nevels family. Although each of them (except Cassie and the baby, Amos) already has the technical ability to read and write, they must work to develop new literate skills required by the city.

Other literacy events that occur within a mountain setting are less obvious, and in this way Arnow further prepares her readers to expand their traditional notions of literacy, an expansion that is necessary in understanding how the Nevels children later read their new world of Detroit. Arnow compares Gertie’s woodcarving ability to literate ability, and throughout the novel it remains one of her most important competencies, particularly when her carving supports the family financially. Near the novel’s beginning, when Gertie explains to the military officer that she has always whittled, Arnow compares the lines on Gertie’s hands to pages from a book to correlate Gertie’s carving with literate activity: “She looked down at the hand that held the poplar wood, the back brown and wrinkled, fingernails black and ragged, then at the palm, smooth with the look of yellowed leather. It was as if the hand were a page engraved with names” (17). This description occurs as Gertie tells the officer that she uses her hands to make practical farm items, like handles, yet the simile connecting her hand with a page engraved with names suggests that readers need to understand (and in fact, read) Gertie’s whittling in a creative, literate context. Here Arnow also reveals Gertie’s yearning to express her carving talents more creatively, yet readers soon learn that Gertie regards the acts of carving dolls and other

imaginative items as “foolishness,” and by revealing the potential for creative expression stifled by practical necessity, this scene forecasts the eventual commodification of Gertie’s carving in Detroit. Gertie’s whittling history encodes her hand, suggesting that just as she shapes the wood for various purposes, the act of carving similarly encodes her world. Arnow thus compares the changes brought to Gertie’s life through her carving with the changes the technical skill of reading and writing introduces to people’s lives. In signaling Gertie’s hand as a piece of writing, Arnow creates a powerful literacy metaphor, and in urging readers to draw comparisons between the act of whittling and a literacy event, Arnow primes readers to critique the way Detroit commodifies Gertie’s talent.

In a gendered twist on the matriarchal literacy trends noted by Heath and Purcell-Gates, Gertie’s father provides her with the majority of her literacy skills. When Gertie tells the army officer about her familiarity with the Bible she goes on to explain: “when I was a grown up my mother was sick a heap an my father hurt his leg in the log woods. I had to help him, an never got much schoolen but what he give me” (18). As an injured man, her father remained at home and carried out the often feminized task of educating his children. Arnow presents a similar overlap in gendered roles when Gertie assumes masculine characteristics ranging from her choice of dress to her eventual role as family breadwinner in Detroit, and a continual tension between Gertie and her mother remains throughout the novel, especially over the forms of literacy Gertie learned from her father.⁴ During one visit home Gertie’s mother chastises her for the learning she received: “Yer pop *would* learn you th Constitution an some a th Bible—an you been spouten em ever since like you was a preacher an a lawyer, too” (59). As she listens to her mother’s ranting, Gertie longingly touches the whittling knife in her pocket, and the narrator reveals that “her mother had ever hated the whittling, even in her father—and in a girl it had

seemed almost a sin” (62). Here Arnow reveals that for Gertie’s mother, acceptable forms of literacy are gender dependent, and in assuming the masculine activity of whittling, in her mother’s opinion, Gertie refuses her role as a woman. Yet later in the novel Gertie acquiesces to her mother’s biblically supported proclamation that Gertie should follow Clovis to Detroit as part of her wifely obligation, even though she has just purchased a farm for the family in Kentucky with her own money. Gertie submits to her mother’s command, and just as characters remain blind to the literacy-based negotiations available to them between Appalachia and Detroit, Arnow suggests flexibility in gendered roles only to have her characters reinforce and submit to gender dichotomies in the novel.

Although Gertie feels proud of her ability to carve practical things for farm use (since this helps the family), she views her special whittling project as a guilty indulgence, perhaps because of her mother’s constant criticism; Gertie repeatedly expresses shame over “her time-wasting ways” (82).⁵ At one point Clovis says to her, “If’n you must waste elbow grease on whittlen, couldn’t you make an ax handle er somethen somebody could use?” (34). Gertie internalizes such criticism, and once readers compare Gertie’s carving with a type of literacy, they also begin to understand why she would deem reading for pleasure a waste of time, at least when other “real” work awaits. In one such incident, she chides her son Enoch for reading: “You’ve been a setten a wasten good coal oil a readen,” when he should have been helping prepare the new cabin for their arrival (129). Enoch defends himself by replying, “I saw all these books an I recollected you wanted us to study ever day like we was goen to school. So’s I studied some spellen” (129). Here Arnow emphasizes both Enoch’s literate skills and his desire to learn. Despite the family’s poverty and their continued struggle to own their own land, Arnow refuses to equate financial need with illiteracy, and she instead endows Enoch with the literate skills necessary to foster a

growing intellectual curiosity. In doing so she overturns assumptions about Appalachian ignorance, instead creating a character eager to fulfill the educational goals his mother holds for him and his siblings.

Arnow also highlights how Gertie embodies that same penchant for reading, because as Gertie looks through the books “many of the poems were familiar as old neighbors who, though moved away and not seen for years, seem neighbors still when seen again” (130). Arnow names Marie La Coste’s “Into the Ward of White-Washed Walls” as one of the poems Gertie reads, an 1864 poem lamenting the death of La Coste’s fiancé in a Civil War battle. The poem’s sentiment parallels Gertie’s grief from the recent death of her brother Henley in World War II, and Arnow allows Gertie to read for only a few moments before Gertie stops “with the guilty realization that she was wasting time” (130). Here the connection between literate activity (both whittling and reading) and perceived wasted time illuminates the division between pleasure and necessity for the Nevels family. This division must be strictly maintained, even when the dividing line shifts (as when Gertie begins carving “frivolous” crucifixes to support her family). Arnow emphasizes that just as Gertie feels obligated to carve practical farm items (instead of fanciful dolls), Gertie also encourages structured school lessons but discourages the spontaneous reading of poetry. Gertie’s delineation between acceptable literate activities and wasted time once again foreshadows the transformation of Gertie’s carving talent into a form of raw labor, when she constantly longs to devote carving time to her block of cherry wood but instead usually carves cheap crucifixes for profit. Perhaps even more important, in these scenes Arnow sets up her later depiction of the kinds of literacy valued by Detroit, as well as the character decisions that valuing system demands, as when Gertie must carve for profit instead of for personal expression.

Unfortunately, the time Gertie is able to devote to her children and their literacy skills vanishes when the family moves to Detroit, and the entire family must learn a new type of literacy—the literacy of urban industrial commerce. Even though Gertie arrives in the city with a substantial amount of cash, she gradually spends the money on clothing for the children, appliances for the apartment, and other necessities of urban life. With Clovis on strike more often than not, Gertie struggles to buy food in addition to paying for things she never bought in Kentucky, such as ice. The new electric stove bought on a payment plan, the cumbersome washer, and the inability to harvest her own food (with the resulting reliance on expensive fruit and vegetable vendors), all combine to consume the majority of her time at home. These new and overwhelming responsibilities illustrate the fraught process of Detroit-specific literacy acquisition, and the drastic transition from an agrarian lifestyle to one of urbanized industrialization forces Gertie to focus her energies solely on her family's financial survival. Consequently, Gertie relies upon one of her home-based talents, whittling, to earn money for the family while her children enter an entirely new discourse in the city school system.

The Detroit classroom functions as a site where the Nevels children are encouraged to become good producers, and to achieve such results, the classroom requires that they read, understand, and acquiesce to the identity changes demanded by the city of Detroit. During the family's trip aboard a train to Detroit, Arnow foreshadows the family's entrapment, including the children's imprisonment in both the school system and the unfriendly ideology that awaits them. On the train Gertie longs to see the landscape, but the dirty windows on the train reveal little because they are "steamy on the inside, crusted with snow and dirt on the outside, and stout as for a prison, with two thick panels of glass" (146). Although trains typically represent mobility,

in this scene the locomotive takes its place in a series of figures for the hardships of industrialization for the family, including the train that eventually kills Cassie. Later, just before a narrative description of the Detroit school building, Cassie notices and dislikes the looming presence of the train, which foreshadows her death by train: “The children stood without complaining, accepting the train and the cold and the smoke and the smell of the cars as if they were a natural part of God’s world, all but Cassie, who stood with trembling chin and brimming eyes” (190). In this instance Cassie rejects the ugly, hulking train through an emotional response, and she later resists the requirements of urbanization by keeping her imaginary friend, Callie Lou, alive.

The family’s cab ride to their new tenement housing in an area ironically named Merry Hill also functions as a powerful foreshadowing tool. Each member of the Nevels family anxiously looks out the cab’s window, hoping for a glimpse of their new home, but smoke, steam, and ice blur their fields of vision. Arnow’s narrator describes how “the frost on the car windows was at times a reddish pink, as if bits of blood had frozen with the frost” (163). Here we see a dim progression of gloom from the snow- and dirt-crusting windows of the train to the cab’s windows speckled with a substance resembling blood. The mention of blood suggests the cost of human suffering to come in Cassie’s death, Reuben’s departure, and the utterly painful transition the family faces in Detroit, and in this way Arnow personifies the city. From the family’s arrival until the close of the novel, Arnow depicts the city as a forceful, live being that exerts a considerable amount of control over the family. The narrator also reveals Gertie’s shock when she sees her new home: “She had hardly thought of [the houses] at all, they were so little and so still against the quivering crimson light, under the roaring airplane, so low after the giant smokestacks” (164). Here Arnow draws a clear connection between the Nevels family’s social

status and their home: like the tenements dwarfed by the factory smokestacks, the family cowers in the presence of a capitalist system that requires either adjustment or abandonment, and she leaves no room for any middle ground between those two choices. While Arnow depicts the act of reading, writing, and learning in the Kentucky cabin as a peaceful event that unfolds in a shared context, her descriptions of Detroit set up a much different literacy situation that soon presents difficult, divisive choices for the Nevels family.

Perhaps one of the most tragic aspects of *The Dollmaker* is that the Nevels family moves to Detroit with high expectations of the public school system. Gertie and her children envision a gymnasium, a sprawling library, and hot food served at lunch. The reality that awaits them presents a much different picture of “opportunity,” as Arnow demonstrates in Gertie’s first encounter with the school building:

Below the flag she saw a black roof streaked with snow, and under the roof two rows of empty windows set in the dark soot-stained walls of a two-story brick building that rose high and straight out of the dirty, trampled, paper-littered snow. The bit of yard was separated from the street by a high iron fence, like the fences she had heard were about penitentiaries. (194)

This symbol-laden passage immediately challenges Gertie’s initial belief that a school could provide a better education for her children than she could at home. Representing the young minds of her children, the empty windows of the building seem hemmed in by the snow-streaked roof, stained walls, and confining fence. The presence of snow on the roof parallels the crusted windows of the train and cab that bring the family to Detroit, and the train, cab, and school building signify eventual imprisonment by the city. The paper strewn about the snow represents the children’s previous literacies that they will necessarily leave behind to function within the city school system. Later in the narrative, these descriptions come to represent an altogether new discourse that the children must adapt to in order to survive. Perhaps even more disturbing, as

Gertie nears the building, she sees “two little flimsy-looking houses” that remind her of “the makeshift railroad workers’ houses she had seen in the Valley” (194). Once she learns that these structures function as portable classrooms, she begins to seriously doubt the validity of her first assumptions about superior Northern schooling. In comparing the classrooms to railroad housing, Arnow once again draws a connection between the imprisonment of the train, the city, and the city’s school system. To be sure that readers understand the relationship between factories and schools, Arnow describes Gertie’s reaction to the sound of the school: “Once outside, she stopped and turned around and stood for a long time staring at the gray building in the square of the dirty snow. A look of listening was on her face, for from [the school] there came between the sounds of distant trains and traffic a faint humming—like that from factories she had passed” (203). Literary scholar William Schafer notes, “the Detroit schools are [. . .] machine-tools designed to shape, plane, and finish children as programmed units in the consumer society,” and Arnow emphasizes that in addition to looking and functioning like a factory, the school even sounds like one, further highlighting the transition its students endure in having their literacies commodified like any other factory product (48).

As Arnow later demonstrates through Reuben’s teacher Mrs. Whittle, this commodification takes place in part because teachers do not value the world from which their students come. Freire insists that teachers must “take the people’s historicity as their starting point,” something that occurs in the Kentucky cabin when Gertie teaches the children. However, once the children enter the Detroit classroom, teachers simply present information for memorization (what Freire describes as the banking method), and thus “fail to acknowledge men and women as historical beings” (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 65). In failing to do so, teachers obfuscate the Nevels children’s Appalachian identities, and the goal of instruction becomes

unquestioned assimilation, a requirement for later factory work. Even so, for Freire the term historicity indicates that learners possess the possibility for change while still keeping elements of their former selves. Without this willingness to acquire what Gee would call elements of a secondary discourse, dialectical learning becomes impossible. If we are to accept Arnow's portrayal of Reuben, then we understand that even if the teachers in the Detroit classroom had respected his background (which they do not), he would still have resisted learning anything outside of his native discourse community. By ignoring the possibility for negotiation in such a situation, Reuben must return to Kentucky, greatly limiting the potential of his own literacy attainment.

The faith that Gertie places in the school system wavers when she sees the building, and it only deteriorates from that point on. Several literacy scholars note similar trends when formally uneducated people place unrealistic amounts of hope in the goals of school systems or in the results of learning to read and write. Juliet Merrifield's study, for example, notes: "All the [Appalachian] people we profiled value education and literacy, perhaps having unrealistic expectations of the difference it could make in their own and their children's economic situations" (87).⁶ Although the participants in this study seem most concerned with economic gain resulting from literacy, Gertie and her children focus instead on what they believe a city school can provide, including material luxuries absent in rural schools (things like access to large libraries and an opportunity to play sports that require equipment), as well as instruction from supposedly better qualified teachers. While the school does function as a site of learning, its primary instruction trains the children to re-make themselves into obedient factory workers, and As represented in Arnow's novel, the school leaves little room for any negotiated middle ground between Appalachia and Detroit. Just as Shirley Brice Heath argues that "the school is not a

neutral objective arena; it is an institution which has the goal of changing people's values, skills, and knowledge bases," Arnow depicts the goal of the Detroit school system clearly—standardization (367). Before leaving Kentucky the older Nevels children already know how to read and write; it is the new required reading of Detroit that threatens to either destroy or remake them. Gertie's first encounter with the school building functions as a significant clue that her children will face difficult decisions about self-identification and discourse affiliation. Arnow's description of the building as factory-like forecasts the commodification of Gertie's children's learning: although the building will produce educated students, the implication is that each child will resemble the others, just as any mass-produced product would.

When she finally enters the school building, Gertie realizes that literacy functions differently in Detroit as well. She remembers "that all a body had to do in Kentucky was send their youngens to school the day the County Health people came," but in Detroit Gertie must assume responsibility for having her children immunized before starting school (198). Similarly, the Detroit enrollment process asks that she read, understand, and sign documents, but Gertie hesitates because "she had never put her name to anything, joined anything, promised anything" (198). In the school office Gertie signs three times, once for each child, and leaves her children's birth certificates on the desk "as directed," a symbolic representation of relinquishing educational control to the Detroit school system (200). Although such formal documents are not necessarily used against the Nevels family, as they were and are for many marginalized people, the paperwork signals an altogether new way of life.⁷ In this scene Arnow also depicts typical assumptions about Appalachian illiteracy when Cassie's teacher, Miss Vashinski, assumes that an inability to read and write causes Gertie to hesitate in signing the documents, when instead Gertie pauses to ponder the consequences of outsourcing the educational training of her children.

Here Arnow emphasizes an Appalachian character's literate ability while simultaneously highlighting Miss Vashinski's misreading of Gertie's literacy, yet in this situation Miss Vashinski (not Gertie) exerts control over the Nevels children. In scenes like this one, readers become aware of the kinds of literacy valued in Detroit as Arnow continues to reveal how the city's cultural value system differs from the Nevels family's mountain existence in Kentucky. Yet at the same time, Gertie's resistance to "joining anything" recalls stereotypical notions about stubbornly individualistic mountaineers, and readers begin to understand the inevitable stand-off between Gertie and the city's requirements for survival.

Foregrounding the required discourse shifts of the Nevels children, Arnow portrays Enoch's first walk to school as a kind of rite of passage that initiates him into a new, marginalized position in Detroit. First a neighborhood boy hits him and knocks his cap off, and then another boy throws the hat into a trash heap and yells over his shoulder: "Go to yu public school, yu hillbilly heathen, youse. We don't have to go to school with niggers an Jews and hillbillies" (187). Here the boy subjugates Enoch in three ways: he points out a class-based divide between children who attend public schools and those who attend private Catholic schools which cost more; he connects heathen with hillbilly, suggesting an inherent superiority of the Catholic faith, which isolates Enoch and his Protestant family; and he compares hillbillies with Jews and African Americans, insinuating a religious and racial divide based on Appalachian heritage. Literary critic Rachel Lee Rubin claims that *The Dollmaker* "demonstrates how the meaning of 'Appalachia' or 'the Kentucky mountains' for one family changes from a regional description, with meaning fixed in the present ('home'), to be understood as a designation of ethnicity, signifying both the historical past and the family's point of cultural origin" (177). She also writes that after the family moves to Detroit, "displacement is the key quality in the makeup

of their ethnic identity” (178). In insulting Enoch based on the displacement Rubin identifies, the boy schools Enoch in reading Detroit as a racialized text, and Enoch becomes aware of his inferior position within that text. Certainly the boy insulting Enoch thinks of hillbillies as their own ethnic category, and scholar Anthony Harkins traces the tradition of portraying hillbillies as their own separate race to the late 1800s:

Through a variety of arguments, including genetic inferiority, excessive interbreeding with ‘nonwhites,’ and environmental factors, such as the destructive influences of the southern climate, rampant disease, and a woefully inadequate diet, these writers asserted that ‘poor whites’ were neither truly ‘white’ nor clearly ‘nonwhite’ but instead, a separate ‘Cracker’ race. (17)

By the time Arnow published *The Dollmaker* in 1954, she was all too familiar with the hillbilly stereotypes Harkins describes.⁸ The neighborhood boy’s intermingling of a slur about race, religious affiliation, and common stereotypes about mountain people illuminates how many of the residents in Detroit conceive of the Nevels family—they are different and must be categorized with all other negatively “different” groups, such as African Americans and Jews. For Enoch, this knowledge functions as another form of literacy: now aware of his subjugated position, he has gained the first of many literacies required by his new, urban existence. The factories that initially draw the family to Detroit also appeal to a range of other ethnic groups, and the resulting work force resembles a multi-cultural sampling; Schafer writes that “all kinds of people are pulled into the labor camps to be homogenized as assembly-line robots” (49). This variation sometimes produces tension amongst different groups, and in the scene Arnow describes, Enoch’s encounter mirrors the diversity (and potential slurs) his father faces by seeking industrialized factory work.

Arnow does little to conceal the racist ideologies of many of Detroit’s residents. Exposure to such thinking causes the Nevels family to consider their place in the Detroit

hierarchy of racial classification, and this operates as another form of literacy for the family. After their arrival, before Gertie and the children leave the train station, they are called “hillbilly” twice (151, 156). Soon after entering their cold apartment, a neighbor child, Maggie, brings firewood and explains: “These houses, they’re good and warm anu rent’s cheap, and they’re the only places in Detroit where they keep u niggers out, really keep um out—sagainsa law. The niggers got into u last neighborhood where we lived” (175). Maggie’s comments demonstrate that a shared fear and loathing of African Americans bonds the residents of the Merry Hill housing project, which seems to strike a discordant note for Gertie, since she recently befriended a black woman from Georgia aboard the train to Detroit. Gertie soon learns that many neighbors dislike “hillbillies” almost as much as African Americans, and Arnow emphasizes this prejudice to illustrate Gertie’s understanding of a complex racial structure. By this point in the novel not only has Arnow endowed Gertie with the ability to read, write, and whittle, but Arnow has also given Gertie and Enoch the skills necessary to read the racial injustices of the city, which makes embracing city life even more difficult. Moreover, through this reading Enoch eventually leaves behind all aspects of his mountain identity, once again emphasizing Arnow’s polarized portrayal of discourse transitioning. In setting up this sort of “either/or” dichotomy, Arnow’s characters differ from the dynamic described by literacy scholars like Gee, who insists that people seldom lose all elements of their primary discourse when undergoing a transition like Enoch’s.

Shortly after depicting views about the Nevels family that label them as hillbillies, Arnow highlights a parallel, yet opposite, view of the family. When Gertie takes her children to school for the first time she carries necessary paperwork in a basket, and the art teacher, Mr. Skyros, calls it a “beautiful basket” and exclaims that he has “never seen one like it” (200). Gertie

explains that a man from home, “Ole Josiah Coffey,” made the basket, and Mr. Skyros seems so taken with it that she temporarily leaves it with him and his students. Arnow spends little time developing this scene, but it says much about the social climate in which the Nevels family operates in Detroit. Harkins argues that while hillbillies were seen as ignorant, degenerate, and dangerous, they were also simultaneously viewed as wholesome remnants of a simpler, purer time in American society. Northerners in particular found mountain crafts and folkways attractively unique, and Mr. Skyros’ appreciation of Gertie’s white oak splint basket does not seem unusual.⁹ Although Mr. Skyros’ views of the basket and its producer might appear to exoticize Gertie and the Appalachian region, his respect for the craft prevents such oversimplification. Unlike the giggling children loitering in the hallway, who laugh at Gertie’s accent, Mr. Skyros shows both interest in the basket and respect for Gertie. When he asks if she stained the basket she replies, “Oh, no. Oak weathers thataway. I allus liked th color a clean weathered oak wood. It’s as pretty as tubaccer when it’s hung up to cure” (201). Although Mr. Skyros’ eyes dance “like Cassie’s,” he responds, “Isn’t it beautiful. [. . .] Tobacco. I saw it only once—one autumn over in Canada. It was curing—all shades of brown” (201). Arnow makes clear that Mr. Skyros and Gertie share an appreciation for natural beauty, and the basket functions as an object which represents the shared language of art, thus establishing a dialogue between Mr. Skyros and Gertie. As such, the basket operates as a text, and both Mr. Skyros and Gertie have the literate ability to read that text, allowing them to communicate through an artistic medium. Arnow’s rendering of this exchange between city-dwelling Mr. Skyros and Appalachian-born Gertie not only emphasizes Gertie’s literate skill set, but it also reveals Gertie’s ability to communicate effectively with those outside of her home-based discourse community, at least about Appalachian artwork. Sadly, Clytie and Enoch express embarrassment

over the basket, as when Clytie says, “Mom, I don’t think people up here carries baskets” and Enoch begs, “Mom, don’t make me carry this old basket no more. Some youngens called us hillbillies and throwed snowballs,” revealing feelings of shame connected to their mountain heritage (188, 247). By depicting Clytie and Enoch’s desire to distance themselves from the basket, and the Appalachian place it represents, Arnow implies that in order for objects to communicate effectively (for example, between Gertie and Mr. Skyros), the bearer of the text (the basket) must present it as legitimate and worth reading, not as a discarded object. This instance also operates as a representative illustration of the way Arnow dichotomizes her characters’ choices about discourse community affiliation based on their reading of the city: even though Gertie is shy in her new environment, she remains proud of the basket, while Clytie and Enoch shun any connection to mountain crafts.

Arnow soon returns to the issue of school-controlled literacy when Mr. Skyros seems concerned that Gertie might not feel comfortable leaving the basket with him. Gertie responds, “I’ve left four youngens here. I oughtn’t to mind leaven a old split basket,” as if whatever he might do with the basket could hardly compare to the changes her children will undergo as a result of Detroit schooling (202). Mr. Skyros tells Gertie that her children will be “all right,” but Arnow also makes clear that he understands the discourse transitions necessitated for the children by their relocation to Detroit. He hesitatingly reassures Gertie: “This school has many children from many places, but in the end they all—most—adjust, and so will yours. They’re young” (202). By separating the words all and most with a dash, Arnow tempts literary critics to debate his meaning: if we combine all and most to mean almost, his statement could imply that although many of the children appear to have adjusted, none of them have truly forsaken all of

their pre-Detroit identities. This notion supports the kind of dialectical negotiation theorized by literacy scholars, yet when read with the eventual decisions of the Nevels children in mind, his statement means that most, but not all, children choose a Detroit-approved identity, just as Clytie and Enoch adjust, while Reuben and Cassie resist identity re-formation.

While pondering Mr. Skyros' predictions, Gertie questions him further about the way he uses the word adjust, and he tells her, "Yes, adjust, learn to get along, like it—be like the others—learn to want to be like the others" (202). In connecting adjustment with desire, Mr. Skyros signals that in order for such discourse transitioning to be successful, the children must want to change, and here Arnow reveals how the residents of Detroit shape the Nevels family's view of itself. The scene of a boy calling Enoch a hillbilly on his first day of school marks the beginning of Enoch's desire to reshape himself and his identity—what Mr. Skyros calls adjustment—and Arnow portrays Enoch's transition as both voluntary (to maintain some sense of self esteem) and required (to function in Detroit). Additionally, the adjustment Arnow portrays implies a stark choice between Kentucky and Detroit, between old and new, and while transitioning from a primary to secondary discourse often embodies such difficult decisions, literacy scholars like Freire argue that the negotiation between discourse communities opens a dialectical space in which critical consciousness can begin to take shape. Such critical awareness of one's place in the world makes communication and growth between two discursive worlds possible. Freire calls this process cultural synthesis, and he writes, "in cultural synthesis—and only in cultural synthesis—it is possible to resolve the contradiction between the world view of the leaders and that of the people, to the enrichment of both. Cultural synthesis does not deny the differences between the two views; indeed, it is based on those differences" (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 162). By applying this idea to *The Dollmaker*, we see that Arnow represents the city

of Detroit as the leader and the Nevels family as “the people.” In order for cultural synthesis to occur, each party must be aware of the other’s differences and willing to work toward a collective understanding, a willingness Arnow does not portray in her characters.

As Gertie continues to ponder Mr. Skyros’ definition, she realizes that “adjusting” would entail far more than learning to get along; it would also mean leaving behind many of the values and perspectives of Kentucky not accepted in Detroit and essentially adopting a homogenized set of middle class values. Arnow highlights Gertie’s resistance to this idea when she describes Gertie’s reaction: “Oh.’ [Gertie] pondered, looking down the hall—ugly gray—and at the children laughing in the doorway, then turned to him with a slow headshake. ‘I want em to be happy, but I don’t know as I want em to—to—’” (202). Mr. Skyros prompts her by asking, “Adjust?,” and Gertie replies, “Leastways not too good” (202). Here Gertie emphasizes that while she wants her children to succeed in school, she does not want them to forsake the old literacies tied to their Appalachian discourse community. In this particular scene Arnow portrays Gertie as perfectly capable of reading the requirements demanded by the school system, but she resists them. Just as the paper-littered snow surrounding the school represents the collective forsaken identities of the schoolchildren, the gray hall in which Gertie contemplates “adjustment” symbolizes the liminal space of transition from one discourse community to another (and the drastic shift between black and white), and Arnow’s description of the color gray as “ugly” also describes how Gertie feels about the situation in which she finds herself and her children.

Before she leaves, Mr. Skyros leans in, “like one preparing to share a secret,” and hopefully tells her, “Maybe they won’t adjust at all [. . .] Most of us do, but there’s always hope that one—” (202). He stops before finishing, as if the possibility of one of her children remaining

unchanged seems unlikely at best. Although Arnow leaves this statement incomplete, its inclusion operates as an important feature: like Gertie, Mr. Skyros shares hope for independence amongst the school-based pressures of adjustment. It is not only Gertie that resists these drastic transitions necessary for literacy commodification—Mr. Skyros does too. Before Gertie leaves he tells her, “Your children will be all right. They will, I fear, adjust better than their mother” (202). Although we could read his statement as sympathetic towards Gertie and her refusal to adjust, instead, he credits Gertie for her resistance and fears the consequences of her children reshaping their identities. In portraying Mr. Skyros’ reaction in this way, Arnow verges on sentimentalizing Gertie’s adherence to her mountain identity, as well as her children’s, and Arnow’s suggestion that Gertie will not adjust once again illustrates the impossibility of any growth resulting from the family’s move.

Even so, the conversation that takes place between the two perfectly captures the dilemma Gee outlines in *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses*, in which he explores the inherent conflicts that arise when a person’s home-based discourse differs with a school-based discourse. Discussing African American children, Gee argues that “in becoming a full member of school Discourses,” these children “run the risk of becoming complicit with values that denigrate and damage their home-based Discourse and identity,” and Gee also acknowledges that this same dilemma exists for many other groups (ix). Certainly the Nevels children find that to be accepted in school they must alter the way they act, dress, and especially the way they speak. These alterations operate as a particularly damaging form of literacy required by the school system and one that results in a palpable sense of loss for those renouncing their Appalachian identities. Gee points out that “the most striking continuity in the history of literacy is the way in which literacy has been used, in age after age, to solidify the

social hierarchy, empower elites, and ensure that people lower on the hierarchy accept the values, norms, and beliefs of the elites, even when it is not in their self-interest or group interest to do so” (36). In the case of *The Dollmaker*, because most of the Nevels children can already read and write before arriving in Detroit, the literacy that solidifies the social hierarchy present in Detroit is one of forced discourse transition, forsaken Appalachian identity, and “adjustment.”

Grounded upon the required literacy of adjustment, the Detroit school system functions as a social institution whose goal is to produce remarkably similar pupils who become commodities, and this process of commodification occurs largely as a result of imposed literacies.¹⁰ In keeping with Harvey Graff’s sociological study about the effects of literacy rates for industrialized workers in nineteenth-century Canada, Gee claims that simply learning the technical skill of reading and writing does not guarantee acceptance or success in the dominant discourse (in the case of the Nevels family, the school-based discourse of urban Detroit).¹¹ However, Gee’s definition of literacy as the “mastery of a secondary Discourse,” illustrates that the Nevels children have an important choice to make regarding their discourse community affiliation (143).¹² Because they are able to read the requirements for acceptance within the Detroit school system, the most critical literacy demanded of the Nevels children is one of abandonment of their home culture: Clytie and Enoch only find approval in the school community when they sever ties with their former (mountain) way of dressing, speaking, and conceiving of the world. Once aware that Detroit rejects their mountain heritage, they follow suit and successfully master the secondary discourse of Detroit, which has obvious disdain for all things Appalachian. Conversely, Reuben and Cassie opt for rejection by the city in a desperate attempt to preserve their mountain identities. As these choices are made, readers begin to see that Arnaw leaves no room for any sort of negotiation between Appalachia and the new urban

environment in which the Nevels family lives. Her presentation of this divide, and the consequences that ensue, sends a rhetorical warning that enjoins readers to embrace a more flexible approach when encountering similar identity dilemmas in their own lives.

In the terms of Pierre Bourdieu, the Nevels children must acquire cultural capital to gain entrance into the dominant discourse, but as Bourdieu points out, economic and social capital are almost always necessary in order to gain cultural capital, and the Nevels family certainly has no economic capital to spare. Moreover, the goal of the Detroit school system in which the Nevels children participate is not their entrance into the dominant discourse; rather, the system aims to produce pupils ready to become industrialized (but educated) factory workers, and one of the ways the school goes about achieving this goal is through literacy instruction. Gee rightly points out that “the history of literacy shows that education has [. . .] stressed behaviors and attitudes appropriate to good citizenship and moral behavior, largely as these are perceived by the elites of society” (34). Just as the elites Gee writes about have defined ideas about the literacies of other social classes, the Detroit school system has no room for the kind of cultural longing both Reuben and Cassie possess, because such loving affiliation with an area and set of values so far removed from urban Detroit will only result in unhappy pupils and later, unhappy workers. If, however, the school system achieves its goal of adjustment, as it does with Clytie and Enoch, then students will accept the required literacies of the city and leave school prepared to labor in an effort to meet the ongoing payments that characterize the cycle of debt factory workers face upon entering the industrialized economic system.

Soon after the children begin school, Arnow reveals which of the Nevels children will purposefully and knowingly transition into this new, secondary discourse and which will refuse. Clytie refashions herself and her modes of speaking early on, and when talking to teachers Gertie

self-consciously remembers, “Clytie didn’t want her to say ‘youngens’” (329). Enoch reacts similarly, as when he seems embarrassed to see his mother standing in the school hallway watching him through the door: “[Gertie] saw him sitting up near the front of the room with a book and some papers on his desk. She looked at him, smiling, until he lifted his head. He turned red, looked quickly away, then down, and began a furious scribbling. She stood an instant watching, her smile dying slowly” (331). Just before Enoch sees her, Gertie remembers that before the family moved to Detroit, she and Clytie had been responsible for educating Enoch, and she was proud to see him working and learning in a “real” school. While he gains the technical ability of literacy in Kentucky, and continues honing those skills in a Detroit school, the contextual situation in which Enoch learns has changed drastically; by consciously avoiding his mother because of embarrassment, he has made a decision to discard his home-based discourse of Kentucky. Such a decision understandably hurts Gertie, but it also enables Enoch to understand the city of Detroit, and Clytie finds similar results in her strategies of “adjusting.” Later in the novel, after the family has lived in Detroit for over a year, Gertie reflects that Clytie “looked like any thousands of other girls Gertie had seen,” and Arnow makes Clytie’s transformation abundantly clear (519).

Unlike Enoch and Clytie, Reuben chooses to maintain ties with his home discourse and thus finds himself at odds with Detroit and its classrooms. Gee sheds light on Reuben’s dilemma when he explains that the frictions between discourse communities can be “particularly acute when they involve tension and conflict between one’s primary Discourse and a dominant secondary Discourse, since one’s primary Discourse defines one’s ‘home’ identity and that of people with whom one is intimate and intimately connected” (146). After facing ridicule from his classmates, and even his teacher, Reuben still refuses to sever the kind of intimate ties he has

with home that Gee describes. When Gertie tells him that he should not carry a knife, because Detroit is “differ’nt,” he responds: “I’ve allus carried a knife. I ain’t a quitten now. I ain’t a maken myself over fer Detroit. I ain’t a standen a taken nobody’s lies—like you done” (316). Still angry with Gertie for moving the family to Detroit to be with Clovis (instead of standing up to her mother and buying their own farm in Kentucky), Reuben takes an accusatory tone with his mother, implying that his decision to rebel outshines Gertie’s choice to follow Clovis to Detroit. Finally he secretly borrows money from his father and returns to Kentucky. Once again Arnow highlights the difference in acceptable reactions to Detroit based on gender: Gertie praises Reuben’s departure, but she feels unable to undertake such an escape for herself, no doubt as a result of her mother’s biblically-supported preaching to “leave all else an cleave to thy husband” (135). Even though Arnow emphasizes the fluidity of gender roles when Gertie eventually earns the bulk of the family’s income in Detroit, typically a masculine role, Gertie rigidly adheres to her perceived womanly role by moving to Detroit, an adherence that proves detrimental for her family.

The only line in Reuben’s letter that explains his decision reads, “I can’t stay here no more,” signaling that the loss of his Kentucky cultural roots is too much to bear (363). Arnow’s decision to include a double negative in Reuben’s message makes an important statement as well: although considered grammatically incorrect in terms of Standard American English, readers understand and connect with Reuben’s painful sentiment. Moreover, Arnow spends several scenes establishing Reuben’s literacy skills early in the novel, which suggests that he may have intentionally included the grammatical “mistake” as a form of written resistance to Detroit and its literacies, an emphatic doubled response of “no.” As such, the note to his parents serves as a permanent, written record of his ultimate refusal to sever ties with his Appalachian

identity, one that Detroit judges as illiterate and non-functional. In portraying Reuben's resistance in this way, Arnow depicts him as someone strategically impervious to change, at least change by Detroit's standards. No doubt literacy scholars like Gee and Freire would argue that such a portrayal prevents Reuben from gaining potentially positive elements of the secondary discourse of Detroit, working toward critical consciousness, or understanding the differences between home and Detroit that would be necessary for any hope of eventual cultural synthesis.

Yet in other ways, the work of those same literacy scholars helps explain Arnow's representation of Reuben. Although Arnow establishes the Nevels children's literate abilities while the family lives in Appalachia, the sudden removal from Kentucky and the ensuing unpleasant relocation to Detroit makes Reuben's transition to another discourse unlikely. Freire and Donaldo Macedo discuss the importance of learners understanding and feeling comfortable within their home discourse before transitioning to another, and their theories account for Reuben's resistance in Detroit: "the refusal to read the word chosen by the teacher is the realization on the part of the student that he or she is making a decision not to accept what is perceived as violating his or her world" (123). In Kentucky, Reuben willingly takes part in literacy events led by his mother in the safety and security of their mountain cabin, but he refuses to participate in learning situations that take place in a Detroit classroom, where both students and teachers alike mock his speech, dress, and his very being, because as he points out, "It ain't like back home [. . .] Back home they ain't no youngens to giggle ever time I say somethen" (260). Such situations prove the New Literacy Scholars' insistence that literacy operates in a complicated social context; Reuben literally refuses to work toward gaining the cultural capital required of him in Detroit, at least given the social context in which this work would take place. Arnow frames Reuben's "deviation" as an understandable and potentially admirable form of

resistance, even as it fails to alter the dominant discourses in power. Because Reuben refuses to function in Detroit, he must return to Kentucky; his only other alternative would have entailed an attempt at adjusting to Detroit, and Gee warns that such techniques are “almost always socially disastrous” (143). Conversely, when writing about Amish literacy practices, scholar Andrea Fishman describes how a young boy named Eli’s definitions of literacy align with those found in his classroom, even though those definitions differ from “mainstream” ones. In speculating about what would happen if Eli’s value system and beliefs about literacy were at odds with those of his school she writes,

I suspect that Eli would have had to make some difficult choices that would have amounted to choosing between what he had learned and learned to value at home and what he seemed expected to learn at school. To conform to his teacher’s demands and values, he would have had to devalue or disavow those of his parents—a demand that public schools seem to make frequently of children from cultural or socioeconomic groups differing from those of their teachers or their schools, a demand that seems unfair, uncalled for, and unnecessary, not to mention counterproductive and destructive. (37-38)

The demands Fishman imagines might be placed on Eli in a non-Amish school are analogous to the ones placed on Reuben in Detroit, and Reuben refuses to devalue or disavow his Appalachian heritage. Along those same lines, as mentioned previously, Freire argues that successful learning situations must “acknowledge men and women as historical beings” and take their “historicity as [the] starting point” (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 65). Reuben’s school, teachers, classmates, and much of Detroit in general refuse to acknowledge and respect the history and culture of the Nevels family. Clytie and Enoch deal with this reality by forsaking their home-based discourse in favor of a new secondary discourse, but Reuben chooses to abandon Detroit entirely and instead returns home to a physically laborious life of farming. As such, no negotiation between home and Detroit takes place for any of the Nevels children.

Although Arnow critic Haeja Chung reads Reuben's departure as a "disaster," Arnow depicts Gertie as proud of Reuben for standing up for himself, suggesting that Gertie views his leaving as a liberating act, not a disastrous one. When Gertie learns that Reuben is safe in Kentucky she says, "I'm glad. Real glad," and here she expresses relief that Reuben no longer has to fight the ongoing battle of adjustment in Detroit, even though as the mother of the family, she feels obligated to remain in the city. Before Reuben leaves, Gertie visits Reuben's teacher, Mrs. Whittle, to discuss his unhappiness in school. Rachel Lee Rubin has asserted that the significance of Mrs. Whittle's name is its indication "that Gertie's artistic integrity is already outside of her control, located here in the denatured, pseudorational advocate of 'adjustment'" (183). If we substitute "literacy" for "artistic integrity" in Rubin's statement, it becomes clear that while Mrs. Whittle controls the school-based literacy rejected by Reuben, she also represents the control the city of Detroit (and the financial need it generates) eventually has over Gertie's prized talent of whittling.

Sadly, Mrs. Whittle treats Gertie as a second-class citizen and says to her: "You hill—southerners who come here, don't you realize before you come that it will be a great change for your children? For the better, of course, but still a change" (333). Here Mrs. Whittle takes for granted that she knows best for Gertie's children, and Gee calls this kind of dogmatic, ideological opinion a tacit theory of language, because people with such beliefs "have not spelled out the generalizations on which their claim rests" (13). In his introduction, Gee challenges readers with his claim that "it is a moral obligation to render one's tacit theories overt when they have the potential to hurt people" (x). Certainly Mrs. Whittle's theory rests on the hurtful assumption that Gertie and her children are lesser, but instead of engaging in the kind of dialogue

with Gertie that Gee encourages, Mrs. Whittle simply goes on to bitterly explain that the influx of people from the Appalachian mountains and elsewhere has resulted in overcrowded schools, making her job more difficult. She almost calls Gertie a hillbilly but manages to stop before saying the term in its entirety, presumably out of some superficial sense of courtesy.

Later in their discussion Mrs. Whittle ridicules Gertie for using the word “recollect” instead of “remember” and then says to Gertie about her children: “The others have, I understand, adjusted quite well, especially the younger boy [Enoch] and the older girl [Clytie], but Reuben—I remember him [. . .] He has not adjusted” (334). Mrs. Whittle, like other school officials Gertie encounters, insists that adjusting is necessary, and in a clever rhetorical strategy Gertie asks her, “You mean [. . .] that you’re a teachen my youngens so’s that, no matter what comes, they—they can live with it” (335). Mrs. Whittle agrees, and Gertie furthers the analogy by asking if learning to adjust would cause her children to accept the views of Hitler if they were schooled in Germany or support communists if they lived in Russia. This line of questioning infuriates Mrs. Whittle, and Gertie explains at the end of their conference that neither she nor Reuben want to “adjust,” and Reuben “cain’t hep the way he’s made. It’s a lot more trouble to roll out steel—an make it like you want it—than it is biscuit dough” (336). Here Gertie asserts her allegiance to her home-based discourse. Even though she knows Reuben would have an easier time at school if he “adjusted” (as Enoch and Clytie do), she supports and understands his refusal to do so, even inadvertently crediting him as being stronger than his siblings. Here it is important to note that “the way Reuben is made” does not prevent learning in a secure environment, like the Kentucky cabin of his childhood. However, when expected to adjust to the requirements of the Detroit classroom—requirements that Arnow make dependent on losing his sense of Appalachian identity—Reuben stubbornly refuses to be molded. Like her children,

Gertie has the ability to read the city of Detroit, and to some extent, she must read the city in order to provide for her family. Conversely, Reuben harbors no such obligation, and Arnow grants him the freedom to resist the literacy of Mrs. Whittle's classroom. This resistance prevents Reuben from engaging in any sort of dialectical learning process, and Arnow celebrates the preservation of his mountain identity.

Tragically, the fictional conversation that occurs between Mrs. Whittle and Gertie happens all too often to the "real" people of Appalachia, particularly urban Appalachians who have migrated to cities, like Cincinnati. Purcell-Gates chronicles the story of Jenny and Donny, a mother and son struggling to become literate.¹³ In several instances Jenny explains that Donny's teachers are unwilling to help her, even though she tells them she cannot read his assignments or help him with his homework. Purcell-Gates explains, "The teachers felt that the culture [Jenny and Donny's urban Appalachian value system], as a whole, did not value education, that the parents did not know how to parent, and that the parents did not instill a desire for success" (37). Even worse, when Purcell-Gates contacts one of Donny's teachers to discuss Jenny's difficulties in reading the teacher exclaims, "I *knew* she was ignorant as soon as she opened her mouth!" (164). Sohn explains that Appalachian English (AE) is a surviving nonstandard regional dialect that members of the mainstream discourse often pass judgment on as lesser or substandard, and Purcell-Gates writes that "Their [Jenny and Donny's] mountaineer dialect and accent invite contempt and/or derision from other urban dwellers" (38).¹⁴ Similarly, in *The Dollmaker* Gertie's usage of "recollect" when speaking to Mrs. Whittle, along with her constant struggles not to use unaccepted words like "youngens" (instead of children or kids), betray her as notably Other, branding her as a non-member of the school-based discourse in which her children must participate in Detroit. As Gee points out, "In socially situated language use, one must

simultaneously *say* the ‘right’ thing, *do* the ‘right’ thing, and in saying and doing express the ‘right’ *beliefs, values, and attitudes*” (124). Gertie fails to say, do, or express herself in the “right” way according to Mrs. Whittle, and such a deviance creates a divide between Gertie, her children, and her children’s teachers.

As Gertie’s children grapple with issues of identity within the Detroit school system, Gertie and Clovis struggle to stabilize the family’s finances, and the resulting commodification of Gertie’s whittling talent parallels the school’s commodification of the Nevels children’s literacies. Even during the family’s journey to the city, Arnow reveals that Gertie’s talent carries with it the potential to earn money when a girl aboard the train tells her, “I’ll bet yo could make big money whittlen. City people sometimes loves handmade stuff. It’s worth mo’n a dollah—way mo’n that if you count the time” (149). Gertie remains skeptical, but when she carves a crucifix for her neighbor Victor, he inadvertently advertises her work when he places it in his window for the entire alley to admire. Soon people begin offering to purchase hand-carved crucifixes from Gertie, and Clovis realizes the earning potential of such work. Always the supporter of modernization and machinery, he suggests using tools to expedite the process: “You could make a pretty good Christ with a jig saw” (317). Gertie initially resists the idea, but as the family’s financial situation becomes dire, she listens to Clovis’ assertion that “in this town a body could sell a million a them things if they was cheap enough. I do believe [. . .] that I can rig up some kind a jig saw, cheap, and that ud do th work in a tenth a th time” (368). Sadly, carving functions as one of Gertie’s only pleasures in Detroit, and with Clovis’ new machinery, she knows that “now it was money she wasted when she whittled a thorn, a strand of hair, or a fold in the loincloth that didn’t have to be there” (369). As Gertie’s once favorite pastime becomes

commodified, her living space becomes a factory-like space, paralleling the transition into industrial society her children have already encountered in school.

Once Clovis creates a machine that will cut identical pieces of wood for crucifixes, dolls, or anything else Gertie can make to sell, he proudly suggests that the entire family become involved in the process: “Tell you what, we’ll start us a factory [. . .] Yer mom can be th pattern maker; I’ll be the toolmaker, tool-an-die man, and repairman; you, Enoch, can be machine operator; Clytie can run th trim department; an Amos—well, on jumpen-jack dolls, fer instance, he can be a ‘sembly hand—run the strings through the holes” (477). By assigning specific jobs to each child, the production process mirrors that of a factory’s assembly line, and the children participate in the commodification of Gertie’s most prized talent—the ability to whittle. Enoch’s suggestion to hang a sign over the bedroom door that reads “Nevels’ Woodworking Plant” further emphasizes the ways in which a once safe domestic space now functions as a factory. Like his sister Clytie, Enoch anxiously adapts to the drastically new discourse community of Detroit, and after suggesting the sign he realizes: “it would be better to put No. 1 after the name so that people passing by would think that there was more than one Nevels plant” (477). Gertie loathes the idea of factory-produced pieces, and she especially dislikes the machine that allows such production: “it was like a monster from some fairy tale that, instead of grinding salt, spewed ugliness into the world” (485).¹⁵ Despite her hatred for the work, the family’s need for money trumps her resistance to factory-produced art. Gertie’s production of the dolls replaces Clovis’ previous factory work as one of the family’s main sources of income, since plant shutdowns, layoffs, and union strikes result in frequent unemployment. By this point in the novel readers understand that in the same way that Gertie loses the enjoyment of slow, careful carving to quick

production for profit, so too do the children lose aspects of their mountain selves when choosing to succeed in their reading of Detroit.

One such change occurs with Gertie's second oldest son, Enoch, when he laughs at a caricature of a hillbilly woman in the newspaper comics. The narrator describes the woman, who in many ways represents Gertie's journey from the comfort of Kentucky to the discomfort and rejection of Detroit, as "barefooted, sunbonneted, driving a raw-boned mule fastened to a homemade sled. They were going to town, and the woman on the way changed her bonnet for a silly looking hat with a big bird and a little long-stemmed flower; the old mule looked round and bucked and knocked down the woman" (523). The cartoon reminds Gertie of her beloved mother-in-law Kate, and she feels angry that Enoch finds humor in the illustration. Consequently she lightly slaps him then immediately regrets it, saying only "it wasn't funny" in her defense (524). As Joyce Carol Oates notes in the novel's afterword, Enoch has "learned the proper contempt for a 'hillbilly,'" and this once again demonstrates the cost of accepting the kind of literacy valued by Detroit (606). Perhaps even more disturbing than his contempt, in this scene Enoch seems to have forgotten his first day of school when other children called him a hillbilly, and when he laughs at the cartoon of a mountain woman, Arnow erases any remaining ties with his Appalachian identity; he has now become literate in prejudice.

Enoch's reading of Detroit also teaches him how to sell things, and he demonstrates the capitalistic tendencies of an effective entrepreneur once Gertie consigns herself to making mass-produced dolls to sell. Near the end of the novel Arnow depicts Enoch's now standardized sales pitch: "Dolls—genuine hand-carved dolls. Solid maple, safe fer a baby—unbreakable string—safe fer a baby" (503). Although Gertie makes the dolls from scrap lumber (because she can afford nothing else), and they are painted in what she considers a cheap and loathsome fashion,

Enoch's sales strategies work, and his techniques generate profit for the family. Enoch's school-induced desire for factory-produced materials echoes his mother's forced doll production techniques, both signaling the "adjustment" to a new factory-like discourse in Detroit.

Like Reuben, Gertie's youngest daughter Cassie refuses Detroit-initiated homogenization, and Gertie struggles to reconcile how she feels about Cassie's resistance. After Reuben's return to Kentucky, Gertie clings to Cassie because "Reuben was lost to her [and] the alley had the others" (380). Although Gertie feels a sense of pride when she thinks of Reuben's refusal to "adjust," she also knows that in order for her children to have a chance at success in Detroit, adjustment is necessary; she only wishes that her children could somehow hold onto their Appalachian selves while doing so. In not allowing negotiation between their Appalachian and Detroit identities, Arnow limits the cultural exchange process literacy scholars have identified in literacy acquisition and discourse community transition. Likewise, her focus on Gertie's wish once again proves rhetorically strategic when readers pause to consider the futility of Gertie's wish, given her stubborn refusal to consider any kind of negotiation between home and Detroit. Clovis even tells Gertie that she needs to adjust too: "That's one a yer big troubles, Gert [. . .] you won't give in to bein' like other people. But it's somethen millions an millions a people has got to do, an the sooner a person learns it, th better" (368). Thus when she "kills" Cassie's imaginary playmate, Callie Lou, Gertie does so in hopes of severing Cassie's ties to a past life in Kentucky, because Clovis warns that if she does not, "Th other youngens'ull git to thinken she's quair, an you'll have another Reuben" (368).

Similarly, when Mrs. Anderson, a neighbor, overhears Cassie talking to Callie Lou, Mrs. Anderson tells Gertie: "You'll have to help her [Cassie] grow out of that dream world [. . .] The other children think them queer, and it gets harder and harder for them to adjust" (379). Just as

Gertie feels torn about Reuben (sad to see him leave, yet proud of him all the same), it is with great difficulty that she “kills” Callie Lou, as when the narrator reveals: “[Gertie] was breathing hard, choked up inside, fighting down a great hunger to seize and hug and kiss the child, and cry; ‘Keep her, Cassie. Keep Callie Lou. A body’s got to have something all their own’” (380). Eventually Gertie decides that Cassie can “have Callie Lou at home,” but Gertie’s first real attempt at negotiation comes too late, since all along Cassie has kept Callie Lou alive outside, which later results in a tragic train accident. In this way Cassie resists the necessary transitions for success in Detroit; by refusing to abandon her imaginary playmate, she keeps Callie Lou as the symbolic representation of the Appalachian home for which she longs.

Even Gertie recognizes that although Callie Lou does not fare well in Detroit (because the other children tease Cassie for having an imaginary friend), Callie Lou would be safe in Kentucky, and Gertie wishes “the war [was] over and they [were] home, a family whole again with Reuben, and only the trees and Gyp to hear the talk with Callie Lou” (372). Perhaps Cassie could have kept Callie Lou in Kentucky, but had she attended school (as the children did when one was available), it seems likely that her classmates would have mocked her imaginary friend, just as they do in Detroit. In presenting Gertie’s longing in a romanticized way, Arnow fails to acknowledge that the death of an imaginary friend might be part of Cassie’s childhood regardless of whether she lived in Kentucky or Detroit. Instead, Gertie blames Detroit for the death of Callie Lou and consequently of Cassie as well: Cassie’s insistence on keeping Callie Lou causes her to stray farther and farther away from the apartment so Gertie won’t hear their conversation, and she eventually retreats to the railroad tracks to play with Callie Lou. Tragically, a train kills both girls, literally and figuratively. Cassie’s refusal to banish Callie Lou results in death, a symbolic representation of the destruction Detroit inflicts on those who refuse to remake

themselves in its image. Cassie's death by train sends the significant message that for Arnow's characters, the choice between life and death, Kentucky and Detroit, is an "either or" decision: they must acquiesce to the city's requirements or return home.

In Cassie's gruesome death scene, and the events that follow it, Arnow explicitly illustrates the consequences resulting from a forced transition between discourses for Cassie and Gertie; notably, the two characters that suffer most are female. Reuben refuses to participate in the Detroit classroom and community, and as a young male he succeeds in returning home. However, when Cassie exerts what little agency she has as a young girl by keeping the symbolic representation of her mountain self (Callie Lou) alive, her insistence kills them both, resulting in an almost unbearable sense of loss for Gertie. In an interview with Chung, Arnow says that when writing the novel, she "kept thinking of Gertie, who couldn't learn [to function in Detroit], partly because she didn't really want to" (213). However, as the person responsible for the family's financial survival, Gertie has little choice but to function in Detroit, while Reuben has the option of escape. Even as Gertie assumes the traditionally male role of provider for her family, her traditionally feminine devotion to her family and to her husband's authority leaves her with a fatalistic outlook that prevents any further attempts at the negotiation she timidly began when she decided Cassie could keep Callie Lou at home.

In the same way that the Nevels children must read the Detroit school system, Clovis quickly learns that in order to keep his factory job, he must read and understand the written, social, and cultural rules of the city, including the nature of factory work. Before leaving Kentucky, Gertie listens to a post office conversation about factory work in Oak Ridge, and this brief statement foreshadows Clovis' Detroit job, as well as the predicament of the Nevels children in the Detroit school system: "people worked without knowing what they did, and never

asked” (114). Gertie overhears a similar remark when her neighbor Sophronie explains to a group of women in the alley how she fell from the factory “merry-go-round,” a large piece of assembly machinery on which she works: “On a merry-go-round they ain’t no fallen back—no gitten ahead. You go jist as fast as it goes” (296). This term presents new information for Gertie, and in reading its meaning she slowly begins to realize that industrial work does not guarantee financial success for the family, nor does it ensure safe working conditions for Clovis and his coworkers. The symbolism in Sophronie’s words illustrates the entrapment of factory work—once families purchase items on payment plans, they must continue to work in order to meet payments, and low wages and unsafe conditions prevent workers from ever moving ahead economically. Arnow’s choice to refer to a piece of machinery as a “merry-go-round” also evokes images of children and playgrounds, yet once readers realize, with Gertie, that the merry-go-round is anything but safe, they are again encouraged to see the parallels Arnow draws between industrial work and the Detroit school system.

In a book set in industrial Detroit unions understandably play a significant role in the novel, yet they fail to provide any real sense of agency—or negotiation between competing discourse communities—for Arnow’s characters. When Gertie registers her children for school and does not have a family physician to list on the necessary forms, the secretary tells Gertie to list hers since “it don’t make no difference, nohow [. . .] Them doctors, they’ve got a strong union, stronger than u CIO. They’ll come if they wanta an yu ain’t got seven dollars, an if they don’t wanta come yu seven dollars don’t do yu no good” (199). Arnow portrays Clovis’ factory union in a similar way, yet he participates in it because he feels obligated to do so. When Gertie asks him a specific question about its business he replies, “Gert, time an agin I’ve told ye I don’t know nothen about the union’s business” (511). Despite a purposeful distancing from union

politics, Clovis gets hurt guarding another union man, and he seeks revenge on his attacker by murdering him. Instead of portraying unions as a space for negotiation and dialectical learning between two different discursive worlds, Arnow presents union membership as another troublesome (and even violent) requirement of living in an urban environment. Such a depiction sentimentalizes the family's existence in Kentucky (the home of vast resource exploitation by coal and timber companies during the time in which Arnow sets the novel), and Clovis' participation in union activity emerges as yet another aspect of leaving behind his Appalachian identity.

Near the novel's close Gertie continues to produce dolls in a factory-like manner in hopes of supporting the family financially, but excepting the time she spends carving her treasured block of wild cherry wood, her carving brings little pleasure. Thankfully, "the man in the wood [gives] rest and peace from thoughts of the things lost behind her and the things ahead she feared" (499). She often laments her former life in Kentucky, as when the narrator provides a snapshot of Gertie's regret:

To have Dock [the family mule] in a barn, even a rented barn, and around her food for the winter, and then be able to stand in the barn hall and listen to the rain while she held the night's milk ... and above her on the hill would be the house with her children, all her children, safe. To live that way, without debts, unions, boys in cars, foremen, traffic; to be free from the fears, forever at her back—. (524)

Unfortunately Gertie can only dream of her past life, since she never achieves it in reality. In a wrenchingly sad effort to earn more money for the family, Gertie chops up her prized block of wood—the piece she has painstakingly worked on for years—into various pieces, so she can use the lumber to make wooden figures for profit. In the novel's afterword, Joyce Carol Oates writes that "Gertie is an 'artist,' but a primitive, untheorizing, inarticulate artist" (608). Oates' commentary obfuscates the crucial observation that Gertie's ability to whittle speaks for her in a

way that she cannot, and her carving skills allow her a creative erudition that she never enjoys by any other means. Even so, the financial survival of her family trumps any desire Gertie has for creative expression, and her decision to destroy the last remnant of pleasurable carving illustrates that she reads, comprehends, and acquiesces to the ultimate requirement of the city—total submission.

When considering the novel's end, William Schafer calls Gertie “the most imprisoned of [the novel's] prisoners,” an accurate description since with Reuben in Kentucky and Cassie buried in a nearby cemetery, Gertie functions as the only remaining character who longs for her Appalachian home—and the literacies it values—but must remain in Detroit (50). Tragically, Arnow provides no viable avenue for Gertie to pursue in negotiating her longing for home with her necessary existence in Detroit, and Gertie's lot appears to be the gloomiest of all the Nevels family members. Gertie's destruction of the block of cherry wood signals her sadness and frustration at accepting the fact that she will probably never return to Kentucky, and perhaps most disturbing of all, the children she has left in Detroit have completely forsaken their Appalachian identities in favor of city-approved ways of being.

Although Arnow expands notions of literacy to encompass more than the technical ability of reading and writing, she does not allow her characters to experience the flexibility that her definition seems to encourage. In forcing her characters to choose totally and completely between Kentucky and Detroit, Arnow leaves no space for the emergence of understanding between these vastly different discursive worlds. As a consequence of this rigidity, both in terms of literacy and gender identity, characters suffer immeasurably. Yet Arnow's portrayal serves a rhetorical purpose by repeatedly illuminating the missed opportunity of negotiation, and this lesson resonates with readers. By providing her characters with the polarized choices of leave or

stay, home or city, abandon or adjust, Arnow highlights the importance of recognizing the full range of strategies available for negotiation between primary and secondary discourses, between female and male.

End Notes

¹ In his biography of Arnow, Wilton Eckley explains that as an adolescent Arnow was influenced by World War I, especially the frequency at which soldiers sent letters home. According to Eckley, she was appalled that some members of her own community could not read those letters, and likewise, there were “parents who had sons in France, yet had no idea what or where France was because they could not read a map. For them, war was truly loneliness and separation” (26).

² These scenes appear to parallel aspects of Arnow’s own education. From 1918 until 1919, Arnow’s mother (Mollie Jane Simpson) taught Arnow and her siblings at home, since the family lived in a remote area of Lee County. After that year, Arnow and her sister attended boarding school in St. Helens, Kentucky (Eckley 27-28).

³ Anthropologist Anita Puckett explains that in a part of Kentucky she observed, residents believe that “it is more natural for a woman to read and write than it is for a man” (139). For more information about the gendered beliefs surrounding literacy in that particular Appalachian community, see “‘Let the Girls Do the Spelling and Dan Will Do the Shooting’: Literacy, the Division of Labor, and Identity in a Rural Appalachian Community.”

⁴ Arnow’s maternal grandmother (Grandmother Denney) greatly resembles the portrayal of Gertie’s mother in the novel. According to Eckley’s biography, Grandmother Denney “did her best to make ladies out her granddaughters; and, while she lived, they wore fine tucked, lace-trimmed, stiffly starched underwear, kept their hair in curls, [and] sat often with books on their heads to make them straight” (21). Similar to these biographical facts, Arnow describes a scene in the novel in which Gertie’s mother tortures her with “required” feminine garments appropriate for church attendance: “Her thighs, that could endure the jolting of a mule’s back or long hours on the iron seat of the iron-wheeled mowing machine, cried to her in church with unceasing agony at their confinement in the encircling bands of knitted or crocheted lace and tucks, all starched and ironed until each toothed edge seemed so much iron cutting into her sweating flesh” (63).

⁵ Again, Arnow’s biography yields more parallels between her fictional strategies and her own life. According to Eckley, just as Gertie viewed whittling as a waste of time, writing “was frowned upon by [Arnow’s] parents as a waste of time and energy” (30).

⁶ Harvey Graff reports similar findings in his study of 19th-century Canadian factory workers. For more information, see *The Literacy Myth: Literacy and Social Structure in the 19th Century City*.

⁷ For more of this history, see Denny Taylor’s *Toxic Literacies: Exposing the Injustices of Bureaucratic Texts*.

⁸ For more information about Arnow's autobiographical ties to *The Dollmaker* (she too moved from Kentucky to Detroit, where she lived in standardized housing), see Thomas L. Arnow's article, "On Being Harriette Arnow's Son," as well as page 42 in Eckley's biography.

⁹ For a more in-depth discussion of America's interest in mountain handicrafts and folkways see Henry D. Shapiro's *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920* and David Whisnant's *All That is Native and Fine*. Whisnant's description of the cultural message that missionary workers send to their students mirrors the one Gertie receives in Detroit: "Cherish your traditions, but mind your new manners; affirm what you are, but groom yourself for social mobility" (67).

¹⁰ In his 1930 piece entitled "Education, Past and Present," Agrarian John Gould Fletcher discusses this trend further by chastising the Northern school system for producing graduates as a factory would. For more, see *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition*.

¹¹ See Graff's *The Literacy Myth* and *The Labyrinths of Literacy: Reflections of Literacy Past and Present*, as well as Juliet Merrifield's *Life at the Margins: Literacy, Language, and Technology in Everyday Life*.

¹² Gee makes it clear that this mastery must occur through acquisition, not learning (as he terms them). In short, "literacy (fluent control or mastery of a secondary Discourse) is a product of acquisition, not learning, that is, it requires exposure to models in natural, meaningful, and functional settings, and (overt) teaching is not liable to be very successful" (144). For more information, see the sections entitled "The Acquisition Principle" and "The Learning Principle" on pages 144 and 145.

¹³ It is worth noting here that while Purcell-Gates relies heavily on the theories of Gee in her work, she also accuses him of "discourse determinism," stating that theories based on discourse sometimes lock individuals into a pre-determined path, denying them the agency that exists in actuality. Instead, Purcell-Gates aligns her work more closely with that of Lisa Delpit, claiming that Delpit's research chronicles those that have gained a secondary discourse, almost despite a primary discourse (192).

Editors James Collins and Richard Blot similarly accuse Gee of denying the existence of agency within discourses in *Literacy and Literacies: Texts, Power, and Identity* (105).

I argue that while Gee's treatment of discourse somewhat pre-determines the way an individual operates in the world, that determination does not preclude individuals from gaining secondary discourses through acquisition.

¹⁴ For a detailed linguistic study of Appalachian dialect and meaning, see Anita Puckett's *Seldom Ask, Never Tell: Labor and Discourse in Appalachia*.

¹⁵ Here Arnow references the Norwegian folk tale "Why the Sea is Salt," which serves two purposes: Gertie's reference once again alludes to her literary awareness, and it also recalls the moral of a tale that depicts the consequences of greedy consumption. In the story a man obtains a

device that can grind anything the owner wishes, but the owner must know how to stop the machine when enough of the desired product has been made. Several times in the story characters purchase the grinder without learning how to properly operate it, and they must return it to the original owner so he can make it stop grinding. In the final scene, a man hastily takes the grinder to the middle of the ocean and tells it to grind salt without knowing how to turn it off. The grinder continues to produce salt until the boat sinks, and the tale declares that the grinder still sits at the bottom of the ocean today, making ocean waters salty. In comparing Clovis' doll-making device with the grinder from this story, Arnow suggests that once the Nevels family starts using the contraption to make dolls, they will not be able to stop. Even more disturbing, Arnow's comparison implies that the mass production of dolls will create insatiable consumers and also prevent Gertie from creating her own original artwork. For one version of the tale, see Gudrun Throne-Thomsen's *East O' the Sun and West O' the Moon with Other Norwegian Folk Tales*.

CHAPTER THREE

NARRATING SOCIALIZATION: LINDA SCOTT DEROSIER'S MEMOIRS¹

As discussed in the introductory chapter to this project, the Local Color Movement was largely responsible for beginning negative written portrayals of Appalachia, and throughout the remainder of the twentieth century literary portrayals of the region continued (and still continue) to shape national perceptions of the mountain South. Equally important to shaping those perceptions are the sociological studies and reports often conducted and written by non-Appalachians. John F. Kennedy's presidential campaign focus on West Virginia and Lyndon B. Johnson's subsequent War on Poverty resulted in unprecedented media attention, and anthropological and sociological reports about the region soon followed. Generally such portraits highlighted the most pitifully destitute situations camera crews and researchers could find, and studies conducted by academics—no matter how small or skewed—were often upheld as unquestionably true.² The genre of academic discourse (as well as media portrayals) seemed to lend credibility to these depictions of illiterate and degenerate mountaineers. Eastern Kentucky-born author Linda Scott DeRosier takes issue with such written representations of Appalachia in her memoir, *Creeker: A Woman's Journey* and her follow-up work of creative non-fiction, *Songs of Life and Grace*. In both works DeRosier emphasizes traditional literacy events³ in which reading and writing operate as the catalyst for gaining new cultural literacies; using Gee's literacy definition, for DeRosier, things learned through reading and writing result in the mastery of a secondary discourse (in her case, that of academia), which functions as another literacy. As with other authors and characters considered in this project, the process of becoming literate, in a technical as well as a discursive sense, introduces significant benefits and also significant conflicts to DeRosier's life and to her conception of the world. By writing about those gains and

dilemmas each of DeRosier's works speak both to Appalachians and to non-Appalachians. The rhetorical decision to write a memoir situates DeRosier's work so that someone from her home community of Two-Mile Creek (or any other Appalachian person) would likely be interested in reading it, but her explanation of Appalachianisms, like the intricacies of Appalachian vernacular speech patterns, also makes clear that she envisions a non-Appalachian audience as well. A professor of Psychology, DeRosier has the training and skills to write an "academic" account of Appalachia, but she laments that in many cases, academic writing is "couched in such a way that if a normal person read it, they'd never understand it" (interview). Although DeRosier could have crafted a fictional account of Appalachia, she instead sets down her own story of the region, and her work has the potential to resonate with readers as the story of one Appalachian woman's life. Even though DeRosier's academic colleagues declared that *Creeker* did not "count" toward her scholarly record because "it was not a professional book," its memoir form spans the gap between the two discursive worlds DeRosier struggles to negotiate in her own life through literate activity: her Appalachian home and the discourse community of academia (interview). The creative nonfiction genre of *Songs of Life and Grace* similarly transcends the divide between home and academia that DeRosier faces. As in *Creeker*, her subject matter centers largely around a personal family history, but she uses those experiences to speak out against the image of illiteracy that has been projected onto the Appalachian region since the turn of the century, and through her writing she reveals how she was able to accomplish the kind of negotiation that Arnow's characters never achieve.

In 2003 the University of Kentucky (UK) required their incoming freshman class to read *Creeker* as part of the required university orientation course (UK101), a venue and situational context that reflects the book's capacity to re-shape and re-align what DeRosier deems

misperceptions of the Appalachian region. Based on statistics gathered at the University of Kentucky, one professor estimates that in the last twenty years, Appalachian students comprised somewhere between fifteen and thirty percent of the UK student body, and in 2002 14.2 percent of the UK student body was considered Appalachian (Reid). In choosing DeRosier's memoir as required reading, UK ensured that Appalachian students, students from other regions, and professors from all over the world read DeRosier's account of Appalachia. By showcasing the centrality of literacy in her own life, in both *Creeker* and *Songs of Life and Grace*, DeRosier overturns stereotypes of mountain illiteracy while also depicting the costs associated with literacy acquisition. Her works also illuminate one of the central arguments of this study: the price that DeRosier pays for entrance into the academic community—a tangible sense of loss with her home community—remains necessary in order for her to share the strategies she uses for negotiating two different discursive worlds.

Of course backwardness functions as one of the hallmark stereotypes of Appalachian residents; since William Harney's 1873 account of "a strange land and a peculiar people," writers have been busy depicting the supposedly odd habits of mountaineers, and even Moonlight School founder Cora Wilson Stewart sought to socialize her adult pupils into accepting middle class values through a host of lessons, including advice on which colors to paint their homes (Baldwin 96). Both of DeRosier's works depict her socialization into secondary discourse communities, and literacy scholar Janet Carey Eldred contends that "All fiction historicizes problems of socialization, including literacy" (686). Certainly literacy—and knowledge accumulated through literate activity—often functions as the catalyst for socialization and a realization that one's home discourse community differs, sometimes drastically, from other

such communities. In subsequent work with Peter Mortensen, Eldred goes on to write that narratives of socialization

chronicle a character's attempt to enter a new social (and discursive) arena. Many texts, especially coming-of-age stories that show characters negotiating the world around them, often contain detailed and insightful investigations of how language is acquired and how it creates particular regional and private identities. In these narratives, literacy is a necessary component, although it is not emphasized. (513)

Whereas Mortensen and Eldred use the emphasis or de-emphasis of literacy tropes to distinguish between narratives of socialization and literacy narratives, DeRosier's work functions as a hybrid of the two. Like literacy narratives that "foreground issues of language acquisition and literacy," DeRosier's works also operate as narratives of socialization since they "chronicle [her] attempt to enter a new social (and discursive) arena" (Eldred and Mortensen 513). This sort of genre hybridity allows DeRosier to employ particularly effective rhetorical strategies in both texts that reveal how she moves between her Appalachian primary discourse community and the secondary discourse community of academia, as when she refuses to change her mountain accent. In describing how she moves physically and emotionally away from her home community of Two-Mile Creek, Kentucky, DeRosier illustrates the need for self-monitoring in both her home and academic discourse communities, and although DeRosier frequently narrates activities centered on traditional literacy throughout each work, she focuses most of her depictions on the losses and gains incurred as a result of gaining the new literacy of entrance into a secondary discourse community. As she continues her formalized education, she increasingly learns that her Appalachian way of being contrasts with accepted ways of being in the academic community, and these realizations cause identity struggles that manifest in several ways, including her name change from Linda Sue Preston to Lee Preston after entering college. Through writing both *Creeker* and *Songs of Life and Grace*, DeRosier identifies misconceptions of Appalachia and its

people (both written and otherwise) and works to overturn inaccurate assumptions that inevitably portray mountain people as ignorant, socially inept, and lesser.

Stereotypical assumptions about sub-standard mountain education are so pervasive that they even make their way into the preface to *Creeker*, when history professor Margaret Ripley Wolfe writes that the memoir “tells the story of an educated and cultured American woman who came of age in Appalachia” (xi). Although Wolfe writes a complimentary introduction, calling *Creeker* “a remarkable alternative to much of what has been published about the Appalachian region and its women,” Wolfe also suggests that DeRosier’s story operates as an unusual one (xii). By placing education, culture, and America along the same trajectory, Wolfe hints that some greater entity of nation, not region, produced DeRosier, who just happened to come of age in an Appalachian place, an area not historically known for its education or high culture. Both *Creeker* and *Songs of Life and Grace* provide a narrative response to this suggestion, and DeRosier consistently adds to what she considers an incomplete representation of Appalachia and its people. Although DeRosier acknowledges the existence of “the everlasting cycle of poverty and hardship in the hills and hollows,” she also adamantly asserts that although the story of mountain poverty “is most certainly a part of Appalachia [. . .] it is not the whole story, not by a long shot” (*Songs* 205). In publishing *Creeker* and *Songs of Life and Grace*, DeRosier makes a significant contribution to the written representation of Appalachia, especially through her focus on mountain literacies. When asked in an interview if people sometimes assume that DeRosier or someone in her family is illiterate because she grew up in Appalachia, she responds: “Did I? Do I? Everybody assumes that.” In *Creeker* and *Songs of Life and Grace*, DeRosier consistently returns to stories in which literacy plays a central and oftentimes gendered role, yet she generally does so without narrating specific literacy events. Although she writes of her grandmother

teaching her to read, and she repeatedly mentions her mother's love for reading and writing letters, usually DeRosier does not describe scenes in which she learns literacy skills: instead, literate activity operates as a backdrop for the stage on which DeRosier lives her life. Always present, multiple literacies usher drastic changes into DeRosier's life from early childhood to present-day learning activities. The emphasis DeRosier's mother (Grace) and maternal grandmother (Emma) place on the centrality of traditional literate activity in a productive life influences DeRosier during her adolescent years, fostering a lifelong affinity for books which later culminates in DeRosier earning a doctorate in Psychology. Yet despite the ways in which DeRosier's mother and grandmother emphasize the practice of reading and writing, neither Emma nor Grace could prepare DeRosier for the vastly different discursive world she encounters after leaving Two-Mile Creek to attend Pikeville College and later graduate school at the University of Kentucky. For Emma and Grace, pleasurable reading fostered avenues for private contemplation not granted by their laborious duties as wives and mothers. DeRosier also derives great pleasure from reading, but unlike her mother and grandmother, the education she gains through literate activity necessitates and ultimately helps her to navigate the two different discourse communities of her Appalachian home and the academic environment in which she works.

Throughout her life DeRosier forges new paths not previously taken by other women in her family, since such freedom was not granted to her mother or grandmother. Despite their sometimes outspoken attention to literate practices, both Grace and Emma functioned within sexist societal limitations that prevented them from pursuing many of their individual dreams, as evidenced when DeRosier states, "My poor old momma was a freight train that never could get to the station. She had a formidable intelligence and absolutely nowhere to focus it that would

have been considered appropriate in that time and place” (*Creeker* 17). Even so, Grace and Emma resist these gendered constraints in various ways, and much of their resistance revolves around literate activity, as when Emma finds a way to provide a high school education for all of her daughters, an unusual practice in the Kentucky mountains during the 1930s and 1940s. Not surprisingly, Grace and Emma pass this strain of resistance connected to literacy on to Linda Sue, who later enters a completely different discursive world of university life at Pikeville College and remakes herself, morphing from “Linda Sue Preston, social misfit [to] Lee Preston, everybody’s sweetheart” (*Creeker* 127). Lee’s college years during the 1960s, a time when more opportunities were slowly becoming available to women, allowed her to explore options not easily available for her mother or grandmother, and such investigations result in a constant obsession over passing for “normal [. . .] not hillbilly” (*Creeker* 179). Reflecting on these memories, DeRosier writes:

Technically, I left Appalachia when I was thirty-nine years old. But I submit to you that I really left Appalachia and the comfort and pain of shared values that early September Sunday when my daddy loaded up our black-and-yellow ’57 Chevrolet and hauled all bad-haired ninety-four pounds—not counting my three new sweater sets—of Linda Sue to Pikeville College. That was the end of Linda Sue Preston right there, and I think my daddy knew it. (*Creeker* 123)

For many years DeRosier clings to her non-Appalachian identity of Lee, but when she begins work as a professor at Kentucky State University, a historically black college, she writes that because of her “hillbilly” background, she understands the marginalized position of many of her students. This realization results in a return to her Appalachian roots, and when she accepts a job as director of the new Appalachian Studies program at East Tennessee State University, she reflects, “After two decades of having leaned on my creation [Lee Preston] for strength, I finally felt ready to let her go; I went to my new job as *Linda* Preston Scott” (*Creeker* 189). In a cyclical

turn of events, we see that DeRosier's familial (and often feminine) exposure to literacy practices prepares her academically (but not socially) for the journey to college, where she re-shapes her identity and denies some connections to Appalachia. Yet her educational endeavors culminate in a job as an academic, where she returns in spirit to her mountain heritage, and it is this return via highly skilled literate practices that allows her to create *Creeker* and *Songs of Life and Grace*. Both works provide moving accounts of Appalachia that resist the stereotypical mountain portrayals so long perpetuated by non-native scholars and documentary directors. Although he writes from a different situational context than DeRosier, Richard Rodriguez notes a steady tension between home and academia in his memoir, *Hunger for Memory*. Highlighting the connection between Appalachian literacy narratives and working class narratives previously discussed in the introductory chapter, he writes that "education requires radical self-reformation," yet he also contemplates, "if, because of my schooling, I had grown culturally separated from my parents, my education finally had given me ways of speaking and caring about that fact" (67, 72). Rodriguez identifies both the gains and losses associated with a shift in discursive affiliation, but he seems to assign more value to his education than to the values and lessons learned in his home community. Literacy theorists like James Paul Gee and Paulo Freire identify the impetus for remaking oneself as a desire to fit into dominant ideological practices, no matter the cost to one's own discourse community affiliation. In some aspects, DeRosier's journey aligns with theirs, but with one important addition—she reflectively re-identifies with her mountain heritage from the perspective of a grown woman comfortable identifying with her Appalachian roots, and in this way she adds a positive dimension to the generally painful transition literacy theorists describe.

From the beginning of *Creeker* DeRosier establishes her literary authority by referencing William Faulkner's famous allusion to Yoknapatawpha County as his fictional postage stamp of native soil: "This is my postcard from Appalachia written from the beginning of the 'Big War' through the 'Age of Aquarius' and running headlong, as quickly as all my baggage will allow, into the twenty-first century" (1). In evoking Faulkner, DeRosier immediately connects one of the most respected writers of the American South with her account of Appalachia. Doing so signals an awareness of past southern literary traditions, and it also foregrounds the connection she has to the Appalachian region and its people. Not only do *Creeker* and *Songs of Life and Grace* tell the story of southern mountain people, but they also relate DeRosier's personal story, and her account of the region consistently returns to a theme of storytelling through both oral and literate forms as major forces that shape the course of her life.

In describing the cultural significance of Decoration Day (in DeRosier's home community of Two-Mile Creek, Memorial Day),⁴ she explains that her family and neighbors maintained an important relationship with the dead, "an attachment that often played itself out in frequent trips to the burial ground and the repeating of stories—perhaps apocryphal—about those who rested therein. It may be because my people never saw themselves in books, history, or fiction that makes it so important for us to tell and retell who was who and what was what in the graveyard" (69). As readers we are tempted to take issue with DeRosier's claim that Appalachian people seldom find representation in books, history, or fiction, since literary depictions of mountain people have been popular since the Local Color Movement. However, DeRosier soon elaborates, proving her declaration accurate in two ways.

First, although the ability to read functions as an important skill for many of her immediate family members (namely her mother and maternal grandmother), the same cannot necessarily be said for the rest of her community. To illustrate, DeRosier writes about an instance that occurred with her neighbor and uncle, Keenis Holbrook. After Keenis returned from a trip to Baltimore, DeRosier recalls, “several of us were sitting around on his front porch listening as he regaled us with descriptions of his adventures in the big city” (*Creeker* 25). Here again she emphasizes the importance of oral traditions, especially when shared with others in the community. During the story, Keenis cites Baltimore as the capital of Maryland, and ten-year-old DeRosier corrects him by stating Annapolis as the capital. Keenis nonchalantly tells her she is wrong, but not to be swayed, DeRosier retrieves her geography book from her house and displays its contents for everyone to see. Remarkably, DeRosier remembers: “Uncle Keenis glanced at my book, said, ‘No, it’s Baltimore,’ and continued with his tale. Everybody accepted his declaration as the final word, and that was the end of the story. Book-learning was not very credible on Two-Mile Creek” (*Creeker* 25). Considering this scene alongside DeRosier’s claim that her people seldom saw themselves portrayed in literature, this perceived lack of representation may be because some members of the community, like Keenis, put little stock in literary depictions. Even so, in creating and participating within this oral tradition, the members of DeRosier’s home community of Two-Mile insist on a type of recognition through storytelling, at least within their home space. The inherent problem with this form of sharing is that it only circulates within the Two-Mile community, seldom reaching outside regional boundaries, except for the occasional re-telling of a story for an absent family member. DeRosier’s literary rendering of such events reaches beyond these limitations, ensuring that her Appalachian

experience finds printed representation. And although not stated explicitly, DeRosier goes on to suggest that community aversion to written texts may be attributed to what she considers an inadequate written portrayal of Appalachia.

Continuing a theme she establishes in *Creeker*, in *Songs of Life and Grace* DeRosier emphasizes the lack of balanced representation of mountain people. When explaining that her parents' "story is not bound by blood but by community," she goes on to assert, "We are of a kind, we rural, hill-country Appalachians. We are common folk, misunderstood by scholars, thus not often seen in books. We are family" (117). Here DeRosier carefully distinguishes between scholarly portrayals of Appalachian people (which she oftentimes deems inaccurate) and more truthful representations in which she describes the presence of both literacy and illiteracy. Ironically, it is DeRosier's scholarly training that enables her to write accounts of her people, and her career as an academic as depicted in her writing sheds light on the divide between scholarly analysis and the kind of truth DeRosier feels she can reveal about her home-based discourse community. Later in *Songs of Life and Grace*, she describes the family friends (Bob and Jane Allen) who agreed to help with DeRosier's primary research, as "my people. They are consummate Appalachians, the kind of folks never seen in the documentaries of gaunt, sad-eyed hill folk standing before ramshackle cabins. Nor are they represented by portrayals of Appalachia inhabited by the weary disadvantaged and the fat cats who've taken advantage of them" (205). In writing both *Creeker* and *Songs of Life and Grace* DeRosier works to fill this gap in representation, and she reflects:

I don't come from the kind of people who pass-along by setting words to paper, so my heritage has been largely ignored by folks who come from the East reaching down to help us. Those folks dropped in on us, then returned to their offices in universities or federal agencies and wrote of the everlasting cycle of poverty and hardship in the hills and hollows. It's hard to find a smile in the entire recorded history of rural Appalachian

people. [. . .] If there is one point I want to make here, it is to separate my rural Appalachian people—we of the creeks and hollows—from those rural Appalachians we have so long seen reflected in pictures of sad-eyed hill-country folk on ramshackle porches. This rural Appalachian story—the one I inhabited growing up and the one that is with me every single day, whatever my zip code of the moment may be—is one of hard work and hope. (205)

In the above passage DeRosier comments on the damaging effects of unbalanced written (and media) accounts of Appalachia. Although DeRosier pays special attention to her mother and grandmother's inclinations for reading and private letter writing throughout her memoirs, as readers we do not get a sense that public writing played a central role in either woman's life. Conversely, university scholars and federal agents recorded their perceptions of Appalachia, and DeRosier asserts that they do not capture a well-rounded vision of mountain life. DeRosier makes clear that she takes great pride in depicting what she feels is a more comprehensive view of Eastern Kentucky, and in creating her own written account of Appalachia, she also explores vast identity changes wrought by literacy acquisition.

In part, DeRosier discusses the rich vernacular traditions of her childhood to establish the differences between her Appalachian community and other groups she later encounters. In depicting Appalachian orality as unique in relation to Standard American English, DeRosier prepares readers to understand the disparities she later encounters when she leaves home.⁵ Early in *Creeker* she highlights the divide between Appalachian and "formal" names for various geographic locales: "Between Paintsville and Inez, you will find Meally, which is Buffalo; Williamsport, which is Two-Mile; and Boons Camp, which is Greasy. I could go on and tell you about Thelma, which is Bob's Branch; Thealka, which is Muddy Branch; and Whitehouse, which is Bee Branch, but no need. All the places have two names" (5). She then explains that government officials came through the area giving names they deemed appropriate, "since the

residents of those communities were mostly illiterate” (*Creeker* 5). As in her re-telling of the Keenis Holbrook incident, DeRosier does not deny the presence of illiteracy in Appalachia; rather she criticizes the rest of America’s response to it, particularly those of government officials since they placed so little value on local naming conventions. While discussing the unique nature of mountain expressions in an interview, DeRosier says, “let me tell you, the vocabulary is not limited in my community.” Horace Kephart documented this wide range of expressions as early as 1913 in *Our Southern Highlanders*, and even though he appears to compliment the mountain people by claiming that the mountaineers he observed were not “simple characters that can be gauged at a glance,” he writes from a smug, observational perspective, and in other areas he calls many of his mountain companions illiterate without declaring any evidence for his judgment (203, 83). Just as the officials DeRosier cites disregard the rich oral ability of Appalachian residents and fail to ascribe much significance to it, Kephart’s compliment about the complexity of mountain speech patterns does not function free of negative judgments, especially when he deems certain mountain people illiterate. Conversely, DeRosier highlights such complexity to emphasize the literate abilities of people in her community, and she similarly depicts literacy as an expected occurrence in her adolescent household.

In describing her father’s resistance to speaking standard forms of English, DeRosier makes clear that he, as well as some (though not all) other members of the community, knew the difference between “proper” speech and mountain speech, yet preferred to use Appalachian dialect. To illustrate, DeRosier recalls that her father would often say, “[Eastern Kentucky] is the prettiest place they is.’ And that’s the way he said it, too, using ‘they’ for ‘there,’ though he knew the difference” (*Songs* 159). She goes on to explain, “During my lifetime, my father

always used ‘they’ for ‘there,’ ‘h[y]erd’ for ‘heard,’ ‘hoss-peetal’ for ‘hospital,’ and ‘see-gretts’ for ‘cigarettes’” (*Songs* 159). In *Creeker* DeRosier writes that she “plain worshipped [her] daddy,” and his resistance to conforming to standard pronunciations no doubt influenced DeRosier as a child and later as an adult when she learned—often via literate practices—that these ways of speaking were “wrong” (8). Her father’s decision to keep his mountain accent mirrors DeRosier’s future decision to reclaim hers, and her respect and love for him intensifies the dilemmas she faces as she learns that much of the academic world negatively views many elements of her home culture. Even so, she always tries to keep her Appalachian accent, because “it would have been a rejection for [her] to sound any other way” (interview). Literacy scholar James Paul Gee notes that in some cases, such adherence to a primary discourse can be advantageous:

When we come across a situation where we are unable to accommodate or adapt [or in DeRosier’s case, choose not to] [. . .] we become consciously aware of what we are trying to do or are being called upon to do, and often gain deep insight into the matter. This insight (meta-knowledge) can actually make one better able to manipulate the society in which the Discourse is dominant, provided it is coupled with the right sort of liberating literacy. (146-47)

DeRosier’s statement that sounding any other way would be equivalent to rejecting her home community demonstrates the kind of deep insight Gee references, and in acknowledging the choices at hand, DeRosier gains some sense of power over the identity struggle that literacy introduces to her life. Moreover, as the author of her own Appalachian memoir—one that was selected by a large research university (UK) as required reading for first-year students—DeRosier’s telling of her decision to keep her accent helps audiences understand why someone might consciously refuse to adopt a homogenous way of speaking. In some sense, maintaining mountain speech patterns allows DeRosier to navigate the space between her primary discourse

of Appalachia and the secondary discourse of academia. By writing about her decision to keep her accent as a cultural marker, her memoir has the capacity to re-align audience ideas about mountain speech and people's sometimes stubborn allegiance to regional identities.

Despite the sense of power that DeRosier gains, she notes that officials believed only the technical ability to read and write should grant authority to name a place: "This [insistence on government-sanctioned names] appears to me to be indicative of the power and credibility given my Appalachian forebears by all those well-meaning, philanthropic folk who came from Washington and the northeast to reach down and protect us from our own ignorance" (*Creeker* 5). Rich with sarcastic overtones, DeRosier's statements point to one of the foundational problems of the discourse transition she encounters when leaving home—much of the nation conceives of Appalachia as illiterate, and because systems of power are tied to literacy, assumptions of mountain illiteracy result in almost automatic marginalization for mountain people.

Considering such marginalization, literacy scholars James Blot and Richard Collins continue the vein of critical inquiry begun by New Literacy Scholars by thinking about literacy as a strong-text skill set and as something that occurs in a social arena, but the theme of their work most pertinent to DeRosier's comments is their consideration of the systemic control over conceptions of literacy by those in power. In the foreword to *Literacy and Literacies: Texts, Power and Identity*, Brian Street comments: "If agencies and educational institutions could convince others that the only model of literacy was theirs—for instance, that literacy was an autonomous, neutral, and universal set of skills—then the particular cultural values that underpinned this surface neutrality could be sustained whilst not appearing to be so" (xiii). In DeRosier's example of acceptable and unacceptable naming of geographic places, she reveals

that government officials judge the Appalachian people's naming system as inferior. As Street notes in his introduction, when agencies in power succeed in convincing others that their form of literacy operates as the only acceptable form, they have succeeded in two ways: government officials have claimed the "official" definition of literacy, and they have also brought their cultural belief system to the forefront while appearing to remain unbiased. This kind of transmission of cultural values tied to literacy greatly affects those considered illiterate, as DeRosier later reveals when discussing the dilemmas she encounters at Pikeville College and again during graduate school at the University of Kentucky.

DeRosier also explains that just as mountain locales have two names (one given by Appalachian people and one handed down by government officials), the mountain people DeRosier writes about also use English in ways that vary, sometimes drastically, from official Standard American English. She notes in *Creeker* that "for most of us from Appalachian rural areas, *English* is a second language. It is not just the accent or dialect problem; there is a difference in the ways words are used" (58). DeRosier's re-naming of English recalls Brian Street's discussion about the definition of literacy and its relationship to power structures previously noted: just as certain definitions of literacy serve those in power, so too do specific definitions of what "counts" as proper English. Throughout both *Creeker* and *Songs of Life and Grace* she defines these terms where they might cause confusion for a non-Appalachian reader, explaining, for example, that "'whipporwill' is a term used in the hills for one who is so 'pore' or thin as to look unhealthy," and "drinking and sworping" means going on an alcohol binge (*Creeker* 19, 44, 63-66). In setting apart Appalachian speech as its own distinctive language, DeRosier implies that the cultural differences between mountain people and "outsiders" are just

as great as those introduced by language divides. Yet she notes that she does not feel disadvantaged by this fact:

Although much of what I have read about language and culture suggests that working-class speakers are disadvantaged because they speak in restricted code, I doubt that such is true of native Appalachians. If restricted means the code is restricted to members of that culture, this is true of my people also. But if restricted means lacking in range, I do not think this is true for us. (63)

Even so, mountain speech does set her and her community apart from mainstream discourses, like the “townspeople” Shirley Brice Heath identifies in *Ways With Words*. Not only does DeRosier overtly address these differences, as in the above passage, but she also illustrates these disparities rhetorically through the genre of memoir and creative nonfiction. She bridges the space between “academic” and fictive writing by freely using Appalachian phrases and sayings, but she also makes clear that other more dominant discourse communities generally interpret Appalachian speech as inferior. Her works consequently encourage us to understand that the choice to transition from a mountain home-based discourse community to a university-sponsored one requires a shift in affiliation.

DeRosier repeatedly returns to the theme of literacy as the ability which allowed such a transition, and in doing so, she reveals the central role her mother and maternal grandmother played in her literacy attainment. Like her grandmother Emma, DeRosier’s mother Grace also finds avenues for self-expression both through the act of reading and writing. When distinguishing between her mother and other women of the community, DeRosier writes, “Still another difference between my mother and the other mothers on the creek was that my momma never sat down in front of the fire or on the porch and just rested. There was always a magazine, book, or crossword puzzle in Momma’s lap (*Creeker* 15). Multiple literacy researchers, including Shirley Brice Heath, note that children exposed to “mainstream” literacy practices

early in childhood often fare better when faced with literacy tasks in the classroom.⁶ The frequency with which Grace engages in literate acts (both reading and letter writing) influences Linda, and during an interview DeRosier comments, “the best thing for me in terms of identity was that from the beginning, I knew that there’s nothing I couldn’t do if the first step was pencil and paper.” Grace’s steady reading habits encourage Linda in her own literate endeavors, and even though she enters college “absolutely unprepared socially [and] completely unprepared emotionally,” she fulfills all academic requirements with little trouble (interview).

In *Songs of Life and Grace* DeRosier continues her emphasis on the frequency of Grace’s reading habits, and after moving to a coal camp in McDowell County, West Virginia, DeRosier’s mother also began writing letters home. These letters often detail activities Grace completed throughout the day, including descriptions of her latest cleaning or cooking tasks, as well as reports on family members and the weather. By including excerpts from many of these letters in *Songs of Life and Grace*, DeRosier showcases not only the writing ability of her mother, but also the important connection these letters provide to loved ones at home in Kentucky. After presenting a segment from one such letter, DeRosier reflects: “Both my parents would have been content to live in a mining camp, and I doubt they would have tried to move out of it if Daddy’s work had not been so far from their parents” (61). While DeRosier’s family stays in West Virginia, Grace continually writes to her mother (Linda’s grandmother), Emma, and in this way the letters provide an important connection to home.

Even though Emma (or as DeRosier refers to her, Emmy) took care of her disabled husband and eight children, she still carved out time for solitary reading, despite the fact that “pure drudgery was the standard for country women in those days—a life filled with birthing, nursing, and bringing up as many babies as the Lord sent, while continually laboring in both

house and field (*Songs* 42). Yet similar to Linda's memories of her mother, DeRosier highlights the central role of literate activity in her grandmother's life: "I do not recall [Emmy] ever sitting without something to read or something to work on in her lap [. . .] when alone, she always had something to read (*Creeker* 35). Just as Emmy encourages her daughter Grace to read, she does the same with Linda, as when Linda remembers, "My Grandma Emmy Mollette had taught me to read two years before I began school, so I was never required to read the little blue soft-cover primer but proceeded directly to the excitement of 'Jerry saw toys and toys and toys!'" (*Creeker* 10). In several scenes we understand that Emmy teaches Grace, Grace teaches Linda, and Emmy also teaches Linda, creating a maternal legacy of literacy instruction that spans three generations.⁷ Additionally, letter correspondence between Emmy and Grace comprises an important part of their relationship, especially when distance separates them during Grace's time at the coal camp in West Virginia.

Despite the practicality of letter writing as a viable means of communication, DeRosier makes clear that her grandmother Emmy's views about both reading and writing aligned with the rest of the community—literate activity might bring pleasure, and developing literate skills takes time and devotion, but these activities could never qualify as work, since "reading was a waste of time when there were chores to be done, an indication that the reader was not doing his or her share of the work necessary for survival" (*Creeker* 16). DeRosier writes that Emmy viewed the act of reading as "something that brought infinite pleasure [and] it was important for her to get the real work—the incessant house and field work—out of the way so that the pleasures of the day could be enjoyed in one book or another" (*Songs* 126). Emmy passes this attitude about pleasurable reading on to DeRosier, as evidenced when DeRosier admits, "[Growing up] I was just dead lazy, because all I wanted to do was read" (interview).

Although DeRosier draws connections between time spent reading and laziness, she also makes clear that Emmy's affinity for books functions as a type of resistance to the oppressively patriarchal system in which she lives her life. In order to help support her mother and siblings after her father's departure, Emmy dropped out of school after the sixth grade, and DeRosier recalls: "to hear her tell it, she loved school but had no other choice but to quit and care for the younger children and help her mother do the necessaries around the place. That marked her, though, for she was very proud that despite being put in practically the same position as her mother [because of Emmy's disabled husband], she was able to see every one of her children through high school" (*Songs* 126). In one case, despite a lack of cash funds, Emmy arranges to pay the administrator at the Mayo Vocational School in Paintsville, Kentucky with fresh vegetables, canned goods, and hog meat so that her daughter, Amanda, can attend classes (*Songs* 125). DeRosier notes that while many neighbors encouraged Emmy to force her daughters to drop out of school and help around the farm, she proudly refused since "while she insisted her boys get a high school diploma before they went to the mines, WPA, or some other job of work, her intent was that all her children be able to figure well enough to keep folks from cheating them and that they learn to read for the pure fun of it" (*Songs* 127). Here DeRosier pays careful attention to the distinction that for Emmy, education played an important practical and leisurely role for both her sons and daughters. Reflecting on her grandmother's beliefs, DeRosier writes, "in my view, degrees and diplomas may well prepare me to make a living, but the information and habits attendant to an education add immeasurably to the making of a life" (*Songs* 127). Literacy functions as the foundational core of those educational habits, and Emmy valued literate ability for its assumed connections to a better economic life, as well as a more intellectually

fulfilled existence, but what makes these beliefs admirable is that DeRosier makes clear that she acted upon them in a time when education for women was often not a priority.⁸

DeRosier repeatedly emphasizes that as an adolescent she too subscribed to expected gender roles: “It never occurred to me that I would ever do anything other than [cooking, straightening, ‘nussing’ as wife and mother] or live anywhere other than on Two-Mile Creek. I was female; that was my future” (*Creeker* 21). In *Creeker* DeRosier explains that marriage was a crucial step in beginning a “real” life, and she writes, “When I say I wanted to get married, I mean that I truly thought of nothing else,” and in an interview she says, “I wasn’t just marrying Brett Dorse. I was marrying what I wanted to be” (117). In *Songs of Life and Grace* she details the identity submersion that women underwent upon marriage in her Appalachian community:

Traditionally, boys ‘married on’ and girls ‘married off,’ so the process was a little different for a female. Taking a man’s name was just the beginning of a woman’s commitment to her husband; indeed, she became part of his family, his community, and his work. Though, on occasion, folks in her new environs might remind each other that some wife or another had been perhaps ‘a Barnett from over on Hammond,’ the woman’s identity was expected to be completely submerged. Even in speaking of the woman, folks would use past tense: ‘Elmer Jackson’s wife *was* [not *is*] a Barnett from over on Hammond.’ (56)

In many ways, the submersion that DeRosier outlines here mirrors the same identity shift that occurs as a result of literacy-initiated changes. Once DeRosier leaves Two-Mile Creek and eventually establishes her career as an academic, she discovers that the new discourse in which she operates has little room for the distinctive (and cherished) cultural markers that identify her as Appalachian, particularly her mountain speech patterns. DeRosier recalls one instance when after presenting a paper at a scholarly conference in Boston a professor in the audience tells her, “I don’t think I have ever heard an intelligent person talk the way you do,” and to further illustrate the ludicrous—and yet common—nature of his comment she remembers, “and he

thought he was paying me a compliment” (*Creeker* 67). When asked whether the change in female identity necessitated by marriage parallels that of an Appalachian person encountering a wholly different discourse community within the university setting, DeRosier responded, “of course” (interview).

Although DeRosier attends college after high school graduation instead of marrying, she spends several pages explaining this unexpected turn of events that lead to a drastic shift in identity. At sixteen DeRosier falls in love with Johnny McCoy, but his eventual rejection of their relationship leaves her devastated. A subsequent relationship with Billy Daniel fails to fulfill her in the same way that her time spent with Johnny McCoy did, yet she still hopes for a marriage proposal. When one does not come, she decides to attend college and reflects: “While that looks like a good decision from where I’m sitting now, I want to make it clear that going to college was not even on the B, C, D, or E list of routes I wanted to take with my life. College was a detour, at best, and I detoured by way of Pikeville College” (*Creeker* 117). She goes on to explain that although she had multiple scholarship offers from other, larger schools farther away from home, she “tossed all those offers of free education in the nearest trash can in hopes that Billy—who was studying drafting at Mayo State Vocational School in Paintsville—would decide to marry me if I stayed close to home and continued to see him” (*Creeker* 117). Although the relationship with Billy ends, DeRosier’s journey to Pikeville College results in identity changes that she could have hardly imagined upon first climbing the college’s “ninety-nine steps to success,” and as she makes the transformation from Linda Sue Preston to Lee Preston, she remembers, “I didn’t want anybody to know that I was sort of looking forward to college for fear they’d think I was getting above my raisin” (*Creeker* 127). The fear she describes here aligns with trends noted in literacy scholar Katherine Sohn’s work: as mentioned in the introductory

chapter, Sohn chronicles the educational histories of three Appalachian women who attend college as non-traditional students, and she finds that these women worry about how their home communities will respond to their continued education. One of Sohn's interviewees (Mary) admits concern over losing her common sense as a result of college, and Sohn explains that some of her Appalachian students resist the homogenization of their native dialect, fearing "getting above their raisings" (24, 35). DeRosier's fears echo those of the women in Sohn's study, yet while DeRosier repeatedly describes the constant need for self-monitoring, Sohn does not report that the women in her study experience this sort of self-inflicted censorship. Important to note, however, is the fact that the women in Sohn's study all remain in their native Appalachian communities, whereas DeRosier leaves hers to pursue her education. While literacy events no doubt introduce identity dilemmas to both DeRosier and the women in Sohn's study, DeRosier expresses the greatest amount of pressure to act out those changes.

Although college provides the first series of incidents that illuminate the differences between DeRosier's home-based discourse community and the academic community, she chronicles several experiences on Two-Mile Creek that foreground the discursive divide she experiences upon beginning college, and all of these incidents happen in a place focused on literacy instruction—the classroom. DeRosier recounts that during her fifth-grade year at Meade Memorial, no less than seven teachers taught her class, since the children "wore 'em out one after the other" (*Creeker* 52). Her least favorite teacher, Janis Carroll, "was [at the school] long enough to get across the message that civilized behavior ended once you left the city limits of Paintsville" (*Creeker* 52). Like many fictional teachers discussed in this project,⁹ Miss Carroll devalues the language practices of her students and takes pains to introduce them to a more "cultured" lifestyle, oftentimes through music. DeRosier remembers that Miss Carroll generally

had trouble controlling the classroom, and during these times she would “burst into song, which might have been effective at calming us if she had sung something that was recognizable. In a class full of kids who could have sung every lyric to ‘I Saw the Light,’ ‘Sugar in the Gourd,’ or ‘Fair and Tender Ladies,’ Miss Carroll was given to bringing us light opera selections” (*Creeker* 52-53). Cultural theorist Pierre Bourdieu claims that because of its spiritual properties, “music represents the most radical and most absolute form of the negation of the world, and especially the social world, which the bourgeois ethos tends to demand of all forms of art” (19). Yet in DeRosier’s case, nothing could be further from the truth: instead of singing songs familiar to Appalachian children, Miss Carroll chooses foreign opera selections, which consequently sends a message of cultural judgment: their songs are not worth singing. In this way DeRosier’s process of socialization (as Janet Carey Eldred defines it) begins, and literacy instruction provides the impetus for classroom gatherings and subsequent singing.

Not surprisingly, Miss Carroll also makes value judgments about the children’s dialect and verbal expressions. DeRosier remembers, “Whenever one of us said we were *done* with a task, she would counter with ‘Nothing is *done* but a chicken.’ She encouraged us to respond to anyone using the term that way by asking, ‘Are you a chicken?’” (*Creeker* 53). Here Miss Carroll not only judges the mountain expressions of her students, but she also indoctrinates her pupils with her own value system by actively encouraging them to mock other students who do not speak “properly.”¹⁰ Literacy narrative author Sharon Jean Hamilton laments this sort of instruction, asserting that “historically, we have placed such a low value on some regional or cultural dialects that we have often blinded ourselves to the human insight articulated through them; conversely, we place such a strong value on so-called standard English dialect that we often assume wisdom in banality” (110). Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of speech genres proves

useful in analyzing the consequences of Miss Carroll's teaching methods, particularly his idea that verbal utterances are not simply uttered by the speaker and then interpreted by a passive listener, as some linguists once believed. Instead, Bakhtin argues, "the fact is that when the listener perceives and understands the meaning (the language meaning) of speech, he [or she] simultaneously takes an active, responsive attitude toward it" (68). The active response Miss Carroll encourages is one that supports her cultural value system, and regardless of whether her pupils respond in the intended way, her pedagogical direction leaves a lasting impact, especially for DeRosier: "Miss Janis Carroll and her city ways were soon gone, but not before she taught us the difference between who she was and who we were" (*Creeker* 53). When discussing a similar relationship between Eliza Doolittle and Henry Higgins in George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, Peter Mortensen and Janet Carey Eldred argue that as an author, Shaw "begins to understand that region and speech are closely aligned with identity, and that attempts to change a person's language are, in effect, attempts to fabricate a new person" (523). Miss Carroll attempts such a fabrication in DeRosier's classroom, and as DeRosier continues with her educational endeavors, she encounters more of these attempts. Fostering a shift in identity, these encounters result in amplified self-monitoring, especially when returning to her Appalachian community.

Similarly, when DeRosier describes the Christmas presents sent to her elementary school from "big cities in the East," she highlights an awareness that the gifts were meant to "help" her and her classmates (*Creeker* 87). Significantly, the transmission of this message occurs in the classroom (as do Miss Carroll's lessons on dialect), and DeRosier only later reflects after many more years spent in classrooms and libraries that the toys were "sent by somebody who wanted to buy his way into Heaven or to pay us back for the coal rights we sat on. No doubt his astute grandpa had come into our hills and bought those coal rights from our illiterate granddaddies for

ten cents per acre, and they were mined by our daddies for a dollar a load until so much of the coal dust filled their lungs that they choked on it” (*Creeker* 87). Ironically, DeRosier receives these gifts in an environment designed to prevent technical illiteracy. Through her commentary DeRosier highlights the injustice of profit divisions, and she implies the irony of big city residents sending Christmas presents to presumably poor mountain children: she remembers receiving a red, green, and yellow macaroni bracelet in the third grade as her present, and even though it “fell apart before Christmas Eve, [she has] never forgotten it” (*Creeker* 87). When asked in an email why she remembers the bracelet, DeRosier agrees that as a cheap gift it represented outsiders reaching down (not out) to mountain people, a pivotal example of a classroom incident that foregrounds what later happens when she leaves Two-Mile Creek. However, she also agrees that this realization took years—and the acquisition of many different new literacies—to materialize, and for a long time she thought of the bracelet as simply a special gift. Either way, the shoddy Christmas present symbolizes the opinion many city dwellers have of rural areas like Two-Mile Creek, and DeRosier interprets their continued Christmas presents as a type of penance. Perhaps even more importantly, this experience, along with the teachings of Miss Carroll, makes DeRosier aware of the discursive differences between Two-Mile Creek and other areas, particularly more urbanized places, and these differences become even more apparent once she leaves home to pursue a postsecondary education.

When narrating this transition from Two-Mile Creek to Pikeville College, DeRosier stresses the difference in these two communities, foregrounding the dilemma in discourse community affiliation that she later experiences: “While it may well have been close to home in distance, Pikeville College was light years away in all the things that nobody talks about but are critical to know—such as how to pass for normal, how to fit in, and most of all, how to keep

folks from knowing that I had no idea what I was doing while I figured out how to do it” (*Creeker* 123). Literacy lies at the foundation of this process of socialization, and just as Janet Carey Eldred describes “Barn Burning” as a story that “chronicles [the main character’s] developing awareness of social power structures, of class distinctions, and of conflicting family and communal values,” DeRosier’s memoirs also tell “a story of conflicting discursive worlds” (689).

Even so, it would be misleading to assert that all of the changes DeRosier underwent resulted from a one-sided imposition of these discursive conflicts. In part, DeRosier purposely reshaped and revised her image in hopes of better conforming to expected gender roles and thus having a more productive social life at Pikeville. Thanks to the socialization that began in high school, she knew that being a bookish, thin mountain girl would probably not increase her popularity in college any more than it had in high school. Consequently, she changes her name and reflects, “Probably the first step toward changing my life began when I changed my name [. . .] As I pictured it, the birth of a whole new character would begin with the creation of ‘Lee’ Preston [. . .] Lee sounded to my ears like someone who was popular, beautiful, sexy, and fun—everything Linda Sue wanted to be but was not” (*Creeker* 126).¹¹ She finds success with her new identity, and after gaining a few highly sought after pounds, Linda becomes a more popular version of herself, but this time as Lee. As DeRosier continues to identify with this new persona, it begins to take on elements of her new university discourse community, resulting in a split with the former Appalachian identity embodied by the name Linda.

Unlike Linda, Lee remains silent much of the time, especially when asked about her classroom performance: “I received four A’s and a B at midterm, but I told everybody that I had ‘done okay’ because it was the highest set of grades I had heard about in the dorm. I had learned

in high school that admitting I made good grades created a barrier to the kind of popularity I was aiming for” (*Creeker* 128). DeRosier learns to disguise her academic prowess in order to achieve popularity, and this masking technique is no doubt a gendered one. A quietly demure girl, Lee Preston “knew when to keep her mouth shut,” while “Linda Sue Preston had been just full of ideas and opinions, and that had gotten her exactly nowhere socially” (*Creeker* 128). Although it seems that DeRosier’s new creation of Lee aligns with the identity submersion DeRosier describes in typical mountain marriages throughout her childhood, when asked in our interview whether Lee was more in line with gender norms than Linda Sue, DeRosier responded, “No, actually, I think it’d be just the opposite.” She goes on to explain that while “Linda Sue wanted more than anything in the world to be married [. . .] Lee [was] a lot freer spirit,” but in some cases DeRosier’s descriptions of a subdued Lee suggest otherwise (interview). Most notably, Lee downplays her literate ability and success in the classroom, while Linda Sue openly read books, but she also remembers, “However much I loved to read, I would have given up reading in a flash if I had found a girlfriend to talk with or a boyfriend to pay attention to me” (*Creeker* 109).

During her first weeks at Pikeville College, DeRosier meets Brett Scott, and the couple marries before she graduates, which results in the acquisition of new literacies and subsequent identity dilemmas. Instead of ending her education, her marriage has the opposite effect: although DeRosier remembers that she “saw no point in continuing” school after her marriage, Brett strongly encourages her to finish college, and she does (*Creeker* 137). A few months before graduation her husband tentatively secures a position as an English teacher for her at a nearby high school, and plans to build a house on land given by Brett’s father begin to take shape. Since DeRosier has hopes that her husband (not herself) will go on to earn a doctorate, the thought of settling down in a house of their own causes her to question whether Brett has serious intentions

to attend graduate school. In an effort to increase the couple's mobility, and thereby increase the chance that Brett will move to another city to attend graduate school, DeRosier takes the Federal Service Entrance Examination and acquires a job with Social Security. Consequently, she must attend training in Asheville, North Carolina, and while she does not relish the thought of being away from her husband for several months, she reflects, "I recall thinking that I was not exactly sure what I wanted to do with my life, but I was dead certain that I did *not* want to spend it eight miles out of town with a couple of kids, a full-time job, and a husband on the golf course all the time" (*Creeker* 141). In this instance DeRosier's resistance mirrors that of her grandmother Emmy (in insisting that all of her daughters graduate from high school), even though her mother Grace warns her that if she continues with her independent behavior, her marriage will fall apart.¹² At this point DeRosier does not know how to drive a car, and "both his family and [her family] were appalled at the idea of [DeRosier] moving away," but she remembers, "I had figured out by then that there was more of the world out there, and I desperately wanted to be part of it" (*Creeker* 141-42). Her love for reading contributes significantly to her learning about a larger world, and once she learns about different places, people, and ways of being through books, she soon longs to experience those things firsthand.

Once she begins Social Security training in Asheville, DeRosier discovers that her nights and weekends are completely free, giving her more time for reading and more opportunity to investigate different discursive worlds through literary media. Unattached from her husband and her role as wife, she remembers, "I was pretty much free to do whatever caught my fancy. Thus, I did what I had always done when left to my own devices: I read from the time I got home from work until I turned out my light" (*Creeker* 144). Although DeRosier reads to learn new information while in college, and again in graduate school, during her time in Asheville reading

serves two purposes: it allows DeRosier to escape into in an alternate literary world, and the process also helps further define her identity and sense of self. She writes:

Since I learned to read, I have never been bound by this body, not for a minute. I discovered in Asheville the meaning of freedom, which for me is time to read whatever I find interesting whenever I want to slop around in my own aloneness. I say aloneness rather than loneliness because I think the Asheville experience set a precedent for me. If there is a book at hand, I am never alone. My leisure during the three months in Asheville was spent primarily in the lives of the characters I read about, and I reveled in it [. . .] the only preparation I had for being in the world on my own was what I had read. (*Creeker* 145)

During her school-age years on Two-Mile DeRosier remembers, “I never saw anyone even remotely like myself in anything I read—even the contemporary stuff,” and this trend continues even when she reads voraciously in Asheville (*Creeker* 58). DeRosier consequently becomes aware of a literary void that she sets out to fill in *Creeker* by writing what she deems the authentic story of an Appalachian woman’s journey to multiple literacies. Her literacy-based exposure to different places, people, and ways of being also simultaneously prepares her for a larger world, as she indicates in the above passage. Although DeRosier learns much about herself and others through the process of reading, her time spent in Asheville introduces her to a different discourse community through her relationship with the only other female in her class: Marie Claire Lentini. DeRosier admits that similar to the time in which she began her studies at Pikeville College, now she also “had to figure out how to pass for normal, how to fit into this new context,” but because of her experiences at Pikeville College she “now felt confident in venturing into new social situations” (*Creeker* 145). This confidence serves DeRosier well in her work environment and even in her friendship with Mary Claire, at least while the two women are in Asheville.

Two years after DeRosier and Mary Claire leave Asheville to begin their jobs in other cities, DeRosier travels to Baltimore to visit Mary Claire, and during this visit the literacy skills that DeRosier had previously relied upon for success fail her. In preparation for the trip, DeRosier remembers that she “[read] up for weeks on Washington [D.C.] and environs,” so when Mary Claire’s brother asked what city sights DeRosier would like to see, she said she would like to visit the zoo, since she had never seen a giraffe. DeRosier remembers, “Mary Claire’s brother slowly shook his head, looked at her, and said, ‘Where do you *find* these people?’ We all laughed” (*Creeker* 151). Quite obviously, the discourse community in which Mary Claire grew up expected its members to be familiar with “common” attractions, such as a zoo. To put the idea in Pierre Bourdieu’s terms, visitors of such a place had the economic capital to gain admission, as well as the cultural capital necessary to appreciate what the zoo had to offer. Conversely, although DeRosier had read about the sights in Washington DC, she had never lived near a zoo, nor had the opportunity to visit one. Similar to Janis Carroll’s expectation that the children of DeRosier’s elementary school classroom would appreciate opera, Mary Claire’s brother can hardly believe that DeRosier has never seen a giraffe. Even so, she carefully points out that she made up for that lack of experience later in life: “A decade or so later, however, when I frequently flew into Dulles from London or Bangkok, I never failed to wish I had Mary Claire’s number so that I could call her and report that I had indeed been to the zoo and seen the giraffe—on four continents” (*Creeker* 151). DeRosier makes clear that her time spent training in Asheville exposed her to different discursive worlds in a positive way, but that exposure also came at a cost: as she learned about Catholicism, different foods, and independent women from Mary Claire, she also subjected herself and her home community to ridicule from Mary Claire’s brother. Just as DeRosier later encounters multiple situations in which literacy is integral in

introducing new discourse communities, immersion into those communities also results in a palpable sense of loss and results in what DeRosier calls “self-monitoring” (interview). Despite this new need to monitor herself, DeRosier also reflects, “If I had learned one thing during my sojourn in Asheville, it was that I could take care of myself. Although I wanted Brett Dorse to join me in Louisville, I no longer needed his presence to prop me up every moment of my day. For me, this was one giant step” (*Creeker* 151). The acquisition of new literacies no doubt fosters this step, and with it DeRosier assumes the position of a more independent woman.

The next step in DeRosier’s life tests this newfound independence when she encounters a host of identity conflicts as a graduate student. DeRosier moves to Corbin, Kentucky with her husband and son, and she continues to work for Social Security until the long, required driving distances and a subsequent car accident cause her to seek work elsewhere. She acquires a job teaching at Sue Bennett, a Methodist junior college, and the requirement that she earn her Masters degree marks the beginning of a major transition in DeRosier’s life. Her entry as a student at Pikeville College resulted in the creation of Lee Preston (from Linda Sue Preston) and a distancing from her Appalachian self, and the start of life as a graduate student—along with all of its required literacies—further this discourse community distancing from Two-Mile Creek. DeRosier’s gender also plays a major role in her decision to teach: “Although I still believed that money was the reason for my not quitting work and being forced back to school, I think a good part of my decision had to do with my assessment of the difference between my life and the lives of other women my age” (*Creeker* 165). She goes on to explain that like many other wives she knew, she followed her husband’s golfing schedule by faithfully attending tournaments, adjusting her activities to fit his, and she remembers that she “spent just about every weekend for eight summers of [her] life engaged in this waiting game [waiting for her husband to finish

playing]” (*Creeker* 167). She goes on to remember that while she dreaded the thought of attending summer school, “one positive aspect was that I had assignments to complete, books to read, and papers to write [. . .] I was not looking forward to teaching either, but, by this time, I could see that, for all my thinking that I did not want to be working, my life just seemed more interesting than the lives of those nonworking golf-groupie wives” (*Creeker* 167). As in the past, DeRosier succeeds in her academic endeavors, but when she begins work on her doctorate in Psychology at the University of Kentucky, while also teaching as an instructor, she enters the new discursive arena of “advanced” academia. Different from her experiences as an undergraduate at Pikeville College, where her literacy skills met her academic (if not social) needs adequately, she encounters a new situation as a Ph.D. student.

DeRosier’s transformation to Lee at Pikeville College, and her continued revising of herself after her marriage to Brett Dorse, friendship with Mary Claire, and training in Asheville, reaches its pinnacle as she begins her studies at the University of Kentucky. In this new environment, DeRosier realizes that her colleagues are wholly immersed in intellectual thought processes: “The thing that impressed me, however, was not that they took classes, read books, and wrote papers, but that they never shut up about what they were doing” (*Creeker* 172). Unlike DeRosier’s home community of Two-Mile Creek, where her childhood text-book-supported declaration about a state’s capital goes ignored, in the university setting DeRosier finds that she did not have one “inkling of what [her office mates] were talking about,” and consequently could not enter into their philosophical and theoretical conversations (*Creeker* 173). She goes on to remember, “For the first time in my twenty-seven years, I was in constant contact with folks talking over my head, and I was not amused. Here I was having a veritable salon in my office, and I could not even participate. I mean, to hell with that business!” (*Creeker* 173). To remedy

the situation, DeRosier checks out forty books from the university library and reads them during her winter break in 1968. In this instance an important shift occurs: whereas DeRosier's constant reading at home on Two-Mile sometimes (though not always, especially with her mother and grandmother) isolated her from her community, in the university setting this penchant for reading operates as a necessary component for admission into the university discourse. Although DeRosier writes that reading those forty books did not qualify her to participate in the discussions held by her colleagues, reading them allowed her to know "enough to phrase a question," and she reflects, "And with that, my former life, my marriage, and everything I had ever thought I knew and believed changed forever. One more time: *Education, if it takes, changes the inside of our heads so that we do not see the same world we previously saw*" (*Creeker* 173). Here DeRosier italicizes her statement about education, as she repeats it for the third time in *Creeker*. Several years earlier DeRosier thought that her happiness hinged on marriage, but now she reflects: "Thus it was that my own education was able to give me exactly what I had been looking for all along: love, and through that love, salvation. I read those books and truly fell in love for the first time in my life. I fell in love with ideas and with a world where such thoughts appeared to be in infinite supply—the university" (*Creeker* 173).

Primarily, DeRosier relies on a skill set grounded in literate ability to gain entrance into this community, and although entrance brings great pleasure to DeRosier's life, it also distances her from another community she loves dearly—her home on Two-Mile Creek: "Graduate school also seemingly rooted out the last vestiges of my Appalachian essence, though I did not know it at the time. Passing for normal—not hillbilly—was a journey I had embarked upon when I entered Pikeville College, and each year thereafter I had moved a bit closer to my goal" (*Creeker* 179). In this instance DeRosier discusses "passing for normal" in academic circles, but she also

later realizes that this transformation causes her to appear rather abnormal to her home community. In this way her relationship with those on Two-Mile Creek changes by requiring more self-monitoring and consequently, a loss of spontaneous expression. Even so, during our interview DeRosier pointed out that in her opinion, she has also made substantial gains as a result of this self-monitoring: “I have a range of friends from a lot of different kinds of life, and it’s the sort of thing that it’s hard sometimes to mix people, but you know, I still live both of those lives.” Here instead of focusing on the losses incurred, DeRosier focuses on the positive aspects of her distancing from home, since it has allowed her to have a range of friends that includes non-Appalachians.

In a chapter aptly named “Finding My Voice,” DeRosier narrates one particular scene that illustrates how her shift in identity—from Linda Sue, to Lee, to Lee with a Ph.D.—changes her interactions with homefolk:

Some years back, I was at a dinner-on-the-ground with about forty members of my extended family—folks who love me. We were sitting in the grass, eating Hazel Lee Johnson’s cabbage rolls, when I used the word “atrocious.” I don’t even remember the context, but I do recall that it practically stopped the meal, mid-bite. Nobody said anything: there was just this pregnant pause where everybody stopped what they were doing to take note of what had been said. That one slip was as offensive as would have been bringing up the fact that I had returned from Japan the Friday before, which I would *never* have mentioned in that setting. That sort of glaring lapse has not happened often and never quite so blatantly. Usually, I am more careful, but it does require some degree of self-monitoring. (*Creeker* 61)

What DeRosier deems “offensive” here is not the notion of “atrocious” but the fact that she has spoken a word outside of “normal,” everyday Appalachian speech. DeRosier interprets the word’s utterance as an intrusion on the mountain assembly, and she understands that using a word like “atrocious” represents entrance into a larger, much different discourse community, a community to which no one else at the gathering has access. Working class studies scholar

Carolyn Leste Law helps explain DeRosier's dilemma when writing about the divide between home and academia: "To talk about my studies seemed ridiculous and stuck-up at best in a context that appeared to be as mistrustful of academia as academia was condescending to it" (4). Although DeRosier writes that inclusion into the university setting provides her salvation, it also molds and shapes her into a much different person than the Linda Sue Preston who left Two-Mile Creek to attend college (*Creeker* 173). In learning a new set of university-accepted speech customs, and by using those new customs while at home, DeRosier risks alienating those in her home community. For this reason, she strives to mask certain elements of her university life, but as DeRosier notes, this requires self-monitoring. Even though DeRosier writes, "Home is largely an idea, a place where we go and know that whatever changes we have made in our lives, we will still always belong right there," her recollection about the dinner-on-the-ground illustrates that some changes made to a life should not be emphasized in the home context (*Creeker* 34). Despite the fact that DeRosier kept (and still keeps) close ties with home, she says that after graduate school "when I was home, I always acted as if I had not changed, but they knew I'd changed [. . .] I didn't recognize [it] until I wrote it down, [but] I don't think I much liked myself during those days" (interview). Although successful at school, DeRosier recognizes that her relationship with her home community has changed, and even now, she says that she is "probably much more of a self-monitor at home" (interview).

In addition to masking certain elements of her literacy-initiated academic identity, DeRosier also finds that she must render certain aspects of the university discourse community into something more acceptable to her Appalachian home discourse community. In *Creeker* DeRosier comments on the gendered split in acceptable behavior on Two-Mile Creek: men can occasionally drink alcohol, "but no decent woman takes even one alcoholic drink" (60). Such

divisions generally do not exist in academic communities, and DeRosier writes, “Champagne brunches, cocktail parties, and wine-and-cheese functions come immediately to mind as events that must be translated into something acceptable to homefolks” (60). As with her usage of the word “atrocious,” DeRosier must again consider which parts of her university life to share with people in her home community, and which parts to exclude. She reflects, “I have found it easier to supervise the content of my speech, however, than to monitor the form—the way I phrase my comments, the words I use, and those terms that are common in my everyday life” (*Creeker* 61).

For example, as a result of the literacy-initiated identity changes DeRosier experienced, she must choose between two very different rhetorical approaches when discussing the relative safety of air travel. While visiting with her friend Bonnie Sue Ratliff on Two-Mile Creek, Bonnie’s ten-year-old grandson (Jacob) eagerly asks DeRosier about the various places she has traveled. Thanks to his incessant questions, DeRosier admits visiting a long list of foreign countries, when another neighbor (Vidie) asks if DeRosier travels to these places on an airplane. When she says yes, Vidie asks if DeRosier worries about plane crashes, and DeRosier describes how she responded to Vidie’s concerns: “Fearing all was lost anyway, I launched into lecture number 347, the old song complete with statistics about how much safer it is to ride on an airplane than it is to ride in a car, when suddenly I knew exactly what to do. Abruptly, I said, ‘You know, Vidie, I figure if the Lord’s gonna take me, he’s gonna take me wherever I am, whatever I may be doing. So, I just don’t worry about it’” (*Creeker* 62). This response satisfies Vidie, but only because DeRosier successfully shifts her rhetoric mid-explanation, something DeRosier says she does “routinely” and “everywhere” (interview). In first answering Vidie’s questions using statistics to back up her argument, DeRosier initiates a type of syllogistic reasoning popular in academic communities, but before she finishes this explanation, she tries a

different approach. In evoking the Christian fundamentalist reasoning of the churches so popular in her home community, DeRosier leaves the worrying up to God, and this strategy aligns with the belief system of her audience members. The fact that DeRosier first cites statistics in her argument and only later takes a different, more audience appropriate approach reveals that in some situations, years of schooling have caused DeRosier to first rely on academic forms of reasoning and only later on those she first learned as a child in her home community. She has become what literacy scholar Lillian Bridwell Bowles calls a rhetorical shape-shifter, “moving cautiously from one form and medium to another, changing perspectives as necessary to understand multiple points of view, while at the same time staying in touch with [her] ‘self’” (2). Finally Jacob names a country DeRosier has not visited (India), and she feels relieved that the conversation moves in another direction, as when she writes: “I know the rules. It’s those sudden shifts I have to watch out for” (*Creeker* 63). In constantly monitoring herself and her responses, DeRosier loses a sense of freedom of expression in her home community, especially during those times when she would normally respond in academic terms but refrains from doing so in the company of those on Two-Mile Creek. When asked if this common shift in rhetoric saddened her she responded, “No, it’s been so long now that, you know, it’s just a natural thing [. . .] it’s not a conscious decision,” and later she says that she automatically molds her responses for one particular group or another (interview).

During this time, although DeRosier stays physically connected to her Appalachian home through frequent visits, she focuses her academic energies on teaching and continuing work on her dissertation in the field of Psychology, neither of which focus on Appalachia. These academic pursuits consequently continue to distance her emotionally and physically from home. After receiving her doctorate in 1972, she secured a tenure-track teaching job at Kentucky State

University, but she notes, “There was, however, one difference between Kentucky State University and the other universities where I had taught before: KSU was a traditionally African American university, and I was the only white female Ph.D. on campus” (*Creeker* 181). In this role DeRosier faces numerous challenges in overcoming her own assumptions about African Americans while also working to overturn her students’ misconceptions of white women. Despite the many differences between DeRosier and her students, she reflects, “Teaching at Kentucky State taught me about making connections with students whose culture was different from my own while letting me see just how similar my background was to theirs” (*Creeker* 182). Although the content of the stereotypes differ, much of “mainstream” American society has preconceived notions of both African Americans and Appalachians, and these ideas are oftentimes negative. DeRosier goes on to remember:

If you did not see the difference in our skin color, we were remarkably similar. Many of them were, as I had been, first-generation college students; they too had never planned to go to college; they believed income was the only marker of success; they didn’t much trust anybody outside their own families; and, where higher education was concerned, they also wanted to “get in, get over, and get out.” (*Creeker* 182)

At this point in her life, DeRosier can identify elements reminiscent of a young Linda Sue Preston in her students, and she understands the difficulties these students encounter as they struggle to master the university discourse. In an unexpected turn of events, DeRosier purposefully sheds her identity as Lee, reverting back to Linda:

All of this took me by surprise. By 1972, prior to going to KSU, I had become so thoroughly assimilated into the culture of academe that with the exception of my still-distinctive speech patterns, I was well-nigh close to passing for normal—as in non-hillbilly. As a result of my six years at Kentucky State University, I rediscovered the hillbilly girl sequestered since my early days in Pikeville and found that I could use cultural insight, long repressed, as a bridge to understanding more about ways my students came to know. (*Creeker* 183)

Almost ironically, the discursive divide that prompts avid self-monitoring at home also allows DeRosier to recognize that many of her students cope with a similar divide. In reclaiming the cultural literacy of her Appalachian home, she successfully connects her experiences with those of her students.

Also during her time at KSU, DeRosier begins conducting research on the effects of culture on cognition, particularly in her home county in Eastern Kentucky (*Creeker* 184). Thanks to a series of speaking engagements about this research, Mars Hill College in Western North Carolina invites her to speak about Appalachian culture, and she reflects, “Consequently, by the time I spoke at Mars Hill College, I was in full hillbilly mode. I had rediscovered my roots completely, and by that time I was taking another look at the twists and turns my life had taken in light of this new knowledge” (*Creeker* 186-87). Her speech leads to a job offer (and acceptance) to be director of the Institute for Appalachian Studies at East Tennessee State University. Thus her realization about the similarities between her students and herself acts as a catalyst for a return to her Appalachian identity, and while she still engages in a great deal of self-monitoring while home, she can more easily incorporate aspects of her home discourse into her academic life, particularly her research. When explicating narratives of socialization, Janet Carey Eldred notes that Toni Cade Bambara and Geneva Smitherman “both assume a ‘double-edged’ voice that appropriates the values of education without erasing the language of African-American identity and, more importantly, that dramatizes the tensions between these coexisting discursive worlds” (695). If we replace African American with Appalachian in this quote, Eldred’s observation applies to DeRosier as well: both of DeRosier’s memoirs operate as powerful narratives of socialization for which literacy initiates substantial identity conflict and change.

During our interview DeRosier reflected, “it is very hard to maintain your value system [. . .] in a world where that value system is not the one most wanted,” a fact of which she no doubt became increasingly aware as she acquired new literacies through years of schooling. Near the end of *Creeker* DeRosier writes, “One thing I know: The hills of eastern Kentucky and the values and customs of that place and those people remain a central part of me today. It is left to me, then, to recognize that fact and draw strength from it or attempt to deny the connection, thereby cutting myself off from it. In either case, it exists” (219). The literacy skills passed to DeRosier from her mother and grandmother, as well as those skills learned in a classroom, cause DeRosier to “deny the connection” for a time, but she later decides to “draw strength” from her Appalachian identity, and those same skills enable her to narrate her journey of socialization through literacy attainment. In *Creeker* she reflects, “I also believe I have been able to achieve full membership in both Appalachian and academic speech communities, although it has taken some time and a sense of watchfulness” (66). When asked in an interview if this required watchfulness saddened her, DeRosier replied, “Actually, it probably makes me angry more so than it saddens me,” a feeling no doubt stemming from past inaccurate representations of Appalachia. Near the conclusion of *Creeker* DeRosier writes, “Appalachia haunts both of us [her and her sister], albeit in somewhat different ways, and we speak to each other of regaining possession of what we have lost upon leaving,” but in our interview she conceded that “it could not be regained by going back” (227).

Consequently, DeRosier channels her response into her memoir writing, and through depicting scenes that explain the difficult identity choices she made as a result of literacy acquisition, she illuminates both the gains and losses that can result from entrance into a new discursive arena via literate practices. Her memoir and work of creative nonfiction both operate

as hybrids of the literacy narrative and narrative of socialization, rhetorically negotiating a divide between the two genres. This strategy reflects a similar negotiation between home and away, Appalachian and non-Appalachian, since DeRosier writes about her mountain experiences in a way that speaks to a wide variety of readers: in some instances she explains Appalachian speech patterns, while in others she refers to elements of mountain life that assume a certain knowledge about Appalachian lore. The seamless literary blending of these two worlds encourages her audience—whether Appalachian or not—to learn new social, cultural, and possibly even technical literacies as she tells the tale of her own literacy-initiated entrance into new discourse communities. In this way, DeRosier’s texts serve a purpose similar to *The Dollmaker*, but instead of warning readers away from “either/or” situations, DeRosier illustrates how to navigate the spaces between an Appalachian primary discourse and a non-Appalachian secondary community, all the while working to overturn century-old stereotypes of mountain illiteracy.

End Notes

¹ Sections of this chapter are reprinted here by permission of *Community Literacy Journal*.

² Perhaps the most damaging media portrayal began with Charles Kuralt’s 1965 CBS special, “Christmas in Appalachia,” which was followed years later by the 1989 CBS *48 Hours* episode, “Another America” with Dan Rather, as well as Rory Kennedy’s 1999 documentary, *American Hollow*. Jack Weller’s 1965 *Yesterday’s People* depicts Appalachia in exactly the way that DeRosier repudiates. Studies about the utterly destitute situations of some mountain people, like Virginia Seitz’s, are undoubtedly important for soliciting philanthropic and governmental aid, but they do not portray the situation of all Appalachians. For more, see Virginia Rinaldo Seitz’s *Women, Development, and Communities for Empowerment in Appalachia*.

³ Shirley Brice Heath defines literacy events as occasions in which “talk revolves around a piece of writing” (392). She goes on to cite the work of Anderson, Teale, and Estrada who categorize two types of literacy events: “first are reading events in which an individual either comprehends or attempts to comprehend a message which is encoded graphically,” and the second are “writing events in which an individual attempts to produce these graphic signs” (392). For more, see *Ways with Words*.

⁴ For more information about the differences and similarities between Decoration Day and Memorial Day celebrations in mountain communities, see “North Shore Cemetery Decoration

Project: Ethnohistorical and Ethnographic Investigations for the Proposed North Shore Road” by folklorists Alan Jabbour and Philip E. Coyle at http://www.northshoreroad.info/deisvolumes/volumeII_appendices/appendixg/appendixg.pdf.

⁵ One such difference worth noting is the pronunciation of the word “Appalachia.” Natives of the region, as well as the majority of Appalachian scholars, pronounce the word with a short *ă*, sounding like “Appalatcha,” whereas non-Appalachians generally use a long *ā*, sounding like “Appalaychia.” In his history of Appalachia John Alexander Williams quotes anthropological linguist Anita Puckett’s observation that “people who said *Appal āchia* were perceived as outsiders who didn’t know what they were talking about but were more than willing to tell people from the mountains what to do and how they should do it” (14). Williams goes on to discuss other pronunciation variations; for more see Williams’ *Appalachia: A History*. Numerous other Appalachian writers and scholars bemoan the “outsider” pronunciation of Appalachia: for more see John O’Brien’s *At Home in the Heart of Appalachia*, as well as Douglas Reichert Powell’s “‘Bluewashing’ the Mountaineer: A Recent Television Trend.” Powell laments Johnny Cash’s “outsider” pronunciation of the term in the public broadcasting series, *The Appalachians*.

⁶ For a revealing look at the effects of home practices on literacy tasks at school, see Shirley Brice Heath’s *Ways with Words*. For more about how connections between home and school shape conceptions of literacy also see Andrea Fishman’s “Becoming Literate: A Lesson from the Amish.”

⁷ For more information about domestic literacy narratives and connections between mothers, children, and literacy, see Sarah Robbins’ *Managing Literacy, Mothering America*.

⁸ For more about perceived connections between literacy and improved socio-economic standing, see Harvey Graff’s *The Literacy Myth: Literacy and Social Structure in the 19th Century City*.

⁹ Namely, Denise Giardina’s depiction of Rachel’s nursing teacher Miss Kurtz, Lee Smith’s Richard Burlage and Miss Torrington, and Harriette Simpson Arnow’s Miss Whittle.

¹⁰ Moonlight school educator Cora Wilson Stewart engages in a similar practice; although she recruits local volunteers to teach in her programs (aligning with the theories proposed decades later by Paulo Freire and Myles Horton), she also expects these volunteers to critique and correct members of their own community. As Baldwin explains in her study of Stewart, “[Teaching volunteers] needed to reinstate ‘-ing’ to its proper dignity [. . .] and eliminate the use of such words as ‘seed’ for seen, ‘crick’ for creek, ‘git’ for get, ‘hit’ for it, and ‘haint’ for has not. By emphasizing correct grammar and pronunciation, volunteers attempted to create a ‘language conscience,’ what Stewart called ‘a pathway’ that would lead to ‘the broad highway of better, if not perfect, speech’” (43).

¹¹ A long established trope in American literature, numerous authors depict such reinvention, including Benjamin Franklin, Frederick Douglass, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and others.

¹² The way in which DeRosier's mother (Grace) advises her to remain geographically close to her husband no matter the cost mirrors the advice Gertie's mother gives her in *The Dollmaker*. Unlike Gertie, DeRosier ignores her mother and pursues her own goals separate of her husband, ultimately fostering the sort of discursive negotiation Gertie never achieves.

CHAPTER FOUR
“OVERCOMING” BACKGROUNDS: COMPETING DISCOURSES IN *THE UNQUIET EARTH*

When I was in school [in the 1950s and 60s] [. . .] we were never told there were Appalachian writers. We didn't read stories set in the mountains. And Appalachian people were not in the history books. So I assumed that we had no history; we had no literature. Those subjects happened someplace else; and we were just dead. Other places were where things happened. I had no idea I could be a writer. (Douglass “Resurrecting the Dead” 246)

In the above interview excerpt West Virginia author Denise Giardina makes clear that the absence of Appalachian writers in her school-based curriculum directly impacted her (in)ability to conceive of herself as an author. During our interview conducted through email she also remembered, “I don't think I read one single book about my place when I was a child. The closest I came was a book by Lois [Lanski] called *Coal Camp Girl*.” Lenski's regional series for children depicted life in various places across the country including Louisiana bayous, Arkansas cotton fields, and West Virginia coal camps. Although Lenski conducted primary research for each of her books, sometimes living in the areas she wrote about for several months, Giardina also remembers that in *Coal Camp Girl*, “the terms were different” (interview). While Lenski's story depicts the hardships endured by mining families, including mine accidents, unsafe slate heaps, toxic refuse pools, and constant financial worry, as with most children's literature, each perilous circumstance ends in a happy resolution. Such endings rarely happened in Giardina's childhood home of Black Wolf coal camp near Bluefield, West Virginia, especially when her family had little choice but to leave the camp when she was thirteen years old and move to the state capitol of Charleston to find work. Giardina reflects, “I think losing my whole community, and not only leaving but having it torn down, really marked me, and so maybe I felt a need to re-create what had been lost” (Douglass “Resurrecting the Dead” 244). The realization that she

could write about her home did not occur until Giardina encountered Lee Smith's *Blackmountain Breakdown* as an adult, a novel that takes place near Giardina's coal camp home (Douglass "Interview" 388). Throughout her childhood and early adolescent years Giardina remembers, "I just assumed no one would write about where I was from because it wasn't worthwhile" (interview). When asked about where that notion came from, Giardina responded, "I think the instances that reinforced negative cultural value judgments were on TV—The Real McCoys, The Beverly Hillbillies" (interview). In addition to these damaging media portrayals of ignorant hillbillies, the literature Giardina read while growing up also taught her that with the exception of Lenski's magically happy endings, seemingly no one wrote about Appalachia.

After becoming more familiar with Appalachian writers like Mary Lee Settle and Lee Smith in her adult years, Giardina began writing about her home and its political struggles. Although her first book (*Good King Harry*) takes place in England and focuses on Henry V, Giardina's next two novels portray the plights of miners in Appalachia. Her 1987 novel, *Storming Heaven*, recreates the Battle of Blair Mountain, and her 1992 novel, *The Unquiet Earth*, weaves a fictional story around the Buffalo Creek disaster.¹ As in Giardina's own life, the characters in *The Unquiet Earth* encounter messages in both literary and oral forms that announce Appalachian inferiority. The transmission of these messages spans several maternal generations beginning with Flora Honaker, continuing with her daughter Rachel, and ending with Rachel's daughter Jackie. Jackie's character functions as an autobiographical representation of Giardina, and as a child Jackie believes that the only kind of stories that exist in her hometown are "dumb old hillbilly stor[ies]," since "real writers live in New York apartments or sit at sidewalk cafes in Paris," not in West Virginia coal camps (106, 108). In both Giardina's real life and in *The Unquiet Earth*, the technical act of reading initially discourages writing, creating self

doubt and a lack of confidence in writing about personal experiences. More poignantly than any other text considered in this project, *The Unquiet Earth* illustrates how the specific literary omission of Appalachia combined with negative media portrayals of the region affects the perceived (in)ability to write. Giardina repeatedly focuses reader's attention on how one facet of literacy (reading) can be potentially detrimental to the other (writing).

Like Giardina, as Jackie matures she learns to value her home and recognize the possibility that she can write about it, yet similar to other works considered in this project, that knowledge comes at a cost. When Jackie leaves West Virginia to work in Washington DC she loses a geographic and emotional connection with her home, and Giardina recounts a similar experience when she reflects, "I'm not the same person who was the ten-year-old kid in Black Wolf, West Virginia. Now I eat sushi and curry. I feel I have lost something, in a sense, as much as I have gained" (Douglass "Resurrecting the Dead" 248). In "Reading Literacy Narratives" Janet Carey Eldred and Peter Mortensen ask, "What happens if speaking a new language means cultural displacement? What happens if speaking a new language means losing self?" (515). The language that both Giardina and Jackie learn through reading is one that demeans their experiences, and it is only through enduring further loss, by leaving Appalachia and entering into other discourse communities, that either woman is able to give voice to her experiences. Their paths once again highlight how literacy attainment can function as simultaneously perilous and empowering for mountain women.

Despite the painful loss Giardina experiences, the acquisition of multiple literacies gives her the insight necessary to believe in the value of Appalachian literature. Consequently, she pursues a career as an author in which she reveals the sometimes devastating consequences of literacy acquisition, as well as the capitalist exploitation that occurs daily in the coal fields, to

reading audiences. Drawing from the loss of her home community that marked her as a child, Giardina marks audiences in her own way by creating fiction that urges readers to re-think their preconceived notions of Appalachia while also questioning the pedagogical approaches of non-Appalachian teachers, as well as harmful coal mining practices. As discussed in the introductory chapter, American audiences have been schooled by literary and popular media to imagine Appalachia as a repository for socially undesirable hillbillies, those who are among other things drunken, ignorant, and illiterate. Giardina works from within in and out of this long established tradition, and the biographical story of her journey away from and back to Appalachia combines with the fictional strategies she uses in her novel to reveal that writing—whether for literary audiences, political audiences, or a combination of both—ameliorates some of the divide between discursive worlds introduced by multiple literacies. Speaking to this point, Giardina declares, “I have achieved a measure of contentment through conjuring lost places and writing about them” (“No Scapin the Booger Man” 131). Jackie finds similar resolution working as the editor of a newspaper in her hometown, a venue in which she can write about the politically charged issue of strip-mining and mountaintop removal in Appalachia. Through her fictionalization of Jackie’s struggle to negotiate varying discursive worlds, Giardina demonstrates how writing fiction allows her to write about both the personal loss she has incurred from gaining new literacies and the destruction and devastation caused by unethical coal mining practices.

Throughout *The Unquiet Earth* Giardina uses multiple narrators to tell various sections, and through these different perspectives she reveals how print-based texts send potent cultural messages to her characters that affect how they perceive their Appalachian home and their place within it. Rachel Honaker’s mother, Flora, spends countless hours poring over mail order

catalogs and magazines to see the latest fashions, and she models her daughter's dresses after advice given in these articles. Most of the material for the dresses comes from second-hand charity donations, yet Flora believes that the knowledge she gains from *Ladies Home Journal*, *McCall's*, and the *Pictorial Review* makes her able to render the clothes acceptable and even fashionable. Rachel remembers, "I wore the white dress and red coat on Class Day to impress the teacher, who was young and fresh from Transylvania College and in the mountains for some kind of adventure" (7). Like many of the readers Giardina addresses in her fiction, Rachel's teacher has been schooled through literary and media images to imagine Appalachia as a wildly exotic place, ripe for the kind of adventurous cultural tourism she seeks upon going there to teach students.

Similar to many of the fictional and real Appalachian students considered in this project, including the Nevels children and Linda Scott DeRosier, Rachel defers to her teacher's cultural authority and assumes a kind of automatic inferiority. In one instance Rachel walks her usual two-mile route to school, and on Class Day it rains, so she arrives to school in a water-soaked outfit. When she takes off the coat she sees that it "wept and left white splotches all over my white dress. It was like I'd been shot, like I'd been through bloody battle" (7). Rachel understandably feels embarrassed, but what most mortifies her is that she feels ashamed in front of her teacher, a Bennett from Louisville that her mother has read about in the society pages of the newspaper. Her mother tells her that the Bennetts are "quality people," and Rachel had hoped to impress her teacher with her clothing (7). Conversely, when Rachel's first cousin, Dillon Freeman, narrates the event, he neglects to mention the stains on her dress, instead commenting that "when she stood up to recite, she looked like a queen" (7). Later we learn that despite their familial relationship, Dillon and Rachel become lovers, and we realize that Dillon has always

admired Rachel.² Dillon's admiration does not depend on Rachel's clothing, primarily because he sees no reason for Rachel to feel embarrassed. Dillon's mother, Carrie Freeman, works as a nurse in the mountains and has little time or patience for frivolous superficialities such as style, and she passes this nonchalance about social codes on to Dillon.³ Gender roles also figure into how Rachel and Dillon view the stained dress, and Rachel's notion of appropriate feminine behavior combined with Flora's literacy-supported teachings leave her humiliated over her ruined clothing. In this scene Giardina begins setting up Rachel and Dillon's views of the same Appalachian place as very different, and those differences remained largely tied to knowledge about social class, gender, and notions of "high" culture gained through literate activity.

Giardina further emphasizes Rachel's exposure to mainstream notions of cultural capital when Rachel remembers: "At night, when we listened to Lum and Abner on the radio, [Flora] sat beside a lamp turning the pages [of her magazine] slowly, her head bent reverently over the glowing photographs" (8-9). Through her reading Flora experiences a kind of social edification that sets her and her family apart from many rural West Virginia families, including Dillon's. As she bends her head "reverently," Giardina makes clear that Flora values the cultural habits perpetuated in her magazines above that of her own mountain culture, and she wants to distinguish her family from "trash from the head of the hollow" (9). Rachel even remembers that her mother "learned out of her magazines how to fold a napkin, how to set out the silverware just so and lay the knife so the curved side faces the plate," and she trains Rachel to follow these dining etiquette rules as well (9). Ironically, while Flora reads her magazines in what she perceives to be a necessary step in rising above her mountain culture, the rest of the family listens to the Lum and Abner radio show. The program aired nationally from 1931 until 1954, depicting the comedic antics of Columbus "Lum" Edwards and Abner Peabody from the then

fictional town of Pine Ridge, Arkansas, based on the real town of Waters, Arkansas. Although not geographically part of the Appalachian region, the leading actors' hillbilly characterizations closely relate to those of Appalachian mountaineers, and entertainers frequently made connections between Arkansas and Missouri mountain people and those from Appalachia.⁴ For producers in the business of making profit from hillbilly caricatures, geographic details mattered little, and lines distinguishing the two groups were rarely clear. As such, when Rachel listens to these broadcasts with her family, the hillbilly stories she hears send the cultural message that mountain people are different and largely ignorant. Episode titles like "Abner Hates Being in High Society" reinforced perceived disparities between mountain and mainstream culture, and by fictionalizing the radio show in her novel, Giardina draws from this tradition to highlight the dichotomy between Flora's societal aspirations and the popular media image of the hillbilly. Scholar Anthony Harkins theorizes that in some cases these hillbilly depictions were forms of "protective self-mockery" that "removed some of the word's stigma and defined their own identity. Playing 'the hillbilly' helped performers and audience alike come to terms with the ambiguities in their own lives, simultaneously separating themselves from and connecting themselves to a rural ethnic and cultural tradition" (94-95). This positive spin on a frequently derogatory art form may apply to other radio and television shows, but Lum and Abner originally began performing in black face and only later switched to their more popular hillbilly act when auditioning; it seems unlikely that their performance was akin to any kind of cultural re-appropriation. Since the pair began their act in black face but soon decided that audience members might be interested in a move away from the minstrelsy tradition, their decision to act out the comic mountain fool did not operate as any kind of self protective strategy for the actors, but it did reassure the social status of a listening public eager to distinguish themselves from

raucously ignorant hillbillies. This tactic proved especially useful during the Depression, when the line between economic security and potential barbarism (as imagined in Appalachia) seemed precariously close for a large number of mainstream listeners, many of whom were on the verge of bankruptcy.⁵ Listening to the Lum and Abner show and observing Flora's almost spiritual devotion to her magazines, Rachel begins to understand her home through these oral and literate forms as negatively apart from much of mainstream America.

Unlike Rachel, who strives to make good grades and please her teachers, Giardina illustrates Dillon's resistance to literacy-based instruction almost immediately. The novel opens with his narration, and he explains that he dislikes school because "you learn spelling rules and grammar rules and that the way you talked all your life is ignorant even though it seems to suit most people fine, and when Teacher goes on and says we live in a free country it's just a little hard to believe" (6). His description of Teacher in this passage sounds remarkably similar to DeRosier's account of Janis Carroll, and in both instances teachers operate as gatekeepers to the kind of higher society for which Flora longs. Dillon's resistance also echoes Reuben Nevels' actions in *The Dollmaker*, and by contrasting Dillon's resistance with Rachel's acceptance of instruction by teachers that assume mountain inferiority, Giardina's text encourages readers to ponder whether Dillon's gender grants him a greater (or perhaps more expected) ability to resist literacy-sanctioned modes of behavior. Anthropologist Anita Puckett's research reveals that in some mountain communities, residents expect women to participate in literate activity, but with the exception of preachers, they do not sanction such behavior in men. If the same belief system holds true for Giardina's fictional community of the Number Thirteen coal camp, then Dillon does not face the same reading expectations as Flora or Rachel and consequently is not exposed to the repeated absence or degradation of Appalachia in literary portrayals. When Dillon begins

writing his own book about his family's history near the end of the novel, Giardina portrays this artistic endeavor as an expected event. Unlike Jackie, who believes for years that she cannot be a writer because she comes from West Virginia, Dillon seems to automatically assume the possibility of becoming an author, though he does "meekly" seek editing advice from Jackie (297). In this way, Dillon's resistance to literacy-based instruction results in an aversion to reading (as Puckett documented in her research), and this aversion ironically supports the belief that he can write about Appalachia, highlighting how his path to authorship functions as the opposite of Jackie's.

Unlike Dillon's mother, Carrie, who remains proud of her Appalachian home, Flora attempts to indoctrinate Rachel with views that denigrate mountain culture. Flora insists that Rachel call her Mother, since Mom "sounded country," and Rachel also explains, "Mother longed for me to go to Berea, where she hoped the offending hillbilly would be whipped out of me and I would marry a future doctor or lawyer and live in Lexington or Louisville" (8, 9). Flora's mainstream literacy-supported notions about progress and a move away from traditional mountain culture make it nearly impossible for Rachel to avoid the kind of identity conflict this project interrogates, and Rachel reflects:

So I grew up with the understanding that I would leave the mountains, and as I got older the idea seemed more pleasing. But my ideas about leaving were different than my mother's. I listened to the radio and twice I had been to the movies in Shelby. I knew the way people in other places talked and I practiced sounding like them. I wanted to drink chocolate malteds when I was in one mood and martinis when I was in another, and wear silk hose with seams down the back and pierce my ears and smear the world's reddest lipstick on my mouth. I wanted to be a stewardess. A stewardess was the most glamorous thing a woman could be, next to an actress. (10)

Here we see that Rachel considers her exposure to mainstream America exciting, and she longs to experience things outside of her mountain discourse community. Her dreams of becoming a

stewardess, as well as her admiration for acting, also illustrate a future closely bound with gender expectations of appropriate occupations for women. Yet when Rachel leaves home, much to her mother's dismay, she pursues her aunt Carrie's profession of nursing, and as with the Nevels family, she encounters an unfriendly situation that judges her and her home as inferior.

Similar to DeRosier leaving her home community of Two-Mile Creek, when Rachel leaves Number Thirteen to attend nursing school she encounters drastic differences between her home discourse community and the new discursive world she enters at school. Echoing the disappointment Gertie experiences when she sees her children's new school in Detroit, Rachel feels disheartened when she sees Grace Hospital, the place where she will learn to become a nurse: "The building was yellow brick with small dark windows and the look of the warehouses that lined Back Street along the Levisa. An alley that stank of garbage bins separated the hospital from the Nurses' Home, where the students lived" (16). As in *The Dollmaker*, imagery reminiscent of factories and warehouses pepper Giardina's description of the school, and her description of student housing resonates as particularly powerful. Rachel describes many of the students as "frightened country girls from West Virginia and Kentucky away from home for the first time," and the fact that they live behind the hospital near an alley that reeks of garbage symbolizes how many of the faculty at the school view their pupils (16). After hearing her mother, Flora, constantly reference "trash from the head of the hollow," the spatial placement of student housing at Grace Hospital only reinforces what Rachel understands about her mountain culture, making negotiation between home and school fraught with difficult identity choices.

Once classes begin, Rachel's new teacher, Miss Kurtz, further confirms Rachel's suspicions about the school's view of Appalachia. Rachel remembers that her teacher "introduced herself by saying she was from Pittsburgh and had come to the mountains to do her

mission work. She held a heavy book against her chest” (16). Miss Kurtz’s ideas about mountain people no doubt align with those perpetuated by the American Missionary Association, and the heavy book she clutches to her chest represents the knowledge she believes she can bring to these supposedly ignorant, backwoods girls. Like other missionary teachers from the North discussed in this project, Miss Kurtz also supports the idea that Appalachians comprise their own separate race, and she uses Arnold Toynbee’s 1934 *A Study of History* as proof of mountain inferiority. She first describes Toynbee to Rachel’s class as a British historian, as if his non-American nationality grants him special authority, and she proceeds to read from his book: “The Scotch-Irish immigrants who have forced their way into these natural fastnesses have come to be isolated from the rest of the World. The Appalachian Mountain People are at this day not better than barbarians. They are the American counterparts of the latter-day White barbarians of the Old World, the Kurds, and the Pathans, and the Hairy Ainu” (16). Giardina’s fictionalization follows Toynbee’s text almost verbatim, and considering a lengthy portion of his original text further illustrates the sort of ideological framework from which Toynbee and Miss Kurtz operate:

The Scotch-Irish immigrants who have forced their way into these natural fastnesses have come to be isolated and segregated here from the rest of the World to a much greater extent than their ancestors [in Ireland] ever were [. . .] the Ulsterman has retained the traditional Protestant standard of education, whereas the Appalachian has relapsed into illiteracy and into all the superstitions for which illiteracy opens the door. His agricultural calendar is governed by the phases of the Moon; his personal life is darkened by the fear, and by the practice, of witchcraft. He lives in poverty and squalor and ill-health [. . .] In fact, the Appalachian ‘Mountain People’ at this day are no better than barbarians. They are the American counterparts of the latter-day White barbarians of the Old World: the Rifis and Kabyles and Tuareg, the Albanians and Caucasians, the Kurds and the Pathans and the Hairy Ainu. These White barbarians of America, however, differ in one respect from those of Europe and Asia [. . .] in being not a survival but a reversion. (310-312)

Toynbee's remarks about geographic isolation support those of earlier historians, and his comment about reversion sends an especially potent message about the degradation of mountain people. That such rhetoric not only makes its way into Rachel's classroom, but actually finds center stage in one of the first lectures given by her teacher, illustrates the sort of stark identity decision Miss Kurtz expects of her students. After quoting from Toynbee she tells her pupils, "If you are to make nurses, you must overcome your backgrounds. You must rise above the handicaps of inbreeding and the filthy living conditions you are used to. At his hospital, we expect you to keep yourselves clean" (16). Notably, Miss Kurtz does not ask her students to incorporate their backgrounds in this new situation, but rather she demands that they "overcome" everything that they have learned in their home-based discourse community in favor of what she has to teach them. Certainly textbook selections factor as important components of learning experiences, and as literacy scholar Yvonne Honeycutt Baldwin points out,

Textbooks in any classroom [. . .] are important in and of themselves, for they signify through their content and form particular constructions of reality or particular ways of selecting and organizing the world of potential knowledge. They embody the 'selective tradition' of legitimate knowledge and culture, one that in the process of enfranchising one group's cultural capital sometimes disenfranchises that of another. (88)

Miss Kurtz's decision to recite selections from Toynbee's work undoubtedly disenfranchises her classroom of mountain students, and Rachel's exposure to textbook-supported "proof" of mountain inferiority further emphasizes what she already learned at home from her mother's reading.

Not surprisingly, Toynbee's derogatory inscriptions about Appalachian people elicit strong reactions from authors and scholars writing about the region. Giardina discusses the excerpt twice by including it in *The Unquiet Earth* and again in her essay entitled "Appalachian Images: A Personal History." She opens the piece with the most offensive excerpt of Toynbee's

Appalachian commentary, later noting, “Arnold Toynbee never visited the place he called ‘Appalachia’” (164). To illustrate the ridiculous nature of his unfounded comments, Giardina spends several pages chronicling her own Appalachian family history, and she cites two relatives who wrote their own poems and were familiar with poetic conventions popular during the Victorian age. She takes a sarcastic tone in comparing her ancestors to the people Toynbee describes, as when she comments, “I examine old photographs of these kin, looking for signs of encroaching barbarism” and later concludes, “It seems mountain people in 1900 knew what a camera was. It seems mountain people looked normal” (163). Giardina’s definition of normalcy encompasses the technical ability to read and write for both her ancestors and fictional characters, and she extends this portrayal of Appalachian literacy as an expected part of life when Rachel recites John Keats’ “Ode to a Grecian Urn” on Class Day and Dillon’s mother Carrie compares his face with a description by Charles Dickens (8, 31). Yet Giardina also incorporates written depictions about the region which send an altogether opposite message, like Toynbee’s, and these materials perpetuate stereotypes of illiteracy that in turn influence her characters, like Rachel. Giardina’s specific inclusion of Toynbee represents the ways in which national reading audiences have been historically influenced by inaccurate accounts of the region, especially by writers like Toynbee that never visited the mountains. In the same way that these accounts influence Giardina’s fictional characters, so too do they influence how readers perceive and react to *The Unquiet Earth*. By juxtaposing intelligent, literate characters (including Flora, Rachel, and Jackie) with notions of an illiterate Appalachia introduced by a non-Appalachian teacher relying on faulty scholarship, Giardina encourages her readers to re-think their own notions of mountain illiteracy. Conversely, Giardina’s fictional characters are not made privy to the same insights until they undergo painful discourse transitioning. As such, later in the

novel we see how Rachel passes this understanding down to Jackie, who struggles with authorship for years before realizing that she can write stories about home.

Similar to the way that Giardina presents Appalachian literacy as a typical skill, she also portrays characters capable of standing up to Miss Kurtz and openly questioning her authority. One of Rachel's classmates, Tommie Justice, uses Toynbee's description to embarrass Miss Kurtz by asking for details about Hairy Ainus. When Miss Kurtz hesitates and finally says, "I'm not sure I know or want to know," Tommie fires back, "I just wondered because my cousins over on Greasy Creek, they're all inbred like you said, and they're cross-eyed and they got hair all over their bodies, even on their penises. I just wondered if they might be part Hairy AINU?" (16). Tommie's trickster-like comment re-directs the conversation, and Miss Kurtz enters an uncomfortable discussion about appropriate medical terms. Although Miss Kurtz never responds to Tommie's initial question, she becomes flustered and Rachel remembers, "we knew her then for a coward" (17). The rhetoric Tommie employs when questioning Miss Kurtz recalls the strategy Gertie Nevels uses in a conversation with Miss Whittle, and in both cases those in assumed lower positions (Gertie and Tommie) manipulate the conversation to disempower the teacher representing power and authority.

Despite this display of resistance, many of the other pupils in the class find Miss Kurtz and the new discursive world she represents unacceptable, and like *The Dollmaker's* Reuben, they return home. Although Rachel becomes homesick, she stays at Grace Hospital, but she also remembers, "I did lose The Homeplace when I went to school, and it had nothing to do with banks or coal companies. It was the inevitable loss known by those who are not tied to the same patch of earth for all their days" (15). For the first time in her life, Rachel leaves home for an extended period of time, and she explains that some of her classmates departed because they

believe “as strong as any religion, that home can be preserved forever and life made everlasting if we only stay put. And school was not like home. The teachers, even those kinder than Miss Kurtz, were there to goad us on, to judge and criticize, where many of us had known only petting and praise” (17). Rachel’s explanation of why some of her classmates choose to go home recalls the predicament of Arnow’s characters, particularly Reuben’s abandonment of Detroit and his ultimate refusal to participate in the required dialectical negotiation process that comprises an integral part of literacy attainment. For some of Rachel’s peers, Giardina sets up a situation that echoes the “abandon or adjust” options Arnow makes available to her characters, and Rachel explains the attraction of such resistance, since those refusing to participate in a new discursive world believe that in doing so, “home can be preserved forever” (17). One of the major themes of *The Unquiet Earth* revolves around the coal mining industry, particularly the way mining companies cheat mountain people out of their land by buying mineral rights or claiming senior patents on the land.⁶ Many of the girls that Rachel goes to school with have lost their physical homes, as she does, and adhering to the language practices and belief systems of their home-based Appalachian discourse community helps preserve what has been taken from them. Even so, Rachel chooses to remain at school and weather Miss Kurtz’s teaching.

Rachel’s Appalachian-related humiliation only increases when she joins the army after finishing nursing school and goes to Manila to work as a nurse during the Second World War. When narrating about her experiences overseas, Rachel remembers,

Every place we went—Fort Jackson, Camp Anzio, Corregidor, Leyte, Manila—we were the only nurses from the mountains. People kept saying, How funny your accents are, Does your father make moonshine Are those the first shoes you ever had on? At first we laid it on good. I said our family mule slept in the living room, and Tommie told one GI that she never saw a pair of panties until she joined the army. It was fun for a while but then it got old. (47)

Giardina's placement of Appalachian characters, as well as the stereotypes that follow them, in a global context highlights the pervasiveness of negative assumptions about mountain people. Although the soldiers that tease Rachel and Tommie are American, their prejudices about Appalachians follow them outside national boundaries. Such stereotypes resonate just as strongly today, as when Appalachian scholar Ronald Eller notes in his introduction to *Back Talk from Appalachia* that "it is ironic that in spell checking a draft of this document, my word processing software (Microsoft Word Version 6.0) could not locate the word 'moonshiners' in its dictionary and recommended that I substitute the word 'mountaineers'" (xi). When Rachel meets and begins dating Fred, yet another soldier with similarly stubborn stereotypical views of mountain people, she remembers, "Fred said I was dainty and trim and had delicate hands like a lady should have, which he didn't expect to find in a girl from the mountains" (48). Rachel does not continue to narrate what Fred would expect to find in an Appalachian woman, but as readers we understand that Fred does not expect that someone as beautiful as Rachel would come from Appalachia.

For decades gendered stereotypes about mountaineers have portrayed mountain men as lazy, violent, and patriarchal rulers, while women were generally depicted as either sexually wanton or de-feminized thanks to their constant toiling in field and home. Appalachian scholar Elizabeth Engelhardt refers to the Granny and Elly May characters from *The Beverly Hillbillies* to illustrate these two disparate, yet related roles, going on to explain that Elly May generally precedes Granny as "the one with illusory sexual power who married early, had too many children, got old before her time, and turned into Granny" (*Beyond Hill and Hollow* 3). After constant farming outside and work in the home, these mountain women were presumed to lose all signs of femininity, and Fred assumes something similar about Rachel. Rachel also

remembers how she felt about Fred's comment about her hands and body when she narrates, "This last comment made me mad, but I feared to argue for I had written to my mother about him. She wrote back, 'Your new friend sounds so nice. I know you have been taught to behave properly and I'm sure he appreciates that. I'm very proud of you'" (48). Unlike Dillon, who we predict would stand up to Fred, Rachel silently accepts his comment, largely in an effort to please her mother. As discussed earlier, Flora relies on magazines and other printed sources for lessons about how women should behave, and she passes this information on to Rachel, who tries to appease her mother's literacy-supported notions of proper womanhood. Rachel's silence also echoes Gertie Nevels' acquiescence to her mother, who relies on biblical scripture to prescribe a woman's role, particularly within marriage. Both Flora and Gertie's mother's print-supported beliefs align with submissive roles expected of women, and they pass them on to their daughters, who in turn internalize the silent submission their mothers demand. In not speaking out against Fred's comment, Rachel grants him a power over her and the home she represents.

Rachel also tries to mold herself to fit Fred's expectations of a proper woman because owning up to other people's reactions to her mountain heritage leaves her exhausted. Rachel's friend, Tommie Justice, dislikes Fred and asks Rachel if she is "getting above her raising" (49). Rachel explains, "I get tired of being different [. . .] I get tired of people thinking I'm stupid just because of the sound of my voice" (49). As with the Nevels children in *The Dollmaker*, Rachel soon learns that those outside of her primary discourse community consider a mountain accent an indicator of lower intelligence, and to avoid such judgment she consciously alters the way she speaks. As with the students James Paul Gee studies, this tactic fosters successful entry into the secondary discourse of army life in Manila, but this decision causes Rachel to mask certain elements of her identity, and this too leaves her tired and confused.

Although Fred promises to marry Rachel, once the war ends and she returns to West Virginia, she never hears from him again. Rachel knows that sharp class lines separate them, since Fred “grew up rich in New Orleans where his family owned a jewelry store,” but she seems hopeful that their love for one another will cross class boundaries (48). When it does not, she begins seeing Tony Angelelli again, an Italian immigrant who keeps books for the coal company. Despite their lack of emotional connection, she marries him, seemingly out of desperation and fear of remaining single. Unlike Dillon, who seems perfectly content to remain single, Rachel feels pressured to marry, no doubt a gendered constraint placed upon her by mountain conventions of womanhood that generally favor marriage over singlehood. Her days spent at home are long, and she remembers, “I didn’t take a job because everyone said it was time for women to settle down and rebuild the home. I sewed curtains and cleaned and learned to cook Italian food, to measure out oregano and basil, pour olive oil in the boiling pasta, slit a squid and remove the thin clear backbone,” but Tony does not appreciate her efforts and only demeans her when “the spaghetti stuck together or the bread was too hard” (63-64). When Tony’s friend and superintendent of Jenkinjones mine, Arthur Lee Sizemore, offers Rachel a job with the county as a nurse, she accepts, especially since as Arthur points out, “Tony won’t dare fuss if the offer comes from me” (67). Although her path to employment operates as a patriarchal one, the job still provides her with an opportunity for independence, and she seizes it. As with Linda Scott DeRosier, staying home and assuming the singular role of wife does not fulfill Rachel, and she seeks employment to enrich her life. Also parallel to DeRosier’s experiences, Rachel’s career choice results in a return to her mountain roots.

When Rachel begins nursing in 1950, she recalls, “It is a different world on Trace Mountain,” and she is able to distinguish this world as different thanks to the new perspectives

she gained in school and abroad (68). One of her main duties involves visiting tuberculosis patients, including Granny Combs. Rachel explains that her “supervisor thought [she] should talk Granny into a nursing home,” but Rachel knows that “if you took Granny off that mountain she would have collapsed and vanished like a long-buried body that is dug up and disintegrates when it is exposed to the air” (70).⁷ Similar to Rachel’s classmates from nursing school that choose to return home, Granny remains tied to the land, as well as the natural remedies she learned there. Granny tells Rachel that she cured her own cold with “honey and corn liquor and camomile tea,” and Rachel remembers, “I drank a cup of her camomile tea myself. It is still the best thing for a cold, so soothing for a cough and clears the sinuses too. They will not teach that at nursing school and call you a hillbilly if you recommend it, but they will suffer the colds” (70). After enduring the teachings of Miss Kurtz and other teachers at Grace Hospital, as well as comments from army soldiers in Manila, Rachel knows the difference between standard medical practices and the homeopathic remedies favored by some mountain people like Granny Combs, as well as the value judgments that go along with them. Even though she views some elements of her mountain culture negatively, thanks in part to her mother’s literacy-supported beliefs, Rachel also recognizes the value of her cultural heritage, as when she adheres to Granny Combs’ medical advice. For Rachel, going away to school further emphasizes the differences between Appalachia and mainstream America that her mother seems so obsessed with, but that distancing also allows her to view home from a new perspective that her mother never experiences. When Rachel travels overseas, becomes involved with Fred, and then returns home she becomes even more aware of the derogatory beliefs others (and her own mother) hold about Appalachia. Yet at the same time, Rachel’s departure and return render her able to recognize and value certain aspects of her mountain culture, like Granny Combs’ remedies. Consequently, although Rachel

still works to “overcome” her background, she seems less intent on doing so than her mother, Flora. Near the novel’s end Giardina also makes clear that Rachel’s daughter Jackie finally overcomes the need to “overcome” her Appalachian heritage, thus granting her the ability to write.

In the same way that both Flora and Rachel learn negative messages about Appalachia, so too does Rachel’s daughter, Jackie. Jackie’s narration begins in 1959, when Jackie is eight years old, aligning with Giardina’s birth date of 1951. Almost as soon as Jackie begins narrating sections of the novel, readers recognize her penchant for reading. When Dillon gives Jackie a copy of *Charlotte’s Web* as a present, she explains, “I have never had a book belong to me,” but she goes on to discuss how her mother takes her to the library on a regular basis, and like Rachel who quotes Keats and Carrie who makes comparisons to Dickens, Giardina figures Jackie’s literacy as a normal part of her life (88). Jackie also makes clear that media informs her conception of the world, and she describes *The Wizard of Oz* as “the only movie I know where a girl is the main character and does most everything right” (90). Like her mother’s ideas about movie stars and stewardesses, many of Jackie’s ideas about proper gender roles come from media depictions, and her comment about *The Wizard of Oz* demonstrates her attention to feminine representations of independent, successful women.

Despite Jackie’s attention to these portrayals, she still seems unable to conceive of herself in such a way, especially in the realm of authorship. When Rachel divorces Tony, she and Jackie move into a new home in the Number Thirteen coal camp. Jackie feels excited that their new house conveniently has bookcases built into the wall, and she remembers, “When we first moved into our new house at Number Thirteen, I figured I would be a writer,” but this declaration does not last long (105). In the new neighborhood Jackie also becomes friends with Toejam Day. She

admits that “Toejam isn’t real smart, and his family is poor,” but despite their intellectual and class-based differences, Jackie befriends Toejam and often helps him deliver newspapers on his bicycle route. Jackie explains that “While Toejam pedals I tell him stories I made up about the people who live in the houses. They aren’t good stories because you can’t tell good stories about people around here, but it is what Toejam likes. His favorites are about the people who live on Hunkie Hill. They are Hungarians, Russians, and Czechoslovakians. Toejam can’t even say ‘Czechoslovakians’” (106). While Jackie wants to become a writer, and even practices telling stories to Toejam, she remains convinced that “you can’t tell good stories about people around here.” This judgment no doubt stems from the books she has read which either omit Appalachia altogether or depict it in a derogatory way. Like Jackie, an adolescent Giardina creates her own stories about people who live in the apartment buildings near her house because at that time she also believes that Appalachian people are not worth telling stories about. Giardina remembers that as a child most of her stories did not contain endings, and she recalls,

I learned about endings later, when I was taught quotation marks and spelling. Learning to spell ended any illusions I may have had that we are totally free and independent creatures. No, there was a higher authority that molded us all to its will and ordered our lives for us, an authority as inexorable in its own way as the booger man. Spelling and grammar are benevolent dictators perhaps, subjugating one raw culture that a broader one may be experienced. (“No Scapin the Booger Man” 131)

In this passage Giardina explicitly discusses the consequences of becoming literate in a technical as well as discursive sense. Once aware of standard literary genre conventions that traditionally require a beginning and ending, the spelling and grammar rules that go along with such genre guidelines become dictators, although Giardina speculates that they are perhaps benevolent ones. She also highlights the subjugation of a “raw” culture so that another larger one may be experienced, paralleling the subjugation of the semiotic to the symbolic noted by French feminist

Julia Kristeva. According to Kristeva's theories, intuition guides the semiotic realm of emotion, which can only be deciphered when it breaks through the symbolic representations that govern our language systems. The acquiescence of original story forms to more conventional literary standards that Giardina notes echoes the same submission Kristeva discusses, both of which apply when considering Gee's notions of discourse transition. When authors like Giardina and characters like Jackie enter into a secondary discourse, more often than not they must mask certain elements of their primary Appalachian discourse, particularly as they relate to language, speech patterns, and dialect. Through writing about Appalachian literacies in fictional form, Giardina's provides a space in which such "raw" cultures may break through to reach literary audiences.

Giardina discusses such subjugation, and the inherent identity conflicts that consequently ensue, again later in the essay when she discusses her experience working as a substitute teacher in Kanawha County shortly after college graduation. In 1974 a controversy over textbook selection erupted in the area when the Kanawha County school board—which was comprised of no native Appalachians—adopted *Interaction* school books, a set of multicultural books and supplemental teaching materials. Many of the Appalachian residents of Kanawha County, particularly staunch churchgoers, felt that the books were inappropriate, and they protested their inclusion in the schools.⁸ Like Rachel's praise for mountain remedies and her simultaneous efforts to mask her Appalachian heritage in *The Unquiet Earth*, Giardina felt torn between the opposing sides, and she reflects,

I shared the anger of a powerless people at the erosion of traditional mountain values, yet I could not join in the protest against multicultural school textbooks. I still lived up a holler, but I fled each Sunday to a local Episcopal church to worship with people who disdained the ways of 'crickers.' The innocence I had lost when I obtained my education was irretrievable, and I had become as alien as the mythical Hapsburgs in my Welch

apartment building [that echo Jackie's stories told to Toejam]. On the other hand, I felt equally estranged from mainstream America. Who the hell was I? ("No Scapin the Booger Man" 130)

In the above quote Giardina describes personal conflict akin to that of her fictional characters, and her biographical struggle to negotiate various discursive worlds mirrors the same dilemmas Linda Scott DeRosier faces, as well as other characters in this project. Despite the identity conflict that resulted from her education, one of the elements of her Appalachian culture that remains with Giardina is Appalachian orality and storytelling. As with DeRosier, storytelling operates as an important part of both Giardina and Jackie's lives. Giardina's showcasing of the importance of oral traditions highlights one way in which Giardina and Jackie negotiate the split between their primary Appalachian discourse and secondary discourse communities that they later enter.

Similar to Gaynelle and Virgie Cline from Lee Smith's *Fair and Tender Ladies*, who seem to "live on storeys [sic]," figures in Giardina's early childhood also thrive on storytelling, and she recalls that she "heard the stories first while perched upon the bony old knees of men," including her grandfather and neighbor, Uncle Brigham (33, "No Scapin the Booger Man" 130). One common mountain story, "Big Toe," figures prominently in both Giardina's essay, "No Scapin the Booger Man" and in *The Unquiet Earth*.⁹ In her essay, she uses unconventional spelling and grammar to tell the story, and she opens by emphasizing the importance of oral traditions in her childhood:

I learned to read and write in standard English at Thorpe Elementary School, but before the teachers enticed me with the clean preciseness of spelling and grammar, mine was a different language. I was no prodigy who reads at age two or three and goes bored and superior to first grade. I stared with some curiosity at the tiny black squiggles that were supposed to be words, but I did not read until I was urged to. I saw no need to hurry. I had the stories. (129)

Giardina makes clear that as a child, she valued the oral traditions of her home discourse community, but once she enters school she learns that her ways of telling stories do not align with methods sanctioned by teachers. Mid-way through the essay she assumes standard conventions, rhetorically aligning with her statement about the illusionary aspect of being free and independent creatures, at least when spelling, grammar, and other conventions of Standard English are involved. In the same way that Uncle Brigham's "Big Toe" story about the devil searching for his toe resonates with Giardina, it also plays an important part in Jackie's fictional adolescence. When Jackie reflects on the "silly stories" she tells Toejam, she compares them to the "dumb old hillbilly story Uncle Brigham Lloyd tells," and Giardina re-tells "Big Toe" once again in fictional form (106).

To situate Jackie's reaction to Uncle Brigham's story, Giardina first reveals that Jackie would much prefer to sit on her front porch and read Nancy Drew, a series generally only popular with young girls, but she feels obligated to cross the road and listen to Uncle Brigham. Giardina's dichotomous descriptions of Jackie's home compared with Uncle Brigham's also sends a potent message to readers. Jackie comments that "it is nice on our porch with the ivy and rose bushes and flower boxes all around," while Uncle Brigham has a "bare old porch," and Jackie must walk across the road covered in red dog (a sharp and rugged byproduct of mining found in slate dumps) and "open the gate that is almost off its hinges" in order to hear his story (106). Rachel's job as a nurse allows her to rent the former company doctor's house, and Jackie knows that her home is larger and nicer than other homes in the coal camp, especially Uncle Brigham's. The red dog road functions as an especially painful liminal space in which Jackie travels from the clean, neat world of Nancy Drew's written stories to the seemingly lesser, disadvantaged oral rendering of Uncle Brigham's stories. Crossing the road Jackie takes a crucial

value judgment with her that she has learned from the printed word and standard literary conventions when she thinks, “I like to sit on our front porch swing and read Nancy Drew mysteries from the library. Nancy Drew is real smart, smarter than anybody in Number Thirteen” (106). Despite her feelings about Uncle Brigham’s story, out of politeness she always listens and acts as though the ending frightens her, yet Giardina highlights how “Big Toe” fails to align with what Jackie considers to be a proper story: “every time I go to Uncle Brigham’s, he tells the same dumb story about the Booger man, and no handsome prince to rescue anybody. It’s not a real story like you would hear someplace else” (108). Upset by the obvious divide between Uncle Brigham’s story and the literary conventions Jackie encounters in her reading material, Jackie explains, “when I got back from his house I’d get a notebook and figure I would write a real story with a happy ending. But it never worked. I’m not a real writer. Real writers live in New York apartments or sit at sidewalk cafés in Paris” (108). Here Jackie also seems unable to negotiate the disparity in gender roles she finds in her own reading material (like Nancy Drew) with Uncle Brigham’s stories that do not necessarily rely on patriarchal storylines in which a prince rescues fair maidens in distress. Since Jackie finds no representations of her home in any of the literature she reads, she tries to imagine that she lives in a different place, and in hopes of writing about that imagined space she visualizes a new reality: “In the dusk I can pretend it is not Number Thirteen, it is the German village where the Grimm brothers told their stories, and Gretel lived, cottages lit with candles and lanterns instead of cheap lamps from the five-and-ten” (108). Yet despite her efforts to transport Number Thirteen into a scene from a fairy tale, “it is still the same old Number Thirteen” (108).

Ironically, Jackie’s surroundings offer multiple storylines for writing, and in one succinct paragraph Giardina highlights many avenues ripe for literary rendering. From Jackie’s

perspective the events seem stale and boring, but by writing about people and situations that Jackie encounters as a girl, Giardina encourages readers to see that they are interesting and varied:

In one house Homer Day reads the Bible while his wife Louella heats up bacon grease for the wild greens Toejam picked for supper. It is all they will have to eat. Nearby Homer's brother Hassel and his friend Junior Tackett sit on a vinyl couch outside Hassel's trailer. Across the street, Uncle Brigham Lloyd is getting drunk and I can hear the TV turned up loud through the open screen door. Betty and the kids are watching 'Bonanza' and Uncle Brigham is hollering at them to turn down the goddamn noise. My mom is working her half-acre in the camp garden, trying to finish hoeing the tomatoes before it gets dark, and Dillon is walking the railroad track toward her. She stops hoeing to watch him come on. (108)

Though Jackie seems largely oblivious to the material contained in this brief description, readers see the irony of her statement about "the same old Number Thirteen," since its stories include the Day family's struggle with hunger-producing poverty; Hassel and Junior's homosexual relationship; Uncle Brigham's battle with alcoholism and domestic violence; and her mother's incestuous relationship with Dillon, Jackie's biological father.¹⁰ When asked about this scene in an interview, Giardina comments, "she is missing all this right under her nose, though I think she has a sense it is there. She just hasn't figured out yet that she can write about it because it doesn't fit her image of stories about princes with happy endings" (Douglass "Resurrecting the Dead" 246). Unlike Jackie, readers of *The Unquiet Earth* see the literary possibilities inherent in Jackie's surroundings much sooner than she does since Giardina schools us to notice them by repeatedly juxtaposing perceived ideas of Appalachia (including an historically assumed lack of literary prowess) with a more realistic portrayal of the area. Similar to Giardina's lack of exposure to Appalachian settings in literature, Jackie cannot comprehend writing a story about her people or her place, and Jackie thinks, "So there is not a thing to write about, only hillbillies, and nobody cares to hear about hillbillies. I go inside to watch TV" (108). Jackie's lack of

exposure to Appalachian literary portrayals sends her to yet another source of unflattering images about the region, and her turn to television reiterates Giardina's statement about the negative cultural value judgments perpetuated on television.

Television also influences Jackie's mother, Rachel, just as the Lum and Abner radio show shapes her perception of her mountain home as a child. Working as the county health nurse Rachel encounters plenty of people in far worse condition than spry old Granny Combs, and she describes "men who had worked in the mines until their lungs filled with dust or their backs gave out, women who had cooked and scrubbed the coal dust from kitchen floors and listened for the accident whistle to blow, who finally depended upon their children for food only now their children had nothing to give" (117). Rachel's adult viewpoint highlights the struggle between competing narrative voices, especially with the much different perspective of adolescent Jackie. But in both cases, media depictions of the area greatly influence these women, and Rachel recalls, "I heard President Kennedy talk about stamping out poverty in America and learned for the first time that I lived in a place called Appalachia. It was a strange feeling to think my home had been named without asking anybody who lived here, but I was glad someone was paying attention. Dillon called me naïve. I didn't care" (117). As discussed in the introductory chapter of this project, Berea College president William Goodell Frost first named Appalachia in his 1899 essay, "Our Contemporary Ancestors." Explaining that mountain people "unconsciously stepped aside from the great avenues of commerce and of thought" and were thus "beleaguered by nature," Frost carefully describes the Appalachian mountain range and declares, "this is one of God's grand divisions, and in default of any other name we shall call it Appalachian America" (6). Frost had his own political agenda connected to Berea's mission of mountain uplift, and Appalachian scholar Henry Shapiro argues that "because Appalachia possessed no reality

independent of its conceptualization as a discrete entity, however, naming was also an act of creation, and explaining was also an act of naming” (68). Giardina participates in a similar re-naming by urging readers to evaluate stereotypes they may hold about the region. At the turn of the century officially naming the area certainly played a part in its Othering, and by the time Rachel learns that the region in which she lives is called Appalachia, much of the rest of the nation has been using the Appalachian name for over six decades. Giardina’s attention to Rachel’s unawareness of naming conventions further illustrates Linda Scott DeRosier’s point about government-sanctioned names for various coves and hollows in Kentucky that differ from names designated by the community. Even contemporary Appalachian residents do not always think of themselves as “Appalachian,” a term that finds the most usage in academic circles. In 2005, when Appalachian State University student Katie Gray asked Mike Mullins (the director of the Hindman Settlement School), “Did you feel that you grew up in Appalachia, or did you discover the term later?,” he responded:

I never knew I lived in Appalachia until I went to Berea College. I was Mike Mullins from High Hat, in Floyd County, in Eastern Kentucky, who lived in the coalfields. If you asked my father, ‘Are you Appalachian?’ he would have no idea what you were talking about. He grew up at the head of Salisbury Branch in Knott County. Our place of reference was our immediate community. (315)

Rachel feels similarly about her home community, but she also indicates that if naming the region causes other Americans to see the hardship many of her mountain patients face, that makes the Othering that comes along with the name worthwhile. Similarly, in writing *The Unquiet Earth* Giardina acknowledges stereotypes of mountain illiteracy that inform much of her reading audience but then works to overcome them by illustrating the multiple literacies her characters possess, as well as the identity conflicts that they cause. Rachel takes a practical view of the region and its people, and to a certain degree she accepts demeaning portrayals of

Appalachia as long as she believes that residents benefit. She demonstrates such logic when commenting on the food given by the government: “Of course it was demeaning; of course it wasn’t enough. Of course Arthur Lee [Sizemore] gave cheese and butter to all his buddies, would have given it to me if I’d taken it. But children don’t care for all that, and a cheese sandwich will fill a child’s stomach” (117). Yet Rachel’s attitude changes when CBS visits her home community to make a documentary. Jackie narrates this event, and her inclusion of Rachel’s comment that “they make me feel like a specimen in a jar” forecasts how the camera crew makes Jackie feel as well (123).

The scene that unfolds as Jackie describes the following events represents how documentary directors and film crews have repeatedly singled out the most pitiful situations and people to highlight in their media depictions of Appalachia, sometimes creating an image of destitution not entirely founded in reality. As with other texts considered in this project, schools operate as a site of such manipulation, and like Rachel’s nursing school and the Nevels children’s school in Detroit, Jackie describes her school as a site of cultural domination and authority: “There is a fence all around the building with barbed wire strung along the top, and if you could escape over the fence you would land in the river. Adolf Hitler would have loved our school” (173). In the school Giardina depicts a media intrusion that fictionalizes a real broadcast, and she highlights its effect on Jackie. Unbeknownst to Jackie, her teacher, or her classmates, the camera crew brings donated shoes to the school, and they plan to film their distribution. Since they will need a large space in which to give away the shoes, the camera crew director, Phil Vivanti, asks Jackie’s teacher for directions to the cafeteria. When he learns that the school has no cafeteria (and children eat their lunches at their desks), he asks for the library location but also learns that the school instead stores books in individual classrooms. When he concedes, “I guess

we'll just have to film in the hallway," another crew member approaches and tells him, "It's okay Phil [. . .] the hall has a nice bleakness" (124). Armed with donated shoes from a company in New Jersey, the camera crew creates the appearance of benevolent benefactor to these supposedly needy mountain children. Miss Cox, Jackie's teacher, does not like the idea but feels powerless against the film crew, as when Jackie narrates:

Miss Cox tries to teach about the planets but we keep looking at the door so she gives up and says that people want to see television shows about Appalachia because they think we are stupid and backward and they can't figure out why. She says we are not stupid or backward and are just as good as anybody, but she says it low and keeps glancing at the door like she thinks someone might come in and take her away. (124)

Although Jackie's teacher encourages self respect in the children, she defers to the authority represented by the filming crew, and she also comments on the rest of the nation's interest in the Appalachian region. Scholar J.W. Williamson contends that much of America remains fascinated with depictions of hillbilly mountaineers because those representations reflect their own fears about "regressing" to a hillbilly state if their own economic situations declined (41). At one point in history those portrayals were also used to raise money for uplift projects like the moonlight schools discussed earlier, as evidenced by Mary Swain Routzhan's 1928 comment, "Perhaps in real life Lizzie Ann is no longer barefooted, but if we show a picture of Lizzie Ann wearing shoes and stockings, it is doubtful whether she will appeal so greatly to the hearts of whose gift the [literacy] work depends" (qtd in Baldwin 16). In either case, these portrayals of mountain people permeate much that is written and said about the region, including Arnold Toynbee's history: "The children persist in going about barefoot, and their parents either cannot afford to give them shoes, or will not take the trouble to insist upon their wearing them, or are too ignorant to be aware that Hook-Worm gains entry into human bodies through sores in naked soles" (311). Giardina provides a fictional voice of agency in response to such derogatory stereotyping when

Jackie raises her hand and tells Phil Vivanti, “Some of us don’t need [the shoes] [. . .] And some of us don’t want them” (125). The 1965 CBS special report entitled “Christmas in Appalachia” from which Giardina draws most of her material for this scene does not depict any children like Jackie, let alone children who do not need shoes. Instead, Charles Kuralt travels through a coal mining community in Whitesburg, Kentucky, interviewing residents while camera crews zoom in on ragged shoes, abandoned buildings, and the dirty faces of children. The report sentimentalizes the plight of its subjects, depending on pathetic appeals to the viewing audience, as when Kuralt declares that one woman, Goldie Johnson, has accepted living “a life without flowers” and goes on to describe her as “a strong woman surrounded by exhausted men.”

While Giardina’s portrayal of Number Thirteen in *The Unquiet Earth* includes depictions of poverty and hardship, through her writing she also grants her characters agency and voice that the CBS report does not. Even though Jackie announces that she does not need or want the free shoes, readers also understand that a number of students in her class do need the clothing items, but once she speaks out, students hesitate to accept the donations until Vivanti entices them with promises of being on television. After Jackie receives “a pair of sandals made of hard purple plastic that look like they would take all the skin off the top of your foot,” she wants to tell Vivanti to give them to his daughter, but she reasons “that would be sassing a grownup,” so she remains quiet (125). Similarly, despite how uncomfortable the camera crew makes her feel, Rachel remains quiet and so too does Miss Cox. Giardina soon depicts the cost of such silence when Dillon, Rachel, and Jackie gather to watch the television broadcast. Jackie narrates their reaction to the program, and Giardina conflates several media and written depictions of the region in Jackie’s description:

We see Mom listening to a man's chest and I point and holler, "There's Mom!" "Poor health care," says a voice. Mom sighs loud like her feelings are hurt. We watch children lined up for shoes and I see Brenda Lloyd and Toejam Day. I don't see me. "Children who go barefoot," says the voice. "Schools and houses in terrible condition." The TV shows empty falling-down coal camp houses. Phil Vivanti looks at us from the TV set. He stands in front of a camp house. "There is another America hidden away in these hills," he says. "Like something out of another century," he says, "a land time forgot, a life most Americans will never experience. Why do people want to stay here? How will we bring them into the mainstream of American life?" (126)

In the above passage Giardina draws from the "Christmas in Appalachia" special report, the 1989 CBS *48 Hours* episode entitled "Another America," William Goodell Frost's "Our Contemporary Ancestors," and Will Wallace Harney's "A Strange Land and a Peculiar People," among others. Immediately following this paragraph Jackie comments, "We sit downhearted like we have been beat on" (126). Certainly the broadcast greatly affects Jackie's perceptions about her home and her nascent desire to become a writer, and when asked about her own reaction as a fourteen-year-old girl to the "Christmas in Appalachia" broadcast in our interview, Giardina responded: "I saw that and a number of other pieces on network TV news. I thought they were all fake in the sense of being posed, of picking and choosing scenes, what to show and what not to show (anything that showed the diversity of the place) and prompting people about what they should say. They didn't capture anything in depth. And you could cut the condescension with a knife." Here Giardina comments on her reaction to these depictions as an adult, but as an adolescent girl—both in the fictional form of Jackie and in real life—the depictions only further support negative depictions of Appalachia. Although Jackie resists the blanketed donation of shoes when she bravely tells Vivanti that not all of the children want or need them, her comments do not find their way into the broadcast. As such, the camera crew and directors wield authority over the kind of Appalachian representation that hits airwaves, further convincing the

rest of the nation of Appalachia's inferiority and confirming Jackie's suspicion that "real" writers do not come from the mountains.

Despite Jackie's doubts about the possibility of becoming a writer, she continues to read voraciously, even when this habit makes her unpopular at school. Like Linda Scott DeRosier's high school experience, Jackie's academic achievements distance her from many of her classmates, and she narrates, "The class treated us [her and her friend Brenda] like lepers from the Bible" (174). Jackie's simile comparing herself with biblical characters further proves her literate prowess, and this tendency serves as one of the connecting points when Tom Kolwiecki, a Volunteer in Service to America (VISTA) worker, arrives in Number Thirteen. He lives with Hassel Day, the self-proclaimed mayor of Number Thirteen, and Tom tries to begin a food co-op, among other things that he believes will help the community. Most importantly for Jackie, his presence encourages her reading habits when he asks if she likes poetry and then tells her that T.S. Eliot is his favorite poet. Astonished, Jackie thinks, "I never met anyone who had a favorite poet except Miss Meade my English teacher who likes Robert Frost" (182). Similar to Richard Burlage's entry into Hoot Owl Holler in Lee Smith's *Oral History*, Tom's presence in Number Thirteen introduces Jackie to a new discursive world. Tom's Northern accent, college education, and his goal of becoming a Jesuit priest set him apart as different from other people in Jackie's community, but unlike Richard's effect on Dory Cantrell, Tom influences Jackie positively by encouraging the technical habit of reading while also introducing her to different cultural literacies.

Jackie longs to please Tom, and like her grandmother Flora, Jackie places great value on things she reads in popular magazines, as when she comments, "Once I saw in *Seventeen* magazine where you can't be a successful teenager until you have a party," so when Rachel

agrees that Jackie can have a welcoming party for Tom, Jackie plans to serve pizza, soda, and potato chips with onion dip (182). However, when Jackie consults *Seventeen* to learn the proper way to throw such a party, she encounters an article entitled “Create Your Own Summer Party.” Disheartened, she explains that the layout “has a big color picture of food I never heard of, like tacos and guacamole. I don’t know how to pronounce them or what is in them, but the guacamole is green and looks really gross. The tacos are in little baskets with red and white checked napkins. I shouldn’t have looked in *Seventeen*” (183). After reading this article featuring Mexican food, Jackie feels ashamed because she does not have the cultural capital to know about foods like those pictured in the magazine, thus she judges her own food choices substandard. Like Flora, Jackie assumes the magazine’s authority over her own knowledge of appropriate party fare, but unlike her grandmother, she regrets ever having encountered the magazine at all.

Even though many of the residents of Number Thirteen resent Tom’s presence, especially at the beginning, he introduces Jackie to a completely new discursive world, and it is through this new type of literacy acquisition that she eventually comes to value her home enough to believe that she can write about it. In one section Hassel explains, “Uncle Brigham is offended by the VISTA. He don’t like to think we need help like they do in Africa, and he says, ‘Here I am a growed man getting grayheaded and some shirrtail youngen is supposed to save me? And him sent by the government and what if hit’s the government I need saved from?’” (176). Dillon has a similar reaction, and in his memoir about Appalachia, John O’Brien quotes one man who echoes the sentiments of Number Thirteen’s residents almost exactly: “These daggone VISTA people. Who is it sends them? Where is this Appalachia place and why do they think I live there?” (115). Like the interview response from Mike Mullins discussed earlier, this man, as well as many of the characters of *The Unquiet Earth*, think of themselves in community terms, not

those created by a national, and usually academic, audience.¹¹ Despite the tension Tom's presence creates in Number Thirteen, Jackie becomes smitten with him, and when Toejam asks Tom if he plans on kissing Jackie at the welcoming party Jackie thinks, "I want to cry. I try to think how a *Seventeen* girl would handle the situation but I figure a *Seventeen* girl wouldn't know Toejam" (185). Once again readers understand that the place and the people of Jackie's life find no representation in the printed pages of a popular magazine and instead seem to be depicted only in skewed media portrayals and written histories like Toynbee's. Consequently, like Flora and Rachel, Jackie devalues her heritage, and her constant reading habits only further enforce this devaluing. After government officials force Tom to leave Number Thirteen, Jackie attends college, and during this time her mother, Rachel, dies of a heart condition she has had for years. Even so, Jackie has "no plans to set foot in the mountains again" because she "wanted to escape for a while to places unfamiliar to [her] people" (237, 238). After graduating from Marshall and studying abroad for a year in England, Jackie works as a press secretary for a West Virginia congressman in Washington DC, where she "tried to close the door on [her] past" (238). Eventually she quits her job and begins work at the Cervantes Center, a Catholic charity organization where Tom works, but Jackie "travels Blackberry Creek [at home] in [her] mind at night as [she falls] asleep" (248). The longer she stays away from home, the more she seems to long for it.

As with other characters considered in this project, once Jackie leaves the mountains she misses home terribly, commenting "I crave the mountains. They invade my dreams, and so do my kin, living and dead" (250). Even so, she takes time to decide whether she should go home, and in an interview Giardina explains: "In West Virginia we have such an inferiority complex sometimes; we feel that if you are successful, you are going to leave. So if you don't leave, you

haven't been successful; and if you do leave, you were successful, so why would you want to come back? I felt it real important to go back for that reason, just to take a position against that attitude" (Douglass "Resurrecting the Dead" 248). In the same way that Giardina returns to West Virginia and reports on the Pittston Strike in 1989, Jackie moves back and takes a job as the *Justice Clarion* newspaper editor, believing that "on Blackberry Creek I would gain strength and color, like a starving person fed rich broth" (263). While this job offers a different kind of creative freedom than Jackie's childhood dream of becoming a writer of fictional stories, her writing in this capacity serves an important function for the people in her community. When Dillon suspects that the slate dam holding refuse water from the coal mines process is weak, Jackie runs an editorial piece about its dangerous condition. Even though the union "said the company should do something [. . .] American Coal sent out a press release saying the dam is safe and the union is trying to harass the company" (327). Jackie's editorial position only allows her so much authority, but unlike the unsure, ashamed girl of her adolescence, she now uses the power of words to speak out against political injustices inflicted upon her home community. When the dam breaks and floods the community, readers understand that Jackie's words have little sway over firmly entrenched capitalist systems that privilege profit over safety. Giardina no doubt realizes the limitations of language, especially in a political arena. She has been (and continues to be) politically active, even running for West Virginia governor in 2000, but Giardina also commented during our interview that "you reach more people with fiction than with newspaper articles or political speeches. You reach a broader group of people also." Unlike Jackie, who writes solely for newspapers, Giardina also writes about important issues, but she does so through fictional form. As with other texts considered in this project, *The Unquiet Earth*

provides a viable space in which Giardina can chronicle the potentially detrimental effects of reading on writing by using fictional characters' problems to illustrate real Appalachian issues.

Near the end of the novel when Dillon begins writing his own story, he asks Jackie about her childhood dream of becoming a writer and she responds, "I do write [. . .] I write every day for a living," but not satisfied with this answer Dillon counters, "That's different [. . .] I'd like to see you cut loose" (297). In many ways, *The Unquiet Earth* allows Giardina to "cut loose," and she depicts the technically literate ability of her characters as well as the resulting shame that ability produces. By tracing Jackie's acquisition of new literacies outside her home community, Giardina, like other authors in this project, illustrates the losses she incurs, but those losses result in a deep appreciation for home and what was lost. In the novel the slate dam break destroys the fictional town of Number Thirteen, mirroring the real destruction of 4000 homes and 125 lives in the 1972 Buffalo Creek Disaster, and Giardina similarly reflects that once her home town of Black Wolf coal camp was torn down that "what [she] found, to [her] sorrow, is that once those ties have been broken, once the community has been left or lost, it can never be restored or duplicated" (Duke 62). Like DeRosier, leaving her home community equipped Giardina with multiple literacies that resulted in the ability to write about that loss, and she also admits,

I've gained a larger cultural experience, yet I don't fit in in the same way. I don't know if I could ever go back to McDowell County and live quite the same way. So in a sense the mountains have spurned me. I think that is the fear of leaving and becoming different. My dad always talked about 'getting above your raising.' He always warned us, 'Don't get above your raising.' Part of that means don't put on airs, but I also took it to mean, if you get too educated and too sophisticated, then you are not quite going to fit in anymore. (Douglass "Resurrecting the Dead" 248)

Like Giardina, Jackie does not fit into her home community in the same way, but she uses her writing to benefit those living there. In our interview Giardina discussed what it was like moving

back to McDowell County in 1980, illustrating that as in DeRosier's relationship with her mother, literacy attainment (whether technical or discursive) can strain family ties:

Even within my own family [living at home again] was difficult. I was trying to read a variety of writers, literary figures as well as popular ones. I didn't have a single relative who read those people, or who read *The New Yorker*, or who had traveled to Europe (except my dad in WWII) or were interested in doing so. And after doing those things and realizing no one else did, I began to realize I had less in common with them. This is especially hard in a culture where family is almost everything.

Giardina strives to recreate what was lost in her fiction, and while this includes a way of life no longer commonplace in twenty-first century America, that re-creation also serves an ameliorative function in allowing Giardina to re-visit a connection with her home that she lost upon gaining the literacies necessary to believe she could become an author. Giardina says that "when I go to schools now, I find that kids have read Appalachian writers" (Douglass "Resurrecting the Dead" 246). This observation leaves hope that perhaps the next generation of Appalachian writers will read representations of themselves in literature much sooner than Giardina's adult discovery of Lee Smith.

End Notes

¹To learn more about the Battle of Blair Mountain see Robert Shogan's *The Battle of Blair Mountain*, David Alan Corbin's *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields*, the second episode of the public television series entitled *The Appalachians*, and The History Channel's documentary, *Hillbilly: The Real Story*. To learn more about the Buffalo Creek disaster, see Kai Erikson's *Everything in Its Path* and Gerald Stern's *The Buffalo Creek Disaster*.

² During our interview I asked Giardina, "Given the pervasive stereotypes about Appalachian incest, what was your purpose in making [Rachel and Dillon] relatives?" She responded: "I didn't have any choice because I had already made them cousins at the end of *Storming Heaven*, when I didn't have any intention of writing about them, or of having them fall in love. And it was in print. So once that was the case, I was forced to deal with it. I really resisted it for a long time. But finally I realized I shouldn't let the stereotype keep me from writing the book. And it was the stereotype which finally killed their relationship. I didn't think it should kill my book too. I also really resented that Jane Austen could suggest Mr. Darcy marry his first cousin without batting an eye, and yet I wasn't supposed to have my characters have a relationship. Talk about a double standard."

³ Like the fictional characters of Carrie and Rachel, Giardina's mother also worked as a nurse. To read more about Giardina's family, see Giardina's essay, "Appalachian Images: A Personal History" in *Back Talk from Appalachia*.

⁴ To read a largely positive history of the Lum and Abner program, see Randall Hall's book, *Lum and Abner: Rural America and the Golden Age of Radio*, and to read more about the geographical "creep" of the hillbilly, see Anthony Harkins' *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon*.

⁵ Literary critic Nancy Parrish notes a similar trend when writing about Al Capp's 1934 cartoon creation, "Lil' Abner" and Billy DeBeck's "Snuffy Smith." She argues, "These were comic images projected upon mountain people—images that, in essence, acted to relieve a prevailing sense of economic anxiety about the Depression by placing at comical distance the poverty that the middle class feared for itself" (39). To learn more, see her article, "'Ghostland': Tourism in Lee Smith's *Oral History*," as well as JW Williamson's book, *Hillbillyland: What the Movies did to the Mountains and what the Mountains did to the Movies*.

⁶ Giardina discusses the process in "Appalachian Images: A Personal History" in *Back Talk from Appalachia*.

⁷ Southern and Appalachian literature depicting strong connections with the earth abound, but to read one that aligns especially well with Rachel's description of Granny Combs, see Ron Rash's *One Foot in Eden*.

⁸ James Moffett, one of the authors of the *Interaction* textbooks, wrote a book about the controversy entitled *Storm in the Mountains*. In his introduction he claims, "I have done the Appalachian fundamentalists the honor of not patronizing them," yet later on he declares that the mountain people suffer from agnosis, stating: "What the textbook rebellion exemplified is the not-wanting-to-know that I have called agnosis. Far from being peculiar to fundamentalists, or mountaineers or the uneducated, agnosis limits the thought and action of virtually everyone everywhere" (187). As could be predicted, his argument angered many Appalachians, including literacy scholar Kimberly Donehower. For her treatment of Moffett and larger literacy issues, see *Rural Literacies*.

⁹ To listen to a 1949 audio recording of one version of "Big Toe," visit the Digital Library of Appalachia at http://www.acadla.org/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/Berea&CISOPTR=404&REC=9. To read a written version of the same story, see Leonard Roberts' *South from Hell-fer-Sartin: Kentucky Mountain Folk Tales*.

¹⁰ Jackie's blindness to this artistic material echoes Gertie Nevels' inability to recognize that any of her Merry Hill neighbors would have made fine models for her carving project. *The Dollmaker's* character, Mrs. Anderson, also has a similar realization when she laments that she

should have painted portraits of people in the housing project, but she does not have this realization until she leaves the neighborhood.

¹¹ In a speech given to conclude Western North Carolina's 2007 "Together We Read" program, Lee Smith made a similar observation about mountain people not necessarily conceiving of themselves as Appalachian: "Also, I think one thing that some of you who are here today who are younger may not understand is that this whole idea of being proud to be an Appalachian person is brand new. When I was growing up in the mountains we were always told that culture existed somewhere else, and when the time came, we were going to be sent off, to get some." To see a clip of this speech, visit <http://www.citizen-times.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=200771202030>

CHAPTER FIVE

INVASION OF THE MOUNTAIN TEACHERS: LITERACY CAMPAIGNS AND CONFLICTS IN LEE SMITH'S WORK

Before [I knew that I could write about Appalachia] I thought that literature had to happen on some sort of high plane. Literally! I thought I had to write about glamorous people, stewardesses or something. Rich people, or people that I didn't know anything about. For one thing, I grew up reading voraciously, but I wasn't ever around anybody who was a writer or a serious sort of literary type, so although I read constantly—I read everything in the library—a lot of it was real schlock [. . .] It was a long time, maybe a year or so after I was in college, that I realized that you didn't have to have huge Biblical plots. It was all right to write about people like Miss [Eudora] Welty wrote about, people that may have even lived in Grundy. (Broughton 88)

In this interview excerpt, Lee Smith's description of what she thought literature was "supposed to be" echoes Denise Giardina's adolescent thoughts about writing. In the same way that Giardina found inspiration through reading Lee Smith's *Blackmountain Breakdown*, Smith discovered similar encouragement from reading James Still's *River of Earth*. Appalachian literary critics often cite *River of Earth* as the first critically acclaimed novel about Appalachia written by an Appalachian,¹ and for Smith, the reading experience proved particularly powerful. The novel chronicles the heart wrenching story of the Baldrige family and their constant struggle to earn a living wage in the coal mines while eking out a living in one isolated mountain cove after another. At the novel's conclusion the father declares that the family will travel for three days and move to Lee Smith's hometown of Grundy, Virginia, where they will "start from scratch" (241). Smith discovered *River of Earth* while a student at Hollins College, and she remembers that she read the passage about Grundy "over and over. I simply could not believe that Grundy was in a novel! In print! Published! Then I finished reading *River of Earth* and burst into tears. Never had I been so moved by a book. In fact it didn't seem like a book at all. *River of Earth* was as real to me as the chair I sat on, as the hollers I'd grown up among" ("Terrain of the

Heart” 280). After this experience Smith finally understood what her writing teachers meant when they advised her to write about what she knew, and she recalls:

Suddenly, lots of the things in my life occurred to me for the first time as stories: my mother and my aunts sitting on the porch talking endlessly about whether one of them had colitis or not; Hardware Breeding, who married his wife, Beulah, four times; how my uncle Curt taught my daddy to drink good liquor; how I got saved at the tent revival; John Hardin’s hanging in the courthouse square; how Petey Chaney rode the flood. (“Terrain of the Heart” 280)

Once Smith felt comfortable telling stories about the kinds of people she knew growing up, she began a long and successful literary career that shows no signs of slowing down. As a senior at Hollins College, Smith published *The Last Day the Dogbushes Bloomed*, and she has since published eleven more novels and three short story collections, seen her stories operate as the base for a musical called *Good Ol’ Girls*, and edited a collection of oral histories about Grundy gathered by high school students entitled *Sitting on the Courthouse Bench*. As with other authors considered in this project, literacy functions as a common trope in much of Smith’s work, particularly in two of her best known novels, *Oral History* (1983) and *Fair and Tender Ladies* (1988). During an interview with Smith in which we discussed the prominence of literacy in her literary depictions of Appalachian life she commented, “I was really interested by your characterizing literacy as including social and cultural literacies [. . .] Because this whole thing, I think that is absolutely central to what I’ve been writing about all these years.” Technical, social, and cultural literacy attainment, as well as the identity conflicts such attainment can cause, figures prominently in *Oral History* and *Fair and Tender Ladies* since both novels feature the entrance of a non-Appalachian teacher into a mountain community. Like Arnow’s Miss Whittle, DeRosier’s Janis Carroll, and Giardina’s Miss Kurtz, the teachers Smith creates privilege their way of speaking, writing, and conceiving of the world over mountain discursive practices. Not

unlike the film crews that descended upon Appalachia during the War on Poverty, Smith's teachers invade mountain communities, bringing with them elements of discourse communities that they assume are superior to any they might find in Appalachia. Consequently, the students of these teachers learn to devalue their mountain heritage, resulting in painful identity conflicts that Smith showcases in her fiction. By highlighting these identity-based dilemmas, Smith urges her audience to recognize the consequences of literacy acquisition for mountain women.

Smith does not introduce a new storyline by writing about outsiders coming into Appalachia with the intent of social and moral uplift through classroom teaching. Since the turn of the century, missionaries have been entering and leaving Appalachia in droves, and for almost as long authors have focused on the tensions created by the entrance of those missionaries into mountain communities. Although Smith draws from this well established literary tradition in *Oral History* and *Fair and Tender Ladies*,² she also focuses specifically on gendered literacy acquisition and the dilemmas such acquisition can cause. In doing so she portrays Appalachia as a feminized space in which women function under an unyielding patriarchal system that renders literacy acquisition especially difficult. In one sense, the mountains enclose and trap the women which live therein, making literacy attainment (technical, social, and cultural) one of the only viable means of escape, at least mentally, if not always physically. Predictably, gaining such literacy also results in a painful split between an Appalachian primary discourse and a secondary discourse embodied by new information that usually judges all things Appalachian as inferior. Yet in another sense, Smith portrays Appalachia itself as feminized. In an interview with Rebecca Smith, Smith comments that women are "bound by family. They're bound by biology. And they're bound by place. Somehow, when I think about that, I think about the mountains, the mountains as womb. I think about geography and physiology together" (22). As discussed in this

project's chapter on Denise Giardina, the geography of Appalachia has long been a site for capitalist exploitation. Companies from the industrial North conveniently drew from the image of a poor, rural Appalachia to advertise their own business propositions as beneficial for mountain residents, even though they often introduced sickness and a dangerous dependency on industry into the lives of mountain people. Similarly, missionaries entering Appalachia to spread the word of God also supported the image of a fixed Appalachia in desperate need of educational help and guidance. By portraying the invasion of such teachers into mountain communities, Smith's novels encourage readers to compare the entrance of timber and coal companies into the Appalachian mountains with the effect generally well-intentioned missionary teachers had on their mountain pupils. During our interview Smith suggested that in some ways Richard's relationship with Dory in *Oral History* parallels the ways "that all these outsiders [mainly timber and coal companies] would come and rape the land." In both cases outside interests invaded the mountains, bringing with them economic and intellectual freedom for some but also poverty and hopelessness for others. While timber and coal companies extracted the natural resources of the mountains, usually at a cost to the environment, missionary teachers also sometimes took advantage of their students, as when Richard assumes an automatically superior position to Dory and leaves her yearning for a life she cannot have. Despite these hardships, the women in both novels make themselves heard through their daughters' voices, private letter writing, or public authorship. Considering *Oral History* and *Fair and Tender Ladies* together allows us to see a progression of silenced feminine voices that gradually gain volume and empowerment—but empowerment at a cost—through literacy attainment.

Private writing and public authorship function as two of the most central ways in which Smith guides her characters to such empowerment. Smith also uses these literacy-focused topics

to draw readers' attention to the access (or lack thereof) reading audiences have historically had to balanced portrayals of Appalachia. *Oral History* and *Fair and Tender Ladies* work as correctives in which Smith formulates literacy narratives that work to re-align reader perceptions of Appalachia. In both novels Smith references a fictional reading audience that we understand represents the real reading audience of Smith's work. Smith formulates this traditionally defined reading audience as sharing similar access to literary and cultural instruction, thus resulting in a fairly homogenous set of values that readers bring to literature. Although readers (both fictional and real) will no doubt have varying types of knowledge and literacies from which to draw, Smith makes clear that members of this audience all bring a similar set of cultural judgments to their reading. As an Appalachian author, Smith is all too familiar with writing within, out of, and against mountain stereotypes, and she clearly understands that many of her readers approach her books with preconceived notions of Appalachia. To combat those notions, Smith cleverly presents a fictional reading audience contained within each book that only has access to certain types of printed materials made available to them in the story, thus fictionalizing the real literary history of Appalachia. That is, by modeling her fictional audience's exposure to limited portrayals of Appalachia, Smith comments upon the skewed image of the southern mountains so long perpetuated in literature and popular media that her own readers have experienced and bring to her texts. Ultimately Smith creates *Oral History* and *Fair and Tender Ladies* as counter-narratives that rhetorically work to re-shape her reading audience's perceptions of Appalachia, Appalachian women, and literacy. Smith models dynamically complex interactions between writers and readers, speakers and listeners in both novels, inviting readers to take on a new understanding of what "counts" as Appalachian literacy. As Smith guides readers through this process of realigning firmly entrenched cultural values and attitudes about Appalachia, she also

illuminates the identity conflicts inherent in literacy acquisition, all the while repeatedly highlighting how her version of the mountains differs from the version to which her fictional reading audience has access.

In *Oral History* the main storyline revolves around Richmond-born Richard Burlage's five-month journey into the Virginia mountains to teach school, where he becomes romantically involved with Almarine Cantrell's daughter, Dory. Dory's character embodies almost every past stereotype of Appalachia as a fixed, feminine region: she is beautiful, docile, seemingly unchanging, and silent. Throughout the novel Smith draws from various character interactions to illustrate that although Dory never narrates her own section, the acquisition of new literacies does bring about change within and around her character. As with the entrance of outsider teachers in other stories about Appalachia, Richard represents a world into which Dory cannot enter, and the fate of their courtship seems doomed from the beginning. The novel opens with the stilted writing of college student Jennifer, Dory's granddaughter, who has come to visit the Appalachian side of her family that she never knew in hopes of collecting data for an oral history project. Jennifer's narrative bookends the novel, making a rhetorical statement about how academic versions of Appalachia always seem to have the first and last word when chronicling the region for readers. Richard's written reflections combine with "oral" stories told from a diverse cast of mountain people to comprise the bulk of the story, but early on readers understand that the fictional reading audience contained in the book must rely on Jennifer and Richard to tell the story of Appalachia, one that remains woefully incomplete without the inclusion of "oral" stories like the ones told by Granny Younger. Conversely, Smith provides her real reading audience with the stories told by various characters surrounding Richard's narrative,

a strategy that illustrates the disparity between Richard's telling of the mountains and native accounts.

Smith grants her readers access to "oral" stories told by a cast of mountain characters that differ significantly from Richard's stuffy written prose about the area and its people. Readers encounter the character of Granny Younger as their first guide, a feisty old mountain woman who announces early on, "I'll tell you a story that's truer than true, and nothing so true is so pretty [. . .] The way I tell a story is the way I want to, and iffen you mislike it, you don't have to hear" (28). Granny addresses the reader directly in several other sections, prompting literary critic Katherine Henninger to speculate that Granny's "frequent asides to the audience may encourage readers' intimate participation in her oral exchange, or it may position readers as those who likely 'know' what they know from images" (164). Granny's addresses do encourage reader participation while also positioning readers in the way that Henninger suggests, but most important for Smith's purposes in re-aligning audience perceptions of Appalachia, Granny's usage of "you" jolts readers out of a comfortably complacent reading position. Smith overtly plays with the caricature of the Appalachian granny figure to challenge the stereotypes in which readers have been schooled. Unlike the tired, worn-out character so long perpetuated in literature and film, Granny Younger brims with an energy that makes clear she has a story to tell. She demands that readers listen, a strategy that Smith effectively uses to alert readers to their prior perceptions of mountain women.

Since the novel's publication literary critics have theorized about the irony of a written novel containing oral stories, and Anne Goodwyn Jones observes that calling "a *written fiction Oral History* is Lee Smith's latest, best joke" (137). Dorothy Dodge Robbins argues that the thesis of *Oral History* "can be reduced to 'oral good, written bad,'" while Katherine Henninger

posits that Smith only “sets up these familiar binaries [. . .] to break them down,” instead proposing that “*Oral History* becomes a self-reflexive meditation not only on the politics and ethical responsibilities of storytelling but also on the place of the southern writer in the ongoing construction of southern ‘place’” (135, 162-63). The book undoubtedly asks readers to question narrative perspective and the notion of “truth” in a post-modern world, as when Fred Hobson notes that the oral stories contained in *Oral History* are no more reliable than written records of history (28). Yet while provoking these questions about truth, history, and place, the novel also asks difficult questions about representation. Smith urges readers to ponder why Dory does not have her own narrative section, while Richard rambles on for pages at a time in his journal. Smith uses characters like Richard and Jennifer to represent the literary construction of Appalachia, while Dory’s character serves as a kind of cultural place marker. Like Appalachia, she has a story to tell, but readers are bewildered to learn that they never hear it from her own lips or read it from her own pen. Instead, the only version of Dory’s story the fictional reading audience has to go from comes from Richard’s memoirs which are eventually published “to universal if somewhat limited acclaim, by LSU Press” and whose contents Smith never makes clear, while the real reading audience hears a distilled version of what happens to Dory after Richard’s departure through Dory’s daughter, Sally (291). Jennifer’s narrative presumably makes its way into a college classroom, and when we consider that the fictional reading audience in the novel must rely only on Jennifer and Richard to narrate the story, we understand these limitations as reflective of the problem that Linda Scott DeRosier identifies in her memoirs and works to overturn: such accounts scarcely communicate a balanced account of Appalachia, and Jennifer’s sophomoric prose combined with Richard’s sentimentally overwrought musings about mountaineers hardly convey an accurate representation of Hoot Owl Holler and its residents.

Conversely, as readers of the novel, Smith makes us privy to the long string of orally rendered stories comprising the majority of the book, and we are able to consider a more varied, and more complete, account of the region and its people. Her careful juxtaposition of the access her fictional reading audience has to Appalachia (through Richard and Jennifer) with the access she grants her real reading audience (through the “oral” stories that surround Richard and Jennifer’s writings) encourage readers to re-evaluate their own perceptions of Appalachia, how those were formed, and to be troubled by it. The fact that Dory Cantrell, one of the novel’s main characters, does not narrate her own section parallels the way that for roughly the first half of the twentieth century, Appalachian people did not tell their own story in printed, published form, at least not to a literary audience of much size. Near the end of *Oral History* one of Dory’s daughters, Sally, fills in the gaps of Dory’s life for readers, but Sally’s story is an oral one and thus not one read by the fictional reading audience contained within the pages of *Oral History* (though Sally’s husband does, of course, hear her story). Smith’s narrative form—and Dory’s silencing—are indicative of the ways in which Appalachian voices have been muted in the past, and while the fictional reading audience within the novel does not have access to Sally’s story, it nonetheless operates as a corrective for Smith’s real reading audience, and through Sally we glimpse the consequences of literacy acquisition for Dory.

In a later and somewhat more hopeful book, Smith continues this narrative line of fictional and real audiences in *Fair and Tender Ladies*. In this novel, like Richard Burlage’s entrance into Dory Cantrell’s life, a missionary teacher, Miss Gertrude Torrington, introduces a similar discursive dilemma for the novel’s protagonist, Ivy Rowe. Ivy tells her story in epistolary form, and even though these personal letters to loved ones comprise the entirety of the novel, very few of her letters are read by other characters. Considering the content of some of Ivy’s

letters, we understand that she responds to someone reading her letters, but Smith also makes clear that within the novel, Ivy's letter writing operates within a private sphere. Even when her letters are read by other characters, that reading takes place with one other person, not a large reading audience. Consequently, the large, traditionally defined audience that Smith fictionalizes in *Oral History* and in *Fair and Tender Ladies* never reads Ivy's letters, though they do apparently read writing by Ivy's "famous author" daughter, Joli. Conversely, in the same way that Smith grants the real reading audience access to Richard's journal entries and the oral stories in *Oral History*, she also provides us with access to Ivy's letters throughout the novel. Through these letters we learn of the discursive divide Ivy faces when Miss Torrington offers to take her to Boston to attend school, and we also witness the painful distancing that occurs between Ivy and her daughter Joli when Ivy "makes her" attend high school in town and then college away from her home on Sugar Fork. Despite the pain involved in this transition, Joli goes on to become a successful author, and she tells stories set in Appalachia drawn from the folklore and stories her mother Ivy shares with her. In this way, Joli's success with the fictional reading audience contained within the pages of *Fair and Tender Ladies* makes clear to the real reading audience that a more balanced account of Appalachia has finally found printed representation for Smith's fictional reading audience, an audience that represents readers from the early twentieth century onward. The real reading audience hears Ivy's story through her letters, and even though Ivy never conceives of herself as a "real" writer, her beautifully wrought sentiments suggest otherwise, and Smith's epistolary form challenges readers to question their notions of literacy and authorship. Smith commented in an interview with Virginia Smith that she has "always been really interested in this notion of women's creativity as being quite different from men's. It is not public; it's so rarely public" (786). In *Fair and Tender Ladies* Smith takes on this notion of

private female creativity, constructing a path to the public realm from Ivy's private letter writing to Joli's public authorship. Moreover, as readers we realize that this public voicing comes at a heavy cost to family relationships when Ivy writes that "Joli has broken my heart" and has "travelled far beyond me now" (271).

Smith's personal and literary experiences have exposed her to many situations similar to Joli and Ivy's literacy-initiated distancing, and during our interview she discussed one such instance that parallels the dilemmas this project explores. Smith explained that to celebrate the publication of *Sitting on the Courthouse Bench*, Grundy High School seniors who participated in the oral history project attended a banquet in their honor. By this point in the school year many of the students had applied to colleges, and according to Smith, all of them were receiving acceptances and were able to pick the college of their choice. She goes on to recall,

And one girl from a family that had absolutely no advantages at all, her mother came, you know, to the banquet, and a whole bunch of other children. And this girl had just been accepted with full tuition to everywhere she had applied, and she was going to go to Berea [. . .] Her mother came up, and this getting into Berea had just happened, and I said, "I guess you're just really proud of your daughter," and she just burst into tears. She said, "It won't never be the same after this." She said, "She'll go off, and then she'll come back and she won't know us no more." And I said, "What do you mean?" And she said, "She just won't really know us anymore. It'll all be different from now on. I've only got," whatever it was, "six more months with her." You know, and it was like, that's exactly what you're talking about.

The reaction that this girl's mother has mirrors Ivy's feelings about Joli leaving and "travelling far beyond" her, even though Ivy encourages Joli to leave home and learn new things (271).

Although this incident occurred after the publication of *Fair and Tender Ladies*, it points to the ways in which Smith fictionalizes reality-based conflict and change caused by literacy. Unlike this woman's sad declaration about losing ties with her daughter, in Smith's version of this story

the daughter (Joli) goes on to make her voice heard, even though that voicing results in a loss of connection with her home and her family.

Examples like these characterize much of Smith's work, and the bridge that she builds through her fiction writing between imagined and real literacy situations finds grounding in her literacy work with Appalachian students. In 1995 Smith won the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Writers' Award, and the grant allowed her to take a three-year sabbatical from teaching at North Carolina State University to devote the majority of her time to writing. As part of the award's acceptance guidelines, she also affiliated herself with a community organization that helped expose people to language, writing, and reading in places where they might not otherwise have such experiences. For her community partnership, Smith chose to work in the adult literacy program at the Hindman Settlement School in Kentucky, an organization where she had experience teaching in the creative writing summer workshops. Smith noted during our interview that over the span of three years in which she worked intermittently with Hindman's students, all of the pupils in her literacy classes were women. When asked whether these students faced the sort of identity conflict similar to the women in her fiction Smith responded,

Oh yeah. In fact, many of them were only able, initially, to get into the literacy program if they were able to get away from their husbands who didn't want them to learn how to read or parents who didn't want them to learn how to read or maybe, say, they'd gotten pregnant when they were real young, and they're all real religious. Nobody ever thought of an abortion it seemed like to me. You know, and they hadn't gone to school, they'd dropped out. Or they stayed at home to be the one that helped Mama take care of the other children and all these kinds of things.

Smith's reflections about why so many of her students were unable to stay in school or become technically literate connects with her previously quoted statement that women are "bound by family. They're bound by biology. And they're bound by place," and for the majority of her students, seeking literacy instruction required a great deal of courage, fortitude, and willingness

to create conflict within their own family relationships (Rebecca Smith 22). The same holds true for the women Katherine Kelleher Sohn chronicles in her study, and these women's stories of struggle and hardship to seek literacy instruction (technical, social, and cultural) help explain why so much Appalachian literature dealing with literacy-initiated conflicts focuses on women: even though Appalachians sometimes consider literate activity "woman's work," as Anita Puckett demonstrates in her research, in other cases many mountain women must wage their own personal battle against an oppressive patriarchal system to gain access to literacy instruction, only to find that such acquisition introduces an entirely new set of conflicts, along with its liberating empowerments.

Florida Slone, one of Smith's students at the Hindman Settlement School, faced many obstacles in obtaining literacy. In addition to fulfilling the lifetime roles of wife and mother, Slone also suffered a childhood bout of typhoid fever that resulted in a lack of formal schooling. Yet once she attended the classes at Hindman she excelled, and during our interview Smith described Slone as the "shining star of the program." In 1993 Appalshop produced a documentary about Slone, and when describing Slone on their web site, they state that "now that [Slone's] children are grown, and her husband has died, Florida has had to become more independent. She returned to school, learned to read and write, and got her driver's license." Smith provided even more context about Slone's life during our interview, explaining that one of Slone's main purposes in learning to read and write was to write down the ballads that she had created and had been singing for the majority of her life. Smith worked with Slone and wrote the ballads down for her until Slone could transcribe them herself. Smith explains that Slone went on to print her songs "in a little book," make a cd, and travel to various places to speak about the importance of literacy. These achievements coupled with Slone's obtaining her driver's license

suggest that literacy had a permanently transformative effect on her life, but Smith references the cost of living within firmly entrenched gender roles when she explains what happened to Slone after the documentary and after Smith's time with the program ended:

This is so predictable. After I left, and I'm just saying that in terms of time. It didn't have anything to do with me. She fell in love with some old man in her church, and guess what his name was. This is a great name. I could never even make this name up. His name was Virgil Lively. And he did not believe that a woman ought to be out there parading herself around in public. And he sort of stopped her signing in public and so on, and driving. [. . .] She was at a high school level by then, or a junior high anyway. And he said all a woman needed to read was the Bible. And she stopped coming.

Consequently, Slone's driving about town on her own, public speaking about literacy, and "parading herself" came to an end, and though she never lived down her local fame as a ballad singer, in many ways she lost the voice that she had worked so hard to gain as a student at the Hindman Settlement School.

Although Smith met and worked with Slone over a decade after the publication of *Oral History*, Smith knew many women like her whose voices also remained silent, bound by the men in their lives and the sometimes claustrophobic mountains in which they lived. Smith's most salient fictional example of such silencing occurs with *Oral History's* Dory Cantrell. When asked during our interview about why Dory does not narrate her own section, Smith responded that while she did not consciously think about Dory's lack of narrative commentary while writing the book, Smith reflected, "I think maybe in my mind she already didn't have a voice, because she was so circumscribed by family, by circumstance." She goes on to comment,

You know, and I just couldn't imagine, exactly, her speaking. You know, getting out of her situation. And I had heard so much, and so many, many stories about [. . .] girls that never got more than thirty miles from where they were from and didn't even know that they were so close to home because there was a mountain in between and they'd been taken by a circular road.

Like the women Smith describes, Dory never travels far from her childhood home on Hoot Owl Holler, and once she marries Little Luther Wade she spends the remainder of her life in the Blackey Coal Camp until she commits suicide by lying down on the train tracks. As readers we never know Dory's thoughts about her own life, but Richard Burlage's written musings about her take up much of the novel, and his perceptions reflect the attitudes and beliefs many early twentieth-century missionaries held about Appalachian people, especially mountain women. Like William Goodell Frost's infamous 1899 essay in which he called Appalachian people America's contemporary ancestors, Richard expects to find a different world, a world of the past upon his entrance into the mountains. He writes in his journal that he "intend[s] this journal to be a valid record of what I regard as essentially a pilgrimage, a simple geographical pilgrimage, yes, but also a pilgrimage back through time, a pilgrimage to a simpler era, back—dare I hope it—to the very roots of consciousness and belief" (93). Richard hopes to find a sense of simplicity that he lacks at home in Richmond, where his depressed, war-scarred brother represents a modernist frustration with life. Richard's commentary also evokes typical mountain crusade rhetoric since he sees himself as someone with the capacity to teach mountain residents about life outside of Appalachia, and he places himself far above them in the social hierarchy.

Like many of the missionaries who entered Appalachia in the early part of the twentieth century, Richard assumes an Orientalist perspective in describing the region as remotely exotic and enticing. During Richard's train ride Smith provides a particularly revealing passage which casts him as a colonizing dominant male entering the womb-like feminine space of the mountains:

Viewing this virtually inaccessible land from the jolting train, I was struck forcibly with a thought: seeing this, who would choose to live here? And yet there is an inescapable appeal, I find, in the very strangeness, the very inaccessibility. As our little train jolted

ever farther into the rough terrain, I realized that, unwittingly, I had probably picked the most remote area still left in these United States; certainly I could not have felt more a stranger had I just entered India. (105)

Richard describes the land as “virtually inaccessible,” yet as the train carries him into “the rough terrain,” he accesses and enters it nonetheless, symbolizing the eventual male control he will exert over Dory, her body, and her literacy instruction. Notably the same train that brings Richard into the mountains kills Dory years later, and as in Harriette Simpson Arnow’s *The Dollmaker*, the locomotive operates as a symbol of modernity, industrialization, and a discursive world to which Dory never gains complete entrance. Conversely, Richard fancies that he has full access to the mountains, and he imagines this Appalachian world as many authors described it in the early 1900s—invitingly quaint, picturesque, and beautiful. Instead he finds a rough wilderness susceptible to the extraction of its natural resources by timber and coal companies and teachers like himself.

To illustrate this sort of susceptibility, Smith describes a scene in which Richard romanticizes circumstances that do not exist in reality. After arriving in town, a local man, Wall Johnson, picks Richard up to drive him to his school, and a woman rides in the back of Wall’s truck. Richard finds it curious that she does not ride in the cab with them, but he accepts Wall’s terse explanation that it “ain’t that far nohow” (107). As a diversion during the ride, Richard begins fantasizing about her beauty, which he cannot see since her back is turned to him (107). Richard’s ex-fiancé Melissa has recently broken off their engagement, and he resorts to “fancying, idly, the girl’s face [in the truck]—giving her all Melissa’s most attractive attributes, yet correcting Melissa’s flaws—in my mind’s eye I created for this unknown girl a Grecian nose rather than Melissa’s shallow little upturned snout, for instance” (107). The girl that he imagines represents Richard’s thoughts about the Appalachian region, and in the supposedly serene

mountains Richard hopes to remedy the “flaws” of his Richmond life and the harrows of modernity, including a failed engagement, strained family relationships, and a brother recovering from the horrors of war. At one point Richard even records that he “passed the ride in a trancelike state of speculation, and wonderment at the beauties of nature unrolling before my eyes” (108). This wonderment continues until Wall reaches their destination, and when Richard looks up to see the truck retreating in the distance he glimpses his first look at the girl’s face he had imagined to be so flawless:

as I turned to watch him go, I received the greatest shock of my journey thus far. The girl in the back of the truck, whose beauty I had occupied myself in imagining all that tortuous last leg of my trip, this girl looked up at me then, and grinned. She was hideous. A purple birthmark covered nearly half of her face, and her left eye, somewhat larger than the right, wandered off to focus on something beyond me, yet the right eye stayed fixed on mine. “Bye-bye!” she called, waving childishly. (109)

Like the girl’s birthmark, the mountains which Richard enter are accumulating marks of their own from timber and coal industries. Critic Suzanne Jones helps explain Richard’s fantasy when she comments that “over the years American writers have perceived Appalachia differently depending on how America has perceived itself” (101). Jones’ statement certainly applies to Richard, and in his quest for beauty and tranquility he instead finds in this girl a stark representation of what he deems horrific, echoing the consequences of industrialization for many (though not all) mountain people.

While Richard finds Wall Johnson’s female companion’s appearance and mannerisms abhorrent, he encounters someone he perceives to be her exact opposite when he meets Dory Cantrell. When Richard begins teaching school he characterizes one of his students, Jink Cantrell, as “exceptionally bright and able,” and he writes to Jink’s family, asking if they will allow Richard to tutor him after school (115). Jink’s father, Almarine, does not want to feel

obligated to Richard for his services, and he sends Jink's older sister, Dory, to convey the message to Richard. When recording this conversation exchange in his diary Richard labels the entry "September 29th—Important!," and he describes Dory as the epitome of Petrarchan beauty:

I must say without preamble that she is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen, with an ethereal, timeless, other-worldly quality about her. Her alabaster face is framed by finespun golden curls, almost like a frizz, about her head—hair like a Botticelli! Her eyes are deep, limitless violet. Her lips are red and full. When she smiles, a blush and a dimple grace her smooth fair cheeks. Her rough attire—a dark green wool skirt, brown handmade sweater, tan, nondescript coat—served only to accentuate the delicacy of her beauty. (116)

Instead of commenting on the economic circumstances in Dory's life that necessitate things like handmade clothing, Richard seems concerned only with the aesthetic effect such "rough" items have on Dory's beauty. He even goes on to call her "a girl from another world" (117). Richard has entered another womblike world—and another set of discursive norms—in Appalachia, and much like Jennifer's narrative that frames the novel, he appears incapable of viewing the mountains and its people in a non-romantic way. After one brief encounter with Dory in the schoolhouse Richard refers to her as "my mountain girl," and before he ever visits Dory's home in Hoot Owl Holler, Richard imagines its "high solitude" and "the clean purity of [Dory's] barren life" (119, 121). Almost immediately following their first meeting, Richard has already appropriated Dory as an object which he exerts control over, and he has created a mental image of her which he keeps throughout the remainder of the narrative. Instead of allowing readers to easily align their perceptions of Appalachia with Richard's, Smith sandwiches his journal entries with "oral" stories told from a host of mountain characters, virtually forcing readers to notice the disparity of portrayals.

In a subsequent conversation following his visit to Hoot Owl Holler, Richard becomes firmly entrenched in his superior position, and he assigns himself a great deal of importance: "I

saw myself then in her eyes as some superior being from another place, with a fund of 'knowledge' beyond her ken. Thus I realized how I seem to her. I understood my position and my responsibility" (128). Richard also understands the difference in his Richmond-based discourse community and Dory's mountain-based one. Despite this knowledge, Richard nonetheless remains enamored with Dory, and when he tells his elderly friend Aldous Rife about his feelings, Aldous administers a stern warning to "forget her" because "She is not suitable. She is not your equal. You are a sojourner here, and the least you will do is create longings in that girl which her life can never fill. That is the least you can do. The worst you can do is far graver" (132). Foreshadowing Dory's eventual suicide, Aldous warns Richard against crossing the discursive divide that separates Richard from Dory, since Aldous believes Dory could never achieve full membership in any discourse community other than her Appalachian one. Richard initially struggles with this advice, even making lists in his journal entitled "Reasons for pursuing Miss Dory Cantrell" and "Reasons to forget Miss Cantrell entirely," but he eventually succumbs to his physical attraction to her, and the two engage in an affair that produces twin daughters that Richard never learns about (134).

While Richard comments on the intellectual potential he sees in Jink, he reasons that Dory "is ignorant and largely uneducated; such a gap exists between us that it could never be truly bridged. Not even by any attempt on my part to educate her" (134). Richard automatically comes to this conclusion, and he never "attempts" to educate her, presumably because as a beautiful feminine possession, he either deems her incapable of learning or fears that Dory would no longer be a possession if he taught her, though he never mentions this possibility in his diary entries. Moreover, Richard wants to keep his image of Dory as a fixed, static, mountain beauty intact, and teaching her would cause change, thus destroying his image of her. Instead, Richard

continues to court Dory, and literary critic Paula Gallant Eckard notes that “Burlage’s exploitation destroyed [the] harmony [that Dory had with her surroundings], and Dory was ultimately cast into the unique position of being an Other in both Burlage’s world and her own” (128). Although Eckard romanticizes the “harmony” Dory had with her surroundings, she highlights an important point: the dilemma that Eckard describes mirrors the conflict faced by the people transitioning from one discourse community to another discussed by literacy scholar James Paul Gee. Both Eckard and Gee focus on the difficulties involved in this doubled othering. Anne Goodwyn Jones even declares Dory a “victim” of literacy, and Smith makes clear that Richard introduces a way of life to Dory that she comprehends and yet never achieves in her own life (137).

In the same way that Richard deems Dory incapable of ever spanning the gap that exists between them, he also assumes the authority to literally re-write Dory’s life experiences. When the couple makes love for the first time Richard writes in his journal that “for a second, too, I was distressed, I confess it, by Dory’s apparent knowledge of lovemaking, but then I recalled her upbringing in that randy cabin with all those boys, the animals around the mountain farm, and I understood her desire to be a kind of purity” (146). Instead of acknowledging Dory’s sexual past, Richard inscribes his own version of Dory’s story in his journal. In doing so he erases her personal history and replaces it with a pastoral image of innocence and bucolic purity that echoes travel writing about Appalachia from the early part of the twentieth century. In this same scene he goes on to portray Dory as the ultimate representation of Appalachian womb-like femininity when he writes, “I try to imagine taking Dory to a picture show, walking along a sidewalk with her, as we did tonight, yet she seems to exist for me only in that shadowy setting—those three mountains, that closed valley—whence she came” (147). The “closed valley” from which Dory

came is also the same valley that Richard enters, both literally (through Dory) and figuratively (through his teaching in the mountains), and in only being able to imagine Dory in her Appalachian home, Richard succeeds in rendering her immobile, utterly incapable of change in his view, even when exposed to new literacies. Just as missionary workers were historically invested in putting Appalachia “in its place,” so too is Richard eager to keep Dory in hers, especially since in his view she represents a fixed point from which he can measure his own progress during his Appalachian journey.

Richard’s progress includes efforts at culturally homogenizing his mountain pupils, and though a bathing scene Smith symbolically illustrates Richard’s desire to culturally cleanse Dory. Richard’s journal entry explains that he uses a washcloth from home to wash her, and Smith’s description illustrates the ways in which Richard imagines Dory as a space to invade: “I see this white cloth with its pine-embroidered border, see it *there* [in Richmond], and then I see it here. I rub it across her pubic hair, between her legs. She is amused by my insistence upon these baths, used, as she is, to bathing seldom in Hoot Owl Holler. I soap her thighs, her knees, her feet, and she squeals and giggles” (157). In this scene Dory embodies the yonic representation of Appalachia, and geography and physiology are once again bound together. The expensive cloth Richard brings with him from Richmond implies a wholly different set of cultural standards than Dory’s mountain set of values, and by cleansing her genitalia—the essence of her femininity and Appalachia as womb—Richard attempts to sanitize and homogenize Dory’s fertile womanhood and the wild, mountainous land that surrounds him, replacing them instead with the dainty, embroidered cloth representative of his life in Richmond. Likewise, by washing Dory with the cloth he submerses his Richmond-based set of beliefs within the supposed feminine wilds of

Appalachia, no doubt a statement of rebellion against the middle class set of dominant values from which he perceives himself to be escaping.

Dory's family does not accept the relationship between Dory and Richard, and once Dory's family appears at the schoolhouse to take her back to Hoot Owl Holler, Richard retreats to the familiar boarding house in town. As he recovers from an illness he mulls over his impending return to Richmond and the possibility of Dory joining him. He has promised to take her and even sends a note asking her to join him (a note that she never receives since her jealous step-sister Ora Mae does not deliver it to her), yet he fails to imagine Dory anywhere else but in the mountains. He writes in his journal, "I lay in bed all that night, it seemed, imagining it, but I confess I could see her in no setting other than the lovely wilderness of her birth, against no background other than these high mountains which are her home. A failure of the imagination perhaps, or a presentiment of the sort which has characterized my journey since it first began" (163). Here Richard reveals a rare glimpsing of his preconceived notions of Appalachia, admitting that they have characterized his "sojourn" into the mountains. Even so, he places Dory in a fixed Appalachian setting once again, apparently incapable of imagining her any other way. During our interview Smith commented that if Ora Mae had given Dory Richard's letter, "I think that probably Dory would've gone to Richmond and it would've been a disaster. Because I don't think Richard Burlage was smart enough or strong enough to have made it work." Here Smith notably places the onus on Richard, not Dory. When we consider that Richard's perceptions of the mountains represent those of a large reading audience, we understand that Smith ultimately suggests that any failure to see true representations of Appalachia falls on the interpreter, not the subject.

Richard returns to Richmond, marries, and has children, yet he returns to the mountains in 1934 to take photographs of the area. He fancies himself as an artist, having temporarily “deserted literature for the relatively new field of photography” (222). He invades the mountains once again, and Suzanne Jones contends that “with Richard, Smith suggests that the artist can exploit the land and its people just as surely as those who purchase the mineral rights” (110). Smith titles the journal entries chronicling his return “Richard Burlage Discourses Upon the Circumstances Concerning His Collection of Appalachian Photographs, c. 1934,” and his overwrought writing style coupled with his smug observations make his assumed superior position painfully clear to readers. In the same way that he fixes Dory in his imagination, he also renders the subjects of his photographs incapable of expressing themselves, as when he describes one woman as

a young mother sitting patiently on the curb waiting for somebody as if she has all day or perhaps all month to wait, which perhaps she has, a filthy squirming barefoot baby on her lap, her plaid dress torn at the armpit, her eyes huge and dark and tubercular and staring straight into the camera, her lips parted slightly as if to utter something she cannot articulate, something which I feel I captured, nonetheless, in this photograph. (224)

Here Richard literally and figuratively frames this woman as verbally inarticulate and presumably illiterate as well, yet he feels he has “captured” her essence in his art. Just as Dory remains silent and unable to tell her story, so too does this woman in Richard’s photograph. Richard best sums up his feelings about the people of Appalachia when he reflects that “my vantage point on the hairpin turn of Hurricane Mountain, facing this coal camp, made me feel omniscient: I could view it all and view it whole, the people tiny, not real people, not at all, the cars and trucks nothing but toys” (231). The technology of photography allows Richard to distance himself even further from the Appalachians he frames in his pictures, and he views their dire situations as mere subject matter. He first invades the mountains, introducing new literacies

to Dory's life which he never fulfills, and in this second return he profits from the artistic exploitation in which he engages, since he eventually sells his memoirs which presumably contain some of these images.

Even though Smith depicts Richard as a convenient character to dislike, he also serves an important rhetorical function in the novel by chronicling the details of his entry into Appalachia for the non-Appalachian reader. Like Linda Scott DeRosier's sections in *Creeker* and *Songs of Life in Grace* in which she explains certain facets of Appalachian culture or language, Richard describes his journey into Appalachia in such a way that allows non-Appalachian readers to better understand his circumstances as he perceives them. His entries also provide basic information for reading audiences, which allows non-Appalachian readers to learn some of the native folklore and dialect presented in the "oral" sections, such as Granny Younger's. When Richard first "sets out" for Hoot Owl Holler, his diary entry reads like a guide for the adventurous traveler, and Richard puts certain terms in quotes and then explains them, something he apparently deems necessary for his future non-Appalachian, memoir-purchasing audience (122). He even explains that he is "what they call a 'foreigner.' As they use it, this term does not necessarily refer to someone from another country, or even from another state, but simply to *anybody* who was not born in this area of the county" (123). He continues to describe other words specific to a mountain vocabulary, and when asked during our interview whether Smith intended Richard to serve as a guide for the non-Appalachian reader she responded, "at a certain point I realized that [. . .] it would be helpful [for non-native readers] if I could have an outsider and give his perceptions as he got to know the place where he was. That that would be interesting, and particularly to tell as he went in, as he traveled by train and got into the region and what his thoughts were and what his impressions were [and I thought] that that might be

helpful.” While Richard does help demystify certain elements of Appalachian dialect, his character also represents the ideological attitudes Appalachian missionary workers and other visitors held about the region in the early and mid-twentieth century.

Like many men during the first half of the twentieth century, Richard not only views females like Dory as fixed in their environment, but he also considers males like her brother Jink better suited for “serious” academic subjects. Consequently, Richard spends time with Jink both inside and outside of the classroom, and he has a substantial effect on the way Jink perceives himself and his mountain culture. Unlike with Dory, Smith grants Jink his own narrative section, and through it readers learn that as with many literacy-initiated changes, Richard’s entrance into Jink’s life brings with it conflict and personal strife. While the mountains enclose and entrap many of the women in Smith’s fiction, they simultaneously enclose and comfort Jink. At the beginning of his section Jink explains that he often retreats to a spot high in the branches of a sycamore tree, and on this particular day he goes there to think over his upcoming participation in the day’s hog killing. He refers to his seating area as “the mother-seat,” signaling an inherent protectiveness about the branches that envelop him. As he gazes out over the mountains he imagines that he can fly, a symbolic representation of the freedom Richard introduced but did not fulfill and for which Jink desperately longs. As he takes imaginary flight, Jink remembers the poem Richard read to him about Wyncken, Blyknen, and Nod, and he remembers an infamous line from Book II of *The Odyssey* but changes it slightly to “rosy-finger dawn” instead of “rosy-fingered dawn” (190). As Jink mulls over the literary themes Richard introduced to him, he also thinks about the ethical lessons Richard tried to instill in him about the immorality of slavery and racism. Suzanne Jones portrays Richard’s effect on Jink as a positive one, arguing that Richard provides “Jink with a more sensitive model of manhood than that he has learned from his

kinfolk,” and she concludes that “after Richard leaves the hollow, Jink bemoans his departure as the loss of an alternative way of life. Soon Jink falls to imitating the violent ways of the men around him” (111). While Richard does introduce Jink to a much wider world, both in terms of literature and morality, his influence is not as benevolent as Jones suggests. Instead, Richard’s lessons about standard English resonate with Jink in the same way that Linda Scott DeRosier’s encounter with Miss Janis Carroll linger with her. Consequently, Jink learns to devalue his native dialect and repeatedly corrects himself when narrating his own section. Eventually Jink’s correction occurs “naturally” when he explains the kinds of songs sung at the hog killing which he attends later in the day: “Little Luther went on singing a whole bunch of stuff you don’t hear him sing when the womenfolks and girls is around [. . .] Some of the time they was—were—out there at the hog-killing and some of the time they were up at the house getting ready to put up the meat” (199). In this passage Jink reveals his linguistic transition into the discursive world Richard represents, and at the end of his narrative readers learn about the dried up orange Jink has saved since Richard gave it to him. While holding it, he considers the orange’s Florida origins, and he thinks to himself “how I’d up and leave here after while, me and [my younger sister] Mary we’d up and leave and strike out walking as far as we could acrost the big round world” (212). While not all markers of Jink’s Appalachian dialect have disappeared, Richard’s teachings have introduced enough literacy-initiated conflict to cause self-monitoring and a deep desire to leave his mountain home. Like Reuben in *The Dollmaker*, Jink’s gender grants him the ability to leave, and through Ora Mae’s narration readers learn that he leaves the mountains, apparently permanently (221).

While both Jink and Richard leave Hoot Owl Holler, Dory remains trapped. She later marries Little Luther Wade and has two children with him (Sally and Lewis Ray) in addition to

the twins (Pearl and Maggie) Richard fathered. As with Dory, the mountains confine her daughter Sally, and Sally tells her husband Roy that as a child she “remember[ed] us all getting in that old Dodge out in the yard and taking [an imaginary] trip to the West” (241). A symbol of mobility, the junk car provides an escape that Sally never finds in real life, yet she does narrate her own section. Through Sally readers learn of Dory’s suicidal demise, and Sally provides the only voice Dory ever receives in the novel, explaining that there was “a place inside [Dory that] was empty that we couldn’t fill” (248). Even so, Sally’s story is an oral one and heard only by Sally’s husband and Smith’s real audience, not the fictional reading audience contained within the pages of the novel. They must instead rely on Jennifer and Richard’s versions of events. This authorial decision on Smith’s part reflects the history of written representations of Appalachia, since for so long reading audiences encountered skewed portrayals of the area and its people. At the novel’s conclusion, especially after “hearing” Sally’s story, readers understand all that they would miss if they only trusted in Richard and Jennifer to guide them through the mountains. This understanding prompts readers to begin realigning their perceptions of the mountains, even though the novel’s representative of Appalachia—Dory—never tells her own story. Conversely, in Smith’s next novel, *Fair and Tender Ladies*, Ivy Rowe’s daughter, Joli, works as an author and shares her version of mountain lore with the fictional reading audience within the book, while Smith gives her real audience access to Ivy’s private letters.

Similar to the matriarchal line of literacy attainment Linda Scott DeRosier traces back to her grandmother Emma and her mother Grace, Smith sets up a generational model of feminized literacy acquisition and subsequent public voicing in *Fair and Tender Ladies* that begins with the storytelling sisters, Gaynelle and Virgie Cline. In a letter to her Dutch pen pal (who never responds to Ivy’s letters) Ivy explains that the women are “maiden ladys” and live an isolated,

simple life on Hell Mountain (33).³ Ivy goes on to speculate, “Dont nobody know how they live exackly Daddy said, they do not farm nor raise a thing but beans and flowers in the yard, nor have a cow, but folks takes them food just to hear ther storeys. I think myself they live on storeys, they do not need much food” (33). In the same way that Smith earns a living by writing her stories, according to Ivy, the Cline sisters find sustenance in the stories they tell. Ivy also draws both strength and creativity from the tales that the sisters share with her family, including Old Dry Fry, Mustmag, and Whitbear Whittington. On one occasion Ivy describes the sisters’ departure, and she writes that she watched “the lady sisters skitter like waterbugs over the snow, moving faster and faster it seemed until they were lost in the shadders of the trees as they headed up Hell Mountain so fast it seemed they were flying” (38). Literary critic Dorothy Dodge Robbins notes that Ivy appropriates “the sisters’ storytelling skills into her own words,” and Ivy’s inclusion of descriptive similes, including phrases such as “skitter like waterbugs,” demonstrates an incorporation of the oral into the written that never occurs in *Oral History* (142). Although Jennifer and Richard both spend time in the mountains immersed in oral traditions, their literary renderings of those encounters still display written conventions and a strict adherence to Standard English, except when Richard tries to “capture” mountain dialect. Neither writer masters the kind of oral telling Smith presents in sections like Granny Younger’s, Rose Hibbitts’, or Sally’s, and Ivy’s integration of the Cline sisters’ storytelling conventions into her letters represents a blending of the oral and the literate that readers do not find in *Oral History*.

By the time Ivy describes the Cline sisters’ stories in a letter, she is already a voracious reader and deep into a textual world, as when she tells her pen pal in a early letter that she loves reading “bettern anything and mostly poems such as Thanatopses and the little toy soldier is covered with dust but sturdy and staunch he stands and the highwayman came riding up to the

old inn door. I love that one the bestest” (14). Yet despite Ivy’s fondness for reading, as in *Oral History*, Smith presents literacy (technical, social, and cultural) as a potentially dangerous skill. In the same way that Aldous Rife warns Richard not to become involved with Dory since at best he can only create longings that her life can never fulfill, Ivy’s mother becomes upset with Ivy’s constant reading and says it “will just fill [Ivy’s] head with notions” which “will do [Ivy] no good in the end” (15). One of the notions that results from Ivy’s reading is her idea to become an author, and she tells her pen pal, “I want to be a writer, it is what I love the bestest in this world” (15). A few letters later she restates her professional goal, this time adding fame as a qualifier of success: “I want to be a famous writer when I grow up, I will write of Love” (21). Ivy soon learns that her teacher, Mrs. Brown, censors student letters to pen pals, telling Ivy that her first letter to Hanneke is too long and not appropriate. This message confuses Ivy, along with the fact that she seems to only read of “love” and never stories focused on Appalachia. In the same way that Denise Giardina learned about “acceptable” subject matter and topics through her reading, so too does Ivy Rowe.

Ivy’s letters, particularly the ones written during her adolescent years, contain unconventional spelling and grammar since she first writes as a young girl who does not have many years of educational training. Even so, Ivy values a school-based education, and she tells her pen pal Hanneke, “I am smart thogh I go to school when I can and try to better myself” (17). Smith uses these writer-reader interactions to make Ivy’s intellectual curiosity clear to readers, working to re-shape any notions they may have about ignorant mountaineers. Even at a young age, Ivy understands the inherent changes involved in gaining an education and new literacy skills. As the novel progresses, her spelling and grammar become more standard as she continues to learn both inside and outside of a classroom. Ivy’s first teacher, Mrs. Brown, plays a

significant role in Ivy's education, especially when she invites Ivy to stay with her while Mrs. Brown's niece (Molly) visits. Ivy's family allows her to go, and one of Ivy's letters to her family reveals the beginning of a discursive divide that continues as Ivy gains new literacies. While describing her new friend, Molly Bainbridge, in her letter home she also writes, "Now as I write this letter I am sad all of a sudden, I dont know what has come over me, I think of you All so. Please do not think I am fancy, nor spoilt, nor putting on Airs. It is not so, as I will tell you direckly" (51). Through this letter Ivy voices her concerns about socializing with Molly, a child who has many more material advantages than Ivy. Ivy's worry over "putting on airs" signals her entry into a different social class and discourse community and also an awareness of the impending conflicted family relationships resulting from that transition. Although *Oral History's* protagonist, Dory, remains silent throughout the novel, Ivy's voice reaches the readers of Smith's novel, signaling a certain sense of progress from Dory to Ivy. Whereas Dory never expresses her feelings about literacy-initiated identity conflicts and must instead rely on an oral telling through Sally, Ivy writes her concerns down on paper both for her family and for Smith's audience of readers.

One source of contention for Ivy revolves around her gender, and before she becomes pregnant—and physically bound by her womanhood and her mother's insistence on keeping the baby—she believes that literacy-centered learning will provide the most viable avenue for escape from what she considers a stagnant life. After her father dies and she moves to town with her mother and siblings, Ivy begins to understand that as a female, she has limited physical mobility. She observes the men in town riding logs down the river to a distant town or joining the army to fight in World War I, neither of which Ivy can do as a woman. This realization troubles her, and in a letter to her sister Silvaney Ivy writes, "But the logs go out on the river, and oh Silvaney, I

wuld give a million dollars to go along [. . .] I wuld give anything to be one of them boys and ride the rafts down to Kentucky on the great spring tide!” (91). Ivy even considers dressing as a man and “trying to sneak along” but reasons that “Momma and Geneva [her mother’s friend] wuld have a fit,” and she decides to stay home (91). As an alternative to riding down the river, she attends school and proudly tells her sister Beulah in a letter that she is “the very first pupil” even though her mother “does not seem to care one way or the other” (100). Ivy studies under Miss Gertrude Torrington, a Presbyterian missionary who Ivy knows has come to “describe the conditions,” though Ivy writes to Beulah, “I cannot immagine what she will say. It seems to me that conditions are very good” (100). Compared to Ivy’s life on Sugar Fork, the conditions of Majestic represent a vast material improvement, but Miss Torrington and her missionary-focused agenda instead see a mountain town in need of educational uplift. Miss Torrington occupies an important role both in the novel and in Ivy’s life, and in casting her as a single female missionary, Smith echoes the historical profiles of many female missionary teachers. Like those who preceded her in history, Miss Torrington envisions Appalachia as a space to invade and “save” along with its inhabitants like Ivy, echoing Richard Burlage’s goals when he first arrived in Appalachia.

Gender functions as the most notable difference between Richard Burlage from *Oral History* and Miss Torrington in *Fair and Tender Ladies*. Richard’s invasion into the feminized space of the mountains parallels his relationship with Dory, but in pairing Ivy with a female teacher, Smith adds a new dynamic to their student-teacher relationship. Even more interesting, Miss Torrington makes a sexual advance towards Ivy, and in this way she represents the masculine ideological dominance over mountain ways that Richard also symbolizes for Dory, since Miss Torrington assumes sexual access to Ivy’s body. Miss Torrington’s gender allows her

to take greater public (not private, as occurs when Richard sleeps with Dory) liberties with Ivy than Richard can take with Dory, and Smith suggests that Ivy's family and friends would not suspect sexual interaction between a female teacher and a female student. Along a similar vein, when writing about her own educational journey, writer bell hooks reflects that "the only respectable women who lived alone in our communities were schoolteachers. Nobody expected them to marry. After all they were the women who had chosen mind over matter. They had chosen to become women no man would desire—women who think" (21). Smith describes Miss Torrington in a similarly "safe," androgynous way: "She is so pale, with hair as light as Silvaney's and a long pale face with skin so fine and so thin you can see the blue vanes in it and almost the bones, and big deep eyes so dark blue they look purple. Her forehead is wide and white. She pulls her hair straight back in a bunch and wears no jewelry of any kind (100). Stripped bare of typical, stereotypical markers of femininity, Miss Torrington seems de-sexed, her womanhood divorced from her role as a teacher. In Ivy's community none of her family members seem concerned about the time she spends with Miss Torrington, and literacy scholar Sarah Robbins notes that in the nineteenth century females were preferred teachers for a host of reasons, one of which "cast schoolteaching as a mother-in-training activity" and another that "held that women's empathetic moral sense made them especially adept at teaching young children" (98).

Hardly a comforting model for motherhood for Ivy, Miss Torrington instead represents a judgmentally different discursive world that introduces a host of dilemmas into Ivy's life. Moreover, within their relationship Miss Torrington occupies the top of an unequal power structure that she establishes once she knows Ivy desires the knowledge Miss Torrington has. Ivy gushes to Beulah that Miss Torrington tells her she is "remarkable" and wants her to return to

Boston with her to attend school (100). Ivy desperately wants to go, since even though she cannot ride a log down the river or join the army, she can attend school. She tells Beulah, “how often I try to imagine the world beyond this town” (101). Ivy also reveres Miss Torrington and the learning she represents, even imagining the classroom as a kind of holy, sacred space in a letter to Silvaney in which she describes

the big recitation hall with all the little panes of glass frosted over by the cold and the new steam radiators hissing. Oh Silvaney, I love this room! It is the room I love bestest in the whole world next to mine! The cielings are very high here, and the woodwork is old and curly around the big windows and the cieling and the door. I love the big slates on the wall and the way the eraser dust hangs in the air, and the oak table with the globe on it, and the pictures of Jesus Blessing the Little Children and Jesus Asending in Light. I love the way the schoolroom smells, the dusty somehow holy air. It seems as if the lessons quiver in the air, the sums and poems and conjugations we have learned by hart are all still there. (104)

For Ivy the “somehow holy air” represents a rebirth that she can only find through acquiring new literacies, but as with other texts considered in this project, that acquisition comes at a price. Similar to other authoritative teachers this project discusses, including Arnow’s Miss Whittle, DeRosier’s Janis Carroll, and Giardina’s Miss Kurtz, Miss Torrington denigrates Ivy’s mountain speech patterns; this not only alters the way Ivy speaks but also the way she conceives of her home and her family. When Ivy responds to one of Miss Torrington’s comments by saying “Yessum,” Miss Torrington corrects her by saying, “Say, Yes Miss Torrington, when will you learn to drop these backward customs?” (105). After diminishing Ivy’s confidence, Miss Torrington immediately bolsters it again, calling her “remarkably tallented [and] so extraordinarily gifted in language,” finally telling Ivy, “I confess you to you I feel that God has sent me here to save you Ivy, to offer you a life which will enable you to use your gifts to his glory” (105). Like Richard Burlage, Miss Torrington views herself far above Ivy in every way, and she tells her, “I am perhaps espeshally suited to help you fulfill your destiny, Ivy. I can

educate you, I can dress you, I can take you to Europe. For there is everything, everything to learn! I am a woman of some means Ivy. I can give you the world” (106). Certainly Miss Torrington represents a life that is in some ways better than the one Ivy has, since she could give her access to more material things. Ivy comprehends the benefits of going with Miss Torrington to Boston and becomes especially excited when she thinks of the books to which she would have access, telling Silvaney, “I thought of all the stories I dont know yet, of books and books full of stories in Boston. I immagined their lether bindings and their deep rich covers and the pretty swirling paper inside the covers, like the snow” (106-107). Acquiring books has always been a hardship for Ivy, and Miss Torrington’s offer provides learning opportunities to which Ivy has never before had access.

Despite feeling excited about those books, almost immediately after considering what she would gain from going with Miss Torrington, Ivy feels guilty because from Miss Torrington she has also learned contempt for her Appalachian family and the ways in which they speak. In her letter to Silvaney Ivy explains that she was standing outside of the school talking with one of the teachers when her grandmother (Granny Rowe) and aunt (Tennessee) came to visit her at school on one of their ginseng-selling trips to town: “Lord God, how ye doing honey, Granny said, and I confess that for a minute I drew back, for here was Granny smoking her pipe and wearing her old mans hat, and Tennessee behind her giggling and clutching that filthy dirty crazy bead purse. I drew back. For all of a sudden they seemed to me strange people out of another time” (107). Ivy knows that Miss Torrington would never approve of a greeting like “Lord God, how ye doing honey,” and Ivy’s initial reaction to “draw back” illustrates that Ivy has successfully learned Miss Torrington’s demeaning judgments about mountain people. In addition to adding to a growing literary repertoire, like Clytie and Enoch in *The Dollmaker*, Ivy has also learned to be

properly ashamed of mountain cultural markers. Even so, Ivy laments her reaction and tells Silvaney, “I was ashamed of myself,” and in her letter she considers the downside of going with Miss Torrington, “If I go to Boston, I will not see [Granny Rowe and Tennessee], nor Beulahs new baby, nor Ethel grinning behind that big cash register in Stoney Branhams store, nor see my little momma any more, and I pictured her there in her rocking chair. Nor will I see Silvaney again I thought” (107). Ivy’s pendulum-like train of thought represents the great divide that literacy introduces to many of the characters’ lives discussed in this project. Although Miss Torrington offers a new way of life for Ivy, the path to that life is fraught with painful identity conflicts and decisions to willfully separate herself from her family. Even so, when she considers the books she can read if she goes to Boston, she decides that she will go.

Soon after Ivy makes the decision to go with Miss Torrington, she also writes in a letter to Silvaney that when Miss Torrington spoke to her “it was like she owned me” (109). In accepting the offer to go to Boston Ivy has given over many of her liberties to Miss Torrington, and she realizes that the opportunities that await will come at a great sacrifice. This realization intensifies when Miss Torrington suggests that Ivy follow her to her room to conduct drawing lessons and Ivy agrees immediately since “this was something I had been hoping for” (109). At first the lesson proceeds without incident, but as Ivy draws Miss Torrington stands near her, places her hand on her shoulder, and then kisses her neck. Ivy instantly jumps up, and Miss Torrington sinks “down on her bed with her mouth in a wide round O” (110). In this one brief scene, Smith casts Miss Torrington as not only an invasive teacher with a dominant system of ideological beliefs to teach her pupils but also as a controlling sexual figure. Although she regrets her actions and later writes an apologetic note to Ivy encouraging her to come to Boston with her, she assumes the same position of sexual authority as Richard does with Dory.

Despite the life altering effects the incident has on Ivy (she runs into the arms of Lonnie Rash, has sex for the first time, becomes pregnant, and defers to her mother's wishes to keep the baby), she desperately wants to believe Miss Torrington's promise to "never be other than [her] good true friend" (119). After bidding her beau Lonnie farewell and wishing him safety in World War I, Ivy decides to go with Miss Torrington. She makes this decision while watching the river that carries Lonnie away, and Smith reminds readers once again of Ivy's binding feminine ties that limit her professionally and physically. Immediately after telling Lonnie goodbye Ivy thinks "So I will go! I will!," and she reflects in a letter to Silvaney that her "mind was as rambunctious and wild as the river" (119). A few paragraphs later she reiterates her decision to leave and states, "I felt then as if I had jumped the logs and ridden them clear to Kentucky! I am glad I am no lady now" (120). Ivy understands that her only means of escape depend on Miss Torrington's offer to take her to Boston, since she knows she cannot acceptably ride logs into Kentucky as a woman. After sleeping with Lonnie, Ivy considers herself compromised, even before she realizes her impending motherhood. Even so, her statement that she feels relief at not being a lady signals a newly recognized freedom in her sexuality. Although Miss Torrington's sexual advance towards Ivy functions as a dominating gesture and upsets Ivy, it also awakens her to a sense of self she had not yet experienced, and she seems prepared to face the identity conflicts that await her in Boston.

However, Ivy never struggles with those conflicts because soon after making the decision to go with Miss Torrington, she learns that she is pregnant. Even though her soon-to-be daughter (Joli) will go on to accomplish what Ivy had hoped to achieve in her own life, including becoming an author, leaving home, and even traveling to Paris, upon first realizing that she is pregnant, Ivy feels trapped. In a letter to Silvaney she laments that "all is lost," and even though

she almost has an abortion, she acquiesces to her mother's demands to keep the baby since "Momma has been through so much" (121, 124). Although Ivy's mother does not use biblically-supported scripture to buttress her request (as does Gertie Nevels' mother in *The Dollmaker* when she convinces Gertie to follow Clovis to Detroit), she does wield a substantial influence over Ivy's decision. In a previously discussed letter to Beulah, Ivy made a comment about her mother's blasé attitude about her academic achievements, and it seems plausible that her mother's demand to have a baby and stay at home functioned as a ploy to keep Ivy in Majestic.

In deferring to her mother's insistence to keep the baby, Ivy feels helpless and trapped, and she tells Silvaney in a letter that she "could see that baby clear as day, tiny and pink and all curled up, and then it started beating with its little fists against my stomach, trying to escape. It hurt me. And then, I cannot explain is Silvaney, I was that little baby caught inside of my own self and dying to escape. But I could not. I could never ever get out, I was caught for ever and ever inside myself" (122). While Miss Torrington's offer to attend school in Boston was problematic and would have no doubt introduced many difficult identity conflicts for Ivy, the biological function of her body combined with a devotion to her mother's wishes has revoked the choice to go or stay. Not only has Ivy's gender kept her from joining the army or riding logs out of town to a different place, it has also grounded her within her own feminine reproductive capacity and kept her from pursuing the avenue of escape offered by Miss Torrington.

In 1918 Ivy gives birth to her daughter Joli, and while she receives no formal educational training, she embarks upon her own literacy campaign that lasts the majority of a lifetime. By this point in the novel the grammar, spelling, and overall organization of her letters have vastly improved, and she borrows six books a week from the company store in the coal mining town where she lives with her sister Beulah. In a letter to her mother's friend Geneva, Ivy tells her, "I

read and read, you know how I love to read! I remember you and Momma saying it was foolishness. Well Beulah thinks so too, I can tell I am getting on her nerves. I know she thinks I ought to go out and get a job soon and so I will have to, but I can not bear to leave Joli just yet [. . .] And so I sit and rock her, and sit and read and watch her sleep” (144). After Joli’s birth Ivy no longer feels the terrifying feeling of motherly entrapment, and she finds her escape through both reading and mothering. Her letters bear no indication that her reading produces the kind of conflict Denise Giardina’s adolescent reading caused for her or for *The Unquiet Earth*’s protagonist Jackie, and Ivy’s hobby of reading has clear implications for her writing. In Pierre Bourdieu’s terms, Ivy operates as an autodidact. James Paul Gee argues that “autodidacts are precisely people who, while often extremely knowledgeable, trained themselves and thus were trained outside of a process of group practice and socialization. They are almost never accepted as insiders [by members of a secondary discourse community], as members of the club” (140). Gee’s statement might apply to Ivy if she ever left Appalachia, but she does not. Instead, she remains in the mountains and even moves from the coal town of Diamond back to her childhood home on Sugar Fork after marrying her adolescent friend, Oakley Fox. Consequently, her literacy campaign operates within her primary discourse community, and after her early encounters with Miss Torrington, she never again encounters the kind of literacy-initiated conflicts that later haunt her daughter Joli.

The inherent problem with Ivy’s literacy campaign is that it never prompts her to gain elements of a secondary discourse community in the same way that it does for Denise Giardina, Jackie, Joli, or a host of other characters considered in this project. While this allows Ivy to avoid the perils of attaining multiple literacies, it also limits her empowerment. Instead of forging into unknown discourse communities, where she would experience both gains and losses, Ivy reads

her books in a cabin high on Sugar Fork mountain, safe within the cultural boundaries of Appalachia. Ivy's literacy development seems like part of a fantasy storyline that explores the possibilities of literacy attainment without the recognizable discursive dilemmas that so often characterize it. Similarly, when encountering *Fair and Tender Ladies* Smith's readers also understand that she grants them access to private letters that Ivy never intended for a large reading audience. In granting that kind of access, Smith works to re-align reader perceptions of Appalachian women, echoing the purpose of many authorial strategies in *Oral History*. Through Ivy's private thoughts we learn of her early intellectual curiosity, her increasing ability to write, and her steady desire to become an author who writes for public audiences. By making readers aware of Ivy's most private—and most intelligent—thoughts, Smith makes it increasingly difficult for readers to keep any preconceived notions that may have about ignorant hillbillies. Recently literacy scholar Katrina Powell has made a similar observation about letters written by real Appalachian people who wrote to government officials protesting their forced removal from the Shenandoah National Park in the 1930s. Powell argues that “the rhetorics employed in these letters by the mountain families counter monolithic discourse written *about* them,” and “the representations contained in mountain families' letters directly counter those constructed for them” (7,56). Smith draws on a similar vein in constructing Ivy's character, who ultimately speaks out against a literary and media tradition that assumes Appalachian illiteracy. Knowing that Ivy's “private” letters will speak to a real reading audience, Smith's strategy has an effect similar to her inclusion of “oral” stories in *Oral History*: not only does Smith's rhetorical approach call readers' attention to their own stereotypes about Appalachia, but it also causes them to be troubled by knowledge of their own prejudices.

Although reading provides a sense of freedom for Ivy, her sexual relationships with men also grant her a refreshing escape from societal gender norms. While living in Majestic with her sister Beulah and brother-in-law Curtis, Ivy begins seeing Franklin Ransom, the son of a wealthy coal operator. Ivy enjoys spending time with reckless, wild Franklin, and she reflects in a letter to Silvaney, “it is a fact that if you are ruint, like I am, it frees you up somehow” (167). Since becoming pregnant with Joli, Ivy first accepted and then welcomed the label “ruint” to describe her single motherhood status. In the same way that reading allows her to travel beyond her life circumstances, so too does her socially unacceptable courtship with Franklin. Many years later, after she marries Oakley Fox and has several more children, Ivy laments that mothering takes time away from her beloved activity of reading, and she writes in a letter to Miss Torrington (whom she still keeps in contact with through writing),

to answer your question, I do not read much any more. I do not have the time. Sometimes Oakley gets me books from the Presbyterian School when he goes to town, or Ethel or Geneva will bring me a book when they come up here, but often I send them back unread, I confess it. Ever since my little twins were born, it is like I don't have near enough hands, or time either one. The time just slips away. (192)

Ivy becomes increasingly depressed as the burdens of motherhood and wifely commitment weigh upon her. In one letter she confesses, “I have fallen down and down and down into this darkness, I can see it all so clear now, and bits and pieces of me have rolled off and been lost along the way. They have rolled off down this mountain someplace until there is not much left but a dried-up husk, with me leeches out by hard work and babies” (195). Ivy feels too physically and mentally exhausted to enjoy reading, and she instead finds comfort in the arms of Honey Breeding, a nomadic bee keeper who visits her cabin to help Oakley begin his own bee hives.

In the same way that reading both defines and sustains Ivy, so too does her extramarital affair with Honey. In a deeply personal letter to Silvaney Ivy explains, “we are exactly the same size. It’s like he is me, or I am him” (218). By describing Honey as a masculine mirror image of Ivy, Smith suggests the kind of character Ivy might have been, had she been male. In an interview with Rebecca Smith, Lee Smith explains,

[Ivy] had all those children, and she had to stay put. But he was a bee man [. . .] And the thing about them is that they were travelers. They were not from anywhere. And I think that’s the main thing that fascinated Ivy about Honey Breeding—his enormous freedom, his traveling, whereas she was put. She stayed put because of the children. But he was her other self, her alter ego, and being with him was somehow her expressing or living out that kind of male principle that she was unable to live in her own life—like going to the top of the mountain. She could never go if a boy didn’t go with her. (21)

Literary critic Linda Byrd has noted that like the bees he tends, Honey floats from feminine flower to flower, but instead of feeling jealous about his promiscuity, Ivy discovers a great freedom with Honey, especially when sharing stories. She writes that “my own voice sounded funny in my ears. It sounded rusty. I felt like I hadn’t used it in such a long time except to say something like, The wooden paddle is broke or Close the door” (224). In the same way that stories flow from Ivy’s pen into her letters, so too do they pour from her mouth once she begins telling them to Honey. She also enjoys listening to his stories and begs him to tell her more, saying “I am starved for stories” (226). During this process of sharing orally rendered stories, Ivy has an epiphany similar to the one literacy attainment brought to the women Smith taught at the Hindman Settlement School—she truly discovers her own independence for the first time. Ivy comments, “I felt I had got a part of myself back that I had lost without even knowing it was gone. Honey had given me back my very soul” (232). The missing component within her soul is a belief in herself and her own abilities, and she tells Silvaney, “all of a sudden I thought, I could of climbed up here by myself, anytime! [. . .] And I had got up there myself at long last with a

man it is true, but not a man like any I had ever seen before in all my life” (233). For a brief time, Ivy escapes the entrapment of her life, trappings that even reading cannot liberate. Through her time spent with Honey on top of the mountain Ivy becomes a fuller version of herself, and though her actions have dire consequences (she misses the death of her daughter and inflicts much emotional pain upon her husband Oakley), she tells Silvaney, “I would of stayed up there. I would of stayed with him until I starved to death and died, I reckon, living on love. I would have stayed right there with him if he hadn’t of made me leave, and that’s a fact” (236).

Two years elapse between the letter in which Ivy tells Silvaney about her affair with Honey and her next letter. By this point in the novel Ivy has undergone many significant identity changes, and Smith reflects those transitions in the way Ivy signs her letters. As a young girl she signs virtually all of them “Ivy Rowe,” and once she marries Oakley she signs them “Ivy R. Fox.” After the couple moves from Majestic back to Ivy’s adolescent home on Sugar Fork, Ivy considers herself completely immersed in her married life and drops her middle initial, simply signing her letters “Ivy Fox.” Once Ivy’s depression begins she signs two letters to Silvaney with only her first name, and after her affair with Honey Breeding Ivy signs off with “Ivy Rowe,” her maiden name (207, 221, 240). This reversion symbolizes both Ivy’s newfound independence and the guilt she feels over the affair and the tragic death of her daughter. Throughout the remainder of the novel Ivy seems more comfortable in her own skin, and she signs the rest of her letters “Ivy,” “Ivy Fox,” “Mama,” “Mamaw,” and even “Ivy Rowe” in a letter to her childhood friend Molly, after Oakley has died (294). Ivy’s signatures reveal how she conceives of herself during various points in her life, and in her final letter to Silvaney she reflects, “I used to think I would be a writer. I thought then I would write of love (Ha!) but how little we know, we spend our

years as a tale that is told I have spent my years so. I never became a writer at all. Instead I have loved, and loved, and loved. I am fair wore out with it” (315).

The sheer volume and insightfulness of Ivy’s letters are a testament to her authorship, yet like the letters Linda Scott DeRosier’s mother and grandmother exchange, Ivy’s writing never sees publication, at least within the fictional confines of the novel. In an interview with Pat Arnow Smith comments,

there’s less an emphasis upon the end product in the artistic work that women do, so often the process is what’s important rather than the product. It’s why in [*Fair and Tender Ladies*] I was trying to show that the writing of the letters was more important than the letters. It’s like the knitting of a sweater, the making of the quilt, and that kind of thing, you know, that something is art even though it’s not perceived as public art. It’s the difference between monumental sculpture and needlepoint. (63)

Certainly the process of writing sustains Ivy throughout some of the most difficult phases in her life. She repeatedly comments on how writing helps her reflect on what has happened, saying “sometimes I despair of ever understanding anything right when it happens to me, it seems like I have to tell it in a letter to see what it was, even though I was right there all along!” (183).

Writing even solidifies events in Ivy’s life and renders them real, as when she tells Joli about Oakley’s death and writes, “I have to stop now. Because I have written this letter to you, it is real now” (274). Writing functions as a necessary activity for Ivy, and just as she works through the discursive divide introduced by Miss Torrington in her letters, she also writes about the conflicted feelings she has about her daughter Joli leaving home to fulfill many of the same dreams Ivy held as a child.

Similar to the story Smith shared during our interview in which a young girl prepares to leave home to attend Berea College and her distraught mother worries about how college will change their relationship, Ivy harbors the same fears for her daughter Joli. After Ivy’s brief

exposure to Miss Torrington and a much different discourse community, Ivy knows that Joli will encounter incredibly different circumstances once she moves to town and then on to college and beyond. Ivy wants to ensure that Joli remembers her home, its culture, and its storytelling traditions, so she insists that they hike up Hell Mountain in search of Gaynelle and Virgie Cline's cabin. Joli protests, arguing that the expedition was "crazy," but the pair make the trek only to discover the remnants of the Cline home site. While the sisters and their cabin are gone, their stories continue to live on in Ivy's memory, and on that day she shares the sisters' stories with Joli. By re-telling the stories to her daughter, Ivy connects the oral traditions of the Cline sisters, Ivy's private letter writing, and Joli's eventual public authorship. Although unaware of her impact at the time, incidents like this fuel Joli's later writing endeavors and support her literary success. When writing about the day to Silvaney, Ivy explains why she felt so strongly about taking Joli to the Cline home site, and she predicts the eventual divide that occurs between them: "for I had got it in mind to go up there and take her. Before she left, before she went down off the mountain for good—for when Joli comes back she will be all different. I know. So I took her up on Hell Mountain while she was still mine" (200).

Once Joli leaves home she graduates from high school, and although Ivy bursts with pride at her accomplishments, she also feels a twinge of remorse, remarking in a letter to her sister Ethel, "it will be such a good thing for her, in the long run" (207). Like Ivy, Joli performs well in school, and she graduates from Radford Normal Institute. She also meets and becomes engaged to Taylor Cunningham III, a man from an elite family in eastern Virginia. In the scene where Ivy and Oakley discuss whether they should attend Joli's wedding, Smith illustrates one of the most painfully divisive conversations caused by competing discourse communities that this project considers. Ivy explains in a letter to Silvaney that declining to go to the wedding has "fair

broke [her] heart,” because she “would love to go, and travel across Virginia on a train paid by Taylor Cunningham the Third, and see what there is to see!” (268). Ivy goes on to reason that Oakley does not physically feel well enough to make the trip, but she also confesses, “And it is more than that. Oakley feels we ought not to go, and in my heart of hearts I know he is right” (268). Ivy has even planned what she would wear on such an exciting trip to see her first-born daughter get married, and when she asks Oakley why he does not think they should go, even though Joli’s fiancé has agreed to pay their train fare, Oakley responds, “She could of come here and got married if she had chose” (269). Ivy understands that Joli has entered a new discursive realm after her experiences in college, and now she has chosen to marry into that world in eastern Virginia, not Appalachia. Even though Ivy cherishes Joli’s accomplishments, like the girl’s mother that Smith discussed during our interview, Ivy feels that she has lost Joli because “Joli has broken my heart. For she is the child of my childhood, and in losing her, I have lost my youth. I can not say it better than that. I wanted her gone, I wished her godspeed, but now I am about to die because she has took me up on it! Oh, I am contrary. It is true! She has travelled far beyond me now” (271). Despite the pain this divide causes for Ivy and presumably for Joli as well, Joli goes on to achieve what no Appalachian character manages in *Oral History*: she brings her stories—stories representative of the mountains—to print for Smith’s fictional reading audience. Dory remains silent, Sally shares her stories orally for the real audience but not the fictional reading one, the Cline sisters’ oral stories reach both audiences, Ivy’s letters are read by us, but it is Joli’s writing that finds public voice within fictional form, representing the impact Smith’s own writing has had for contemporary readers.

Notably, Joli uses Appalachia as the setting for many of her bestselling books, and Ivy also functions as an active source for Joli’s stories. In a letter to Joli Ivy tells her,

Oh Joli! It is no time at all that you and me were sitting out together in the sweet long grass and I knew what all you had read and what you'd not. And now you have gone on past me down the road. It is too late for you to turn back, honey. You have got past the point where you can do that, past the point where you could ever come back here and live. I know it and you know it. So you have got to keep on keeping on. I know it is hard sometimes. (280)

Although Ivy insists that Joli has “gone on past [her] down the road,” she still suggests books that Joli should read, including *Gone With the Wind*, and she repeatedly tells her to include more romantic plotlines in her books, since “people don’t like to have too much thinking in a book” (293). Like Denise Giardina, who thought that “real” writers lived in New York or Paris, Ivy has similar ideas about where “real” books take place, and she warns Joli against placing her novels in Appalachia, telling her in a letter, “Oh honey, I am real proud of you! But I wonder, why don’t you write about New York City, since you have been up there for so long? Or about Norfolk and the newspaper life? It seems like that would be more exciting than these mountains which nobody wants to read about, honey” (290). The vast success of Smith’s literary career, which includes a large number of works set in Appalachia, highlights the irony of Ivy’s statement, yet during our interview Smith also commented that her father held beliefs similar to Ivy’s. Smith said that her father “didn’t like it when [she] came back and started writing about the mountains.” When asked to elaborate about why her father felt this way Smith responded,

Well my daddy said again and again, he said, “I did not send you off to those fine schools,” because he never got a college education himself, but he went for a year. He said, “I did not send you off to those fine schools to come back here and be writing bad English [laughs] and up in the hollers talking to Ava McClanahan and Granny Rowe” and so on. You know, because I was gathering materials for my books and talking to the people I’d always loved. He wanted me to “rise above.”

Like so many of the people and characters considered in the project, Smith’s father had learned to devalue his mountain heritage, and Smith echoes this sentiment in Ivy’s suggestions for Joli.

Like Smith, Joli ignores her family's advice and continues to draw from her Appalachian heritage to create popular works of fiction. Even though Joli never returns to the mountains to live, she stays in close contact with Ivy. While Joli's acquisition of new literacies permanently changes their relationship, by the novel's end readers understand that the two share an unbreakable bond, and without Ivy, Joli's public authorship would never have been possible. Near the novel's conclusion Ivy even writes to Joli explaining an Appalachian folk remedy that no doubt finds its way into one of Joli's stories, though Ivy cannot imagine why it would make appropriate subject matter: "It was chicken gizzards, but why you need to know is beyond me. Are you going to put it in a book? Or have you got one? Anyway, what you do is peel the outside off of the chicken gizzard and rub it on the wart. Then you bury the gizzard and forget all about it. When you forget, the wart will be gone. If you don't forget, I won't promise a thing!" (301). Remedies like this one pepper Smith's fiction, and Joli's methodology clearly reflects Smith's own research tactics, especially for *Oral History*, as when she told Edwin T. Arnold in an interview, "I did all this research, all this reading, and I'd been taping my relatives for years and I knew all this material that I wanted to do something with" (246).

In the same way that the Cline sisters "live on stories," Ivy lives on her letters. In Ivy's penultimate letter she explains to Joli that she always knew that her beloved sister Silvaney died in the 1920s flu epidemic, but that she wrote to her anyway because "the letters didn't mean anything. Not to the dead girl Silvaney, of course—nor to me. Nor had they ever. It was the writing of them, that signified" (313). To prepare for her own death Ivy burns her collection of letters, and she tells Joli, "with every one I burned, my soul grew lighter, lighter, as if it rose too with the smoke" (313). Having fulfilled her role as author (though she never conceives of herself as such), mother, wife, and the link between the oral traditions of the Cline sisters and the public

voicing that Joli achieves, in a final letter to Silvaney Ivy writes that she has “got so much on [her] mind these days, and no time to waste on talking” (314). Instead, she writes until the moment of her death, and she tells Silvaney in a previous letter, “Joli is the writer which I always wanted to be” (303).

As with much of her fiction, Smith found inspiration for *Fair and Tender Ladies* from real life. In an interview with Pat Arnow, Smith explains that when she purchased a packet of letters at a flea market in Greensboro, North Carolina she began thinking about writing an epistolary novel. She tells Arnow that she was interested in them because

They were from a woman to her sister, and she was a woman who had not had any particular education. I was just struck how every now and then she'd have this real literary image, or striking turn of phrase or something. And I just got real interested in the idea of somebody's letters being a sort of work of art. You know, letters over their whole lifetime. Is it art because there's a critic somewhere who perceives it as art? Or is it art because it just is? I don't know. It's just some sort of aesthetic thing I've had in my mind for a while that interests me. (63)

In keeping with this woman's writing style, Smith highlights Ivy's lack of formal education in the beginning of *Fair and Tender Ladies* through heavy dialect and unconventional spelling, and readers become increasingly aware of the literary progressions Ivy makes as she continues to read and write. Ivy's refusal to consider herself an author also resonates with readers. Smith worked to overturn this same notion in the life of Lou Crabtree, Smith's model for Ivy Rowe. Smith encountered Crabtree when teaching a writing workshop in Abington, Virginia, and she discovered that Crabtree had been writing stories her entire life without any thought of publication. During our interview Smith said, “Yeah, [Lou Crabtree is] where I got the idea of someone who just simply writes for the love of it because it's necessary to keep her soul alive, you know, as a way to make it through the night [. . .] When I first encountered her she had literally suitcases full of writing that she'd done all her life.” Smith was amazed at Crabtree's

talent, and after working with her, reviewing her pieces, and helping her polish selected stories, in 1984 LSU Press published Crabtree's collection of short stories entitled *Sweet Hollow*. In an interview with Jeanne McDonald Smith remembers, "Once I said to her, 'Lou, what would you do if somebody told you that you weren't allowed to write anymore?' 'Well,' Lou replied, 'I reckon I'd just have to sneak off and do it'" (188). Ivy treats writing similarly, and it soothes her in much the same way it functioned as a cathartic exercise for Smith, who wrote the novel while her mother was dying. Smith operates as the catalyst which allows Crabtree a public voice, and Ivy does the same for Joli. Smith's fiction, as well as the other works considered in this project, repeatedly focuses on the identity conflicts necessitated by the acquisition of new literacies, yet those literacies make possible the public voicing that these authors and characters like Joli achieve. During our interview Smith reflected that "by the very act of writing [. . .] you put yourself outside of whatever you're writing about [. . .] the very act of writing makes you no longer a part of whatever community or relationship or whatever it is you're writing about," but that painful distancing remains necessary in order to give public voice to these Appalachian women's stories of literacy-initiated conflict.

End Notes

¹ For an interesting take on the created literary persona of James Still, see Claude Lafie Crum's *Appalachian Journal* article entitled "Constructing a Marketable Writer: James Still's Fictional Persona." Crum argues that the reading public's conception of Still as a romantically rugged mountaineer was more fiction than fact, and Crum suggests that Still purposely emphasized and marketed his role as an isolated Appalachian author, even though he was quite worldly. Still held two master's degrees, taught as a college professor, spent four years in Africa, and counted "Saul Bellow, Katherine Anne Porter, Robert Penn Warren, Elizabeth Maddox Roberts, Elizabeth Bishop, Eleanor Clark, and Robert Frost" among his friends (432, 435).

² When describing typical storylines for Local Color writing about Appalachia, memoirist John O'Brien echoes the ill fated love between Richard Burlage and Dory Cantrell in *Oral History* almost exactly: "The plots of the stories and novels varied but followed a distinct pattern. A young man of means with a name like Egbert leaves his fine home in Boston or Philadelphia to

‘sojourn’ in the Appalachian wilderness. By happenstance, [in Smith’s case, because he is teaching and thus invading the mountains with his dominant sense of knowledge] he encounters a ‘mountain gal’ as lovely as a wildflower—and about as smart—and is smitten. The chaste romance becomes complicated by a drunken father who, in at least one book, swings through the trees like an ape. Like virtually all Appalachian men in these stories, he is a ‘feudist,’ constantly drunk on ‘moonshine’ and in the habit of randomly murdering his neighbors. The young man finds himself caught in a dilemma: hopelessly in love, but aware that marriage would be impossible. His mountain gal could never comprehend his sophisticated world of music, art, museums, and cultural refinement. Trapped between the glories of civilization and true love, he chooses civilization, if only because his mountain flower would wither when confronted with the dazzle of high culture” (173).

³ Interestingly, Ivy relies on a number of stereotypes about Dutch people when imagining how her pen pal must act and look. Ivy’s dependence on stereotypes to imagine a person from a place she has only read and heard about echoes the exact position of many of Smith’s readers when they try to imagine how an Appalachian woman must act and look. Smith’s inclusion of these stereotypical notions serves as yet another reminder to readers to consider the perceptions they bring with them when approaching Smith’s work.

CONCLUSION FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Appalachian memoirist John O'Brien asserts that once "myth becomes established in the collective imagination, dislodging it becomes virtually impossible" (277). As discussed throughout this project, stereotypes associating Appalachia with illiteracy have plagued the region for well over a century, yet the women writers in this project disrupt such cultural judgments by repeatedly encouraging readers to consider characters' multiple literacies, as well as the conflicts that accompany them. Though this project has highlighted what literacy proponents seldom acknowledge—the very real losses sometimes incurred through literacy acquisition—characters also clearly benefit by transitioning from one discourse community to another. If Harriette Simpson Arnow's "heroine" never learns the power of negotiated identity, her readers do; after leaving home to pursue a secondary education, Linda Scott DeRosier questions the sexist system that governed (and to some extent still governs) much of Appalachia; new literacies allow Denise Giardina and *The Unquiet Earth*'s protagonist, Jackie, to write about social injustices; and literacy acquisition grants Lee Smith's characters in *Oral History* and *Fair and Tender Ladies* a voice fueled by literacy attainment.

These Appalachian women's depiction of literacy acquisition presents a contested space, complicated by multiple rhetorics of identity including gender, class, race, and religion. The complex dynamics of power and peril I have outlined in this dissertation suggest many further avenues for studying the relation of region, literacy, and gender, including analysis of both female and male authors. Much of Lee Smith's newest novel, *On Agate Hill*, revolves around a classroom setting. When the novel's protagonist, Molly Petree, leaves her piedmont North Carolina home to attend boarding school, she must quickly adapt to a new discursive world. As

Molly matures she becomes an educator and takes her teachings into the Appalachian mountains. Molly's character operates as a re-visioning of Smith's other teachers discussed in this study: like Richard Burlage and Gertrude Torrington, Molly is a non-Appalachian who enters a mountain community to "do good" through her teachings. Yet unlike Burlage and Torrington, Smith grants readers access to Molly's own personal struggles with discourse transition, and readers understand that as someone who left behind elements of a primary discourse to seek entrance into a secondary discourse community, Molly approaches her role as a teacher with caution and a certain respect for her students.

In Charles Frazier's second novel, *Thirteen Moons*, literacy acquisition results in turmoil between two Cherokee tribal members, and the novel's narrator, Will Cooper, asks, "Literacy, a blessing or a curse?" (366). Throughout the novel Frazier focuses much of readers' attention on the malleability of historical "truth," especially as it relates to written stories published by local color writers and journalists. On several occasions Cooper tells journalists bogus stories, later laughing when he sees his words in print. As referenced in the introductory chapter of this project, much of what was written about Appalachia was meant to entertain a reading public, but in many cases it educated readers, leading them to believe outlandishly negative portrayals of the region. Frazier's attention to this phenomenon, as well as his characterizations of the effects of literacy for the Cherokee people, deserves further scholarly attention.

The work of Appalachian writers Jim Wayne Miller and Cratis Williams provide equally exciting opportunities for continuing the line of inquiry this project begins. In his best known collection of poetry, *The Mountains Have Come Closer*, Jim Wayne Miller leads readers from a home in anywhere America back to the heart of Appalachia. The collection begins with a poem entitled "Saturday Morning," which takes place in an ordinary house, where a whining vacuum

cleaner and a droning washing machine suggest that their owners' cultural identity has been overshadowed by a sterile sense of homogeneity. As the collection continues, its poems gradually return to Western North Carolina, Miller's adolescent home. The collection ends with "Brier Sermon—"You Must Be Born Again,"" a poem in which a brier (a derogatory term used to reference a mountain person who went north to seek industrial work) declares, "I've been through all the books and come out yonside" (52). He goes on to warn that "we've got so far away from home, we don't know where / we are, how we got where we are, how to get home again" (53). Throughout the poem the brier character evokes evangelical rhetoric, repeatedly telling his listeners, "you must be born again." At one point he asks, "What's it like—being born again?," to which he answers, "It's going back to what you were before / without losing what you've since become" (63). That single line summarizes the identity negotiations that lie at the heart of this project. An analysis of how these dynamics between home and away, departure and return play out in poetic form would yield much for those interested in intersections between Appalachia, Appalachian literature, and literacy. Like Miller's work, Cratis Williams' memoir, *Tales From Sacred Wind: Coming of Age in Appalachia* focuses on both the gains and losses incurred when Appalachians leave the mountains. An investigation of the correlations between Williams' memoir and Miller's poetry would uncover a male response to dilemmas similar to those that the female authors and characters in this project struggle to negotiate in their lives.

Research focused on the history of readership in the Appalachian mountains could also yield interesting insights into the relation of literacy and identity formation. Learning which authors Appalachian people read, and why, would shed light on the complex relationships between authorship, audience, and rhetorical strategy that prove so important when considering issues of literacy in literature. Similarly, the rhetorical construction of whiteness through

literature and literacy proponents, and how this phenomenon affected (and still affects) Appalachian people, deserves much more attention than I have been able to give it here. As discussed in the introductory chapter, the American Missionary Association was responsible for creating the “mountain white” label, and a more in-depth investigation about the politics of this representation would reveal much about how and why native Appalachian authors portray literacy in the ways that they do.

While this project has clear intersections with literacy studies, cultural studies, and working class studies, there are more connections still yet to be made between Appalachian writers and African American writers. The terms and experiences of both groups are unquestionably different, but as evidenced by Linda Scott DeRosier’s time spent teaching at an historically black university, connections between the two groups—and the ways in which they are represented in literature—are ripe for further analysis.

Lastly, this project has exciting implications for archival work, especially as it relates to Moonlight School documents. Both the University of Kentucky libraries in Lexington, Kentucky and the Pack Memorial Library in Asheville, North Carolina have collections of letters written by Moonlight School students, as well as photographs of participants. Analysis of these letters will most certainly offer new insights into the effects of various literacies upon forming and negotiating mountain identities. Of particular interest would be the methods teachers used, how they compare to practices modeled by Paulo Freire in Brazil and Myles Horton at the Highlander School, and what results—positive and negative—might be evident in the correspondence. Whatever future direction Appalachian literary/literacy scholars take, such analysis will only benefit by considering both the empowerments and the perils of literacy acquisition so clearly evoked in Appalachian literature.

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APPENDIX: PERMISSION

From: "Michael R. Moore" <mmoore@mtu.edu>
To: "Erica Locklear" <elockl1@lsu.edu>
CC: kgvande@king.edu, khollowa@king.edu
Subject: Re: Copyright Permission
Date: Wednesday, February 20, 2008 3:32:53 PM Wed, 20 Feb 2008 16:32:53 -0500

Congratulations, Erica!

The Community Literacy Journals leaves copyright ownership in authors' hands, so it's all yours.

Best,
Michael

At 11:45 AM -0600 2/20/08, Erica Locklear wrote:
Dear Michael,

As you know, my article entitled "Narrating Socialization: Linda Scott DeRosier's Memoirs" appeared in Community Literacy Journal's fall 2007 2.1 special edition on Appalachian literacies. As I told the editors for that issue (Katherine Vande Brake and Kimberly Holloway) when I submitted my essay, I took the piece from my dissertation.

I successfully defended my dissertation on February 11, 2008, and I am now ready to submit the final document to the Graduate School at Louisiana State University. Before I do so, I need to obtain copyright permission from Community Literacy Journal, since my work on Linda Scott DeRosier appeared in your journal first. Could you please grant me permission to include the piece in my dissertation? Responding to this email will be sufficient for Graduate School records.

Thank you so much for your help,
Erica Abrams Locklear

Erica Abrams Locklear
English Department
Louisiana State University

VITA

Born and raised in the Western North Carolina community of Leicester, Erica Abrams Locklear researches and writes about Southern literature and culture, focusing primarily on Appalachia. After completing her bachelor's degree in education and English at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, she received a master's degree in English and technical writing from Utah State University. In 2007 she won an American Fellowship from the American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, and in 2006 she won the university-wide LSU Alumni Association Teaching Assistant Award. She has published in *The Southern Literary Journal*, *Crossroads: A Southern Culture Annual*, *Community Literacy Journal*, *North Carolina Folklore Journal*, and *Appalachian Journal*. In May, 2008 she will graduate from Louisiana State University with a doctorate in English, and in August, 2008 she will begin work as an assistant professor at the University of North Carolina at Asheville.