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Setting the Record Straight:

Anne W. Armstrong, Regionalism, and the

Social Efficacy of Fiction

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Katherine Hoffman Doman

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Dedication

To my parents, Laing and Weedie Hoffman, for the love, support, and confidence to make it through this process.

Acknowledgments

I am a most fortunate person, having benefited from the assistance and encouragement offered by many generous people in the completion of this project. Central to my effort has been Mark Doman, who spent long years listening to my ideas and helping me earn this degree. I remain very grateful for his support.

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process easier by serving as my sounding boards and offering both material and moral support. I am truly grateful.

Abstract

Categorized by the few critics who know her work as a "minor" Appalachian writer, Anne Wetzell Armstrong has never enjoyed the recognition she deserves. But she produced an important body of work, including fiction, non-fiction and drama. In the 1970's, critic Elaine Showalter led the gynocritical effort to recover women writers and inspired the reintroduction of a number of overlooked authors. This national impulse and the positive reception of its results has driven, in turn, an interest in similar regional efforts—hence my own interest in recovering the work of Armstrong, whose work has value in both national and regional contexts.

This study applies a regionalist lens to Armstrong's fiction, including an early short story entitled "Half-Wit Mary's Lover" (1912), and her two novels: *The Seas of God* (1915) and *This Day and Time* (1930). The project begins with Armstrong's biography, outlining the elements of her long and unusual life that influenced her writing. The three regionalist close readings point out the ways in which her fiction resisted hegemonic culture and offered a new perspective to early twentieth-century American readers. This project explores the ways in which Armstrong used her fiction to resist dominant culture's view of marginal populations, with a particular emphasis on the stereotyping of women and Southern mountaineers.

Because Armstrong's considerable body of work focuses frequently on marginal women, the temptation exists to adhere strictly to a feminist lens in reading her work. Such an approach proves valid; however, the lens of literary regionalism—especially as defined by critics like Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse and differentiated from local color by its counterhegemonic agenda—offers a broader consideration of Armstrong's

work. As a site for feminist readings, Armstrong's work proves interesting but stands as one among many; as regionalism, her fiction offers important new opportunities both to support and to problematize current thinking about the definition of the term as it applies to literature and also to explore certain controversial topics arising in the theoretical discourse, the role of feminism being one of those topics.

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Introduction: Anne W. Armstrong and the Case for Literary Recovery

Categorized by the few critics who know her work as a "minor" Appalachian writer, Anne Wetzell Armstrong has never enjoyed the recognition she deserves. If they are familiar with her work at all, most scholars know and mention only her 1930 novel *This Day and Time*, set in the Big Creek community of Sullivan County in eastern Tennessee. But Armstrong produced an important body of work beyond *This Day and Time*, including both fiction and non-fiction and covering everything from her friendship with writer Thomas Wolfe to her experiences as a woman who held a management position on Wall Street in the 1920's. While her use of genre varies, one theme unifies Armstrong's work: her need to set the record straight based on her own personal knowledge of marginalized groups and to use her own experience and observations to disrupt prevailing opinions on such wide-ranging topics as women in business, dominant literature and criticism, and southern mountaineers.

Because Armstrong's body of work focuses so frequently on the struggles women faced in a very patriarchal turn-of-the-twentieth-century American culture, the temptation exists to adhere strictly to a feminist lens in reading her work. Certainly, such an approach proves valid. But the lens of literary regionalism—especially as defined by critics like Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse and differentiated from local color by its agenda—offers a broader consideration of Armstrong's work and an even more interesting and engaging method of approach. As a site for feminist readings, Armstrong's work is interesting, but it stands as one among many; as regionalism, her fiction offers important new opportunities both to support and to problematize current

thinking about the definition of the term as it applies to literature and also to explore certain controversial topics arising in the theoretical discourse, the role of feminism being one of those.

Of course, one of the first hurdles in recovering Armstrong's work from obscurity is making the case for an "Appalachian" writer's value; in an age when subaltern studies and post-colonial criticism are popular, even the most broad-minded scholars sometimes neglect the study of Appalachian literature[1] and culture for fear that they will be considered less than serious scholars. Just as Southern literature emerged as its own entity from under the rubric of American literature, Appalachian literature has finally begun to garner the interest of established critics, especially those who are interested in the study of regionalism.[2] By examining Armstrong's fiction and showing how her work offers opportunities for critical analysis through a number of theoretical approaches, I hope to contribute to the efforts of other scholars who have been working to shift the study of Appalachian literature into the realm of scholarly visibility and respectability.

This dissertation presents Armstrong's fiction as regionalism, with an emphasis on how each work contributes to the idea of "Appalachian-ness." Of course, her works have value as regionalism in general, but of particular interest to Appalachian scholars are her explorations of the lives of mountain women, especially in the cases of "Half-Wit

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[1] My definition of "Appalachian literature" includes *belles lettres* written about the region as well as written by anyone with a connection to it. I consider Appalachian any literary work that might shape a reader's impression of the region and its people, whether it shapes those opinions directly or indirectly.

[2] Appalachian literature initially tended to be linked to Southern literature, as much of the writing about the region focused on the southern parts of the region. In recent days, however, scholars have begun to realize the importance of considering the northern parts of the region—those located in Pennsylvania and New York, for example—as they define and redefine the boundaries of Appalachia. For one of the most influential considerations of this issue, see chapter 1, entitled "Regional Definitions," in *Appalachia: A Regional Geography* by Karl B. Raitz and Richard Ulack (1984).

Mary's Lover," her earliest published piece, and *This Day and Time*, her second novel. Her first novel, *The Seas of God*, in turn, though it does not rise to the level of literary quality or complexity of *This Day and Time*, offers a unique opportunity to explore the life of another Appalachian woman but one whose experience is urban rather than rural. Along with better-known novels such as Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel*, the novel provides a new site of analysis for scholars whose interest lies in interrogating the somewhat homogeneous feuds-and-cabins view of Appalachian people that has prevailed among outsiders since the nineteenth century. As Ted Olson notes in his essay from *High Mountains Rising: Appalachia in Time and Place*, a growing interest in such works exists. He notes that "when constructing the Appalachian literary canon, previous scholars had focused largely on the literature of the highland areas and coalfields of Appalachia and had devoted far less attention to literature from the region's valley and urban areas" ("Literature" 167). Virtually ignored for decades, *The Seas of God* has much to offer scholars interested in demonstrating the heterogeneous nature of Appalachian culture.

This project begins with a biography, reintroducing Anne Armstrong and examining the ways in which the events and experiences of her life influenced her regionalist agenda. It also includes three close readings of her fiction, the first of which focuses on an early short story called "Half-Wit Mary's Lover" (1912). That reading is appended to the end of this introduction as a preliminary demonstration of the ways in which regionalism fits her fiction. The others are regionalist readings of her two novels, *The Seas of God* (1915) and *This Day and Time* (1930), each of which is the subject of its own chapter. My primary purpose is the literary recovery of Anne W. Armstrong with a

re-presentation and rereading of her fiction, demonstrating its importance in the further expansion and delineation of regionalism as a literary field complete with its own theory and its contributions to the Appalachian canon that, as Olson notes, is currently under reconstruction.

In terms of regionalist theory, Armstrong's work both supports and expands current thinking. First, it undergirds the theory put forth by critics Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse in *Writing Out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American Literature and Culture* that regionalism differs from local color in that it resists hegemony—often both local and national—and that it pushes for a marginal person's autonomy and self-definition. This push is sometimes individual, sometimes cultural, and often both. According to Fetterley and Pryse, local color tends to caricature the cultures and individuals it depicts, exploiting them and/or justifying their exploitation. Regionalism, on the other hand, constitutes an effort to decenter the stereotypes and labels that encourage the exploitation of a culture.[3] It allows the author to act as an apologist, countering previous simplistic, shallow, or negative depictions. Each of the close readings in this dissertation demonstrates the ways in which Armstrong's texts fit what I consider the most important tenet of Fetterley and Pryse's theory: these works fight against stereotypes and socially constructed roles and encourage readers to question (or even reject) the status quo. All of them require identification with marginalized

[3] An example of this in Appalachian literature would be the tendency for local colorists to depict mountaineers as types—usually either as noble but benighted Anglo-Saxons or depraved and violent hillbillies. The contention of many Appalachian scholars is that hegemonic culture used such stereotypes to justify impinging on the local culture to "improve" it. Altina Waller's 1988 monograph *Feuds: Hatfields, McCoys, and Social Change in Appalachia, 1860-1900* explains, for example, how principals of the coal and timber industries encouraged the media to report on Appalachian feuds, creating the impression that the mountaineers were more violent and in need of subjugation than people in other regions.

characters, and they challenge and seek to reorder commonly-held paradigms. But this is only one of the ways in which Armstrong's work proves useful; it also helps problematize and expand the very theory it supports by showing how regionalism exists beyond certain regionalist parameters set by Fetterley and Pryse—parameters that even they have come to recognize as flexible, if not questionable.

Fetterley and Pryse make a number of important points in their criticism, which began to emerge with Fetterley's *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (1978). Like many feminist literary critics of their era, Fetterley and Pryse see literature as political and believe in its ability to effect social change. Fetterley, for instance, points out in her essay "Not in the Least American: Nineteenth-Century Literary Regionalism" that regionalist literature insists—albeit sometimes gently—on bringing readers' attention to a culture in order to raise awareness of it and, in turn, to push for its inclusion in the nation's definition of itself. Regarding regionalism's purpose, Fetterley explains that "in regionalism [she finds] a literature that models a subjectivity attained by standing up for others, not on them" (878). In reference to the national agenda of homogenization, she insists that regionalist texts "challenge the values currently associated with the term 'American,'" which for her and her feminist colleagues is a term too often associated with the national paradigm of white masculinity and that tends to exclude women and even "minority males" (878).[4] For Fetterley, "figuring one's critical stance as unAmerican provides a way of thinking about one's activity that does justice to its political intent" (878). Regionalism, then, tends to explore an individual character's

[4] One of the frequent criticisms raised against Fetterley's definition of regionalism—the one she developed and shares with Marjorie Pryse—is its dependence on gender identification. I share this concern and will explain my reservations in more detail later in the introduction.

quest for self-definition and autonomy in a localized culture and has a penchant for critiquing both the local and the national hegemonic norms as it does so.

In *Writing Out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American Literary Culture*, Fetterley and Pryse argue that "historians have minimized, ignored, and disparaged [regionalist] writers, either replacing them to the category of 'local color' or describing them as a subset of realism by the phrase 'regional realists'" (4). This dismissal occurs, according to Fetterley and Pryse, because the critics sometimes cannot look past the gender of the writer (often female) or the rural setting of a text, so they miss or mistake its agenda. They explain:

> although realism and local color are not binaries in the way that male and female are considered to be, the fact that the writers we have designated regionalist cannot be contained in either category, as evidenced in part by the instability of their assignment in contemporary anthologies, posits regionalism as a crisis-creating 'third' that makes visible the ideological implications of American literary history . . .[;] regionalist texts create more than one kind of "category crisis." (9)

In other words, the foundational ideology of regionalism plays a primary role in setting it apart from the genres with which it is often conflated. It is interesting to note that regionalism often carries out its critique of resistance by borrowing elements from other, more accepted genres such as romance, local color, realism, and naturalism and then, in effect, using those elements against the very genres from which they are borrowed. In this way, it truly becomes a "crisis-creating third." Armstrong's work exhibits these characteristics.

Writing Out of Place also illustrates how Pryse and Fetterley consider and employ the work of other critics of regionalism to support and problematize their own theories. They quote Canadian critic Frank Davey, for example, commenting on how "his complex understanding of regionalism helps explain the marginalization of those particular regional texts that make visible rather than conceal the presence of ideology" and noting his "distinction . . . between regionalism as a political strategy of resistance and regionalism as a commodity production of the nation-state[5] that serves its political interests while pretending to be non-ideological" (5). They agree with his assessment of "the role of the critic," which is to "denaturalize what it means to claim a regionalist identity, either for someone who inhabits a specific geography or for a literary text that takes place within an identifiable region" (5), but in rendering their regionalism distinctive, Fetterley and Pryse also examine the issue of genre along with the issue of geographical place.

In "Not in the Least American," Fetterley explains that she and Pryse "use this term [i.e., regionalism] to create a category parallel to and thus potentially of equal importance to the category of realism. And we seek as well to create a framework that will enable us to see connections, origins, and aims that remain obscure if we continue to

[5] As do other regionalist critics, Davey notes that the nation-state is difficult to define because it constantly redefines itself based on political, economic, and social pressures—some of which derive from regionalist ideology at work. Rather than simply being a place, the nation-state is, for Davey and a number of other critics, an ideology. Loosely defined, it is the national norm as currently delimited by those in power. The nation-state has geographical boundaries, of course, but what is more important to regionalist critics such as Davey (and Fetterley and Pryse) is the set of cultural, social, economic, and political boundaries that it constructs and to which regionalism reacts, sometimes to reinforce them but more often to resist. Davey argues that "regionalism is not merely one of the possible responses to the unifying efforts of the nation-state, but also a differential term that requires a specific other that is larger" (3). Fetterley's "Not in the Least American" serves as an excellent example of this kind of regionalist exploration of tension between the larger "other" of the American nation-state and the regions which seek to explore their relationships to that larger entity.

subsume the work of regionalist writers under the category of realism" (882). Their theory, according to *Writing Out of Place*, "locates regionalism alongside realism and naturalism as a parallel tradition of narrative prose" but insists that it is a distinct category of its own based on the ideology it promotes (4). This is accurate to an extent; the regionalism on which they focus their attention was contemporary with literary realism and naturalism and distinguishable from local color, which they seem to view as a subgenre of realism. But I contend that unlike the "purer" genres of local color, naturalism, and turn-of-the-century literary realism, regionalism has not run its course and continues to be produced. In order to prove this, however, it is necessary first to note the ways in which these categories are defined and conflated by scholars.

Eric Sundquist, for example, author of "Realism and Regionalism," an oft-quoted essay from the *Columbia Literary History of the United States*, not only conflates local color and regionalism but also includes both under the general heading of realism. Sundquist claims that "because their edges blur and their central meanings shift, the categories 'realism' and 'regionalism' cannot be conveniently separated" (501). He notes "the complex aesthetic, social, and economic entanglements between [realism and regionalism]" and claims that, under the rubric of realism, they are "a developing series of responses to the transformation of land into capital, of raw materials into products, of agrarian values into urban values, and of private experience into public property" (501). Though he does not separate local color from regionalism, Sundquist does acknowledge

that there are at least some regional[6] works that acknowledge and investigate clashes of cultures and values—the same clashes that critics like Fetterley and Pryse notice and that Armstrong examined through her fiction.

In fact, in an autobiographical sketch sent to Alfred A. Knopf, Armstrong makes clear that part of her purpose is "to embody in further stories . . . a life fast passing before the industrial invasion [of Appalachia]" (2).[7] This move toward preservation is a common theme among many writers of regional literature and constitutes one of the reasons why local color and regionalism are often confused and combined by readers. Armstrong writes that there were "three or four different things" that "conspired to make [her] undertake a novel dealing with [mountaineers]," one of which was that she "realized that the old life, the old mountaineer, would be things of the past" (3). This particular goal does not set her apart from other regional writers. It is, instead, her political and social agenda that identifies her fiction as regionalism, and the fact that she does not simply lament the passing of the old traditions but strives instead to offer an accurate account of what happens in the cultural interface between central and marginal peoples and also notes the resulting changes—sometimes even improvements—in the cultures of each as a result of the exchange.

One of the subplots in *This Day and Time*, for example, involves the infringement of the industrial world on the rural by way of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA),

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[6] For ease of reference, I will use the term "regional literature" to refer to the conflated body of work containing both local color and regionalism; I use "regionalism" and "regionalist" to refer specifically to those works which exhibit a clear and sustained resistance to hegemony.

[7] Armstrong refers here to a collection of short stories that, to my knowledge, does not exist in either manuscript or typescript form anymore. If she indeed wrote it, it was never published as far as I can determine. I have not discovered any of her post-1930 short fiction, published or unpublished, that focuses on mountain culture.

which dammed a number of the mountain rivers in the 1940's to create a system of lakes for hydroelectric generation.[8] The comments of Armstrong's fictional Senator Timberlake mirror the claims made by the TVA when it began to push people off of their land and flood their farms; his argument is that creating the lakes will in turn create jobs and opportunities for the mountaineers and make their lives more like those of the flatlanders. In reality, the flooding of the valleys resulted in the displacement of a number of people to other areas of the country and did little to further the prosperity of the mountaineers. Armstrong's protagonist, Ivy Ingoldsby, speaks against the idea to the senator, but her double alterity[9] (she is both a woman and a mountaineer, thus twice marginalized) allows him not to take her seriously. The reader, however, has come to identify with Ivy and because of this identification recognizes the negative—and previously obscured—paternalistic and capitalistic attitudes of the senator clearly. The reader is also aware from the first pages of the book that Ivy has experienced the "town life" that Senator Timberlake declares better than hers but has rejected it as unsatisfactory. Political and social commentary like this, along with Armstrong's desire to foreground the struggles of mountain women and to chronicle mountain culture more precisely, prompted her to write *This Day and Time.*

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[8] Armstrong's own property was inundated by the TVA in the mid-1940's.

[9] Though my definition of the term differs from his, I borrow "double alterity" from Rodger Cunningham, who uses it in his 1996 essay "Writing on the Cusp: Double Alterity and Minority Discourse in Appalachia" from *The Future of Southern Letters* (pp. 41-53). According to Cunningham, Appalachians are characterized by double alterity because they are from a region which is a sub-region of the nation. He argues that the nation sees the South as "other" and that the South, in turn, sees Appalachia as "other." Of course, this view has since been complicated by those who insist that Appalachia be seen *in toto*, with its more northern parts included. Using Cunningham's definition, I might argue that Ivy actually suffers *triple* alterity.

Like Sundquist, Donna Campbell, author of *Resisting Regionalism: Gender and Naturalism in American Fiction, 1885-1915*, considers both regionalism and local color together as a form of realism. Her text asserts that "the displacement of local color fiction and those women who were its contributors occurred as part of a broader shift from realism to naturalism, which in turn marked the passing of a nineteenth-century sensibility and the emergence of a twentieth-century one" (5). She also states that "it is the naturalists' perceptions about local color rather than the demographics of the practitioners that inform [her] argument" (6). Her main contention is that regional writing because it was associated with women was pushed out of fashion by naturalism, a literary movement associated strongly with men. This claim has merit; clearly, patriarchal control of the publishing business prevailed at the turn of the century, and as a number of feminist critics have pointed out, many male writers and critics were threatened by the success of their female counterparts. Fetterley and Pryse make a similar assessment, attributing prevailing attitudes in large part to male animosity toward female writers. Importantly, however, Campbell elides the distinction that Fetterley and Pryse make between local color and regionalism.

Armstrong's anti-essentialist, anti-stereotypical agenda anticipates Fetterley and Pryse's thinking regarding the local color tendency to caricature cultures and exploit them. Often, critics who do not differentiate between local color and regionalism focus on the limitations of Fetterley and Pryse's feminist leanings and ignore what is actually Fetterley and Pryse's strongest point: regionalism's ideology of resistance to hegemony. The tendency for critics to dwell on and disparage their theoretical overdependence on gender evokes Fetterley's concern that if scholars accept this argument, the "re-

vanishing" of the women writers who have been so carefully recovered from obscurity over the past several decades may occur. I argue, using Armstrong as an example, that Fetterley and Pryse's contention about the differences in ideology and agenda is actually more important than these authors' feminist leanings, and that scholarly attention to their regionalist ideology and agenda will keep these authors from re-disappearing. The feminist push against patriarchy that Fetterley and Pryse seem to cling to as central to their theory can easily be generalized into a broader concern with hegemony of any sort.

Neither element should be deleted, but I argue here for a reconsideration of how they are viewed in terms of importance. In such a rearrangement of priorities, feminism becomes important as one of many ways in which regionalism resists hegemonic culture but loses first position. This move would help embrace within regionalism the example of Charles W. Chesnutt's *The Conjure Woman and Other Tales*, which Fetterley and Pryse discuss in detail in the introduction to *American Women Regionalists* but which they seem to have some trouble accommodating and whose texts—after a great deal of explanation and justification—they ultimately choose to exclude from a volume in which they claim to want to be inclusive. Shifting the focus to a general concern about power allows Chesnutt (and other male writers) to fit the designation without excluding any of the women or the protofeminist and feminist elements of their agendae.

In most of their work, especially that published before 1998, Fetterley and Pryse focus almost exclusively on the work of female writers of the late nineteenth century. Their anthology entitled *American Women Regionalists: 1850-1910* proposes a specific time frame for regionalism. Just as I question the primacy of feminism to their theory, I seek to extend this timeline; Armstrong's work supports my contention that regionalism

was produced well into the twentieth century and continues to emerge. All of Armstrong's regionalist work (at least, all that has been discovered so far) falls after 1910 and stretches toward mid-century, offering evidence that while it may have been undergoing some changes, regionalism was still extant and even developing post-1910, especially in regions like Appalachia. In fact, a rich vein of Appalachian regionalism began after the turn of the century, and a regionalist agenda continues to be central to many "Appalachian" works from the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Fetterley and Pryse themselves would probably not dismiss such an extension out of hand; in the introduction to their anthology, they acknowledge that the timeline they originally proposed should not be adhered to too rigidly, and the anthology includes works published on either side of their central time frame. The greatest value of Fetterley and Pryse's work, then, is not that it is necessarily definitive but that it gives scholars a place to begin and can be expanded in useful and interesting directions.

Another point of contention in current discourse is the function of setting in regionalism. In general, regional texts are set in relatively rural locations or in quaint small towns, but this is not necessarily a requirement, as exemplified by *The Seas of God.* All of Armstrong's regionalist fiction is set in Appalachia. "Half Wit Mary's Lover" and *This Day and Time*, for example, are clearly Appalachian in terms of setting, as both of them take place in the mountains of East Tennessee, but rather than following the practice of the local color writers, Armstrong's mountain fiction pointedly resists and argues against the stereotypes of mountaineers so firmly entrenched in the minds of outsiders. This resistance, this push for self-definition and autonomy, plainly marks the texts as regionalist. *The Seas of God* offers an attractive opportunity for application of a

regionalist lens because the setting is urban while regionalism is generally associated with rural areas. However, the fictional city of Kingsville is clearly modeled on Armstrong's Appalachian hometown of Knoxville, Tennessee. Although Lydia eventually moves to New York City to seek employment, it is Kingsville's "regional" culture that shapes Lydia's perceptions of herself and others.

As a number of regionalist critics have noted, it is not necessarily the setting itself that marks a text, although the setting certainly serves part of that purpose, as regionalist or not; instead, it is the function that the setting and its culture serve and how those affect the development of the characters that marks a work as regionalist. As Pryse and Fetterley describe it:

> While those writers we have termed regionalist are often interested in features of the physical landscape, they are not nature writers; on the contrary, [they] focus on the relationship of [the natural world] and human consciousness. Regions, for these writers, have boundaries, but those boundaries that separate regional from urban or metropolitan life highlight relations of ruling rooted in economic history and the material requirements for everyday livelihood rather than in physical and 'natural' borders. (*Writing Out of Place* 4-5)

They contend further that "[Regionalists] both in their fictions and in their own biographies frequently move back and forth between urban and rural/regional places; while cosmopolitan attitudes might assume clear barriers between the modernizing life of the cities and the presumptively pre-modern world of the regions, for the writers themselves and in their regionalist texts, these barriers become permeable and transitive" (5).

This assertion certainly applies to Armstrong. In fact, following this logic, one can argue that one of the regionalistic elements of *The Seas of God* is the role the setting plays in the protagonist's development. Kingsville's culture functions as the catalyst for Lydia's most important decisions, even while she lives in New York. She continually defines and measures herself in terms of her hometown's culture, and she does so up until the end of the novel, when she begins to define herself by breaking away to move west. With this novel, Armstrong meant to critique and decenter Kingsville/Knoxville's patriarchal culture, along with suggesting that an individual woman can manage to define herself in spite of cultural pressure to follow sanctioned gender and class roles.[10] Thus, *The Seas of God* exemplifies urban regionalism. As such, it offers an important site on which scholars can focus their discourse regarding the expansion of Appalachia's definition to include cities as part of the picture, accommodating urban areas along with the ubiquitous quilts-and-cabins stereotype.[11] Armstrong's fiction also serves to complicate the discourse of regionalism and render it more interesting by demonstrating how it began to be applied to extended fictional works. While many critics, Fetterley and Pryse included, tend to focus on the short story as the primary medium for regionalism, Armstrong's novels show that longer texts also prove effective as vehicles.

With "Half-Wit Mary's Lover," Armstrong published first in the genre most often associated with turn-of-the-century regionalism and local color, but she likely was working on that text and *The Seas of God*—at least conceptually—at the same time. Her

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[10] Armstrong later critiques this culture vigorously and directly in her unpublished autobiography, *Of Time and Knoxville: Fragment of Autobiography.* Chapter 1 of this text offers more details regarding her views on Knoxville culture, its merits and flaws, and its effects upon the citizens of the city.

[11] See the sections entitled "Urban Appalachian Experience" (pp. 347-352) and "Images and Icons" (pp. 199-237) in the *Encyclopedia of Appalachia*, Abramson and Haskell, 2006.

two novels prove that instead of adhering to the tradition of sketches, short stories, and story cycles, Armstrong began to experiment with applying her ideology to longer fiction. *This Day and Time* became the first Appalachian novel to offer graphic detail in an attempt to balance the darkest elements of mountain life—incest, violence against women, alcoholism—with the more optimistic elements, such as the inherent generosity and hospitality of mountain culture. Using the novel form rather than the short story also allowed her to accommodate more than just cultural concerns. Of a necessity, a short story must take a central issue and cleave to it in order to prove its point in a few pages; the length of the novel allows for more complexity in the incorporation of additional themes and subplots. One example is the political exploitation of the mountaineers intended by Senator Timberlake in *This Day and Time*. The novel form thus allowed Armstrong the space to interweave an interrogation of both the culture itself and the outside forces that were at work upon it. Her second novel, even more than her first, became the kind of "crisis-creating third" mentioned by Fetterley and Pryse as typical of regionalism. Armstrong stalwartly insisted that too many authors had portrayed the mountaineers stereotypically and without complexity, and she trusted her readers to discern the truth—or, at least, another truth—in her fictional account of one mountain woman's life.

This idea of American culture as an amalgamation of regional cultures threads throughout the writings of critics interested in regional literature. In his 1936 essay entitled "Regionalism and Fiction," Melvin J. Vincent anticipated the arguments made by current regionalist scholars when he quoted a review by William Allen White in the *Saturday Review of Literature*: "In the nature of things, the great American novel must be

a composite of regional novels. Always since fiction began to appear in the United States, it has been regional fiction" (335). Vincent here elides local color and regionalism. He notes, however, that "we shall have to be content for the present to gather from a number of authors, who have studied the life in various divisional units [i.e. regions], *by sections*, the picture of the whole" (340). This mirrors Fetterley and Pryse's contention that the regionalists whose work they included in their anthology were attempting to make their regions part of the whole of America while remaining distinctive, therefore challenging the hegemonic national definition.

Twenty-four years later in "Regionalism in American Literature," Cleanth Brooks notes "the outpouring of literature from the American South during the last forty years," and argues that "indeed, one way of considering modern literature is to say that the minority culture of the province is making its commentary upon the dominant rootless civilization," insinuating that regional literature has efficacy in defining the national culture (35). He asks a question echoed by recent regionalist critics: "I wonder whether a truly national as opposed to an international or a regional literature may be said to exist today in either England or America" (36). In addition, he articulates the usefulness of anchoring a work in a particular place, noting "the strength to be gained from the writer's sense of belonging to a living community and the special focus upon the world bestowed by one's having a precise location in time and history; the penalties and gains connected with his being in a minority position vis-a-vis the dominant cultural pattern" (36).

Brooks's text further supports the idea that regionalist literature critiques hegemonic culture, stating that "the literature of the South, then, has characteristically moved in reaction to the utopian tendencies. It has criticized the dominant urban culture

from the point of view of a conservative minority culture" (39). Of course, some exceptions can be taken to this last statement; certainly not all Southern literature operates in this manner, nor is all of it written from conservative and/or rural viewpoints. But in general, his statement applies well to literature written from a regional point of view—especially that with a regionalist agenda—in that these works require the reader to identify with something other than hegemonic culture, however briefly.

Brooks's essay contains an eloquent explanation of how individuals surrender and conform to hegemony, lamenting this tendency and stating that because of this homogenization, "our modern world" is "one in which the moral component of life has tended to disappear" (40). As he puts it:

> You own so much stock in American Telephone and Telegraph, but you obviously can exert no real influence in determining its management policies. You hold your modest job in a bank or corporation and are a cell in that great body, or perhaps you are one unit in a great labor union. But unless you make a career out of "leadership," you accept corporate decisions for good or ill rather than make such decisions. And even in your more personal world, the pressures for conformity have become so powerful and the areas of moral decision so narrow, that your basic virtues become perforce those of being a nice guy, a well-adjusted extrovert, and a cheerful complier with the powers that be. (40-41)

For Brooks, the antidote to this homogenization, this compliance with "the powers that be," is the small community in which one has pronounced individual agency and responsibility. This, for him, seems to be part of the power of regional literature, which focuses on "(1) the concreteness of moral problems, (2) the polarities which everywhere

confront one in the Southern scene, and (3) the pervading sense of community," all of which, according to Brooks, show that "the Southerner, even in the cities, has escaped the anonymous life of the great metropolis" (40). Of course, those who see local color and regionalism as different entities might protest to some degree, pointing out that local color, while it is a form of regional literature, tends to promote and defend hegemony rather than questioning it, but they would also agree with Brooks's assessment when it comes to those texts which actually challenge the status quo and push for a region's self-definition.

Although she does not herself argue for a differentiation between local color and regionalism in her essay "Varieties of Local Color," Merrill Maguire Skaggs supports that delineation when she comments that "local color is primarily storytelling, not prophecy; narrative, not symbolism; character sketch, not psychological analysis" (219). According to Skaggs, "the local-color label puts a premium on the idiosyncrasies of habit and custom in a particular place" (221). Skaggs notes that "writers who do not know well the terrains choose to simply repeat the clever observations of earlier writers. Literary conventions are thus created. In this way, the mountaineers of Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and Georgia became indistinguishable" (221). Skaggs's essay discusses a number of authors whose late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century literature focuses on a particular place with its geographical and cultural idiosyncrasies, but does not distinguish between those works which exploit local custom and culture and those which seek to explain or valorize it. For instance, she calls both Mary Noailles Murfree and John Fox, Jr., local colorists, though Murfree is clearly a regionalist (as Fetterley and Pryse have identified her), while Fox is a local colorist. Skaggs also does not differentiate

between the "local color" writing of men and women, though she does note the association of regional literature with the feminine and also observes its consequent dismissal by a number of scholars as less worthy of study than the modernist literature that followed it (219-220).

Armstrong's regionalist agenda—clearly stated in her autobiographical sketch—recognizes what Skaggs points out as the tendency of people to view mountain culture on a surface level or, worse, to rely on old and inaccurate stereotypes in creating their fiction. Her purpose was to rectify the fact that "mountain life had, in general, been depicted thus far as more joyless, and the mountaineer himself as a more melancholy creature, than is actually the case. [She] wanted too to protest against some of the rather sticky[12] mountaineers that had been appearing in print during the last few years and some of the preposterous interpretations of them by journalists" ("Autobiographical Sketch" 3). Armstrong intends to set the record straight regarding both mountain culture in general and in particular "the mountain woman's life, her often heroic struggle" which, in Armstrong's estimation, "had not been sufficiently stressed" (3). Regarding others who wrote about the same culture and dialect, Armstrong notes that "a story teller may have his people talk as he chooses. I only object to the critics' calling it 'authentic'" (4). Her objective, then, is to present the mountain folk as accurately as possible so that her readers might learn what the culture is really like. Armstrong was after a certain type of realism; hers was a regionalist realism that attempted to correct commonly held but

[12] In her autobiography, Armstrong uses the word "saccharine" rather than "sticky." She writes: "How little I thought that in years to come the endless windings, twistings, of my life would bring me eventually into long and intimate association with this elemental folk. I would even write a book about then [sic], *This Day and Time*, . . . a protest against the saccharine Southern Mountaineers appearing in contemporary American fiction" (*Of Time and Knoxville*, 90-91).

imprecise paradigms regarding this "colorful" culture without romanticizing or sentimentalizing them.

Similarly, in "Toward the Ends of Regionalism," Frank Davey cites P.A. Buckner's observation on Canadian regionalism that there was a "need to replace stereotypes and myths . . . with research that could detail such things as regional and class differences" and which might work against "an homogenizing and essentializing label that has obscured historical and local diversity" (9). Davey goes on to observe that regionalism operates from "an interest in replacing mythologies with political, economic, historical, and ideological differentiation" (10). Armstrong's clearly stated objective was that of shifting the national paradigm by offering her own "research": the observations and insights she had gained based on a close association with mountain culture. She hoped that by sharing her account, she might change the commonly-held "outlander" perceptions of mountaineers. Her effort involved taking up the regionalist agenda set forth by her literary predecessors and applying it to the novel.

Though Armstrong's work is often centered on women and women's issues, it helps make a case for extending regionalism beyond a programmatic feminist focus[13] to a broader examination of social structure and the ways in which power and oppression are reflected and interrogated in literature. Armstrong constitutes an important bridge figure,

[13] I do not deny the importance of regionalism's feminist focus. I recognize how it grew out of the feminist canon critique of the 1960's and 1970's, and appreciate that many of the earliest examples of regionalism are the work of women, such as those collected and analyzed in *American Women Regionalists: 1850-1910*. But just as feminism developed from an interrogation of its original focus on the work of affluent white women to include women who were even more marginalized, so has regionalism grown to encompass more than the male/female binary. Armstrong's works, especially "Half-Wit Mary's Lover" and *This Day and Time*, are productive sites for the examination of regionalism as a commentary on hegemony in general—beyond the male/female binary—and how it results in the oppression of particular groups such as the southern mountaineer.

playing a previously underappreciated role in the emerging voice of women in Appalachian literature and also in the earliest efforts to critique the ways in which hegemonic culture exploited and oppressed the mountaineer in general. Publishing her fiction between the genteel but insistent regionalism of writers like Mary Noailles Murfree and Emma Bell Miles and the grittier, more troubling and revealing fiction of authors like Mildred Haun, James Still, Wilma Dykeman, Denise Giardina, and Lee Smith, Armstrong acknowledged the darker elements of mountain life in a way that her predecessors could not. She anticipated, perhaps even inspired, the long line of strong mountain woman protagonists created by those authors who followed her, protagonists who face these elements of violence and darkness but who prevail in spite of them and achieve an undeniable autonomy and agency unlike their less complex and less outspoken local color predecessors.

This Day and Time stands as the first Appalachian novel to tell a mountain woman's story from her own perspective rather than relying on a sympathetic intermediary. As such, the novel opened a door for the generation of native Appalachian regionalist writers who succeeded Armstrong, writers such as Mildred Haun and James Still, whose fiction offers regionalist interrogations of their own culture simultaneously with a critique of the outside cultures that encroached on it. Davey points out the role played by this doubly-directed critique in constructing the ideology of regionalism, noting that "as a discourse, it represents a general social or political strategy for resisting meanings generated by others in a nation-state . . .[;] however, it is important to note that it is usually also a strategy for resisting other meanings generated in its own region—meanings such as nationalism, feminism, class, ethnicity, localisms, or race" (4-5).

Armstrong built on the foundations of her literary predecessors in questioning the definition of mountain culture by "others in [the] nation-state" while pointing out the ways in which the culture kept its own people oppressed. The writers who followed her built, in turn, on her efforts.[14]

Armstrong's prolonged and intimate familiarity with mountain life and her empathy for the position of a people exploited in literary, political, and economic ways by the nation prompted her to write as she did. Though she came from a background of privilege and wealth, Armstrong imagined the position of a mountain woman and wrote her best novel, *This Day and Time*, from that perspective. Neither the local culture nor the outsiders are spared examination and critique; the goals were, first, a fictional work that explains and records the many forces at work in and on the local culture and, second, a work that helps explode and thus explain the stereotypes so persistently applied to Appalachian culture. The goal in this strain of literature is not to excuse the culture's flaws but to allow a reader to identify with and understand the culture through the characters.

Regionalism and Feminism: A Problematic Association

Fetterley and Pryse offer a number of salient points in their definition of regionalism as a distinct and important genre of literature. However, a number of critics

[14] For an example, see "Social Criticism in the Works of Wilma Dykeman," by Oliver King Jones III, in Miller, Hatfield, and Norman, *An American Vein*, 2005 (pp. 73-90).

express valid concern regarding their heavy reliance on a feminist agenda. Armstrong's fiction offers an important site for the exploration of regionalism as women's writing and whether the feminist aspects of their theory hold true as regionalist writing develops on into the twentieth century.

In her preface to a special issue of *American Literature*, Cathy N. Davidson comments on critics' tendency to rely too heavily on the "separate spheres" model for reading literature. As editor of the issue, she sought essays that wrestled with "how other categories [besides the male/female binary] complicate the separate spheres paradigm, especially with regard to issues of race, class, sexuality, *region*, religion, occupation, and other variables" (443, emphasis mine). Clearly, this move away from the binary opposition is as important in regionalism as it has been in other areas of criticism such as feminism, in which debate has turned to the inclusion of women of color, leading, then, to interesting interfaces and overlaps with postcolonial criticism and also to discussion of gender construction, intersecting, that is, with gender theorists who have taken the discourse further in order to consider the possibilities of more than two genders. Armstrong, in spite of her frequent focus on women, shows early glimmerings of this move toward a broader view. A number of her non-fiction essays on women in business[15] support this case.

Another of Davidson's central contentions is that "for all the utopic appeal of loving female worlds, the binaric version of nineteenth-century history is ultimately unsatisfactory because it is simply too crude an instrument—too rigid and totalizing—for understanding the different, complicated ways that nineteenth-century American society

[15] Some of these are quoted in the biography that follows this introduction.

or literary production functioned" (445). Davidson's "hope is that by recognizing different positions in the debate, "critics will "move on to the next level" (448). If this works as intended, then "instead of another binary, the result will be a call-and-response, where the entire production depends for its trenchancy on its interactivity" (448). Davidson's argument in this essay remains general, addressing all forms of literary criticism with a tendency to engage in "separate spheres" thinking, but this type of conversation about gender-linking has certainly been one of the latest hot topics among scholars of regionalism. Armstrong's work presents a very interesting site for teasing out these threads of discussion.

Davidson mentions Fetterley and Pryse directly as she lists her concerns regarding the limitations of heavily gender-dependent theory. As she points out, Fetterley and Pryse "insist that post-separate spheres criticism has contributed to a neglect or devaluation of precisely the women writers that earlier feminist critics resuscitated from critical obscurity" ("Preface" 449). She carefully includes an essay from each of these two critics in the issue, noting their importance even as she disagrees with some of the finer points of their theory. However, the main ideas behind Fetterley and Pryse's definition of literary regionalism in particular are not, after all, reliant on gender, and they prove both useful and accurate in assessing the value of regionalist literature. For example, in their eyes, regionalism is disruptive; it allows marginal, regionalized people to upset popular conceptions held by others about them. They acknowledge their debt to Michel Foucault in this regard, quoting carefully in *Writing Out of Place* his belief that "points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network" and that "more often [than not]

one is dealing with mobile and transitory points of resistance, producing cleavages in a society that shift about, fracturing unities and effecting regroupings" (7).

For Fetterley and Pryse, regionalist works are those which "fracture" hegemony, not those which support it. Regarding regionalism, they contend that instead of simply reinforcing commonly-held ideas about a certain region or regional culture, these texts have a political and cultural agenda, and they "[involve] us in a process that makes a difference in the way we 'read' the culture in which we live" (1). Regionalism requires readers to adopt a marginalized individual's perspective, then offers them an opportunity to view their own socio-economic and cultural positions from a different angle which is not always complementary or positive. Fetterley and Pryse claim that they "are not trying to establish regionalism as a fixed literary category, but rather to understand it as the site of a dialogical critical conversation" (2).

In "On 'Reading New Readings of Regionalism,'" published in *Legacy* as a response to critiques of their work, Fetterley demonstrates her willingness to expand the discourse even as she declares her uneasiness about the push toward minimizing or eradicating the feminist coloring of her work with Pryse. Regarding the concerns voiced by Davidson and others, she says, "I feel at an impasse right now as to how to pick up the subject of regionalism in a way that does the kind of feminist work that I want to do but is also responsive to some of the legitimate questions people have raised about our earlier work" ("On Reading"). Undervaluing feminism's contributions to the rediscovery of regionalist works would be a mistake. Fetterley and Pryse's theory shares a strong connection to feminist canon critique and has a logical gender ideology element—especially in terms of the time period on which they first concentrated their analysis.

During that time, women—mostly affluent, educated white women—were the most literate and articulate marginalized group and had the easiest access to readers.

As Skaggs notes in "Varieties of Local Color," the "association of local-color writing with women is not accidental. A startlingly high percentage of the Southern writers publishing in the late nineteenth century were female" (219). Skaggs also points out that in spite of the assumptions made about the prevalence of Reconstruction poverty in the South, these women were people of means and education: "indeed, most of these women came from an affluent social background . . . [;] as a group they represent a social and economic class much higher than that of the Southern male writers of the same period" (220). But writers such as Charles W. Chesnutt, whose fiction shares the women regionalists' concerns about empowering an oppressed group but applies it primarily to former slaves and other African-Americans, exemplify that other groups—not just women—produced regionalism. Regionalism's agenda has always been broader than previously imagined and is most notably linked to concerns about what we now call social justice. Acknowledging the role that any marginalizing factor plays in a text, gender included, is appropriate—but so is recognizing that there is often more than one factor at work. Armstrong's fiction offers a number of opportunities to demonstrate this point. Read a certain way, even Fetterley and Pryse suggest that a concern regarding the imbalance of power holds primary importance in driving the regionalist agenda.

Though she often wrote about the experiences and tribulations of women, Armstrong anticipated the broader concerns regionalist critics now discuss regarding hegemony in general, not just the patriarchal elements of it associated with the male/female binary opposition. "Half-Wit Mary's Lover," for example, can be read

through a feminist lens to great effect, but the close reading of the short story appended to the end of this chapter also demonstrates that though there are elements of the story that could be read as a feminist critique of patriarchy, these do not seem to be the most important details. Instead, Armstrong emphasizes the relationship between the women in this community to illustrate that women are equally as prone to hierarchical thinking and small-mindedness as are men. There are men in the story, but they appear infrequently (Mr. McCormick) or are entirely offstage (Mary's imaginary beau and her abusive father). The story does mean to foreground two issues often associated with the male/female binary but at the same time is not tied exclusively to this subject. That is, Armstrong wants first to destabilize hegemonic assumptions about marginalized groups, specifically African-Americans and mountain people. Second, she wants to emphasize the ways in which people oppress each other when they adhere inflexibly to social constructs that unfairly privilege one group over another.

Though Armstrong's gender, experience, and perspective often prompted her to use a female vantage point for her arguments against the power structure, this focus was somewhat incidental. It has become almost platitudinous to state that writers rely heavily on their own experience and knowledge when they produce their fiction, but in the case of regionalism that tendency is important because it foregrounds the historical, political, economic, social and cultural contexts these writers were cross-examining and attempting to present to their readers. Many of the writers happened to be women, so their female/feminine perspectives figured heavily in what they wrote, but not all of them were concerned solely with changing the marginalization and disempowerment of women. Though that was certainly part of what she hoped to do, Armstrong's larger goal was to

require her readers to consider anew marginalized people of all genders. In order to achieve this, she offered perspectives from the edges of American society, the depiction of which might result in a fairer treatment of the marginalized.

As a woman who often operated outside of gender and class norms herself, Armstrong relied on her curiosity about those who were different from her, her own experiences, and her keen powers of observation to inform her writing. She had had experiences that few other women were afforded—matriculation at Mount Holyoke during the 1890's at the insistence of her mother, a brief marriage ending in divorce in 1894, the responsibility of supporting her son as a single mother until her 1902 remarriage to Robert Franklin Armstrong, and, later, her management experience on Wall Street. She lived during the years in which the New Woman transmuted into the flapper and during which women fought for and won the vote. The country's attention was firmly held by the controversy over the woman question, and though Armstrong seems never to have weighed in directly (at least not in print) on this matter, she unquestionably would have supported a woman's right to vote. However, Armstrong did not necessarily valorize the feminine. She had little patience, for instance, with those women who, like her fictional Mrs. McCormick, could not move past their preconceived notions to learn about, understand, and appreciate the people among whom they found themselves living and working.

Armstrong's many life-contexts are reflected in the biography following this introduction, which outlines the insights and experiences she gained during her unusual and fascinating life. These prompted her to write regionalist fiction, which constitutes part of her overall effort to push against both regional and national hegemony in

important new ways.[16] She creates powerful female protagonists in her fiction, all of whom suffer from a sort of double alterity. Each is marginalized not only on the basis of her gender but also because of her cultural and socio-economic status. Mary Melton of "Half-Wit Mary's Lover" and Ivy Ingoldsby of *This Day and Time* are mountain women who struggle against the patriarchal structure of mountain culture, a culture in which violence against women is commonplace and often accepted if not condoned. They also face the challenge of overcoming the negative stereotypes ascribed to them by outsiders because they are from the mountains, not just because they are women.

Lydia Lambright's double alterity is somewhat less obvious in *The Seas of God*, but Armstrong intends for readers to see it nonetheless. She carefully outlines not only the ways in which Lydia's patriarchal hometown culture works against her as a woman with the ambition of either marrying well (that is, into an affluent Kingsville family) or finding a fulfilling job after she is orphaned. But, it is not simply Lydia's gender that holds her back; she is also marginalized because her father has lost his professorship—been disgraced for teaching evolution on the university campus—and also because her mysterious and long-dead mother was suspected of having an immoral past. Lydia further marginalizes herself by becoming the New York mistress of a wealthy Kingsvillian and later a prostitute. So, while Mary, Ivy, and Lydia are all undeniably victims of their society's gender construction, which places certain social constraints on them, they are equally the victims of their ancestries and cultures.

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[16] Besides her fiction, Armstrong also wrote a number of non-fiction pieces. Whatever the genre in which she was writing, a common theme seems to emerge: a concern for truth-telling and promoting understanding among disparate and sometimes conflicting groups of people. Many of these texts are mentioned throughout my dissertation as support for my analysis of her fiction, but I have left the collection and analysis of her non-fiction for a later project.

Armstrong's fiction requires readers to identify with marginal protagonists, showing how they strive to overcome or reconcile themselves to their alterity and to achieve some form of agency and autonomy. For Armstrong, the struggle includes a protofeminist push against the patriarchal cultures which have defined these women—for Lydia, the regional customs and mores of Kingsville, and for Mary and Ivy, southern mountaineer culture—but it also includes the broader issue of their inability to define and assert themselves in relation to the larger national culture as well. Armstrong was interested in using her fiction to prompt others to refuse the ready acceptance of stereotypes and social constructions that disempowered any individual. She wanted her readers to think critically, to question tradition, and to dispense with the elements of received wisdom and custom that considered natural the oppression or devaluation of certain segments of the American populace including not only women but men.

The application of regionalism in Armstrong's case will prove her worthy of attention both within and beyond the "sphere" of feminism. Davidson notes that "both Fetterley and Pryse write, explicitly, with the hope that recently rediscovered women writers will not, in Fetterley's coinage, 'be re-vanished'" ("Preface" 450). Armstrong's role in participating in cultural critique extended beyond the male/female binary and, as Davidson puts it, "[is] more concerned with evaluating the larger social system that collaborates in the creation of interlocking ideologies of the separate spheres" (451). This alone supports Armstrong's recovery, but using her fiction as the material for regionalist analysis also suggests ways in which regionalist theory might be expanded and advanced to incorporate time periods and genres of literature not currently included.

Armstrong's texts, then, assist Fetterley and Pryse's "effort . . . to create a community of readers for regionalism and to generate critical conversation about a movement that American Literature has not yet made visible" (*Writing Out of Place* 2). Her works offer evidence that their theory could be logically extended further into the twentieth century, at least in the area of Appalachian literature. It also suggests that the gender-linked aspect of their theory could be relaxed and could therefore accommodate male authors more easily, including Charles Chesnutt and, in the Appalachian field, James Still. Finally, Fetterley and Pryse consider only short fiction, but as the regionalist agenda developed, later writers such as Armstrong attempted to employ it in works of extended fiction. Armstrong's work is thus important as one of the first clear attempts at regionalism in Appalachian literature. Though she never reached her full potential artistically, her texts are important in understanding the trajectory of this movement within Appalachian literature as well as in a national context.

One of the most interesting aspects of regionalism as a lens for reading literature is its broadening effect. That is, the consideration of region in literature—at least as defined by critics like Fetterley, Pryse, and especially Davey—requires a consideration of a work's political and social efficacy as well as its literary merit. Though Armstrong's fiction, even the best of it, is somewhat underdeveloped (take, for instance, her somewhat annoying reliance on alliteration in naming her protagonists and her over-reliance on exclamation points, especially in *The Seas of God*), I maintain that it is nevertheless worthy of study, especially in terms of regionalist theory and the kinds of related theories that might render it useful in terms of understanding our literary history and our national culture as a whole.

"Half-Wit Mary's Lover": A Regionalist Close Reading

In his introduction to *The Local Colorists,* Claude M. Simpson notes that the short story was the "characteristic medium" for local color "between the end of the Civil War and the turn of the twentieth century" (2). He goes on to offer his estimation of why this medium suited the local colorists so well, noting that "provincial manners can successfully dominate the single episode, and it is perhaps for this reason that the short story is a better medium than the novel for their exploitation. This is not to say that the local colorist lacks interest in the more universal aspects of human nature, but rather that his major emphasis is on *differentiae*, not on the generic" (2-3). About the era, he argues further that because of the popularity of Bret Harte's literature, "a host of imitators were encouraged to exploit their own local veins throughout the United States" (3).

Regional literature enjoyed its highest degree of popularity during the era in which Anne W. Armstrong grew up; an avid reader with access to a considerable home library, Armstrong would certainly have encountered works by a number of the authors whose stories are included in Simpson's influential anthology, including Mary Noailles Murfree. But Armstrong's work, while it borrows some elements from the kind of local color fiction Simpson describes, does not precisely fit his definition. For example, while she does deal with "provincial manners" in her short story "Half-Wit Mary's Lover," Armstrong's "emphasis" hits the reader differently from the way Simpson claims. Instead of seeing the protagonist, Mary Melton, as strange and incomprehensible, Armstrong sympathizes with her and her provincial manners and presses the reader to do so as well.

Indeed, read with Armstrong's autobiography and her other fiction in mind, the story suggests that the "Northerners," not Mary, are out of line—not the usual move in local color fiction. This story is regionalism, a genre related to local color but working against it as it attempts to defy and resist dominant culture. Though it uses dialect and rustic characters in a manner not unlike local color fiction, and though the place—East Tennessee—is one often depicted in that genre, "Half-Wit Mary's Lover" uses these elements not to eulogize a disappearing culture or to give readers a tourist's surface-level view of the stranger parts of local culture. Instead, it focuses on the more "universal" theme of the problematic nature of unexamined prejudices and beliefs and shows the reader the cost of too heavy a reliance on stereotypes and the inability to look past them to discern individuals.

As Davey argues, the real point in regionalist literature is not necessarily the location except in that it represents a certain ideology; the location—in this case a city in the Tennessee mountains—stands, to borrow Davey's words, not so much as a "geographical manifestation" per se as it is a discourse "for resisting meanings generated by others in a nation-state, particularly those generated in geographic areas which can be constructed by the regionalism as central or powerful" ("Toward the Ends of Regionalism" 4). In Armstrong's mind and in the minds of her readers, the McCormicks' culture would have been much more mainstream than Mary's. Readers would almost certainly approach the text with certain preconceptions about Mary's mountaineer culture gleaned from regional literature, including travel writing and local color. To borrow Davey's terminology, "geography acts as a metonym for social identification" in a story such as this, in which characters from certain locations—in this case the Tennessee

mountains and the "North"—would be associated with particular cultural traits (3). These notions are what Davey refers to as "visible regionalisms": ones that have been "most frequently constructed in anthologies and criticism, and most successfully publicized and commodified as regionalisms both outside and within the geographic areas they claim to regionalize" (5). The ideas Mrs. McCormick has about Mary derive not from her own personal experience but from what she has "learned" about mountaineers from others, presumably including what she has read about them. Armstrong writes this story in an attempt to dismantle these visible regionalisms and replace them with a more complex understanding of the ways in which adhering to them can blind people, even those who mean well.[17]

With this story, Armstrong participates in the regionalist agenda already begun by writers such as Mary Noailles Murfree and Emma Bell Miles, whose stories render mountaineers—and mountaineer women in particular—rather more complex and sympathetic than other fiction of their day. In fact, her autobiography mentions her familiarity with Mary Noailles Murfree's work,[18] and her review of Edd Winfield Parks's 1941 Murfree biography, "Miss Murfree's Novels," conveys Armstrong's admiration of the author for her willingness to "show a touch of cynicism and the possession of that ironic sense which later was to distinguish the work of another Southern lady of quality, Ellen Glasgow" (212). It is Armstrong's "ironic sense" and her "cynicism" about the ways in which local culture has been misunderstood and exploited that makes her short

[17] Armstrong, even as she is attempting to rehabilitate mountaineer stereotypes, seems also to be resisting what would have been part of the current, more positive conventional wisdom about Northerners: i.e., the idea that as Northerners, they were likely to be more racially tolerant and more open-minded about "Negroes." Mrs. McCormick certainly proves a counterexample of tolerance and open-mindedness.
[18] See page 84 of Armstrong's autobiography, *Of Time and Knoxville*.

story regionalist. Read as an ironic voice, the narrator of the story, whose comments often seem to be in line with the ideas of the McCormicks, conveys the irony and cynicism with which Armstrong attempts to view the segment of society in which she was raised and by which she was, at least temporarily, blinded in terms of respect for the marginalized.

Armstrong initially follows the tradition with which she became familiar, trying her hand first at a short story with regional content, but she was hardly an "imitator," as Simpson terms it. She did not simply copy the local colorists. Instead, Armstrong took elements from a number of different traditions and melded them into a text with a political agenda: that of rehabilitating the reading public's view of mountaineer culture. By doing so, she hoped to challenge readers to examine their long-held preconceptions and beliefs and become more open-minded regarding those who seem to be "other."

"Half-Wit Mary's Lover," published in a periodical called *The Cavalier* in 1912, is the earliest example of her fiction discovered so far. The story stands as an excellent example of regionalism; it makes local culture central over the dominant and seeks to rupture some particular mountaineer stereotypes of great concern to Armstrong. In fact, the title becomes ironic as the reader begins to realize that Mary Melton, though she may have her limitations, is not the "half-wit" that her employer imagines. Armstrong expects the reader to see the mountain woman not only as an underestimated power but also as a sympathetic character; rather than seeing Mary through the eyes of the more educated and cosmopolitan Mrs. Thurston McCormick, readers are encouraged by the narrator to consider Mary's perspective. They are pleased when, at the end of the story, she has prevailed over her "betters." Armstrong builds deliberately toward the surprise ending of

the story, and by the time we recognize how the McCormicks have been hoodwinked, our sympathy lies fully with Mary, whose haul of household goods seems a just recompense for the ways in which she has been underappreciated, taken advantage of, underestimated, and, to use a word even more germane to regionalism, exploited.

Armstrong's autobiography and her two novels support a regionalist interpretation of "Half-Wit Mary's Lover." The theme of the underappreciated servant, productive but quietly resentful of her employers, reappears several times in Armstrong's fiction and is derived from an actual experience with a family servant. In *Of Time and Knoxville*, Armstrong recounts how her mother had engaged "a white woman from somewhere in the Smokies who was said to be clean and an excellent plain cook" and how, when she found that the woman was unhappy working for the family, Mrs. Wetzell asked her daughter to find out why and to try to convince her to stay (93). The ensuing conversation made quite an impression on Armstrong; the mountain woman's comments reappeared later in *This Day and Time* in almost identical form as Ivy Ingoldsby's explanation for why she gave up being a servant in a townswoman's house, and Lydia Lambright has similar thoughts about being a housemaid for the Van Antwerp family in *The Seas of God*. "Half-Wit Mary's Lover" seems to be Armstrong's first attempt to deal with what she learned from this mountain woman whose dignity she may have failed to honor in the moment but whose words later caused a major shift in her thinking and influenced her regionalist literary agenda.

Armstrong's describes the encounter in *Of Time and Knoxville: A Fragment of Autobiography*, an unpublished typescript, and her recollection certainly mirrors descriptions offered of Mary in the short story. It also reflects her reconsidered

impressions of the woman and her eventual epiphany regarding the inner lives of servants:

> The mountain woman sat near the wall, her feet in their worn and clumsy men's shoes resting on the apron, her big-knuckled work-coarsened hands in her lap, her shoulders hunched, head drooped, her eyes downcast, in an attitude of utter despair . . . I think, as I look back on it now, with my later knowledge of the mountain people, of their fanatical clinging to their independence and feeling of losing caste with their fellow mountaineers if they worked as a servant, that no black woman for sale on the block in the old slave-markets ever felt more debased than this forlorn creature whom I had been sent to cheer up. (94)

Armstrong's autobiography offers the woman's explanation for her departure:

> Town-folks . . . is the curiousest folks I ever knowed. Seems like folks in town don't never make a body feel much welcome, so I reckon I'd best get up to the hills and hollows where I were raised up and my fathers afore me . . . [;] You-all's been nice to me . . . accordin' to your lights, but I don't reckon I could ever be satisfied in no town. I'd sooner be dead an' the grave-vine a-growin' on my grave as to live in any town on earth. (95)

Armstrong's analysis of the incident reflects her disappointment in herself and in her family, who had "wept over the sufferings of the neglected Florence in *Dombey and Son*; yet . . . were alike insensible to the heartache within the walls of our own home" (95). "The words [of the mountain woman] stuck in my mind," she writes, "in the minds of all of us, but they amused us, I fear more than moved us" (95). Like the McCormicks, the Wetzells failed to see their servant as fully human. Armstrong clearly later viewed this as

a sort of surprising humanitarian failure on the part of her family, given that they considered themselves much less narrow-minded than their counterparts in Knoxville society. She explains:

> My father was, in truth, one of the most humane of men and with what in his day was considered an advanced social view-point, but it never occurred, I am confident, either to him or to my mother that we could have found a place for this desolate mountain woman in our family circle, in the glow of the open fire, where even Trix [the family dog], stretched on the hearth-rug, had her place and where there was human companionship. (95)

Summing up the effect of the "nameless mountain woman" on her thinking, Armstrong admits that she "kept coming back to me . . . the way she looked when I opened the door to the dining-room that winter evening long ago. She stands a shadowy ghost at my elbow even now as I write these lines in the middle of another century" (96). The creation of Mary Melton seems to be Armstrong's first attempt to exorcise herself of this ghost and to make amends for her family's insensitivity by encouraging others to avoid the same error.

I have noted that according to Fetterley and Pryse, regionalism "makes a difference in the way we 'read' the culture in which we live" (1). In order to write "Half-Wit Mary's Lover," Armstrong had not only to identify with Mary's culture but to read her own differently and to question the elements of it which, in her interrogation of it, she found unjust. As *Of Time and Knoxville* points out, Armstrong's parents, the Wetzells, were very wealthy Northerners. She came in contact with a number of other Knoxvillians who had moved to the Southern mountains from other, more cosmopolitan sections of the

country and who refused to adapt their behavior or expectations to fit local culture. Like Mrs. McCormick (and, I would argue, a number of local color protagonists who represent hegemonic culture), Armstrong's neighbors expected local culture to adapt to them. In her autobiography, these neighbors and acquaintances are those whom she finds most fascinating because of their narrow-mindedness and hypocrisy, and are those whose ideas she works to defy.

Armstrong's concerns went beyond the insensitivity of her family and community to mountaineers. Like the McCormicks in the story, the Wetzell family had a number of African-American servants. As Armstrong notes, though they had been culturally insensitive to the white mountain woman who left their employ, the Wetzells were more progressive in their social, religious, and political views than their upper-class counterparts. Young Anne noticed and was deeply influenced by the difference between the "lenient" way her mother treated "Negro" domestics and the manner in which they were treated in other households.[19] Even as a young girl, Armstrong recognized that these servants were, for the most part, underpaid by people who could well have afforded to compensate them more fairly. Characteristically, this troubled her, and as with other issues of social justice, she sought to effect some change through her fiction. She also recognized the prejudices held against those of the lower class—no matter their race—and noted that such prejudice was not solely on the part of the Southerners but was also firmly entrenched in the minds and manners of the Northern contingent. Mrs. Thurston McCormick, identified directly with Northern culture in this text and steeped in stereotypical thinking, is unwilling to let go of her beliefs even when they clash with

[19] See pages 74-75 of Chapter I.

reality. She can be read as a composite of all of the women in whom Armstrong observed such narrow-mindedness. In "Half-Wit Mary's Lover," Armstrong rereads, rewrites, and critiques her own culture and expects her readers to do the same.

Deceptively simple at surface level, "Half-Wit Mary's Lover" becomes much more interesting when read as an ideological text. Armstrong makes the unusual move of setting the story in the city. The country is close, however, and the mention of nearby rural Sevier County locates the story in Appalachia and activates certain stereotypes and connotations in the minds of Mrs. McCormick and the reader,[20] but these are the very stereotypes that Armstrong hopes to render fragile and the connotations that she hopes to problematize. The narrative unfolds in the urban setting of the McCormicks' home, and it is quite significant that Mary achieves her triumph not in her own milieu but in the Northerners' "territory."

This story delineates Armstrong's position on those who, like Mrs. McCormick, decline to adapt to a new culture and refuse to look past stereotypes to discern reality. In her mind, they lose something important. The McCormicks' loss of their tangible goods, along with the loss of Mary's excellent services, is a metaphor for this greater cultural loss. The story seeks more to foreground the collision and clash of cultures and the historical and economic factors that seem to divide the characters than it does the actual location in which the conflict occurs. Armstrong sets up the opposition of Southern mountaineer/Northern industrialist here only in order to tease it apart and show the ways

[20] Sevier County, close to Knoxville, is in the Smoky Mountains. At the time, the county was known as a likely place for finding moonshine, so the occupation of Mary's imaginary lover would have been quite believable to the McCormicks.

in which it should be resisted.[21] In this way, the text opposes the impulses of local color, which tends to use a specific locality to promote and maintain national hegemony.

Regionalist discourse has recently begun to acknowledge the importance of including cities in the scope of its inquiry; Davey's definition of regionalism certainly allows for and even asserts the validity of urban settings in regionalist works. Fetterley and Pryse support this. This observation applies directly to Armstrong and her body of fiction. A privileged and educated woman for her era, she moved easily between urban and rural cultures and settings herself, though she tended to choose marginal vantage points and emphasize the rural/rustic/oppressed in her fiction. Her protagonists all change settings at some point from the provincial to the more cosmopolitan and sometimes back again. It is by doing so that they become—as was Armstrong herself—socially liminal. This liminality allows them to function effectively in different contexts and keeps them from being as limited as Mrs. McCormick, who refuses to adapt to and honor new circumstances and to learn from them.

"Half-Wit Mary's Lover" is not the only piece of Armstrong's fiction set in the city. In *The Seas of God*, Armstrong places regionalist cultural critique in an urban landscape, once again going against the commonly-held notion that regionalist literature is always set in a rural area or a small community. She does this purposely. Her agenda is

[21] It bears mention here that Armstrong also addresses, albeit indirectly, another problematic element of the interface between Southern mountain culture and the Northern industrialist culture from which she came. When the McCormicks begin to enthusiastically assemble household goods to offer to Mary, they can be read as self-congratulatory and condescending, referring to Mary as a "poor thing," though they themselves are taken advantage of by her in the end (94); in this way, Armstrong may be indirectly questioning and critiquing the sometimes patronizing missionary impulse that led many Northern churches to send money and household goods to set up settlement schools and communities in the southern mountains. Though these missionary efforts were generally welcomed and appreciated, some mountaineers resented them, especially when the outsiders simply assumed that they knew what the locals needed rather than asking how they could help and allowing the mountaineers to participate in the decision-making process.

broader than a simple examination of the city/country binary. For her, as for Davey, regionalism resists the power structure, working to change it in favor of those who are members of what Elaine Showalter calls a "muted culture" [22] and what postcolonial critics term the subaltern. Fetterley and Pryse seem to agree, noting in *Writing Out of Place* that "it is analytic rather than geographical commonalities that construct regionalism across the borders that are presumed to divide writers" and, quoting Elizabeth Ammons and Valerie Rohy, argue that "while some readers still take the region in regionalism at its most literal, comparing regionalist literature with environmentalism and nature writing [,]

. . . region is more accurately a metaphor that describes differences of culture as well as geography" (12).

The conflict is clear in "Half-Wit Mary's Lover": Mrs. McCormick clearly represents what Davey terms the nation-state. Her views (though they may be exaggerated for literary purposes) are those which were likely entertained, if not strongly held, by the reading public. The counterhegemonic elements of the story, those with whom readers are expected to sympathize, are Mrs. McCormick's African-American servants, whom she cannot seem to keep in her employ, and Mary, whom Mrs. McCormick considers and calls "white trash" before she has even had a chance to know her. Armstrong hopes that such an identification with the counterhegemonic will challenge the beliefs and stereotypes the readers' culture may have instilled in them.

[22] Postcolonial theorists might use the term "subaltern" to describe the mountaineer. Begging pardon of Elaine Showalter—who borrowed the term originally from sociology and anthropology and overlay the gender connotation on it—I return to the practice of de-linking her feminist term "muted culture" from gender. Armstrong's regionalist point, after all, is that these people have been effectively "muted" by others who seek to define them from outside without sufficient information to do so. Armstrong's work is her effort to un-mute their voices, both female and male.

Further, Mrs. McCormick's Northern origins and whiteness are characteristics that she shared with Armstrong and likely with the reading audience. She is also clearly affluent. But significantly, she is also the character of whom readers are most likely in the end to disapprove in spite of the fact that she represents their culture.

Armstrong carefully foregrounds Mrs. McCormick's strongly held preconceptions at the very beginning of the story. As she considers Mary for employment, Mrs. McCormick clearly underestimates her; this is the same process of misidentification of the clever subaltern seen in "slave" stories. The narrator offers an impression of the protagonist as Mrs. McCormick sees her, noting that "Mary was a 'poor white,' a half-wit at that, who owed her discovery to Mrs. McCormick" (90). In fact, Mary does not owe her discovery to anyone; she simply appeared at the McCormicks' door seeking a position in their household. But, as is typical of her ilk, Mrs. McCormick is quick to take credit. Her preconceptions about "poor whites" have been imported intact from the North along with her racial prejudice; the narrator reports that she didn't like "colored servants" because "they were irritating, exasperating, maddening . . .[;] after two years' experience with them, if a cordon had been formed of the 'discharged from her service,' it might have covered a good part of the trail back to Guinea" (91). It turns out that by the time Mary appears at Mrs. McCormick's door, there have been "sixteen dusky domestics" who "had entered and decamped, or been discharged, from her employ" in as many weeks (91). The exaggerated and extreme number of departures and the condescending language used to describe the black servants draw the reader's attention and emphasize the extent of the problem, suggesting that the difficulty may lie with Mrs. McCormick herself and not with the servants whom she loses.

A litany of Mrs. McCormick's complaints against her servants follows this information, and from the way in which Armstrong couches it, we are clearly meant to recognize Mrs. McCormick's unreasonableness. We are, that is, to notice that the fault lies more with her unbending nature than with the departed servants. Even Mrs. McCormick's spoiled and lazy daughters recognize the problem: "The girls were growing sensitive about the matter. Their mother was getting such a reputation for being hard to please that soon they would not have even applicants. They had felt a secret humiliation when the last one, discharged, and shuffling out of the kitchen in her big shoes and drabbly skirts had called back angrily, 'Don' like to hire to Northern folks nohow. Dey always meddlin' roun' de kitchen'" (92). The reader recognizes the truth in this servant's complaint because Armstrong has carefully offered evidence which corroborates it.

Evidence that Armstrong based her fictional cultural critique on her personal observations lies in the fact that at least two of the "colored servants" appear later in her writing. The fact that they emerge again in different forms implies that Armstrong was using her fiction to work through her own feelings about race relations while also attempting to nudge readers to be more open-minded than they probably were. For example, one of Mrs. McCormick's recalcitrant servants is a woman named Aunt Caroline, who initially "had promised better than most" as a prospect but who appeared on Christmas "reeling drunk into the kitchen" because "she *would* have her Tom and Jerry now and then" (91). In *Of Time and Knoxville,* Armstrong recounts a similar incident with a "Negro" cook by the same name, remembering that "Mama dismissed Aunt Caroline for habitual drunkenness" (93). In the story, Aunt Caroline is succeeded by "Charlie, the mulatto with book learning from the 'Babtist' College," who proves

unsatisfactory because "while [Mrs. McCormick] would be waiting half the morning for the front steps to be cleaned, Charlie would be poring over Caesar in the kitchen" (91). A similar servant appears in *The Seas of God*. She is Viola, a housekeeper in the boarding house where Lydia Lambright stays briefly after her arrival in New York. Lydia becomes slightly annoyed with her because she happens upon Viola while she is neglecting her duties in order to study Latin. The racial tension is clear here in both cases; these two white women seem in some ways to be threatened by the black servants who read Latin and evidently hope to better their circumstances.

The narrator of "Half-Wit Mary's Lover" also notes ironically that "Mrs. Thurston McCormick was a rigorous housekeeper. She had brought her rigor from 'up North,' and she did not propose to make concessions to changed climactic conditions" (90). Of course, the reader sees clearly that Mrs. McCormick does very little of the real work of housekeeping at all. If she is rigorous, it is in making her servants miserable and in refusing to adapt to their cultural differences. Instead of engaging in self-examination and considering how her own rigidity has contributed to her problems, Mrs. McCormick attempts to externalize, using stereotypes as her "evidence" that the trouble lies with the culture she is trying to bend to her own will instead of with her obstinate adherence to notions that are clearly inaccurate. In presenting this character to readers who might share some of her prejudices and impressions, Armstrong clearly means for them to recognize Mrs. McCormick's errors and to engage themselves in the kind of cultural self-examination in which Mrs. McCormick fails.

In the service of her paradigm-shifting agenda, Armstrong makes use of two tropes often employed in local color fiction about the mountains, one of which is the

mountain trickster figure and the other of which is the insider/outsider figure. But Armstrong does not use either of these in the usual local color manner. In this way, the story becomes the kind of "crisis-creating third" described by Fetterley and Pryse. For instance, Mary "tricks" the McCormicks at the end of the text, but she takes advantage of the McCormicks only because they open themselves to it and even insist, albeit indirectly, upon it. Unlike the protagonist of traditional mountain Jack tales or George Washington Harris's Sut Lovingood, Mary does not seem to be a natural trickster. She does not set out to take advantage of her employers, but she does capitalize on the opportunity when it arises.

The other and more important trope is that of the outsider who enters a region/location and changes it, usually in such a way that subdues the local culture or shifts it toward the mainstream. In a great deal of the local color fiction about Appalachia, outsiders come into a mountain community and end up in control of either the environment or the people or both; John Fox, Jr.'s fiction offers a number of examples of the disruptions and changes effected by outsiders on mountain people and communities and the economic successes achieved by outlander characters at the mountaineers' expense. Fox's fiction contrasts with Armstrong's, however. In his work, the mountain folk are depicted in such a way that the outlander's exploitation of them seems justified; the law must be called in, for example, in *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* in order to rein in the violent members of the mountain community. In Armstrong's story, however, the tables are subtly turned. Her rural/lower class protagonist enters and successfully exploits hegemonic culture. As Fetterley and Pryse point out, regionalist fiction suggests that "regions are never fully ruled," and Armstrong's depiction of Mary

certainly supports that notion (*Writing Out of Place* 6). Ideologically, it is significant that Mary, a rural/lower class character, enters the city and profits from the opportunities she finds there first by being honest and doing an excellent job.[23]

Though their prejudices are not as firmly entrenched as those of their mother, the two McCormick daughters nevertheless also have their doubts about Mary's hire. For instance, when she discovers her mother's decision, Henrietta reacts with concern: "Had [her mother] not been warned that in the South the best poor white made a more unsatisfactory servant than the worst darky?" (91). The younger daughter, Sue, in turn, worries that Mary will "get here in the morning after we have made the fire in the range and gotten the breakfast and washed the dishes" (92). But Mary proves industrious, reliable, and punctual, and "as time went on the girls were compelled to admit that, in spite of her idiot face and weak mind, that Mary was far superior as a servant to those gone before" (92). Even in their praise of her, they cannot help referring to Mary's "idiot face" and her "weak mind," a mind which works well enough to outwit them—or at least to take advantage of them—by the end of the story. Had they been more culturally sensitive and approachable, they might have interpreted Mary's silence and apparent shyness differently.

Read through the lens of Armstrong's autobiography, the text suggests that Mary is quiet in their presence not because she has nothing to say but because she recognizes

[23] Mary's honesty and solid work ethic are another element of the story designed by Armstrong to rupture commonly-held beliefs about the stealth and laziness of mountain people. The fact that she does not make all of her mountain characters noble or hardworking—Mary's sister Ellen, for example, is far less industrious—shows Armstrong's commitment to going against not only those types of local color stereotypes that denigrate mountaineers but also those which romanticize them. Armstrong is interested in individualizing these people and showing that their culture is, at least in this way, not so different from the readers' own in the variety of personalities and character traits involved.

the futility of explaining her dissatisfaction with her position or changing the McCormicks' minds about her. Because she is a servant and beneath their notice and also because they consider her mentally deficient, they most likely talk in front of her, and she probably hears and understands some of the insulting and condescending remarks they make. Clearly, Mary needs the money that she earns. Defending herself to people like the McCormicks would not only be futile but might also cost her her position. So, in a passage that recalls Armstrong's memories of the "nameless mountain woman," the narrator notes that "in silent clumsiness [Mary] came and went about her work, month after month; but under her big hands the work was accomplished, and work that could bear the scrutiny of Mrs. Thurston McCormick and win approval was beyond reproach" (92). In due course and in spite of the McCormicks' preconceived notions, she eventually wins their grudging approbation for her work ethic, but Mary remains discontented with her position in spite of their backhanded praise.

Though the McCormicks eventually become happy with Mary's work, the narrator's ironic tone and comments capture their basically unchanged attitudes and prejudices toward her personally. Even the praise they offer her is qualified. For example, the narrator reflects the family's ideas in reporting that Mary "exhibited no creative skill; but what she was shown she would do as near like as possible" (92). Regarding her appearance, the narrator reflects their prejudices with the comment that "unlike most of her class, she did not 'dip' snuff. Consequently the corners of her loose mouth were clean. Her clay-colored hair, which was always neatly combed, kinked just a little, giving suspicion that somewhere back in the line there might be a drop or two of other blood; but nothing else in her appearance strengthened this suspicion" (92). Though they

appreciate the work she does for them, they still fail to see her as she is: instead, "the sense of repulsion which her vacant face had at first inspired gave way to pity, and presently there grew up in them all a respect for her faithfulness and for the quality of her service" (92). In all likelihood, Mary senses their "repulsion" and is offended not only by it but also by the McCormicks' "pity." Her "vacant" face, like her silence, can be read as a defense mechanism, and though the McCormicks cannot do so, the reader sees why Mary would choose to be careful not to reveal her feelings through her facial expressions or her words.

Ironically, the narrator reports that "it was Mary's honesty that won from them all the highest admiration" (92). Of course, it turns out that though Mary is honest in her refraining from stealing food or hiding broken dishes, she does prevaricate in order to leave her position with the McCormicks peacefully, telling them that she must go in order to marry her moonshiner beau. Had she liked and trusted the McCormicks, she might have been honest about the other offer and given them a chance to negotiate with her. But even though she has done her best for them, Mary never quite wins their full approval: "week after week they expected that something must crop out that would force them to revise their [good] opinion of her, but that thing never happened" (92). Even after she has worked for them for an entire winter, they still fail to recognize Mary's humanity. In light of this, she creates the marriage story in order to depart with the least amount of trouble.

When Mary tells the McCormick women about her impending marriage and that she will be leaving them, their reaction is strong and insensitive. Instead of being pleased for her, Mrs. McCormick complains that "it's ridiculous for her to be married . . . it's disgraceful for a girl with only half sense! There must be laws against it, aren't there

Papa?" (93). She further complains that this has happened "just when it's the most inconvenient to break in another girl" (93). Ever ready to fall back on stereotypes and assumptions, she dismisses Mary's fiancé by declaring that "all outlaws and moonshiners and men like that come from Sevier County, they tell me. I know he will beat her, and, if I should see him, I would probably be sure of it" (96). As is her custom, Mrs. McCormick quickly jumps to conclusions based on what she has heard from others and makes sweeping generalizations that the reader recognizes immediately as problematic; certainly, "*all* outlaws and moonshiners" do not come from Sevier County, but by this point in the narrative, the futility of attempting to disabuse Mrs. McCormick of her deeply-held though untested theories is clear. The daughters, as thoughtless as their mother, conspire to ask Mary to defer her marriage because its timing doesn't suit them. Indeed, they ask her to work on the very day she is supposed to be married. Mary, of course, agrees to do so.

Throughout the story, Mary's responses to the McCormicks are minimal and whenever possible noncommittal. This tendency on Mary's part—offering answers that can be interpreted a number of different ways—is an effective regionalist tactic of Armstrong's. For example, when the family finds that Mary really plans to leave them, Henrietta gives her a couple of hand-me-down dresses for her trousseau. Mary's response, as described by the narrator, is somewhat complex: "She made no comment, but a look somewhere between shame and pleasure, as sometimes when she was commended, creeped [sic] slowly over her face" (94). Henrietta, desiring full credit for her good deeds, "[pauses] for a sign of approval from Mary," which the girl offers only

by saying her usual “Yes’um” and, in Henrietta’s eyes, “looking more foolish than common” (94).

Armstrong wants the reader to recognize here what Henrietta cannot: that Mary probably does feel both shame and pleasure regarding the gifts, but not for the reasons Henrietta imagines. As an honest woman, Mary probably feels a bit guilty about the deception in which she is engaged, but she has not deceived the McCormicks in order to gain anything extra. She has done so in order to escape her position with the least possible amount of commotion. Though Mary looks foolish to Henrietta in that particular moment, Henrietta looks both shallow and foolish to the reader, who recognizes her superior air and her petty need to be acknowledged as generous. And, of course, in the end, we realize that Henrietta must look just as foolish to Mary in that moment as Mary does to her. Considering the disrespect and “pity” with which Mary has been treated in their household, it is small wonder that she chooses to accept the bridal gifts they proffer.

Only late in the story do any of the McCormicks begin to realize that they may have underestimated Mary. Of them all, Henrietta seems to be the character most likely to change and engage in at least a minimal amount of self-examination. Like Armstrong did for her mother, Henrietta approaches Mary with the family’s requests. The narrator’s account of Mary’s last day at the McCormicks’ house reveals the patronizing attitudes of the family, who notice that Mary “[smiles] about her work, which they had never seen before,” and a “look well-nigh intelligent seems to light up her features” (95). They are disappointed that Mary’s fiancé demurs a visit, and when asked about his refusal to meet them, she responds that “he was afeared you-all would make fun of him” (95). Only then does it “[occur] to Henrietta that Mary might be more sensitive than they had suspected”

and that “even in her weak brain some of the finer reserves had found a place, and she did not propose to have held up for the entertainment of strangers those most sacred to her” (95-96). Finally, “Henrietta [respects] the girl’s feelings; [feels], indeed, that she [has] been properly reproved by Mary, and pressed the subject of her curiosity no further” (96). Henrietta seems to have begun the process of change. By including this detail, Armstrong suggests that the possibility exists for more understanding between classes and cultures.

As Fetterley puts it in “Not in the Least American,” “In seeking to empower persons made silent or vacant through terror to tell stories which the dominant culture labels trivial, regionalism seeks to change our perspective and thus to destabilize the meaning of margin and center. For including the story of one previously silenced and marginalized inevitably affects the definition of margin and center and calls into question the values that have produced such definitions” (887). This is, in fact, exactly what Armstrong tries to do with this text. Mary has been silenced and marginalized by the McCormicks, disrespected, and this story details her self-empowerment, her victory over the forces that previously held her in check. Mary thus becomes the center rather than the margin, and in shifting focus away from the dominant culture, Armstrong draws the reader into questioning the values inculcated by that culture. Mary decenters and destabilizes hegemony by showing, through the behavior and attitudes of the McCormicks, how such a culture leaves itself vulnerable when it refuses to engage in the process of self-examination and denies reality.

When Mary's older sister Ellen[24] arrives the next day to substitute for her, the truth about Mary's departure is revealed, and Mrs. McCormick is forced to confront her own skewed view of reality. Asking Ellen about Mary's journey to Sevier County with her new husband, Mrs. McCormick finally discovers, along with the reader, the extent to which she has been fooled; a shocked and bemused Ellen tells her that "Mary hain't married. Mary hain't knowed ary feller in her life" (96). Ellen also claims that "Mary hain't right in her head. She ain't never been" and explains further that "Mary's got a new place out to the lake . . . [;] She didn't like to tell you-all. She's afeared she'd hurt you-all's feelings. You-all had too much company fer to suit Mary. She hearn o'this place out by the lake whar they jest two in the family an' she's gone out thar to hire" (96).[25]

Ellen's revelations prove as vexing as they are amusing. The reader is surprised to find that Ellen, Mary's own sister, calls Mary somewhat of a "half-wit." This is an interesting choice on Armstrong's part. If Ellen is serious and truly considers her sister a "half-wit," Armstrong might be attempting here to make the story less predictable. On the other hand, perhaps Mary has gone home and reported to the family the comments she has overheard regarding her looks, her service, and her mental acuity. Perhaps the mountain women have discussed the McCormicks in much the same manner as the McCormicks have discussed Mary, and Ellen is simply using Mrs. McCormick's prejudices against her. Ellen's very apparent enjoyment of Mrs. McCormick's reaction supports such a reading. But the fact remains that even if she does suffer from some sort

[24] This is a discrepancy; earlier in the story, the narrator claims that Mary has a "host of younger brothers and sisters," suggesting that Mary is the eldest of the brood, but here Ellen is described as older.
[25] It is significant to note that in *This Day and Time*, Ivy Ingoldsby finds a similar position, becoming a housekeeper out by the lake for the Pembertons. To some degree, these relationships mirror Armstrong's own with her housekeeper Rosa Duncan.

of mental limitations, Mary is less "weak-minded" than any of them—including her sister—had previously guessed. The evidence of that lies in the fact that she leaves the McCormicks' employ not only with a wagon full of household goods but also with a better offer in a more satisfactory—and perhaps less condescending—household.

The extent of Mary's "trick" is mildly surprising but pleasing to the reader, who, like Ellen, is amused and gratified by Mrs. McCormick's strong reaction: "[Mrs. McCormick] felt as if she were suffocating, as she fanned herself with the morning paper that was in her hand. "'Well,' she wheezed at last, 'well, if that doesn't beat *anything!* To be outwitted by a—*weak-minded person!'"* The fact is, and Armstrong makes this clear, that the McCormicks have actually tricked themselves.

The story is regionalist, then, in that, as Fetterley and Pryse observe about such texts, it "[challenges] these touristic images and [allows] regional persons to insert articulations of their own understanding" and because it "[disrupts] . . . popular conception" and "[reveals] regions themselves to be discursive constructions" (*Writing Out of Place* 6). This text allows a mountain woman a sense of her own agency: she defines herself fictionally as a bride, prompting the McCormicks to provide her with household goods. More importantly, she learns that her services are valuable and uses that knowledge to find herself a better position. By the end of the story, the underestimated Mary has found that she is, in fact, empowered.

Because the story was written by a woman regionalist and because it focuses primarily on female characters, Fetterley and Pryse might be inclined to offer a more feminist reading of the story than I have. Such a reading is possible. Patriarchal culture is in full evidence in the story from the very beginning, when Mrs. Thurston McCormick is

introduced by her husband's first name rather than her own. Clearly, she is important only because he is important. At the end of the story, the women have given Mary household items, clothing, and "trinkets," all associated with the domestic sphere; Mr. McCormick, on the other hand, is associated with actual money and, therefore, the public sphere as he "[wishes] her Godspeed and [presses] a bill into her hand" (96). Mary's father, the McCormicks learn, is a brute to their servant and her "host of younger brothers and sisters" and "sometimes beat them—even grown, unfortunate Mary" (92). But these elements seem more incidental than central to the story, which focuses primarily on the way in which a group of women relate to one another.

In fact, the hegemony against which Mary struggles here is not male, though it is arguably patriarchal. Nor is it entirely female. Instead, it seems to be a general cultural hegemony that places a dominant group over a marginal group. By taking the men almost completely out of the picture—Mary's imaginary lover and her father never appear, and Mr. McCormick makes only brief and minor appearances—Armstrong emphasizes the fact that women are as capable as men of pettiness and narrow mindedness. She suggests in this story that women are equally proficient in the kinds of damaging and unjust behavior toward others as are men.

In "Not in the Least American," Fetterley writes, "indeed I would argue that literary regionalism occurs most often in the form of the sketch or short story because this form made it possible to tell stories about elderly women with bristling chins, about women for whom the eventful means something other than marriage, about women in relation to one another, about women who take care of themselves" (884). This argument might be made regarding the stories included in *American Women Regionalists.*

However, “Half-Wit Mary’s Lover” proves an exception to this claim because, though it centers on women and the domestic sphere, it does not seem to valorize femaleness or femininity. Fetterley’s essay implies that regionalism is about women in *positive* relationships with one another; this story clearly shows the opposite. In doing so, it supports those who argue that there are other, broader dimensions to regionalism.

About the rationalization of stereotypes and narrowly defined social categories, Fetterley comments that in regionalism, “the rationalization collapses and the category it has sustained no longer seems inherent. Once revealed as constructed, it can then be deconstructed” (887). Fetterley has feminism firmly in mind when she makes this comment, but her point can be applied more broadly, and Armstrong’s intent is in line with that more expansive interpretation of the idea.

This story is Armstrong’s first known attempt to deconstruct some of the mountaineer stereotypes promulgated by local color, and though it has its flaws, “Half-Wit Mary’s Lover” proves both interesting and important as a site for the further discussion and delineation of regionalist theory. Its ideology fits the regionalist agenda of social and political change, and it works against what would have been the prevailing opinion of the general public to require new ways of thinking about a local culture with the larger goal of having readers apply this process in other cases. Having employed the process of self-examination herself, Armstrong paid her readers the compliment of believing that they were capable of transcending their culture by engaging in self-examination and paradigm change in the interest of what we now call social justice. This story and the work explored in the following chapters thus attest both to her agenda and

her faith in her readers' potential for open-mindedness even as it expands our understanding of what constitutes regional literature.

I. *A Biography of Anne W. Armstrong*

In his 1903 essay "The Responsibilities of the Novelist," Frank Norris comments that "to-day is the day of the novel. In no other day and by no other vehicle is contemporaneous life so adequately expressed; and the critics of the twenty-second century, reviewing our times, striving to reconstruct our civilization, will not look to the painters, not to the architects nor dramatists, but to the novelists to find our idiosyncrasy" (5). One of the most interesting literary "idiosyncrasies" of Norris's day was the tendency to ignore or discount novels written by women. Even now, thirty years after Elaine Showalter first introduced gynocriticism with its focus on the recovery of women writers who had previously suffered critical neglect, there is still work to be done in this area. This dissertation is an effort to continue the gynocritical work of "reconstructing" early-twentieth century "civilization" more fully by recovering and reintroducing an important woman author whose work has languished in obscurity for too long: Anne Wetzell Armstrong.

Just as women have previously been ignored by established critics and have had to fight for visibility and respect, so, too, has Appalachian literature—even among regionalists. Happily, this is beginning to change, and Armstrong's fiction offers a new perspective to the discourse. In addition to her value for feminist scholars, Armstrong's short story "Half-Wit Mary's Lover" and her two novels offer an important site for the exploration of regionalist theory, especially as it applies to Appalachian literature. In the beginning paragraphs of his essay entitled "The Rhetoric of Regional Representation: American Fiction and the Politics of Cultural Dissent," Larry McClain outlines the

reasons why regional literature like Armstrong's fell out of favor, and in doing so he cites the influence of such literary stars as Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, and William Faulkner for a general critical "reluctance to affirm the regionally particular"; for these writers and critics, he posits, literature needed to be "de-localized" in favor of the current vogue for what was then seen as the "universal"(228). According to McClain, there exists a "still-fashionable critical bias" ranged against "regional fiction (southern and non-southern alike) that *insists* on the particular instead of the universal" (229). Armstrong's fiction very much insists on the particular, foregrounding cultural social constructs and the settings to which they are connected. Recently, regionalist scholars have begun to re-examine "minor" literary works like these.

McClain claims that "rather than [seeking] to rescue regional fiction from its obscurity by demonstrating its adherence to prevailing canonical standards, [he chooses] instead to reconstitute its power on entirely separate terms" (242). Armstrong abstained from meeting "canonical standards," choosing instead to shape her work as she saw fit and as her agenda of social change demanded. Further, McClain argues, "although non-canonical regional fiction may not conform to the contours of canonical tastes, its lack of critical respect does not signify an absence of value. The 'value' assigned to a literary text is not inherent or fixed but always in motion" (242). Armstrong needs to be re-presented, especially as she fits into the category of Appalachian literature, a canon (for lack of a less restrictive term) in which she has, ironically, been marginalized for years in spite of her focus on mountain culture. This dissertation marks my own effort to initiate a new consideration of her value in terms not only of her influence on the broadening and

strengthening of regionalist discourse but also of her role in the emerging voice of women in Appalachian literature.

For years, Armstrong has been known only to a handful of Appalachian literature scholars, and most of those who know her at all have read only her second novel, *This Day and Time* (1930), set in the mountains of East Tennessee. It chronicles the life of a mountain woman whose husband abandons her to raise their young son alone. But Armstrong's body of work was large and diverse, including an earlier novel (*The Seas of God*, 1915) and many essays and short stories published in national magazines such as *Harpers*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and *Forbes*. Read through the lens of her life, Armstrong's work clearly reflects her concerns for what Showalter refers to as a "muted culture": one which finds itself under the control of hegemonic culture and which must push against it to attain autonomy. Armstrong's novels illustrate many of the issues facing women of her era who operated outside of social norms, as do most of the essays she wrote reflecting her observations and experiences as a business executive in the 1920's. She wrote with a sincere desire to reveal the social constructs that trapped and damaged women, hoping that her writing would broaden the minds of her readers and help them understand and work against what she saw as rather stifling social expectations of women. *The Seas of God* provides a fictional example, and her many non-fiction essays support that goal.

Armstrong's work had a feminist literary context, only recently reconstructed, which she shared with such higher-profile writers as Ellen Glasgow and Susan Glaspell. All of these women created novels that explored women's issues and required identification with protagonists who challenged and interrogated traditional gender roles.

All three writers, for example, created protagonists who were "fallen women" but who were nonetheless sympathetic. These protagonists helped readers understand the reasons why women made such choices as elopement and extramarital sex. Glaspell's fiction has been overshadowed by her accomplishments in drama and has only recently begun to be appreciated on its own. Glasgow's fiction, in turn, has often been relegated to the regional, where it was viewed as "Southern literature," and its national cultural implications were left largely unexplored. But with the reconsideration of authors like these and the reintroduction of authors like Armstrong, a broader, more national literary push against patriarchy becomes evident as this generation of women novelists becomes more and more visible and their work garners more critical attention.

In *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing*, Showalter comments on how, since she first introduced the idea of the gynocritical approach to literature in 1979, critics have "developed . . . a coherent narrative of women's literary history" (xx). She comments also that "women's writing has moved through phases of subordination, protest, and autonomy, phases connected by recurring images, metaphors, themes, and plots that emerge from women's social and literary experience and from reading both male and female precursors" (xx). Though Showalter focuses on British novelists, her theory applies to American women writers as well, and I argue that Armstrong's literary context, shared by contemporaries such as Glasgow and Glaspell and connected by common themes, took place in the phase in which female protagonists began to achieve autonomy. It is this feminine autonomy that threatened the male establishment and provoked the backlash that relegated these women writers to their current (and, I hope, temporary) minor positions in the larger literary picture.

The recovery and reconsideration of early twentieth-century protofeminist and feminist work is important because it broadens and interrogates the picture of what life was like for women. In doing so, it changes the carefully-crafted social constructions and expectations of women set up by a patriarchal society. Norris and the hegemonic male publishing establishment, participating fully in this patriarchy, had a vested interest in diminishing the power of novels such as those written by Armstrong and her female contemporaries. Anglo-American feminism recognizes this male anxiety about female authors and illuminates the ways in which certain women writers resisted attempts to muffle their voices. Of course, a few—Armstrong included—remain muffled, but both feminist and regionalist critics continue to uncover and reintroduce them because, ironically, these critics share Norris's belief that "by no other vehicle [than novels] is contemporaneous life so adequately expressed" ("Responsibilities" 5). Notably, in recovering Armstrong's work women are not the only beneficiaries of re-vision. One of her objectives was the reconsideration of Southern mountaineers in general, and she devoted her most important novel to that purpose. Anglo-American feminist criticism was instrumental in fomenting the kind of canon critique and questions about American identity and culture that, in turn, inspired many scholars of regionalism. Armstrong's life and fiction offer much new ground for exploration by both schools.

In fact, Anglo-American feminist literary critics would agree with Norris's assertion that the novel is "essential" because "it expresses modern life better than architecture, better than painting, better than poetry, better than music . . . [;] it is an instrument, a tool, a weapon, a vehicle" ("Responsibilities" 6). They share his contention regarding the ability of novels to reflect culture accurately and also to change it. As for

his argument that "it is that thing which, in the hands of a man, makes him civilized and no longer savage, because it gives him a power of durable, permanent expression" ("Responsibilities" 6-7), they would argue as I do that such power is not limited to the pens of men; it works for women, too. Citing Norris illustrates Armstrong's vexed literary context: one in which "serious" novels were seen as important instruments of social change but in which they were also seen as the exclusive territory of men. This territory was heavily guarded, as Norris's essays demonstrate. Quoting him here reveals, as a case in point, the attitudes against which Armstrong and other women writers struggled in the first few decades of the twentieth century.

In fact, the same volume of essays in which "The Responsibilities of the Novelist" appeared also includes Norris's essay entitled "Why Women Should Write the Best Novels, and Why They Don't." This essay outlines further the patriarchal view of Norris and his contemporaries that female authors' efforts at writing novels will never measure up to those of males. He contends in the latter essay that "the answer is found in the wise, wise, old, old adage that experience is the best teacher" and that "all the education in the world will not help [women] one little, little bit in the writing of the novel if life itself, the crude, the raw, the vulgar, if you will, is not studied" because "an hour's experience is worth ten years of study—of reading other peoples' books" (234-5). According to Norris, even the most educated of women is ill-equipped as a novelist because "women who have all the other qualifications of good novelists are, because of nature and character that invariably goes with these qualifications, shut away from the study of, and the association with, the most important thing of all for them—real life" (236).

Anne Armstrong is a prime example of the kind of woman writer that he and his patriarchal colleagues overlooked, denied, even purposely ignored. She participated in "real life," as Norris defined it, and she used that experience to write her fiction. But, in spite of this—or perhaps because of it—her writing never found great favor and went quickly out of print. Encouraged by a threatened male establishment, readers' focus remained on women writers who followed gender rules. Norris writes:

> Even making allowances for the emancipation of the New Woman, the *majority* of women still lead, in comparison with men, secluded lives. The woman who is impressionable is by reason of this very thing sensitive . . . and it is conceivably hard for the sensitive woman to force herself into the midst of that great, grim complication of men's doings that we call life. (emphasis mine, "Why Women…" 236-7)

With the word "majority," Norris grudgingly acknowledges that along with the women who stayed within the domestic sphere, there were women like Armstrong who found themselves, for one reason or another, outside of socially-sanctioned gender roles and had to navigate through what was traditionally male territory. Armstrong understood conventional feminine roles and even played them from time to time, as her autobiography and other papers reveal. But she also had a broader experience than most women of her era—perhaps even Glasgow and Glaspell. Her novels draw on that experience and work to interrogate the patriarchal rules against which women struggled for autonomy.

It was her "situatedness"[26] as a woman that helped Armstrong begin to understand other marginalized populations, so if this biography has feminist leanings, it is because there is a genuine link between feminism and regionalism, both of which ask that readers adopt an unfamiliar vantage point in the interest of gaining a new—and sometimes troubling—perspective. Armstrong certainly used her female vantage point as a central component of her social critique, hence her female protagonists. But she broadened her purpose, including but not limiting herself to issues of gender in the hope that she might foreground issues of importance to marginalized people of both genders.[27] "Half-Wit Mary's Lover," *This Day and Time*, and some of her non-fiction pieces such as "The Southern Mountaineers" epitomize her efforts to push for a new and fuller understanding of mountain culture, for example.

As a female college student, a divorcée, a writer, and a business executive, Armstrong often found herself outside the norm. Later, as her family's fortune dwindled, she navigated a change in socio-economic status that left her even more sympathetic to those who had not enjoyed her advantages. She began life as a wealthy young woman with every benefit that her family's position could bring, but her family's commitment to her education and her own choices regarding marriage and work would give her insights not readily available to other women. The fact that she attended Mount Holyoke, a college committed not only to the education of women but to the education of women from all walks of life, certainly added its influence. She used those insights to create two novels that, though short-lived in their circulation, nevertheless push against patriarchal

[26] See page 154 for more on the definition of this term.
[27] Though some current scholars might object to my limitation of gender to two categories, I am working in the spirit of Armstrong here and beg to say that, progressive as she may have been, she would not have thought of gender except in terms of the traditional female/male binary.

strictures and reflect at least one woman's ideas regarding the ways in which women and others on the margins of society might learn to live for themselves. Her fiction took up a protofeminist/regionalist agenda and pushed for paradigm shift. In the case of Armstrong, it is important that a strong, resisting female writer is not ignored—one who offers particular insight into the lives not only of women but also of other muted cultures during this era such as the mountaineer.

My purpose is two-pronged. First, I attempt here a gynocritical literary recovery of Armstrong, and because gynocriticism focuses on the woman as writer, not reader, and on how those women writers are shaped by their own experiences and social contexts, it seems logical to begin with a biography of Armstrong that places her firmly in her historical, cultural, and religious context—the very one that her regionalist literature critiqued. Armstrong's generation of women writers help feminist critics understand the particular subjectivity of women during this era and also help us trace the emergence of the lines of thinking that eventually led to the development of the Anglo-American feminist criticism that blossomed in the 1960's and 1970's. Again, it is fiction like Armstrong's (and that of her female contemporaries) that, though it was underappreciated and often ended up out of print, nevertheless helped to fuel an important movement against patriarchy. These were writers who used the matter of their own lives to create fiction that resisted hegemonic culture and opened readers' minds to the perspectives of those who were marginalized. Second, I am interested in revealing the regionalist agenda that drives Armstrong's fiction. Gynocriticism's focus on the woman as being shaped by her context certainly fits in Armstrong's case. The reverse is also true, however; Armstrong was influenced by her context, but she also wrought changes in it by

becoming a spokesperson for the populations who, in her opinion, were being ignored, misunderstood, and/or unfairly treated.

Perhaps the best place for beginning a biography of Armstrong is the text she produced during her last few years. In the late 1950's, she wrote an autobiography, but she died before she could finish chronicling her long and interesting life.[28] Her typescript, *Of Time and Knoxville: Fragment of an Autobiography,* was never published. Though it focuses primarily on her adolescence, this typescript is especially important because it offers important insight into the ways in which Armstrong's progressive attitudes and beliefs were developed and shaped. She acknowledges the purpose of her effort, writing in her introduction to the work that "this [book] is simply. . . full of the trivia which after all make up the lives of most of us. Though there are facts in it, it is not primarily a book of facts. It is a tissue, if I may call it so, woven of memory, legend, of myth, of gossip, even of scandalous tittle-tattle --- and of dreams, for often in dreams I still walk the streets . . . [,] climb up and down the hills of old Knoxville [Tennessee]" (iii). Armstrong seems both fond of Knoxville and bothered by it, attributing her attachment to the fact that, as she put it, she spent "the most impressionable years of [her] life" there (i). But the overriding impetus behind her autobiography seems to be her desire to tell her side of the story not just of her life but of her hometown and region and even the age in which she grew up.

Other than the autobiography, there are few details available regarding the earliest years of Armstrong's life. Personal records of her early childhood are scarce. However, in

[28] She died on March 17, 1958, at the age of 86. At the time of her death, Armstrong was living in the Barter Theatre Residence in Abingdon, Virginia, about 25 miles from her former longtime residence in East Tennessee.

Of Time and Knoxville, she omits childhood completely and declares that her life truly began with her family's move to Knoxville in 1885. She writes, "Like James McNeil Whistler, who did not 'choose' to have been born in Lowell, Massachusetts, but in Baltimore, Maryland, St. Petersburg, Russia, or where he would at the moment, I choose—whatever my birth certificate may state[29]—to have been born in Knoxville, Tennessee" (1). Anne Audubon Wetzell Armstrong was in fact born on September 20, 1872, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, to Lorinda Snyder Wetzell and Henry B. Wetzell.

Armstrong was the middle child of three; she had a younger sister whose given name was Mary, though the family called her "May." The sisters do not seem to have been close, and as far as Armstrong's autobiography goes, May is somewhat of a cipher. She is mentioned in passing a few times, but there is little information given about her personality or the sisters' relationship. May outlived her older sister, and according to the typescript of an obituary written by John Ardinger of the Barter Theatre of Virginia, at the time of Armstrong's death, May's married name was Mrs. Mary W. Peyton and she resided in Pasadena, California (30).

Armstrong also had an older brother, Harry, who died tragically when she was sixteen. A junior at the University of Tennessee at the time, he had been swimming in the

[29]Armstrong's March 20, 1958, obituary from the *Washington County News* erroneously reports that she was born in Knoxville, while the *New York Times* obituary of March 18, 1958, calls her a "native" of the city. Attempts to retrieve her birth certificate and confirm the place of her birth have been complicated by Michigan's privacy laws, which dictate that such documents—even those over 100 years old—are not a matter of public record and cannot be given to non-relatives. *Ancestry.com* offers the United States Census for 1880 in Grand Rapids, which does verify that she was born in Michigan, though it does not list the city. She is listed as "Anna" A. Wetzell , 7 years old on last birthday, daughter of Henry "V." Wetzell, dealer in lumber, and "Laurinda" Wetzell, his wife. The census taker misspelled Anne's name as Anna, misspelled Lorinda's name, and recorded Henry's middle initial incorrectly as "V" rather than "B." In spite of the errors, this is most certainly the correct household.

Tennessee River with a friend when he drowned, June 4th, 1888. Though Armstrong loved and admired her brother, she readily admits that they were not close. She writes:

> With very different temperaments, there had never been the ideal relationship between us that exists between some brothers and sisters. Perhaps I was too self-centered to look up to him as some girls to their older brothers. But we had very different tastes, too. Harry was one who accepted the prevailing thought around him without question. He had never stayed around as I had, more or less out of sight, drinking in conversations of my father with his friends on philosophic, religious, or political subjects. He had none of my own insatiate curiosity about books. Yet for all that, we shared memories and knowledge shared by no one else . . . this was my brother! I was proud of him. (*Of Time and Knoxville* 290)

Armstrong's relationship with her brother, then, seems vexed; for instance, she admired him, but she did not share his religious piety or his scientific interests. Of course she was deeply affected by his death, as was the rest of her family. But in some ways, Harry's loss seems to have shifted her parents' focus onto her in some positive ways. She became the eldest child, and she reports that after Harry's death, her mother became even more committed to the idea of her attending college. As she puts it, "Now that Harry was gone, my parents, it was clear, were centering their hopes and ambitions on me, and during the summer Mama had been so favorably impressed by a niece returning to Mount Holyoke for her last year that it was to this institution founded by Mary Lyon[30] that she decided to send me" (306).

[30] Pages 103-104 of this chapter offer an analysis of why Mount Holyoke seemed to fit the Wetzells' educational ideals for their daughter.

In spite of the tragedies she endured there—Harry's death and her father's terrible accident just over a year later[31]—Armstrong loved Knoxville and remained nostalgic about it for the rest of her life. She was fascinated by and drawn to the city in spite of the fact that unlike Harry, she never really became completely acculturated to what she frequently referred to as the "hypocritical" and "narrow-minded" elements of upper-class Knoxville society. Her first novel, *The Seas of God* (1915), is set in a fictional southern city called Kingsville. A June, 1915, review of the novel in the *New York Times* hypothesizes that this fictional city is Richmond, Virginia, but it is clearly the Knoxville of Armstrong's adolescence as she describes it in *Of Time and Knoxville*, replete with characters she knew from her younger days: a kindly, open-minded, intellectual father; an aristocratic, old-south rake who proves to be the undoing of a beautiful young woman; and the narrow-minded but well-meaning neighbors who try to keep that young woman tidily bound in her traditional gender role, to mention just a few. Her adolescent observations and experiences translated through the lens of several years of experience as an outsider—as college student, wife, divorcee, single mother—became the basis for her first novel, which forwards an agenda both protofeminist and regionalist.

Though Armstrong sometimes struggled against the Knoxville society in which she grew up, she also appreciated it. She managed, due to her family's wealth and social standing, to circulate in all of the upper social circles, but she was able to avoid either adopting or falling victim to what she saw as its more negative social characteristics. Her assessment of her fellow Knoxvillians, though much of it came from her own personal

[31] Armstrong's father was horribly injured while on a train ride to celebrate the opening of a new railroad spur around Knoxville. He was with many other of the "merchant princes" of Knoxville, all of whom had an interest in the endeavor. Evidently, his back was broken, and he was paralyzed by the accident. See pages 97-100 of this introduction for a more detailed account.

observations, also derived largely from her parents' thinking. They were, in contrast to most of their neighbors and business associates, very liberal in regard to religion and social issues. Though their money allowed them to get on well with Knoxville's elite on a surface level, they took every opportunity to expose young Anne and her siblings to other cultures and ideas. As she reports in *Of Time and Knoxville*, Armstrong traveled extensively in Europe and the United States with her parents. She even ventured into the wildest mountain communities with her father on his lumber-buying trips.

Of Time and Knoxville recounts how her parents withdrew her from school on more than one occasion in order to take her on these journeys. About beginning school late, she wrote:

> School had opened a month earlier. But there had always been a trip somewhere to prevent starting school when the other children did, and looking back on it, I am less and less inclined to believe that this was either careless or merely accidental on the part of our anything-but-easygoing parents. If opportunity for travel offered, we would gain as much from it, they evidently believed, as from the days we would otherwise have spent in school. This seems to fit with the pains they took, wherever we were, to have us, at so early an age, visit historic sites, art galleries, and to see the great plays and actors of the day. (108)

A few pages later, Armstrong wrote that in comparison to her schoolmates, she "had traveled widely while they had never been anywhere to speak of except Knoxville; that [she] had seen famous theatrical stars that were only names to them" but that such experiences had not, she claimed, given her "the slightest feeling of superiority" (111). In

fact, she admits that she "envied them" for "the wild fun they had at Montvale, Lea Springs, or Tate's, nearby resorts where they went with their families in summer" (111).

In her autobiographical sketch written for Alfred A. Knopf, who eventually published *This Day and Time*, Armstrong remembered how her father also took his family with him on his business travels around the Appalachian mountains:

> My childhood and girlhood were spent in Knoxville, Tennessee. My father was, at that time, the American manager of an English syndicate interested in the development of mining and timber properties in our southern mountain country. My only brother having been drowned in the Tennessee River, my father made me more of a companion than perhaps otherwise would have been the case,[32] and some of my childhood memories are of accompanying him on mining and timber prospecting trips in the mountains . . . staying with him at night in cabins thirty-five and forty miles from the railroad, cabins always teeming with children, and going out with the other children, when it was barely light, on frosty fall mornings, to wash in the "branch" that tumbled down behind the cabin. (1)

These trips introduced her to another world outside of but in close proximity to the privilege and comfort enjoyed by her family. In *Of Time and Knoxville*, Armstrong offers a more detailed account of the visits to mountaineers and how these folk "had not been made known to our household solely through Miss Murfree," then known as Charles

[32] Oddly, Armstrong's autobiography claims that at least some of these visits with mountain folk took place before Harry's death, contrary to her comments in the letter to Knopf. The letter was most likely written in the late 1920's, since *This Day and Time* was published in 1930. The autobiographical typescript was made in the late 1950's, while Armstrong lived at the Barter Theater Residence in Abingdon, Virginia.

Egbert Craddock, whose stories and novels of the mountaineers were wildly popular[33] (84).

More than her peers in Knoxville, then, Armstrong was exposed early in her life to a number of different cultures and classes of people. Her autobiography reflects her eclectic experiences with people of all classes and races, including the "negro servants" whom her family employed and whom her mother refused to treat the way others did. These early experiences most certainly influenced her later regionalist agenda, and many of the concerns she expresses about marginalized people in her autobiography later appear as elements of her fiction. For example, though the neighbors advised Mrs. Wetzell that she should "measure out the flour, meal, grits, sugar, coffee, and other supplies needed daily, then lock up the rest and carry the key herself," she did not do so (91). Most of the wealthy Knoxvillians who employed "negro" servants considered them untrustworthy and slatternly; Mrs. McCormick, one of the central characters in Armstrong's short story "Half-Wit Mary's Lover" reflects the most extreme levels of prejudice and narrow-mindedness young Anne must have seen in some of these neighbors. On the other hand, Armstrong's compassion for these servants came from within her own family; her mother realized that the wages paid to house servants were too low and also that in order to feed their families, these people sometimes took home the scraps and crumbs left over from the families for whom they worked. Rather than upsetting the social order by paying her servants a higher wage, "Linnie" Wetzell decided to allow them to take home extra food and supplies. This way, she could assuage her

[33] Armstrong later wrote a review of Edd Winfield Parks' biography entitled *Charles Egbert Craddock (Mary Noailles Murfree)*. The critique was published in *Yale Review* in 1941.

conscience without causing a social stir. The Wetzells were part of the upper echelon of Knoxville society by virtue of their money, but their daughter saw that they were different in significant ways, more socially and religiously liberal than their Knoxville counterparts. This difference, observed initially in her parents, sharpened her curiosity about those who were different from her and would shape Armstrong's approach to marginalized people for the rest of her life.

Armstrong was, then, anything but, to use Norris's terms, "shut away . . . from real life." She certainly positioned herself (and was forced) into what he refers to as the "great, grim complication of men's doings." She was insatiably curious, a trait she never lost. Throughout her autobiography and in many of her other non-fiction writings, she continually recounts instances in which she overhears or participates in conversation from which she gleans important details—not always pleasant ones—and makes inferences that lead her to conclusions about the workings of society. At thirteen, for instance, she already understood something about the power of money. She knew why her family had moved to East Tennessee, which was "the strategic center of a region abounding not only in marble, but in iron and coal, with endless tracts of timber, an all but inexhaustible supply, to which the ax had not yet been laid. Fabulous fortunes would be made here" (*Of Time and Knoxville* 9).

As Armstrong was growing up in Knoxville during the 1880's and 1890's, the city of Knoxville was enjoying an economic heyday. Much of the upper crust of society tended to look backward in many ways to the antebellum Confederate aristocracy, but there were a number of Northern industrialists, Armstrong's father included, who chose to move to Knoxville for the opportunities it offered. Though some undercurrents of

conflict remained, as Armstrong details in her accounts of Knoxvillian schoolmates whose families harbored a strong nostalgia for the "Lost Cause" of the Confederacy, those two groups who had fought so bitterly during the Civil War were generally quick to make peace and learned to coexist in the interest of commerce. Armstrong's father, a lumber prospector for a British company, had been a Union soldier and had fought at the battle of Fort Sanders in Knoxville during the war.[34] He returned there with his family twenty years later to live and work, choosing Knoxville because of its economic and geographical advantages as a railroad hub and its location on the edge of what was then considered the West.

"It is true," she wrote, "that my father had already made a fortune, or so I had inferred from words let drop by our eccentric . . . Cousin Simon: 'By George, Henry a millionaire, and not yet forty'" (9). Like so many Gilded-Age millionaires, however, Henry Wetzell had also fallen on relatively harder times, and his daughter knew it. She wrote, "I had gathered also, from this and that, a vague impression that my father had lost some of the first fortune and was bent now on making another in a new region thus far largely unexplored, undeveloped—or as we would say in labor days, unexploited" (9). This last comment reveals not only her early understanding of her father's business as part of the "great, grim complication of men's doings" but her later ambivalence about the industrialists who "exploited" Appalachia—an ambivalence which would become even more apparent in her regionalist second novel, *This Day and Time*.

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[34] According to Ancestry.com's *1890 Veterans Schedules* and *American Civil War Soldiers*, Henry Wetzell was included on the schedule of survivors of "the war of the rebellion" for the 24th district of Knox County, Tennessee. The schedule reports that he served in Company H, 51st Infantry Regiment, Pennsylvania. *American Civil War Soldiers* reports that he enlisted as a private on August 18, 1862, and was discharged as a corporal on May 18, 1865.

As Armstrong reveals what she remembers about her adolescent impressions of the people around her in old Knoxville—family, neighbors, fellow citizens, schoolmates, powerful people, the marginalized—she illustrates the expansive range of her interest. No group or type of individual is beneath her interest or free from her scrutiny; she approaches all of them with curiosity, generosity, and openness. Her quest is for an understanding of their situations, and her autobiographical manuscript reveals how she came to be so curious and so open-minded in a town and an age in which this was hardly encouraged in men, let alone women. Her parents were clearly the source of her intellectual freedom. One of the first places about which they encouraged her to think for herself was the church, and *Of Time and Knoxville* clearly and strongly offers some of the origins of her unorthodox religious and social views. Many of these manifest themselves as elements of *The Seas of God*, in which she critiques the religious narrowness and hypocrisy of a city bearing striking similarities to the Knoxville of her own youth.

Perhaps because she was an octogenarian at the time she was writing her autobiography, she divulges her thinking fully in *Of Time and Knoxville* without any whitewashing or sugar-coating. Her goal in writing this text, as she states it, is to offer "the Profane History of Knoxville" [sic], revealing "that despite its prodigious display of piety and its strong streak of Puritanism of our deadly Southern variety, there was probably as much pure worldliness, as large a proportion of rascality and lubricity in Knoxville, as many young rake-hells among its first families, as in any equal area in the United States" (iv). She writes, then, in order to counteract the "completely denatured history of Knoxville" offered by the East Tennessee Historical Society in their 1945

volume *History of Knox County, Tennessee* (iii).[35] She objects to its propriety, stating that "it is, in fact, incredible that what I had always known as a highly colorful community could be so completely drained of all its color" (iv).

For Armstrong, a community devoid of its color was one devoid of interest and even of worth because it was devoid of truth. No matter the topic of her writing, she insisted on telling the truth as she saw it. She was intent on having her reader understand not the surface of things but the inner workings. Her ultimate goal was to educate her readers regarding certain groups, and throughout her writing career, she applied that purpose to both her fiction and her non-fiction. She trusted that her readers were capable of understanding and appreciating the characters and cultures she presented, even if they were proven to be imperfect. Her object was the kind of consciousness-raising advocated and articulated by the Anglo-American feminist critics and literary regionalists who came a generation or two after her. And it was writing like Armstrong's that, even though it eventually disappeared, fomented the emerging voices of feminism and regionalism in their push against dominant culture.

With her characteristic concern for setting the record straight, Armstrong begins *Of Time and Knoxville* by explaining what inspired it. Originally, she bristled against an insult to Knoxville published by H. L. Mencken in the *American Mercury.* Mencken, Armstrong reports, "commented . . . in his inimitable insulting fashion, on some place or other that it had sunk to the cultural level of Port-Au-Prince Hayti [sic], and Knoxville, Tennessee" (i). She was troubled by this comparison, but as she put it, "circumstances

[35] Armstrong uses the subtitle here rather than the main title of the book, which is *The French Broad-Holston Country: A History of Knox County, Tennessee*.

. . . prevented [her] supplying the article she had in mind" in response to Mencken's comments (ii). When John Gunther insulted Knoxville in 1947, calling it "the ugliest city he had ever seen in the USA," she was prompted "to such an unreasonable pitch of resentment as to make [her] wonder anew what it was in this dirty old town of Knoxville that could still command from [her] an allegiance that [she] had never felt for any other place" (ii).

Armstrong spent her formative years in Knoxville, and it was there that her personality began to develop. It was there that she became socially liminal, with the aid of her parents, experiencing a number of associations with a number of different classes and types of people and learning to operate in many different contexts. That social liminality inspired her self-confidence and prompted her to challenge social boundaries. It also stimulated her interest in those whom society tended to push aside and denigrate in the manner in which Mencken and Gunther had denigrated Knoxville. It was this ability to move between center and margin that inspired her protofeminist and regionalist agendas.

Anne, naturally curious, was encouraged by her parents to explore new ideas and, even more importantly, to question tradition. In the last chapters of her autobiography, she reminisces about her parents' library, which was always open to her and from which she drew many of her more radical lines of thinking. "I was dipping," she writes, "into all sorts of books I found lying on our library table . . . or on the shelves in our book-cases. No salacious ones were there, not even a classic like the *Decameron*, but there were the works of Huxley, Darwin, and Tyndal, of Voltaire, Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, and Renan's *Life of Jesus*" (247). So, her parents, who exhibited such

public propriety and worked to maintain good relationships with the other wealthy businessmen of Knoxville and their families, meanwhile maintained and fed their liberal views within the confines of their own library walls.

Armstrong's parents, while they required good behavior from her, did not insist that she adhere to the rather narrow systems of belief that she found around her in Knoxville society. As a result, she began at a young age to think for herself and to question widely-held ideas. The family library played an important part in prompting her to become such a progressive thinker. She notes that her parents, and her father in particular, were ahead of their time in offering their children access to controversial material:

> None of the books in the family library had ever been urged upon us as we were growing up, though neither had they been forbidden. They were simply there. We could read them, if we chose to. Looking at the matter, retrospectively, I can only conclude that my father's ideas of education . . . were closely in tune with those of the yet unborn Dr. Robert Maynard Hutchins as president of the University of Chicago --- that it should be a process not of "settling" students' minds, but of *unsettling* them, if their horizons were to be widened, their intellects inflamed. (248)

Thus began Armstrong's lifelong effort to unsettle minds and redirect them into what she saw as the more humane and reasonable ideologies of what later came to be called feminism and the kind of regionalist writing that led to social justice.[36]

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[36] Mark Hussey's brief biography of Virginia Woolf begins Susan Gubar's edition of *A Room of One's Own.* In it, Hussey notes that as a young girl, Woolf was given free access to her father's library and that

According to Armstrong, one of the most influential books she encountered in her young life was a novel: Mrs. Humphrey Ward's *Robert Elsemere,* published in the States in 1888. She would have been about fifteen at the time of its publication, and she probably read it soon after its appearance. She writes:

> The books I was reading now, on my own initiative, were furnishing the most joyously exciting experience I had ever known. An instinctive rebel . . . I was primed, then, when it appeared . . . [as] a closely reasoned attack on evangelical religion . . . selling nearly a million copies here after creating an unparalleled furore [sic] in England, where it had agitated bishops, set cabinet ministers at bitter variance, and called forth from Gladstone, then Prime Minister, his famous answer, *Robert Elsemere and the Battle of Belief.* (248-9)

The six pages of typescript Armstrong devotes to explaining the impact of this novel on her thinking attest to her belief that fiction changes its readers. Considering its influence on her own thinking, it is quite logical to assume that she later hoped for the same kinds of effects on readers who read her own novels.

One passage of her autobiography in particular shows how *Robert Elsemere* convinced her of the religious and social efficacy of fiction:

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she also had the opportunity to overhear conversations between her parents and many important intellectual and artistic friends. Both Armstrong and Woolf were, to a large degree, self-educated—prompted by great intellectual curiosity to delve into their families' libraries. Unlike Armstrong, however, who actually attended college at her parents' insistence, Woolf did not go past the normal amount of schooling for young women of her class in England. Hussey notes that "Such homeschooling was a source of some bitterness later in her life, as she recognized the advantages that derived from the expensive educations her brothers and half brothers received at private schools and university. Yet she also realized that her father's encouragement of her obviously keen intellect had given her an eclectic foundation" (xi). I argue that much of the overlap between Armstrong's ideas and Woolf's can be attributed to the fact that both of them were given free access to ideas as young women and learned to evaluate these texts and arguments for themselves. This led each of the two women in a unique intellectual direction for her social context, prompting each to reconsider and question the social norms of their respective societies.

> If I was not consciously in search of a faith, nonetheless I had found one. Like millions of others, then, Americans, British, Continentals, who refused to accept religious or other opinions simply because they were held by most of the people around them, I resented, I resisted with all the small might I possessed, the vengeful, petty God of the Old Testament, that monster of Judaism, yet I wished to retain Jesus --- a Jesus my reason would let me believe in . . . [;] here, in *Robert Elsemere*, it was all put in a form for me to grasp more readily, more surely, as tense in every fibre of my being I followed its hero, grappling, in agony of spirit, with the problem of ridding himself of the deeply incrusted ideas of Jesus he had inherited . . . [,] a hero who triumphed at last . . . [,] in the clear image which finally emerged from his years of anguished doubt, the image of a purely human Christ . . . not the Jesus disfigured and misrepresented by the churches. (250-251)

Armstrong refers to *Robert Elsemere* as a "definite milestone in [her] life" and notes as well that "it was to Mrs. Humphrey Ward's generation that Papa and Mama belonged" (249). She makes this comment after noting Mrs. Ward's associations as "the granddaughter of the celebrated Dr. Arnold of Rugby, sister of the poet and critic Matthew Arnold, aunt of Julian and Aldous Huxley; from a family of scholars and eminent educators . . . [living] in an atmosphere of scholarship, skepticism, and inquiry" (249). In other words, like the novelist whose work she was reading, Armstrong's parents took a scholarly and thoughtful approach to religion and refused simply to accept the tenets of the conservative Christian tradition without question.

Armstrong also writes of how she was relieved and encouraged to see her own liberal religious views reflected in the book—views that she inherited from her parents.

But she knew enough about the workings of society that she initially hid her inclinations. Armstrong was, in her own words, "intensely interested in religion, a subject that none of the romantic or purely frivolous interests natural to my age[37] ever crowded entirely out of my mind" (243). In spite of her deep interest in the subject and her doubts about the church, Armstrong was circumspect regarding what she referred to as her "secret life" (253). When one of her friends, Mary Gaines, happened upon Armstrong and found her engrossed in the novel, Mary asked what she was reading. Armstrong replied "as off-handedly as [she] knew how" that it was only a novel "about an English minister and his wife" (252). "I could never tell Mary Gaines," she writes, "what *Robert Elsemere* was about. There was no one then in Knoxville, or anywhere else, with whom I could, or wanted to, talk about 'religion,' religion as it was gradually taking shape in my own mind" (253).

Armstrong's father in particular influenced her religious views. At the beginning of her autobiography, she notes unequivocally that "Papa was not a member of any church" (13). He was not a religious man at all, it seems, at least not in traditional terms, though he attended church with his wife each Sunday.[38] When they arrived in Knoxville, Armstrong's more conventional mother immediately transferred her previous church membership to Second Presbyterian. Armstrong knew that "when [Papa] and Mama lived in New York during the early years of their married life they attended the Plymouth

[37] She refers here to her adolescent years.
[38] There are some interesting parallels in Armstrong's fiction. In *The Seas of God*, Lydia Lambright's father loses his professorship because his religious views are so unorthodox and causes consternation among the neighbors when he chooses to die without a visit from a minister. Much of the conflict in the novel comes, in fact, from an exploration of the effects of narrow-minded religious views on Lydia. In *This Day and Time*, Armstrong offers another "unchurched" father whose views dismay the community: Mr. Pemberton, Shirley's father. He, too, dies without assistance the clergy.

Church in Brooklyn[39] and for its pastor, Henry Ward Beecher[40] [Papa] always expressed great respect, as later for Spurgeon,[41] the famous English preacher, whom he went to hear whenever he was in London" (13). She also wrote, however, that "neither religious denominations nor religious dogmas made any strong appeal to my father, although he cheerfully put on his frock coat and every Sunday morning accompanied Mama" (13).

The books in her father's library were not the only items that influenced the unconventional development of Armstrong's views. As young Anne listened to her father discuss religion with other adults in the privacy of the library—conversations from which she was never barred—she "became gradually aware that while [her] father and his close and congenial friends accepted the teachings of the New Testament as a guide to human conduct, they rejected the doctrines of the Christian church" (243). Armstrong writes that both of her parents struggled with the social need to fit in by going to church and their own personal positions on the tenets of Christianity. Of the church where the affluent Wetzells had their own family pew, Armstrong notes that "the Second Presbyterian Church was, indubitably, in the 80's and 90's . . . Knoxville's most fashionable church" (224). Undoubtedly, Henry Wetzell understood the town's expectations that he and his family had at least to keep up Christian appearances. But he and his wife also chose this church because, among all possible choices, it was most suited to their views.

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[39] The U.S. Census of 1870 (as reported on Ancesty.com) records a Wetzell household of three people: Henry, age 27, teacher of penmanship; Lynney [Lorinda], age 25, and Henry 9 months. According to these records, Henry had been born in New York the previous April.

[40] Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887) was originally Presbyterian but later became famous as a Congregationalist minister known for his oratorical skill and his liberal causes, including woman suffrage, the abolition of slavery, and evolutionism. He was also the brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* The Wetzells would have attended his Congregationalist church in Brooklyn.

[41] A reference to Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892), a British Baptist minister who, though he was not highly educated, became incredibly popular in London, especially with the working class.

Second Presbyterian was, as Armstrong noted, "often referred to as the 'Northern Presbyterian Church,' as it was a member of the Northern Presbytery and many of its congregation were of Northern descent or had been Union sympathizers" (224). "The preponderance of Knoxville's wealth and fashion in the Knoxville of the day," she writes, "would have been found in the Second Presbyterian Church. Here were most of the 'merchant princes' who had made their fortunes in coal and lumber and marble, in wholesale drugs and dry goods, groceries and hardware" (225). The Wetzells fit perfectly in that respect with the rest of the church's congregation. But if Armstrong's account of them is accurate, then the Wetzells' spiritual connection to the doctrine and dogma of Second Presbyterian was more vexed than that of other members.

Armstrong writes, for instance, of the services that they were excruciatingly long and boring, and that she was never convinced by the content of the sermons.[42] She and her parents seem to have objected most strongly of all to communion, of which she writes this:

> I was never so acutely miserable as when the whole church was permeated with the drowsy fermentative odor of wine rising from "The Lord's Supper," an odor heavy with the suggestion at once of sin, of death and the tomb. I knew that I was never so deeply disturbed as when I glanced sideways at Mama's bowed head, her face dark, withdrawn, and as if she were gazing into depths, invisible to me, but which the light of the sun would never reach. I watched her nibble at the small white square of communion bread in her gloved hand and crumbs of which, it

[42] She would later write an essay for the *Saturday Review* on the importance of good sermons. See page 87 of this introduction.

> seemed to me, from the movements of her throat, she swallowed with an effort. I saw why Papa left before all this began, and I longed to get away myself, out of this gloom, this morbid atmosphere, out again under the cheerful sky --- anywhere else. (242)

Armstrong envies her father, who, perhaps because he is male and can better get away with an overt move against tradition, leaves before communion is served. She and her mother and siblings stayed behind to take the sacrament.

The only Wetzell who seems to have accepted the tenets of the church at all was her brother Harry, who, to the apparent consternation of the rest of the household, later instituted morning prayers for the family. Just before his untimely death, Harry suddenly began to grow more serious and pious. While Henry Wetzell was out of town on a business trip, Harry approached his mother about instituting family prayers every morning after breakfast. The women of the family accommodated him, but not altogether willingly. Of their first morning prayer, Armstrong reports that her mother's "face was dark and withdrawn, exactly as when she nibbled on the little square of bread on Communion Sunday," and that May's "head was bowed, too, as if she hardly knew how to behave; her long fair curls hanging down, half covering her face" (292). Armstrong's revulsion is clear: "Oh, this was awful! Next Harry would be 'joining the Church.' Family Prayers, at this late day! And when Papa and Mama had never had anything of the sort. Nothing so unnatural, so utterly alien to it, had ever happened before in our home . . . [;] I was stunned" (292-293).

Not very surprisingly, Armstrong seems never in later life to have joined an organized church. In the Mount Holyoke College Alumnae Biographical Record that she

submitted in 1936, under "Church affiliation—Denomination," she listed "None" (1). Nothing in my research indicates that she had any more associations with organized religion than social propriety required, though she continued to be fascinated by religion for the rest of her life.

For example, the July 16, 1932, issue of the *Saturday Review*, poses the question "Is the Service or the Sermon the more Important?" in a weekly argument column. Guy C. Pollock argues for the service, while Armstrong argues in favor of the sermon. She contends "that the sermon at its best is inspired truth, whereas the service at its best is only hired art" (62). She further argues that "it is only since the clergy exalted the service and degraded the sermon that people have ceased going to church" and that 'the delivery may be good and the enunciation perfect, but thin soup on a silver plate is still thin soup that leaves you hungry and disappointed" (62). Such comments echo her feelings about the sermons at Second Presbyterian.

Later, in the September 24, 1932, issue of the *Saturday Review*, Armstrong takes an affirmative position against John Pollock's negative in the argument column entitled "Is Religion Better Than Conscience?" Though this position initially seems to run counter to her beliefs, the article reveals that her definition of religion is characteristically expansive and would likely include any religion that uplifts and inspires the best in its adherents: "It is the sense and realisation [sic] of this infinite and immeasurable vastness that fills us with fear and wonder and makes us worship with awe and trembling, but it is also this that comforts us and gives us consolation (and whoever heard of conscience in the role of comforter?) and strength in the hour of weakness and affliction" (318). According to Armstrong, conscience "must always set itself up against the world, and the

sense of duty which is its glory and its justification is sometimes not far removed from self-satisfaction and the giving of thanks that its owner is not as other men are" (318). Conscience, then, is simply a means for people to congratulate themselves on their individual virtue. According to Armstrong, religion is something that requires a personal investment in something larger than oneself. For her, religion "is a unity, not a distinction and division. Religion sinks the self in God, and self, in so sinking, finds itself" (318). She ends by commenting that "Conscience often attains its goal. Perhaps religion often merely strives and fails. But some failures are greater than some successes, because they aim higher" (318). This last comment, very characteristic of Armstrong, is reflected in her fiction.

Indeed, both of Armstrong's novels adhere to this same idea that virtue is rewarded—but not the kind of hollow virtue dictated by society's constructions and decrees. For Armstrong, the most egregious social failure—Lydia Lambright's venture into prostitution in *The Seas of God,* for instance, or Ivy Ingoldsby's failure to keep her husband at home in *This Day and Time*—is rectified and redeemed by a person's adherence to her own principles and by a sincere wish to effect positive changes in her own life and the lives of others. If Armstrong had any "religion" at all, she seems to have described it accurately in her *Saturday Review* essay as the force that encourages people to question the status quo when it impedes their ability to make a positive place for themselves in the world. She created protagonists whose mistakes and problems actually offer them opportunities for growth and expansion rather than destroying them. In the end, they achieve a modicum of success in spite of their errors and trials. This is what makes them fit so well with one of the Anglo-American schools of feminism, authentic

realism, which, according to Sara Mills, views literature as "a potential vehicle for change in women's lives, since it can serve as a catalyst for consciousness-raising, and a basis for constructing other ways of living" ("Authentic Realism" 51). Armstrong certainly intended to emphasize the lives of women in a protofeminist manner that anticipated such thinking, or she would not have offered the kinds of female protagonists that she did. But like that of Fetterley and Pryse, Mills's gender-linked theory can be broadened to apply to humanity in general. It was through her body of writing that Armstrong sought to practice her "religion," unsettling minds as she worked against damaging social constructions and stereotypes and worked toward the "unity" that she so valued among men and women.

Armstrong's protofeminist agenda is evident; just as she was interested in exploring her own spirituality and exposing religious hypocrisy, Armstrong was also interested in replacing the ways in which her patriarchal society constrained and damaged women. In fact, this was a major concern in her entire body of work and in her business career. She served that interest by using her upper-class background, her many social contacts, and her education to cultivate or gain access to the groups in which she intended to effect a change and then working quietly from within to chip away at the status quo, substituting the traditional with new ideas that challenged social norms and stereotypes. And though she would never have self-identified publicly as a feminist, for doing so would have jeopardized her ability to infiltrate the groups she wanted to change, women—especially those from marginalized groups—are among those who most often benefited from Armstrong's work, whether in the world of business or literature.

As her autobiography reflects, Armstrong came to realize early in life that there were women who operated outside of social norms. She noticed that those women were not only publicly ostracized by men but were also shunned by other women. One notable example is Mrs. Hamilton, who lived across from the Wetzells and walked past their house to church each Sunday. Though others walked together, chatting and laughing, Mrs. Hamilton was always unaccompanied except for her son. In her autobiography, Armstrong remembered Mrs. Hamilton as "a most beauteous lady" who walked with "her tall, handsome son, a lad in his teens, her arm lightly tucked in his" (144). Mrs. Hamilton and her situation were clearly fascinating to Armstrong as a child, and it is significant to note that, like Mrs. Hamilton, the protagonists of both of Armstrong's novels were single mothers with sons to raise, as was she herself.

The Seas of God may well have had as a primary inspiration Armstrong's memory of Mrs. Hamilton and the hypocritical way in which she was treated by Knoxville society. Like the novel's protagonist, Lydia Lambright, Mrs. Hamilton seems to have chosen prostitution as a means of supporting herself and her son; *Of Time and Knoxville* refers to her as "Knoxville's Lost Lady" (145). Recounting that when she "questioned Mama about her," Armstrong "[received] an evasive and chilling answer, one which made me realize that Mrs. Hamilton was a person not to be talked about, even referred to," yet, Armstrong notes, "Even the most censorious --- the most indignant that she should be living in the very heart of one of the most respectable, indeed select neighborhoods, could not quite dismiss her as a brazen strumpet. She was so palpably well-born, well-bred" (145). This description of Mrs. Hamilton as well-bred and attractive, this sympathy for

her isolation and exploration of the reasons for it, certainly echoes the kinds of themes and issues that Armstrong develops in *The Seas of God* with Lydia Lambright.

This section of Armstrong's autobiography also delineates the author's awareness, even at a young age, of the hypocrisy of the community in its application of a sexual double-standard:

> No one ever entered Mrs. Hamilton's, by day or by night, by the marble steps and winding path up the two or three terraces that led to her front door. No carriage, assuredly, ever pulled up in front of her house. But there was an entrance for servants, through a gate, under an arbor overhung with honeysuckle . . .; it was in this vicinity that boys old enough to be allowed out for a while after dark, and a few Tom-boyish girls, secreted themselves among the wild cherry trees . . . and with their sharp young eyes discovered who were the visitors that slipped through the arbored rear gate at Mrs. Hamilton's . . . --- the president of a railroad; the president of a bank; very often the town's outstanding viveur, a fancier of fine horses, fine women, fine liquors; frequently one or another of these "merchant princes" --- leaders, one and all, in the town's church and social circles, bearing its proudest names. (149-150)

Mrs. Hamilton constituted Armstrong's earliest encounter with a "fallen woman," and judging by her account of the woman's life in Knoxville, Armstrong's sympathy and interest lay firmly on the side of the outcast. Certainly, the lovely and mysterious Mrs. Hamilton and her situation provided some of the inspiration for Lydia Lambright just as the men who patronized Mrs. Hamilton provided some of the inspiration for Ransom Churchwell, the womanizing "merchant prince" who deflowers Lydia, sets her up as his

mistress in New York City, and then abandons her when she becomes pregnant with his illegitimate son.

At the end of her autobiography, Armstrong reminisces about the mores of her peers in her social set and offers her analysis of why more of her female friends did not find themselves "in trouble." She claims that "it was not that girls were more virtuous then, more chaste au fond. It was more that there were fewer opportunities for them to violate the moral and social code of the day" (333).

She begins by noting that women did not drink, except on social occasions. In contrast, "men of all ages drank as a matter of course" (334). As she puts it:

> I remember at dances at the Sans Souci Club not infrequently the boy who took you would be unable to bring you home. Nothing was easier to understand with fifty-one saloons in Knoxville and the "elegant barroom" of Schubert's Hotel only a step or two down the street from the club-rooms. When it occurred, some other young man brought you home. You thought nothing of it. It was simply the custom of the day for young men to drink and young girls not to. (334)

Clearly, though she "thought nothing of it" at the time, Armstrong's autobiography reflects her later recognition that there was something inherently wrong with the social constructs that allowed this kind of behavior on the part of the men. Characteristically, she offers it up for consideration but seems to reserve judgment, allowing the reader to judge for herself/himself.

What follows is another very frank and open acknowledgement of the sexual double standard of her youth, and recognition of what must have been as much a taboo in polite conversation as mentions of Mrs. Hamilton:

> . . . it must be acknowledged that there was another factor which helped sustain that age of innocence, so far as girls were concerned; the tacit understanding of the time and place that young men of social position, granted unlimited license when it came to drinking, were not by the same token expected to play sensuously upon a girl of their own class --- not with the social risk involved, not (as you heard a few years later put frankly) with a Crozier Street in town, an Em Parham's,[43] with complacent Negro house-girls. (334)

Armstrong understood the social roles prescribed for young men and women; she understood and accepted the existence of brothels and the expectation that young men of her set might frequent them. She played her own role as her parents expected and followed the rules of her gender, class, and family to the letter before leaving home to attend Mount Holyoke. Her autobiography presents these items simply as facts without making judgements, but simply by re-presenting them she seems to suggest here that some of what had been "tacit understanding" in her youth bore further examination. She wants readers to note the males' behavior and reconsider their customs and mores in regard to drinking and sex. Though she never directly criticizes them, she suggests that these double standards are troubling simply by bringing them up for the reader's contemplation.

This analysis and interrogation of custom later formed the basis for her two novels, her essays on women in business, and finally, her autobiography—all of which begin the process of change by at the very least presenting questionable social constructs

[43] Crozier Street was evidently the location of several brothels, including Em Parham's. It is now Central Avenue.

for the consideration and analysis of readers. Though she tends not to criticize openly the double standards that she "thought nothing of" in her youth, the fact that she reexamines them later in both her fiction and non-fiction suggests that they troubled her. She wants others to acknowledge their existence and, in doing so, to question them. This is the kind of writing that formed the basis for what feminist critics later referred to as consciousness-raising, an element of her broader regionalist agenda as well.

The older she grew, the more Armstrong herself began to leave behind the social strictures of her youth and experience life outside of traditional female gender roles. The year in which she lost her brother was to be a year of great change in Armstrong's life. Chapter 10 in *Of Time and Knoxville* reflects this transition from childhood and adolescence into young adulthood. Harry's death had taken a toll on the family emotionally, of course. After the funeral, Henry Wetzell had to return to England on business, so his wife went to stay with one of her sisters. Young Anne was sent to Michigan to stay with cousins for a few months.[44] She seems to have been the most resilient of the group in recovering from the blow. "Sometimes that summer," she wrote, "as I sat with the others watching the sun 'drown' in Lake Michigan . . . a sudden realization that Harry was gone, not to return, would sweep over me and involuntarily I would start sobbing. But in general it seemed as unreal now that he was dead as when taps had sounded over him after he laid in Old Gray" (304). [45] But even as she was still mourning her brother's death, Armstrong was also enjoying herself and becoming an

[44] There is no mention of where May was during this period.
[45] A historic cemetery in Knoxville, established in 1850, and one of the city's oldest graveyards. Originally named simply Gray Cemetery after English poet Thomas Gray, who wrote "Elegy in a Country Churchyard," the "Old" was added after the establishment of "New" Gray Cemetery in 1892. This was undoubtedly the cemetery Armstrong had in mind in *The Seas of God*, when Lydia is appalled to learn that her father will be buried in the new cemetery rather than the more prestigious old one.

independent young woman. “Most of the time,” she wrote, “I was the merriest of the merry, and under my own supervision commenced doing my hair up on top of my head, thus announcing I had taken another step in growing up” (305).

When the family reunited in the fall, the loss still hung over them. Armstrong reminisced that “the first thing Mama saw was the change in my hair. She smiled, though her eyes were filled with tears. Her eyes were now seldom free from tears. She had wept so much that the doctor said she had injured them” (305). Her mother’s depression was so severe, in fact, that her father decided to try what Armstrong refers to as “the old 19th-century cure for all human ills—Europe!” (306). The Wetzell couple departed for a long journey, leaving Anne and May in the care of their Aunt Allie.[46]

Even more than the summer at Lake Michigan, this proved to be a period of great growth, experimentation, and independence for Armstrong, as she remembered it, noting that she was:

> . . .taking full charge of things even before Papa and Mama had boarded the *Umbria* of the old Cunard Line for Liverpool, and one of the last things they would have anticipated, for Aunt Allie had always been looked upon as something of a boss. I had heard it said that she ran over Grandmother and her sisters as long as they were at home. But now, before she could assume any managerial prerogatives, I assumed them myself. (310)

Armstrong began by declaring herself in charge of the meals and shopping, and by breaking her mother’s rule about staying out of the kitchen. She befriended the cook—a shocking move—and convinced the young mountain woman to teach her how to cook.

[46] This was Alice Wetzell, Henry Wetzell’s sister.

“This fling at high living was no mere matter of self-indulgence,” she reported, “as I was experiencing for the first time the joy of cooking, so was I having my initial experience in entertaining . . .[;] although I had often spent the night with other girls, none had ever spent the night with me, or even been asked for a meal” (315). Aunt Allie had misgivings about the proceedings, but “she said to herself, perhaps, that this extraordinary frivolity was what she would have expected in Henry’s house, ‘with his views!’ For Henry was a brother of whom she was inordinately proud, yet about whom, and whose ‘soul,’ she no doubt felt anxious at times” (317).

Letters from Europe indicated that Lorinda Wetzell was regaining her strength and equilibrium, and Henry Wetzell wrote that as soon as they returned home, he and his wife would begin planning a new house. On the homefront, in spite of the conflicts that inevitably arose between the headstrong Anne and her aunt, they got along fairly well. But there was one constant prick to Armstrong’s conscience: her failure to study as promised for the entrance examinations to Mount Holyoke (316-320). The Wetzells had made arrangements for their daughter to study with Dr. Tuck, whom Armstrong describes as “a retired Presbyterian minister [who] had never had a pastorate in Knoxville” (323). She remembered “trying, with his gentle aid, to solve some problem in advanced algebra, for which I had not the slightest gift, or blundering through a passage in Cicero’s *Orations* or his *De Senectute* which I had failed to look at before leaving home” (323). Though Armstrong was ambivalent about going to college, her parents were insistent, and Dr. Tuck did his best to prepare her. “He was,” according to her, “thoroughly in favor of higher education for women . . . [and] periodically he would applaud my ‘ambitious spirit,’ which, if it pleased me, at the same time made me feel more than a trifle guilty,

knowing, as I did, that it was not of my own volition I was going to college" (324-25). In spite of her difficulties with self-discipline, Armstrong did gain entrance to Mount Holyoke and matriculated in the fall of 1889. But by the time she left for college, tragedy had once again struck the family, and a larger obstacle than her procrastination stood in the way of her college career.

According to William S. Rule's *Standard History of Knoxville, Tennessee* (1900), Henry B. Wetzell[47] was one of the charter members of the Knoxville Belt Railway Company, founded on February 28, 1887, "for the purpose of constructing a railway . . . making a complete circuit of the city, a line twelve miles in length" (*Standard History,* online version*).* This was simply one of Wetzell's many different business ventures, supporting the timber and mining businesses that had made him a wealthy man. Rule reports that "on August 22, 1889, an excursion party from Knoxville and West Knoxville . . . on board a train making a tour of observation" had what he refers to as "a very serious accident . . . at Flat Creek, Grainger County" (*Standard History*). According to Rule, the accident resulted in the deaths of five prominent men, including the chairman of the board of public works, a judge, and an alderman. Twenty-four men, all of whom were either investors in the railroad or public officials involved in economic development, were seriously wounded, and Henry B. Wetzell was among them (*Standard History*).

Armstrong's autobiography includes her own recollection of the railroad tragedy, which happened only two days after Henry Wetzell's return to Knoxville from Europe. Wetzell was to go, Armstrong wrote:

[47] Though Rule misspells Wetzell's name, there is no doubt that this is Armstrong's father.

> with many of Knoxville's prominent men on a day's observation tour over the new Knoxville, Cumberland Gap and Louisville Railway, which, begun in 1887, connected Knoxville with Middlesboro [Kentucky], a distance of some seventy miles, and ran through a rich agricultural and mining region. As the first trip over the new railroad it was important in Knoxville's history and there was to be a banquet to celebrate the event when the guests, directors, and other stockholders reached Middlesboro . . . [;] as he appears to me now on that morning of August 22, 1889 he is standing in the sitting-room, May clinging to his hand, a tall broad-shouldered man of easy movements. He is wearing new light-gray tweeds made by a London tailor . . . somehow you can detect a spirit of unconquerable buoyancy, a hint . . . of the unconquerable adventurer in him . . . [;] you might suspect that he was a man of many and highly varied tastes, loving the world of art and letters and science as well as the world of nature. And you would be pretty sure, in any case, that he was one to extract joy out of existence, existence on almost any terms. (358-59)

Armstrong's historical facts are accurate, but it is her description of Henry Wetzell at this moment in his life that offers insight into the profound influence her beloved father had on her own personality and into the enormous impact that his incapacitation must have had on young Anne and the rest of her family. She comments that, at the time of the accident, he "was a man at the top of his manly strength and vigor, and young for his age, if they knew it --- forty three" (359).

When the Wetzells first hear of the accident, there is no news regarding whether Henry Wetzell survived. Armstrong paints Linnie Wetzell as characteristically stoic:

“Mama did not scream. She did not burst into sobs or sink to the floor. She only shook, her whole body. Her long discipline of sorrow had started with Harry’s death” (361). At last, they learn that he is alive, though critically injured. Remembering his homecoming, Armstrong wrote:

> Mama preserved her outward calm. I can see the lights in the house, the darkness and rain outside as the men with muddy feet carried the stretcher from the porch through the open French windows . . . [;] [Papa’s] new tweed suit had been cut off of him, probably in extricating him from the wreck. It lay in strips, soaked with rain, across his body. Many of his teeth had been knocked out or broken and his mouth kept filling with blood, so that a man, a stranger, squatting beside the stretcher on the other side, kept sponging Papa’s mouth out, to prevent his choking . . . My father was conscious and in great agony, it seemed. One of the men, another stranger, whispered to me in the hall that they thought my father’s back was broken. (361-362)

Armstrong recounts the comments of the men who attend her father before the nurses arrive and the doctors—of whom there were many too few to attend all of the injured businessmen. In fact, Armstrong reports that “there was no hospital in Knoxville then” and that “a telegram had been sent to Cincinnati for a surgical bed to be sent down, one that would be suspended from the ceiling by pulleys. Meantime, until it arrived he must not be moved, although before daylight two men nurses had been installed” (362).

Armstrong watched her father over the next few weeks and her account of his suffering is vivid. She notes that he was attended by a man named James Morrison, “who

had been a nurse all through the war in the Confederate Army,[48] a minister at one time in the Methodist Church . . .and now came forward to take chief charge of my father, the most seriously injured of those who had survived the wreck" (363). Of her father's condition she writes that "the least vibration of the floor hurt him, but from time to time I would take off my shoes and tiptoe into the room. It was hard to make myself look at his face. But there had been no concussion, and despite his continuous and terrible suffering and the fact that he could only make signs, he was perfectly aware" (363). "Every day," she remembers, "seemed endless. Would Papa live or die?" (364). It seems that in the midst of all of the family's trouble, she received her acceptance to Mount Holyoke.

Armstrong's ambivalence about her matriculation at Mount Holyoke continued to plague her. She says: "It was on one of these long sultry afternoons when I was in this dazed state that I was alone in the parlor . . . wondering vaguely whether if Papa died I would go off to school just the same (all the other girls had already gone) or whether, if he didn't die, I would go. It didn't seem to matter either way" (366). But it mattered to her parents, and in particular her father. "He was conscious that the days were passing," she writes, "and before long able to make the doctors understand it was time, past time, for me to leave for College [sic]. Never before in the least concerned whether or not his children entered school when it opened, nothing would do but that I should start for college without further delay, and the doctors, after consultation, decided the effect on him might be worse if I stayed than if I left" (366).

With her characteristic independence, Armstrong prepares for the journey, "not in the least daunted," she claims, by the fact that she would have to travel alone, handling

[48] Armstrong's father had fought for the Union in Knoxville as a youth.

the changes in trains and stage coaches without the help of her father (367). She recognized that the experience of seeing her father suffer and others who were injured in the accident die had taken an emotional toll on her. But the resilient spirit that her father has instilled in her refuses to be quelled by what she refers to as a "shattering experience"; "nevertheless," she declares, "I would have started around the world alone, without an instant's hesitation, had there seemed a reason for it and had it been proposed" (367). At the same time, she is visited by the "piercing thought . . . that [she] might hardly reach [her] destination till [she] was called back home. But [she] mustn't dwell on this thought" (367).

Again, in the face of tragedy and adversity, Armstrong proves to be more her father's child than her mother's. As she remembers it, "Mama, in perfect control of herself, moved around seeing to everything, but I think it was in those days her face took on the <u>still</u> look it would wear for many years" (364). Of herself, Armstrong notes that "at sixteen it is a glory just to be alive. Everything is bound to turn out all right and I was highly excited as I watched Mama hastily packing my trunk . . . there was only a little sickness, somewhere inside of me, as I came out the front door, with the carriage at the gate" (368).

Armstrong had reached a major turning point in her life, and she knew it, though she did not know the magnitude of the changes she would face in the comfortable and affluent lifestyle that she had come to enjoy. In her words, "this, I realized, was no ordinary goodbye I was saying. I did not realize, however, that never again would there

be the bright magic of those days, those years, in the Barnes house;[49] that the Knoxville I would know hereafter would be a different Knoxville" (368). When Armstrong returned to Knoxville a few years later, her circumstances were markedly different; she returned not as the married daughter of a wealthy Knoxville businessman but as a young divorcee with an infant son to support.

In the last paragraph of the typescript, Armstrong describes the magnitude of the changes she and her family would face:

> I did not know --- no one had heard yet --- of the failure of the great Midlands Bank in England, which in its crash would spell financial ruin for its English investors, nor that Papa, struck down at almost the same hour, when his scattered American interests needed consolidation and expert direction, had also been ruined financially by this bank failure in faraway England. I did not dream that the sumptuous new home on Fort Sanders, which I had not cared to consider, would now never be built, nor have the slightest prescience that the wreck at Flat Creek would profoundly affect my whole future life, and as I came down the steps of the Barnes house on that September afternoon in 1889, in my traveling dress, carrying my little new traveling bag of alligator leather, if I failed to see that the Barnes house in our modern parlance was a point of no return, even less I saw that, for me, it was as well a point of departure. (368)

When Armstrong left for college, she was shaken to the core by the tragedies that had befallen her family within the course of a year. But she was also equipped with the strong

[49] This was the name of the house that the family was renting at the time with the idea that they would be there only long enough to build their new mansion.

foundation that a loving, stable childhood provides and with the adventurous, inquisitive, and resilient spirit that she had inherited from her father.

The intimate details of Armstrong's life after her departure from Knoxville are harder to determine than those of her early life, as she never finished writing her autobiography. Records from the college's archive show that she did attend Mount Holyoke College from 1889 just after her father's accident until the spring of 1891. Though Armstrong's personality seems to have been more like her father's, her mother was not without influence; it was her mother who chose Mount Holyoke as the college her daughter should attend. Though she was more circumspect in showing her liberal thinking outside of her family circle, Linnie Wetzell certainly agreed with her husband on a number of social issues, including the education of women. There are a number of reasons why Mount Holyoke would have fit the couple's purpose regarding young Anne. First, it was located in the North and would remove their daughter from her current southern context, exposing her to a more open-minded community in both social and religious matters. When Mary Lyon founded Mount Holyoke in 1834, she avoided affiliation with any particular religious denomination, relying instead on a wide variety of donors from all levels of society and all manner of churches. Lyon was careful to keep tuition low—a fact which probably worked in Armstrong's favor after her father's accident and the ensuing financial problems—and in addition to their academic assignments, all students worked on campus. This allowed women of moderate means to attend. Mount Holyoke offered the opportunity for students to get to know other young women from all socio-economic levels. In addition, the curriculum, unlike those of other women's colleges, was designed to mirror that at men's institutions.

The Mount Holyoke web site offers the college catalog online, and a perusal of the academic years 1889-90 and 1890-91 offers some insight into Armstrong's two years there and what kinds of courses she took. The student list tells each student's name and her hometown, and the predominance of students was from the north, especially New England; Armstrong was one of only a handful of southerners.[50] Each catalog lists her as a student in the "Seminary Course." These "courses" were not individual classes but courses of study equivalent to what would currently be called a major. The Seminary Course seems to have been the most general option offered among four. The three others were Classical, Scientific, and Literary. Each course required a student to complete a pre-determined set of classes and examinations in each subject area, and each was designed to give students the same kind of liberal arts education offered to men in similar courses of study. According to the 1889-1890 catalog, the courses Armstrong took during her first year included Latin, Mathematics, Ancient History, Botany, Chemistry, Rhetoric, Physiology, Bible, Vocal Music, and Gymnastics (*Annual Catalogue of the Mount Holyoke Seminary and College* online).

According to the information she provided for her 1937 Mount Holyoke College Alumnae Biographical Record, Armstrong did not return to college for the 1891-92 academic year. The document, filled out and submitted by Armstrong herself, indicates that in 1892 she married Leonard T. Waldron, a Yale graduate and an attorney. No specific date is offered on this form as to the date of her marriage, though another source, the family Bible, indicates that it took place on June 1st in Hyde Park (Naylor email 17

[50] The 1889-1890 *Catalogue* lists her as *Anne* Audubon Wetzell, while the 1890-1891 *Catalogue* lists her as *Annie* Audubon Wetzell.

Jun 2006). The Alumnae Biographical Record states that she gave birth to her only child, Roger, on September 8, 1893, and that she and Waldron divorced in 1894. The exact date of their divorce is not specified, nor does she indicate which of them filed or where they were when the divorce occurred. It does, however, show that she returned to Knoxville to teach English at Knoxville High School from 1895 until 1902, the year in which she married Robert Franklin Armstrong.[51]

The facts concerning Armstrong's activities during this period are scarce, but she seems to have returned to Knoxville to teach. Andrew Hannah, Senior Associate Registrar at the University of Chicago, was able to verify that, in 1898, Armstrong attended the University of Chicago for a brief period as a special student. According to Hannah, Armstrong "matriculated under the name Anne Wetzell Waldron on July 2, 1898, and was enrolled that summer quarter for two half-credit English literature courses. Her record indicates that her home was Knoxville, TN, and that she had attended Mount Holyoke College at some point prior to her matriculation at Chicago" (email). Hannah also reports that "she was employed at the time of her enrollment as a teacher (teachers taking summer courses at Chicago being very common at the time) and was married" (email). This information correlates with the alumnae form Armstrong filled out for Mount Holyoke in all respects except one; on the Alumnae Biographical Record, she claims to have divorced Waldron in 1894.[52]

Ancestry.com offers The Twelfth Census of the United States, which verifies that in 1900 in the 24th Civil District, of Knox County, Tennessee, H.B. Wetzell, white male,

[51] They remained married until his death in 1931.
[52] Armstrong was actually divorced by the time she matriculated at the University of Chicago.

age 55, lived on White Avenue as the head of his household with four other people. The first two are listed as "Allie" Waldron, his daughter, age 27, and Roger Waldron, his grandson, age 2 ("H B Wetzell").[53] No occupation is listed after Henry Wetzell's name, which suggests that he was either retired by this time or disabled. "Allie" is listed as a school teacher and her son as "at school." Interestingly, she also seems to be listed as "married." Two "boarders," Michael Campbell and John Campbell, 22 and 21 years old respectively, were also living in the house and were listed as "at school." Presumably, they were students at the University of Tennessee who were renting rooms from Henry Wetzell (Ancestry.com). Armstrong probably continued to live in her father's household until she married Robert Franklin Armstrong, a scion of Knoxville society, in June of 1902.

The Armstrongs were a prominent Knoxville family, still wealthy and influential perhaps partially because they had been Union sympathizers during the Civil War. In her autobiography, Anne Armstrong remembers her teenage impressions of the family and her future husband as they arrived at Second Presbyterian on Sunday mornings:

> When the Armstrongs were late, supposedly it was because, as frequently occurred, their carriage had stuck in the mud and had to be pulled out on their way into town from their plantation, which was on Kingston Pike and extended for some miles, on both sides, along the river. The islands in the river were their's [sic] too. It was on the islands that they raised their finest melons and had buried their silver --- pieces they valued most --- during the War, to keep the Yankees

[53] Though the enumerator obviously recorded her name incorrectly, this is obviously Anne Wetzell Waldron and her young son. I have no information as to where Linnie Wetzell was at the time; she may have been away staying with relatives, but it is also possible that the enumerator simply neglected to write down her name.

> from getting them. Their home, Bleak House,[54] a mansion with a tower, overlooking the river and all the plantation, had been General Longstreet's headquarters during the siege of Knoxville. Minie balls were imbedded in its walls and in the big square rosewood piano in the drawing-room. In the ball-room above, with its prism chandeliers and fire-place at either end, great log fires roared on nights when the Armstrongs were giving balls --- those balls where, as at all the Armstrong parties, such superlative food and drink were served as nowhere else even in a region famed then for its food and drink. (233)

Young Anne was clearly impressed with the Armstrongs from the time that she first knew about them. "They were exciting people, these Armstrongs," she writes, "They drew me like the moon draws the tides. They had about them, one and all, the seigniorial air of a family long accustomed to landed grandeur, yet at the same time they were singularly free from any suggestion of smugness, far less of stuffiness" (233).

Armstrong's description of her future mother-in-law shows her admiration for a woman who refused to play exactly by the gender rules of her era. Armstrong and Louisa seem to have shared a sense of adventure and fun and an outspokenness rare in women of their day:

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[54] Bleak House still stands at 3148 Kingston Pike in Knoxville and is open to the public as a historic site. It is also known as Confederate Memorial Hall. The mansion was built for Robert H. Armstrong and Louisa Franklin Armstrong, and Anne Armstrong's husband grew up there. In his 1997 article "Bleak House: An English novel, a Confederate General, and an Heir," Jack Neely notes that the house shares few similarities with the fictitious mansion by the same name in Dickens' work. Most of the article reports on the mansion's role as Longstreet's headquarters during the Civil War. According to Neely, "Longstreet was likely attracted to this house for its location near the front lines, its unusually thick brick walls, and its . . . third-floor tower from which you could see the city itself" (no page number). Neely verifies Anne Armstrong's account of the Minie balls and other relics of battle.

> That [Mrs. Louisa Armstrong] was a bit of a madcap could be read into her looks as she flashed her black eyes, as sharp as her tongue was known to be, around her once or twice before settling herself into her corner and reaching for her hymn-book in the rack in front of her. Save for her nose, which, though well-shaped was a trifle too prominent, she would have ranked as one of the great beauties of her day. As it was, many considered her so when, as Louise Franklin, an outstanding belle, the motherless sixteen year old daughter of a rich planter in Cocke County,[55] she had come down to Knoxville on a visit and captured its most eligible bachelor, Robert Houston Armstrong, some twenty years her senior. As the dashing young mistress of Bleak House during the war, afraid of no horse or man that ever lived, she had been the toast of both armies, and to the end of her life carried with her that je ne sait quot [sic] of women who have had more than ordinary attraction for men. (234)

Armstrong's attraction to Mrs. Armstrong is understandable; they seem to have shared an irreverence that must have been a little scandalous among their peers. About Mrs. Armstrong's opinion toward her own husband, Anne writes:

> She was determined, at all accounts, that [her husband] should not take himself too seriously, and with the rather raffish streak of humor that was in her, would announce to a group of guests, in his presence, "When Colonel Armstrong dies, I'm going to have engraved on his tomb-stone: 'Here lies a man who never did a lick of work in his life.'" She delighted to shock him even more, if possible, than she delighted to shock others. (235)

[55] A Tennessee county that lies two counties away from Knox County, in which Knoxville is located.

Having had such a mother, certainly Robert Armstrong would have been more prepared than other men for a wife like Anne—a woman who, while she understood and adhered to most of the social graces of her day, also refused to take all of them seriously and even challenged the strictures she thought most confining.

As for her future father-in-law, Armstrong's typescript describes the Colonel as "the kindliest of men" and "gallant" (236). She notes that "from his bearing, you might have mistaken him for a retired military man. In reality, he had never been a soldier. His title . . . was purely complimentary" (235-36). He seems to have been a gentle, refined soul who would "paint . . . [,] play the flute, compose Latin poems [and] read the classics --- Ovid, Marcus Aurelius, Plato" (235). Apparently, though fond of her much-older husband, Louisa Armstrong often found him exasperating and "was even a bit resentful, it appeared, that he indulged in none of the Southern gentleman's legendary vices" (235). Armstrong reports that her father-in-law was "very abstemious himself, preferring, quite frankly, lemonade or buttermilk" to alcohol, though there were plenty of good wines in the cellar at Bleak House which he "dispensed liberally to his guests" (236).

Armstrong reports that her mother-in-law, in discussing her hopes for her only son, declared to a number of her friends that "she wanted her son Bob, whatever else he became, not to be a milk-sop . . . [;] she wanted him to drink and swear and gamble --- be a <u>man</u>! And according to all accounts, the son . . . was by way of fulfilling even the wildest dreams his mother had ever entertained in regard to his future" (236). As Armstrong remembers it, "he drank, swore, gambled --- that was the least of it" (236).

Those few scholars who know Armstrong's work and have done research on her life have sometimes speculated that the Armstrongs' marriage was troubled and/or that

Anne was abused by Robert in some way. Her autobiographical typescript suggests otherwise; Armstrong's adolescent fascination with her future husband—and her continuing admiration of him as his widow—is evident from the way she presents him. If Armstrong was abused by a husband, then it most likely happened during her short-lived marriage to Waldron, with whom she seems to have cut all ties once they parted in spite of the fact that they had had a child together.

She reports that Robert Armstrong, to whom she referred as "the most talked of member of a much talked of family," had shown himself to be no milk-sop; indeed, he had shown his bravery and manliness and was highly regarded by the community for both (238). Bob Armstrong had been sent to Washington, D.C., to act as an "escort and protector" to his sister, Adelia, who was "to study painting at the Corcoran Art Gallery" (236). While there, he "took to hanging around the office of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs" which "set the blood of young Armstrong on fire" (236-237). He took a position with the agency despite his parents' protests and stayed out west for five years. When he came back from the Dakota territory, by Armstrong's report, "the store windows on Gay Street were filled with Indian war-clubs, pipes, moccasins, spoons carved from buffalo horns, head-dresses of eagle feathers --- all manner of trophies, which he had brought back" (238). Two of the most interesting to her were a ghost-cloth and "an Indian painting of such rare artistry as to be destined ultimately for the Smithsonian Institute" (239).[56] Considering her own sense of adventure and interest in the unusual, it is no wonder that Armstrong was attracted to such a young man and thought highly of him

[56] Also interesting is that in *The Seas of God*, when Lydia Lambright's son asks about his father, she fabricates a story about his having been an "Indian fighter" and uses a number of these details in describing him.

when others might have looked askance at his adventures and his refusal to follow his parents' advice to the letter.

Armstrong's autobiography dwells for several pages on the first time that she saw Bob. She was a girl of fifteen, sitting in her family pew and waiting for the service at Second Presbyterian to begin, when she noticed him:

> There in the aisle stood for an instant . . . this dare-devil of dare-devils, the Armstrongs' erratic and picturesque son, a tall, broad-shouldered, slim-hipped, virile yet graceful figure in a dark suit, not dandified, but wearing his clothes well . . . , and his hair, with a just perceptible wave . . . [.] He had, so people said, his mother's devastating wit, and his nose, like hers, was prominent, though better suited to a man's face than to hers and a balance for the extremely sensitive, almost tender mouth he had inherited from the old Colonel . . . which . . . combined with his vivid blue eyes, his conspicuously Saxon coloring, might have given a faintly feminine cast to his face, save for the prow-like nose . . . He was not exactly handsome, but he was above everything else very much a man. (239-240)

Her heart, as she puts it, "gave a leap," and she muses about "how startled I would have been had some voice whispered that in future years the life of this man would be intricately intertwined with my own" (240). This is not the description of a man who had caused her pain and anguish; rather, Armstrong's recollections of her husband seem to indicate that she maintained a deep affection and admiration for him throughout their marriage and after his death.

According to Faith Naylor, Armstrong's great-granddaughter, the family Bible records that Anne Wetzell [Waldron] married Robert Franklin Armstrong in Washington, D.C., on June 14, 1902 (Naylor email 17 June 2006). The *Historic Structure Report on Bleak House, Confederate Memorial Hall* reports that, like Anne, Robert had been married previously to a woman named Celia Houston (Lewis and Steirer 6).[57] Few details are available regarding the marriage of Anne to Robert, but Ms. Naylor indicates that Roger Waldron, the biological son of Anne and Leonard T. Waldron, was adopted by Robert Armstrong and became Roger Armstrong (Naylor email 17 June 2006). The 1910 Census indicates that the couple lived in Harriman, Tennessee, and that they owned their home with no mortgage. Robert was employed in Harriman, but the name of the company for which he worked is illegible. Interestingly, Roger is not listed as a member of their household at this time. The document does, however, indicate that Anne has one child, while Robert has none; they are reported as having been married for 10 years ("Annie Armstrong").[58]

From comments made here and there in Armstrong's papers, both published and unpublished, it seems that the couple moved around quite a bit for the first years of their marriage and spent a great deal of time traveling. In her autobiographical sketch written for Knopf, Armstrong notes that:

In later years, though my life has been principally in East Tennessee, in proximity to the mountains, I have lived in other places, among them Washington[59] and New York,

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[57] I have been unable to verify this information regarding Robert Armstrong's previous marriage, and have no further details regarding when it occurred or when and how it ended.
[58] If Ms. Naylor's information is correct—and I am more prone to trust hers than the census report's—the Armstrongs would actually have been married only 8 years.
[59] The District of Columbia, not the state of Washington.

and made many trips abroad. My husband and I purchased our present property, about sixty acres, in 1915 . . . [.] Here we have lived since (except for my own excursion into the business world), lived on intimate terms with our mountain neighbors and almost as primitively as they do themselves. (2)

Armstrong and her husband lived together at Knobside, the name of their home overlooking the Holston River, until his death in 1931. She remained there after he died until the Tennessee Valley Authority flooded the river valley in the mid-1940's to form Holston Lake. Local legend has it that the log home at Knobside was dismantled and moved to a location in nearby Bristol.[60] The imminent flooding of the river valley and other ways in which the mountaineers were exploited by industry become some of the recurring themes of *This Day and Time*.

As for her "excursion into the business world," Armstrong explains to Knopf that "in 1918, following financial reverses, without the knowledge of either my family or friends, I went to New York to seek a job, securing an executive position with the National City Company in Wall Street.[61] From National City Company I went to the Eastman Kodak Company in Rochester, and shortly thereafter was made their Assistant Manager of Industrial Relations" (5). Armstrong did not stay in Rochester; she managed, however, to stay with Eastman Kodak when she moved back to her beloved East Tennessee, taking a position with the company in Kingsport.

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[60] I have not yet been able to confirm this fact, nor do I know whether the home was moved to Bristol, Tennessee, or over the state line into Bristol, Virginia.

[61] For a more detailed account of her initial foray the job search, see the first two paragraphs of Armstrong's article entitled "A Woman in Wall Street: By One." The article was published anonymously in the August 1925 *Atlantic Monthly*; it outlines her experiences during the interview process and after securing a position as a personnel manager for a large Wall Street bank.

A number of sources claim that she served as executive secretary to George Eastman there, but she never mentions having served in that capacity—perhaps because in order to return to her East Tennessee home, she took what amounted to a demotion. An oral history interview with Dr. John Shelton Reed[62] suggests that, whatever her title, she did work directly for Eastman in his Kingsport office. Dr. Reed, now in his 90's, noted that he had been chosen by Eastman himself for certain scholarships, including the payment of his tuition to college and medical school. Eastman was interested in making certain that his employees had access to quality medical care, so he sent Dr. Reed off to school first at the University of Rochester for college, then to Harvard for medical school. Dr. Reed met Anne Armstrong while she was working for George Eastman, remembering that during a dinner Eastman hosted, she addressed the small group of young men whom he had chosen to educate for different professions and explained to them their responsibilities to the community in return for the consideration Eastman was offering them. Dr. Reed remembered talking to her on several other occasions and commented that she was "some sort of receptionist" for Eastman (interview).

In spite of the success she enjoyed in business, Armstrong left Eastman Kodak in 1922. Her autobiographical sketch contains a brief explanation of why she left her position there:

> In 1922 my only son, a naval aviator, was killed when his plane crashed at Hampton Roads [VA]. A year later I resigned from the Eastman Company, going abroad fro [sic] a year, and then resumed my life here in the mountains and began

[62] Dr. Reed served for many years as the principal general surgeon in the city of Kingsport and is the father of author Lisa Alther.

> writing my reactions to big business life in contributions to various periodicals, chiefly to the Atlantic Monthly and Harper's. These articles, if I may mention it . . . , attracted a wide amount of editorial and other attention. About two years ago, I forsook magazine writing and devoted my time afterwards to the novel now in your hands.[63]

It seems that, as her mother had done so long ago, Armstrong tried to assuage her grief over the loss of her son by taking a long trip to Europe. Fortunately for Armstrong, between the travel and her own resilient personality, she was able to overcome her grief and carry on productively. She seems, fortunately, not to have had her mother's penchant for depression. She put herself to work writing in the late 1920's and published a number of essays and articles in a wide variety of periodicals over the next ten or fifteen years.[64] Of course, she also set to work during this period on what would become her best-known work, *This Day and Time*.

Armstrong's outgoing personality, her life-long tendency to question the social status quo, and her social liminality seem to have aided her in her career as a business woman. They afforded her the opportunity to work with a number of different types of people, putting them at ease with her friendliness and also helping her understand how to approach each one effectively. In challenging male hegemony, her approach was patient and polite, rendering it more difficult to defeat than direct confrontation. She was direct when necessary, but on the whole she found that soft-pedaling issues most often led to some modicum of progress, while direct confrontation sometimes set a project back. She

[63] She refers here to *This Day and Time*.
[64] See appendix 1 for a bibliography of Armstrong's published work.

understood the attitude toward women and their abilities prevalent among her business associates, but she refused to allow those more powerful associates to maintain those attitudes untroubled.

The non-fiction articles that she mentions to Knopf in her biographical sketch reveal the protofeminist slant of her personal life, a slant which colors and illuminates the purpose of her fiction—both the novel she published before her Wall Street employment and the one she published afterward—and places her firmly in context with other women such as Ellen Glasgow and Susan Glaspell. However, unlike Glasgow and Glaspell, who never held jobs in the business world, Armstrong had a unique perspective, earned by actually working as an executive in the male-dominated realms of banking and manufacturing.

In *The Seas of God*, her first novel, Armstrong imagines and writes about how the patriarchy disallows (or at least cannot imagine how to accommodate) a bright, attractive young woman who seeks employment in New York City. Lydia Lambright tries to find work in sales (the same field in which Armstrong was interested when she made her way to Wall Street seeking a job), but is rejected because of her lack of experience and education. She must find an alternate, less socially acceptable method of making a living and becomes something that the patriarchy both accommodates and condemns: a prostitute. In effect, Lydia is trapped by social constructs that cannot be adapted to fit her individual needs.

Ironically, Armstrong herself—at the age of forty-six—had the opposite experience of Lydia. Her intrepid effort was rewarded on the first attempt, and quite handsomely—she secured a good position in a Wall Street Bank, National City

Company. She describes the experience and the impetus behind it in "A Woman on Wall Street, By One," published anonymously in *Atlantic Monthly* in 1925:[65]

> My husband had refused to listen when I suggested that I might help restore a margin that had been wiped out; and as I had never had a day's business experience in my life, and was not of the type recognizably commercial, I knew it would be hopeless, even if he listened, to try to convince him that I could earn enough to be of any use. So it was with an ostensible object quite different from the real one that I left home and began my search in New York for a job. What were my assets? Several years of college and university training . . . a novel published . . . a good deal of experience in public speaking, though only as an amateur . . . wide travel, but entirely for pleasure. An unimpressive list to present to the hard-headed businessman. However, I had developed a taste for tackling the thing that looked impossible. (145)[66]

While Armstrong's fictional Lydia had been turned down flatly by every business she approached, the author herself was hired by the first company she contacted. She became the employment manager of women at National City Company, though she had initially applied for a position selling bonds (146). Armstrong's article, the first among several

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[65] This was the first of a number of articles on business that Armstrong published between 1925 and 1928. Many of the essays focused directly on working women and the titles indicated this; however, even the ones that were ostensibly about business in general tended to include some sort of commentary or anecdote about women's experiences, either Armstrong's or those of other working females.

[66] Interestingly, Armstrong does not mention her stint as an English teacher here. In *The Seas of God*, Lydia Lambright considers taking a teaching position anathema; perhaps Armstrong felt the same and her omission here reflects that along with her fiction. Perhaps she simply wished to forget the experience or still felt some shame over having to be one of those unfortunate women who worked for a living. On the other hand, she may have chosen not to mention it here because it is a somewhat stereotypical occupation for women and she is attempting to emphasize the unusual nature of her experience. However she felt about her teaching years, she never mentions them other than to record them on her alumnae questionnaire for Mount Holyoke.

that discuss business from a woman's point of view, describes the many obstacles she faced as a woman in a responsible position. In it, Armstrong outlines the ways in which she managed to succeed without becoming embittered in spite of the resistance many of her male colleagues offered to her presence. According to this earliest essay, the two most important lessons she learned early in her dealings with male colleagues were that opposition handled properly was opportunity and that one of the most important elements in breaking down the long-held stereotypes of women in business was to maintain her equanimity when confronted with a problem or even an insult.

According to her own account, Armstrong eventually managed to earn the respect of the men in her company. She reports that, after a fairly brief tenure with the company, she was under consideration as the general employment manager over both men and women. She was also entertaining an offer from what she refers to as "a well-known company in up-State New York" (157). The company was, of course, Eastman Kodak. In the end, she reports that she chose to take the new offer because the executives at her current company decided against putting her in a higher position. As her supervisor explained it, "It isn't that they think you couldn't do it, but they're afraid that it would injure our prestige to have it known a woman was interviewing men for us. They're afraid the right sort wouldn't apply" (158). "The matter was settled," she writes, ". . . and not to be reopened. In the end it was the issue that decided me to go" (158). She had, it seemed, made as much headway as she could make, so she chose to move on.

The predominance of articles Armstrong published on business appeared between 1925 and 1928, and almost all of them deal in some way with the challenges faced by women in the workplace. In 1926, for example, she wrote an essay for *Harpers Monthly*

entitled “The Seven Deadly Sins of Woman in Business.” This piece introduces a theme that will appear in later articles: the ways in which women impede their own much longed-for progress and, worse yet, the ways in which they fail to change business ethics for the better by their presence. Armstrong advises first against rudeness. Second, she suggests that women must be careful not to take themselves and their jobs so seriously that they neglect to smile or be gracious. The third sin is forgetting to have interests and activities outside of the office, which dulls the mind and fatigues the body. Fourth, she warns women that they need to have outside relationships, whether marriages or friendships or membership in organizations. These first four points are of general use to both genders, though here she uses examples designed primarily for female readers. But the last three “sins” are particularly interesting in terms of providing insight into her theories regarding gender relations, and are focused on women.

Armstrong spends a great deal of time showing the folly, for instance, of seeing men as adversaries rather than associates. This is the fifth deadly sin, and to illustrate it she uses a character named Miss Black, noting about her “that there is nothing at all unusual in the spectacle of women in business sharply antagonistic—as sharply as they dare to be—to their men associates” (300). She notes that:

> These are usually, like Miss Black, women of superior ability, and perhaps have played brave parts in the feminist movement. It is for the honor of the sex, rather than as an individual matter, that they feel it incumbent upon them to demonstrate at every turn that the feminine brain is in no wise inferior to the masculine. There is something gallant in this attitude, and I should be the last to charge it against them except that their gallantry stops too often with their own sex. (300)

Armstrong implies here that she has nothing against feminism until it drives one into committing the first deadly sin, which is rudeness. As is typical, she pushes for her reader to consider each individual not in terms of gender but in terms of humanity. Armstrong does not advocate the overthrow of men by women; she hopes for a situation in which each individual is judged on her or his own merits. "Why do we feel," she asks, "that the fine art of making people happy about themselves is so out of place in business?" (301). Several paragraphs later she goes on to beg for fairness, noting that "the thing we women in business do is to look on our male associates as rivals, instead of as partners. Let me be plain. I do not charge the iniquity to others more than to myself . . . [;] we should, no doubt be judged rather leniently on this score. Most of us have had a fairly hard time of it to gain any recognition at all" (301). But she adds an admonition that "what we're apt to forget is that it's a good deal of a fight for the man, too, who gets anywhere in business; that he is faced with many, if not all the obstacles that impede our own progress; has as much, nay more, at stake than we have" (301). She notes that, breadwinning notwithstanding, for men, "failure to succeed in business spells ignominy . . . [;] to us, as yet, it spells nothing of the sort" (302). She ends this section of the essay by urging patience, noting that "when we women invaded business we invaded one of their last strongholds. Heaven knows we were not invited, except to do monotonous routine work they wished to escape themselves . . . the average business man is still smarting under our all-too conspicuous presence in a house he thought he had built for himself" (302). "We must," she declares, "give him time" (302). She does not indicate that this state of affairs is equitable; she simply puts forward what she views as the most practical approach to making progress in a patriarchal field. This also reflects the same kind of fairness and

balance with which she approached her regionalist agenda, refusing to oversimplify or turn any conflict into a strict binary opposition (e.g., female/male or mountaineer/flatlander).

The sixth sin, on which she spends less time, is "lengthy disquisitions" of a business matter or proposal when a brief explanation would do (302). Men, she explains, are programmed to hear women as gossips and chatterboxes. She protests this to a male colleague, saying, "But business abounds . . . in long-winded men" (302). "Oh, Yes!" he counters, "But don't forget . . . that your sex is still on sufferance in business. You can't afford to imitate quite all of our vices" (302). In this example, she offers a man who recognizes the stereotype and admits that it is unfair but who is honest about its power over his colleagues. Here, she suggests that if women are to change this stereotype and the resulting unfairness, they do so by accommodating it and figuring it into their approaches. The implication here is that slow and steady pressure will do more to dispel the negative stereotype than railing against it; this mode of thinking is reflected in her regionalist literature as well.

This brings Armstrong to what she calls "the deadliest of sins," which is forgetting to be feminine (302). As she explains it, "imitation of man, when it comes to our clothes and manners, does not necessarily lead to business and professional triumphs, and may as likely as not defeat them" (302-303). She ends her essay by lamenting that "so few women see that it's the woman in them, above everything else, that business needs—needs frankly, more than in mere matters of tea, cretonne, and flowers on the desk" (303). The idea that women can and should change the tenor of the way business is done is an idea that she revisits and discusses in detail in later essays. She ends this one

by noting the patriarchal nature of business, but insisting that change is both possible and necessary:

> Both sexes are highly involved, directly and indirectly, yet the point of view of only one sex has entered thus far, to any appreciable extent, into the conduct of business. Is it too unreasonable to hold that neither society at large nor the business world itself will profit greatly by our entrance into it, until we women, no longer content solely as understudies, shall offer, at whatever hazard, our own contribution—all we have gained through our special inheritance and experience—until we seek to supplement, rather than duplicate the parts in business that men play? (303).

Here, Armstrong reveals her belief that men and women are indeed different from one another and that each has something positive to offer.

Armstrong's 1927 article entitled "Are Business Women Getting a Fair Deal?" suggests that while the answer to her question is, for the moment, "no," a "yes" is possible if women learn to handle themselves and their positions properly. She begins by declaring that "whatever business men might be thinking about the matter, business women, it is evident, have no intention of relinquishing such rights as they have established in the business world as squatters" (28). She outlines the obstacles and indignities that she has had to face, including the young executive who never invited her to sit down when she entered his office and the men who were confused by her demeanor because they expected a professional woman to be something of an "adventuress" (31). Such stereotypes of women, she admits, like those of the gossip, are common among

men. But as she always does, she offers in the interest of fairness her assertion that there are women who get in the way of progress as well.

Armstrong's greatest criticism of these women is that some of them, having achieved a modicum of success in business, have "fallen into those same practices that have made men the target of business critics" (36). She advocates "the cultivation on [women's] part of friendly relations with business men" and declares that "women, in their efforts to prove themselves, have often sacrificed the business graces to a rigorous but sterile pursuit of the business virtues" (36). Again, the theme of fairness and cooperation surfaces; Armstrong is clearly not interested in seeing one gender triumph over the other but wishes instead for a balanced, cooperative working relationship that will benefit business overall.

That there is need for change in the status quo, Armstrong hastens to admit. "There is need, unquestionably," she writes, "for radical readjustment on both sides—greater magnanimity from business men and far more deft, more skillful adaptation from business women" (36). She ends with the pithy and practical observation that each side has more to gain by cooperation than by conflict:

> If the business woman will insist on agreeing that the business man is an adversary, she must recognize that he is a powerful one and that, on the whole, her chances are probably better of winning than of whipping him. But should the miracle of miracles happen, and the business man decide to cultivate the friendship of the business woman, a diplomatic victory of no mean calibre would be achieved, with the participants on both sides thereby immeasurably strengthened. (36)

Armstrong's interest in balance and cooperation—and in the judgment of each person based on individual merit rather than gender—is evident in her business essays, as it is in her fiction. But another element common to both is her refusal to offer an unequivocally happy ending where none is warranted.

In "Have Women Changed Business?" published in *Harper's*, 1928, Armstrong revisits a number of the questions she broached in earlier essays. The article opens with Armstrong's refusal to accept Nellie Tayloe Ross's[67] claim "that the entrance of women into conspicuous positions of trust . . . has been contemporary with the elevation of the ethical standards in the conduct of business" (10). In fact, Armstrong spends most of her time in this essay debunking that idea and pointing out the ways in which she has been personally disappointed by women's failure to rise to the occasion; she held high hopes that they would actually clean up some of the less savory business practices maintained by the patriarchy but is losing her confidence in their ability and/or their interest in doing as they claimed.

About the patriarchy and women's participation in maintaining it, she says that "there are business women eager to get on, who are watching their step. But in all probability, for every one whose apparent apathy toward the correctable evils of the business world is dictated by caution, there are a hundred who have been lulled into the belief that whatever is in the business world is right" (15). This failure in women to question the status quo and to assert themselves in favor of positive change frustrates and disappoints Armstrong. She says, "No realm—not even the religious—takes itself so

[67] Ross (1876-1977) was the first woman governor to serve in the United States. She won a special election in 1925 after the sudden death of her husband, who was serving as governor of Wyoming. Later, she served under Franklin D. Roosevelt as the director of the United States Mint.

seriously; and it is inevitable that a large proportion of business women, as of business men, should have been influenced by the bunkum which pervades it" (15). Adding to the problem, she notes, is the fact that "it must not be forgotten that when women entered the business world in significant numbers the ideas which govern it were already predominant" (15). The ideas she refers to here are, of course, the ones promulgated by men and the ones which have given rise, she suggests, to a rather higher level of corruption or, at least, social injustice than she would like to see.

Along these lines, Armstrong revisits in "Have Women Changed Business?" what she designated as the "deadliest sin" in an earlier essay: the tendency of women to imitate men and to choose the worst kinds of practices and characteristics to imitate at that. Armstrong ascribed strongly to the ideals set forth early on by the National Federation of Business and Professional Women, which began its organization with the idea that women would, in their words, "elevate the standards for women in business and the professions by emphasizing the conduct of such business and professions for service to society rather than personal gain" (11). This is a goal that Armstrong herself took to heart and cherished; I argue that her object in writing fiction (and non-fiction) mirrors this goal of service to society. In all cases, she writes to disabuse readers of long-held but inaccurate notions about stereotyped people, and women attract her special attention.

Above all else—even women's concerns—Armstrong is interested in promoting humanity and social justice, whether through her non-fiction or her fiction. In "Have Women Changed Business?" Armstrong remembers attending the Federation's national convention in 1926 and enthusiastically supporting the organization's president, Olive Joy Wright, when she "pronounced the plan which the Federation had formulated, to

raise the standards not only of women in business, but of business conditions and business ethics, a worthy one" (11). Armstrong does not blindly adhere to a feminist agenda, and this article is evidence of that. In it, she offers a biting commentary on the ways in which women have failed to rise to the initial call and have instead turned their attention to matters that do not directly connect with the Federation's stated goal.

With no little disdain, Armstrong describes club and organization meetings with "business women attired in all manner of childish habiliments and lugging around their toy talismans with a naïve pride that would put a Shriner's convention to shame" (11). "We find," she writes, "business women's clubs, in pathetically sedulous imitation of their business brothers—of Rotary and Kiwanis, of Lions, Civitans, and what not—furnishing rooms in anti-tuberculosis sanitoria, distributing gifts to poor children at Christmas and Easter, buying milk for undernourished grade children" (12). Armstrong does not condemn these philanthropic activities themselves, but she has an important question regarding what she thinks should be the central purpose of these business women's organizations: the improvement of the business world by raising its standard of ethics. She asks, "what in heaven's name have irrigated cemeteries and better babies . . . to do with raising the standards of business conditions and business ethics? What have doles to unfortunate children, creditable as are the humane instincts from which they proceed, to do with a better business world?" (12).

In this essay, Armstrong's concern for the marginalized in general, not just women, comes to light. "Have Women Changed Business?" offers just one example of her thinking about how business might improve not just itself but society in general by attending to its standard of ethics. She writes:

> Where, in all this business women's reporting and discussing and rushing back and forth across the continent in Business Women's Specials is the remotest recognition of industry as an organic social process, making and distributing wealth in accordance with human welfare, and, therefore, while based on voluntary action, requiring some social control? Where in all these business women's councils is the slightest repugnance shown to the doctrine that business is business? Where is the ghost of a hint that the business world as a whole is deep-bitten with greed, dubious dealing, hypocrisy? Where in it all is any reassurance whatsoever that business women are "cherishing" ideas of helping to bring about a different state of affairs? Certainly, if in 1926 business women were still being urged to hold fast to their early ideals, in 1928 there is not a whisper among them, that I can catch, of "business ethics." (13)

Never one to append a happy ending where it doesn't belong, Armstrong ends this essay with a note of mourning, lamenting an ideal for which she feels business women have failed to strive. She asks, "Will there not be business women who refuse to help perpetuate the idea that the business world is no place for the finest human instincts, and that these instincts must find expression (if they find it) at home, in public life, through philanthropic channels—anywhere at all except business itself?" (16). She also asks whether there are "women who, with courage, tolerance, humor, and the willingness to endure ridicule and dislike, shall blaze business trails of a new sort?" (16). Attempting to call women to action in favor of revisiting their original purpose, she ends the essay with the comment that "the time has come, it seems to me, not only to ask this question, but to consider the possibility of a negative answer" (16). Armstrong is engaged here in the

practice of consciousness-raising. She is hoping to pull women away from the patriarchal practice of business as usual in order to prompt them to change business for the better. She views these modifications as a way to foment important social changes that will result in improvement not simply for the individual businessmen but for society in general.

After 1928, Armstrong seems to have turned her attention, as she noted to Knopf in her autobiographical sketch, to writing her second novel, *This Day and Time*, which reflects her regionalist concern with humanity and the development of better relations between marginalized groups and those in power. Between 1928 and 1933, there are few periodical publications, probably due not only to her focus on *This Day and Time* but also due to Robert's death in 1931.

According to clippings from Armstrong's file at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin,[68] Robert Armstrong's funeral was held on March 26th, 1931, and his wife delivered the eulogy. An unidentified newspaper clipping[69] (probably from the *Bristol Herald-Courier*) gives an account of his funeral, reporting that Bob Armstrong died in his home of a heart attack on the 24th ("Mountain Folks"). The obituary states that he had "[come] to Big Creek for peace and contentment after a life spent at various times on a plantation, among Indians, and as a traveling salesman." The mountaineer neighbors, with whom he and his wife had become close over the past fifteen years, turned out for the funeral, as did friends from nearby Bristol and other local towns. During her remarks, "Mrs. Armstrong said that her husband had 'great faith' in

[68] This is where the archival material from Alfred A. Knopf is stored.
[69] Probably from the *Bristol Herald-Courier* or some other local East Tennessee Paper.

the youth of the section," and that "he had three wishes: to die without suffering; to be buried on the knoll he selected March 22 as the place he loved best; and to be buried by the mountain folks. All wishes were granted" ("Mountain Folks Bury Bob Armstrong"). An additional clipping from the Lansing, Michigan *Capital News* states that "Mrs. Armstrong . . . will continue to spend her summers in her Tennessee cabin, but hereafter her winters will be spent in New York or some other city" ("Robert Armstrong"). The variety of letters on hotel and resort stationary after this date attest to the fact that, until she settled in at the Barter Theatre Residence at the end of her life, Armstrong was quite peripatetic and continued to explore her interests to the fullest degree possible.

In 1932, the focus of Armstrong's publications shifted from business to literature and culture. Obviously, she was finding time to read as she traveled; she seems to have spent some time in England as well as traveling around the United States. During December of 1932, two of her book reviews were published by the *Saturday Review*. Her diction in these *Saturday Review* articles suggests a British audience, as does the fact that the price of the first book she reviewed is given in shillings.

The first piece, a review of *The City Without Walls*, includes her comments on an anthology complied by Margaret Cushing Osgood. Armstrong praises Osgood's volume, which pulls together works from a number of sources: "there are many exquisite things in this anthology, which is culled from every literature and from all the ages: Genesis, St. John, the Budda [sic], Thomas Aquinas, Thomas Hardy—the whole drama of life is here" ("City Without Walls" 695). Interestingly, the anthology seems to be made up mostly of writings by male authors—no female authors are mentioned at all. Armstrong makes no comment about this. After noting that *The City Without Walls* is a collection of readings

about love, Armstrong goes on to comment that "Within this fair city are two sorts of citizens; the Platos and Parsifals who seek the one true God and the Tristans and the Dantes who seek the one true Woman" (295). Interestingly, Armstrong's protofeminist view of business seems not to have colored her expectations as to the inclusion of women in such volumes.

Her second *Saturday Review* article, appearing two pages later in the same issue, is "Farewell to 1932—Novels." In it, Armstrong offers an accounting of the year's most popular novels. She begins by quoting a business acquaintance who commented during a conversation that "Frocks and Fiction . . . are the only trades that are doing well in the present slump, and both are signs of the Decadent Feminism that is ruining England" (697). She comments tongue-in-cheek that "he talked in capitals like all Great Business Men and even Decadent Females when they are not quite sure of themselves, but his judgment set me thinking . . .[;] has 1932 been a good year for fiction?" (697). She takes on the omnibus first, declaring that during this year, "the omnibus style has come in and the Problem Novel has definitely gone out" (697). She comments further that "the omnibus, after all, is merely a reprint by another name" and the Problem Novel is "merely a moral dressed up with a triangle of talk to make it readable. The first is simply a method of giving you more for your money and second a means of giving you something else (that you probably don't want) for your money, and neither makes much difference in the long run" (697). Apparently, Armstrong was for the most part unimpressed with the current mode in novels.

She goes on to note that "only a few books . . . seem likely to mark our 1932 from its predecessors and successors," and she lists among them *Flowering Wilderness* by

John Galsworthy and *Helene* by Vicki Baum. She also mentions Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. She does not, however, explain why these books stand out above the rest of the field—she simply takes it for granted that her reader is familiar with them. She includes a long list of additional novels, commenting only on whether they are good or not, and writes at the end of her general disappointment: "And the summing up? Not really much more than an average year" (697).

Armstrong's February 1933 essay entitled "The Women of Galsworthy," also published in the *Saturday Review*, offers some insight into how her personal experience in business colored her literary philosophy. In it, she discusses the female characters in Galsworthy's work and applauds his eventual creation of women who challenge the patriarchal world. She notes that these resisting women appear after *The Forsyte Saga,* and explains the process by which Galsworthy came to change his portrayal of women. She begins by questioning a widely-held view of the novelist: "Galsworthy, they say, was first and foremost a man's novelist, not a woman's. I doubt it" (115). She suggests that Galsworthy is actually progressive in his view of women, citing the fact that his writing about them shifted with alterations in social views. She begins by acknowledging the book of Galsworthy's that is least "feminist" in order to prove her point by contrast:

> In *The Forsyte Saga*, the men are inevitably the major and the women the minor key. But that was not so much Galsworthy's fault, if "fault" is the word, as the fault of the late Victorian household, and we can no more have a grievance against Galsworthy because his men overshadow his women than we can blame Conan Doyle for there being so few women in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes.* (115)

Her point is that Galsworthy is simply reflecting reality as he sees it. "Galsworthy chose," she writes, "to write about life as it was actually lived, and left the sloppy love story . . . severely alone . . . [;] he was quite right to make his women no more than the incidental music in the great male orchestra of property and business" (115). Armstrong's affinity for Galsworthy is not surprising, as her own fiction follows the same model. Like Galsworthy, she attempted "to write about life as it is actually lived" and to avoid "the sloppy love story." She notes that "Galsworthy was extremely sensitive to social changes" and that "in his later books—written when the feminist revolution had begun, and even 'quite nice' women did some work for their living—the position was reversed, and his women seemed to me more effective than his men" (115). As in her essays on business, Armstrong shows her respect for the individual who can put humanity above gender: "the truth is," she writes, "that [Galsworthy] understood both men and women" (115).

While she was writing, Armstrong continued to travel, though she still made her East Tennessee property her home base. She used it primarily as a writing retreat and summer home after her husband's death, hosting such guests there as Thomas Wolfe and her former business associates. Having lived in the Big Creek community among the mountaineers for years, she was particularly bothered by what she considered the general public's misunderstanding of them. They had been, in her mind, damaged by the portrayals of them offered by local color writers. Her regionalist novel, *This Day and Time*, written in an attempt to rectify the situation and offer what she considered a more realistic and accurate account of mountain culture, had garnered critical acclaim but had not done as well as she hoped. In March of 1935, five years after the novel debuted, she

made another attempt to disabuse the public of their erroneous notions with her essay entitled "The Southern Mountaineers." It appeared in *Yale Review*, and as was characteristic of Armstrong's work, it took an opposing view to the conventional wisdom regarding mountaineers. She declares that "much nonsense has been talked and written about the Southern Mountaineers, on whom the Tennessee Valley Project, affecting, as it will, the destinies of many of them, has focused fresh attention. Nothing about this romantic folk seems too romantic on the one hand, too grotesque on the other, to be believed" (537). The essay undergirds the re-presentation of the mountaineers she had offered in *This Day and Time* five years earlier, strengthening and expanding some of the points touched on in the novel.

In later life, the mountain folk among whom she and her husband had spent so many years seem to have become a central interest. "The Southern Mountaineers" demonstrates her respect and concern for a people she had come to view as her own, and as she had done for women in business, she worked to reveal the truth about their muted culture and help outsiders understand what, in her view, they were truly like. *This Day and Time* is just as much an effort to enlighten the public as this patently non-fiction essay. Ironically, part of its failure to reach the circulation Armstrong and Knopf hoped it would is that it moves away from the stereotype that had already been so deeply imbedded in the minds of readers. The reading public often couldn't accommodate her regionalist presentation of the mountaineers because it did not fit what they "knew" about mountaineers from the writings of such authors as John Fox, Jr. as I will argue in Chapter Three.

One of Armstrong's greatest concerns later in her life was the way in which mountaineers had been exploited not only for literary purposes but by business and industry as well. Her essay on their culture addresses this, but so does her fiction; one of the issues in *This Day and Time* is the conflict between an independent but hardscrabble country life and the more lucrative—but exploitative and intermittent—work to be found in the city. Armstrong's protagonist, Ivy Ingoldsby, chooses the independent life, but comes home to find it threatened by big business and the government, who want to flood her valley and claim that they wish to do so for the public good. Ivy, like Armstrong, questions the patriarchal establishment's definition of "public good" and recognizes that there is a degree of greed and paternalism behind the expressed wish to "help" the mountain folk improve their lives. She hopes that her readers will see the same ulterior motives behind the claims offered in defense of such projects as the Tennessee Valley Authority's dams and the intrusion of factories and extractive industries (mainly mining and timber companies) into the region.

Armstrong's attention turned also to literary associations with mountain culture. In 1941, the *Yale Review* published Armstrong's review of a biography written by Edd Winfield Parks. Parks's volume, *Charles Egbert Craddock (Mary Noailles Murfree),* addressed an author whose work had been familiar to Armstrong since her childhood.[70] Armstrong's admiration for Murfree's work is evident, and she states that though "we owe a debt to Mr. Parks for his attempt to rescue this little lost lady of letters from complete oblivion . . .[,] it is to be regretted that she might not have found a somewhat bolder advocate of her claim for survival" ("Miss Murfree's Novels" 213). She laments

[70] See page 73 for Armstrong's mention of Murfree in *Of Time and Knoxville.*

that Parks focuses overmuch on her femininity rather than what Armstrong sees as Murfree's greatest merits. Parks, like other critics, seems to have been fascinated by Murfree's ability to "pull off" a male persona for so many years undiscovered,[71] and in his fascination with this feat, he lost track of Murfree's other, more important accomplishments. Her concern over the overemphasis of Murfree's gender mirrors her own careful avoidance of making any of her writings too militantly feminist. Also, while she found the renditions of mountain speech by most local color writers inaccurate and even a little insulting, Armstrong thought that Murfree had it right. She discusses how, although Murfree had contact with the mountain folk only when she visited Beersheba Springs and other mountain resorts, she was able to capture their culture: "It was here at Beersheba that she had her first contacts with the mountain people, gaining insight into mountain character and a mastery of the picturesque mountain speech which it is safe to say has never been excelled" (212).[72]

But Murfree had even stronger, more universal literary merit in Armstrong's view. "It took superlative courage," Armstrong writes, "to write of characters tormented by religious doubts, as so many of Miss Murfree's were, at a time and place when no lady was supposed to know of even the existence of religious doubts" (213). Armstrong must have felt a connection with Murfree on this count, as her own novel *The Seas of God* dealt harshly with overzealous religious orthodoxy. Armstrong also notes in her review that "it took scarcely less courage, of another sort, for a fiction writer of the day to go

[71] No one, not even her Boston publisher, knew for years that Charles Egbert Craddock was actually a slightly crippled aristocratic southern woman who garnered her information on mountaineer life from visits to summer resorts such as Beersheba Springs. There was quite the sensational reaction when Murfree's true identity was revealed— her male publisher was shocked to see the diminutive woman whose "manly" works had been one of the mainstays of his business.
[72] Current scholars might not agree with Armstrong's assessment of the dialect in Murfree's work.

against the demand for happy endings; to give us again and again . . . one that was sombre, unresolved, or definitely tragic" (213). Again, this is an element that Armstrong and Murfree have in common; Armstrong's novels end with hope, but not completely happily; this prevents them from fitting precisely into any of the most predominant genres of her day. They are not local color, romance, realism, or naturalism, though they draw from each of those genres. Murfree, an author whom Armstrong encountered early in life through her family's library, undeniably influenced the younger writer, though whether that influence was direct or indirect is difficult to say. It is, however, significant that Armstrong praises what she sees as Murfree's innovations and departures from the genre in which she was classified: local color fiction.

In discussing Murfree's work, Armstrong claims that Murfree's "earliest writings . . . already showed a touch of cynicism and the possession of that ironic sense which later was to distinguish the work of another Southern lady of quality, Ellen Glasgow" (212). Most readers of Murfree's day missed these elements of her writing, but they are there, especially if one reads her work through the lens of regionalism as set forth by such critics as Marjorie Pryse and Judith Fetterley. Anne Armstrong, then, was ahead of her time in recognizing in Murfree's work what so many other readers and critics had missed—the ways in which it interrogated and disrupted the tradition in which it was most often included. Armstrong suggests that, as with Glasgow, "it is probable, indeed, that failure to find satisfaction in purely social pursuits was a factor in making Mary Murfree a writer" (212). The same might be said of Armstrong, too, who by all accounts was most personable and charming but who would never have been satisfied or happy playing the socially constructed roles dictated by her society.

Armstrong's most often-quoted short piece is an essay she published in 1946 in *Arizona Quarterly Review*, "As I Saw Thomas Wolfe." In it, she remembers a 1937 visit Wolfe made to her guest cabin. She quotes a letter from him in which he reports that his efforts to write near Asheville had been thwarted by friends and family: "It has been pretty difficult so far. I know that you have found out from your own experience that most people, including your own family, simply cannot get it into their heads that writing is work. Apparently, it comes under the head of fortunate or eccentric gifts of nature, about which you need to do nothing, provided you have them. As a result, people have been coming out all hours of the day, including the night" (5). So he came to stay in her guest cabin for a while, which she reports was "more in scale with his own proportions than many places he found, and now he seemed jubilant to be back in it, its key in his pocket" (6). The portrait she paints of Wolfe is one of an eccentric but charming man who, after "costly entanglements with certain agents he had had in the past" and "the love affair of year's [sic] standing and tragic termination—a *temps perdu* ever with him, it was plain" was looking for a place where he could rest and write in peace (7-8).

In spite of his requiring rather high maintenance on the parts of Armstrong and her housekeeper, Rosa Duncan, she seems to have enjoyed having him at Knobside. There was a mishap on the first night which she presents rather comically; "There had been, he reported now, laughingly, though a trifle shamefaced—a catastrophe. The bed had collapsed . . . I realized then, if I had not before, what painful difficulties and embarrassments lay in the path of this young Colossus wherever he went" (9). Though she recognized and appreciated his literary talent, Armstrong dwells mostly on his personality here rather than his literature, noting his "helplessness" (13). According to

her, "he could not drive a car; could not, or certainly did not, swim . . .[;] could not run a typewriter, keep a fire going to heat water for his bath—could not even operate successfully an uncomplicated reading lamp" (13). At the end of his stay, Armstrong drove him to Marion, Virginia, where he was to stay with Sherwood Anderson for a while. "As I Saw Thomas Wolfe" is of interest to Wolfe scholars not so much because Armstrong offers insight into his literature but because she offers insight into the man himself.

Though Armstrong did not publish much during the 1940's, the decade was far from uneventful for her. During this period, she turned her attention from fiction and non-fiction to drama. According to material from the archives of the Barter Theatre in Abingdon, Virginia, Armstrong began experimenting with plays by the late 1930's; her folder in the Barter archives contains several letters written back and forth during the 1940's between her and Robert Porterfield, the managing director the theatre. Her most frequently documented project seems to have involved several transmutations of her second novel, *This Day and Time,* into stage productions.

The earliest correspondence from the Barter archive, dated August 13th, 1940, is a letter addressed to Armstrong in East Tennessee. It contains a request from Porterfield for an appearance: "I wonder if you would make a special effort to come over here and see us during our Drama Festival?[73] I would like very much to have you speak to us during our conference here, on August 23rd and 24th, on 'The Mountain People as Dramatic Material.' The conference if [sic] for the purpose of having a mix of minds of the people

[73] This festival is the precursor of what is now the Highlands Festival in Abingdon, a two-week craft and arts event with music, drama, and juried craft and art shows spread throughout the town.

who are interested in theatre and drama" (letter). There is no indication of whether Armstrong fulfilled his request, though she enjoyed public speaking and would likely have accommodated his request if her schedule permitted.

A letter from Armstrong to Porterfield dated June 12, 1947, shows that sometime in the late 1930's, he had overseen the production of one of her plays in process, *Mountain Ivy*. The letter is typed on stationary from The Terrace Hotel, Lafayette, Louisiana. In it, Armstrong notes that she is "now making her home in the Deep South, for winters anyway, though there is just a chance that I may look in on you in Abingdon before summer is over" (1).[74] She writes, "I am wondering whether you might ever be interested in introducing into your repertoire (if not for the summer season, already arranged for of course, then perhaps later) at least one Folk play, especially one conceived in & depicting that particular Virginia-Tennessee mountain region, & its primitive people . . . my own play, "MOUNTAIN IVY" (1). She goes on to praise his handling of the first version of the script:

> Bob, when I look back on the presentation of that play in the old Opera House in Abingdon some ten years ago, after only one week's rehearsal & with its large cast, & three very different sets . . . it seems to me little short of a miracle that you were able to get the amount of authentic atmosphere into that production, the amount of dramatic fire and excitement out of it that you did—the sort of miracles that you have been performing ever since (1).

[74] By this time, Armstrong had been forced to leave her beloved home, Knobside, outside of Bristol, as the Tennessee Valley Authority had begun flooding the valley to form Holston Lake. The TVA began inundating the valley in 1946.

She goes on to explain that she has rewritten *Mountain Ivy* "with a view to making the play cheaper to produce, through reducing the number of sets and characters" (1-2). She closes thus: "If you have the least idea, Bob, that you might sooner or later be able to do something with it, write me just a line --- I know how busy you are --- to that effect to my present address, & I will send you a copy of the script . . . [.] Then you can examine [it] at your convenience" (2). There is no reply to this letter from Porterfield in the Barter archives, though records show that the two corresponded on the same subject again in early 1948.

Armstrong seems to have been pleasant but persistent about having her play staged. She evidently contacted Porterfield again regarding the play in early 1948, and he replied with a brief letter on March 18, 1948: "It was nice to hear from you. It would be wonderful if we could do 'Mountain Ivy' again this summer. I will take it up with the directors and the Play-Reading Committee, and if they think it is advisable to revive 'Mountain Ivy', we will do so. You will hear from me in about two weeks." Evidently, he did not meet his own deadline for letting her know; in another Barter archive letter dated May 5th, 1948, she writes to Porterfield that "it is nearly two months since I heard from you and I am venturing now to inquire again what, if any, prospect there is of your doing MOUNTAIN IVY again this summer. Please be quite frank with me. I shall be disappointed, though not completely crushed, if you have decided against it" (1). This letter is written on stationary from the Nu-Wray Inn in Burnsville, North Carolina, where Armstrong reports that she has taken up residence for the summer and declares that "it is good to be back in our mountain country again" (1). Porterfield's reply to this query is dated May 26th, 1948: "As much as I would like to do Mountain Ivy again this summer,

and as topical as it really is around here, I don't at this moment, know whether we will be able to do it or not. You may rest assured that I will let you know."

The archive attests to the fact that while she was very interested in having the Barter produce her reworked script, she was also working to have it staged elsewhere. Among other interesting documents related to Armstrong's long association with the Barter Theatre, her file in their archives contains a program from the Raleigh, North Carolina production of *Mountain Ivy* at the Raleigh Little Theatre. The program notes that "a resident of Asheville for the past two and a half years, Mrs. Armstrong, now 79, was born in Tennessee" (*Mountain Ivy*). If the program lists her age accurately, then this play was being staged at the Little Theatre in 1951, the same year in which the reworked version finally premiered at the Barter under the title *Some Sweet Day.* Both the North Carolina, and the Virginia productions were evidently well-received. The Raleigh program announces that Armstrong was "winner of the First Raleigh Little Theatre Playwriting Contest."

A clipping from the Barter archive file shows that on August 1, 1951, the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* ran a story by Edith Lindeman on the Barter premieres for that month. One of them was a play called *Mrs. Thing*, by Mary Chase. Lindeman reports that Chase "wrote her new play . . . because she is weary unto death of being known only as the author of *Harvey*."[75] Chase, as Lindeman tries to put it tactfully, was "practically unapproachable," but not because of "temperament or snootiness. Mrs. Chase is basically a shy person." The writer of the other premiere, Anne Armstrong, was a very different story. Lindeman notes in her article that Armstrong's *Some Sweet Day* was due to debut

[75] The movie version, starring Jimmy Stewart, was an enormous hit.

on August 6th, and that the author was, in contrast to Chase, "not so elusive" and "loves to talk about her beloved mountain people." She also notes that the play is an adaptation of *This Day and Time*. About Armstrong, Lindeman writes that she is "more amazing than any character she might dream up." Her description is positive:

> Handsome, charming and voluble, at 79 she has the vigor of a mountain woman and the sophistication of a cosmopolite. She happens to be both, having traveled around the world several times during the Winter months, but always having returned to the Summer home in Tennessee where she lived for 26 Summers until the TVA blew up her mountain and buried her valley under a billion tons of water.

In spite of Mrs. Chase's higher national profile, Lindeman focuses mostly on Armstrong and her work, presumably because Armstrong—ever pleased to talk about her projects—was so much easier to interview. Armstrong's picture rather than Chase's is featured with the article.

The *Washington County News*, a local Abingdon paper owned and run by Sherwood Anderson's family, also announced the premiere of *Some Sweet Day*. After opening night, Eleanor Crist Anderson published a review of the play in the September 9, 1951, edition, first explaining that it "shows the effects of generations of life on steep mountains in small cabins" and that "mating, death and birth are natural and frequent and are common subjects of conversation" (1). Anderson reports that the story "deals with the return of Ivy, beautiful mountain girl, from a factory job to her cabin on the mountain" and that "[Ivy] awaits the return of the husband who left her before her son was born" (2). "The final return of the husband," she notes, "brings the plot to an unexpected

conclusion"(2). Her response to the play was mostly positive, though she noted that "throughout the play there seems to be a tendency to include incident and conversation for the sake of portraying language and custom rather than for the sake of dramatic necessity, but [the] richness of the language justified the tendency for me" (2). Anderson ends by praising the actors, who handled the difficulties of mountain speech and manner well and delivered a good performance (3).

At age eighty-two, Armstrong was still writing. Another play, *Granny's Millions,* premiered at the Barter Theatre on September 15th, 1954. On the subject of this particular play, the archives and the local papers are, strangely, nearly silent. The only description of the play's content is a one-sentence paragraph in the *Washington County News,* September 9, 1954: "The play, which will be in period costume of 1913, is concerned about the life of a family in Knoxville, according to advance reports" ("Anne Armstrong Play Premiere Next Week" 1). In spite of its usual habit of reviewing each of the Barter's plays, the *Washington County News* seems to neglect *Granny's Millions* and does so pointedly. In the September 30th edition of the same year, the paper reports that "three new plays received world premieres [this month]: Virginia Card's production of 'The Barber of Seville,' Mary Chase's 'Lolita,' and Anne Armstrong's 'Granny's Millions.' All except 'Granny's Millions' were reviewed in this paper" ("'Moon is Blue' at Barter Through Saturday" 4). There is no indication of why the reviewer chose not to write about the production, and the Barter archive has no record of it other than simply noting the date on which it premiered.

As her life was drawing to a close, Armstrong was also working on the autobiographical typescript on which the first part of this introduction relied so heavily.

She seems to have made Abingdon—and the Barter Residence—her permanent home for the last eight or so years of her life, and she died there on March 17, 1958, at the age of eighty-six. None of her obituaries mentions an illness or the cause of her death, which seems to have been sudden. The March 20th edition of the *Washington County News* reports that "private services were held . . . [;] interment was in the Rooty Branch Cemetery near Bristol [Tennessee/Virginia]" ("Authoress Dies Here" 4). Brief obituaries also ran in the *New York Times, Publisher's Weekly,* and other national periodicals.

Both Armstrong and her husband Robert are buried in the Rooty Branch Baptist Church Cemetery in the Emmett community of Sullivan County, Tennessee. This probably has to do with their wish to rest in the rural mountain community they loved rather than with any religious connection; they were, in fact, never members of Rooty Branch Church, though many of their neighbors were. The cemetery is in close proximity to where Knobside, their cabin, used to sit. According to the Rooty Branch Cemetery web site, Anne Armstrong's gravestone is engraved with the title of her second novel, *This Day and Time*, which was set in the community where Rooty Branch lies. Both Armstrongs chose to be laid to rest among the mountain people they had grown to love during their life together in the mountains.

II. *The Seas of God*

Critical Context, Reception, and Genres

Published anonymously in 1915, Anne W. Armstrong's *The Seas of God* garnered the following praise from a *New York Times* reviewer: "the indications are that this very remarkable novel is not a first book. Its firmness of touch, its sense of comparative values, its observance of 'les nuances,' its artistic restraint, and the Tolstoyan absence of sentimentalism with which a most sensational subject is treated, all indicate that this is the work of no 'prentice hand" (*The Seas of God* 211). The "sensational subject" to which the reviewer refers is, of course, the young female protagonist's seduction and subsequent entry into prostitution which, in 1915, proved most controversial as the matter of a novel. But, the *Times* critic reads past the potentially distracting subject matter to discern the very purpose of the text, closing the review with an observation that *The Seas of God* has value for those who wish to examine the life of a marginal figure and understand what drove her to the fringes of society:

> Painful as is the subject of *The Seas of God*, it has nothing morbid or erotic about it—no more than has *Anna Karenina*. One may question why or whether such a story should be told at all; but if told, it could hardly be better done than this. The author stands aloof, holding no brief. The characters live. It is for the reader to find the lessons that every life must teach, whether it will or not, even the life apparently most hopelessly adrift on the most uncharted of "the seas of God." (211)

The novel was, in fact, Armstrong's first. Since its publication, few readers have encountered the text, which fell out of print early and has remained in obscurity for decades. In it, Armstrong made use of recollections from her own childhood, drawing on her own experience to add notes of verisimilitude to the culture of the fictional city of Kingsville. In *Of Time and Knoxville,* Armstrong muses over her puzzling attachment to Knoxville, wondering what it was about the city that so fascinated and attracted her, frustrating and repelling her at the same time. In *The Seas of God,* she seems to be working through her conflicting feelings about her hometown by fictionalizing it as Kingsville and showing how it both traps and damages the young female protagonist, Lydia Lambright, who internalizes its characterization of her.

Lydia's experience is very different from Armstrong's own in terms of economics; Armstrong's family, though not originally from the city, was privileged and wealthy, and their economic success made hers a much more positive experience than Lydia's. But like Lydia, Armstrong noticed a cultural divide between her family and their neighbors. Her family, like Lydia's, was of Northern origin, and also like Lydia and her father, the Wetzells held views that ran counter to what they considered the narrow-mindedness and religious hypocrisy of the other members of Knoxville's elite. Try as she might, Lydia finds that Kingsville defines and oppresses her as some of Knoxville's culture oppressed Armstrong herself; its social constructions and mores seem inescapable to her, at least until the end of the text. She leaves Kingsville looking for new opportunities in New York City only to have her past catch up with her in the form a man who, by making her his mistress, seduces and damages her even as he seems to "save" her financially.

When the book opens, Lydia lives with her ailing father, a professor who has lost his position at nearby Ransom University because he dared to lecture publicly on the theory of evolution, thereby invoking the wrath of the conservative local elites and middle class. The Lambrights live in a shabby cottage, barely making ends meet, until the professor dies. Left completely without resources, Lydia at first depends on some kindly neighbors, the Pooles, but their "respectable" lifestyle chafes; Lydia has been educated at the knee of her father and does not share their religious and social conservatism. She refuses to take a position as a schoolteacher, mostly on the grounds that she must join an organized church in order to do so. To the great consternation of the Pooles, Lydia decides to leave Kingsville and seek her fortune as a "book agent," but she finds that the work is much more difficult than she imagined. She cannot make a go of it, but rather than return to the Pooles', she decides to buy a ticket to New York City. There, she reasons, she will find more appropriate employment opportunities for an intelligent and ambitious young woman like herself.

Unfortunately for Lydia, her inexperience and the fact that she has no social connections in New York work against her. She cannot find a job, and without references even finding a place to live proves problematic. She eventually rents a room in a boarding house but has no luck with employment. Desperate and lonely, she finds herself wandering down Fifth Avenue one afternoon contemplating suicide as her prospects and her finances dwindle. At what seems to be her darkest moment, she has a chance encounter with Ransom Churchwell, a former student and old friend of her father's, who has traveled to New York on business. He recognizes her, notices her distress, and offers to help her, and, having no other options, Lydia accepts.

Lydia has some reason to trust Churchwell; unlike others in Kingsville, he continued to visit Professor Lambright even after his departure from the university, though his visits were infrequent and clandestine. In addition, Lydia has always harbored a secret infatuation for Churchwell, who, as a member of one of Kingsville's most established and elite families, symbolizes for her the epitome of breeding and culture. He seduces Lydia, and she becomes his New York mistress. For a while, it seems that Lydia's financial problems are solved, but after a year or so, she becomes pregnant with his child. He promptly abandons her, writing a farewell letter and enclosing $500.

As a pregnant single woman, Lydia once again finds herself in a financial predicament with no place to live. New Yorkers, it seems, are as judgmental about such matters as Kingsvillians. Fortunately, an acquaintance, Emma Stark, and her "aunt" (to whom Emma refers as "My Old"), offer Lydia a room in their house.[76] Lydia finds employment as a housemaid, and she and her son, Peter, stay with the Starks for about seven years. This association ends when Lydia becomes the mistress of one of her employers, Mr. Van Antwerp, for whom she works as a housemaid.

Van Antwerp is the New York version of Ransom Churchwell: handsome, educated, wealthy, and worldly. Through him, Lydia meets other men willing to pay for her sexual services, and she leaves the Starks' lower-class but respectable home to rent her own luxurious apartment. There, she can ply her trade and pay for the lovely things she has always craved—beautiful furniture and clothes, massages and manicures,

[76] Lonely and bored during her first weeks in New York, Lydia decides one day to spend some of Churchwell's money on flowers for Emma Stark, the only woman with whom she has really connected on a personal level since her arrival. She shows up at the Starks' with the flowers, and My Old, somehow guessing Lydia's situation, reveals that she is, in fact, Emma's mother and that Emma is her "love child." Out of empathy and understanding, they allow Lydia to move in after she is evicted from yet another boarding house, charging her a nominal amount of rent and assisting with child care.

expensive jewelry—and also for Peter's tuition at a Catholic boarding school. Lydia lives this way for a number of years, traveling to Europe with her clients and enjoying the finer things, but alternately racked with guilt that she has had to send Peter away. After a failed attempt to reunite with Churchwell, Lydia begins to reconsider her choices. While on a trip to Italy with Van Antwerp, Lydia learns that a couple named Lambright has registered in the same villa. She does not reveal her identity to them but lets them know that she is from Kingsville. They turn out to be her father's brother and his wife. In what she thinks is a casual conversation, her aunt reveals the unusual circumstances of her parents' marriage, and Lydia discovers that she was probably not Professor Lambright's biological daughter. Lydia is shocked, of course, and her discovery leads to unaccustomed introspection and a reconsideration of her life's direction.

Having felt for years that she was trapped in a "gilded hell," Lydia suddenly recognizes that she can free herself by breaking the old associations that hold her there, both the ones from Kingsville that have been imposed upon her and the ones from New York that are the products of her own decisions. Lydia returns home to New York alone, sells all of her belongings, and retrieves Peter from boarding school, determined to begin a new life—a new one that she and Peter can be proud of. The novel closes as she and Peter are on a train, headed west, where she has arranged for employment running a boarding house.

The novel's focus on a marginal female protagonist and its insistence that the reader understand the elements of her culture that precipitated her tribulations might inspire a number of different theoretical approaches to the novel. Of course, a feminist reading might come to mind first as a logical endeavor, given the anti-patriarchal aspects

of the text and its focus on a woman. I have chosen for two important reasons, however, to focus on this novel as regionalism.

First, though it is less obviously regionalist than either "Half-Wit Mary's Lover" or *This Day and Time, The Seas of God* proves important to regionalist discourse as a site for the further examination and delineation of urban regionalism. As Frank Davey points out in "Towards the Ends of Regionalism," the genre "has often been virtually equated with place," in particular with what he terms the "hinterland" (2). *The Seas of God* offers an excellent example of a text in which the tenets of regionalism are applied with efficacy in an urban setting. Davey notes that scholars have had a general "disregard for the complex intranational and international power relationships that make any hinterland-centered analysis simplistic"; Armstrong's work certainly supports Davey's assertion (2). Lydia never lives in a "hinterland"; she does not grow up on the coast of New England or in the hills and hollows of rural Appalachia. She is firmly rooted in a metropolitan area, albeit a rather provincial one. Rarely does Lydia venture into the countryside or even run across rural characters except during her unsuccessful attempt to become a book agent. Even then, she is outsmarted and mistreated by the locals. When she does make a move, it is from city to city. By having Lydia become peripatetic not only in her move to New York City from Kingsville but also in her travels through Europe, Armstrong illustrates the strength of the patriarchal Kingsville hegemony that binds her in almost every location, showing that it follows her even to Italy. The only chance Lydia seems to have lies in her decision to leave the dominant East for the less firmly acculturated West.

Frank Davey posits that "regionalism operates as a transformation of geography into a sign that can conceal the presence of ideology" ("Toward the Ends of

Regionalism" 3). This holds true for *The Seas of God* in which Kingsville represents, at least in the person of Ransom Churchwell, the Old South and the lingering antebellum ideology and power structure there that limits Lydia and keeps her from achieving social and financial success. Davey further argues that "the individual called to by regionalism is invited to hold certain restraining and shaping beliefs not because of political difference, but because such beliefs are perceived as 'true' or 'natural' to the inhabiting of a specific geography" (3).

Armstrong invokes certain beliefs and assumptions on the part of the reader by setting the novel in an old southern city, but by forcing the reader to view that society from the perspective of a marginal figure rather than a central one, she destabilizes the reader's paradigm and forces her to consider society from a different angle. She makes a purposeful choice in this respect and in doing so proves Davey's point that regionalism is "a phenomenon that can be both divisive and/or integrative," simultaneously upholding and interrogating social norms (3). Lydia herself is a prime example of the ways in which this is true; while she desperately wishes to fit in with Kingsville's elite, their rejection of her and her father also makes her resent them and refer to them as "most deliciously narrow-minded" and "self-satisfied" (*The Seas of God* 15).

The urban setting of *The Seas of God*—or perhaps the plural "settings" is more appropriate, as Armstrong takes Lydia through a number of cities—might initially mask the novel's regionalist agenda. As has already been established, rather than celebrating the perceived national norm, regionalism "centralizes" society's margins by focusing on local, often rural, or small-town culture rather than the urban or mainstream. But, as with other regionalist texts, the exposition of ideology in *The Seas of God* remains primary

and the setting, though important, proves secondary, functioning to support the points Armstrong makes regarding the ways in which Lydia's enculturation influences her goals and actions. That is, Kingsville, the first and most important "region" in the text, is a very provincial southern city, old-fashioned and set in its ways, and Lydia spends the entire novel attempting to break free from the definition it has imposed upon her.

Along with contributing to national discourse, the novel has value in furthering the efforts of Appalachian studies scholars, adding breadth and depth to current discussions regarding the Eastern mountain region and how it is defined in terms of both geography and culture. *The Seas of God* can be viewed alongside such urban Appalachian novels as Rebecca Harding Davis's *Life in the Iron Mills, or, The Korl Woman* (1861); Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929); Olive Tilford Dargan's[77] *Call Home the Heart* (1932); James Agee's *A Death in the Family* (1957);[78] Thomas Bell's *Out of This Furnace* (1941);[79] and Harriette Arnow's *The Dollmaker* (1954); all of which offer insight into what life was like for the residents of Appalachian cities (or, in Arnow's case, the Appalachian residents of cities) as opposed to the more frequently depicted rural folks. This list of texts, incomplete as it may be, represents the kinds of works Appalachian studies scholars have recently begun to recover and examine as they foster

[77] The novel was actually published under Dargan's pseudonym, Fielding Burke. It was republished by the Feminist Press in 1983.
[78] Agee's novel was published posthumously in 1957 and won the Pulitzer Prize in 1958.
[79] This novel, out of print for over three decades, was republished by the University of Pittsburgh Press in 1976. It chronicles the lives of two generations of Slovaks who worked in the steel mills of Pittsburgh and illustrates the hardships faced by blue collars workers who tried to organize unions. The recovery of works like this one helps dispel long-held and inaccurate notions that Appalachia is completely southern, white, and rural.

recognition of the fact that, contrary to popular belief, a large percentage of Appalachian culture is—and has been—centered in urban areas.[80]

Second, in choosing an approach to *The Seas of God*, I took into consideration that in spite of the fact that this particular text lends itself more easily to a feminist reading, Armstrong's greatest value as a writer probably lies in the area of regionalism. This is true especially in terms of Appalachian literature, an area of inquiry still underemphasized by regionalist critics but expanding. Armstrong's other fiction is regionalism with protofeminist/feminist leanings; *The Seas of God* reverses those emphases. Nonetheless, logic dictates that this reading should be aligned with the other two theoretically in the interest of this project with one important caveat: once recovered, Armstrong's writing should then be read using other types of theory that might be more applicable on an individual basis by text.[81]

A feminist reading, of course, need not preclude a regionalist one. Fetterley and Pryse, both regionalist and feminist critics, explain that "gender as a category of analysis made the tradition of regionalism visible to [them]," and they "have used a feminist analytic to interpret the meaning and significance of this tradition" (*Writing Out of Place*

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[80] For more information, see the section entitled "The Urban Appalachian Experience" in *The Encyclopedia of Appalachia*, edited by Rudy Abramson and Jean Haskell (2006), pp. 347-391. The individual entries on "Urban Appalachian Experience" (387) and "Urban Appalachian Identity" (387-389) are particularly instructive.

[81] Were I to consider *The Seas of God* in the context of America women writers of the early twentieth century, for example, I might be more inclined to read it as a protofeminist or feminist work and place it in context with the work of Susan Glaspell and Ellen Glasgow, the trajectories of whose literary careers matched Armstrong's. I might compare *The Seas of God* with Glaspell's *Fidelity*, also published in 1915, and Glasgow's *Barren Ground* (1925), both of which also explore the issue of the "fallen" woman. All three novels feature female protagonists who reject the sexual norms for women of their day, and all three require readers to identify with those marginal women. They also interrogate, from within a marginal woman's perspective, the patriarchal social constructs that conspire to damage not only these women but those around them as well. Of course, such a reading would in no way disqualify *The Seas of God* as a regionalist text; it would, in fact, actually add weight to my argument that this is a text worth analyzing.

64). They advocate the gynocritical recovery of texts such as *The Seas of God* based on their idea that "by locating these texts that have seemed for so long 'out of place' in American literary culture," readers can "understand [regionalism] as the site of a dialogical critical conversation" and begin to understand how "regionalist texts call into question" not only the cultural status quo but also certain "assumptions about literary history that their authors probably would recognize and that [*Writing Out of Place*] in effect argues that they anticipated" (2).

Borrowing from the writing of critic Susan Friedman, Fetterley and Pryse posit that a region is "a location that makes visible the cultural situatedness of women," revealing once again their tendency to link regionalism heavily to feminism (65). But they argue further that "regionalist writers draw attention to location in order to analyze situatedness; they utilize a regionalist positionality to interpret the discursive systems that create the concept of region and to construct alternative meanings" (37). This second quote applies more broadly and therefore more appropriately to Armstrong's overall agenda, which was not limited to the improvement of only women's situations but to the improvement of social conditions for any individuals and groups "situated" outside of the mainstream.

In *The Seas of God,* Armstrong uses Lydia's "situatedness" in terms of Kingsville to "interpret the discursive systems" that she loves. Lydia loves them and is sometimes even complicit with them in spite of the ways they prevent her from defining herself and attaining a form of agency with which she is satisfied. Arguably, Lydia's success as a prostitute constitutes some form of agency, but it is not the one to which she actually aspires. By having readers consider Lydia's struggle, Armstrong hopes to help them

understand the ways in which Lydia's relegation to the margins of society in both Kingsville and New York influences her decisions and drives her to make what are, in terms of dominant cultural mores, immoral choices.

Some readers might argue that this novel, flawed as it is, does not warrant reintroduction to scholars. In point of fact, *The Seas of God* does have less to recommend it as literature than *This Day and Time*, which is a better work in terms of both style and content. The latter is less exclamatory, more concise in its descriptions, and more complex in the number of themes and issues interwoven in the plot. Even as a lesser novel, however, *The Seas of God* has value. As Paul Lauter asserts in his essay "Race and Gender in the American Literary Canon: A Case Study from the Twenties," even flawed works matter, because through them "social and cultural continuities" can be "understood as clearly as the periodic categories" of the canon: a comment which articulates well with regionalist theory (37). According to Lauter, "the major issue is not assimilating some long-forgotten work into the existing categories; rather, it is reconstructing historical understanding to make it inclusive and explanatory instead of narrowing and arbitrary" (37). *The Seas of God*, as a product of its era, offers insight into the "social and cultural continuities" of Armstrong's era, especially those in which she hoped she might effect a change.

Like other feminist critics—and most regionalists—Lauter seems to see human consciousness as constructed, at least partially, by an individual's environment. That is, he believes that cultural and economic factors like the ones with which Lydia grows up in Kingsville—her ancestry, social class, and economic circumstances, among others—shape her consciousness. Surrendering one's self-definition to these factors is not,

however, inevitable; by recognizing them, one can begin the process of analyzing and changing or rejecting them—at least to a degree. Though flawed, Armstrong's first novel reflects this process. By virtue of its focus on a marginal protagonist, *The Seas of God* is also both "inclusive and explanatory." It achieves efficacy by nudging the reader into considering an alternate perspective and into exploring the possibility that personal agency can be achieved even in the most confining of conservative cultures.

Along with its flaws, the novel has many merits. The *New York Times* reviewer points out several of these, observing that "several things in the tragic tale are especially worthy of note. One is that there is nothing of the White Slave theory in Lydia's moral ruin . . . [;] the initiative, the allure, always come from herself" (211). The critic notes that "save in one instance, a liaison with her is purely a commercial matter. The reader is permitted no sentimental illusions in regard to the frail heroine; it is a case of barter. With open eyes she pays the price for a luxurious life" (211).[82] Even as the reviewer points out the unsentimental nature of the novel, however, s/he does not mistake the equivocally hopeful note on which it ends, observing that "happily, we do not leave her in the lowest infamy; just as love for the old scholar [i.e., her father] was the pure passion of her girlhood, so love for her child ultimately becomes the redeeming feature of her womanhood" (211). This note of hope is important, as it suggests that Lydia might find a way to redeem herself after all and that she might actually escape the tyranny of the regional culture against which she struggles. The novel's ending, discussed more fully in the close reading that follows, implies that in spite of the strength of the social constructs

[82] A naturalist reading of the novel might agree with the praise offered here of Armstrong's unsentimental approach but might, on the other hand, take issue with the assertion that Lydia has complete agency and point out the ways in which her culture entraps her.

that bind her, Lydia might be on the verge of redefining herself, breaking the cycle of oppression under which she has long suffered. Of course, this theme of self-definition and autonomy applied to a muted culture, a theme central to regionalist literature, appears in Armstrong's other work, first in "Half-Wit Mary's Lover" and later in *This Day and Time*.

The language of this *Times* review suggests that the critic read the text as literary realism, a logical approach for both the era in which it appeared and the surface form of the novel. However, though Armstrong undeniably strives for a realistic portrayal of life in its pages, *The Seas of God* cannot be classified strictly as realism. As Eric Sundquist notes in *The Columbia Literary History of the United States*:

> As it initially appeared in French aesthetic theory, 'realism' designated an art based on the accurate, unromanticized version of life and nature, an art defiant of prevailing convention as in the prose of Gustave Flaubert. . . [;] the American tradition deriving from Walt Whitman,[83] Nathaniel Hawthorne, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Herman Melville adds a democratic openness in subject matter and style that breaks down rigid hierarchies even as it may indulge in imaginative disorder or utopian fantasy in order to probe the limits and power of a prevailing social or political reality. ("Realism and Regionalism" 502)

Sundquist goes on to argue that "economic or political power can itself be seen to be definitive as a realist aesthetic, in that those in power (say, white urban males) have more

[83] Well read and highly educated for a woman of her time, Armstrong was likely familiar with all of these authors but was certainly familiar with Whitman from whose poem "Passage to India" she drew the title of *The Seas of God* and whose poetry she quotes on several different occasions in its text. Whitman's poetry plays a significant role in the novel; Lydia has clearly read Whitman's work and internalized it, even though she is aware of society's view that it is base and improper, and it inspires her self-renewal later in the text.

often been judged realists while those removed from the seats of power (say, Midwesterners, blacks, immigrants, or women) have been categorized as regionalists" (503). For Sundquist, realism "participates in the rising spectator culture promoted by newspapers, magazines, advertising, photography, and later motion pictures" (503).

Certainly, Armstrong's work fits with the European realist ideals as Sundquist describes them. She also has the "openness in subject matter and style" that he notes in American realism. In her fiction, Armstrong "probes the limits and power of a prevailing social or political reality," but she does not offer either great disorder or a utopian view of the worlds in which her protagonists live. Armstrong was not interested in simply reflecting the cultures about which she wrote. Indeed, she sought to make her readers more than just spectators: she hoped to change them by telling the truth as she saw it and consequently changing their minds about a group they thought they knew, whether it be prostitutes or mountaineers.

In order to promote her vision of change, Armstrong follows much of Howells' realist practice as described by Sundquist. That is, her literature is "anchored in its own time and place," as opposed to being set in the past; it is also pays "psychologically mimetic attention to the customs and actions of common people" and "[relies] on observation and a 'neutral' dramatic method of narration" (504). Sundquist explains that "Howells's realism focuses on the rising middle classes, while treating upper and lower classes largely as raw material for observed spectacle, and avoids indulging in either sentiment or naturalistic degradation" (504). Armstrong breaks with Howells, however, in treating the oppressed classes as the main focus of her material and, by doing so, adds

an important element that can be read as regionalism in its resistance to preconceived notions—in this case about fallen women—held by dominant culture.

Like Howells, Armstrong never treats her subjects sentimentally, rather, in a move that foregrounds the problems inherent in patriarchal societies, she chooses to write about lower-class female protagonists. This departs from Howells' practice and exposes not only the ways in which society subjugates women but also the ways in which it oppresses the poor. Of course, Lydia Lambright has known the comforts of middle-class life, but by the time Armstrong's reader encounters her, she and her father have lost their middle-class status and live in poverty on the fringes of Kingsville society. Having once tasted a better life, Lydia longs to rejoin the middle class or move above it, which leads her to leave Kingsville and eventually to enter into prostitution in New York.

Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse assert in *Writing Out of Place* that there existed regionalist works which, like *The Seas of God*, seemed to be realism but did not fit the category exactly. A number of turn-of-the-century critics, unable to fit these texts neatly into any one current literary genre, sometimes viewed them as what Fetterley and Pryse term "failed realism." In the introduction to their volume, they also note that "historians have minimized . . . [regionalist] writers, either relegating them to the category of 'local color' or describing them as 'regional realists'" when they do not fully fit either designation (4). *The Seas of God* creates the kind of genre-blending predicament that marks regionalism's questioning of hegemonic culture and literary production, and, not surprisingly, it suffered "minimization" as a result.

Fetterley and Pryse, then, invoke the writing of Marjorie Garber, quoting her assertion that there are texts which serve as a "third term" and which, as such, "introduce

and indicate a 'category crisis'" (229). They also quote Garber's argument that "the 'third' is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility" that "challenges the possibility of harmonious and stable binary symmetry" and "puts in question identities previously conceived as stable, unchallengeable, grounded, and 'known'" (229). In other words, the "third" operates by destabilizing binary oppositions such as good/evil or rural/urban, focusing instead on the grey area between these definitions. Breaking down those binaries also, according to Garber, results in "a failure of definitional distinction, a borderline that becomes permeable, that permits of border crossings from one (apparently distinct) category to another" (229).

Arguably, *The Seas of God,* because it combines characteristics of both realism and naturalism, avoids "definitional distinction." Either type of reading alone would serve to uncover at least some of the "lessons" that Armstrong seems to want to "teach." On the other hand, regionalism—because it allows for "permeable borders"—offers a more precise, more interesting way of analyzing this particular text that accommodates and utilizes the elements of each.

The sense of entrapment that Lydia feels, the idea that she cannot escape Kingsville's definition of her no matter where she travels, is one of the most strikingly naturalistic elements of the novel. Armstrong elucidates the painful struggle Lydia faces in leaving behind the culture that defined her for so many years: the perceptions, customs, and mores that were still ingrained in spite of her best efforts to resist them. Naturalism often dwells on characters who are not strong enough to win the struggle against their social and economic contexts, those who fall victim to social conventions and financial

ruin. For most of the novel, Lydia is presented not only as such a victim but also as the victim of her baser, more brutish instincts—another naturalistic feature.

A scene from the novel serves well to exemplify the point. Late in *The Seas of God,* Armstrong strikes one of many "masculine"/naturalist notes when she shows the moral depths to which Lydia has sunk. She steals money from one client, a low to which she has never stooped before, rationalizing that he is very wealthy and will never miss the money. A bit later, she has a tryst with a young man whom she dislikes because her bills are due and because this is simply part of her business. Armstrong does not describe the sexual liaison specifically, as it is not central to her point. Instead, she foregrounds the reason why Lydia goes to bed with this man and the effect of the event on Lydia: "She had played fast and loose with this man, blown hot and cold on him and still he endured it, though always with the manner of a grudge against her. She did not know how much longer he would endure it, and did not care greatly, except that he was a man of fortune, without ties, frankly infatuated with her—and she was in desperate need of money" (271). After he leaves, her opinion of the young man—and of herself—has obviously changed for the worse: "when the last clasp of his moist, nerveless hand had been endured, when the door had clicked behind him, and she had heard the elevator door open and slam shut, and knew that he was descending, gone . . . [,] she leaned wearily against the wall filled with loathing of him, profound loathing of her life . . . [,] deathly disgust with existence" (278).

Spurred on by a wish to extricate herself from the morass of her current life, Lydia then attempts reconciliation with Ransom Churchwell, the father of her illegitimate child. She writes to him, hoping that he will help her leave what she refers to as her

"gilded hell" to begin a new, more respectable life with their son. But the reconciliation goes awry when Churchwell refuses to leave his wife and his children, one of whom is "afflicted" (336). Lydia is crushed, but she takes a different tack from what might happen in a fully naturalistic novel: she begins to consider the ways in which she can change her life for the better. Thus, Armstrong offers unswerving insight into the most disturbing and base elements of Lydia's life, yet the novel cannot be called a true work of naturalism because Lydia, the protagonist, eventually finds that she can act on her own behalf and that she can reject the definition of her imposed on her by others. Hope for Lydia's redemption exists at the end, at least the kind of redemption she seeks in her own eyes. This ending, in which Lydia discards her clients and begins to rely only on herself, shows that she can exercise free will and therefore renders problematic the classification of *The Seas of God* as a purely naturalistic text. This resistance to conformity in a standard "male" genre of the day supports a regionalist reading.

Donna Campbell's *Resisting Regionalism: Gender and Naturalism in American Fiction, 1885-1915* serves two purposes in my analysis of Armstrong's work. First, her text supports the common feminist argument that Armstrong and her female contemporaries had to contend with a patriarchal publishing industry—an industry threatened by the new openness with which women were writing about their lives and the popularity these women enjoyed. Second, Campbell's assertion that literary naturalism was a "masculine" reaction to the "feminine" genre of local color echoes that of Fetterley and Pryse. Campbell's criticism helps explain, that is, how Armstrong and her contemporaries appropriated elements of naturalism in an effort to react against the old "feminine" modes of romantic and local color fiction but refused as well to participate

wholeheartedly in the masculine/naturalist agenda. In doing so, she also supports the idea of the "crisis-creating third."

Armstrong's *The Seas of God* proves interesting when read through the lens of Campbell's commentary because, according to her, naturalism is a direct reaction in opposition to local color. "The gradual decline of women's local color fiction and the rise of American naturalism at the turn of the nineteenth century," she argues, "cannot be seen as discrete events, contemporaneous occurrences that otherwise have little bearing on each other" (12). Turn-of-the-century literary power lay primarily in the hands of men, despite the rise of women writers since the 1850's; Campbell names those men and offers her own interpretation of their opposition to female authors, outlining the ways in which they actively sought to denigrate and disparage the fiction of their feminine counterparts. She cites, for instance, James Lane Allen's 1897 essay "Two Principles in Recent American Fiction" as a seminal work in foregrounding the masculine/feminine "split" in early twentieth-century fiction (75). As outlined by Lane, local color was part of "entrenched native traditions of the 'Feminine Principle'" (75). According to Campbell, "the brute's propensity for violence functioned as an antidote to a greater threat, the 'mollycoddle'" (75). The times were indeed changing, and sentimentality was giving way to the valorization of action over reflection.

The local colorists, with their gentle, nostalgic stories, were swept purposely out of fashion by authors and critics who sought, as they saw it, to redeem American literature from the sissies and redirect it into a more vigorous, manly vein. Though Armstrong begins *The Seas of God* as if it were going to be a romance and makes use of Old South local color flavor, the novel quickly becomes something unusually action-

oriented for a text about a woman's life. Lydia must contend with the world—no handsome hero "saves" her by marrying her, and no long-lost relative dies and leaves her a large inheritance so that she can live happily ever after in a beautiful, cozy cottage. Mistreated and misunderstood, she must shift for herself, supporting both herself and her young son by whatever means she can find.

Campbell notes the centrality of Norris's criticism to this effort toward the masculinization of fiction. Referring to "Why Women Should Write the Best Novels: And Why They Don't," she shows how Norris, like Lane in his earlier essay, carefully delineates a male/female binary opposition among writers in order to show how the "male" approach to literature is superior to the "female."[84] Campbell claims that Norris's stance "should not be seen as mere misogyny, since he is equally contemptuous of men who shut themselves off from life," and because Norris's views were inevitably shaped by his historical context (2). In fact, "believing that male artists have access to a larger world and are culpable if they ignore it in their art," writes Campbell, "Norris refuses to hold female artists responsible for failing to use such sources, since they have virtually no access to 'real life'" (2). She then makes the important observation that "left unspoken is the logical corollary to this assumption: if men's life is 'real life,' the fit subject for fiction, then women's life is, in effect, 'not life,' and fiction made from it is, at the very least, 'not literature'" (2-3). This is a fairly radical departure, she notes, from William Dean Howells's earlier assumption that women actually wrote more realistically than men (3). In both of her novels, Armstrong disproves Norris's idea that a woman's life is

[84] For more on Norris's theory, see pages 59-64 of Chapter One.

not real life. She chooses to make women's lives central to her fiction, but she does not adhere strictly to the tenets of the "feminine" genres of local color or romance.

For Fetterley and Pryse, along with the fact that it is often a "crisis-creating third," a regionalist text is one that "[contradicts] ideas of the 'American' and of American Literature that were in their formative stages after the Civil War" (*Writing Out of Place* 2). That is, though it may be set in a particular and identifiable *place*, the real focus of the text lies in its interrogation of what they describe as "human consciousness" and in the challenges that the text offers to the hegemonic "American" status quo (4).

Like Lauter and many other critics, Fetterley and Pryse imply that consciousness is constructed. Lydia's region, then, influences her psyche not through geography alone but also through custom, culture, socioeconomic status, and a number of other environmental factors combined. *The Seas of God* can be read as regionalism because it is less interested in upholding the moral and social status quo than it is in interrogating it and exploring the ways in which dominant social constructions, especially the regional mores and customs of the novel's fictional Kingsville, trap and damage the characters. In order to escape her dominant culture's definition of her, Lydia must change her own consciousness by deconstructing the ideas ingrained in her by her region[85] and choosing which ideas to save and which ones to jettison. She does not lose them all. She retains, for example, the unorthodox religious views inculcated in her by her father. She resists only the ones that oppress her or impinge upon her individuality with no clear benefit. The regionalist idea is that in reading about Lydia readers will, by extension, likely

[85] I refer here to the broader meaning of region, including not just geographical boundaries but cultural and economic factors as well.

engage in the same process of reconsidering long-held perspectives and stereotypes and soften their views regarding a marginal person. This is, of course, a process that Armstrong revisits later with even greater success in *This Day and Time.*

Long out of print, *The Seas of God* certainly qualifies as a text that fell "out of place." The *New York Times* review notwithstanding, *The Seas of God* did not fare well with the general public and quickly disappeared from view. Armstrong herself described the general public's reaction to the text in her later correspondence with Alfred A. Knopf. Her letter makes no attempt to sugar coat the negativity surrounding her novel, though she does briefly lobby for its republication:

> in spite of reviews as favorable as the one . . . from the *New York Times,* the book was pronounced highly immoral by readers who purchased it. John Wanamaker indignantly returned some two hundred and fifty copies to the publishers.[86] Other booksellers behaved in a similar fashion, and the publishers, not unnaturally, I suppose, buried it as speedily and inconspicuously as possible. (1)

The protest of readers against what seemed to them the sordid subject matter of the book was undoubtedly the primary reason for its relegation to obscurity. Its form, however, also did nothing to assist it, as the novel fails to fit neatly into any of the literary genres of the day.

Part of the problem with the novel's reception derived from the fact that, as a work which blended genres, the reading public was sometime unsure how to approach it.

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[86] John Wanamaker, a wealthy Philadelphia merchant and a strict Presbyterian, is credited as the originator of the department store. The other publisher mentioned here is Mills and Boon, an English house known for romances. They published *The Seas of God* in 1916 under Armstrong's full name in Britain. Unfortunately, their archives contain no correspondence with Armstrong and no documentation of readers' reactions to the novel.

The literary borderlines in *The Seas of God* are indeed permeable. Its resistance to categorization led the *Times* critic to read it as realism, while the British publishing house Mills and Boon must have seen it as some sort of romance. Arguably, it could also be viewed as either "failed realism" or as a failed romance. As regionalism, however, the novel succeeds. Armstrong borrowed from those other genres intentionally and used the elements of each first to raise readers' expectations and then to disrupt these as the novel moves in unexpected directions. This unsettled readers and pushed them to think against the norm, increasing the chances that they might engage in the critical analysis necessary for a paradigm shift that would make them more sympathetic to those who operate outside the mainstream of society.

A Regionalist Close Reading

The earliest chapters of *The Seas of God* establish its Southernness and illustrate carefully the ways in which Kingsville's patriarchal culture maintains itself not only through the actions of men but also through the unquestioning cooperation of women like the kindly Mrs. Poole. Careful reading reveals two other interesting facts, however. First, Lydia is not the only person trapped by Kingsville society, nor are women its only victims; her father and Ransom Churchwell have also clearly been oppressed by these patriarchal social constructions. For instance, though Lydia naively assumes that Churchwell, with his money and social position, has no problems, readers learn as the novel progresses that his social status comes with its own burdens. Second, the particular kind of patriarchy that plagues Lydia, her father, Churchwell, and the other characters

derives directly from the narrow-minded strain of Christianity predominant in Kingsville. Its patriarchy is informed by the religious bigotry, closed-mindedness, and hypocrisy that Armstrong herself bristled against as a young woman, even as she learned to love many other aspects of life in her hometown. Armstrong's own vantage point as a woman may have made her most comfortable creating a female protagonist, and Lydia certainly bears some similarities to her own experience as a woman who did not always operate within the dictates of society. Such a focus suggests a concern for women's issues, and Armstrong certainly harbored such a concern. But a regionalist reading of the novel also recognizes that Kingsville claims other victims besides Lydia though enculturation and that at least a few of them are male.[87]

From the beginning of *The Seas of God*, settings act as a metaphor for the theme of separation and isolation—especially in terms of Lydia's relationship to Kingsville—which remains primary in terms of the novel's regionalist agenda. With the notable exception of her years in the household of Emma Stark, Lydia seems always to be on the outside of society looking in. As the novel opens, for instance, she stands at the window of the shabby cottage she shares with her father and watches the sunset. The first three paragraphs of the text offer a vivid description of the setting, noting the beauty of the moment along with the location and the run-down condition of the cottage.

The juxtaposition of beauty with ugliness sets another theme in motion for the rest of the novel; Lydia strives to reconcile the positive elements of her region with the negative. The narrator describes "the bare trees etched in all the delicate, lacelike

[87] One might also say that this text has features common to texts that lend themselves to other types of theory. The ideology revealed in this text, for example, prefigures materialist feminism's observation that women are not the only individuals oppressed by damaging social constructs. However, such an articulation with other modes of reading does not preclude a regionalist analysis.

intricacy of their twigs and branches against the deepening orange of the sky" and notes that Lydia "was deriving now, from this sad but splendid sunset hour, most exquisite sensations, tinged—pleasurably—with melancholy" (1). "A great evergreen tangle of honeysuckle" contrasts with "slats, broken, or missing entirely" which "left conspicuous gaps in all the blinds," and "both green and grey paint . . . were dingy and streaked from Kingsville's fierce summer suns, and the frequent soot-showers of her winters" (1). The narrator observes that "the cottage had no distinction except one of site, and in Kingsville, girt by its blue mountains, a *beau site* was so common as hardly to constitute of itself any distinction at all" (1). About Lydia, the narrator reports that "a time had come when she wondered why she did not hate, instead of love, Kingsville" (2). Armstrong thus begins the novel with a description of Lydia's geographical context, identifying clearly the physical region Lydia inhabits and then moving from there into how the setting reflects Lydia's situation.

An explanation of why Lydia might choose to hate Kingsville follows immediately the mixed description of her place and the declaration of Lydia's vexed state of mind:

> her glance *would* travel to a neighboring hill where the old Ransom College stood silhouetted against southern sky, the chapel with its little bell-tower crowning the hill-top. At the foot of the hill, in the house surrounded with great magnolia trees, whose chimneys she could make out from the cottage window, she had lived from her earliest memories until Ransom College—where her father had given his best years—had invited his resignation. (2)

So Lydia has changed her location once already, involuntarily, because of her father's dismissal from the faculty of Ransom College; she has been moved from one social milieu to another by his departure from the faculty.

A few pages into the text, the narrator provides the facts surrounding Professor Lambright's dismissal. This revelation reflects Lydia's perspective: "bitter injustice had been done to him; he had been sacrificed to satisfy the prejudices of absurd provincial bigotry"; in her mind, the trustees of Ransom College are to blame for the illness that currently plagues him (6). "They had forced his resignation," the narrator explains, "because of a series of lectures he had delivered on the Descent of Man" (6). These were lectures given by the college as a service to the community, and, as Lydia remembers it, "her father's Thursday Nights had always been well attended because already suspicion had breathed over Kingsville that he upheld those disquieting modern theories so totally at variance with Kingsville's inherited conviction that God, having finished heavens and earth, had *ended* his work which he had made, and rested! . . . " (7). The culture and custom of the region—local religious beliefs in particular—have already become primary here, and they remain so for the rest of the novel.

In her characteristic manner, however, Armstrong also uses the narrator to question Lydia's feelings. Rather than standing firmly on Lydia's side, the narrator suggests that the situation was actually more complicated:

> A God still at his work of creation?—Impossible! Blasphemous! . . . At least, in some such way, Lydia had scornfully interpreted Kingsville's attitude [about the lectures], every drop of blood in her young body fierce in justification of her father, when the Kingsville clergy, hugging close the Book of Genesis, had

> openly referred to his lectures, had admonished their congregations of hearty-eating, soft-sleeping Kingsvillians that God was still spelled with a large *G*, Nature with a small *n*—they were not to forget *that*—had finally brought pressure to bear on the trustees that had accomplished his severance from the college. (7)

The narrator, on close reading, introduces at least a shadow of a doubt as to Lydia's complete justification in defending her father's actions. This kind of discursive construction reflects regionalist literature in general and Armstrong's fiction in particular, which tends to reveal ideology and then problematize its own assertions. The narrator foregrounds the emotional nature of Lydia's filial response, her "[scornful] interpretation" of the events; the emphasis on her anger and the use of the word "interpretation" imply that there may be other perspectives, perhaps less reactionary and more accepting of local religious beliefs. With passages like this one, Lydia's impetuosity and immaturity begin to be established.

As they sit playing chess, Lydia silently contemplating the injustices done her father by the trustees, the Lambrights are interrupted by a visit from Ransom Churchwell, with whom Lydia has always been infatuated. Once again, her naïveté and impetuousness are clear, and her feelings are reflected by the setting. As Churchwell walks into the room, she feels "a great colorful warmth—the lovely radiance of afternoon sun through jeweled windows! They were not isolated now, she and her father! They were related through him, through Churchwell, to all the wealth and warmth of the outside world" (8). For Lydia, at least at the moment and with her limited world view, Kingsville *is* the outside world and Churchwell "the choicest flower of the complacent aristocracy of Kingsville" (9). She clings to his association with her father, imagining that he "was the

Lambrights' one point of contact with the picturesque reigning class of Kingsville on which Lydia's child eyes and maiden eyes had looked with so highly complex a mixture of awe, contempt, hatred, envy" (9). Again, the narrator foregrounds both the ambivalence Lydia feels toward the town and her naïveté; were Churchwell truly interested in providing a "connection" between the Lambrights and the town's elite, his visits to them would be more frequent, they would not be done secretly, and he would have supported Professor Lambright publicly during his troubles.

But Lydia fails to recognize this. For her, Churchwell is Kingsville and success personified; she remembers her despair when she found that he was to be married, though she knew full well that she would not be a suitable bride for a man of his caste. Interestingly, Lydia does not seem to love Churchwell in the romantic sense. Her infatuation seems more related to her own ambition than to an emotional connection. That is, she seems to desire him because she believes that to be associated with him publicly would alleviate her feelings of isolation and make her part of what she calls the "grand class" of Kingsville. Throughout the novel, she thinks of him in terms of what he represents culturally, never as an individual with personal characteristics that endear him to her.

As the narrative continues, Armstrong makes the social and geographical gulfs between Lydia and Churchwell increasingly clear. He never associates himself with Lydia or her father publicly, for doing so would disturb his place in Kingsville society. Though he and Lydia are eventually intimate in terms of sex, they are never for long periods close together in terms of geography. In Kingsville, before they are lovers, she lives in a separate, less acceptable part of the city. When he encounters her in New York

City the first time, he asks why she left Kingsville, and she offers him some insight: "Oh Mr. Churchwell," she responds, "How can you ask me that? Why should I stay in Kingsville? What could I do there? *Your* Kingsville and *my* Kingsville are two very different places, you know, Mr. Churchwell! Everything beautiful and desirable there is yours. But what was there for me if I stayed in Kingsville?" (147). Lydia's reply shows her recognition of how Kingsville, itself a discrete geographical location with definable boundaries, is "regionalized" both ideologically and culturally. Her calling him "Mr. Churchwell" further emphasizes the distance between them at this point in the narrative, though she later calls him "Ransom" after they have become lovers. The "beautiful and desirable" things to which Lydia refers are not necessarily material, though that is part of what she craves; she actually refers here to her somewhat adolescent perception that Churchwell, because of his upper-class status, has no worries or problems and that he has probably suffered less than she. The boundaries between the two of them are social and hierarchical as well as geographical; they inhabit the same towns, or at least come together in them, but they never travel in the same social spheres.

The *New York Times* review points out this cultural division between Lydia and Churchwell; in it, the critic incorrectly but understandably assumes that the setting is "a Virginian town" on which Kingsville is based, pointing out "the brick-built Southern city on seven hills with its 'old cemetery' where immemorial ivy clambered over the tree trunks and clumps of holly stood guard" (221). The centrality of the culture is noted by the critic, however, and privileged over the geographic location of the town. S/he notes that "in the progress of the tale it becomes patent that the writer is . . . intimate with the metropolis," but notes importantly that Armstrong writes about Lydia's experiences with

Kingsville's culture, "the ways of which the author knows only as one 'to the manner born' can know them" (221). Of course, Armstrong uses the novel to interrogate the social constructions upheld by her own class, but in doing so she recenters to focus on the margins rather than her own more privileged position and her regionalist agenda.

Armstrong thus carefully delineates the firm boundaries between the social classes in Kingsville and clarifies for the reader the status quo that works against Lydia's hopes for a fulfilling life in her hometown. She makes the city unmistakably southern, setting up a contrast with the more diverse, cosmopolitan city of New York to which Lydia is about to move. The narrator offers a number of details establishing its Southernness, including the description of the "River Road"[88] with its "dignified antebellum mansions that marked it at intervals for eight or more miles into the country" (87). As Lydia walks along hoping to meet Ransom Churchwell, she stops before his family home, "built in the [eighteen-]forties. It stood on a knoll, its grounds rolling away from it with charming irregularities. Its slave quarters, still preserved, were visible from the road" (87-88). Though the story takes place in the early twentieth century, the mention of the extant slave quarters suggests that the customs and culture of the Old South remain in force to a large degree, and the narrator further evokes the pre-war era by noting that as she stood on the road before the mansion, Lydia saw "an old black mammy in a Turkey-red gown and white kerchief coming down the winding drive, a toddling child by the hand, another trailing behind" (88).

[88] Knoxville's Kingston Pike, where Armstrong's in-laws lived in their own antebellum mansion, Bleak House.

Lydia, who is about to leave Kingsville at this point in the story, stands contemplating the Churchwell mansion because for her it symbolizes the epitome of success. As she stands before the mansion on the River Road watching the mammy and the Churchwell children, the narrator notes significantly that "Lydia had never been inside the house or even in the grounds" (88). Once again, her physical separation from the Churchwell home is a metaphor for the social boundaries that prevent her ever becoming part of the family's social milieu, though she desperately wishes for association with them. Ironically, her desire for the Churchwells' acceptance makes Lydia complicit with this ideology that keeps her separated from them.

Along with her views regarding regional theology, Lydia's "Northern" roots are parallel to Armstrong's and are one of the characteristics which, though beyond her control, also keep her isolated from the Kingsville aristocracy. Armstrong's family money assured her a social position in spite of the fact that she was not originally Southern; she gives her protagonist no such advantage in the novel. When Lydia tries to purchase a suit in the local dress shop, the manager, Mrs. Joy, engages in the typically Southern practice of trying to determine who she is in terms of her family. When she tells Mrs. Joy her name, the woman responds, "from the North, I suppose . . . so many Northern people in Kingsville now" (25). Lydia becomes defensive, saying, "I've lived in Kingsville always, almost . . . My father's Northern" (25). The narrator continues:

> Of course [Lydia] would not deny it. But it was irritating the way people in Kingsville always, smiling it might be, but with lifted eyebrows, pronounced this word—*Northern!* It seemed to her that you never could quite get away in Kingsville from the blight of Northern extraction . . .If it hadn't been too disloyal,

> she might have wished countless times that *her* father, *her* grandfather, *her* great-grandfather, had been of Kingsville origin. She felt that then, perhaps, everything might be different for her. (25-26)

Mrs. Joy adds insult to injury by remembering all at once her father's dismissal from the college, which then prompts her to say, "We all have our little troubles, dear! Don't brood on yours! We don't choose our parents" (26). When Lydia takes offense, she declares, "Oh my dear . . . there's worse people in the world than atheists! Kingsville's a bigoted old place! I've come pretty near finding *that* out, *myself!"* (26). She refers here to the fact that she, as her employer's mistress, knows what it is like to be outside the realm of respectability. At this early point in the novel, however, Lydia is too immature to understand the kindness in Mrs. Joy's words. This is only one of many instances in which Lydia distances herself from those who could have provided her with some sense of community, but she, even as an outsider, has internalized Kingsville's social standards and—ironically, as it turns out—she is judgmental of Mrs. Joy because of her well-known position as her employer's paramour. Once again, Lydia demonstrates her complicity with the very set of social constructions that restricts her.

There are some elements of local culture, of course, with which Lydia is not complicit at all. One of these is Kingsville's patriarchal religious tradition. In order to foreground how local religion supports the patriarchal structure of Kingsville society, Armstrong creates the Pooles, two longtime neighbors of the Lambrights who step in to help Lydia after her father dies. Fetterley and Pryse assert in *Writing Out of Place* that one of the ways in which regionalist texts operate is by focusing on character rather than plot (3); the Pooles are an interesting example of how this theory works. In a local color

story or a romance, they would be "types," but Armstrong gives the Pooles an important complexity—a complexity that helps create the kind of discursive construction that characterizes regionalism because it vexes the issues that it attempts to solve. The Pooles, with their middle-class adherence to local religion and custom, demonstrate the entrenchment of the sort of ideas that Lydia must battle in order to attain agency.

What makes this novel difficult is that the Pooles' relationship to Lydia and her father is more complex than it might be in a different genre of novel, in which they might be seen as either entirely benevolent or entirely malevolent. But in spite of their obtuseness and their narrow-mindedness, here they mean no harm; in fact, they genuinely want to help Lydia. In doing so, they take a social risk; Professor Lambright's fall from social grace and his dead wife's sullied reputation render his daughter questionable by association, and the Pooles' attention to her could cost them some approval in Kingsville. They step in, however, and begin to help Lydia make arrangements as soon as they notice a need, even taking her into their household after the professor's funeral. In this way, they are a striking contrast to Ransom Churchwell.

For the most part, the Pooles adhere strictly to convention. In keeping with the patriarchal custom of the region, Mrs. Poole obediently concedes to her husband and does his bidding regarding his plans for helping Lydia. She stands as a foil to Lydia, who thwarts his every effort to have her handle the funeral and her subsequent decisions about how to support herself in a socially acceptable manner. The Pooles are traditionally religious Protestants, convinced that Professor Lambright should be offered the opportunity to see a minister before he dies in order that he might have a change of heart and be saved; Lydia blocks their efforts to bring in the clergy, even her father's old friend

Dr. Dunbar. They are shocked and horrified by her refusal to have hymns sung at the funeral and also by her unconventional decision not to wear mourning. They are steeped in the ways of the church, and their particular brand of patriarchy derives largely from its hierarchical views and its insistence on the man as the head of the household.

Just a few days before her father dies, Lydia prepares a small, unaccustomedly festive meal for his birthday. The table and its accoutrements are important in showing the marked contrast between Lydia's manner of thinking and that of the Pooles. In order to provide some special touches to the table—a single rosebud and "a cheap little bottle of claret"—Lydia sells some of her old books (31). She sets the table carefully with their best dishes and "two lighted candles twinkling merrily" in celebration (30). But, when her father arrives home from his walk, he falls to the floor ill, and Lydia must run to the Pooles for assistance. The meal, of course, is momentarily forgotten, but it becomes the first detail of the novel that foregrounds the conflict between Lydia's world view and that of the Pooles.

Once they arrive, the Pooles take control. Rather than letting Lydia sit with her father and talk to the doctor, Mr. Poole simply assumes that, as a man, he should take care of these matters. As Lydia waits in the living room with Mrs. Poole, the older woman notices the wine on the table and says, "I would put away that bottle, dear" (31). The Pooles, thoroughly steeped in dominant culture, misunderstand the birthday table: "Mrs. Poole's eyes, fixed upon the supper table, expressed astonishment, plainly tinged with disapproval, at the pomp, the brilliant circumstance, with which Lydia and her father were apparently in the habit of supping" (31). Her repetition of the directive "I would certainly put it away" shows her deep concern regarding the matter (31). She goes on to

admonish Lydia that "there may be others in, and people look at these things so differently, you know" (31).

Lydia bristles against this dictate: "'I won't tell her a thing about the birthday,' she [thinks], with intolerance of Mrs. Poole's intolerance" (31). Here, the narrator engages in the kind of irony that marks the text as regionalism—Lydia engages in the very "intolerant" process she interrogates. She walks over and blows the candles out but leaves the table otherwise untouched, ignoring Mrs. Poole's firm but gentle instruction regarding the wine. Mrs. Poole, as a product and a guardian of Kingsville culture, then takes matters in hand: "[She] rose very gently, and removing the bottle herself, carried it to the kitchen. Lydia could hear the pantry door open, then close" (31). Later, when Mrs. Poole thinks Lydia is asleep and cannot hear her, she remarks to her husband, "And, Edwin, wine and flowers on the table, and not fifty cents' worth of staple groceries in this house!" (34).

Lydia tries to wrest control of her own situation at several other moments, but the Pooles—especially Mr. Poole—always stand in her way. As her father lies dying in his bedroom, for instance, Lydia attempts to conceal the poverty of the household; however, the Pooles discover that, along with a lack of food, there are no unworn linens, and there is almost no coal left in the coal bin. They do not ask Lydia how she wants to be assisted. In patriarchal fashion, Mr. Poole simply takes control of it all, from discussing the professor's condition with the doctor to ordering a half-load of coal. When the coal arrives unexpectedly, she realizes that in spite of her efforts to control the situation, Mr. Poole has prevailed. Lydia has wildly mixed emotions:

> She heard the harsh rattle of the coal on the shed floor as the driver threw it in shovelful by shovelful from his wagon. She stopped her ears. The first—*charity!* Oh, why did it hurt so bitterly? Why, why, was she not grateful? All at once, something struck her with grim humor! 'One thousand pounds,' the man had read from the slip. Mr. Poole had realized that her father might not live till a whole ton of coal should be exhausted! How canny!—a *half*-ton! How tempered with discretion Mr. Poole's charities were! But suddenly she marveled at the wickedness of her own heart that she could analyse even to her most secret self the quality of Mr. Poole's kindness. How good Mr. Poole had always been to her! . . . Mr. Poole was a truly generous man; not rich; half a ton from him was more than twenty tons from—say, Mr. Churchwell. (37)

Through the narration, we recognize that Mr. Poole truly does exhibit generosity, albeit in and because of the patriarchal manner dictated by Kingsville custom. Also, having the narrator make the comparison makes clear the difference between the middle-class Pooles and the upper-class Ransom Churchwell.

Later, Mr. Poole attempts to dictate the type of coffin Lydia will purchase for her father, arguing that she doesn't really know what she wants and suggesting that he should make the decision since he—presumably because he is male—knows more about these matters. Lydia prevails in that particular tussle, but on the way to bury her father, Lydia realizes that Mr. Poole has decided where the interment will take place without asking her, and her father will be interred in the cemetery she least prefers. "It had not occurred to Lydia to inquire where her father was to be buried," reports the narrator, ". . . She had been in sort of a trance from the moment Mr. Poole had helped her into the carriage; but

now she was stung into painful half-life by the realisation [sic] that her father was being taken for burial to this bare and hideous New Cemetery. Burial space in the Old Cemetery had been too expensive for her to buy—or so Mr. Poole had decided" (70).[89] Lydia's feminine "situatedness" in relation to Kingsville culture is made clear as the narrator says, "She kept her eyes on her lap. She was utterly helpless in the matter, and she knew it" (71).

Mrs. Poole, in turn, strenuously upholds the system that puts her husband in charge of affairs. Her conventionality is made evident on a number of occasions. Lydia scandalizes her by not wanting a minister to go talk to her dying father, and she is further nonplussed by Lydia's seeming ingratitude at the "generosity" of those who send food, flowers, and other items appropriate to Kingsville tradition. To Mrs. Poole, the fact that Mrs. Wyndham Wood sends mourning clothes constitutes great generosity. For Lydia—and the reader—Mrs. Wood's gesture smacks of an attempt to force Lydia to follow local custom. Lydia refuses to do the accepted, and Mrs. Poole, thoroughly acculturated, cannot see Lydia's perspective. Likewise, when expensive food begins to arrive in its fine dishes, Mrs. Poole exclaims over the goodness of those who sent it, while Lydia recognizes the element of hypocrisy inherent in this regional tradition:

> She knew quite well that she . . . could not have swallowed a morsel of any of these dishes, proffered, many of them, by rich and important families of Kingsville who had manifested no previous interest in her father except in active opposition to him in the movement of opinion that had effected his removal from the college . . . [.] All day long, in an unbroken stream, people called, among them

[89] See the footnote on Old Gray Cemetery, page 94 of Chapter I.

> faces she could not remember ever to have seen before, and while many only inquired with polite solicitude at the door, others, who had never before been inside the cottage, now pushed their way in and offered their sympathy and assistance with eyes whose roving Lydia was keenly alive to and resented angrily. (40-41)

Lydia tries to keep the shades lowered in order to disguise the shabbiness of her home; Mrs. Poole, oblivious to Lydia's feelings, argues that the shades should be lifted. Metaphorically, Mrs. Poole assists the curious in allowing them to see what Lydia desperately wishes to hide. She is similarly upset by Lydia's refusal to wear a veil to her father's burial service; to her, feminine nonconformity is anathema. Mrs. Poole, though she means well and clearly wants to help Lydia, obviously supports the status quo by her own participation in traditional customs and her encouragement of Lydia to do the same.

The final break between Lydia and the Pooles comes when she refuses the "lady-like" position they have so carefully worked to secure for her. She has been staying with them for a few weeks and has been making her own plans to go into business. All the while, the Pooles have been working with the local minister to install her as a schoolteacher after the current teacher marries. They have not consulted her; they have simply assumed, rather naively and in spite of her pattern of convention-breaking, that Lydia will take the position offered to her and be grateful for it. When they broach the subject with her, Mrs. Poole couples it with another attempt to have her fall into line with Kingsville's religious community, declaring that "if you join the church, Lydia, it'll be the means . . . of getting you this nice, lady-like position we'd all be so proud to see you in" (80-81). Mr. Poole adds his approval: "I wouldn't like to see you neglect what's so

plainly to your interest, Lydia . . . [,] this good opening in the schools" (81). Lydia's ironic thought to herself reveals her rejection of the "lady-like" option offered: "'*Opening!* Opening to what?' . . .Visions shot through her of the dowdy, underpaid, tired-faced school-mistresses of Kingsville" (81).

Lydia recognizes the job as a dead end for her—and for other women who need "respectable" employment.[90] Though she clearly appreciates their care of her after her father's death, Lydia cannot bring herself to exercise the option and meet the Pooles' expectations. She reveals instead her plan to become a general agent for a book company, to which notion a shocked Mr. Poole replies, "You've said nothing—nothing—to us, about this, Lydia" (82). He repeats himself "in a sorely aggrieved tone. 'I hardly thought, Lydia, I hardly thought you'd go ahead and make all these plans and say nothing to us when we're so interested in everything that concerns you'" (83). The irony is lost on him—but not on the reader—of the fact that it never occurred to him to tell her about his plans to make her a schoolteacher. He simply assumes that he knows best, Mrs. Poole concurs, and they put the plan in motion without making any mention of it to Lydia, whom it will affect most directly.

Though the Pooles are instruments of the patriarchal, narrow-minded religious culture of the region, Armstrong carefully keeps from making them shallow or stereotypical. Their genuine concern for Lydia remains clear even as she leaves them behind. Mr. Poole accompanies her onto the train and tells her to "remember, we're home to you—Poole's is home to you, Lydia," with "his old voice shaking" (94). Even after she

[90] It is interesting to note that Armstrong spent a number of years supporting herself and her son by teaching in Knoxville. She held that position after she divorced Leonard Waldron and until she married Bob Armstrong.

has disappointed and shocked them, they still care about her: “Mrs. Poole’s eyes and nose were both red. She had been crying ever since they left the house for the station” (95). Conventional as they are, the Pooles go out of their way to befriend the disgraced professor before his death and to become close to Lydia. Such actions on their part show that, though they might be somewhat provincial, they are less narrow-minded than some of their peers (and their social “betters”). Associating with the Lambrights cannot have improved the Pooles’ standing in the community. Additionally, they, unlike some other Kingsvillian “Christians,” seem to have a genuine concern for helping those who are less fortunate, or they would never have continued to support Lydia, who proved noncompliant and even defiant at almost every turn. This complexity of character and interaction is characteristic of regionalism as a discursive structure, requiring readers to understand the ways in which both positive and negative elements of local religion interact to influence the characters’ decisions and experiences.

Though she is less so than the Pooles, even the resistant Lydia is strongly acculturated by Kingsville, enough so that she cannot escape its modes of thinking even when she moves to New York City. Upon her arrival in New York, she seeks a room and chooses one in the house of a Miss Tompkins, who advertises a “Refined Christian home with bountiful table” (114). The narrator points out the irony of Lydia’s choice in light of her earlier denigration of the narrow-minded strain of Christianity that drove her father from his position: “Ordinarily she would have been amused by this combination of advantages which the advertisement offered. But as she had drawn near the city, she had found herself more distinctly terrified than merry, and had selected this advertisement from a long list precisely because of its word—Christian. The word seemed to throw a

cloak of protection around her" (114). Lydia's ambivalence is once again made clear here; it was the Christian hypocrisy of Kingsville, at least in part, that inspired her departure from her home region, but she chooses the Christian now that she is in alien territory because it is at least familiar. Ironically, the Christianness of Miss Tompkins and her other boarders later drives Lydia from this sanctuary just as it drove her from Kingsville; they note that the unmarried Lydia spends large amounts of time with a man—Ransom Churchwell—purported to be her cousin, and they also note that though she has no employment, she somehow has the money to pay her room and board. When her comings and goings cause the other boarders to speculate about Lydia's morality, Miss Tompkins asks her to leave.

One of the most admirable aspects of this novel is the way in which Armstrong problematizes religion, showing that it has both its drawbacks—the narrow-mindedness that destroyed Lydia's father, for example, or that prompted Miss Tompkins to ask Lydia to leave—but that it also has its merits, as evidenced by the genuine Christian generosity also shown by the Pooles in taking in the outcast and poverty-stricken Lydia. Armstrong's resistance to oversimplification supports a regionalist reading. This is true not only for aspects of local culture but for the characters she creates as well.

A less sophisticated novel, for example, would make Ransom Churchwell, the instrument of Lydia's "fall," into a simple cad. Armstrong resists doing so. She makes his character very complicated and decidedly un-villainous in spite of his faults. As Lydia notes, Churchwell has money, social position, and clout in the community. She naively underestimates, however, the burdens that accompany his position, though Armstrong delineates them carefully for the reader.

Ransom Churchwell's continued friendship with Professor Lambright is somewhat similar to the Pooles', though he is not as public about the relationship. His continued visits to the Lambright home even after the professor's firing indicate that in spite of his association with the most established branches of Kingsville society, he is interested in the professor's progressive and controversial ideas and is, as well, sympathetic to the professor's predicament. However, the fact that his visits are infrequent and take place after dark indicates that, while he respects the professor and wishes to continue an association with him, Churchwell is also unwilling to go against prevailing public opinion either to defend his friend or to make public his own sympathy to unpopular ideas.

Armstrong offers other, more definitive evidence that Churchwell feels as trapped as Lydia by Kingsville convention. Late in the book, for example, Lydia summons him to her New York apartment to discuss his unacknowledged and illegitimate son. During their meeting, she confronts him with the fact that he is the father of her "love-child," and he admits that he suspected as much but avoided knowing for sure. After a long and emotional exchange, he declares his love for Lydia and promises to elope with her and their son, leaving his wife behind with his money and position. This scene, while it foregrounds Lydia's problems, also renders Churchwell's character more complex; it suggests that his feelings for Lydia are real and that he is truly conscience-ridden over his misuse of her. As they talk, the dialogue also exposes the ways in which Churchwell feels ensnared in his position as one of Kingsville's elite.

As she did with Lydia's walk down the River Road, Armstrong begins the scene by emphasizing the distance between the two lovers: "Indeed, it seemed to [Lydia], that

here, where she had but to put out her fingers and touch him, he was worlds and worlds separated from her, farther from her than he had ever been—even in Kingsville when she had looked off from afar at him across the impassable gulf which had separated them" (313). The "impassable gulf" to which the narrator refers here is the class difference between them. The narrator continues to emphasize the magnitude of this abyss: "This unexpected sense of his distance and separation from her was agony. The old savage desire for exclusive possession seized her. She felt she would rather die than to have to continue to live with the knowledge that he was no longer *hers*" (314). Here, the narrator describes Lydia in clearly naturalist terms, foregrounding the "savage," almost animalistic instinctual need she feels to "own" Churchwell. This throws into relief for the reader the realization that, in fact, Churchwell was never hers. He belonged to her only temporarily and sexually; he had been married for years before Lydia became his mistress, and he remains married to his wife. It also highlights the difference between Churchwell's more measured conduct and Lydia's atavistic behavior.

In a fit of pique and hoping to wound Churchwell, Lydia asks if Kingsville is "the same old Kingsville," and then adds "with deliberate malice . . . 'I always think of it as the quintessence of the provincial—as the most deliciously narrow-minded, self-satisfied, town the sun ever shone on'" (314-315). Of course, her hypocrisy is clear. The narrator has established on a number of previous occasions that Lydia thinks often of Kingsville and wishes that she could return there in spite of the fact that she was never accepted by those to whose social status she aspired. Churchwell suffers her insults patiently for a few moments, then asks her, "Why did you send for me? Can I be of use to you? I judge you've left your husband, from the fact that you've taken your name back" (315). At this

point, Lydia tells him that she has never been married and that her luxurious apartment and its appointments came from her having sold herself to men. Churchwell is shocked by this news, but he takes responsibility several times during their exchange for his part in her "ruin."

On an impulse to atone, Churchwell promises to run away with Lydia, but he also explains that "it was quite useless . . . to consider divorce, because there were no legal grounds on which he could secure a divorce from his wife, and she was so constituted that she would never procure one from him, particularly if she knew he desired it" (326). His feelings about his wife are clear here—he feels as trapped by his marriage as does his wife, who knows about his frequent infidelities. Later, they begin discussing their plans for elopement, Lydia expresses her concern that Churchwell will miss Kingsville. He laughs at her, reminding her that just moments before she had called it "the quintessence of the provincial" and saying, "you think that my provincial soul will never be content away from the congenial provincialism of its native place" (328). His response shows his ambivalence toward Kingsville, its expectations of him as one of its elite, and the ways in which it defines him.

Lydia, in turn, ignores his revelation and responds vehemently, revealing her own odd homesickness for the place that has proved so isolating for her:

> Seriously, Ransom, nothing has been harder for me to bear than the thought that I can never go back to Kingsville again! You see you don't know what the feeling is—*exile*! I could never describe to you what it feels like, but it's an awful restlessness that never leaves you, a burning envy of everyone who can stay there, who can live in Kingsville when you can't, and it's a dull pain in you somewhere

> that never ceases, never, day or night! Why Ransom, there have been times when I've felt I'd rather . . . be back in Kingsville and be one of those miserable little waif dogs that used to pick up scraps around the Market House[91] than to be the grandest person in the world anywhere. (328-329)

The source of Lydia's grief seems to have been her marginal status in Kingsville. When Churchwell accuses her of "idealizing" Kingsville, she denies it, fervently explaining her own ambivalence and, in spite of it, her lifelong desire to be accepted there: "even when I was a little child I hated the place, but all the time I absolutely adored it—just as you adore people and hate them at the same time! . . . Of course, I was only an alien there, really, and there's no place else in the world, I suppose, where an alien is more truly an alien than in Kingsville" (330). He responds that "perhaps it is just because you were an alien that you've accumulated all this sentiment about Kingsville" (330).

This conversation is important in that it deepens both Lydia's and Churchwell's characters and foregrounds elements of the novel that support its regional agenda. The dialogue shows that the social gulf still exists between them but that there may be hope for communication across that gulf, that the socially privileged Churchwell can begin to understand the marginalized Lydia and that in the process of an honest exchange between them, some move toward overall social change can begin.

Even when Churchwell once again tries to explain his perspective to her, she continues to declare her love for Kingsville:

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[91] The actual Knoxville Market House was built in 1857. Local farmers and other vendors set up stalls there where citizens could buy produce and other goods. The building was destroyed completely by an accidental fire in 1960 (Wheeler 111, 116-117).

> You'll think it's ridiculous . . . but it's true—what do you suppose I loved the best in London—the pictures in the National Gallery? No—the smell . . .Yes, actually the smell, that smell that everyone else hates! And because the smell of London is just like the smell of Kingsville! It's the soft-coal smoke and something soft and damp in the air. Why, the first time I went to London, I was simply mad with joy . . . and sadness, too, because it smelled like—home! (329)

Churchwell's ambivalence regarding his hometown becomes unambiguous at this point. He claims not "to feel any such passion for Kingsville as [she confesses] to" in spite of the fact that "the town was founded by [his] ancestors" and declares that, "frankly, it won't give [him] much of a wrench to leave Kingsville" (331). "I know Kingsville better than you do," he says to Lydia, "I have no illusions about Kingsville . . . I can live away from Kingsville, I promise you" (331). It turns out, however, that he cannot live away from Kingsville after all, and a stricken and fragile Churchwell returns the next day to let her know that, though he loves her, he has chosen to return to his wife and family.

In Churchwell, Armstrong creates an oddly sympathetic character. Were the novel less realistic, he would be an unfeeling rake, interested solely in deflowering Lydia and then abandoning her. But Churchwell's feelings for Lydia are real, even if they cannot compel him to leave his wife and legitimate children for her, and he proves that he is not completely devoid of conscience in the matter by admitting that he suspected her pregnancy when he left her. Lydia asks him directly if he knew, and he says, "I swear it! I swear it! I swear by everything holy that I did not dream," at which point Lydia interrupts him and interrogates the religious order that centers Kingsville culture:

> No, no, don't swear by everything holy, Ransom . . . an oath by the old God that no one believes in any longer, that you don't believe in yourself, only you're afraid to say so because . . . because you're a Kingsvillian—an oath of that kind, the old kind, doesn't satisfy me! I must know, oh Ransom, I must know the truth! There's only one name I know you wouldn't swear falsely by, and it's not God's . . . it's my father's name . . .[;] swear by the name of my father, Ransom! (322)

He cannot do it. The narrator reports that "his lips worked, but they uttered no sound. He moved away from her, freeing himself from her touch, even from the contact of her garments. 'You have my answer,' he said, at last, in a toneless voice . . . 'I could not swear falsely . . . by the name . . . of my friend . . . your father'" (322). Lydia "[cannot] look on his shame" (322).

Lydia calls him on his religious hypocrisy, on his adherence to Kingsville custom, and to his credit he owns up. He also admits that he left the money for her hoping that she would terminate the pregnancy, saying:

> All men, I suppose, dread such complications . . . No, no, I'll take that back! I won't implicate other men! I won't undertake to say how they feel or how they would act under similar circumstances! I won't implicate other men in my guilt! Perhaps I'm the lowest of my sex . . . [;] I didn't dream that things would go on . . . and there would be a child . . . I suppose I didn't properly estimate your innocence . . . and I thought that if I provided you with money, you'd get along alright [sic]. (323-24)

The fact that he would not swear falsely on her father's name suggests that he may, in fact, be telling the truth—though there is room for argument to the contrary. However,

Armstrong raises his credibility further by having him explain to Lydia that he had heard from the Pooles that she had married, and so he assumed that she was safely ensconced in a respectable, middle-class life of her own without further need of his assistance. This frank conversation between them allows Armstrong to illustrate the ways in which both of them are trapped by Kingsville's brand of patriarchal culture and to foreground once again the ways in which local religious hypocrisy renders it particularly destructive. In the end, Churchwell returns to his position of power and accepts Kingsville's definition of him, unpalatable as he may find it.

Religion remains a theme throughout the text, specifically the associations of religion with Kingsville. Late in the novel, as she travels by train through Italy, church spires remind her of Kingsville and her isolation:

> Santa Maria Novella's marbles [glistened] in the morning sun . . .then all that had meant Florence to her—vanished. A thought flitted through her mind of the morning she had left Kingsville and looked back, her eyes lingering on its spires that were glistening in the morning sunshine. How little she had dreamed, then, that she would never again look on those church spires. How full of hope she had been! How steeped in beautiful girlish dreams! How simple life had looked to her, and how easy and certain of conquest the big, unknown world. (362)

As her journey continues, she notices not what sets Italy apart from her home region but what connects the two: "It came back to her with faint amusement how in their provincial pride Kingsvillians had been wont to compare Kingsville on her seven hills to Rome on its famed seven hills. How that comparison had fired her childish imagination" (362). She

has left her home region physically, but to this point in the novel she has never let go of its social constructions; those she has internalized and carried with her for years.

Though Lydia seeks happiness in other cities, she cannot find it. New York, though it promised the anonymity of a big city and the diversity that might have allowed Lydia to find people with common interests and goals, had not worked for her; in her quest to attain the wealth and luxury that her Kingsvillian definition of herself required, she had rejected the companionship and the respectable but shabby comfort of Emma Stark's household. European exile also disappoints; the cities are beautiful, but she cannot escape her past there, as her chance meeting with her father's family members proves. But being in Europe does at least afford Lydia the perspective she needs to initiate a change in her life. The encounter with her aunt and uncle prompts a vivid dream in which she sees Kingsville again and hears the old fishmonger calling, and this prompts her to pack her bags and leave Italy alone despite Van Antwerp's protests.

Apologetically but firmly, Lydia attempts to clarify for Van Antwerp why she must leave and begin a new life:

> I don't pretend that I see the truth even now in a great white blaze, or anything like that—I suppose only great minds see the truth that way. I see only a little glimmer of truth—but you must let me follow . . . that glimmer . . . [;] it's taken me such a long time to realize that we have to renounce what's dear to us in order to gain what's dearer—dearest of all—self respect, and the respect of others . . .[;] I've felt sometimes that fate was unjust to me, but at last I have realized . . . I've made my own fate! My character has been my fate! (376-77)

Until this point in the book, readers might find Lydia fascinating but might also harbor some ambivalence toward her. That is, though one might sympathize with her at times, Lydia is never a truly likeable character. It is more her situation than her personality that makes her interesting and drives the story. Along with illustrating the ways in which Lydia is held back by social constructions, Armstrong also carefully shows Lydia's vanity, her cultural blindness, her impetuousness, and her avarice. Only at this point late in the novel does the reader develop hope that Lydia will change and even a qualified admiration for her; she has finally taken responsibility for her choices and gained a modicum of self-knowledge.

In addition to the implication that readers should be more empathetic to marginal persons, Armstrong suggests in this text that even a person who has committed the most egregious of social sins can hope for redemption. A late scene in the garden of the Villa d'Este supports this assertion. While Van Antwerp pursues other business, Lydia sits alone in the lovely garden contemplating her situation and how she should proceed with her life:

> Patches of sunlight fell about her. A slender jet of water sprinkled her with its diamond drops of spray where she sat. Tall cypresses lifted themselves in gloomy grandeur above her to the sky. The flashing white of the villa looked down from above—ah, she had never seen or imagined a place like this! It burst upon her that nothing, no not even her sins, could alienate her from the great heritage of the world's beauty. (370)

This feeling of connection to something—anything—outside of Kingsville is unusual for Lydia, so the moment is important. She shows here that she is recovering her self worth

(or perhaps developing some in the first place), which leads, in turn, to her new resolve to leave her "trade" and become a more respectable mother to her son. As she sits there, she recalls lines from Whitman's "To a Common Prostitute"—"Not till the sun excludes you do I exclude you/Not till the waters refuse to glisten for you and the leaves rustle for you"—then recollects another quote from elsewhere in *Leaves of Grass*—"Whoever you are, you are he or she for whom the sun and moon hang in the sky!" (370).

However, even as she notes her connection to nature and beauty, she cannot yet forget her distance from Kingsville:

> How rich she was! She had been banished from Kingsville—by her own acts had banished herself—forever. Even so, how rich she was! Sky, earth, trees, fountains, all this glory, hers, too! . . . She had mutilated her life; her mother, her mother's mother, they too had mutilated their lives.[92] In a sense, she was an outcast, and would be forever, from what had been dear to her. Even so, for her sun and moon hung in the sky. (370).

This scene in the garden offers the first hint that Lydia has begun to mature and understand that in order for her to develop, she must sever herself from some of the aspects of her regional culture that damage her—the social hierarchy that holds her firmly in place below where she wishes to be, for example, and the religion that supports that hierarchy. The implication is that she might soon begin to take responsibility for her actions and might even develop personal agency and self-esteem, but not by denying her own former complicity in the system or her personal responsibilities. Armstrong writes:

[92] Lydia's maternal grandmother was French and, therefore, culturally suspect by Kingsville standards.

> Her sins passed in review before her . . . [;] She could not analyse [sic] or separate them now. She did not seek to palliate them to herself. She had sinned, sinned grievously, put her mind and body to degraded uses . . . been disloyal, unclean, selfish . . . But as she dwelt on her sins, still other words came to her from that book of Walt Whitman—the book that in Kingsville no one had dared speak of aloud—but now they came freighted to her—the earth remains jagged and broken only to him or her who remains jagged and broken . . . She wanted to stand up and shout for gladness. She had been liberated from a long and terrible darkness. The future opened up before her, all at once, broad, almost limitless in possibilities, even for herself. (370-371)

Lydia has this epiphany in Europe, far from Kingsville and New York, and her revelation comes, significantly, from poems considered unacceptable in Kingsville because they challenge the dominant view. Lydia here finally begins to leave Kingsville ideologically as well as literally. Here in the garden, she begins to find that she has not been as thoroughly acculturated as she thought, or, perhaps, that she is more capable of resisting others' definitions of her than she realized. She can, in fact, leave the geographical location of Kingsville behind, and the suggestion here is that she can also erase—at least partially—the marks on her identity and psyche. The marks are strong, but not completely indelible.

At this turning point, Lydia returns to New York, gathers up her son from boarding school, and divests herself of her luxuries, cutting her ties with the men who have provided her living thus far. As she rides the train west with Peter in the last pages of the text, she is glad to be taking him "to a part of the world where barriers of social

distinction [are] not yet so impassable as in the older communities of the world," i.e., in Kingsville, New York, and Europe (382). As she anticipates this new opportunity, she shows that she has matured. Her youthful impetuosity and exuberance have cooled to a more adult and qualified optimism:

> She would always be haunted by the fear that some one [sic] who knew things about her she wished hidden would appear and reveal them. Then too, she had not attained a very great age even yet; she was by no means drained of hasty blood . . . she was not sure how much strength she could muster to a supreme testing of herself. And, above all, the problems of existence still offered much to perplex her; she did not see a clean-cleft path which willy-nilly she should follow. She saw what seemed the truth, as she had told Mr. Van Antwerp she saw it, merely as a glimmer, fluctuating, dying down now to the smallest, feeblest-glowing ember, now leaping briefly into clear flame . . . But at any rate, she felt, somehow, stronger to fight . . .[;] She hoped devoutly that she would not succumb again, as it had occurred to her might happen, at some unexpected point of attack. (382-83)

After moving from city to city, Lydia finally truly leaves Kingsville behind, both geographically and ideologically.

The novel ends with the two of them on the train: "[Peter's] eyes were following with unabated interest what passed outside the car window . . . Life would never be entirely easy—evidently life was not intended to be that. But she was going to work hard, going to make herself respected in this new place that was to be their home . . . Her eyes were dim with tears, but there was far more of happiness and hope in her heart than of fear and sorrow" (383). Peter has taken a central place in her heart and mind now, much

as she did in her father's. She has left behind her desire for the luxurious tangibles that she once craved and replaced them with a sense of responsibility to herself and her son. Lydia finds, as is so often the case with regionalist protagonists, that in order to transcend the damage done to her by her regional culture, she must learn to define herself on her own terms, maintaining adherence to those social constructs that promote positive development in herself and her community—which at the end of the novel will be a community of her own choosing—but resisting those which are more damaging—in this case, the narrow-minded aspects of Kingsville religion and a social hierarchy that prevents individuals of different classes from associating freely with one another.

III. *This Day and Time*

Critical Context, Reception, and Genres

When it appeared in 1930, Anne W. Armstrong's *This Day and Time* garnered more critical attention than her previous novel, probably due to its subject matter and to the fact that it had been picked up by a higher profile publisher, Alfred A. Knopf. If *The Seas of God* is arguably Appalachian fiction, Anne W. Armstrong's *This Day and Time*, published fifteen years later, is undeniably such. Set in East Tennessee,[93] the novel chronicles the life of Ivy Ingoldsby, a mountain woman in her mid-twenties whose husband, Jim, abandoned her just before the birth of their son. In the ten years after his abandonment, Ivy learns to conquer her loneliness. She leaves her mountain community to try working in town, but the work she does there leaves her feeling demoralized and dehumanized. In town, it seems, Ivy belongs to everyone but herself. She returns home to the cabin she has inherited, where she restores her mountain farm to productivity and develops a sense of personal agency that makes her stand out from a number of the other women in her community.

Evidence from Armstrong's body of writing outside of her fiction supports a regionalist reading of this novel, which she intended as a "protest" against commonly held beliefs regarding southern mountaineers. After reading so many texts that oversimplified mountaineers and, in her mind, presented them inaccurately, she wanted to offer a text that showed the incongruities and complexities of mountain life and presented

[93] Armstrong lived in the Big Creek community of Sullivan County, between the small cities of Bristol and Kingsport. The novel makes use of that locale and its culture.

them in a more accurate manner than had, in her mind, been done before. Her ultimate goal was engendering an understanding among her readers of the cultural realities that had been ignored by local color and travel writing and to foster a better understanding of a muted culture for which she had a great deal of admiration in spite of its faults. The text, long ignored by all but a few scholars of Appalachian literature, offers new ground for reading through several different critical lenses—especially those which concern themselves with the process of reflecting, decentering, and then rebuilding social constructs in the interest of revising preconceived notions about a marginal population.

Armstrong's novel took readers by surprise because it did not treat mountaineers in the way audiences had come to expect in terms of genre, subject matter, or language. Understandably, this sometimes resulted in problems with its reception. As she did in *The Seas of God,* Armstrong blended genres and used the disparate elements in unexpected ways, which sometime confounded readers—even those who approached her text with open minds and a genuine interest in her subject matter. Her mountaineer dialect, for example, was not the caricatured version found in much of the local color and travel writing about the region, nor were her mountaineers all of a type. Readers steeped in the usual approaches were unsure of how to react to the re-presentation of this culture they had come to "know," and this influenced their reactions to the text.

By way of introduction to the challenges faced by Armstrong's text, the 1970 edition of *This Day and Time* offers an essay by East Tennessee poet and scholar David McClellan. In the essay, entitled "Anne Armstrong and *This Day and Time*: A Personal Reminiscence," McClellan acknowledges and explains the negative reaction of some "town dwellers" to the novel, even as he calls Armstrong "an independent and fearless

crusader for advanced modern literature in a provincial part of the country" (xiv). McClellan evidently knew from personal experience just how provincial the "town" was; "My own maternal grandmother," he writes, "a fine spirit herself but one at the same time limited in literary vision . . . burned our family copy because to her its realism amounted to obscenity and I have heard that the book suffered the same fate repeatedly in other Bristol [TN/VA] area homes" (xvi). McClellan also notes that "a full and detailed study of the novel in terms of origins and related matters must await a future time, since the originals of some of the characters are still living and the sensitivity of people in regard to their transformation into fictional characters is acknowledged" (xv). Even forty years after its initial publication, the book remained at least locally controversial.

Published fifteen years after *The Seas of God*, *This Day and Time* is more complex and more accomplished than the earlier work, although Armstrong revisits a few of the themes and elements of her first novel in her second. Once again, she chose to write about a marginal female protagonist who struggled to raise a son alone. Once again, she attempted to elicit the reader's identification with a woman who operated outside of social norms, though in this novel, Ivy herself did not make the choices that have rendered her if not technically then practically single. However, though they share outsider status and single motherhood, Lydia and Ivy are very different in other respects. Lydia, though she never becomes completely likeable, garners the reader's sympathy and eventually earns a grudging respect for the choices she makes by the end of the text; Ivy, on the other hand, is warm, engaging, and easy to admire from the opening pages. Unlike Lydia, who chooses to succumb to the financial lure of prostitution as a means of making a living, Ivy works hard to avoid any association with men that might cause gossip or

conjecture. Though at the outset of the novel she has been abandoned by her husband for ten years, she still hopes for his return and works hard to keep her name clean so that when he arrives "some sweet day," no one will be able to cast aspersions on her that might cause him to leave again. Initially, Ivy stays celibate because she worries about what Jim will think. Later in the text, however, she seems to be moving in a different direction, staying celibate as a matter of self-control and personal empowerment.[94] While Lydia eschews manual labor, leaving behind her housekeeping job to become a prostitute, Ivy works hard to reclaim and maintain her cabin and garden, and she eventually manages to become self-sufficient with the initial help of a number of her neighbors. As in *The Seas of God* with Emma Stark and My Old, a community of women provides the most substantial assistance to the troubled protagonist; significantly, most—but not all—of those who help Ivy are women, and most—but not all—of those who stand in her way are men.

In fact, *This Day and Time* is not anti-male but it is very pointedly anti-patriarchal and would thus lend itself easily to certain kinds of feminist readings, hence the first focus of the close reading offered in this chapter. Armstrong definitely writes the book from a female vantage point, and it records Ivy's efforts to succeed as a woman who operates outside social norms in a very patriarchal culture. However, though her novel offers a predominantly female point of view, Armstrong's agenda can also be read more broadly and is not necessarily as gender-linked as some other works of Appalachian

[94] Interestingly, each of Armstrong's protagonists arrives at the decision to remain celibate—at least for the present—by the ends of their respective texts. Though they arrive at this conclusion via very different routes, both Lydia and Ivy decide that, though they might sometimes wish for the intimacy and companionship of a relationship with a man, they do not actually need men as much as they had previously imagined and that such relationships interfere with the sense of personal agency each begins to develop.

fiction with female protagonists; Emma Bell Miles's "The Common Lot"[95] serves as an early example and Lee Smith's *Fair and Tender Ladies* (1988) as a more recent one of this tendency.

I have chosen, as with Armstrong's other fiction, to undertake a regionalist reading of *This Day and Time* because, as the first extended analysis of the novel since its publication, I want to examine here what I believe to be Armstrong's main agenda: rehabilitating outsiders' impressions of southern mountain culture. Such a reading allows me to focus on this overarching purpose without precluding other analyses using other theoretical modes. In fact, I argue here that Armstrong's regionalist agenda anticipates feminist and regionalist approaches and that in advocating for social change, her approach had two major foci. The first was more attention for mountain women and recognition of the double alterity under which they suffered as females and as members of a "muted" population. The second was an identification of the ways in which mountaineers had been unfairly stereotyped and treated by the larger American culture and a resultant change in the level of respect and fair treatment to be afforded them.

This chapter, then, attempts to delineate the ways in which Armstrong hoped her novel might achieve social efficacy, encouraging her readers to reconsider long-held stereotypes. If they participate fully in this process, these same readers might participate in the discursive construction of regionalism that critiques and problematizes each

[95] In this short story, her first, published in *Harper's* in 1908, Miles directly interrogates the mountain custom of early marriage for women. Her protagonist, Easter Vanderwelt, eventually decides to marry her suitor, though she actually voices her fears to him when he proposes. Having spent a great deal of time helping her married sister, Easter knows exactly what kind of servitude marriage will mean for her. She loves Allison, however, and decides to marry him according to custom. The text of this story can be found in Volume II of *Appalachia Inside Out: A Sequel to Voices from the Hills*, and is followed directly by an essay entitled "Emma Bell Miles: Feminist Crusader in Appalachia," by Grace Toney Edwards (pp. 708-713).

question it presents; Ivy herself is the site of an interface between town and mountain culture, and she adopts and rejects elements of each as she sees fit to engage in the characteristically regionalist practice of self-definition. Armstrong's fiction mirrors this process by appearing to be one thing and abruptly changing into another; a section of banter between neighbors in local color-style dialect, for example, might be followed by a more stylistically romantic section of description, which might then be followed by a bleak account of murder or alcoholic dissipation. These stylistic changes disconcert readers in the same manner as do the sudden changes in topic and mood. By doing this, Armstrong intends to catch readers off guard and to use this opening to plant the suggestion that a blending of cultures/styles/ideas might be more preferable than adherence to a more well-beaten but narrower track.

Throughout the novel, Armstrong weaves a sense of impending change for Ivy's community in general and carefully includes the many ways in which "modern" culture and mountain culture interface, causing a number of upheavals and changes in the mountaineers' lives. As a reviewer from the *Book Review Digest* observed, Armstrong's novel shows that "a . . . disruptive influence has been at work upon the mountaineers, for capital has gone South, where labor is cheaper than in New England, to build shirt factories and the like" ("Tennessee Hill Billies" 30). In fact, Ivy attempts and rejects just such a factory job, doing "piece work," to return to her mountain home, where she finds equally hard work—arguably harder work, in fact—but where she feels less oppressed and alienated.

In spite of what it offers to scholars of regionalism in general and of Appalachian literature in particular, *This Day and Time* is not widely read. Several factors seem to

have collaborated in relegating *This Day and Time* to its current position of relative obscurity even in terms of Appalachian literature. First, there is the question of chronology, which prompts those who run across it now to dismiss it as just another novel of its time about a strong mountain woman. Without an understanding of its context, one might easily overlook its contribution to the development of a tradition of strong, complex female protagonists in Appalachian literature that began in the mid-twentieth century and continues to thrive. The novel, as the first to centralize a mountain woman's point of view, had a different impact then than it would have had even ten or fifteen years later, after the current line of strong mountain woman protagonists began to be established and augmented by other writers. Second, there is the question of subject matter. Unfortunately, old ideas about the text—and the mountaineers themselves—have conspired to keep the novel from resurfacing.[96] Even some of the most discerning and ostensibly sympathetic readers of Armstrong's own era were unable to see past their own deeply—if unconsciously—held beliefs to recognize her most salient points. Ironically, the work of Cratis Williams, often referred to as the father of Appalachian studies, was instrumental in influencing subsequent misreadings of Armstrong's writings.

A close reading of the novel and an examination of its context shows how Armstrong takes a decidedly different approach to mountain culture from most of her contemporaries and delineates the ways in which Williams and others misunderstood the text. As is so often the case with something that appears before its time, Armstrong's second novel confused many who encountered it, and as reviews from its debut show,

[96] In 1970, Dr. Jack Higgs and others on the faculty at East Tennessee State University republished the novel through the university's Research Advisory Council. Though local interest in the novel was temporarily revived, the hoped-for regional and national attention they sought never came.

though many critics noted its merits, they generally preferred novels that fit rather than challenged their literary expectations.

Though *This Day and Time* refuses to slide easily into many narrower designations, it does fit well in the category of regionalism. Such a reading foregrounds Armstrong's agenda and makes clear the purpose that so many readers missed or misunderstood when the novel first appeared. A document already quoted in the introduction bears repeating here for both evidence and emphasis; as Armstrong explained in her autobiographical sketch for Alfred A. Knopf, she had had a longtime association with mountain culture dating from her childhood. In the same sketch, she notes that later in life she and her husband chose to move back to East Tennessee and live in a very rural area among the mountaineers rather than taking up residence in a nearby town. She explains her purpose in writing *This Day and Time* straightforwardly to Knopf, saying, "first, I realized that the old life, the old mountaineer, would be things of the past. Second, I felt that the mountain woman's life, her often heroic struggle, had not been sufficiently stressed. Then I felt that mountain life had, in general, been depicted thus far as more joyless, and the mountaineer himself a more melancholy creature, than is actually the case" (3). In her correspondence with Knopf, she also expressed her dissatisfaction with the ways in which mountaineers—especially mountain women—and their culture had been depicted by other writers including Maristan Chapman,[97] Percy Mackaye, and John Fox, Jr. Her directly-stated purpose is to add her own perspective to the growing body of literature centered on mountain culture and, consequently, to

[97] Actually the wife-and-husband team of Mary and Stanley Chapman, authors of several novels about mountain culture and Armstrong's contemporaries. The most widely read of their now largely forgotten novels was *The Happy Mountain*.

"protest" the descriptions offered by others by adding her interpretation of mountain culture to theirs (4).

Armstrong's closeness with the locals and her interest in their concerns and culture shaped her fiction as it had shaped the work of other "outsider" regionalists who wrote about mountaineers, including writers such as Rebecca Harding Davis, Mary Noailles Murfree, and Emma Bell Miles.[98] Her agenda, however, set it apart to some degree from many of the other stories of mountain life already circulating to great critical acclaim, especially those local color works that served primarily to designate the mountaineers as "other" and which, in many ways, justified the exploitation of them by outsiders.[99] While local color works such as those written by John Fox, Jr. sought to contrast mountain culture with the hegemonic and serve to render it "other," Armstrong's more complex purpose was to interrogate both the mountain culture and the hegemonic culture which had presumptuously defined it from outside.

Fox's work, which Armstrong mentions in "The Southern Mountaineers," serves as an example of the type of local color Armstrong hoped to counter. He was a contemporary of hers, though by the time she published *This Day and Time,* his work had fallen out of wide circulation and favor. Fox's early fiction, especially his bestselling

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[98] Some might argue "insider" status for Emma Bell Miles, who married a mountaineer, Frank Miles, and lived in his community with her family. The fact remains, however, that Miles began life as the daughter of two formally educated parents who came to the mountains to teach. Her book *The Spirit of the Mountains* reflects her deep love and respect for mountain culture, but her background was sufficiently different from her husband's to have caused a number of problems during their marriage. Even after her marriage, Miles kept up her association with wealthy women from Chattanooga and other cities who purchased her paintings and came to hear her give lectures. In fact, these activities, along with her writing, helped Miles support her family when her husband was unable to do so.

[99] For an extended explanation of this theory and the germinal work on the topic of Appalachian "otherness," see Henry D. Shapiro's *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920.* Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina Press, 1978.

novel *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine,*[100] participates wholeheartedly in the local color agenda, presenting mountaineers whose lawlessness justifies the subjugation of their communities to outside control—in this case, law officers sent to quell the feuding and violence depicted as rampant in a mountain community. Fox's famous novel, in distinctly local colorist mode, valorizes urban culture over mountain and justifies the "need" for outside control of the "dangerous" mountaineers.

Armstrong's depiction of mountaineer is in striking contrast to those of Fox. However, in her foreword to the most recent edition of *The Heart of the Hills*, Fox Jr.'s last published novel, Darlene Wilson softens his image. Fist, though, she notes the many advantages that Fox and his brothers gained from the turn-of-the-century industrial incursion into Appalachia. Of course, Fox Jr. benefited financially from his literary portrayals of the mountaineers, but Wilson explains how the Fox brothers profited in other ways. They were instrumental, for example, in helping industrialists obtain—sometimes through ethically questionable methods—land and mineral rights in the mountains of Southwest Virginia. Wilson notes that while Fox's "primary role in the emerging rail and coal industries was that of publicist or promoter," his brothers had been personally and directly involved in many of the shady dealings that took direct advantage of mountaineers (xii). In an interesting new perspective on his work, Wilson claims that Fox's last novel, *The Heart of the Hills,* constitutes an act of contrition for his previous depictions of Appalachians, depictions so unflattering to them that "native mountaineers,

[100] First published in 1908, the book was responsible for setting, if not creating, a number of stereotypes about mountaineer/flatlander relations. In his foreword to the 1984 edition of the novel published by the University Press of Kentucky, John Ed Pearce notes that "hero Jack Hale, the bluegrass engineer who comes to the mountains to make his fortune in coal but remains to fall in love with the region and with a simple mountain girl, is impossibly brave and pure. June Tolliver, the beautiful mountain waif, is only slightly more believable" (viii).

especially younger ones, threatened to tar and feather young Fox for his misrepresentations of their lifestyle, moral sensibilities, and communities" (xii). Wilson finds in this final novel "the distinct threads of a textual 'apology,' painful admissions of personal culpability by Fox Junior . . . who had begun to comprehend the powerful politics of class and cultural representation" (viii).[101] In *The Heart of the Hills*, Wilson argues, Fox deserts his former mode of stereotypical presentation and "suggests that men of the southern mountains had been not only maligned and mistreated, but also betrayed . . . by members of their respective classes" (viii). Though she does not use this terminology, Wilson essentially argues here that Fox, originally a local colorist, wrote a regionalist novel at the end of his literary career. But *The Heart of the Hills* never enjoyed the success of Fox's earlier works, and as a result, his overall body of writing became the target of efforts like those undertaken by Armstrong to change ingrained stereotypical notions. From the beginning, her agenda remained consistently regionalist in its orientation, and it was the exploitation of mountaineers both in literary and economic terms that she hoped to rectify by offering a different picture in *This Day and Time*.

Armstrong was not the first writer to have undertaken this task of stereotype revision in relation to mountaineers and mountaineer women. In her essay "Exploring Contact: Regionalism and the 'Outsider' Standpoint in Mary Noailles[102] Murfree's

[101] According to Wilson, this change of heart came about at least partially through the influence of John Fox, Sr., the author's father, who still lived in Big Stone Gap, Virginia, while Fox Jr. was writing a draft of the novel and who had come to realize and be ashamed of his family's role in the exploitation of mountaineers.

[102] In her essay, Pryse consistently spells Murfree's middle name incorrectly: No*ia*lles. In the interest of consistency and accuracy, I have chosen to silently correct it the way that Murfree herself would have done.

Appalachia," Marjorie Pryse explains how Murfree, a writer whose work Armstrong knew well, used her 1891 novel *In the "Stranger People's" Country*[103] to further a regionalist agenda. Pryse designates Murfree's Appalachia as a "contact zone"[104] in which social critique takes place "by way of autoethnography, narrative that emerges from indigenous or regional subjects and that may challenge readers' preconceptions about those subjects" (199). Murfree, explains Pryse, offers a narrator who "'encounters' the preconceptions outsiders have toward her Appalachian mountaineers and self-critically positions herself as sympathetic. Aware that urban readers view Appalachians as strange, [the narrator] takes up the 'stranger peoples's' [sic] standpoint as her own and explores her own relationship to that standpoint" (199). Pryse argues in addition that this text constitutes Murfree's "attempt to intervene into [the insider/outsider] binary in various ways . . . representing tensions in Appalachian politics that emerged with the arrival of outsiders into the region and constructing the novel itself as a contact zone between outsider narrator and characters who inhabit the mountains" (200). Murfree, according to Pryse, uses the novel to "[advocate] keeping cultural distinctions alive through linguistic variation . . . and argues against intrusion into the lives of her characters" (200). This reading mirrors Armstrong's explanation of her work to Knopf and connects the two writers in relation to their regionalist agendae. Armstrong, while she might have "advocated keeping cultural distinctions alive through linguistic

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Murfree published much of her work under pseudonyms, the most well-known being Charles Egbert Craddock.

[103] The "Stranger People" are a group of Native Americans whose burial mounds are going to be disturbed by an outsider archaeologist, but a local woman, Adelaide Yates, intervenes, arguing that the burial ground should be respected as sacred.

[104] Pryse borrows this term and its definition from Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London: Routledge, 1992. pp. 4-7.

variation," at least in print, might have balked a little at "arguing against intrusion"; unlike Murfree, she seemed to see this kind of cultural interface or intrusion as inevitable and simply wanted to have it play out in the most productive and mutually satisfying manner possible.

But, if she served as a regionalist literary antecedent for Armstrong, Murfree, too, had her own such antecedents. Sixteen years earlier, Rebecca Harding Davis had published a short story entitled "The Yares of the Black Mountains" in *Lippincott's.* Kevin O'Donnell and Helen Hollingsworth make an interesting point regarding the short story in *Seekers of Scenery:Travel Writing from Southern Appalachia, 1840-1900,* observing that "unlike . . . other conventional fictionalized travelogues of the period, ['Yares'] uses a third-person narrator. And rather than feature an ensemble of characters, it focuses on one main character, and on her perception of the region's inhabitants as she travels into the Black Mountains" (173). O'Donnell and Hollingsworth refer here to the young widow, Mrs. Denby, who brings her sick baby to the mountains because her doctor believes that the air will be good for him.

In the manner of a regionalist character, Mrs. Denby chooses to disregard the strongly negative comments made about the mountaineers by the other "outsiders" in her company. Intent on curing her baby, she ignores their warnings and travels into the deepest parts of the Black Mountains to stay with a family of mountaineers, the Yares. She is rewarded for her bravery not only with an improvement in her son's condition but also with a greater insight into mountain culture and a deeply satisfying friendship with the Yares themselves. Regarding Mrs. Denby's developing and sympathetic relationship with the Yares, Harding Davis writes:

> These were the first human beings whom she had ever met between whom and herself there came absolutely no bar of accident—no circumstance of social position or clothes or education: they were the first who could go straight to something in her beneath all these things. She soon forgot (what they had never known) how poor they were in all these accidents. After that Charley and his mother were adopted into the family. (187)[105]

Miss Cook, Mrs. Denby's traveling companion for much of the trip and an important literary foil to Mrs. Denby, warns her friend about making the journey into the higher altitudes to stay with the family of Jonathan Yare. Miss Cook is a cynical and shallow journalist who cares about the mountaineers only because she wants to write about them for money. Quoting Jean Pfaelzer, Marjorie Pryse notes that Miss Cook constitutes "Davis's pointed (and perhaps self-reflexive) critique of the female local colorist, an outsider who reduces the complexity of southern history to the sketch or tall tale" ("Contact" 200).

Miss Cook, ever ready to believe the worst about these primitives, tells Mrs. Denby that "her brother had once penetrated into the mountains as far as the hut where the Yares lived . . . [;] Beyond that there were no human beings: the mountains were given up to wild beasts. As for these Yares, they had lived in the wilderness for generations, and by all accounts, like the beasts" ("Yares" 183). She encourages the young widow to abandon her plan, but Mrs. Denby, forging her own way in spite of multiple warnings, ends up high in the mountains, thirty miles from the nearest settlement and happily ensconced among the balsams and the Yares.

[105] The quotes from Davis's short story were drawn from the reprint of the text in *Seekers of Scenery*.

Though most critics are rightfully focused on Mrs. Denby and Miss Cook and their conflicting views of mountain culture, there are two other characters whose roles should be examined further, especially as they help in contextualizing Armstrong's work within Appalachian literature. The characters most germane to this analysis are old Mrs. Yare and her daughter Nancy. They are clearly Ivy Ingoldsby's literary ancestors, strong women whose author allows them the voice to tell their own stories without depending on men to do so for them. Though she hears many stories about hunting and other mountain adventures from Jonathan Yare, it is from his wife that Mrs. Denby learns about the most substantive and admirable aspects of the Yare family's history. Mrs. Yare also reveals to her guest that her family was basically sympathetic to the Union but refused to fight on either side during the war. They did so not due to cowardice but because they had seen reprehensible deeds done on both sides and felt that they could not fully support the actions of either. Mrs. Yare reveals to Mrs. Denby that the taciturn Nancy is capable of working just like a man and did so during the war. She notes as well that Nancy and her brothers, working together, ensured the safe return of both Rebel deserters and escaped Union soldiers to their homes. Theirs was a dangerous, stressful, and life-threatening undertaking, done in the interest of fairness and justice. When Mrs. Yare reports that "hundreds of [soldiers] hev slep' in this very room, sayin' it was as ef they'd come back to their homes out of hell. They looked as ef they's been thar, really," the young widow realizes with a shock that "her husband had been in Salisbury . . . and had escaped. He might have slept in this very bed where his child lay. These people might have saved him from death" (189).

In an unusual move for her day, Harding Davis allows Mrs. Yare to tell her own story. In doing so, the mountain woman makes a deep and abiding connection with a woman from the outside. In most travel literature and local color fiction of Harding Davis's era, mountain women are silent figures, stereotypically lovely when young and unmarried, but almost instantly wizened and careworn as wives. They have little to say and offer little insight into their lives. But here, Harding Davis makes a move that Murfree and Armstrong (and others) later follow. She puts the most important, most deeply humane and revelatory words into the mouth of a mountain crone.

Reflecting further regionalist form, "The Yares of the Black Mountains," though it certainly seeks to foreground the positive aspects of mountain culture, avoids valorizing one culture completely over the other, suggesting instead that each has merit. Likewise, it suggests that there is room for improvement in each. This duality prefigures the relationship Ivy later forges with Shirley Pemberton in *This Day and Time*, in which the two women share an open admiration for each other and become friends in spite of their cultural differences.

As presented by regionalist authors, these intercultural relationships constitute significant interfaces; they are sites not only of some conflict but also (and perhaps more importantly for Armstrong because it had not been emphasized) of productive cultural exchange—an exchange that opens the possibility for each side to learn from the other and improve its own culture as a result. In Armstrong's writing, the impulse toward preservation of a unique culture so often present and/or noted in regional writing is tempered by the simultaneously discursive nature of the regionalism, which suggests that while mountain culture, for example, might have much to recommend it, wholesale and

unthinking preservation of every tenet of the culture is less than desirable.[106] Rather, in the interest of productive self-definition, a culture must observe and consider new ideas and practices, adopting them only if they seem truly advantageous.

In "The Yares of the Black Mountains" and, later, in Armstrong's novel, the suggestion is that each side must approach the other with interest, respect, and an open mind, leaving behind the preconceptions that might preclude a real connection. Any change, if it is to be permanent and positive, must occur by choice, with a sense of personal agency, instead of by force or coercion. Each individual—insider or outsider—must consider and then accept or reject elements of the "foreign" culture at hand based on deliberation and the application of practical wisdom, not on blind acceptance or fear of repercussions. As Harding Davis's fiction suggests, conversions of the heart and mind are more lasting and profitable than conversions by an economic, religious, or sociological force. Murfree and Armstrong later picked up on this suggestion and wove it into their fiction, expanding and exploring it in important ways.

In "Exploring Contact," Pryse points out the ways in which Harding Davis's piece provided a foundation for Murfree's *In The "Stranger People's" Country* and also notes that an early short story of Murfree's, "My Daughter's Admirers," was published in the same issue of *Lippincott's* as "The Yares of the Black Mountains" (200).[107] She also

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[106] A good example might be, for example, the tendency toward misogyny and alcoholism shown in some of the male characters in *This Day and Time*. Armstrong clearly means to denigrate and discourage those aspects of mountain culture while valorizing and encouraging others, such as the neighborly cooperation and generosity demonstrated by a number of Ivy's female neighbors. It is significant—and characteristic—that she uses female characters to illuminate the surrounding culture.

[107] In their headnote to the story in *Seekers of Scenery*, Kevin O'Donnell and Helen Hollingsworth (who do not differentiate between local color and regionalism in the same manner as I do) support the idea that "The Yares of the Black Mountains" influenced Murfree, arguing that "it may well be the first [local color] story featuring southern mountaineers to appear in a national magazine. The story first appeared in *Lippincott's,* July 1875, while another contender for the title, Constance E. Woolson's 'Crowder's Cove: A Story of the

observes that "Murfree grants her characters their own voice and their own stories, developing Davis's use of the vernacular into the full-blown dialect that characterizes Murfree's fiction" (201). Pryse argues convincingly that "The Yares" influenced Murfree's novel and also her short story "The Star in the Valley," as they "[depict] the mountaineer and the urbanite as occupying opposing but intersecting trajectories" (202). She claims that Murfree "explores the complexity of their relation" in much the same way that Harding Davis had done in "Yares" and that Murfree had "[seen] urban and mountain worlds in more than binary opposition to each another. [*In the 'Stranger People's' Country*] explores in particular the problem of the outsider in the regional world, a problem that reflects Murfree's own desire to write about the mountaineers in ways that will not set them up for ridicule or create humor for urban readers at her characters' expense" (202).

Armstrong shared Murfree's desire to render mountaineer characters who were worthy of respect, and she also took up Murfree's interest in "the opposing but intersecting trajectories" of city dwellers and mountaineers, exploring it further in her fiction. "Half-Wit Mary's Lover" serves as an early and important example, but with *This Day and Time*, Armstrong established herself as a significant bridge figure in Appalachian literature, adding to those of writers like Harding Davis and Murfree her own contributions to the emerging voice of women in Appalachian fiction. Other writers used the figure of a sympathetic intermediary—Mrs. Denby, for example, in the case of "The Yares of the Black Mountains"—in order to precipitate an understanding of

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War,' appeared eight months later (*Appleton's,* March 1876). Meanwhile, Mary Noailles Murfree's 'The Dancin' Party at Harrison's Cove'—the story usually regarded as seminal—appeared almost three years later (*Atlantic,* May 1878)" (173-74).

mountain culture through the perspective of an outsider who appreciated it. Though Mrs. Yare is allowed to tell her story, she does so only because an interested outsider so prompts her. By contrast, Shirley Pemberton, the sympathetic outsider in Armstrong's novel, appears late in the text, well after Ivy's story is already underway. Armstrong takes tradition one step further, choosing to place herself imaginatively in the situation of a mountaineer and creating Ivy, thus offering one of the first—if not the first—regionalist novels told from a mountain woman's point of view. Had Armstrong followed the traditional practice of her day, she might have written her novel from Shirley's point of view rather than Ivy's.

"The Southern Mountaineers" helps in understanding Armstrong's authorial choices. The essay does much to support the idea that she strove to make Ivy's situation realistic in its complexity and therefore convincing. Appearing five years after *This Day and Time*, this brief but pointed essay indirectly acknowledges negative reactions to her novel and constitutes in part a justification for her decisions in writing it. With her characteristic concern for setting the record straight, Armstrong writes that "the truth is . . . that any realistic approach to this left-behind people[108]. . . is sure to be resented, and nowhere more keenly than in the towns and cities, in the four or five States which lie on the boundaries of the region in question" (54).[109] Without citing her book or its reception

[108] Evidently, though she departed largely from the conventional beliefs about mountaineers, Armstrong shared the commonly-held view that the mountaineers were something of an anachronism. Like other writers who take the mountain folk as their subject, she seems to be at least partially interested in writing to preserve the ways and speech of the mountaineers; her method and purpose differ a bit, however, in that she presents a snapshot of the present mode of change and the incursion of more "modern" ways into mountain culture, while others tended to engage in nostalgia and focus on the past, "purer" (read old-fashioned) way that mountain communities operated.

[109] The region, of course, is Appalachia; the states to which she refers probably include Tennessee, Virginia, North Carolina, West Virginia, and Kentucky.

directly, Armstrong laments the fact that "a novel attempting to give a clearer understanding of [mountaineers] as they are today is, in the current patter, 'lousy'" (541). This reaction, she argues, derives from "honest ignorance" when it comes from a "Northerner" or a "tourist," but when it comes from town-dwellers in the five-state area to which she refers, she claims that it shows a general reluctance to acknowledge the existence of social problems or constitutes, as she terms it, "an instinctive effort to keep the regional skirts clean" (541). Clearly, she finds this effort exasperating and unproductive.

Another of Armstrong's 1935 essays, "A Writer's Friends," mentions *This Day and Time* and details the reactions of her closest associates and family members. She wrote, "I myself find it exceedingly exasperating when my cousin Georgia writes, in regard to a novel of mine that has recently appeared, that she has to admit many of its happenings were 'entirely too sordid' for her taste" (760). Armstrong's genteel and wealthy family obviously found the content of much of her writing troubling; "As for my aunt Rebecca and my aunt Ellen," she notes, "it is a difficulty to decide whether they are more shocked or saddened when they come upon my views on social problems, or see in print those touching on religion, though I derive some comfort from knowing that the journals which harbor these opinions rarely find a place on my aunts' tables" (760). Despite her family's criticism, Armstrong steadfastly insisted on writing the truth as she saw it. Aware of the controversial nature of some of her content, she nevertheless persisted in presenting it as accurately and pointedly as possible because she felt that presenting this material was necessary in order to have readers take the first step toward addressing the social problems that concerned her.

Because she believed in the social efficacy of fiction, Armstrong used *This Day and Time* to attempt a rehabilitation of the mountaineer stereotype so persistent in the local color fiction and travel writing that she had grown up reading. She realized that the writing of such authors as John Fox, Jr., a supposed "expert" on mountaineer culture, had worked to ingrain certain negative ideas about mountaineers in the minds of readers from elsewhere in the nation. Fox had done so with both his non-fiction and his best-selling fiction about mountain culture. She also noted that a number of other authors had given what she considered inaccurate treatments of mountaineer life and culture, and she wanted to offer her own perspective, gained from lifelong association and her intimate acquaintance with them in later years.

Her rendering of mountain life proved controversial. The first national reviews of *This Day and Time*, most of which appeared shortly after its publication in the summer of 1930, were mixed in their assessments of the novel's merits. None of them panned it completely, but a few of them gave only a qualified approval. The most damning reading in terms of the text's staying power, however, came three decades later from Cratis Williams. In his essay on Appalachian literature in *High Mountains Rising*, Ted Olson writes that "the earliest and most ambitious of the previously published efforts to survey Appalachian literature was [Williams'] 1961 dissertation 'The Southern Mountaineer in Fact and Fiction,' which has long been one of the influential texts in the interdisciplinary field of Appalachian studies" (166). Williams knew *This Day and Time* and offered his interpretation of it in his study. His reading of the novel has played an important role in subsequent misreadings and the general dismissal of the text as sub-par, even by scholars interested in Appalachian studies and literature.

In their recently published anthology *An American Vein: Critical Readings in Appalachian Literature*, Danny Miller, Sharon Hatfield, and Gurney Norman begin with an excerpt from Chapter 8 of Part IV of Williams' dissertation, entitled "New Directions: Folk or Hillbilly?" in which he discusses Armstrong's *This Day and Time*. Williams' description reads as follows:

> The Tennessee mountaineers have been reduced to misery and moral bankruptcy in Anne W. Armstrong's *This Day and Time* (1930), an honest tale of lechery, fornication, incest, murder, and betrayal as they touch the life of Ivy Ingoldsby and her son. After Ivy, abandoned by an irresponsible husband, starves out of a textile town, she returns to a miserable shack on a rocky scrap of farm in a socially disintegrated mountain community to contend with poverty and the hacking lechery of the passion-ridden men who live around her. (4)

Williams goes on to say that Armstrong's novel makes an effort to show a culture in a state of decline and that Ivy's society is actually "strangling in the cesspool of its own social and cultural excrement" (5).

Williams' assessment of *This Day and Time* as an "honest" and "fearless" portrayal of mountain life rings true, and there is no reason to deny that Armstrong offers a glimpse into the "hacking lechery" with which her protagonist, Ivy Ingoldsby, must contend. The list of societal flaws Williams offers also stands as true; Ivy does in fact face the issues of "fornication, incest, murder, and betrayal." But while Williams' presentation of these facts is accurate so far as a factual list goes, his interpretation of them falls quite short in a number of ways. Williams completely ignores Armstrong's suggestion that there is room for optimism regarding Ivy's situation and that of the

mountaineer in general. In addition, he seems to find it difficult to fathom that Ivy might choose subsistence farming over factory work. Ivy was not, for instance, as Williams puts it, "starved out" of the textile town. She *chose* to leave there because she disliked her job and resented the way she was treated by "town folks." Ivy is not a victim; she has agency. Though her unusual choices complicate her life, she does not simply bow to the negative patriarchal aspects of her culture—she rises above them to define herself and influences her son to begin doing the same.

As for what Williams refers to as her "miserable shack on a rocky scrap of farm,"[110] Ivy's own description of the mountain home to which she returns is much more positive. At the beginning of the book, Ivy hitches a ride up the mountain with a neighbor who has come to town for supplies. She comments on how beautiful the mountain looks on the cold March day, to which Andy Weaver replies, "Pretty, shucks! Never seed such weather for March. When's a feller to git his plowin' done. . .I don't reckon you'd a-fixed to come back in today, Ivy, if you'd a-knowed it was goin' to be like it is" (4). Ivy rejoins, "Law, yes, I'd a-come the same" (4). At the end of the chapter, after they've eaten their first sparse meal since their return, Ivy's son, Enoch, worries about her because he notices tears in her eyes. She responds to his concern by saying, "Don't you be afeared, honey. Hit hain't nothin'. Hit's jest 'cause I'm so glad to be back, an' me an' you to ourselves agin" (12).

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[110] Amy Loveman, whose review of *This Day and Time* followed its initial publication closely, will be discussed in detail later in this chapter. In it, Loveman offers a description of Ivy's life that anticipates Williams': "after [vainly attempting] to make a living in town for herself and the child . . . [she] returns to her early home to struggle for a meager subsistence from her niggardly acres" (69). Here, Loveman misses the point that Ivy has chosen to leave town and views her farm not as "niggardly" but as the means of providing a more certain and self-reliant living for her son, one which will not require either of them to compromise their principles or self-respect.

Once again, Williams has overlooked the hopefulness and optimism that Armstrong so carefully included in the novel. Perhaps even the father of Appalachian Studies himself was too steeped in the stereotypes set up by travel writers, still too chronologically or psychically close to them, to be able yet to shake them from his mind. For some reason, he found Ivy's optimism and contentment unbelievable. Perhaps, as so many feminist critics have pointed out about other readers of his era, Williams could not escape his male perspective for long enough to understand Ivy's point of view—especially since she is going against the female norm. Of course, the purpose of Williams' project was a survey of material rather than an in-depth analysis, and such a dissertation does not often involve thoughtful and detailed readings of the works listed. At any rate, it appears that rather than breaking through it in his dissertation, he unintentionally participated in maintaining the film of stereotypical darkness through which authors traditionally presented mountaineers. The influential nature of his dissertation seems to have helped entrench these ideas rather than inspiring the interrogation of them.

Interestingly, Williams seems not to have read Armstrong's own non-fiction essay on mountain culture for his "fact and fiction" study. As a result, he persists in calling *This Day and Time* Armstrong's attempt to show the "social and moral decay of a community without psychic resources and strangling in the cesspool of its own social and cultural excrement." In contrast, Armstrong explains in "The Southern Mountaineers" that she "[sees] no reason why we should go on glossing over the defects of the present-day Southern mountaineers . . . ; these vital, highly intelligent countrymen of ours are entirely able, in my opinion, to stand the fullest light that can be turned upon them" (543). In

forwarding her regionalist agenda, Armstrong seeks not just to rehabilitate readers' opinions of women but of mountaineers in general. Her portrayal of them is complex rather than simplistic and sympathetic without being patronizing. She admires them in spite of their flaws, and she expects her readers to do the same.

Williams' misreading of *This Day and Time* is further exposed by a close look at the ending of the novel. As we leave her, Ivy faces a number of daunting challenges. She learns that her husband returned to town considering a reconciliation only to be repulsed by a male neighbor who lies about her, saying that she has been unfaithful to Jim. In addition, she also notes that she doesn't have enough supplies to make it through the winter. For a moment, ". . .everything had become black," writes Armstrong of her heroine; "Everything was over—over for her and Enoch. The end of the world had come" (266). The novel ends, however, not with total misery and gloom but with Enoch's happy report that a distant neighbor, learning of her plight, has delivered a whole load of wood. Ivy says, "Why, I don't hardly even know them Stringfellows. . . Law, Enoch, people is so good, hain't they?" (269).

Perhaps some of his comments on the novel reflect his having read reviews of it upon its publication. No proof of his having done so exists, but it seems reasonable to expect that he might have encountered them during the research phase of his study, even though they were published three decades before his own work was completed. Whether he did or not, Williams' misreading of the novel mirrors those of some previous reviewers who were unable to leave behind their preconceived notions in order to recognize Armstrong's accomplishments.

For example, Amy Loveman, a reviewer for the *Saturday Review of Literature*, wrote in 1930 the following:

> Like *The Time of Man,*[111] with which it inevitably challenges comparison, Mrs. Armstrong's tale of the Tennessee mountaineers weaves a strand of poetry through the dunness of its portrayal. It is a grim book, as any delineation of lives lived on the margin of subsistence and so starved of beauty to seek to release it in the crudest of passions must necessarily be, but it is a valiant book, largely by reason of the heroic personality of its heroine, Ivy Ingoldsby. (69)

A few paragraphs later, she notes that "[Armstrong] has a sympathy and understanding for the simple folk of whom she writes and a pity for them that wraps their stark lives in pathos and dignity" (69).

If not influencing it directly, Loveman's focus on the more dismal elements of the novel more obviously anticipates Williams' later interpretation of *This Day and Time*. By focusing on its grimness, Loveman, like Williams, deemphasizes what was a more important element of the novel to Armstrong: hope. Armstrong indeed includes the bleakest of elements in her text, but she wants the reader to recognize them as eradicable rather than inevitable. Indeed, Ivy pointedly avoids what Loveman calls "the crudest of passions" and in doing so provides a strong and positive contrast to those who succumb. Armstrong clearly means for Ivy to serve as an example, not the others who do not rise to her level of behavior.

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[111] Roberts's *The Time of Man*, published in 1926, takes place in the Kentucky "knobs," close to the mountains if not exactly in them. The novel chronicles the life of Ellen Chesser, a young woman who becomes the wife of an itinerant farmer. Ellen's husband, like Ivy's, proves unfaithful. Also like Ivy, Ellen faces the constant demands of subsistence farming.

Similarly to Williams, Loveman claims that Armstrong "pities" mountain folk and views their lives as "stark." A closer examination suggests, however, that this is the opposite of the author's implication. Ivy is no victim, and, consequently, she requires no pity. Additionally, Ivy does not view the life she lives in her mountain home as "stark"; she might instead use that word to describe her experiences living in town and attempting to make a living there. Like a number of other critics of her era (and Williams after her), Loveman seems handicapped by ingrained ways of thinking about mountain people, which prevents her from understanding fully Armstrong's regionalist attempt to work against them. Perhaps because she herself would consider Ivy's subsistence-level life on the mountain difficult and undesirable, Loveman cannot identify easily with Ivy's decision and recognize it as a valid and even preferable alternative to the dominant culture's norm. Armstrong's suggestion is that, as she explained it to Knopf, the life of the mountaineer was not as "joyless" as others had depicted, and she uses this text in an attempt to rectify that misconception. Perhaps because Armstrong avoids the usual ways of presenting mountaineers in terms of genre, style, and language, Loveman has trouble discerning the main point of the happy scenes, causing her, in turn, to see the more "joyful" elements of the book—she cites both Old Mag's birthday party and the ending of the novel as examples—as an incongrouous and disconcerting "sentimentalism" that "[prevents] a consistent robustness in [*This Day and Time*]" (69).

Continuing her comparison of *This Day and Time* and *The Time of Man*, Loveman writes that Armstrong "uses the flavorsome speech of the mountaineer to excellent effect, though as she presents it, it lacks that almost Biblical richness and measure of Miss

Roberts' dialogue" (69). She sees *This Day and Time* as a lesser work than *The Time of Man*, claiming that it lacks the following:

> that sustained lyrical quality, that poetry which Miss Roberts's work seems always held in solution, again and again to be precipitated by a sense of the radiance of life despite its frequent sordidness . . .[.] Nevertheless [Armstrong's] is a fine book, one which deserves to be read now and to find its place on the shelf beside Miss Roberts's kindred tale and other such novels such as Edna Ferber's *So Big* and Ellen Glasgow's *Barren Ground.* (70)

Armstrong, given the opportunity to respond, might argue that she provides a number of examples of the "radiance of life" but that Loveman, looking for radiance in language rather than in substance, simply dismisses the elements of joy that she includes in the novel as sentimentality. Armstrong might further explain to Loveman, as she did to Knopf, that one of her deepest objections was the "highly fantastic language" attributed to mountaineers by previous authors (autobiographical sketch 4).

Armstrong may well have read and been influenced by *The Time of Man*, but in terms of language, she has made a conscious choice to follow her own course and present mountain speech without making it "Biblical" or adding elements of "richness" that might render the book more stylistically pleasing. Roberts's excellent novel is arguably superior to Armstrong's in its literariness and use of stylized language, but Armstrong's concern was not in these areas. A regionalist, she was interested in the social efficacy of her fiction which required an accurate—if sometimes prosaic—portrayal of mountain life including all of its complexities along with a precise depiction of their language. Her interest was not in creating lovely prose, but in decentering and destabilizing commonly

held views regarding mountain culture. In fact, in "The Southern Mountaineers," Armstrong addresses the language issue directly, noting that "visiting poets and novelists write tales about them, putting into their mouths a jargon which does credit to the author's own inventive powers, but which would puzzle any *bona fide* mountaineer as deeply as Hindustani" (537).

An anonymous review of the same period in *Book Review Digest* likewise compares *This Day and Time* and Roberts's text. This critic notes that "in its title, substance, and general locale this competent novel brings to mind a greater novel, Elizabeth Madox Roberts's *The Time of Man.* And its main character, Ivy Ingoldsby, whom the publishers liken to . . . Jane Eyre and Maggie Tulliver . . . bears more of a resemblance to Miss Roberts's Ellen Chesser than to any of the figures drawn from across the Atlantic. Consequently, the reader of *This Day and Time* has the somewhat wasteful sense of traversing old ground" ("Tennessee Hill Billies" 6). Having offered this bit of mixed commentary, the reviewer then notes what Armstrong would have seen as the novel's main virtue:

> Nevertheless, Miss Armstrong's novel has its own merits as a story of Southern mountain people. These merits are largely of a sociological order. Miss Armstrong's eye is on the present;[112] she writes of the infiltration of modernity upon a folk that, ever since the westward push of the late eighteenth century, has been stranded in the mountain coves and isolated from a world that clanged on into industrialism. (6)

[112] *The Time of Man* was set in the years just before the turn of the twentieth century, while Armstrong focuses on the present.

The reviewer further observes that "the mores of the mechanized world have seeped back over the switchbacks into the higher altitudes" and rendered Armstrong's mountaineers too "concerned over the 'victroly,'[113] the Ford car, the confession magazine and the lipstick and the system of buying on the instalment [sic] plan [which] vies in local public interest with the lucrative profession of bootlegging" (6). This critic discerns more clearly Armstrong's regionalist purpose: the critique of not only mountain culture but the change in that culture's values resulting from its interface with the hegemonic. "Miss Armstrong's story alone would carry the book," notes this reader, "for it differs in detail if not in essence, from Miss Roberts's more original work" (6).

Yet another critic makes the comparison between Roberts's novel and Armstrong's; in his review for the *New York Evening Post*, Vincent McHugh offers what Armstrong must have viewed as a vindication of her purpose in spite of his qualifications. He writes, "Mrs. Armstrong's dialogue impresses one as being more nearly literal to the speech of the hills than any one has read. This is praise and objection in a word. The legitimately formalized dialogue of *The Time of Man*, the dramatized dialogue of Fiswoode Tarleton's sequences, have the special virtues of style one misses in *This Day and Time"* (5). He then levels an additional bit of criticism at the novel, arguing that "it comprises certain not quite minor faults of address and conception. All its action hangs upon a single stay, the return of Ivy's husband; and this, in itself a trifle loose and overburdened, is lost sight of too often in the rush of mountain events" (5). Actually, Armstrong makes this move on purpose. Ivy may think that everything hangs on Jim's return, but many readers do not; they watch Ivy learn to live and even thrive without him,

[113] i.e., the Victrola, or phonograph.

becoming more attractive as she becomes more self-sufficient. Armstrong's point here is anti-sentimental and anti-romantic; Ivy does not need a man at all. In order to show this, Armstrong ends the text without a reunion that has the couple living blissfully ever after.

In spite of what he demarcates as minor flaws, McHugh's review for the most part is positive. He understands and applauds Armstrong's verisimilitude, commenting that "her material, intimate and copious, is evidently exact in scale and line. One detects in her work neither the thin expansiveness of poeticized language filling in the cracks of knowledge and imagination with colored air,[114] nor the undue contraction of purely dramatic values" (5). "She pins her faith generously," he argues, "to the large richness of human character and the virtues of her book are resident in this" (5). Here, McHugh recognizes and foregrounds Armstrong's regionalist concern with the greater issues of humanity.

McHugh compliments Armstrong on her inclusion and handling of the darker elements of mountain life. According to him, the novel has "a sense of depth, variety, and richness" because Armstrong "writes of mountain violence and squalor, of sadism and neighborliness, without pettiness, squeamishness, or sensationalism; and the balance and poise of her story are inherent in the character of Ivy Ingoldsby, who looks at life with a stiff, tender courage and goes forward continually into it" (5).

The most positive contemporary analysis of *This Day and Time* came from the pen of Margaret Cheney Dawson. Her *New York Herald Tribune* review claims that:

[114] This comment seems odd and almost contradictory in light of his praise for Roberts's style elsewhere in the review.

> The artist who starts with an intimate knowledge of an arresting scene, a forgotten race,[115] a pungent idiom or curious custom usually has won half the battle to get a hearing. But it is a courageous author who presents us these days with a story of the Southern mountain folk. But forget your prejudices and your weariness. For *This Day and Time* is neither imitative nor trite . . . [;] Miss Armstrong does not lean too heavily on this dialect, nor on the obviously quaint in mountain manners, but she uses her properties to their utmost advantages, and it is easy to see that her knowledge of the place and people is thoroughgoing. (3)

Here, Dawson vindicates a number of the literary choices critiqued by other readers. Further, her comments support a regionalist reading of the novel, pointing out the ways in which Armstrong works to change people's minds about mountaineer culture. She writes:

> It is impossible for a sophisticate to write about a primitive or backward race without putting an accent over the things that seem ludicrous or terrifying to more civilized readers. But it is possible to avoid sentimental idealization and its counterpart, horror-struck recoil. Such emotional equilibrium Miss Armstrong possesses, and it is this that makes us feel we have seen a true and memorable picture of the people. (3)

[115] It is ironic that Dawson refers to mountaineers as "a forgotten race" even as she complains that they are too often the subject of literary works, but this simply serves to illustrate the persistence of the idea that Appalachians were isolated and backward. Even those who were sympathetic to them could not always shake this perception, so firmly implanted by travel writing and local color fiction. As David C. Hsuing notes in his essay on stereotypes for *High Mountains Rising*, current Appalachian studies scholarship has begun to deconstruct the idea that all mountaineers were isolated from outside influences. He writes, "research on upper East Tennessee in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries reveals . . . [that] these mountaineers were never cut off from the larger American society, never so isolated as to develop the characteristics described by the local color writers" (105). My own oral history research in Hancock County, Tennessee, supports Hsuing's assertion.

Of all of the reviewers, Dawson seems to have best grasped Armstrong's attempt to present a realistic account of mountain life and culture, foregrounding the positive in order to show that mountain life is not, indeed, completely "joyless."

Unlike Loveman, who somewhat overemphasizes the "grimness" of mountain life as presented in *This Day and Time*, Dawson reads the text as balanced, understanding Armstrong's point that mountain life, with all of its problems, also has its assets. Dawson also observes that "the story is relatively simple. It consists of 'makin' hit,' of making ends meet for herself and her boy, after her husband's desertion; first, the killing stretch of 'piece work' in town, with squalor, monotony, and four dollars a week; then return to the mountains, thankful for the sweet air and neighborly help" (3).

Of course, including the darker characters in the novel—Doke Odom and Uncle Abel being two of the most degenerate—left *This Day and Time* open to misreadings that foregrounded the sensational and ugly over the positive. Loveman, Williams, and other critics dwell on the mountaineers Armstrong presents as "miserable and morally bankrupt"; however, one of the most interesting elements of the novel is the community of women who come together to help Ivy re-establish herself in her mountain home. Unlike those who focus on the sordid, Dawson acknowledges this "neighborliness" and understands how it is meant to temper the more sinister facets of mountain society. Many of the women in Armstrong's novel are kind, generous, and honorable—Ivy foremost among them. And though they are less obvious in the text, some of the male characters—Luke Diggs, for example, and Ivy's father-in-law Uncle Jake—are also positively treated. Dawson, unlike the readers who cannot shake their fascination with the more unsavory characters, understands that one is meant to focus on the protagonist over the others.

Consequently, she comes closest to understanding the novel's regionalist agenda, noting its optimism and hopefulness in the face of difficult changes and great challenges and its attempts to reorder the preconceived notions readers might have about mountain life. In fact, her admonishment to readers that they should approach the book without "prejudices and your weariness," as it is "neither imitative nor trite," suggests that she recognizes Armstrong's purpose in re-rendering a topic so often overdone.

The ending of *This Day and Time*, because it refuses to be easily categorized, evoked opposing reactions from a number of readers, some very negative, as with Williams and also Loveman, who decried its "Pollyanna mood" (70). Certainly, Armstrong could have made other choices, but the ending she creates fits her agenda most neatly, avoiding the happy/sad, male/female binaries that might render the novel less complex and easier to process and interpret. While Ivy's heart is clearly broken over losing her husband Jim once again, it is simultaneously evident that she does not consider herself mired in "social and moral excrement" as described by Williams.

Of all those who analyzed the novel, Dawson seems to understand best the ending, declaring that "if any further proof is needed of the author's skilful craftsmanship, the fate which she devises for Ivy supplies it. With both the weight of logic and the shock of the incredible, the blow falls. To the reader, it seems unendurable. But even before she has recovered from the first daze of misery, Ivy begins to plan again how to 'make hit'" (3). About Ivy, she asserts that "without benefit of gay trappings, with nothing but a tragic remnant of romance, she achieves magnificence" (3).

The positive comments of other reviewers notwithstanding, Williams' influence is evident even in the most recent reading of Armstrong's work. In Appalachian studies,

where the book might have found a more receptive audience, it has languished in obscurity and remained on the margins of the field. Few critics have even read the book, and those who have seem to rely heavily on Williams' interpretations. For example, Danny L. Miller's study *Wingless Flights: Appalachian Women in Fiction* takes a view of Armstrong's novel similar to Williams', commenting that as the local color movement began to wane, "the emphasis on victimization [was] the chief quality of mountain women's lives" on which writers tended to focus as they "turned to less romantic depictions of the mountain people" (2). Miller claims that "because these works were often geared to reform efforts, they emphasized many of the most negative aspects of mountain life: violence and brutality, lust and immorality, degeneration resulting from inbreeding, incest, illegitimacy, and the subjugation of women" (2). He cites Edith Summers Kelley's *Weeds* and Armstrong's *This Day and Time* as two prime examples of such novels, saying that "because women were surrounded by such depressing conditions and their lives were often characterized by defeated acceptance, their victimization appeared even greater than in the works of the local colorists" (2). He ends his comments by saying that the female protagonists of these two novels "are depicted as pathetic victims of childbearing, toil, poverty, and lasciviousness" (2).[116]

[116] Armstrong seems to have had little or no interest in "reforming" the mountaineers. She was not religious herself, and would not have interfered with their spiritual lives. Regarding her intentions and her husband's toward her mountaineer neighbors, she unequivocally states in her autobiographical sketch for Knopf, "neither of us are in the least of the missionary temperament" (2). Of the mountaineers themselves, she praises their generosity, hospitality, and the "element of play" that they maintain in their lives, lost, she notes, by many of the "town people" whose busy lives will not accommodate a leisurely visit or a chat over the garden fence ("Southern Mountaineers" 552). She comments about outsiders that "if they come with the full realization that there is more, perhaps, for them to learn than to teach, there may still be some gain from the situation. I have thought sometimes that even in their present state, the Southern mountaineers might, with no less advantage, if such a project were feasible, send out missionaries from among themselves to the outside world" (553-554).

While Miller's assessment of *Weeds* makes sense as offered, the two novels are simply too different to be compared in such a manner. Many of the arguments already outlined against Williams' reading of the novel apply to Miller's as well. Like Williams, he reads Ivy as a victim—a fact which cannot be easily substantiated, at least not at the conclusion of the novel. But there are other reasons for rejecting the comparison. In *Weeds*, Edith Summers Kelley firmly focuses on Judith Blackford Pippinger's dismal life and the fact that she is trapped by her social and economic status, not to mention her gender. Kelley's novel fits very well into the naturalistic genre of novels such as Frank Norris' *McTeague* and Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*. Judith's inability to escape and/or thrive makes this novel a bleak and troubling commentary on how women lived in a lower-class Kentucky farming community of the 1920's.[117] Kelley's careful use of animalistic images and the suggestion of the cultural and economic traps from which her characters cannot escape certainly mark it as a work of literary naturalism. Like Armstrong, Kelley is engaged in protofeminist/feminist work, but she makes no attempt to balance the bleak with the optimistic. For instance, Kelley's protagonist faces hopelessness at the end of her story, whereas Armstrong's does not exhibit a "defeated acceptance" of her lot in that she seems instead to believe that she and Enoch will find a way to live and be happy in their mountain community. In fact, the implication is that she is better off without the wayward and undependable Jim.

Because critics, both on a national level and in the more specific area of Appalachian literature, have often found themselves at a loss as to how to categorize the

[117] In its setting and subject matter, *Weeds* actually has more in common with Elizabeth Madox Roberts's *The Time of Man*. It also chronicles the life of a poor Kentucky farm wife in the "knobs" of Eastern Kentucky.

text, they have overlooked the contributions it makes to Appalachian literature, especially in the area of socioeconomic and cultural critique. As a work of regionalism, the novel offers new ground for exploring the vexed interface between traditional mountain culture and the hegemonic industrial culture impinging upon it. As one reviewer notes, Armstrong "writes about the effect of the infiltration of modernity upon folk that, ever since the westward push of the late eighteenth century, has been stranded in the mountain coves and isolated from a world that has clanged on into industrialism" ("Tennessee Hill Billies" 30). In "The Southern Mountaineers," Armstrong shows her optimism about the mountaineers, predicting that "with their extraordinary adaptability, such of them as live within the territory principally affected by the Tennessee Valley development, and others who are drawn into it, will readily adjust themselves to the comfortable and commodious houses which have been designed for their use" (554). Ivy, of course, embodies her optimism that the "extreme adaptability" of mountaineers will help them overcome current obstacles. Armstrong immediately qualifies this, however, by noting that "It will, however . . . [,] take more than kitchen sinks and porcelain bathtubs to offset the damage that has already been done to the Southern mountaineer—more than the flood of electric light that is to replace his one little oil lamp with its cracked and smoky chimney" (554). She refers here, of course, to the exploitation of the mountaineer's environment and culture by outsiders—exploitation outlined and interrogated in the pages of *This Day and Time*.

A Regionalist Close Reading

This Day and Time, Anne W. Armstrong's second novel, meets the criteria for regionalism as defined in this dissertation because it provokes and encourages the examination of social constructs—those of both hegemonic and subaltern cultures. Even as the novel shows the ways in which the mainstream industrialist agenda of her era encroached on mountain communities and changed them, it also shows that hegemony existed in mountain culture as well, delineating an ingrained patriarchal social structure which worked from within against the mountaineers' own self-interests.

A regionalist reading of *This Day and Time* allows for examination of a number of previously unnoticed subtleties in Armstrong's text. As past readers have grappled with the novel, many have been sidetracked by one element or another of the novel that proves shocking or problematic, such as the rampant problems with alcoholism that Armstrong outlines and the "hacking lechery" to which Cratis Williams refers. For its era, the novel was somewhat graphic in its presentation of the less-than-savory elements of mountain life. What Armstrong intended, however, was for readers to see past the individual elements of the novel, both negative and positive, to understand the larger picture that she offers of a regional culture in flux. In order to do so, she presented what she saw as cultural realities, rather than the surface-level versions of mountain life offered by other writers. She wanted readers to recognize, through watching Ivy Ingoldsby strive to define herself in her own terms rather than accepting those of either hegemonic culture or her own community, that self-definition is both desirable and possible for individuals from a muted culture. The implication is that Ivy's success in

achieving personal agency will allow her, in turn, to effect changes in her family—namely, by encouraging her son to do the same. Those changes will subsequently affect regional culture as a whole.

Another part of Armstrong's agenda in *This Day and Time* involves her effort to explain that the social "cankers" plaguing the Southern mountaineer in "this day and time" were not necessarily inherent in that culture but had often been imported from outside or exacerbated by mountaineers' contact with dominant culture. Armstrong's *Yale Review* essay "The Southern Mountaineers," published five years after the novel, puts in non-fictional terms the argument Armstrong initially made through her fiction. Perhaps she felt it necessary to do so because she was disappointed in the reception of her novel, which received some good reviews but ultimately failed to be as popular as she had hoped. She felt strongly on the subject of the unfair stereotyping of mountain culture, and she obviously wanted her argument to circulate; the non-fiction essay offered an opportunity for her to make another attempt at refuting preconceived notions about a marginalized people. It also proves useful as firm substantiation of the regionalist agenda of her earlier fiction.

"The Southern Mountaineers," like *This Day and Time*, is regionalist in both content and form. In it, Armstrong first delineates the ways in which, to her annoyance, "much nonsense has been talked and written about the Southern mountaineers" (537). She then weighs both the flaws and the virtues of mountain culture, along with noting the vexed relationship between mountaineers and hegemonic culture. While they do not completely escape her disapproval, the mountaineers ultimately earn her praise. At the beginning of the piece Armstrong notes this:

> [The mountaineers] are referred to as the "Southern hill people," as "our Southern Highlanders"—names equally strange to the mountaineers themselves; termed our "contemporary ancestors" by psychologists and sociologists, and, along with other varieties of backwards Americans, dubbed "hill-billies" by more flippant commentators. But under any and all names they remain a people about whom curiosity is, apparently, inexhaustible, and of whom anyone, it would seem, after even the most casual contact, may venture an interpretation. (537)

Here, Armstrong's last sentence connects her agenda with that of Rebecca Harding Davis, who used the fictional Miss Cook in "The Yares of the Black Mountains" to lodge a similar complaint about those who swept into a mountain community, took a few notes, and then wrote about the locals as if they were authorities. Armstrong's complaint concerns some of the more well-known "experts" of her day in the area of mountain culture, whom she indirectly criticizes here by referencing their phrases. One of these was Horace Kephart, a journalist who moved to the mountains and wrote a best-selling treatise on mountain culture called *Our Southern Highlanders.* Another was William Goodell Frost, president of Berea College in Kentucky, who published an oft-quoted essay entitled "Our Contemporary Ancestors in the Southern Mountains" in the *Atlantic* in March of 1899. Later in her essay, Armstrong also critiques the role of John Fox, Jr., calling him "an incurable romanticist who fixed the [mountaineer] type" but allowing that, her own taste notwithstanding, "there is, of course, a place for romantic literature,

and American popular taste still responds warmly to mountaineers of the John Fox type when they appear in stories or on the screen" (542).[118]

On the other hand, she argues, there are other, more accurate ways of writing about those whom hegemonic culture—American or otherwise—views as "other." These are the ways in which she attempts to present the mountaineers in *This Day and Time*:

> . . .if we are looking for a veracious picture of our Southern mountaineers, I am inclined to think that Reymont in his monumental novel *The Peasants* or even Zola in his terrific *La Terre* has come closer to giving it to us than any of our native writers. With their insatiable gossip and endless backbiting, as slyly spiteful when good fortune attends their fellows as they are maliciously gleeful when misfortune befalls them, the peasants of Poland, as Reymont depicts them, bear a singular resemblance to the elemental, lusty folk who inhabit our own Southern mountain region. (542)

Here, Armstrong makes the point that the mountaineer, rather than being singular and separate from the rest of humanity, shares much in common with those of his social class and economic status the world over. She goes on to comment on an aspect of Zola's and Reymont's writing that she most admires:

> It must be remembered . . . that neither Zola nor Reymont mixed dark tones with the characters of his peasants for his own satanic delectation—in any wilful [sic] and irresponsible spirit. Zola, especially, as the world was all too tardy in recognizing, was, above everything else, a great humanitarian, who, in eschewing

[118] Armstrong probably refers here to the fact that several silent movies had been made using Fox's texts as the basis. Since this essay was published in 1935, it is unlikely that she refers here to the still-available movie version of *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine,* based on Fox's bestselling novel of the same title. The movie starred Silvia Sidney, Fred MacMurray, and Henry Fonda and debuted in 1936.

> the rosier hues, was actuated by the hope that *la belle France* might become more fully aware of the cankers in her own social body. And if we are similarly concerned with the health of our own social body, I see no reason why we should go on glossing over the defects of the present-day Southern mountaineers. (542-43)

This is this kind of balance to which Armstrong aspires herself. Here, she reveals her regionalist thinking, though she, of course, would not have articulated it as such. Following the example of Zola and Reymont, she wrote *This Day and Time* out of a "concern for our social body," revealing the "cankers" that she found in her examination of the interface between mountain culture and the industrialist/capitalist culture that was encroaching on it. The discursive nature of this essay matches that of her novel and marks both as regionalist; an example is the way in which, having criticized Fox, she also gives him credit:

> It is only fair, not only to the [mountaineers] themselves, but to John Fox, to Charles Egbert Craddock,[119] and other writers who first made them widely known to say that the mountaineers of fifty, thirty—yes, even of twenty years ago—were far less degraded than the mountaineers of to-day. And any understanding of their present state must take into account some of the factors that have produced this change. (543)[120]

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[119] Mary Noailles Murfree's pen name.

[120] There is some recent scholarly support for Armstrong's assertions that mountaineers were once less prone to violence. In *Appalachia: A History* (2002), John Alexander Williams explains that post-Reconstruction politics played a large part in fomenting these problems in Appalachia. He cites William Lynwood Montell's assertion that "the violence of the Civil War years trained mountain people in the use of force to settle personal and political disputes, and that these effects lasted at least two generations" and that "after 1915, the documentary record supplements oral tradition and shows an extremely high ration of

These factors include, in Armstrong's opinion, a "decline in their prosperity due to progressive deterioration in their steep little farms through soil erosion and generally unenlightened husbandry" and "the gradual destruction of forests with the resulting loss of hunting and trapping" (543). These are factors over which the mountaineer might exercise some control, which Armstrong duly notes, "but over and above any such natural forces as were working slowly for their ultimate undoing," she argues, "was a situation imposed on them from the outside that in less than two decades worked them incalculably greater harm than natural forces had done in nearly two centuries. This was Prohibition" (543). She reports that, based on her conversations with a number of mountaineers, "there have been moonshiners . . . as long as there have been Southern mountaineers. But where there was one before Prohibition, fifty grew under it" (544).[121]

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homicides to population, even compared with the rest of the South, not to mention the nation at large" (186). The mountain region had, of course, been racked by division during the war, with large numbers of southern mountaineers supporting the Union cause over the Confederate; those tensions, at least in some cases, lasted for generations. in *The Southern Highlander and his Homeland* (1921), John C. Campbell noted that homicide rates were high in the mountains even after the feuds began to subside. He uses the year 1916 as his example, pointing out that the highest numbers of murders occurred in industrialized areas, especially mining towns. He urges caution in generalizing about this, however, due to the somewhat difficult task of verifying the vital statistics compiled and the fact that there are no previous figures for comparison (114-117).

[121]As Armstrong suggests, distilling came to Appalachia with the first Scotch-Irish settlers but was originally undertaken primarily for personal use. The practice was ignored until the government levied a tax on alcohol production as early as the eighteenth century. Enforcement was difficult and spotty, especially after the 1794 Whiskey Rebellion, and for all intents and purposes there may as well not have been a tax. In *Appalachia: A History*, Williams reports that this laissez-faire policy changed during the Civil War, when, "in 1862, Congress reenacted the tax as a measure of wartime revenue" (187). Enforcement, still somewhat lax during the war years, began to be taken more seriously in 1877 under the administration of President Rutherford B. Hayes, a supporter of the temperance movement. Some incidents of violence ensued when attempts were made to collect the tax, especially during the "initial years of enforcement, which were also years of [economic] depression" (188). As Williams explains, the presence of revenuers, who sometimes hid their identities in order to discover stills, "became a standard if unwelcome feature of the social landscape of the mountain region between Reconstruction and 1919, when the enactment of the prohibition amendment greatly expanded the market for moonshine" (189-190). John C. Campbell's *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland* (1929), published about the same time as Armstrong's novel, also substantiated this. He reports that "the activity of moonshiners has varied with its profitableness" and that "in late years, state prohibitory laws have increased activity in certain quarters

In a typically regionalist move, even as she acknowledges the problems that arose in the interface between mountaineer culture and outsiders, she also acknowledges the benefits of that interface. For Ivy Ingoldsby, perhaps one of the most important benefits of that interface, gained by her association with Shirley Pemberton, was change in attitude regarding the treatment of women. Consequently, *This Day and Time* would be an interesting site for certain feminist readings, though reading Armstrong with too strict a focus on women could potentially distract one from the broader implications of her text. On the other hand, ignoring her protofeminist perspective would also weaken the complex rendering she offers of Ivy's world view and discount certain cultural realities, many of them patriarchal, that Armstrong wanted to stress in order to effect changes. In the novel, Armstrong says much about the oppression of women in the region's culture, and what she offers is often troubling. This has led, on the part of some readers, to a misunderstanding of the novel's purpose and a focus on gender that renders their readings too narrow to discern Armstrong's broader purpose. The knee-jerk reaction to such patriarchal readings might understandably be a militantly feminist reading of the novel, but, again, by focusing on only one particular theme or event or cultural characteristic or on only one gender, readers miss the "big picture" that Armstrong believed them worthy of comprehending. She hoped that they would understand the complexity of the vexed relationship between mountain culture and the greater American culture that was beginning to influence it. She wanted them to understand the ways in which certain social

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. . .[;] The high price, brought about by a limited supply, has added monetary stimulus to the natural protest [against taxes]" (109).

constructs—national and regional—trapped and damaged those individuals of both genders and cultures who accepted them blindly and did not question them.

Thus, as with *The Seas of God*, the protofeminist/anti-patriarchal elements of *This Day and Time* constitute logical considerations for a regionalist analysis. Dealing with Armstrong's anti-patriarchal agenda helps further one of the clearly stated foci of her effort: foregrounding the "often heroic struggle" of the mountain woman's life, which Armstrong felt had not been "sufficiently stressed." Attending to this purpose in no way obscures that the novel serves another broader and less gender-linked purpose: the rehabilitation of the reputation of southern mountaineers in general, countering what Armstrong viewed as "preposterous interpretations" of them by other writers.

Though her emphasis was certainly on mountaineers, Armstrong did not mean to valorize one culture completely over the other, just as she did not mean to suggest that women were somehow better than men. In fact, she wrote from a female vantage point primarily because that was her own and, more importantly, because it was that of Rosa Duncan, her housekeeper and friend in the mountain community who served as the basis for Ivy Ingoldsby's character. She did not necessarily find it more valid than a male vantage point; she simply seemed to feel that male ground had already been covered. Through Ivy, Armstrong implies that no matter one's cultural background or gender, the most desirable goal, the most important contribution one can make to one's community, is gaining a sense of responsibility to oneself and one's neighbors and an awareness of the interconnectedness of human existence.

Ivy engages in this process of self-definition so common to regionalist fiction, refusing to allow either outsiders or the members of her own community to define her

completely. She carefully weighs each option and action, firmly guarding her reputation and patiently reclaiming her little farm from neglect. From the first moments of her return home, for example, Ivy faces the advances of men who think that because she has been abandoned by her husband she is sexually available. But Ivy—unlike Lydia Lambright in *The Seas of God*—avoids having any sexual associations with men, even those who might offer her in return the means to support her son. In doing so, she goes against local custom and expectations. She is careful that "there hain't livin' man kin say I've give in to him, an' him speak the truth . . . many's the one, sence Jim left, has named hit to me—good as named hit. But one thing's certain an'shore, Jim cain't put no name o' whore on me ef he comes" (41).[122] But such patriarchal customs are not the sole creation of men, and Ivy's community is no exception. That is, suggestions that Ivy might trade sex for money and other necessities do not come just from the men in her community; her friend Martha suggests that Ivy's life would be easier if she would "get [her] a feller," to which advice Ivy reacts with her usual non-judgmental but firm refusal to follow what she considers a self-destructive norm (32). "Not wishing to rebuke Martha," the narrator reports, "Ivy . . . made no reply" (33). What almost goes without saying here is that Ivy took no lover, either. This is only one of many instances in which Ivy quietly but firmly decides against the local status quo and takes understated but effective action against it.

[122] Though Ivy often resists outside influences in her attempt to define herself, she is not immune to them. She obviously still cares what her husband thinks of her and hopes that she can keep her reputation unsullied so that he will take her back someday. She seems never to give Jim's own sexual activity (or abstinence) a thought; the implication is that she participates as fully as many of the other characters in the sexual double-standard so prevalent in her day. Ivy's feelings about Jim—a mix of self-recrimination, loneliness, desire, and anger—and her excusing his abandonment make a purely feminist reading of the novel problematic unless one weighs heavily the fact that she might someday overcome her feelings. This somewhat anti-feminist thread is one which helps support the idea that the novel is more regionalist than feminist, though there are distinct anti-patriarchal undertones that drive much of the narrative.

Ivy carefully guards her self-respect in other areas as well. When she accepts employment from a "town woman," Shirley Pemberton, Ivy does so on her own terms. Once Ivy becomes certain that she has Shirley's respect, they enter an employment arrangement that proves mutually beneficial. In a truly (but not exclusively) regionalist move, Armstrong problematizes the situation, showing over the course of the novel that Ivy does not achieve her personal agency by rejecting either mountain culture or "town" culture altogether; instead, she pulls what works from both sides of the equation and creates a better situation for herself than she previously enjoyed. The suggestion is that her example will influence her son positively, and that he will grow up to be different from other mountain men in two significant ways: he will leave moonshine alone, and he will treat women with respect.

In addition to improving her community by raising her son to be a better man, Armstrong implies that Ivy's influence extends beyond her mountain neighborhood. For what may be the first time in an Appalachian novel, a woman speaks her mind to a politician/industrialist, explaining why his paternalistic attitude toward the mountaineers needs to be adjusted. It is the complexity of Ivy's position and the multiple levels on which she wields influence and pushes for social changes that mark this text as regionalism, rooted as it is in a localized, largely subjugated, and widely misunderstood culture.

On the surface, *This Day and Time* seems a simple text: woman faces trials, prevails over hardship, and lives happily ever after at the end. But a regionalist reading unpacks the intricacies of the novel's construction and points out the purpose behind the interweaving of a number of seemingly disparate elements that many contemporary

critics found difficult to reconcile and understand. Armstrong wrote against the oversimplification of the mountaineers' situation. That many readers missed the point is understandable; they were so steeped in the modes of thinking inculcated by local color and travel writing that they were used to being presented with a much simpler agenda and a more one-dimensional message. They did not know how to process what they were encountering in her fiction because it did not fit their expectations; on the surface, it appeared to be local color, but it did not run according to the local color rules.

The book, rather than caricaturing local culture, seeks to help readers understand it and, in turn, to engage in the process of critical analysis that will effect social change. Anchoring this reading of the novel is the issue of Ivy's single motherhood and an argument against Vincent McHugh's claim that the action of the novel "hangs on the single stay of Jim's return." The crux of the novel's message is actually Ivy's relationship with her son, Enoch. Throughout the novel, Ivy makes decisions that lead to her own liberation from stereotypes and social customs. Consequently, she maintains her optimism, if not wholesale and unadulterated happiness. Through Ivy, Armstrong shows how one individual can begin to make important changes in her culture; she fights hard to raise her son with the same kind of engagement in self-definition and self-empowerment that she has managed. In order to do so, Ivy must battle negative influences emanating from both mountain and "town" cultures. She must teach Enoch to recognize what she has learned: that every human being must make individualized, deliberative decisions about how to live her/his life, basing those choices on personal experience and not on immediate self-gratification. She must also make him understand how those choices will affect the individual and her/his community in the long run. Ivy refuses to view life in

terms of the firm binary oppositions set up by others—town/mountain and male/female, for example—and the end of the novel suggests that Enoch is learning to do the same.

Hence, this reading of *This Day and Time* centers first on the two greatest challenges Ivy faces in raising Enoch: entrenched regional ideas regarding alcohol and the treatment of women. If she succeeds, Enoch will be the next agent of the kinds of positive social changes Ivy has already initiated in her own community. The first test involves keeping Enoch out of the illegal liquor trade. The second is convincing Enoch that he can, in fact, resist a number of the other traditionally male characteristics of his culture, such as the deep, sometimes misogynistic disrespect for women evident in a number of the men Ivy encounters.[123]

Thus, this close reading of the novel also includes an in-depth exploration of the novel's focus on the challenges faced by mountain women. Armstrong played an important though formerly unappreciated role in the feminist movement in Appalachian literature—a movement that began with protofeminists such as Harding Davis and Murfree and the more clearly feminist Miles, all of whose contributions have been at least briefly delineated. In addition, *This Day and Time* demonstrates how Armstrong used a female vantage point to add her own material to the foundations later built upon by the first generation of native Appalachian writers to present their own culture, including Mildred Haun[124] and James Still.[125] Still later came writers such as Wilma Dykeman,

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[123] Armstrong does, as I will later demonstrate, provide a few positive male characters in her book: however, in order to make her larger point, she must show—through providing a number of examples—what she considers a troubling cultural reality: the pervasiveness of local males' harmful attitudes toward women.

[124] Mildred Haun's *The Hawk's Done Gone and Other Stories* centers on the life of Mary Dorthula White, a mountain granny-woman. The story cycle offers great insight into the lives of mountain women and is heavily based on Haun's own childhood in the mountains of Cocke County, Tennessee. As a teenager,

Harriette Arnow, and Lee Smith, to list a few of the better-known, all of whom produced works with strong mountain woman protagonists and all of whom have also produced fiction that can be read as regionalism.

The relationship between feminism and regionalism is, of course, logical and proper. As I have noted elsewhere in this dissertation, regionalism profited from a feminist interrogation of the American literary canon that was driven by the impulse to render the canon more inclusive. The aim of regionalism remains an interrogation of perceived "American" culture[126] and it has in common with feminism a desire to problematize and question the status quo, decentering and dissenting in order to effect change. Consequently, the two are not mutually exclusive and often work together in one piece of literature or another, as they do in *This Day and Time.*

Though Ivy's individual quest for personal agency and self-definition remains her central focus in *This Day and Time,* Armstrong weaves the economic and moral issues surrounding liquor through the text; it becomes a vehicle through which Armstrong's anti-patriarchal regionalist agenda is revealed to the reader. In fact, the first major

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Haun left the mountains to live with an aunt and uncle so that she could attend an urban high school, and she later attended Vanderbilt University where she earned both her undergraduate and her Master's degree. She was one of the first generation of native Appalachians to earn the education that would allow her to speak for herself in terms of what I would identify as regionalist fiction—a fiction that both honors and critiques her own culture as it seeks to explain it for outsiders.

[125]James Still, a Kentuckian contemporary of Mildred Haun who also had access to the kind of education that allowed him to write and publish, offers in his only novel *River of Earth* (1941) a story told from the point of view of a young boy whose parents disagree regarding the best mode of providing a living for the family. The fictional Baldridge family, much like Still's own, lived during the era of Appalachian industrialization, when the pull between agriculture and industry was most acute. The mother, in concert with the usual association between nature and the feminine, sees farming as the most certain means of making sure that her children have enough to eat. The father, on the other hand, believes that employment in the coal mines will provide a better living. Still's novel shows a firm preference for the mother's mode of thinking and is easy to read as both a feminist and a regionalist text.

[126] Here, I am referring to the definition of "American" generally held by the dominant culture of Armstrong's era—the very definition questioned by critics like Fetterley, Pryse, and Davey as being too narrow in scope.

problem Ivy faces with Enoch upon their return to the mountains is the prevalence of drinking. In "The Southern Mountaineers," Armstrong foregrounds this as one of the most important problems existing in the interface between mountain and hegemonic cultures. "Killings," she reports, "seldom any longer are the outcome of ancient feuds" (545).[127] She explains that:

> Friends, brutalized by drink, shoot friends to death. Nor have the mountain men alone been affected. Little boys, whose highest ambition is to reach the day when they can help 'pappy' with the mash or keep a lookout for the "Law," fight each other savagely with knives till they fall in the road in a drunken stupor. Fathers batter sons, sons, fathers, often within an inch of their lives, in the bloody Sunday afternoon brawls that have become a regular feature of mountaineer life. Mothers may even be found who are willing to sell away from their families the last jar of canned vegetables or fruit in order to satisfy their own thirst. (545)[128]

In *This Day and Time,* she includes a number of elements that mirror this explanation. For example, late in the novel, the community learns of the "killings" of Neff Withers and Dexter Pickle. According to Doke Odom, "Crum Taylor, he were possum-huntin' last night, an' he were comin' home—hit were right atter sun-up—an' he seen two men a-layin' side an' side, clost to the road. He 'lowed they was jest drunk an' he weren't a-

[127] Armstrong seems to have fallen victim herself to the stereotyped idea that mountain people were somehow naturally prone to feuding. In *Appalachia: A History*, Williams suggests that the feuds were attributable not to an inherent personality trait of the mountaineers but to the tensions wrought among the mountain population by post-Reconstruction politics and friction between political parties and between those who lived in towns as opposed to rural areas (191).

[128] Though the increase in moonshine production that Armstrong notes is documented by historians, I have been unable to verify that rates of alcoholism rose in Appalachia after the institution of Prohibition as Armstrong claims here. Much of this must have been based on her observations of local people and is, as far as I can tell, anecdotal evidence.

aimin to bother ‘em, but then he seen some blood, an’ he seen it were Neff an’ Dexter” (205).

When Ivy asks Doke if there are any suspects, he names Bud Bullock and Wallace Birthright. Ivy protests in surprise that the four men have always been friends. Doke’s reply supports Armstrong’s assertion in “The Southern Mountaineers”: “God,” he says, “there hain’t no good friends atter men’s been a-layin’ up drunk together fer two or three days!—But looks like Bud and Wallace . . . was plenty sober to beat hit! I reckon they’re yon side the mountain by this time” (206). The suggestion is that Bud and Wallace will face few consequences, if any, for the crime. Aside from the critique of patriarchy, no other social issue receives more attention in *This Day and Time* than what Armstrong presents as the rampant problem of alcohol production and consumption.

One of the first mentions of bootlegging appears early in the novel, when Doke Odom—whose presence usually spells trouble for Ivy in one way or another—arrives, ostensibly to welcome Ivy back to the mountain. Ever ready to gossip and always aware of the latest news on the moonshining trade, he asks her if she’s heard about One-arm Press Philips, who is in the penitentiary. He reports that the revenuers “pinned it on him proper! Found old Press at the still, an’ reckon he ‘ull have to serve his term. Hain’t nobody this time to pay his fine . . . Bruce and Dave, they was there with their pap. But doggone, them boys gave the constable the slip. The boys, they beat hit to town and joined the army” (39). Ivy, of course, is dismayed to hear this news.

From the beginning, Armstrong uses the novel not only to offer what she considers an accurate picture of the moonshine trade but also to delineate the ways in which it adds to the problems of the overburdened mountain women in the novel. The

narrator reports that Ivy, upon hearing about One-arm Press, "stood in the doorway, her eyes resting idly on the river below, a long winding line of black between its snowy edges. She was thinking of Mrs. Philips, another wife left to make a living" (39). Ivy says aloud to Doke, "Hit's hard on Mis' Philips . . . A one-arm man were better 'an no man. An' now she hain't got nary man-person on the place, on'y Adam and Simon Peter, an' they don't count, no more'an Enoch. They hain't hardly took to the hoe yit" (545). Doke's rejoinder to her is not to "stay up of a night a-studyin' about Mis' Philips. That old woman 'ull make hit. She's bootleggin'. She's a-packin' a gallon or two to town ever' week of the world. She totes hit in the basket with her butter and eggs" (545). Here, as Armstrong notes happens in her essay, a woman has taken up the liquor trade, feeling forced to do so in the interest of providing for her family in the absence of a "man-person." Armstrong then counters and critiques this practice by illustrating through Ivy that while such a choice may seem most expedient, it is not necessarily the most certain route to self-sufficiency and independence.

A few scenes later, Mrs. Philips, recognizing Ivy's dire financial straits, offers her the opportunity to make a little money by "[packing] a basket to town fer [her], oncet or twicet a week . . . I 'ull pay ye well" (81). Ivy refuses but fears that Mrs. Philips will be offended by the rejection of her generous, if misguided, offer. She says, "Don't think hard on me, Mis' Philips" (82). Fortunately, the older woman takes no offense and kindly answers that "You don't have to tote the stuff, Ivy, without ye've a mind to. There ain't nobody a-going to make ye" (82). The brief exchange shows Ivy's own commitment to avoiding the liquor trade and also demonstrates the strength of the warm and non-judgmental relationship between the two women. At the end of Ivy's visit, Mrs. Philips—

bearing no grudge and having noticed that the newly-returned Ivy looks "pore as a weasel"—insists on giving Ivy and Enoch dinner before they leave (81). In regionalist form, even as she critiques one aspect of mountain culture, Armstrong praises another, and this exchange reinforces the major and more positive theme of female cooperation and community among mountaineers.

The issue of alcohol continues to pervade the novel and turns out to be one of the most insidious problems Armstrong has Ivy face in raising her son. Not long after her visit with Mrs. Philips, Ivy returns home from work one afternoon to find her nine-year-old son drunk. This is a pivotal scene, as part of Ivy's great success in the end includes having kept Enoch from falling into the habits and vices that plague other mountain males. This episode illustrates the enormity of the challenge Ivy faces; it reinforces the idea held by both men and women that moonshining and bootlegging are *de rigueur* and even an economic necessity.

Knowing that she needs to discover the source of the alcohol in order to stem its flow, she approaches her son carefully: "Where did ye get yer dram, Enoch? . . . I'ud like to git me one myself" (120). Enoch admits that Leola Odom, Doke's wife, "poured out liquor in a tumbler and gave it to [her sons] Guy and Noah, bribing them thus to hoe the cabbages for her or to pick the bean-beetles off the bean-vines. It was not the first time [Leola] had offered Enoch a drink of the raw, powerful mountain liquor" (121).

Armstrong earlier used Mrs. Philips, one of the more respectable female characters in the novel, to show how unthinkingly mountain women contributed to the moonshine trade that damaged them both culturally and economically. Here, she accentuates the pervasiveness of the problem by offering the example of Leola, one of the

less respectable and responsible women in the community. The challenge she faces is great, and Ivy knows it; when she quizzes Enoch further about Leola's "sugar liquor," he admits that he "jest naturally likes the taste o' liquor . . . as good as a cat loves cream" (121). Not only does his drinking make him feel part of the community of men that surrounds him, but he also likes the taste and feel of it, adding to the danger that he will succumb to the habit in the manner of most of his neighbors.

Ivy then goes to Leola and "[delivers] her mind" (121). She informs her in no uncertain terms that she is not to give Enoch any more liquor. Hoping that she has solved the problem without being too harsh on her neighbor, Ivy arrives home from work just a few days later to find Enoch drunk again. This time, her son is even more seriously inebriated than before, lying unconscious and prone in "a pool of filth" (122). Rather than losing her composure, Ivy thinks deeply about how to handle this challenge and comes up with a solution that is as grim as it is effective.

Obviously, her previous measures had failed. This time, the narrator reports there is "no anger in her" (123). Instead, as Ivy sits by her insensible son, she has a vision and sees his dark future, certain to condemn him to unhappiness if she cannot effect a change in his course. She sees him grown, "skulking around the edge of a wood at dusk, his clothes soaked with winter rain, his face haggard with fear, wan with hunger. The law was hunting him. It was Enoch, her son, her baby, what the years had made of him, her poor little Enoch" (123). As she ponders her situation, she believes that, if she only thinks hard enough about it, "there must be a way to turn a boy from such evil, a way to make Enoch the man she had dreamed of" (125).

The narrator goes on to recount how "Ivy thought of all the men she knew, up and down the river, up the creeks, in and out the hollows. How few there were who had not been mixed up with liquor, who had not been in jail! Where was the man she could lay before Enoch as an example?" (126). Because she cannot muster up a single appropriate male example,[129] Ivy must innovate. Success—hers as a mother and Enoch's as an adult—depends on her coming up with a proper punishment.

Initially, Ivy's newest approach to keeping Enoch out of trouble seems too lenient. When he groggily awakens, she addresses him kindly:

> "I hain't a-goin' to rare on ye, honey," she said now. "Seems like my heart 'ull bust—I'm a-sufferin' death, fer I don't want ye to be no low-down drunken sot. But I've been a-studyin' about it the endurin' night, an' you needn't to be afeared. I hain't a-goin to frail ye—looks like hit don't do no good. Honey," she said, after a pause, gazing into the pallid face against the pillow, "you've always wanted a pet . . . seems like I never afore could git enough victuals for me 'an you 'an a pet both. But ef I was to let you have a little dog . . . ef I let ye have hit, for yourn, you've got to swear on the Good Book never agin to touch a drap o' liquor" (127).

Enoch accepts this sentence without protest. He swears just as she asks, but by way of insurance, the canny Ivy adds the masterful but grisly element that ensures her victory: "Enoch," she admonishes him, "don't make no mistake . . . Ef you ever breaks your word, so help me Lord God, I 'ull tie a rock round the little dog's neck and drap it in the

[129]On several occasions, Ivy remembers with pride that her estranged husband had never been mixed up in the liquor trade. Certainly, she understands that using him—the father who abandoned Enoch before he was born—would be inappropriate in this case. Luke Diggs also occurs to her, but she abandons that choice as well for reasons I will explain later in this chapter.

river, afore your eyes" (127).[130] This horrific threat, sadistic as it seems, serves the purpose; there is no further mention in the novel of Enoch's drinking or hanging about the stills while the men are making moonshine.

Armstrong holds mountaineers—male and female—mainly responsible for engaging in the illegal liquor trade in both *This Day and Time* and "The Southern Mountaineers." However, Armstrong does not consider mountaineers entirely to blame. In her article she notes that in recent decades "there has been a steady increase of drunkenness among the mountaineers," as evidenced by her conversation with one "exceptionally sober and reliable mountain man" who lamented, "I've got to move somewhars else. The mountains ain't no place fer a man to bring up his family sence them lewd town folks has got to comin' here" (546). Armstrong notes this:

> The growth of drunkenness among the mountaineers cannot be laid exclusively, however, to their efforts to pour into 'dry' towns all the liquor called for. In some degree it is due to the influence of visitors from the towns, who, penetrating even further into the mountains, and then 'going native,' as they like to call it, have furnished examples of depravity from which, ironically, the mountaineers themselves often recoil. (546-47)

This assertion is matched in *This Day and Time* with Doke Odom's telling Ivy that "I've fotched many a gallon o' liquor . . . to them summer people, to them big rich folks from

[130] Ivy makes a move here that is strangely similar to one Lydia Lambright makes in *The Seas of God*. When Lydia confronts Ransom Churchwell about whether he knew she was pregnant when he abandoned her, he claims not to have known. Doubting his answer, she asks him first to swear on the Bible, then realizes that he might be willing to lie anyway because, for him, the text is not sacred. She then asks him to swear on her father's name, which prompts him to answer truthfully and reveal the depth of his transgression. These two incidents underscore Armstrong's own ambivalence about Christianity in an interesting manner.

town. There's cottages I've went to, of a night, an' found 'em a-dancin' to a victroly, an not a stitch o' clothin' on their naked bodies, bathin' suits or nothin', on'y their nastiness—men and women both" (111). Such criticism of the "town folk" would be damning coming from any mountaineer's lips, but coming from Doke, one of the laziest, most reprehensible and lecherous men in Ivy's community, it carries particular weight despite his own hypocrisy in judging others more harshly than he does himself.

Armstrong illustrates the viciously cyclical nature of the alcohol trade yet again when, in the later chapters of *This Day and Time*, she includes an encounter between Ivy and One-arm Press, who has been newly released from jail. She sees him coming down the road past her cabin with a large bag of sugar on his back and hails him to say hello. The two-page exchange reveals many of the elements that conspire to keep the liquor trade in place in spite of the legal measures against it. This exchange points out the corruption inherent in the legal system—often carried out by locals who are appointed officers but administered by outsiders who control the laws—that allows the trade to continue. This is yet another problematic interface between regional and hegemonic cultures.

Observing that Press "didn't have to stay [in jail] no big time," Ivy invites him to sit down a minute and talk. He tells Ivy that "The jedge . . . give me as light a sentence as he could, I reckon—. . . I reckon Jedge Blount is well pleased—I reckon he's well satisfied for me to be out agin. He hain't had a drap o' decent liquor, he says, sence he sent me up" (172). He goes on to elaborate on the state of the trade in general:

> I tell you what's a fact—hit's a crime the liquor some o' these fellers is willin' to put on a fine gentleman like Jedge Blount, an' sech as him. Useter be there wasn't

> nothin' *but* good liquor—good corn liquor—come out o' these here mountains. Why, when I first started, way back yonder, there wasn't on'y two or three of us fellers owned stills . . . but with so many of them [now] a-messin' around with liquor—sugar liquor—this day and time, the most of hit 'ud make a dog puke. Nothin' on earth but nasty slop. (173).

This passage shows that Press, in spite of his criminal record, is a man of some honor; he makes a decent product in the old, time-honored manner and takes pride in the quality of his whiskey. He disparages the sugar liquor made by those who aim to make a quick dollar, like Doke Odom, whose wife gave the lower-quality "stuff" to Enoch. Obviously, Press looks down on such practices. Armstrong renders his character fairly complex; he is a criminal, yet he is also a kind man. Unlike some of the other men who visit Ivy, Press makes no sexual advances on her. Instead, he offers Ivy a little of his sugar because he is aware that she cannot afford to buy any. This sets him even more firmly apart from Doke, who often includes sexual innuendoes in his conversations with Ivy and borrows things from her without returning the favor when she asks.

However, though she recognizes the better parts of his nature, Ivy still does not accept Press's self-justification when he claims that "a man has obliged to do somethin' or ruther, besides tryin' to raise him a little stuff, without he wants to starve to death, him and his family both" (174). Though she agrees with him outwardly with her "Law, yes," the narrator describes how Ivy inwardly resists: "She could name a few men, two or three at any rate, who had made a living off of their little patches of land—if not a very good one, at least as good as those who fooled with liquor were making, what with the fines

they had to pay and one thing and another. She had not done so badly herself—she had made it, somehow or other, year after year. No need, however, to speak of this" (174).

Ivy keeps her counsel partly out of a desire not to offend a man whom, even if she disagrees with him, she respects nonetheless for his sense of honor and generosity. She does so also partly because she realizes the ineffectual nature of direct confrontation on such a deeply ingrained idea. As is typical of Ivy, she holds herself and Enoch to a higher standard, even as she reserves judgment on those who, like Press Philips and his wife, have made other choices. In addition, as a woman in a patriarchal society—one in which men view women as chattel to be claimed and traded and in which women do little to question the status quo—Ivy understands the folly of directly contradicting even so kindly a man as Press.

As she did when her friend Martha suggested that she take a lover in order to support herself, Ivy keeps her own counsel but acts firmly against a component of the status quo that she recognizes as destructive and debilitating. Having left the community to try life in town, Ivy returns a different woman; she becomes less willing to follow local custom as it pertains to male/female relationships. Because she has been abandoned by her husband, the other men in the community see her as unclaimed sexual property, and Ivy must exercise great diplomacy in rebuffing their advances without causing herself too much trouble. Ivy clings to the idea that Jim will come home to her and Enoch perhaps because of loneliness, but this may also be an unconscious effort on her part to keep herself from becoming entangled in another destructive relationship and losing her newfound autonomy.

The patriarchal nature of Ivy's society is clearly delineated from the very first pages of the novel, and Armstrong makes the prevalent lack of respect for women clear in the portrait she paints of mountain culture. It is against the example set by many—but not all—of the male characters that Ivy finds herself working to raise Enoch. Even in the first pages of the novel, she begins to faces these challenges; when she arrives at her cabin having hitched a ride with the local storekeeper, Andy Weaver, she asks him "how much do I owe ye, Mr. Weaver?" (8). She hopes that, at the least, he won't charge much, and, at best, he might give her the ride for free. His unexpected and disrespectful answer horrifies her: "Not a God-blessed cent, Ivy, if you won't be so everlasting prickly . . . If you won't deny me" (8-9). Her response is firm, quick, and direct: "I'll give ye to understand I don't kiss men"; and as he approaches her expectantly, she says, "I thank ye, Mr. Weaver, I don't kiss men" (9). "Lord 'a mercy," Weaver returns, "Who said anything about kissin'?" (9). When she refuses him again, he charges her three dollars just for spite, though as Enoch points out to her, "He don't need that money nary mite" (9). Though she is firm, Armstrong avoids making Ivy too self-righteous in her refusal, and it is the balance and equanimity with which she counters each incident that makes her such a likable character and renders her a good example for her son. This equanimity also functions to make Ivy more effective in carrying out her agenda than she would be if she were more confrontational—people tend to listen to her because she shows them respect.[131] However, Armstrong also makes clear that Ivy's inner struggles are mighty; even as she deflects advances of admiring men throughout the narrative, she grapples

[131] This theme of calm consideration followed by a polite but firm refusal to conform recurs often in of Armstrong's writing and constitutes one of the central tenets of her agenda for social change.

inwardly with her desire and loneliness for Jim, on whom she has not given up even after his mistreatment of her. This inner struggle against her loneliness for Jim is another of the points at which it becomes a bit difficult to reconcile Armstrong's protofeminist/feminist agenda with the regionalist and is one of the reasons why the novel may be best understood as a regionalist work with feminist undertones.

In previous regionalist novels, authors used the voice of a sympathetic intermediary, sometimes a narrator, sometimes an outsider, in carrying out their regionalist agenda. In *This Day and Time*, Armstrong offers everything from Ivy's point of view, and little is filtered. The text so clearly illustrates the darker aspects of patriarchy that some readers might be tempted to dismiss or condemn it as anti-male. In fact, a letter addressed to Dr. Jack Higgs[132] from a former student just after his republication of the novel illustrates such a reaction:

> I have wanted to pass this comment on to you for some time + keep forgetting it—Mr. Burton[133] jogged my memory this week—I asked my father to read This Day and Time for his reaction (he has been a minister in Sullivan County for 50 years now + has gone into some very isolated areas in the county) anyhow—he read its [sic] and turned its [sic] back with this comment. "It is true to life as far as it goes—but she misses something. There isn't a good man in it—and that is not true of these mountains!" It really made him angry—then I got a long sermon about the men who took pride in there [sic] wives and children, who kept good

[132] Dr. Higgs edited the 1970 edition of *This Day and Time* published by the Research Advisory Council at East Tennessee State University. He has maintained a longtime interest in Armstrong's work and in Appalachian Studies in general.
[133] Actually Dr. Tom Burton, a colleague of Dr. Higgs at East Tennessee State and a well-known regional folklorist, now retired.

farms and took pride in "plowing a straight furrow." It gave me pause for thought—and I thought you might appreciate it also—[signed] Jane Bobic. (1)

The minister's reaction to the novel supports the comments about its local reception provided by McClellan in his prefatory material. Worse, it even suggests an implicit acceptance of some of the more misogynistic aspects of mountain life. He says, by his daughter's report, that the novel "is true to life as far as it goes," then offers a bit of a sermon on how unfairly Armstrong portrays men. The troubling aspect of this comment is that the murder, drunkenness, rape, and incest in the novel escape his comment, suggesting that these may simply be a matter of fact with him. He dismisses these parts of the novel, evidently, as "true to life" and leaves them at that. Startlingly, these crimes seem to be of less import for him than Armstrong's "crime" of judging men who behave badly toward women.

One would expect a minister to be more bothered by the sordid and violent elements of the story than by the negative portrayal of men. These are precisely the parts of the story that Armstrong's readers would have found shocking in 1930 and that she intended to use in jolting readers out of their complacency. She wanted to attack and dismantle the prevailing attitude that the darker aspects of mountain culture were simply inevitable and unchangeable. Once acknowledged, she believed, these issues had a better chance of being addressed. But the preacher focuses instead on gender issues. Read a certain way, his reaction shows that at least in some cases, a knee-jerk defense of the system took precedence over change. He correctly states that this novel does not show

mountain men in the best light; however, he is incorrect in claiming that there "isn't a good man in it."[134]

Decidedly anti-patriarchal as it may be, *This Day and Time* is not, in fact, anti-male. Armstrong includes a number of kindly and generous men, including One-arm Press, the bootlegger. Another example is Ivy's father-in-law, Uncle Jake. Though he was both "irascible" and "bitter-tongued" at times, his intrinsic decency shows on his deathbed. Uncle Jake admits about his own son that "He done ye wrong, Ivy. God knows Jim done ye wrong, but me and his mammy—what time she lived—has tried to make hit up to ye, what little we could" (27). He forbids Ivy to send for the doctor, declaring that "the doctor 'ud take your turkeys fer pay. Ef he come agin, he 'ud take your cow. Hain't no need. My time's come. They 'ud rob you of your last dust o' meal fer all the mercy them fellers has got" (27). He also tells her not to buy a casket, noting that "Doke Odom, he'll make ye a box. Jest wrop me in my windin' sheet" (27). His final words, seemingly directed at himself but possibly also at his son, are "Justice overtaketh every man" (27).

Additionally, throughout the novel, Ivy consistently depends on the good nature and helpfulness of Luke Diggs. Just after Ivy returns to the mountain, Luke calls on her in the middle of the night to let her know that a neighbor, Mrs. Dillard, has passed away and that the family needs her help (42). Like Press, Luke makes no sexually suggestive remarks to Ivy; he simply bears the current message, tells her that "Everybody shore is proud, Ivy, to hear you're back," and then leaves to carry on the task of informing the neighbors of Mrs. Dillard's death (43). Later, as Ivy and the other women cleanse the

[134] Bobic's father would have been of the "respectable" class of mountain men that didn't often appear in Appalachian literature, which tended to focus more on extremes—especially bad ones. This fact makes his reaction a bit more explicable though still troubling.

corpse and sit up with it according to local custom, Luke appears to make sure they have plenty of wood for the fire. A storm rages outside, but Luke braves it to help Ivy and the other mourners, mostly females. "Hit's a right smart storm," he observes; "Hit's a turnin' cold, too, an' Ivy, I see you're in need of wood" (56). As he leaves, it occurs to Ivy that "Luke is the on'y man-person I ever knowed where'd stir hisself to help women-folks" (56). Several chapters later, Luke appears unbidden to donate several squirrels to the birthday meal Ivy plans to prepare for her friend Old Mag. On another occasion, he shows up with a string of fish. Unlike other men, he never asks for anything inappropriate in return, though the implication is that he is attracted to Ivy.[135]

Though Luke has Ivy's respect, she realizes that others view him as odd. Her own private approbation of him is due to the fact that, like her, he refuses to play traditional gender roles. But she recognizes him as a social anomaly. When she finds Enoch drunk the second time, she momentarily considers holding Luke up as a role model but realizes that, in spite of the fact that she would like Enoch to follow Luke's example, her son is not mature enough to see the wisdom in doing so. In fact, part of the reason for his drinking is so that he will fit in with his friends, all of whom are following in their fathers' footsteps. She remembers others' comments about Luke—"Looks like Luke, he ain't hardly a man—he don't never raise no hell" and "Luke's quair. Luke Diggs, he hain't all there"—and comes up with another way of addressing the problem with her pre-adolescent son (126). This does not mean that Ivy has given up on having Enoch emulate Luke rather than other men in the community; her decision in the moment is

[135] In 1951, Armstrong's stage adaptation of the novel, *Some Sweet Day*, debuted at the Barter Theatre in Abingdon, Virginia. In that adaptation, Armstrong made some significant choices, one of which was to expand Luke's role and make him a clear love interest for Ivy. The play ends with the suggestion that she has finally given up on Jim and will turn her attention to the more appropriate and dependable Luke.

pragmatic and exemplifies her understanding of the complexities of the situation. Praising Luke's example, she decides, must wait for a more opportune time when Enoch will be more receptive. By once again showing Ivy's inner struggles against the conventions and beliefs of her community, Armstrong once again foregrounds her own beliefs about how local custom needs to change.

In the last section of the novel, Ivy is called to return to the Dillard cabin to care for Bertha Jane, a young neighbor dying of tuberculosis. She arrives to discover that the ailing girl is actually also in labor. Ivy needs help delivering the baby, but she must find someone who will provide assistance without revealing Bertha Jane's condition. When Uncle Abel, Bertha Jane's father, refuses to go for help, Ivy decides to call Luke Diggs because he "[lives] hardly more than a mile away [and] Luke could be trusted" (251).

Her friendship with Luke notwithstanding, Ivy must navigate carefully her relations with most of the males around her. She understands, for example, the magnitude of having gone against Uncle Abel's wishes in sending for the midwife. Armstrong writes: "She was badly frightened at taking into her own hands affairs that might be properly considered Uncle Abel's. She could feel the blood beating in her arteries, pounding in her ears. Yet she kept on" (251). Ivy understands that she is stepping well outside of the bounds of female behavior for her community in which women are treated as the property of the family males. Characteristically, however, she acts on her instinct and runs for help. Luke, of course, honors Ivy's request and sends Mrs. Philips, the community midwife.

The sexual vulnerability of women in mountain culture is explored yet again in this chapter. It is a facet of mountain life that Armstrong acknowledged in "The Southern

Mountaineers," reporting that "any real probing of mountain life will uncover by no means rare instances of infanticide" (546). She also reports that "even incest, if it finds no apologists, arouses nothing like the horror one might expect, and in no way is the moral disintegration of a people more plainly marked than in their changed attitude toward this particular offense" (547). Armstrong attributes this partly to the nature of mountaineer life, noting that "no adult should find it difficult to grasp why such things happen where more than a dozen human beings frequently inhabit one room and a loft," but she makes certain to point out, on the other hand, that their attitude toward this practice has worsened since their contact with outsiders, rendering them more likely (as was Mrs. Bobic's father) if not to approve of them, to grudgingly accept incest and infanticide as facts of mountain life (547).

Armstrong's observations about incest inspire an important episode in the novel; under these circumstances, Luke's goodness becomes even more evident in contrast to the shocking discovery that Uncle Abel has "bigged" his own daughter. Unlike the mountaineers to whom Armstrong refers in her essay, Ivy reacts with unbounded horror when she finally understands what has happened. After Bertha Jane's baby dies, Ivy, Mrs. Philips, and Uncle Abel bury it secretly. Ivy, curious about how Bertha Jane, who had little contact with the outside world, could have become pregnant, asks Mrs. Philips her "idee" regarding the identity of the father. Armstrong carefully crafts Mrs. Philips's reply:

> The older woman returned her direct gaze, standing in silence for a moment, her eyes narrowed. Then a slight disdainful smile gathered around her lips . . . "hain't ye guessed, Ivy? Hain't ye guessed who were hits daddy?" Ivy stared. A

> glimmering of truth, faint and far off as yet, had begun to dawn on her. 'Why no! Why, no!' she gasped. The older woman dropped her eyes. 'There's more things happens in this world 'an some folks knows on," she muttered. (256)

As a midwife, Mrs. Philips must have been privy to this kind of situation before. She reacts in the manner described by Armstrong in "The Southern Mountaineers." Ivy, on the other hand, is surprised and shocked.

Paradigm shifts—both individual and cultural—take time. Over the course of the novel, Ivy begins to reconsider certain local social norms. In the process, she discovers her own complicity in maintaining the patriarchal status quo. Early in the novel, as she is reminiscing about her childhood, Ivy remembers that "her childhood, when she thought of it, did not seem to her to have been an unhappy one. Her father, if high-tempered, had not been brutal, or only occasionally, when he was drunk and might beat her mother or kick one of the boys" (21). At this early point in the novel, Ivy accepts her father's behavior as the norm and does not question it, much less protest his violence. Further, when she considers Jim's abandonment, she tends to blame herself for his departure. She remembers an exchange in which Jim admonishes her not to "talk so loud, Ivy, for Gawd's sake," and wonders, "why did Jim do me that-a-way, never to show his face agin? . . . were hit because Jim couldn't stand fer his woman to have rough ways?" (25). Agin, though she has made the unusual decision of refusing to take a lover who might help support her, Ivy still clings to a number of the patriarchal tenets traditional to her culture.

One sign that Ivy has begun to reconsider and redefine gender roles comes when she returns home from work to find that Enoch has not completed his chores, which

include washing the breakfast dishes. She confronts him, asking, "What do you mean . . . a-leavin' them dishes I told ye to wash?" (115). He responds insolently that he "ain't a-goin' to wash no dishes fer no one" because "it ain't a man's work"(115). She punishes him, against his protests that she "ort not to ask [him] to do sech as that . . . [;] the boys 'ud make fun o'me. Washin' dishes is woman's work" (115). Furious, she switches him too hard, rebuking him with strong words: "Me a-doin' man's work year after year, sence the day you was borned, an' you a-tellin' me you won't do no woman's work? Hain't ye shamed?—Now quit off your bawlin'! Go hack me some cookwood. You're plenty big to be right smart o' help, and hit hain't fer no little brats like Adam and Simon Peter and Woodrow Wilson to be a-tellin' ye what ye kin do an' what ye cain't" (116).

Armstrong makes Shirley Pemberton, one of the "summer people" and Ivy's employer, a key player in bringing about Ivy's epiphany on this point. This is one of the ways in which Armstrong critiques mountain culture and suggests that "town ways" are not always to be avoided. As they work in the kitchen together one day, Ivy tells Shirley about another woman on the mountain whose husband has left her alone to provide for their children. Shirley observes, probably thinking specifically of Ivy, that "there are a great many women here in the mountains whose husbands have deserted them" (117). Ivy acknowledges the truth of this, and Shirley further comments that "These men in the mountains don't respect women" (117). Faced squarely with this assertion from another's perspective, Ivy considers it, and the process of change begins.

Shirley continues, disparaging the common local practice of wife-beating, and Ivy responds matter-of-factly that "the most of 'em . . . don't hit their wives with nothin' on'y their fists" (118). Shirley's ensuing remarks about how terrible she considers this practice

is followed by her pointed statement that she "[hopes] Ivy will bring Enoch up to have different ideas about women" (118). This makes quite an impression. Ivy, taken aback by the idea of change, thinks, "After all, men were men. Some of them might treat their women badly, but men's ways in general were hardly more to be questioned than the ways of God. Nevertheless, Shirley's words had set her thinking" (118). Her previous problem with Enoch and Shirley's comments conspire to "set Ivy to thinkin'" in much the same way Armstrong hoped to affect her readers. Ultimately, Ivy decides that indeed "mountain women had borne too much" (118). Shirley's words hit the mark and begin the process of change, as Ivy realizes that "She felt all at sea . . . but Shirley had good learning. Shirley lived in town and had traveled to far-off places. Shirley had had a better chance than she to know the truth of such things" (118). Though she has rejected "town" notions in the past, Ivy recognizes the validity of this one and resolves that "[she] 'ull have to learn Enoch to be different . . . to think somethin' o women, more 'an jest to big 'em, an' fer the work they kin do" (118).

Within a day of this conversation, Ivy faces yet another conflict with Enoch. This time, she goes home to find that he has been using tobacco. She beats him for it, but in doing so she realizes that "it meant more and more of a struggle to conquer him" in this way (119). Ivy "[whips] him until she [is] worn out before he [will utter] a cry of either pain or repentance" (119). Insightfully, Ivy realizes that in beating Enoch, she is simply continuing the vicious cycle of violence and domination that she has decided to change. If she persists, she realizes, Enoch is likely to become "stoical, stubborn, ready to take what came, but have his will he would—a true mountain man" (119). These skirmishes lead up to the supreme battle Ivy faces with Enoch over alcohol.

Though the process of bringing Enoch up to be different from his male counterparts takes a long time and does not go easily for her, Ivy makes progress. Enoch grudgingly does as Ivy bids, though "often he did [the chores] carelessly, but he never refused outright to do the 'woman's work' which—as Ivy realized, with secret pangs of sympathy for the little fellow—shamed him before his playmates" (118). By the end of the book, Ivy seems to have effected real change in Enoch's view of women. His initial grudging acquiescence becomes an admiration for his mother and an adherence to her way of thinking.

Though a few critics disliked the way in which Armstrong ended the book, citing Ivy's optimism as unrealistic and denigrating what Loveman called her "Pollyanna mood," part of the point Armstrong wants to make is that Enoch has, like Ivy, begun to participate in the practice of self-definition, refusing to fit local male stereotypes and choosing his own path. About Jim, who leaves after hearing Doke Odom's lie that Ivy has been sexually active in his absence, Enoch says, "Mammy, I wouldn't grieve so—I reckon me an' you is better off without him. He ain't no count, or he wouldn't'a let no man blackguard ye that-a-way, like Doke done" (268). She protests that she has let him down by fighting with Doke Odom, but his reply demonstrates the new level of respect that he has for her. He praises her, saying, "Ef all the women in these here mountains, Mammy, was as good as you are . . . there wouldn't be no need to build no church-house, an' fer no preacher" (269).

It is at this point, when Ivy learns that Jim has left for good, that she also learns how fully her son has accepted her way of thinking. And it is at this point that another good man appears to end the novel, a distant neighbor who—for no other reason than

kindness—brings a load of wood because he has heard she might need it. Armstrong seems to be driving home her point that there are indeed good men in the world and that Enoch has chosen to be one of them. Finally, read a certain way, the ending actually proves that Ivy may unconsciously have even freed herself of her perceived need for Jim; when she fights with Doke in the dust of the road, she seems angrier about the slur on her reputation than she did about his running Jim off. Her words are a strong indicator: "Cain't no man livin' pin whore on me!" (265). This phrase, which appeared earlier in the book, is in this case less directly associated with Jim's opinion of her and is more indicative of her pride in herself, so it takes on new meaning in light of Ivy's new sense of personal identity and empowerment.

Having examined regional culture and acknowledged its flaws, Armstrong balances her critique by including a number of what she sees as the virtues of mountain community life. In "Southern Mountaineers," she asserts that "with all its demoralization, this folk retains riches which the outside world has lost" (549). She also writes about the "tourists who speak scoffingly of mountaineers they [have] seen, as they flashed by [in their cars], sitting on their cabin porches 'doing nothing' . . . [;] it hardly occurs, apparently, to these restless, questing critics that here is preserved a blessing which too few of them enjoy themselves" (550). Certainly, Ivy spends a great deal of time visiting back and forth with her neighbors—especially other women—and in doing so, she promotes another of her culture's virtues, what she refers to as its "communal character" (551). The two episodes in which Ivy assists at the Dillard funerals are part of this communal character, but there are a number of other cases as well.

There are dark sides to life in mountain communities, which Armstrong carefully includes in the interest of accuracy and balance. When Ivy must confront a neighbor—Leola Odom, for example, when she gives Enoch sugar liquor, or Doke Odom when his cow tramples her corn—she must be very careful in how she approaches them. Armstrong makes it clear how important good relations with neighbors are in mountain communities, both in the novel and in "The Southern Mountaineers." When Ivy confronts Doke angrily about his cow, Doke further provokes Ivy by sidestepping the issue of his cow and making remarks like "Ivy, you must be wantin' a man" and insulting her for "niggerin'" for town folks (110-11). As he intends, Ivy loses her equanimity and scolds him more strongly than she should. After returning home, she is disappointed in herself, thinking that "if a person fell out with neighbors, inconveniences were bound to follow" (116). "A body cain't hardly live to hisself," she thinks, remembering that she depends on Doke to cut Enoch's hair and lend the occasional hand around the farm (116-17). In retrospect, Ivy realizes that "hit hain't no good to stay at outs" and she might have been wiser "to have borne with Doke's tongue than to come home some evening to find only her chimney standing" (117).

However, the tenuous balance of good relations includes positive examples as well, and it is these positive interactions that Armstrong emphasizes. In fact, an apple-peeling[136] and a birthday party for Old Mag, both of which take place in Ivy's home and both of which illustrate the kind of connection and community existing among mountain

[136] With the apple-peeling, Armstrong includes an example of one of the many ways in which neighbors worked together to accomplish a time-consuming and necessary task. These events, barn and cabin-raisings, molasses stirs, and apple-peelings, among others, became social events as well as functional ones. In this scene, the women of the community (with the notable absence of Leola Odom) gather to peel their apples for drying and canning.

women. These are examples of the neighborliness Armstrong carefully and frequently includes in her depiction of mountain life. Loveman considered these sections of the novel incongruous, stating that Armstrong "lapses at times . . . into a sentimentalism strangely at variance with the usually tough fiber of her tale" (69). She calls them "jarring," asserting that they "break into a narrative that is otherwise of moving strength" (69). She levels her most serious criticism at these happy scenes, maintaining that they "would do credit in . . . general sweetness of spirit to a juvenile [novel] for girls" (69). But these scenes are as necessary to Armstrong's agenda as the positive descriptions of Ivy's natural environment that Loveman praises. They serve to balance Armstrong's depiction, which requires acknowledging both the difficulties and the pleasures of mountain life.

Of course, Armstrong emphasizes mountaineers, mountaineer women in particular, in *This Day and Time* as she attends to her regionalist agenda. But she broadens her focus substantially—a move she did not make, at least not to the same degree, in *The Seas of God*—to include a cross-examination of hegemonic culture as well. Again, Ivy serves as the site of cultural interface and exchange. Armstrong works against stereotypes in this text, showing that they operate in both directions; the mountaineers are as guilty of stereotyping the town folks as the town folks are of stereotyping the mountaineers. Through Ivy's relationship with Shirley Pemberton—a relationship that mirrors that of Armstrong with Rosa Duncan and draws on other encounters and exchanges with actual mountaineers—the author resists the urge to valorize one culture completely over the other and furthers her own version of regionalist

agenda, demonstrating that cultural interface and exchange can have positive effects as well as negative.

One of the most important and most obviously regionalist components of the text is the exchange between Ivy and the suggestively named Senator Timberlake,[137] a politician who has come to visit Shirley's father and whose views regarding the impending damming of the river differ widely from Ivy's. Ivy, though she works as cook and housekeeper for the Pembertons, has actually befriended Shirley. Shirley's father, now a successful industrialist, was originally from the mountains, so Ivy feels relatively comfortable with him as well. Though she enjoys good rapport with the Pembertons, Ivy—with good cause—feels called upon to take issue with the senator on some of his paternalistic and self-serving assertions.

In his conversation with the dying Mr. Pemberton, the senator claims to be helping these unfortunate and benighted mountaineers by making way for the Tennessee Valley Authority to dam the lakes and "give employment . . . to thousands upon thousands of these poor mountain people" (165). As she listens to him, Ivy begins to think about the effect the dam will have on her own life: "The dam would mean that folks' cabins all along the river, little homesteads where their fathers had lived before them, would be swallowed up. The water would reach 'way up Troublesome, 'way up Grandmam's, as high, some folks said, as Ivy's own cabin. A sharp new pain shot through her heart" (165). As she listens carefully to the senator's words, she thinks to

[137] Armstrong names the Senator ironically, combining two of the industries that exploited regional resources and citizens without providing what she considered ample remuneration or consideration. She includes first the "timber" business, which denuded the mountain slopes and left a number of mountaineers jobless after the timber was depleted. She ads to this the "lake" that resulted from the damming of the Holston River by the Tennessee Valley Authority and which forced her to surrender her own beloved home, Knobside.

herself, “hit’ ull ruin me ef the dam’s built, hit’ull mighty nigh take my life” (165). “All at once,” writes Armstrong, “her cabin, the few acres that Uncle Jake had left her, seemed almost as dear as Enoch” (165).

The contrast between the senator’s theoretical and paternalistic view of how the dam will help the mountaineers contrasts sharply here with Ivy’s reaction to the idea. Armstrong means for this to occur. She further identifies Timberlake as self-serving by having him “cast a pleasant, understanding glance in Ivy’s direction” and exclaim, “Poor, but no finer people living! Pure Anglo-Saxons, no foreign admixture!” (165-166). The patronizing senator presumes to know what Ivy and her neighbors need or, worse, presumes to know what’s best for them in spite of what they want. He reveals his capitalistic, exploitative agenda in his speech, as he continues lamenting the behavior of “workers somewhere else, his low rolling voice becoming more impassioned as he went on” (166). In his passion, the senator who has claimed to feel so kindly toward the mountaineers exposes the possibility that his interest in moving “the Grossberg concern” to the mountains may involve more than his desire to help the mountaineers (165). That is, as he describes these workers from elsewhere who refuse to behave properly,[138] he reveals his true agenda, noting that the “mountain people” provide a fresh—and distinctly not foreign—“labor supply” (166).

Mr. Pemberton, who is of mountain origins, briefly plays the devil’s advocate to the senator. He articulates the main thrust of what Ivy has been thinking. “Senator,” he says, “just between us—sometimes I wonder if they’ll really be better off—our mountain

[138] Armstrong’s readers would have recognized the fact that he was objecting to efforts to unionize labor in other areas of the country.

people here—when they're herded together in a lot of milltowns" (166).[139] Timberlake disputes this, continuing with his argument that the mountaineers lead "tragically monotonous lives" and that "God never intended that a woman's hand should be put to the plow" (166). The senator, of course, stands to make a great deal of money from the deal, as do the Pembertons.[140] As she listens carefully to the senator, Ivy can no longer remain politely silent. She remembers her experience as a factory worker in town and speaks up, saying "Law, Senator . . . I hain't never plowed, but I 'ud a heap ruther to hoe an' to clear the filth o' new ground as to work in ary factory on earth. . .I wouldn't work in one of those old hateful factories agin—not ef you was to give hit to me" (167). Ivy's protest is polite but direct. She is one of the first fictional mountain characters to challenge male hegemony in both her own culture and the culture that seeks to subjugate hers for economic gain. And she speaks eloquently and effectively for herself, illustrating Armstrong's belief that mountaineers needed no sympathetic intermediary; they simply needed a sympathetic and open-minded reconsideration from her readers.

Mr. Pemberton himself is a complex character. He's clearly in league with Senator Timberlake and other politicians and industrialists, but he has not completely forgotten his mountain origins, hence his comments to Timberlake about whether or not their current course of action on the dam is the best one after all. At the end of that chapter, he gives Ivy $100, telling her that he understands that she needs a cow and he wants her to use the money for that purpose (167). The good-hearted Ivy sees this as

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[139] The "Grossberg" of the touted "Grossberg concern" sounds suspiciously close to "Bemberg," the actual name of a German textile manufacturer that opened a large facility in nearby Elizabethton, Tennessee, just after the formation of the TVA lakes. Armstrong probably makes a veiled reference here to the Bemberg plants, which were the site of a number of incidents of widely publicized labor unrest.

[140] This situation is very similar to that of John Fox, Jr. and his brothers and their roles in helping industries set up in the mountains.

another example of Mr. Pemberton's generosity; the more cynical reader recognizes the possibility that he is assuaging his guilt over knowing that Ivy will lose her property when the lake is built and that this is his deathbed atonement for his moral sin against her. He thanks her for help and attention, to which she responds, "Oh, sir, you-uns has done twice—yes, thribble, fer me . . . I won't never forgit ye, Mr. Pemberton" (168). The reader knows that this is true, but on several levels; while Ivy will remember his generosity toward her individually, she may later come to realize his part in bringing about a change that will irreversibly change the course of life in the region, and not necessarily for the better. While the hundred dollar bill signifies autonomy to Ivy in the moment, it may also signify Mr. Pemberton's recognition of the fact that projects in which he has participated may ultimately impinge upon the autonomy Ivy has worked so hard to develop.

Finally, there is the relationship between Shirley and Ivy, which Armstrong presents as more simply positive. Shirley's father may be suspect in his intentions and actions, just as in retrospect Armstrong may have been ambivalent about her own father's participation in the timber and railroad concerns that allowed her to life a privileged life. Shirley, in turn, seems to be at least partially a self-portrait. The incident from years before in which young Anne Wetzell and her family failed to treat the family servant, a lonely mountain woman, humanely left an impression on the author that lasted throughout her life. In every piece of fiction, she explores this theme and insists that her readers adopt at least partially the perspective of the servant in order to engage them in a new line of thinking about social class and hierarchy.

In another crucial scene, Shirley Pemberton avoids the error that Armstrong felt her own family made. Ivy has just begun to work for her, and Shirley asks her to set the table for dinner. Remembering the widow who wanted Ivy and Enoch to eat in the kitchen and not at her table, Ivy becomes apprehensive. She has come to like Shirley, but she is afraid that Shirley will disappoint her as the widow did and ask her to sit by herself during meals. When Ivy—full of trepidation—asks, "Shirley, how many places a ye a-aimin' fer me to set on the table?" Shirley answers to Ivy's (and the reader's) great relief, "This is where my father sits . . . I'll sit here, and will you lay a place for yourself over there, opposite me?" (106). Shirley, by treating Ivy as an equal and inviting her to be part of the family, opens the door for positive cultural exchange. Socially liminal, as was Armstrong herself, Shirley does not belong entirely to the "summer people" but is not really part of the mountain community either. This liminality makes her different and opens up an interface that allows her to learn from Ivy as Ivy learns from her. Because Shirley regards Ivy as a true friend and treats her with genuine kindness, Ivy is able to hear Shirley in a way that she might not hear another outsider; it is Shirley, for example, who prompts Ivy to believe that she can raise Enoch to be respectful of women.

Ivy prevails at the end of the novel because she defines herself not according to stereotype or social constructs but according to her own individual principles. She finds a way, in spite of the patriarchal structure of her community, to raise her son to her own standards, managing to keep him—at least during the duration of the novel—from engaging in some of the misogynistic and violent modes of behavior that local men exhibit toward women and even finding ways to keep him from engaging in the local male tradition of making, drinking, and bootlegging moonshine. Ivy faces a number of

grim and difficult trials during her first year back home, but she retains both her optimism and her pride at the end of the text in spite of a crushing blow, when Jim's return is thwarted by a spiteful neighbor's lie. Though a number of critics consider this ending problematic, it serves a regionalist purpose. As with *The Seas of God*, *This Day and Time* ends with hope, if not with unequivocal happiness, and thus insists on the possibilities and vibrancy of a third kind of culture that results from a combination of town and mountain elements.

In creating her individualistic but admirable protagonist, Armstrong offers an example of the kind of self-definition and empowerment with which regionalist writers often imbue their characters; by suggesting at the end of the novel that Ivy has influenced Enoch to engage in the same sort of process of agonizing but profitable personal development, she shows how individuals who refuse to follow traditions blindly can influence and improve not only their individual situations but also their communities. As a number of regionalist critics have pointed out, this type of fiction suggests that social change begins with individuals and spreads from there to changes in local culture, regions, and, finally, to changes on a national or even global scale.

Conclusion

The gynocritical effort to recover women writers that Elaine Showalter began in the late 1970's has resulted in the reintroduction of a number of overlooked authors over the last several decades, as evidenced by the publication of Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse's *American Women Regionalists: 1850-1910.* This national impulse and the positive reception of its results has driven, in turn, an interest in similar regional efforts—hence my own interest in recovering Anne W. Armstrong, whose work has value in both national and regional, especially Appalachian, contexts. In the last decade or so, a new focus on Appalachian women writers has inspired such anthologies as Joyce Dyer's *Bloodroot: Reflections on Place by Appalachian Women Writers* and *Listen Here: Women Writing in Appalachia,* edited by Sandra L. Ballard and Patricia L. Hudson. In the introduction to her volume, Dyer notes that "Literary history, generally, has not been kind to women who have chosen to write with a strong sense of their regions, and it has perhaps been least kind to women from Appalachia . . . [;] They have had to bear injustices caused by their gender as well as their place" (2). She cites the examples of Emma Bell Miles, Elizabeth Madox Roberts, and Harriette Arnow as women whose work, though excellent, has been underappreciated.

Certainly, Armstrong can be added to the list of Appalachian women writers whose work should be reconsidered in light of new and developing theories—regionalism among them—that might benefit from the consideration of her texts. In fact, Ballard and Hudson took care to include an excerpt from *This Day and Time* in their volume, noting that "though [Armstrong] received little recognition as a novelist, [the novel], set in upper

East Tennessee in the 1920's, preserves the mountain culture that has virtually disappeared with the industrialization of the region" (30). Though I might argue that her purpose is slightly different from the one they assert (e.g. rather than preserving it, she wished to show the changes in mountain culture that resulted from the influx of "town people"), the inclusion of her work suggests that they recognize the potential contributions her fiction could make both to general readers and to scholars were it more widely available.

Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse, driven by a feminist desire to reexamine, redefine, and restructure the American canon, opened a new dialogue regarding the recovery and reconsideration of a number of female writers. As they undertook their work, they noticed that many of these women had been relegated to the category of "regionalist" and therefore dismissed as "minor." Dyer, Ballard, and Hudson undertake the same kind of project on a more specifically regional scale, attempting to draw attention to Appalachian women writers not in the hopes that they will eclipse males, but in the hopes that they might finally earn equal recognition where warranted. Through their work, writers like Armstrong have been reintroduced; now scholars must undertake the task of reexamining their work in terms of its value not just to the regional "canon," but in terms of what it illustrates about American literature in general. As Ballard and Hudson put it:

> The absence of Appalachian women's voices in American literature, though lamentable, is understandable when we realize that much of the work by these writers has remained uncollected or is no longer in print. The inaccessibility of much of the best Appalachian literature means that students from Appalachia who

> study American literature rarely find their "place" depicted in textbooks. While they can see the relevance of literature set in other places, it is easy for them to come to the conclusion that writers come ONLY from other places. (2)[141]

Ballard and Hudson implicitly suggest here that not only do students from Appalachia miss out because of the invisibility of Appalachian women writers, but also those from outside the region who do not encounter and consider their work. Obviously, these writers must be recovered in order for this process to begin.

I hope that by offering an extended analysis of Armstrong's fiction using regionalist theory, I can convince other readers of her value, at least as a regionalist and as an important bridge figure in Appalachian literature. I hope that this extended analysis of her fiction will serve as a beginning-point for more study of Armstrong's writing not just by me, but by others who might become interested and who might even take issue with my interpretations which are, of course, as arguable as any others offered in the spirit of scholarly discourse.

In terms of Armstrong's regional context, there is much left to be explored both in terms of her relationship to her contemporaries and her influence on regionalist writers who followed her. Viewed retrospectively, Armstrong's fiction, "Half-Wit Mary's Lover" and *This Day and Time*, especially show the shape of things to come in terms of Appalachian regionalist writers. For example, Armstrong and her regional contemporary Olive Tilford Dargan shared a number of interests and addressed a number of similar themes. In 1925, for instance, Dargan published *Highland Annals*, a set of semi-fictional

[141] Unlike most other editors who compile anthologies of women's writing, Ballard and Hudson do not mention patriarchal publishing practices or masculine prejudice against "scribbling women" as the main reason for the disappearance and/or neglect of the women in their volume. They are oddly quiet on this issue.

essays based on her life among the mountaineers of North Carolina.[142] Like Armstrong, Dargan was an outsider who wrote against mountaineer stereotypes; In the introduction to the 1998 edition of *From My Highest Hill: Carolina Mountain Folk*, Anna Shannon Elfenbein reports that that the "socialist feminist" Dargan resolved early "never to exploit the highlanders in her fiction as others had done before her" (xix). Like Armstrong's *This Day and Time,* Dargan's text was set in the present and, according to Elfenbein, "Dargan's treatment of the specific conflicts between Miss Dolly and her neighbors is filled with insights into the general problem of conflict between arrogant outsiders with power and privilege and the relatively powerless members of exploited [mountain] communities" (xlix).[143] Unlike Armstrong's novel, Dargan's stories are offered through the eyes of a sympathetic "outlander" intermediary, Miss Dolly, certainly based on Dargan herself. Five years later, with the publication of *This Day and Time,* Armstrong broke new ground by daring to write—for the first time—from a mountain woman's point of view, a tradition that was taken up by many writers after her, including Mildred Haun, James Still, Wilma Dykeman, Mary Lee Settle, Lee Smith, Denise Giardina, Sharyn McCrumb, and Sheila Kay Adams.

Another of Armstrong's and Dargan's shared interests was labor relations. In *This Day and Time,* Armstrong introduces, through Ivy Ingoldsby, the idea that labor in a "town" factory might not actually be preferable to mountain life, as was being argued by

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[142] These essays had been published previously in the *Atlantic Monthly* and the *Reviewer*. Dargan later revised them, added one additional essay, and republished the volume with a new title: *My Highest Hill: Carolina Mountain Folks* (1941).

[143] The two authors shared a strikingly similar experience in that Dargan, like Armstrong, lived in the mountains just before the building of the TVA dams. Elfenbein reports that "four years after the publication of *From My Highest Hill* [in 1941], the town of Almond and much of Swain County, including a portion of Dargan's mountain property, were inundated by the waters cresting behind the Tennessee Valley Authority's Fontana Dam" (xlix).

industrialists who wished to exploit both the labor and the resources of the mountaineers. In *This Day and Time*, Armstrong introduces the kinds of leftist themes regarding labor and exploitation that were taken up two years later as the central focus of Dargan's *Call Home the Heart.*[144] Though she never delves deeply into the aspects of the job that inspired Ivy to leave it, Armstrong must have based at least some of her insights into Ivy's dissatisfaction on her experience as the Assistant Manager of Labor Relations at Eastman in the 1920's. Dargan and Armstrong's shared a number of their views on labor, though Dargan tended to lean far more publicly left, and Dargan's protagonist, Ishma Lancaster, reflects this. She takes a position in a textile factory very similar to the one that Ivy rejects in *This Day and Time*. Unlike Ivy, however, Ishma stays and ends up being part of the effort to organize the laborers for the union—an effort that embroils her in the politics and attending violence of the textile mill strikes.

Armstrong's value goes beyond the regional, however, because she writes in so many genres and about so many different topics and consequently offers an interesting array of texts to which literary and critical theory can be applied with important results, not least of which is the interrogation of certain theoretical problems and blind spots beyond regionalism. In fact, the scholarly discourse on the subject of regionalism, because it is not confined solely to literature, often leads to the consideration of other kinds of theory applicable to a number of fields.

Of course, Armstrong's work offers fresh ground for feminists, especially those Anglo-American feminists who tend to view literature as a medium for social change. Because it considers race and class along with gender, materialist-feminism might be an

[144] This novel was published under Dargan's masculine pen name, Fielding Burke.

appropriate lens for reading Armstrong's fiction. In the introduction to *Feminist Criticism and Social Change: Sex, Class and Race in Literature and Culture*, Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt argue that in reading a text, feminists must not only ask "so what?" but must also "take on the task of asking other questions as well—like what is the relation of literature and therefore of literary criticism to the social and economic conditions of our lives?" (xv). Armstrong's regionalist agenda certainly does not preclude a more specific examination of these questions in terms of women. As materialist-feminists, Newton and Rosenfelt focus on what is, for them, "a central insight of the women's movement—that gender is socially constructed and that its construction has enforced unequal relations of power" (xv). Further, they argue, "from that insight it is a relatively short step to the assumption that products of consciousness, like literature and literary criticism, are also socially constructed, and that they too are political"(xv). Armstrong's texts offer an excellent site for the exploration of these arguments, not only in the regionalist exploration of general stereotypes, but also in the specific area of patriarchal oppression of women.

Later in their introduction, Newton and Rosenfelt ask other questions that might be applied to Armstrong's texts with interesting results. For example, they argue that "materialist-feminist critics do not assume that literature and cultural production 'reflect' history in a simple mimetic moment . . . literature, rather, draws upon various ideological productions of history or discourses about history to make its own production. What a text does not say, therefore, becomes as interesting as what it does say" (xxiii). Armstrong, having noticed lacunae in the writing already produced about certain

marginalized people, wrote to fill them in; it would be interesting to explore, in turn, the omissions she made in presenting her own ideology in the form of fiction.

Post-colonialism is another of those theories which might be applied and provides an example of a theoretical blind spot. Just as the first set of predominantly white, middle-class feminist critics had to be reminded that their sisters of color should be allowed to enter the discourse on female life and space, the post-colonialists must be reminded that subjugation is not always the product solely of race or ethnic discrimination: that is, despite the fact that they are predominantly white and were often celebrated as a "pure Anglo-Saxon race," the southern mountaineers have historically been both marginalized and "colonized." One regionalist aspect of Armstrong's texts is that they reflect her concern that mountaineers were misunderstood by other Americans, considered subalterns of a particular kind. Though such a move is not within the purview of this dissertation, I suggest that because of its exploration of an exploited population, her regionalist agenda renders her fiction (and perhaps her other texts) promising as sites for postcolonial intervention. Postcolonial theory offers a lens through which one can begin to understand the "colonial" relationship between Appalachia and the rest of America, which was still quite strong in Armstrong's lifetime. In fact, her beloved father, who made his money in timber and railroads (and possibly mining), would have been one of the "colonizers."

Ania Loomba points out in her introduction to *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* that while postcolonial theory strives to "allow the voices of once colonised peoples and their descendants to be heard," it often unintentionally "closes off both their voices and any legitimate places from which critics can speak" (2). Loomba notes that cultural

conservatives are sometimes troubled by postcolonialism's "politicisation of the academy" (1); I will argue that scholars who insist on barring the admission of Appalachian studies from serious scholarly consideration are precisely the kind of conservatives to whom Loomba refers. Again, Armstrong's work provides a locus for exploring postcolonialism in its broadest sense: as cultural and economic theory as well as literary theory, and as a theory that consistently requires the acknowledgement and examination of patriarchal imperial practices in order to define social problems and seek alternatives. Postcolonialism stands as only one example; certainly there are other ways in which Armstrong's fiction can serve scholars and deepen theoretical discourse.[145]

Armstrong's varied experiences and relatively high level of education, along with her engaging personality, rendered her well-equipped to associate comfortably with diverse groups. Her innate curiosity about others prompted her to pay close attention to their concerns and issues, and through her writing, she offered a conduit through which marginalized groups could gain a voice: mountaineers, prostitutes, women in business, middle-aged job applicants, and others. She presents her characters (or in the case of non-fiction, her subjects) flaws and all, believing that readers, imperfect themselves, were capable of assessing all the facts and coming to new conclusions about people or cultures they already "knew." Her own social liminality taught her that there is something to be gained from considering every person's perspective and something dreadfully lost in not doing so.

[145] The examination of Appalachia as an American "colony" began in the 1970's with *Colonialism in Modern America: The Appalachian Case*, published in 1978 by the Appalachian Consortium Press and edited by Helen M. Lewis, Linda Johnson, and Donald Askins.

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Vita

Katherine Hoffman Doman was born on November 9, 1962 in Richmond Virginia. She spent most of her childhood in Cumberland County, Virginia and attended Huguenot Academy in Powhatan, Virginia for a number of years but graduated from Trinity Episcopal High School in Midlothian, Virginia in May of 1981. The following fall she matriculated at the College of William and Mary in Virginia, where she earned a B.A. degree in English in May, 1985. After working as a banker for several years, Katherine returned to school, earning her Masters in English from East Tennessee State University in 1993. Her thesis was entitled *The Progressive Complexity of Mothers in Selected Works of James Joyce.* This dissertation completes the requirements for her Ph.D. in English at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, July, 2008.