

“Can the Circle Be Unbroken” : An Ensemble of Memory and Performance in Selected Novels
of Lee Smith

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for the listeners

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for everyday use

Many thanks

to Bill Hardwig, for reminding grad students to perform close readings

to Martin Griffin, for jogging the memory work done here and elsewhere

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and

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ABSTRACT

This project combines performance studies and memory studies to the analysis of three of Lee Smith's southern Appalachian novels in order to open the texts to broader understandings of Smith's use of oral performance forms, such as ballads, music, and storytelling, in her characters' transmissions of tradition. The approach draws on performance work by Joseph Roach and collective memory theory by Maurice Halbwachs to create a lens through which to add to existing Smith scholarship centering on feminist readings and women's authorship. This blended approach allows room to analyze the oral performance forms so central to Smith's work and their role in her work of transmitting Appalachian cultural memory through multiple family generations. Close readings of murder ballad themes and country music that pervade Smith's work yields insight into Smith's negotiation of personal memory, collective memory, and public memory passed down through the malleable forms of song. Chapter 1 probes the importance of audience and listener in *Oral History*. Chapter 2 analyzes the artistic process of negotiating individual memory with shared memory in *Fair and Tender Ladies*. Chapter 3 analyzes the role of "roots" and origins in the development of country music as portrayed in *The Devil's Dream*. Each of the three chapters takes up a different theme on Smith's use of performance as a vehicle through which her characters artistically revise cultural memory, recover personal memory, and create public memory.

CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1	
“Such a Killin’ Crime” : Hearing, Remembering, and Sharing the Warnings of <i>Oral History</i>	22
Chapter 2	
Sisters: Women’s Struggles for Memory and Authority in <i>Fair and Tender Ladies</i>	46
Chapter 3	
Poor Wayfaring Strangers: Creating Collective Celebrity and Recovering the Lost Individual in <i>The Devil’s Dream</i>	66
Conclusion.....	90
Works Cited.....	94
Vita.....	98

INTRODUCTION

When Alan Lomax grew out of his Texas boy guitar image, he was frequently pictured kneeling among white, ragged mountain children or kicking back with Woody Guthrie, whom he recorded as part of his field work collecting oral histories and songs for the Library of Congress Archive of Folk Song in the 1930s. Seeking to record passing “primitive” folkways that were facing obliteration by commercial technological advancements, he spent time traveling not only throughout Appalachia and the United States but also to Spain, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Ireland, even assisting the anthropological work of Zora Neale Hurston in Florida. Oral historian to the core, he took his tape recorder to the streets upon the bombing of Pearl Harbor to capture the historical memory-in-the-making. Lomax stands as an early representative of the cultural moves in the mid-twentieth century to preserve the fading folk culture of America as defined by Appalachian roots music. Lomax began the work of cataloguing and defining the folk music traditions that survive in national public memory today.

On one sweep through the southern Appalachians in search of preserving the folkways and sharing them with national consciousness, Lomax discovered the “Mother of Folk” tucked away in the Cumberland mountains. Jean Ritchie, “Mother of Folk” herself, now 89, is perhaps best remembered as a young woman in a gingham dress with a dulcimer across her lap singing with her family for Lomax’s recordings in Viper, Kentucky in 1955. Her family songs she wrote and recorded would also be recorded by the likes of Emmylou Harris and Dolly Parton. As she notes in her autobiography *Singing Family of the Cumberlands*, she grew up on her uncle’s knee in the family cabin listening to the stories of the Old World—Scottish and Irish folk songs that would eventually take her overseas to record the origins of her family songs with two volumes of *British Traditional Ballads in the Southern Mountains* (1960). Jean Ritchie—a product of the

folk revival movement—bridges the transatlantic displacement of musical origins. But in doing so, she sets a precedent that Appalachian origins could be systematically recovered in English and Irish folk traditions—a romanticized view that exists in public national consciousness today.

Another family-oriented performer, A.P. Carter, had already arranged his family band and they were performing in rural venues by 1927, when Jean Ritchie was still a young girl and Lomax was still picking guitar in Texas. Carter's reach has likely had the farthest influences in the national public memory of roots origins with his family's Carter Family Band and their legendary first hit, "Can the Circle Be Unbroken" (1927). The stern face of business in the background of his performing family, he was rarely pictured singing or with a guitar, though he is attributed with writing many of the family's recorded songs. Traveling across the country publicizing his cash-crop new sound may have cost him his marriage but still won him a place in the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1970, followed by immortalization on a postage stamp in 1993. While the Carter Family success is mostly romanticized as recording manager Ralph Peer's "discovery" at the Bristol Sessions, A.P. was a savvy businessman who sought out Ralph Peer for a studio recording.

Each of these figures have in common the shaping of Appalachian public memory as a repository of original culture. The public memory around these figures is durable enough to influence academic scholarship today. When dealing with Appalachian texts for instance, the natural inclination is to seek *origins*. I can say this because I was one of those researchers influenced by the public memory surrounding the recovery of American cultural origins and Appalachian authenticity.

Emulating the Appalachian line of ballad collectors and musicologists who set out armed with tape recorders and guitars to preserve the mountain folk culture amidst the tyranny of

technological expansion, I, too, embarked upon a scholarly spirit quest seeking the origins of what I thought held the key to understanding southern Appalachia, hoping to do more than the collector predecessors of John Jacob Niles, Cecil Sharp, Ralph Peer, and Alan Lomax.

Then an undergraduate whose scholarly spirit quest was really but a tangent on the study abroad circuit, I arrived at the Linen Hall Library at 17 Donegall Square North, Belfast on July 7, 2009 for the purpose of finding “original,” never-before-recorded Ulster-Scots ballads, which would, of course, unlock some ground-breaking folk link between Appalachia and Northern Ireland that even Jean Ritchie had missed.

The exact date of such a quest would ordinarily not be worthy of memory except for the fact that it just so happened to coincide with the rest of the world’s memorializing quest to Michael Jackson’s funeral that same day—an entirely different act of cultural memory construction but not wholly unlike my own that day. Armed with leather-bound notebook and the zeal of Alan Lomax repairing to Woodie Guthrie’s cabin in the mountains, I made my way up the creaky stairs to the “Irish Special Collections.” I was fully prepared to offer a memorized abstract of my intentions to what I was sure would be a walled city of Derry of paperwork and procedures for entering the sanctuary of cultural memory that existed in the broadsides there.

Judging by the room full of lounging middle-aged to ancient men all sporting some piece of apparel that made it possible to track Michael Jackson’s entire career span in one room, the special collections’ stronghold left much to be desired. I chose the corner least-populated with the pop-culture quasi-scholars in blue jeans who whipped through genealogy records seeking their family origins like my grandmother turns through *People* magazines. I pulled down what looked to be the most tattered, and therefore of course most authentic, of broadsides and sat

down to dutifully transcribe obscure eighteenth-century ballads that held the key to understanding Appalachian literature as I knew it.

In the midst of my transcriptions, just as a rare sun beam wobbled through the lead-glass window creating a light shaft that extracted the rich, red hues of the mahogany leather binding of my ancient books, my reverie was throttled back to the immediate present with a screaming mobile ringtone. . . “Cause this the THRILL-uhhh! Thril-ler night!”

There in the Linen Hall Library, the blue jean scholar’s reverberating memorial to the King of Pop on his funeral day seemed as good a sign as any that homage was due at that moment—not to the eighteenth-century Appalachian origins—but to the global collective memory-making taking place on TV.

While my interests and research outlook have (thankfully) matured since the my naïve outlook on recovering authenticity, I’m still interested in cultural memory and how it evolves—whether it is something like Michael Jackson as a global cultural icon or something like selecting traits that have defined American “folk” music. I’m still interested in Appalachia, its origins and its ballads, how it reinvents itself in collective memory, and how it exists in public memory. Even as frightening as it is to look in the mirror of the past back to the “well-intentioned” researcher of my formative days, my impulses then were not unlike the work of Alan Lomax—seeker of origins, Jean Ritchie—performer of origins and fading culture, and A.P Carter—inventor of American rural roots. Each of the above anecdotes represent a slightly different piece of the complex processes involved with oral performance being cataloged and shared collectively for the purposes of cultural memory on national and regional levels. At the origin of each ballad’s evolution to public consciousness is likely an instance of its everyday utility. For instance, maybe the performance exists first as a family routine, as it did for Jean Ritchie singing

with her family on the porch after a day's work (14). But when the performance of the song becomes public and serves as a way of cataloguing the national folk culture as Ritchie's performances on *Smithsonian Folkways* did, the performance broadens in its purpose, gaining cultural capital—both economically and symbolically. In Appalachian culture, oral performance forms, such as ballads and storytelling, are time capsules of cultural memory that simultaneously safeguard origins and adapt and share origins for collective use in constructing national public images and memories. Music serves as a means by which cultures invent origins and invent collective culture. As each performance of a folk song or recounting of a family story occurs, collective culture is recovered, reinforced, and inventively shared. While the songs sung or the stories told may be widely familiar, the telling or the singing of them is always unique to the individual artist who adds his or her own flare to the communal songs, forever making these pieces of performative oral culture always adaptable, fluid, and inventive. Conversely, the performances of these folk origins construct a public national memory that becomes part of broader historical identity.

The interdisciplinary work of Joseph Roach's *Cities of the Dead* offers contemporary examinations of the relationship between memory and history. Roach focuses on live *performance* in cities “where the dead remain more gregariously present to the living, materially and spiritually” of London and New Orleans. Roach argues for an interdisciplinary approach to account for the musical, ritual, and theatrical performances' roles in continuously reinventing and revising the present's conception of the history of the oral past. Coming from a background in eighteenth-century theater history, Roach traces the eighteenth-century through the circum-Atlantic world to show the role of living bodies performing today in the continual reinvention of the past. Roach's analysis of the Mardi Gras Indians' second-line parade performances in New

Orleans is perhaps the most frequently cited section of this text and illustrates Roach's claim that the living bodies of the present reinvent the past. The "tangle of creation narratives" linking the Mardi Gras Indians' call-and-response singing, tribal parades, and elaborate costuming to West African, Caribbean, and Native American origins "provide a crux for the construction of collective memory out of genealogies of performances" (Roach 194). Roach argues that in the face of the white political world of domination and exchange, these music-dance-drama performances from murky origins invoke a fragmented "patchwork" (194) in order to re-imagine origins and reinvent memory of the chronicled history of the dominant white collective past. While the Mardi Gras Indians represent only one piece of Roach's work, their example is representative of Roach's commitments to the complex reinvention of history and collective memory through performance's recovery of a patchwork of origins. This is similar to my project's work of analyzing how texts revise and adapt cultural origins and how texts negotiate individual and collective memories' mediation of those origins.

Maurice Halbwachs's 1941 theory of collective memory is related to Roach's work of collective performance. Halbwachs's arguments for the construction of collective memory mirror Roach's examination of a culture's negotiation of reinventing history to give voice the patchwork of fragmented experience and memory. Halbwachs's *On Collective Memory* (translated from French by Lewis A. Coser in 1992) argues two primary premises: the creation of individual memory requires a social framework, and that social framework will distort the memory of the past to meet the collective demands of the present. Halbwachs particularly highlights the necessity of oral discourse in sharing individual memories with a group in order to imbue meaning: "One cannot in fact think about the events of one's past without discoursing upon them. In this way, the framework of collective memory confines and binds our most

intimate remembrances to each other” (53). If other people are necessary for self-sifting of what one preserves in individual memory, then the individual memories are at least in part influenced by the group with whom an individual primarily associates. Halbwachs illustrates this dilemma in an example of the child’s memory molded by the immediate group of the family, who is a group in which “position is determined not by personal feelings but by rules and customs independent of us that existed before us” (Halbwachs 55). Halbwachs cites family, religious groups, and social classes as the ways society creates “sufficient unity of outlooks” to function (182). Finally, then, Halbwachs arrives at the revision of memory that occurs on the individual and collective level to meet new rational demands of the changing present:

...society tends to erase from its memory all that might separate individuals or distant groups from each other. It is also why society, in each period, rearranges its recollections in such a way as to adjust them to the variable conditions of its equilibrium. (183)

The lost memory that occurs in the revision of individual and collective memory to suit the changing demands of the present and preserve social unity has similarities to the psychological processes of traumatic loss. Looking at fictional representations of this negotiation of lost memory between individual and collective memory spheres is one piece of my project’s aims.

While trauma studies scholar Cathy Caruth is perhaps best known for her studies with memory of the Holocaust, her work on “loss” and recovery more generally is useful here in our discussions of “lost” memories in the creation of what Halbwachs defines collective memory to be. Caruth is more abstractly related to Roach’s work of exposing reinventions of memory that recover the cultural lost or repressed as a result of the history of exchanges in white circum-Atlantic exchange. Admittedly, in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma Narrative, and History*,

Caruth's explorations of storytelling as vehicle of recovery from trauma deal with tangible life and death experiences as what she calls the "crisis of death," which is the actual encounter with death, and the "crisis of life," which she describes as "the ongoing experience of having survived" (7). However, while Caruth's scope of work goes far beyond my aims here of finding ways to investigate what is lost in the transaction of individual memory becoming collective memory through the revision of the past, her work provides a helpful framework for discussing loss and not knowing. Grounded in Freud's work on trauma, Caruth notes that the Greek word "trauma" translates to "wound," though not only a wound inflicted on the body, but, in Freud's interpretation, a wound inflicted on the mind (3). For Caruth, the wound of the mind speaks to an individual's inability to recognize or perceive the origins of loss. She writes,

...so trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on. (Caruth 4)

Because, as Caruth argues, literature is "interested in the complex relationship between knowing and not knowing" (3), literary analysis of the processes of narrative that serve to recover that which is unknowable relates to the similar process Halbwachs and Roach allude to in terms of individual or cultural representation that is "lost" in the creation of cohesive collective memory. As literature with oral components exposes, the performance of storytelling seeks to recover the "wound," or at the very least, "loss," of the teller's often unknowable loss that, I argue is fundamentally linked to the losses involved in individual and collective memory construction.

As evident by the loose connections among these scholars with regard to performance's role in recovering and reinventing individual and collective memory, I am proposing an

interdisciplinary approach to the intersections between performance forms and memory *in* literary texts. While Roach comes from the semi-textual approach of performance studies, his own connections between memory and performance concern living, embodied “texts,” such as the Mardi Gras Indians. Similarly, Halbwachs’s work on the construction of collective memory relates to and derives from patterns he has observed through sociological observation. Finally, while Caruth’s work uses the literary text as her subject for analyzing the “knowable” and “unknowable,” she does so primarily for illuminating human psychological patterns. Even oral history projects—perhaps the closest existing medium to actively engage memory constructed through oral performance and the active recovery of “unknowable” loss—run into complications with regard to individual and collective memory. Oral historian Anna Green raises this dilemma in her essay “Can Memory Be Collective?” She notes that as a result of Halbwachs’s collective memory theory influencing revival of collective memory approaches to memory theory in the humanities through the 1980s, the result has been complete “assimilation of autobiographical or personal memory into that of the group” (Green 98). Each of these theoretical pieces has valuable work to offer the field of culture studies academically and Appalachian cultural construction more generally, though they have yet to be applied to a medium that can accommodate them. By combining sociological approaches and performance studies to literary texts, we can use the “on the street” observations of the sociologist to illuminate the human interactions occurring fictionally. Conversely, the novel as a site where all forms of oral culture can interact in a written form offers ways to think about the cultural value of music and the traditions it represents as well as the cultural value of Appalachia as a region imagined by most of the country to be a repository for the roots “folk” culture of the nation. Analyzing how the

anthropological aims of defining culture connect or disconnect with what cultural value is *lost* in those definitions of “folk” culture is where the novel can bridge performance and sociology.

Folk music provides one entrance where this blending of disciplines can work to think about personal and collective memory in national and regional culture production. For instance, folklorist Alan Lomax represents the institutional safeguard for recovering and sustaining American folk “origins” in his work with the Archive of American Folk Song for the Library of Congress. Lomax recruited artists such as Pete Seeger to perform “representative” folk music origins on Lomax’s program *Back Where I Come From* between 1940-1941 (Wilentz 44). Even sixty years later, similar work has been deemed relevant with Pete’s half-brother Mike Seeger’s recording the *Smithsonian Folkways* album *Southern Banjo Sounds* in 1998. Similar to Pete, Mike Seeger recorded tunes that were universally recognized as emblematic of the American folk tradition, such as “Jim Crack Corn,” but Mike also attests to presenting his individual contribution by asserting differential techniques in the communal cultural pieces. In his liner notes to the album he says:

Much if not most old-time banjo music was made by a person entertaining himself, or herself, family, or a few friends. Solo banjoists are free to create techniques, tunings, rhythms, and ways of accompanying their own vocal music, much of which wouldn’t fit into ensemble playing. (Mike Seeger 3)

In the authoritative cultural product that is the *Smithsonian Folkways* recordings for which Seeger performs, he negotiates choices concerning which musical techniques to employ on each performance of the well-known songs. In this instance, Seeger negotiates his own personal memory associations of a piece with the creation of a sound that will exist in the public memory as the definitive cultural authority on mountain banjo tunes. However, while this example is an

active negotiation of the personal and collective, it cannot address the “loss” of other pieces of cultural memory left out of Seeger’s selection of the representative songs chosen for the album. To account for loss and the unknowable wound of excluding memory from the public definition of folk music is beyond the album. To truly examine these processes of what is lost and recovered in the transfer from individual to collective memory, we must turn to representations of this in a medium that can accommodate these negotiations—the novel. Unlike the Seeger album and Jean Ritchie’s albums, the novel can probe questions about what is “lost” and be aware of cultural “wounds” that are made as a result of creating specific categories for cultural definition that will inevitably leave out some piece of memory in construction of a national public memory.

In the interest of examining the processes for bigger patterns of American negotiation of cultural self-definition, as the allusions to Lomax, Ritchie, Carter and the Seegers predicate, I propose an interdisciplinary approach that combines performance and memory *in literary texts* as a site for the active fictional representations of individual and collective memory negotiations. It is this relationship between personal memory and public memory through performances in novels that can best accommodate memory and performance studies. When we look specifically at written texts, the driving question then is: how are oral performance forms used in negotiating the loss that occurs when personal memory becomes collective as represented in novels? Therefore, I implement a blend between primarily Halbwachs and Roach, while borrowing from Caruth’s framework for storytelling being a mode through which to recover unknowable loss. I have chosen to work specifically with the novels of self-identified Appalachian women writer Lee Smith to investigate how Smith uses performative forms in her novels to negotiate individual and collective memory and associated losses. Smith is particularly apt because of her investment

in creating a public regional image that recognizes its past traditions while also invents new ways of utilizing and understanding those traditions.

Smith is an ideal writer for thinking about the broader implications of oral performance in texts due to her position as a contemporary women writer invested in her inventions of public regional images of Appalachia. Smith recognizes the region's past traditions while also inventing new ways of utilizing and understanding those traditions both on a regional cultural level and on a national cultural level. There is a likely correlation between the revival of collective memory studies in the humanities in the 1980s (Green 98) and Smith's first publication (short story collection *Cakewalk*) in 1981. Smith directly responds to the anthropological and sociological trends in her novels regarding oral history and the problematic "collection" of individual experience for academic study. Finally, Smith's multi-generational narrative structures that explore fictional family storytelling across decades of time, coupled with her craft's attention to dialect and dialogue, make Smith an active participant in the representation of recovery and adaptation of memory over (fictional) time. Smith's use of dialect, first-person storytelling, and songs make her work an ideal sample for exploring the intersections among oral forms *in* written texts. Smith seeks to transmit a specific version of cultural memory and explore these very negotiations of oral-to-written culture and what is lost and/or reinvented in that process of recovering and inventing cultural origins through performance.

Examining Lee Smith's novels under the lens of Halbwachs and Roach not only offers a way to intersect memory and performance studies more concretely, but this approach also yields more varied readings of Lee Smith's texts and pushes the boundaries of existing Smith scholarship. Smith is almost exclusively considered as an Appalachian women's writer, and criticism dealing with her work has primarily consisted of second-wave feminist analysis

committed to an exploration of her strong female characters asserting agency within the patriarchal constraints of Appalachian tradition. This criticism tends to follow predictable patterns with regard to analyzing Smith's triumph of female characters who imagine new mythic and artistic forms in Appalachia. Typical of this kind of scholarship is Dorothy Combs Hill who writes:

Smith's redemptive spirit helps her accomplish an enormous feat of integration as she returns to her territory—the mountains and the conflict—and finally writes her way to another end, one that no longer demands the spiritual death of the female or her collusion in her own spiritual paralysis and death. Smith as a writer has imagined her way out of the accepted social construction. (200)

While this is certainly part of Smith's agenda, it is only a piece of what Smith does with regard to transforming the way memory is transmitted throughout generations as portrayed in her novels. And while "Appalachia" as a region is certainly crucial to Smith's project, Smith is invested in opening up the region to consider voices left *out* of the cultural memory that tends to circulate in public memory outside the texts. Tanya Mitchell notes that Smith's project is "the (de)construction of place" and is one that many Appalachian women writers undertake (413). This (de)construction involves "revision of oppressive hierarchies and traditions from the periphery" (Mitchell 413). While this is certainly a major aim of Smith's work, Smith's more general negotiation of revision as a process for deconstructing individual and collective memory for a better representation of cultural memory is what I am most interested in. The implications of Smith's work moves beyond regional boundaries of Appalachia in more nuanced negotiations of reinventing cultural memory.

Triangulating memory, performance, and gender then yields more complex understandings of the linked processes of performing as a way of accessing, transmitting, and adapting memory. This has particularly important implications for thinking about art's role in national understandings of "culture" and Smith's awareness of cultural undertakings. As Tanya Mitchell paraphrases Homi K. Bhabha for applicability to Smith,

Art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as contingent "in-between" space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The "past-present" becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of the living. (419)

Smith's project is to reinvent the very foundations of how memory is transmitted, giving access to voices previously shut out of public definitions of culture. In so doing, she creates a new art modeled on her characters' everyday present "living" of daily negotiation between personal and collective memory. Smith revises traditional ballad and song themes to then juxtapose these revisions her characters' use of various performance forms, namely storytelling. Through performance, her characters redefine and adapt collective memory. As such, Smith argues for a resistance to commodification and ownership of these stories that are in actuality fluid and collaborative representations of cultural memory.

While more specific terminology from Roach and Halbwachs will be explored later, I would like to clarify and define a few terms that I will routinely use throughout the project. I am primarily working with three different layers of cultural memory. First, there is *personal* or individual memory. As Maurice Halbwachs defines, "Individual memory is brought about because of triggering other people and places. Individual memory also exists separate from collective because it presupposes meaning made with other people that they may not be with or

sharing new memories with at the time (Halbwachs 23). Secondly, there is *collective* or family memory. Finally, there is *public* memory. What Graham Smith defines as “social memory” is close to what I mean when I say “public memory”: “social remembering broadly describes both the processes involved in individuals communicating their memories of a shared past and knowledge that results from the act of reminiscing” (G. Smith 437). The emphasis on the “processes” as well as individuals’ necessary interactions with others is what lays the foundation for public memory. Typically, public memory for my purposes means American memory, whereas collective memory tends to be a more specific group’s—such as family memory or Appalachian memory. Each of these layers contribute to what I loosely refer to as “cultural” memory—or the transmission of unifying performances that distinguish what memories survive over generations of reinvention or what fall away from memory.

While “cultural memory” and “cultural transmission” are loaded terms, I generally focus on “culture” as it carries weight for collective identity formation and recirculation of that identity. I build from Bhabha’s tenants of culture’s necessary investment in inventive regeneration for the survival of a collective whole, as he describes in *The Location of Culture*. While Bhabha writes about regeneration of culture in terms of postcolonial displacement, migration, and territorial boundaries, his arguments align with my focus on Caruth’s paradigm of lost memory as unknowable memory when he says that culture is a strategy for survival (247). It is a strategy for survival *not* in its static authenticity passed down like a reliquary but as a nation’s or people’s awareness of their traditions invented and constructed for unification (Bhabha 248). This sense of “culture” being a constructed set of memories and tradition being “invented” is an ideal paradigm for looking at Lee Smith, whose work seeks to reveal this very inventiveness of origins and traditions. Her work suggests that if cultural memory can be constructed, then it can also be

deconstructed to be confronted, reassembled, and restorative of previously lost voices in collective and public memories. Therefore, for this analysis, I refer to “culture” to mean the series of performances —oral or otherwise—that are constantly regenerated in communal, yet individually adaptable, ways. The sum of these performances then exist as valuable to collective imaginations and public imaginations that seek to construct representations that reflect both past origins and present cohesion.

My general method for investigating Smith’s fictional representations of cultural memory construction follows the same general driving question for each of the three texts: how is Smith using performance as a way for negotiating between recovering or revising personal memory and creating a collective memory? In order to answer this question, I will focus on *Oral History* (1983), *Fair and Tender Ladies* (1989), and *The Devil’s Dream* (1993). The first two are linked by what I argue is an important consideration in reading the texts through their allusions or use of the “Fair and Tender Ladies” Anglo-Irish-American ballad that serves as the epigraph for *Oral History* and the title of the second novel under consideration. *The Devil’s Dream* engages performance in a more overt way as Smith traces the genesis of country music through a fictional portrayal of the Bailey family, which is loosely based on the Carter family. The hymn “Wayfaring Stranger” figures prominently throughout this novel. Thus the “Fair and Tender Ladies” ballad and the “Wayfaring Stranger” hymn serve as examples of cultural memories transmitted through multiple family generations in the novels. They are representative of performance of song as a way into recovering past collective memories, while simultaneously asserting individual adaptation of that memory for personal use for a new generation or individual. The songs serve as an entrance to examining Smith’s complex negotiations between personal and collective memory in the broader transmission of Appalachian cultural memory.

Oral History is generally the most widely read and acclaimed of Smith's novels for its complex narration of eight different narrators representing multiple generations of the fictional Cantrell family "curse." This novel explores the revision of collective memory through individual performances of storytelling. *Fair and Tender Ladies*, an epistolary novel based on Ivy Rowe's letters from childhood to adulthood, takes a powerful look at the personal confrontation and revision of a collective past involved in negotiating individual anxieties about *sharing* personal memory and making it collective through a personal recovery of storytelling. *The Devil's Dream*, then, explores the loss of the individual memory in creation and sustainment of a collective image existing as a public stage presence.

In Chapter One I argue that *Oral History* examines the role of adaptive storytelling as a mode of performance that allows for an assertion of personal perspective within a collective memory framework. I focus on the role of the audience as listener to reposition traditional readings' emphasis on the storytellers' craft. Examining the novel in terms of the in-text audience of Jennifer draws attention to Smith's work of performative storytelling that is based on adaptive and regenerating narrative cycles that resist individual ownership and therefore exist and are regenerated by shared "ownership." Further, the denial of this revisionist style of storytelling opens up the daily use value of the stories to commodification, ownership, and public memory.

Chapter Two's reading of the epistolary novel *Fair and Tender Ladies* examines the role of performance in Ivy's negotiation between her highly privatized revision of personal childhood memory and her realization of the necessity of *sharing* memory to make it collective and enduring. Similar to the "Fair and Tender Ladies" ballad that serves as the epigraph for *Oral History*, the same ballad plays a more central role in this novel whose title comes from the ballad

itself. I read the text as a reinvention of personal memory by revision of the oral cautionary ballad themes intrinsic to Ivy's childhood memory but literally rewritten by Ivy herself on her own terms. Ivy's negotiation of memory is notable here because she does not outright reject, nor does she denounce the cultural memory surrounding her childhood, but she reinvents it through writing and finding a nurturing way of sharing memory through the letters she writes to her dead sister Silvaney. Ivy must reinvent her personal memory, and only sharing and storytelling with the created persona of her dead sister allows her recovery of her art that is intrinsic to her sense of self. To better understand the performative role sharing with the dead plays for Ivy's self-identity construction, I apply Roach's notion of *effigy*, usually used for analyzing rituals or street performances, such as Mardi Gras Indians in New Orleans, to a text. Roach defines effigy as "a set of actions that hold open a place in memory into which many different people may step according to circumstances and occasions...performed effigies—those fabricated from human bodies and the associations they evoke—provide communities with a method of perpetuating themselves through specially nominated mediums or surrogates..." (36). Ivy's dead sister to whom she writes as a process for revising personal memory through collective sharing functions as the effigy—the surrogate for live people Ivy feels comfortable enough to *share* with that eventually becomes interchangeable with Ivy's children and grandchildren. *Fair and Tender Ladies* is also an important work for tracing revision of personal memory and negotiating that with collective memory through non-traditional performance forms.

Chapter Three's reading of *The Devil's Dream* builds on Chapter Two's analysis of the relationship between personal and collective memory by considering public celebrity and what personal memory is lost in the transfer of the Bailey family recording their family songs. I use Roach's definition of the duality of the celebrity body—the body natural and the body

cinematic—to frame the loss of individual self that occurs at the expense of the collective image (*It* 36). For the founder of the family musical act, R.C. Bailey (loosely based on A.P. Carter) performs as an attempt to recover personal memory when the personal is necessarily sacrificed to the collective as their family music is *recorded* at the Bristol Sessions. His inability to see his own duality of personal and performer as an artistic construction he himself creates, contrasts his ways of handling memory “loss” with the protagonist’s collective family performance in which her individual, everyday self is separate from the collective. As the characters create their own celebrity images, they are in effect crafting the immortal images that will remain. Where memory can tie in nicely here is in noting that in these dual forms, the “body” form is the more human form—a safeguard for personal memory despite the façade that simultaneously exists as the public image. I argue that we can analyze R.C. Bailey in terms of this dual celebrity self to understand his inability to recognize that his celebrity image is not an entire representative of his personal memory. Furthermore, this inability stems from R.C.’s “unknowable” loss that occurs when his performance forms suddenly become “recordable” and resists the adaptable fluidity his cultural memory is based on.

While each of these texts treat the layers of personal, collective, and public memory in varying ways, a few themes emerge to address the original questions about how Smith uses performance and how she negotiates individual within collective and public memory. As seen in all three novels, Smith, in the spirit of Alice Walker, posits women’s “everyday use” of oral storytelling and singing to keep alive the daily performances that serve to interrogate, recover, or redefine individual memory lost to the creation of the collective family memory or to the public memory. Emphasis on oral traditions, vernacular speech, and the focus on the immediate concerns of everyday life is the adaptable art that links Smith to similar work of Toni Morrison,

Eudora Welty, Zora Neale Hurston, and Leslie Marmon Silko—all women writers who use oral performance in various ways. Smith also seems to argue for a way of viewing “ownership” of shared memory and experiences that is not based on monetary value but by sharing communal memory with outsiders. When the individual memory is “lost” to the creation of collective memory, or when the living memory is lost to commodification, Smith draws attention to instability of individual ownership balancing both personal and public images.

Smith’s texts are ideal for investigating transfers of personal and collective memory in the construction and revision of past collective memory because the lines in these novels are blurry for how much should be “shared” and made collective without loss of the integrity of individual memory. Story-sharing, dependent upon both the artistic rendering of the teller and the active agency of the listener, is vitally important in the transmission of a culture and collective identity. As Jocelyn Hazelwood Donlon articulates so nicely,

Oral performances of personal narratives command real, warm-blooded listeners to enthusiastically receive, value, and confirm the experiences of the teller. In this recurring cycle of telling and listening, the speaking subject tends to be venerated as one who asserts an identity. (17)

Whether the performance is in storytelling, singing, or adapting a ballad, the performance itself is an act of communal identity-construction of shared experience. At what point does the pursuit of “culture” and preserving “culture” become too exclusive or too commodity-driven? The other side of the coin is storytelling as reinforcement of boundaries that Smith seems to be deconstructing. Donlon notes, “Storytellers, faced with the threat of having their personal narratives either dismissed or appropriated, recount their experiences in order to secure ownership of events that belong to them” (Donlon 16). This sense of “ownership” of events and

“belonging” is what Smith grapples with in a real way—preserving the individual voice and authenticity of experience while also recognizing the value of a collective environment.

To return to our key players in cultural preservation and invention, how do Alan Lomax, Jean Ritchie and A.P. Carter walk the line of cultural preservation through public performance without risking the imbalance of cultural appropriation and commodification? Do the quests for *authenticity* in Lomax’s preservation of “dying” culture, in Ritchie’s recovery of British “roots,” in A.P. Carter’s invention of an “original” sound, and in a young academic’s misguided search for cultural “origins” lose sight of the fluidity of collective memory and the daily revision process of sifting and sieving memories for cultural transmission? Even as Smith’s work directly engages the collective past’s cultural memory and institutions, she challenges readers to see cultural memory not as tangible but as shareable, not as recoverable but as adaptable, not as “own-able” but revisable, not as transcribe-able, but as performable.

CHAPTER ONE

“Such a Killin’ Crime”: Hearing, Remembering, and Sharing the Warnings of *Oral History*

It is the voiceless people of the planet who really have in their memories the 90,000 years of human life and wisdom. I've devoted my entire life to an obsessive collecting together of the evidence.
Alan Lomax, 1972

From flinging babies over precipices to revenge poison, from feuds to attempted train-sniper plots, from suicide to revenge murder, *Oral History* proves its “Fair and Tender Ladies” ballad epigraph true: love is indeed “such a killin’ crime.” As one of the novel’s eight narrators telling his perspective on the Cantrell family curse, outsider Richard Burlage is disturbed by the family legacy, describing it as:

...that nonsense which seized hold of my mind in a peculiarly ruthless fashion, contributing in no small way to my fever and delirium...some wild information...I’m sure to the effect that Hoot Owl Holler is haunted, and those many deaths (quite chilling, in all truth, in kind as well as number: a horrible litany) and Dory, too, was cursed, and that a “witch-woman” walks up and down Grassy Creek from Hoot Owl. (Smith 160)

Oral History is a series of performances by first-person narrators each contributing their own stories to the collective memory that is the Cantrell family history. Packed with orality, not only in the ballad themes Smith weaves throughout the text but also in the dialect her characters use to share their tales, the text provides complicated intersections of personal performances that construct collective family memory. Each character represents the next generation’s perspective on the family curse and its tragedies.

Smith’s generational negotiation of individual and collective memory ultimately falls to the last descendent in the Cantrell line, Jennifer Bingham, who denies all access to both

individual and collective memory of her family past. Jennifer's passive denial of her history ends in the Cantrell homestead falling to a cousin, whose version of ownership of the stories he enacts is to create an amusement park on the property that charges visitors to sit on the porch of the haunted house and listen for ghosts. Jennifer remains silent; she never shares the stories further than her college folklore assignment. So while the family stories Jennifer hears are primarily warnings about careless love, Smith seems to be making an underlying warning herself with regard to memory: that stories and memory carefully locked away need an audience to perform their purpose. And yet, even so, sharing stories based on commodified ownership has an alternative effect that results in the creation of theme-park-proportion entertainment that the family homestead becomes.

I argue for a reading of *Oral History's* family stories in terms of the "Fair and Tender Ladies" ballad warnings about love in order to more deeply account for how the role of audience and implied listener of the stories (Jennifer) affects our interpretation of Smith's handling of personal and collective memory. I read the text, perhaps unconventionally, as the transcriptions of the ghost stories Jennifer's tape recorder captures in the haunted house. To examine this more closely, we can come back to the character Sally, whose storytelling reveals an artistry that best balances collective sharing with personal memory. Jennifer's dismissal of Sally's story in particular is a tragedy not only because it asserts the past has no place in modern times, but also because it asserts a transmission of memory based on ownership rather than personal investment in the collective.

Jennifer's dismissal of Sally's story ultimately leads to a harmful version of ownable memory in the form of the amusement park. Even if Jennifer herself has no real stake in the theme park, by denying storytelling and its revision/sharing processes she opts for a static, fixed

image of her family history as a band of primitive people endlessly rocking on a front porch in a holler. For illustrating ownable and commodified memory, Joseph Roach offers what can here serve as a parallel example of ownable, commodified memory in his discussion of a drastically different type of image—Elvis on a postage stamp. Roach recounts the process of requesting permission from Hamilton Projects (the owner of Graceland) to reproduce an image of Elvis on a U.S. Postal Service stamp in his book *Cities of the Dead*. To do so, he would have had to obtain a certificate of insurance for one million dollars holding the U.S. Postal Service harmless of any damages arising out of the publication of Elvis's image. Roach says he believes the strictures were applied “to protect not intellectual property per se but the effigy's power of selection over what is remembered inviolately and by whom” (Roach 71). This power of remembrance over who owns the rights to how something can/should be remembered is similar to the commodification of the family stories as “ownable” and “sellable” by the end of *Oral History* when the family homestead becomes an amusement park. While still not Elvis on a postage stamp, the amusement park is a stamped, fixed buyable image that misrepresents the depth of the family stories.

In the novel, stewardship of memory falls to an oft-neglected piece of Smith's storytelling puzzle: the implied audience of Jennifer as listener and receiver of the family stories who ultimately has the capacity to control how the collective family memory is made public. Jocelyn Hazelwood Donlon is one of the few critics to turn attention to *Oral History*'s listeners, which she primarily interprets as the readers of the text. In “Hearing is Believing: Southern Racial Communities and Strategies of Story-Listening in Gloria Naylor and Lee Smith,” Donlon examines *Oral History* in comparison with *Mama Day* arguing that Smith and Naylor “ultimately reveal their distrust of the American reader, whose historical reluctance to hear

stories of difference compels the authors' use of narrative ploys" (16). Donlon demonstrates how images of "Whiteness" in *Oral History* remind the reader-audience that they are positioned in a distinctly White storytelling dynamic generally skeptical of outsiders or difference (29). She aligns the reader-audience with the American audience in African American texts:

...there is a White "discourse of distrust" at work in Smith's novel. If African American literature manifests a distrust of the "American reader," Smith's text also embodies distrust of this reader, specifically the (predominantly White) American academy which has traditionally refused to authenticate the value of oral storytelling in favor of literary difficulty. Furthermore, by pointing to cultural and class boundaries within the White community itself, Smith confronts the very community that has perpetuated the notion of a "universal" reader through presupposing its own White authority. In this way, Smith aligns herself with Toni Morrison, helping to unravel the myth that White acts of reading and writing can be race-free. (Donlon 29)

Indeed, Smith creates a distinctly white narrative that calls its readers to re-think the universal—whether that is universal assumptions about predominately white academia and what it validates, assumptions about stereotypes of Appalachia, assumptions about women in Appalachia, or assumptions about the past as a fixed and static folk-lore repository. Donlon's analysis that takes up an audience-centered approach to the novel to show Smith's objectives in inviting readers to rethink assumptions can be expanded to look at how listening functions as a force that shapes and influences storytellers' individual performative art not just for the reader-audience, but the audience *in the text*. This allows us to look at Smith's handling of sharing personal stories and how collective memory is negotiated in various forms of ownership.

Donlon's emphasis on the reader as "listener" misses the way the idea of audience and "listener" can be applied to Jennifer. This angle reveals a better understanding of Smith's comments on sharing and owning stories and narratives as they relate to public memory. When we consider more closely Jennifer's role as implied listener for all of the stories, we see how the stories can be read as *individual warnings* directed to Jennifer not only about the "killin' crime of love" but also about the "crimes" and benefits of sharing stories with outsiders.

The germ of collective memory the Cantrell women pass down lies in the novel's ballad epigraph, which sets the theme for building a collective family memory based on warning against the trials of careless love. The epigraph includes the first two stanzas of the ballad "Fair and Tender Ladies":

Come all you fair and tender ladies
Be careful how you court young men.
They're like a star in a summer's morning,
First appear and they're gone.

If I'd a knowed afore I courted
That love, it was such a killin' crime,
I'd a-locked my heart in a box of golden
and tied it up with a silver line.

As much as the ballad above is a warning to the reader-audience against carelessness in love, it is also the foundation of the series of warnings Jennifer receives as the in-text "fair and tender lady" to whom all the "be careful" stories in the novel are addressed. Reading all the stories in the text in terms of Jennifer as in-text audience is important because it reveals an important piece in Smith's objective: to call readers' attention to the power of ownership they wield over stories and storytelling as audience. By reading Jennifer's handling of her ownership of the stories, we as reader-audience are called to examine our own power as audience in the formation of public memory. To distinguish these terms more clearly, we can turn to James Phelan's *Reading People*,

Reading Plots. Phelan defines the audience that the author intends as the “authorial audience.”

He writes, “the authorial audience is the ideal audience that an author implicitly posits in constructing the text, the one that will pick up on all the signals in the appropriate way” (Phelan 5). For Smith, this would be us—the reader-audience. I’m arguing that Jennifer is what Phelan would call the “narrative audience.” He writes, “The narrative audience is that group of readers for whom the lyric, dramatic, or narrative situation is not synthetic but real...for the mimetic illusion to work, we must enter the narrative audience” (Phelan 5). In *Oral History*, we are primarily hearing the stories from the perspective of Jennifer as narrative audience.

Placing heightened awareness of Jennifer as the implied listener throughout the entire novel’s family story takes into account why memories are shared, remembered, and/or recorded and who benefits from that sharing. Jennifer’s quest to record the ways of her mother’s family is done for a college project to impress her professor whom she will marry after graduating. This is the frame for the story sharing that comprises *Oral History*. Some critics, such as Donlon, argue that it is ultimately unclear who the in-text audience really is or if there is one (27). She cites the narrator who frames Jennifer’s first person journal entry as evidence for Jennifer not being a sustained in-text audience (Donlon 28). However, reading Jennifer’s recordings of what she hears as the in-text audience adds a complexity that goes beyond the reader-audience: “Jennifer’s tape, when she plays it, will have enough banging and crashing and wild laughter on it to satisfy even the most hardened cynic in the class” (Smith 284). I read this to mean that the tape recorder *does* capture all the stories and voices in the novel, but Jennifer just *chooses* to reduce them to, and present them as, no more than bangings and crashings and wild laughter because she wants no part of her mother’s family, who she decides is “primitive.” The text seems to support a conscious *choice* Jennifer makes to disregard what she hears:

But by the time she gets back to the college, Jennifer has stopped crying and gotten a hold on herself. She has changed it all around in her head. . . They still live so close to the land, all of them. . . They are really very primitive people, resembling nothing so much as some sort of early tribe. Crude jokes and animal instincts—it's the other side of the pastoral coin. (Smith 284)

In moments where an identifiable third-party narrator steps in and offers the future tense is where Donlon diverges from my view citing that this dismantles the continuity of Jennifer as narrative audience throughout. Indeed, the third person narrator who knows the events to come is a different insertion here. However, I think this is simply the narration one would expect from an epilogue outside of the consistent narration throughout the rest of the novel—though it is not named as an epilogue. But the fact that Jennifer “changes it all around in her head” is indicative of an initial acceptance of something other than thinking of her family as primitive, crude, and tribal—the language of academic anthropology. To me, this supports a *choice* to disregard the warnings and the art forms she hears. Some of the stories would be understandable to want to disregard, such as Ora Mae's—the family monarch and self-imposed martyr caretaker of the Cantrell family—whose passionless adherence to the restrictions of mountain life would likely seem undesirable. But less convincing is why Jennifer would disregard Sally's life and story that takes place in more modern times and finds ways to reinvent the family story in ways that are productive to her personal memory as well as the collective family memory.

Sally's story demonstrates the negotiation between individual and collective memory not only by embodying a fusion of the past with the modern (Billips 28) in a way that is explicitly artistic but also by using the performative art of storytelling to clarify her own individuality within the collective family curse she carries. She can only reshape the collective memory by

asserting her own artistic right to do so and making herself different from the other storytellers that precede her. Sally's individual memory is constructed and clarified to herself through the performance of her storytelling, which is shared not only with Jennifer as the novel's implied audience but also explicitly with her husband Roy. Through sharing her stories with multiple audiences, even Sally's individual memory is shaped collaboratively by her husband's reactions and responses. As Graham Smith notes, "individual remembering includes...recollection of direct experience and the result of being reminded of such experiences through engaging with other people's recollections" (437).

Sally's artistic successes in assimilating the past into the present require an audience, both to enable Sally's ownership of language and body and to deconstruct the past in order to reinvent meaning for herself in the present. Jennifer's dismissal of Sally is therefore tragic from an audience perspective because it enforces a transmission of history and art based on ownership and exclusive access. Unlike the theme park that asserts ownership over the family stories, Sally's *ownership* is not primarily over the collective memory but over herself as an individual utilizing her version of the collective memory to live her life. Sally enacts what Graham Smith notes is "embodied memory" that includes habitual body memory within people's recollections (437). Sally represents a balance between being her own individual *within* the family past through her merging of sex and storytelling. As Linda Byrd articulates, "A healing is offered in the marriage between Sally and Roy, one based on equality and communication. Unlike the sexual intercourse between so many before her who could find no words to express their sexual feelings, Sally is filled with words and shares all of them with her husband" (141). Jennifer's dismissal of Sally's story is read by some scholars as a tragic dismissal in three layers: she dismisses herself as artist (Dale 187), as reviser of a family history traditionally bound in

hierarchal gender restrictions (Hill 199), and as negotiator between how much the past should affect her individual life in the present/future (Eckard 16).

As implied audience (or “narrative audience”) for Sally’s story, Jennifer’s dismissal of Sally’s telling is less about the actual story and more in the way Sally tells the story as entertainment rather than direct warning. While Jennifer is the listener of Sally’s story, Sally recounts her *process* to Jennifer of her telling the story to her husband to pass the time during his injury from a truck accident. Immediately when Sally begins, “I told him the whole story, I never had told it before, Roy sitting home in a leg cast so he couldn’t do anything else *but* talk” (Smith 235). Jennifer would recognize that this story has a different purpose than the didactic warning of most of the others. Sally’s storytelling becomes a lesson in storytelling itself rather than how to live, which is why Jennifer’s dismissal of Sally’s story is doubly tragic. She denies the whole process of storytelling, which serves as a model for incorporating the past into the present memory.

Throughout Sally’s story of her mother’s and sister’s tragedies, she does tell them to Roy in part as entertainment. In doing so, she also underscores the non-linear pacing of her “live” telling by making self-referential commentary to the active construction of her own narrative thereby imbuing the construction of family memory with this precedent of active, on-the-spot revision. Sally is the first teller to fully and explicitly deconstruct the family tales and appropriate them expressly for her own construction that is *useful* to her. She deconstructs origin as a fixed event or historical point and works out her own place to start. She says: “I can see I’ll have to start again. It’s hard, you know, to find the beginning. This is not it either, of course—nothing ever is—but this is where we’ll start” (Smith 245). She begins her telling not with Red Emmy (the first tale that begins the novel) and not with her own birth, but unconventionally with her

mother Dory's suicide on the train tracks. The stories have an everyday use value to her in passing the time until supper or keeping the daily memories with her that make her who she is. As Debbie Wesley notes of Sally's art, "For Smith, the artistic moment is to be found when people come together and create order through the commonplace rituals of everyday life. She wants to take art off Mount Olympus and back to the people" (89).

Unlike other characters who restrict memory and use it only to warn the immediate inner circle of the Cantrell family, Sally engages Roy in a way that enacts what Roach calls a "living memory" that is resistant to the necessary forgetting that occurs with restricted memory. Roach calls this living memory the transmission of gestures, habits and skills (26). The stories have a practical, adaptable purpose for her daily situation, such as when she needs to adjust the telling to finish by supper. She says, "And most of this is so bad I'll have to tell it real fast, the way I did Mama dying. I had to tell it real fast to Roy that day anyway, we were pushing suppertime by then" (Smith 274). Packed in this comment reveals both the everyday use value of her stories passing time until supper and the impact her family tragedies have in Sally's daily existences as the person she is.

One of the primary lessons Sally passes on to Jennifer via her storytelling is that performing stories (sharing them) can provide personal healing and overcome loss. Sally's version of ownership of her stories stems not from warning and thereby enforcing a loop cycle of the curse's exclusivity, but she finds ownership in the stories through *sharing* them with the imagined audience of Jennifer but also in a very real, tangible way with her husband Roy. In sharing her story with Roy, she revises her family history to make it useful to her individual needs—entertainment and healing for her everyday life. Sally's words are inventive, original,

and artistic because they take as subject the everyday bits of existence as family history; her words go beyond words of warning. As Wesley notes of Smith's aims,

For Smith, the artistic moment is to be found when people come together and create order through the commonplace rituals of everyday life. She wants to take art off Mount Olympus and back to the people... Sally's artistry is manifested in its digressions and multiple perspectives coupled with emphasis of ownership of own body and language. (Wesley 89)

This version of everyday art allows her to overcome loss and gain *healing* while entertaining her audience of Roy. By revising art and memory she has inherited, she overcomes and makes sense of her mother's loss. She works through her mother's suicide by recalling and reliving the morning in detail. Unlike other storytellers in the novel, Sally's identity is not tied up in regeneration of the curse. But the loss Sally experiences from her mother's death is a piece of her past/curse that she can't ignore, so she acknowledges that loss and works through it via storytelling. In denying Sally's story specifically, Jennifer denies storytelling as a way to overcome loss that occurs in a mutual sharing between teller and listener as embodied in Sally's telling to her listener husband Roy.

However, as owner of her individual ability to craft these stories, Sally does sift through what to remember and what to take lightly, and she does this through humorizing tragic family events. Roach terms this "selective memory" as public enactments of forgetting, either "to blur the obvious discontinuities, misalliances, and ruptures or, more desperately, to exaggerate them in order to mystify a previous Golden Age" (26). On the surface, one might argue that Sally's storytelling emphasis at times as comical entertainment passes to Jennifer denial of tragedy rather than overcoming it given her emphasis on the entertainment value of her stories. The

storytelling begins to explicitly take on a different purpose that is not necessarily to warn but to entertain, to share humor, and to pass the time: “Listen, I said, and I got him a beer, I’ll start at the beginning, I said, which I did, and although I told it the best I could, I’m still not sure I got it straight. It took me a day to tell the whole thing” (Smith 235). Sally’s story begins under the guise of passing the time to occupy Roy after his truck accident, but it is packed with tragedy that Sally is forced to confront if she’s orally telling the story unrehearsed. In this way Roy as audience—more specifically Roy as a willing listening audience who seldom interrupts or tries to impede Sally’s method of telling—serves as the impetus for Sally sifting through her individual memory to decide what is important to keep solemn and what can be presented lightly—what *needs* to be serious and what *needs* to be humorous for moving on.

For instance, while we’ve seen that Sally tells her mother’s death as a way to overcome loss, she treats the tragedy of her sister Pearl, who had an affair with a student and died in childbirth, as mostly comical. Though the story has grave implications in that it is her student Donnie who ends up shooting one of the Cantrell cousins out of revenge, Sally tells this tragedy with emphasis on a punch line when she recounts Pearl relaying the instant she realized she could not love Donnie. As Sally humorously tells what Pearl said to Donnie before she left him, “(This is Roy’s favorite part). ‘Donny, you know you really ought to order some vegetables. You know you’re a growing boy’” (Smith 273). Sally acknowledges that, despite the tragedy, the story is funny. She says, “I wish I could have stopped telling there. Because that part—that last part, Roy’s favorite—*is* funny, even though it is also bad, and the rest of it is just bad. Sometimes it’s hard to tell the difference” (Smith 273). Sally chooses to laugh rather than cry in recounting these memories: “Well, if you didn’t laugh, you’d have to cry” (273), and she has support from her husband Roy who loves to listen and talk. Sally’s conflation of laughing and crying solidifies

the emerging dual purpose of the storytelling that moves away from warnings per se and creates a new focus on assimilating loss and tragedy into everyday experience even if humor is the way to do this for herself and her personal memory. This is a coping model Sally passes on to Jennifer via storytelling in negotiating memory of loss and tragedy while also glossing over what can be glossed over in order to move forward in the face of loss.

However, sharing tragedy in terms of humor is also what really complicates the public memory aspect of story-sharing in the novel. Entertainment and humor become associated with tourist attractions. Sally herself acknowledges how her sister's tragic story and the murder at Hoot Owl Holler put the homestead on the map as a "tourist attraction." Suddenly the story-sharing spreads to the public who have no real investment in the family history, so the stories become not vehicles for overcoming loss at all but instead are "attractions." We see the extreme of this by the end of the novel when Al Cantrell builds an amusement park on the homestead and charges admission to experience the family "ghost stories." What Sally passes on to Jennifer is a model for overcoming loss through sharing, but the effects of "too much" sharing undermines the original purpose and loses the audience aspect of storytelling as mutual healing between teller and listener and instead becomes based on competitive *ownership* of entertainment.

But even if Sally's stories carry the undertones/wariness of the effects of story-sharing with a wide, public audience, Sally never directly echoes the didacticism of the ballad's warning. With the tragedies Sally recounts, she could have made them at the forefront of her tales to warn listeners of careless love. But instead she approaches the careless love with acceptance and recognition that she is an individual capable of her own path outside of the family curse and uses the careless love stories to cobble together her own version of how they are useful. If Sally is imparting wisdom to Jennifer as a listener, she is passing on a need for negotiation, balance, and

revision of memory that takes into account tragedy but also necessarily makes light of it in order to move forward and “live.” Sally introduces a spectrum of entertainment starting with her own telling as entertaining for her husband and sets up the ultimate progression of that entertainment to the amusement park that her relatives will build around the family story. But notably somewhere in between that spectrum emerges a sense of artistry—of recounting history as an art that must be shared with an audience to have meaning and understanding. By sharing her family story she creates art that heals and revises, entertains so as to lose some of the tragedy, and liberates herself from the cycle of the curse. Simply put, what is lost/denied by Jennifer is the value of sharing personal stories for *healing*—both for the listener and for the teller. Unlike other storytellers only concerned with preserving strict adherence to a closed insidersness designed to warn against violation of purity, Sally passes on to Jennifer a respect for audience and sharing as necessary to storytelling’s healing process for overcoming loss.

Positioned in contrast to Sally’s version of storytelling based on sharing and listening, two other women matriarchs, Granny Younger and Ora Mae, are characters representative of the opposite version of storytelling based on didactic warning and resistance to collective sharing. Where Sally is more concerned with sharing her storytelling process and application to daily life rather than any warning itself, Granny Younger’s sole purpose in telling is to *warn* Jennifer against the careless love Almarine succumbed to by marrying a witch Red Emmy (the beginning of the family curse).

As we saw with Sally, sharing the family stories with an individual voice is necessary to keep the balance maintained between individual and collective family memory. However, Granny Younger’s is the first voice on Jennifer’s tape, and she sets the harmful precedent of denying individual desire, taking a patriarchal tone in calling Almarine Cantrell’s first wife a

“witch woman.” She warns against Jennifer against people like Red Emmy the witch woman because future generations must be warned against a careless love—careless to the extent of being in bed with the devil. She addresses the listener directly: “For I believe it’s been going on a long time, and it’s high time you heard it out loud. It ain’t gone do no good to tell it, I know that, nothing ain’t gone change in the telling, but leastways somebody can warn the younguns. The younguns orter be told” (Smith 173). Granny Younger sets out the purpose for her telling the story of Red Emmy and Almarine’s ill-fated love story—“somebody can warn the younguns.” Granny echoes the ballad’s warning to the fair and tender ladies, the “younguns,” like Jennifer. Granny paints Red Emmy as a sex-obsessed fiery witch woman who consorted with the Devil and drove Almarine to madness. Red Emmy represents the carelessness Jennifer should be warned against, but nowhere in Granny Younger’s warning does she account for her listener’s own agency or individual action. Granny’s story assumes all tragedy and carelessness is to be avoided; yet, as we know from Sally’s experience, the capacity for individual memory construction must first be established in order to access the collective memory and utilize it personally while also regenerating it artistically.

Similarly, the matriarch Ora Mae represents another example of a warning figure at odds with Sally’s version of storytelling. Ora Mae’s existence enacts the ballad’s warning to keep love “a-locked away in a box of gold.” Their stories embody a complete disconnect from the passion and carelessness the ballad warns against. However their experiences undermine the ballads’ warning because their lives end only in unhappiness or anti-climactic death. Ora Mae Cantrell is the self-proclaimed caretaker of the Cantrells. She acts as a martyr figure staying around the family because they can’t otherwise function or be stabilized without her. She marries twice but seemingly only to keep the family intact (her son Billy is the one the high school avenger Donnie

kills). Ora Mae's descriptions of attraction and sex mask most all emotion and feeling. She clearly feels, but she does not allow herself to give over to careless emotion, as evidenced by her description of sex with her first husband:

I hate what-all I know. I kept on crying but I laid there just as still while he kept kissing me on my shoulders and my breasts and my belly, every damn place, I laid there just as still while he did it, and every kiss burned like fire on my skin, I can feel them kisses yet if I've got a mind to.

Which I don't.

I'm all they've got. (Smith 216)

Ora Mae's immediate denial of herself for the sake of dealing with the Cantrell family rationally and objectively takes the ballad's idea of locking love away nearly to the extreme. By taking this route, Ora Mae seems to acknowledge and accept no portion of love or happiness through her life. But with admissions like the one above, she clearly does not "feel" (or at least does not admit to "feeling") but represses those urges and seems to have twinges of regret in at least a few points in her life. Ora Mae is the one who ceremoniously discards the matrilineal gold earrings symbolic of the other Cantrell women's carelessness and tragic demises. When Pearl dies from childbirth, Ora Mae takes the earrings and memorably holds them up to her own ears before tossing them off the mountain precipice. At that moment, we see Ora Mae once again taking control of the Cantrell situation, but her action of holding the earrings up to herself before flinging them away first is telling of her possible regret or secret yearning to love carelessly as other women in her family have. Her warning to Jennifer is then two-fold: on the one hand her life and story suggests for Jennifer to guard herself and guard personal memory—that emotional sharing has no place in individual survival. Yet images of regret like holding the earrings to her

ears suggest to Jennifer she should not necessarily heed the careful warnings if she wishes to be happy. In both Granny Younger and Ora Mae's cases, we see that the collective memory cannot obliterate the individual. Granny Younger and Ora Mae represent storytellers directed toward a restricted inner public of the Cantrell family. By keeping themselves focused on an audience that is the collective Cantrell progeny, they lose sight of Jennifer as an individual.

But given Jennifer's options of careful love like Ora Mae and Granny Younger or more careless to balanced love Sally describes, she rejects not just the careless or careful version of love (or memory) but rejects it all in its entirety. The final tragedy in the Cantrell curse in one sense is Jennifer's dismissal of her inheritance of the collective memory. And for that tradeoff, the Ghostland amusement park materializes just as Ora Mae and Luther and Sally move away or die off. The Hoot Owl Holler house standing empty as a mausoleum is obviously an impractical resolution, but Jennifer's dismissal of the stories and the creation of the amusement park together still embody the kind of careless and careful mentalities throughout the novel—only by the end the careful and careless is more to do with memory and how it is shared and who controls sharing it. Though suddenly the lines are very blurry about which option is which. Is Jennifer being “careful” by leaving the Cantrells behind? Or is she careless? Is the amusement park the best possible solution for how to channel collective memory when there no longer exists a Cantrell collective to inhabit it? Instead of dwelling on whether or not the amusement park is a heinous invasion and takeover of mountain purity, what we need to be addressing attention to again is the implied listener for the novel: Jennifer.

At the end of the day, what are Jennifer's losses for not buying into her oral family legacy? On the surface, she gets out of the cycle of oscillating between careful and careless—both to generally unhappy ends. But on a deeper level, despite the voices of warning and threats,

what outlives the verbal warnings are the actions—the actions of full-lived lives. Red Emmy defied the space cut out for her and severed herself from the Cantrell family, Dory loved outside her close family community and literally severed herself from the Cantrells by killing herself, Pearl was killed by the life she created in the baby she conceived with her student, and Sally moves to Florida with her second husband happy and content to be entertained by the stories of the Cantrell collective. Is it really then surprising that Jennifer leaves? And by her leaving is she not also participating in the legacy that precedes her?

So far neglected in this argument is the schoolteacher/photographer character of Richard Burlage, who provides a substantial central portion of the novel's narration, including his affair with Dory, his exile from the mountain, his return to the mountain to photograph his old stomping grounds, and finally his publication of his memoir at the end of the novel. Richard is important because he is the closest character we have to Jennifer in terms of their similar academic aims of uncovering self as well as anthropological material. Richard represents a balancing force similar to Sally because he balances his "careless" love-affair that gets him exiled from the mountain and his older self who returns to the mountain to photograph his old haunts. In the end, Richard rounds out the "safe" academic option for recording memory. However, even with the publication of his memoirs at the end (an alternative representation of the family stories), the narrator seems to treat even this version of memory/commodification with derision: "old Richard Burlage will write his memoirs and they will be published, to universal if somewhat limited acclaim, by LSU Press..." (Smith 285). The stories are made public through the academic eyes of Richard, but the epilogue narrator seems to be poking fun at the actual universal circulation and readership here. Thus even this form of story-sharing has limitations to full representations of the family history.

The collective memory in the end does what it sets out to accomplish. It pervades individual everyday lives. It is not tied to fixed physical space nor fixed genetic inheritance. The stories do their work for the actual family members' daily lives whether it be in assimilating the tragedy and coping with it mixed with entertainment purposes (Sally) or whether it is in filling a missing piece or link that Jennifer then protects by leaving it. With each accumulation of new audience, the story may not change much, but the change in audience affects the use value of the story. Al recognizes a new audience—the wider public—and the stories take on a different daily use value in performing the “killin’ crimes” at their most entertaining extremes. As soon as the stories become “ownable” in the monetary sense, the storyteller loses the space and narrative time to construct stories like Sally does—by impromptu choosing what is/is not important and through that dealing with loss and tragedy by orally memorizing the past’s influence on the present in order to move forward living in the present and future. When that storyteller-audience transaction becomes a product that an audience is paying for, the audience’s demands are what affect and change the way the story is told.

Jennifer’s fate ultimately is to relinquish any ownership to her family history and control over the delicate balance of using it for personal memory as well as sharing it to make sense of it. She undoes everything that Dale and Eckard laud Smith’s characters for achieving: an ownership of expression tied to defying conventions through sexual freedom and revising the past to incorporate their own perspective in the collective memory the past exists in. Jennifer, however, uses the experience to earn an A on her anthropology assignment, does indeed marry her professor, and finally moves to Chicago, where she refuses to ever share her mother’s family experiences any further with her husband. She never visits the Cantrell site again, nor does she stay in touch with any family members despite her husband’s interest in meeting them. She locks

those memories away and runs from them and does indeed reinforce the same White resistance to difference Donlon describes.

However one explanation left mostly unexplored by readers is that she runs from ownership of those stories because she's stripped of ownership of both *her* language and *her* sexual power—the very combination of ownership and strength all the women in the novel adopt and perfect for inserting their lives and stories into collective memory. In Jennifer's last exchange with her Uncle Al Cantrell upon leaving the homestead with her recording, he reinforces the warnings of the ballad by confining her and essentially manipulating her sexually to surrender her claim or stake in the family stories. Al walks her to her car and, just before she gets in, he “grabs her right up off her feet and kisses her so hard that stars smash in front of her eyes. Al sticks his tongue inside her mouth. Al lets go of her and she drops back against the open door. “Drive careful,” he says” (Smith 284). Al underscores the ballad's warning of being “careful” not only by vocalizing it but by sexually possessing her, notably with his tongue—a physical insertion of his right to tell and own the oral stories thus far passed on only orally. Al is clearly the one asserting the control over how his family's memory will remain and will exist publically, which he capitalizes on by creating the amusement park version that is Ghostland. He asserts his *ownership of the stories* and asserts his masculine power over Jennifer to “be careful.” By doing so, he's not only asserting ownership of the stories, but he's also creating the memory that traumatizes and sticks with Jennifer. Upon returning to college, “she has changed it all around in her head. Al is nothing but a big old bully, a joker, after all. They still live so close to the land, all of them. They are really very primitive people, resembling nothing so much as some sort of early tribe. Crude jokes and animal instincts—it's the other side of the pastoral coin” (Smith 284). This is the version of memory that lasts for Jennifer—memory that she wants no part of but

perhaps more complexly takes the intrusive hint of warning and would rather relinquish her “right to tell” and share out of fear and compliance with Al’s parting warning words to “drive careful.”

Adopting a version of sharing based on ownership and commodification, Al turns the Cantrell homestead into a Dollywood-esque theme park called “Ghostland” capitalizing on the family ghost stories with amusement park rides surrounding the old Cantrell house, which visitors can pay \$4.50 to sit on the porch and wait for “the laughter to start, to see it with their own eyes when that rocking chair starts rocking” (Smith 286). Al takes the seeds of storytelling as entertainment to the extreme of its spectrum, obliterating any foundation Sally’s storytelling laid for sharing as a way of overcoming personal loss and contributing to the collective memory of experience. The theme park “memorial” that stands as the capsule of the family stories no longer functions as the everyday living orature of memory. Roach cites French historian Pierre Nora’s “environments of memory”—the largely oral and corporeal retentions of traditional cultures—to say that “modernity is characterized as the replacement of environments of memory by places of memory, such as archives, monuments, and theme parks” (27). Similar to his example of the Elvis image, *Oral History’s* Ghostland represents a body of orature reduced to a commodified place. Ghostland stands as an artificial site for memory production that, by its monetary value, undermines the family stories’ corporeal daily use.

The amusement park has little artistic value—the other goal of personal sharing. Art, by Sally’s story’s implicit definition, is found in the vernacular, everyday story-sharing so that the art is always continuously relatable and accessible. Driven by commodified stories, the amusement park does “share” the stories with an audience—but certainly not for healing, and there is certainly a price. In this the novel’s final example, the reader-audience returns to the

forefront as it is the demands and paying outsider public who would support this version of story-sharing. The final “audience” for the novel is not unlike the actual reader-audience—the paying general public who have bought in, literally, to the ghostly lineage of the real Cantrell family and support the transmission of this version of the story.

With *Oral History*’s ending of family memory being subsumed both in personal use by an individual basis and in public entertainment, Smith leaves us uncertain as to what purpose the ballad warnings serve in the collective sense. On a personal level, they seem to have evolved into something more individual than a blanket warning about what should be considered “careful” or “careless.” But on a public level, they seem to have only an ambiguous resolution, if any. What value does the amusement park have for the public? Smith has often been quoted regarding *Oral History* saying, “I had been doing a lot of thinking about how the story itself really depends upon the individual needs and dreams and desires of that storyteller. We create narratives we need, the stories we have to believe in order to live our lives. Denial is often necessary.” While Smith does focus the bulk of narrative attention to how each of her characters tells his/her story based on their own motivations, as I’ve argued, the audience is a big determiner of some of those motivations and story-telling choices. What the story-teller needs to deny for him/herself in order to live may not be what a certain audience or listener needs—maybe they need access to the “mystery” more than the teller until the absence of truth or full narrative leads to the public consumption of mystery as entertainment. Certainly we can see Smith’s sense of “forgetting” or denial trickle down through the personal stories. Sally begins to cast the tragedy as entertainment in order to create the story she must believe in to live her life. Jennifer, at least outwardly, denies all of her stories in order to live her life. Neither can really live realistically under the shadow of the ballads’ warnings, but the resulting tragedies from the warnings are nevertheless a part of

these women's daily lives. And still, Smith grants complete denial to Sally and Jennifer. Sally says to Roy: "That's the past I said. It's nothing to talk about now. Now it's about you and me. It's not over yet, I said" (Smith 278).

Where this approach might work for *Oral History*'s ambiguous ending and need to tie off so many character narratives so quickly and succinctly, this does not work for Smith's novel *Fair and Tender Ladies*, which follows primarily one voice (Ivy Rowe) from childhood to adulthood and her negotiation of memory along the way. I would argue that in *Fair and Tender Ladies* Smith complicates the "past is the past" claim made in *Oral History* by following Ivy all the way through her life and observing how she not only handles revising her own personal memories but also how she negotiates protecting/revising personal memory while also fulfilling the need to share memory collectively. Like *Oral History*, in *Fair and Tender Ladies* Smith takes up an "everyday use" theme for memory and its purposes, but in the latter she shows how this everyday use is actually negotiated in a more sophisticated way than her characters' denial in *Oral History*.

The two novels are also linked under the ideas of performance introduced here. Where I argue performance is relevant in *Oral History* for looking at each of the stories as warnings in the tradition of murder ballads for the killin' crime consequences of careless love and careless memory-sharing, in *Fair and Tender Ladies*, performance is much more internal to the text. Smith's quote about *Oral History* being focused on the storyteller and his/her needs for living their lives is actually much more applicable, I think, to *Fair and Tender Ladies* because Ivy is our one storyteller who uses storytelling itself as a way to recover and examine her past and denials in order to confront them and revise them, which in turn allows her to live her life. Audience is not as big a concern for *Fair and Tender Ladies* as I claim it should be for *Oral*

History because Ivy's audience is rarely interactive or transformative: her primary audience is her dead sister whom she writes to in order to better understand herself. And this is where we see Ivy's masks that she constructs to either deny or recover certain memories in order to assimilate them into herself and/or craft appropriate versions for wider sharing.

CHAPTER TWO

Sisters: Women's Struggles for Memory and Authority in *Fair and Tender Ladies*

*We would sit on the swing, and the lightning bugs were out, and there was mist coming off the river.
 We called it singin' the moon up.
 I could see Fair Ellender so plain. I'd feel that was me.
 I was the heroin of the ballad.*

Jean Ritchie, 1983

Where *Oral History* traced the revision of family memory and its transformation to public memory, *Fair and Tender Ladies* takes a much more introspective view at the process for individual negotiation of revising and sharing individual memory. With overt connections to Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Smith utilizes a particular model for constructing individual and collective memory that embraces a blend of written and oral performance in epistolary novel form. *Fair and Tender Ladies*' protagonist Ivy Rowe writes letters to her dead sister Silvaney spanning from her childhood growing up in Sugar Fork to her own death on the same mountain. Ivy's letter-writing art, which allows her to ground oral stories and songs in writing while negotiating for herself what she retains and how she redefines it, serves in part to blend both oral and written in constructing a collective memory based on recovery of meaning that defies collectively-constructed fixed absolutes.

As Ivy moves from an oral culture to a written one, she sets a precedent for breaking down previously held dichotomies (Robbins 1) in an effort to reexamine her childhood memories for relevance in her adult life. By grounding oral language and storytelling anecdotes in her letters to Silvaney, Ivy not only diffuses the dichotomy of "oral versus written" and shows that both mediums are valuable for self-expression, but she takes ownership of her own individual memory as an art form itself—an art form that depends upon blurring and deconstructing

binaries. Ivy's process for revising her own memory occurs only in "dialogue" with her dead sister. Ivy's impetus for revision stems from a need to reconstruct her childhood past memory in order to assert her individual memory in the present. As Maurice Halbwachs notes of memory, "memory gives us the illusion of living in the midst of groups which do not imprison us, which impose themselves on us only so far as long as we want to accept them" (50). In Ivy's case, the illusion she experiences is her childhood nostalgia. As an adult, Ivy realizes the fixed absolutes that so often pervaded her childhood neglect and restrict her own individual interpretation of her autobiographic past, so she sets out to restore the fluidity of her past and memory.

Smith positions memory construction along gendered lines in this novel. Where a masculine model of memory relies on guarding the purity of oral forms in fixed absolutes in time, the female model is more fluid and constantly refreshed and revised. A clear matrilineal legacy facilitates the transmission of memory throughout Ivy's generations alongside the adaptation from oral to written memory: as a child Ivy first records Christmas stories her elderly aunts tell around the fire, Ivy continually returns to these stories to reframe them and make her own additions, and finally Ivy's daughter Joli becomes a popular novelist to complete the literary matriarchy reigning from oral to written. Though the form alters, the story and its orality remain (Robbins 3). The novel's central focus on integrating oral and written memory matrilineally then opens up a range of "integrations" that occur—one of the most important being an integration of past and present in order to create a cohesive collective memory. Smith presents a new model for transmitting tradition that moves away from guarding "pure," absolute memory/culture to a collective recovery of past pain and eventual integration of past and present, to sharing collective memory, and then finally to negotiating what is shared and what remains personal. In *Fair and Tender Ladies*, Smith revises the traditional model for transmitting memory by showing Ivy's

model for collective memory construction, which involves confronting nostalgic memories, revising them through recovery and reinterpretation of oral forms, and finally negotiating what memory remains personal and/or shared. Whether Ivy's storytelling performance is shared publically or is a written self-performance, Smith negotiates the personal and collective based on how the performance of memory will get the most active "everyday use" (to use Alice Walker's phrase). Ivy's process for adapting and revising memory draws upon the ballad tradition that lends the title to the novel and mirrors that tradition's own constant revision and adaptation.

The original "Fair and Tender Ladies" ballad that serves as the novel's title captures the tension between fixed tradition and fluid mobility in its preservation of sexual purity. The tension between the preservation of purity the ballad represents and the novel's heedless women serves to set up Smith's ultimate negotiation of preserved memory and shared memory as well as the revision of memory. At first the "Fair and Tender Ladies" ballad serves as the traditional standard and example of fixed absolutes that Smith revises. But the ballad also offers opportunities for *recovering* traditions of female strength that aid in the revision trajectory the novel takes. The title of the novel connotes a tradition of fair maiden ballads typically characterized as cautionary tales warning women against false lovers. Smith orchestrates Ivy's own recovery and reinterpretation of that tradition of admonition. This tradition serves in part to establish "fair and tender ladies" in its most traditional sense in order for Smith to redefine and reinterpret this tradition in the novel.

The "Fair and Tender Ladies" ballad recorded by Jean Ritchie, Roseanne Cash, and others fits in the tradition of what Wilentz and Marcus classify as "fair maiden ballads": offering "moral entreaties to young women to keep waiting for their princes despite the temptations that rogues present; sung in the voice of a sadder-but-wiser girl they tell of a false love that will

entrap the heart” (26). Wilentz and Marcus cite similar ballads in this tradition to be “O Waly Waly,” “Jamie Douglas,” and “O Love is Teasing” all of which are linked by the phrase “come all you fair and tender ladies. . .” (27). Regardless of the version Smith may have been alluding to in the novel’s title, Smith uses the ballad strain to establish a tradition of admonition to women and female purity that the novel will confront and revise drawing from the moments of female strength undergirding the ballad to be confronted and revised.

Though there are many versions even dating back to the English Child ballads collected by Francis Child in England and Ireland in the 1870s, for the sake of consistency and accessibility, I’ve chosen to look closely at Jean Ritchie’s version of “Come All Ye Fair and Tender Ladies” printed in her 1955 autobiography *Singing Family of the Cumberlands* and recorded on several of her albums; her lyrics are the most consistent with multiple versions I’ve been able to find and represent a distinctly American version of this traditionally Anglo-American ballad.

Come all ye fair and tender ladies
Take warning how you court your men
They're like a star on a summer morning
They first appear and then they're gone

I wish I was on some tall mountain
Where the ivy rocks were black as ink
I'd write a letter to my false true lover
Whose cheeks are like the morning pink

They'll tell to you some loving story
And they'll make you think that they love you well
And away they'll go and court some other
And leave you there in grief to dwell

I wish I was on some tall mountain
Where the ivy rocks were black as ink
I'd write a letter to my false true lover
Whose cheeks are like the morning pink

I wish I was a little sparrow
 And I had wings to fly so high
 I'd fly to the arms of my false true lover
 And when he'd ask, I would deny

Oh love is handsome, love is charming
 And love is pretty while it's new
 But love grows cold as love grows old
 And fades away like morning dew
 (Ritchie 106)

At first the ballad seems to represent everything it is categorized to be: fair maidens are warned to guard their purity to avoid trusting lovers' empty promises. Smith situates herself in the tradition of ballads of admonition that warn women to stay faithful to their husbands or fiancés under pain of fatal consequences echoing the threats characteristic of murder ballads in which men warn their wives and daughters to stay faithful. Here that admonition sets up a major tension that runs throughout the ballad—that of reaching or aspiring but never having the option of attaining those desires as in the line: “They’re like a star on a summer morning / They first appear and then they’re gone” (3-4). The desire for flight and upward reaching pervades the rest of the ballad not only in the imagery of climbing mountains or having wings to fly high as a sparrow but perhaps even more strikingly in the repeated subjunctive tenses. Even with all the warning language to guard purity, desire is still indicated in the subjunctive constructions: “I wish I was” (5, 14, 18) and “I would” (7, 15, 19, 23). The speaker internalizes the warning tone but also continues to wish and contemplate hypothetical situations.

Despite the ballad’s warnings, Smith finds the *seeds* of upward motion and mobility in the desires the ballad expresses about mountain climbing and flight as well as letter-writing (7) and expands on these for a redefinition of memory. Seemingly in direct conversation with the ballad, Ivy fulfills the ballad speaker’s wishes to write a letter, which Smith achieves by basing

her novel in epistolary form allowing Ivy a first-person account of her own story. Furthermore, Ivy reverses the ballad tradition by seizing upon men's ability to tell stories—false stories—and writes her own “true” account of her own story. Her writing transforms oral stories passed down to her so that they become revised for her own purposes and understanding. As Tanya Long Bennett observes in her essay “The Protean Ivy in Lee Smith’s *Fair and Tender Ladies*,” “The letters. . . foster in her the possibility of fluidity, of her identity as a fluctuating and fragmented self, rather than a fixed one” (2-3). Much like Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, to reach a revision of memory that accounts for memory’s fluidity and constant change rather than fixed absolutes, Ivy questions her past understandings of memory, confronts nostalgia, recovers and revises memory through her own storytelling, and controls who shares in her versions of memory.

Ivy’s childhood memories of her father center around what Smith seems to set up as a masculine version of preserving memory that is static and fixed. Most of Ivy’s memories of her father are of him lying by the fire weak and ill while her mother refuses to claim right to the land after he dies because it was “Daddy’s” (Smith 66). Ivy gradually revises her nostalgic childhood renderings of her father’s memory throughout the course of her life culminating in a return to her “daddy’s land” and childhood home after years away and confronting the pain and struggle of running that homestead. Smith subtly qualifies Ivy’s childhood memories and foreshadows the impending clash between old and new memory. One of Ivy’s fondest memories of her father is climbing the mountain and his admonition to remember the sweet experience of birch sap. In a letter to her deceased father, she writes: “Oh Daddy don’t you remember how you took us up the mountain every year about this time to gather birch sap, it was so sweet and tart on yor tongue, and you said, Slow down, slow down, Ivy. This is the taste of Spring” (Smith 82). Her father is essentially saying, “Remember, remember, remember *this*.” Yet the fondness of this memory is

also riddled with tension, making the memory unsustainable in its blissful form for the long run. The repetition of “slow down” directly addressed to “Ivy” immediately challenges the long-term sustainability of the injunction to savor the memory because Ivy’s very name connotes an expansive vine that grows rapidly upward and outward. Furthermore, like the memory itself, the birch sap is both “sweet and tart” challenging the sustainable sweetness of the taste this memory promises. When Ivy returns to her childhood home after the mine explosion to recover the security of her childhood home, she is forced to confront the harsher realities that the nostalgic “sweet taste of Spring” memory overshadowed.

Ivy confronts this fixed sense of memory when she nostalgically marries her childhood friend Oakley and moves to her childhood home in Sugar Fork immediately after a mine explosion. The move in itself is Ivy and Oakley’s attempt to recover from the upheaval of the explosion that fatally ripped apart families and destabilized the false economic security the coal company had established for its employees and their families. After most of her twenties living “ruint,” raising her daughter Joli singlehandedly, and so staunchly resisting marriage with multiple prospects, Ivy’s sudden marriage to a childhood friend and return to her childhood home is a telling reaction to recover stability and the memories of a time before the coal company and before the loss of so many lives. As Ivy and Oakley set up house together, Ivy confronts, reevaluates, and revises nostalgic memories in light of the real hardships of new experience. She recalls the game “Statues” that she and her siblings used to play that involved striking funny poses and falling in the grass and lying frozen and still in whatever pose they landed in. The Statues game is a near embodiment of John Arthur’s understanding of memory and tradition as fixed and statuesque; it is this sense of tradition that Ivy begins to question when she responds to the memory as negative. In light of having three kids and working the farm, she

says: “Now I feel like I’ve been playing Statues and got flung down into darkness, frozen there. I look down in my mind and see statues” (196). Within months of moving home and confronting the hardships of farm work and child rearing, Ivy recognizes the damaging frozenness of her routine. She writes to Silvaney: “I have been caught up for so long in a great soft darkness, a blackness so deep and so soft that you can fall in there and get comfortable and never know you are falling in at all, and never land, just keep on falling. I wonder now if this happened to Momma” (Smith 195). Implicit in this memory recall is the beginning of reevaluating her childhood and her parents who always seemed to make ends meet. Occupying the same rooms and gardens as her mother, Ivy confronts her mother’s spirit as she sees her own “spunk” degenerate into the darkness of complacency. Ivy also sees Oakley as a statue figure when there is no “life” left in the farm: “The statue of Oakley is always working. Its back is always bent, its face is always turned away. For it aint no way to make a living from a farm” (Smith 196). In the same way John Arthur Rowe refused to modify or change the family’s economic livelihood, Oakley stubbornly works at farming for little payoff. Even though “it aint no way to make a living,” farming represents the purity of Sugar Fork and the value of past’s preservation of fixed purities. Thus, the stillness the childhood Statues game represents mocks Ivy’s current immobility, and these memories force her to reevaluate her father’s words to “slow down.” Ivy encounters the slowness and lethargy of apathy and routine, and she regrets the taste.

Despite the fixed memories her father and Oakley adhere to, Ivy’s childhood memories are certainly not all counterproductive to her revision of memory; on the contrary, Ivy’s childhood memories of female performance are sources of creativity and regeneration even in her depressed, tired state. While Ivy is using a written medium to tell stories to Silvaney, she includes explanations and stories of what Joseph Roach would call “orature.” Roach defines

“orature” as: “orature goes beyond a schematized opposition of literacy and orality as transcendent categories; rather, it acknowledges that these modes of communication have produced one another interactively over time and that their historic operations may be usefully examined under the rubric of performance” (11-12). Not only does this work well with Ivy’s deconstruction of oral and written binaries, but it is a helpful term for talking about the pieces of orature Ivy includes in the self-performance of her letter-writing to Silvaney. These pieces of orature could range from gesture, song, dance, storytelling, gossip, and ritual to emphasize the “practical formulas for daily living” (Roach 11).

For instance, Ivy’s various pieces of orature she records and interprets in her letters include: oral stories, songs, recipes, and burying quilts. Ivy’s childhood homestead is also a source of memory of the stories Granny and the Cline sisters told Ivy as a girl. The day Granny dies, she takes Ivy out alone on the mountain and passes on the recipe for rejuvenating the blood after it gets “slow and dark in the wintertime, and needs to be salivated” (197). Granny implores Ivy: “Look at me. Here’s how you boil your bitters, and I looked straight into her bonnet, at her apple-doll face. Remember, she said, and I have” (197). Granny’s medicinal recipe and John Arthur’s command to “slow down” are both direct oral imperatives, but they imply different approaches to memory. John Arthur commands appreciation for the fixed moment while Granny’s literally calls for a quickening of the blood and offers a form that has intention for practical *use* in the future. Even in Ivy’s secondhand relation of the oral transaction that occurred between her and Granny, the recipe itself stands as a performance Ivy uses to connect the present with the revision of the past. Performance scholar Elin Diamond offers a helpful way of underscoring this relevance. Diamond posits that any given performance (such as baking a cake) is linked to those who have baked cakes before and who will bake cakes in the future (73).

Diamond describes this as “the thing doing and the thing done” (74). The pieces of orature Ivy values and draws strength from are all performances that involve process and all take place in what Diamond calls “the thing doing.” Each performance has practical daily application for Ivy in order to make them meaningful.

Furthermore, the transmission of Granny’s memory involves Ivy’s revision of her own memory selection process. Immediately before Granny commands “Look at me...,” Ivy recalls the memory of her and her sister playing tea parties close to where she and Granny are sitting. This memory is a strictly nostalgic one of a lost time of purity and happiness. Ivy makes an active revision and choice to value Granny’s recipe as a more significant memory than the nostalgic one. Granny’s memory is valuable because it is life-giving and active in its transmission—not simply a fixed purity of the past.

It is important to note here that I am not arguing for Ivy’s recovery of some authentic, fixed *origin* of self in these explorations and recovery of the past. Roach’s “genealogy of performance” theory can help clarify Ivy’s process here. Roach describes performances’ cumulative work at creating meaning by drawing from a collective past:

Genealogies of performance draw on the idea of expressive movements as mnemonic reserves, including patterned movements made and remembered by bodies, residual movements retained implicitly in images or words (or in the silence between them), and imaginary movements dreamed in minds...a psychic rehearsal for physical actions drawn from a repertoire that culture provides. (26)

While Roach is primarily describing theatrical performances or dancing and street parades, the concept is still applicable to our purposes of verbal storytelling and oral transmission of culture. Making the past relevant for the present “use” involves a complex process of creating linkages

between and among all thing past, present, and future so that the past and the present are continually being recast and remade in each performance. For Ivy, each piece of performance she recovers from her past involves a negotiation of how she herself fits in with past meaning and interprets the prescriptions for use in the present. This process-based approach to incorporating performance genealogies then is avoids seeing the past on static, fixed terms.

The “frozen” moments of the past that Ivy does come to memorialize and value are those moments that represent a snapshot in time that is transitional and rejuvenated by performative creativity. Therefore Ivy even reinvents “frozenness” to embody her eventual version of memory that is fluid and built upon transition states and connections. These moments of frozen time would be what Elin Diamond calls “the thing done”—the completed action that is fixed and static (44). For instance, the day before Joli leaves for college, Ivy and her daughter climb the mountain to the Cline sisters’ old cabin. Here Ivy is flooded with memories of the stories the aunts used to tell her as a child, and Ivy passes these stories on to Joli. Ivy recalls: “That day was like a day out of time, frozen fast. I was a girl again, that day. Joli and me were like girls together. I started telling her some of the old stories. It’s funny how clear I can recall them. It is like they sit in a clear calm place in my head that I never even knew was in there” (199). This day, like the day with Granny, is a ray of hope in Ivy’s period of depression after moving back to Sugar Fork. Both experiences feature a recovery of past memory, a matrilineal transmission of life-giving memory, and a selective process that privileges these snapshots over others. Ivy knows that when Joli leaves home for school things will not be the same, but instead of guarding that purity, of slowing Joli down, she takes her last opportunity to share the oral stories the Cline sisters once told, girding her daughter with the strength that creative performance generates.

Even though Ivy has these brief glimpses of hope and rejuvenation in the months after she moves back to Sugar Fork, it is not until she rejects her home, husband, and children that she is fully able to recover the rejuvenating powers of performance and creativity. After Ivy's anecdote of sharing the Cline sister cabin memories, she stops writing to Silvaney for ten years. The ten-year span of silence is notable as the longest time between entries to Silvaney is only a year. The noticeable silence as a result of Ivy confronting her childhood memories and sifting through them sets us up for Ivy's climb to recovery of those life-giving creative processes necessary to what she repeatedly calls her "spunk." In order to recover and revise individual memory, Ivy must also participate in social frameworks. The fact that she does not interact with Silvaney or anyone during her depression supports Halbwachs' theory that "the individual calls recollections to mind by relying on the frameworks of social memory" (182). Only in social memory or dialogue will individual memory construct and revise itself.

Ivy's recovery of individual occurs with rejuvenating her artistic dialogue with the beeman Honey Breeding. The defining moment in Ivy's self-actualization is her climb to the top of Blue Star Mountain and is notable for what many critics recognize as Ivy's integration of sensuality and motherhood. Tanya Long Bennett examines the dichotomy Ivy reacts against in being torn between a maternal role and a sexual role without an option to integrate the two (29). Corinne Dale argues Ivy's development from *Oral History's* protagonists is her ability to move beyond the mind-disconnected-from-body motif and blend this dichotomy in a way that is meaningful to Ivy's fluid and evolving sense of self (188). Finally, Dorothy Combs Hill argues that Ivy's affair with Honey Breeding restores the "sacred-sexual" figure of Ivy that "heals the split" between present and mythic past—a mythic Celtic past in which female sexuality was sacred and "before the time of the defilement of the naked goddess" (203). Leaving her home,

husband, and kids to follow Honey Breeding up the mountain, Ivy recovers a mythic past as a sexual goddess. And Ivy's sexually recharged return to the homestead and her motherly duties integrates sexuality and motherhood. Ivy's climb up the mountain sparks the beginning of her transformation in balancing motherhood and individuality but also in claiming her voice in the storytelling tradition and transmitting memory on her terms by her selection and interpretation of childhood songs, poems, and stories blended with new ones she exchanges with Honey during their extended love affair on the mountain (Barrineau 46). As Ivy puts it: "There has got to be one person who is the lover, and this time it was me, and one who is the beloved which was Honey" (Smith 236-7). As 'lover,' Ivy also takes on the role as active selector of pieces of experience she remembers, which she proceeds to challenge and reinterpret.

Honey Breeding echoes all the cautions the "fair and tender maidens" ballad tradition invokes, but Ivy decisively rejects these warnings, continues the affair anyway, and emerges as an active agent in constructing shared memory on her terms. On the mountain, Honey repeats "I am bad news. Anybody will tell you that. We can't stay up here" (Smith 234). Ivy recalls at this moment "an old song Revel used to sing, He is just a heartbreak in pants" (Smith 234). Ivy's recollection of the heartbreak in pants song is essentially a raw interpretation of the "Fair and Tender Ladies" ballad warning women to be wary. Pervading the original ballad is an overriding distrust of all male contact—a distrust that is linked to a system in which virginal purity and chastity are privileged and their loss punishable. Distrust in the ballad is linked to being left "in grief to dwell" as a result of heartbreak to men's false pretenses, but the grief speaks also to the consequences women suffer when "love" or purity is sacrificed. Grief ensues after the ballad speaker gives up her only capital as a woman that would give her hope to attain her desires—her sexual purity. Instead, she loses her capital to "a false true lover" who simply tells "a loving

story” that is as changeable as his handsomeness and charm as old love fades. This skepticism and distrust of men then ties back to the warning tone of the ballad to women to guard their sexual purity—their defining capital. But instead of adhering to the tradition of caution the song represents, Ivy reverses the caution by taking full ownership of what happens on the mountain thereby steeling herself against heartbreak. She adapts the ballad’s admonitions and the song’s warnings by taking the pants but leaving the heartbreak.

Perhaps most importantly, the mountaintop experience is one in which Ivy recovers storytelling, song, and sharing memories that allow her to recover of creativity. Through listening and sharing stories with Honey, she not only recovers the stories but the art and performance of telling them as well. Ivy recalls: “It seemed like I had heard that story, or one like it, from Daddy—years and years ago. Honey Breeding was as good as Daddy or the lady sisters for telling tales” (Smith 232). In aligning herself with her father and the Cline sisters, Ivy positions herself in the line of transmitting these stories, but more importantly she takes ownership of her voice and her ability to adapt the traditions to fit her own model. She tells and recalls stories from her childhood, but the circumstances of the current sharing are far from innocent, given the prolonged affair with Honey.

Ivy’s mountain climb and sexual experience there reclaims and reinterprets memory in an important *space* as well. Here where Ivy recovers her voice and finds her own originality in storytelling, she blends the childhood mountain memory of the birch sap sweetness with a revised memory of personal success and storytelling/creation of memory that is exclusively on her own terms. She recalls:

And here I was, on top of Blue Star Mountain, finally! All of a sudden I thought, I could of climbed up here anytime! But I had not. I remembered as girls how you

and me would beg to go hunting on the mountain, Silvaney, but they said, That is for boys. Or how we wanted to go up there after berries and they'd say, Wait till Victor can take you, or Wait till Daddy gets home...[On the mountain] I felt I had got a part of myself back that I had lost without even knowing it was gone. (Smith 232-233)

Here in the mountain space formerly associated with her father and tasting “Spring,” Ivy creates a space in which she is the agent of memory construction—confronting the harsh realities of domestic life in Sugar Fork, rediscovering the power of storytelling and song while also merging those oral folk traditions with new experience, and finally forging not only a new personal interpretation of cultural memory, but returning home to negotiate memory-sharing that is based on equal input and equal access.

The mountain-top experience, as intrinsic as it is to Ivy's self-actualization and ownership of memory, is also significant because it remains a private memory that is never shared with her husband Oakley nor even her daughter Joli. The memory of the mountain is kept personal, existing only in letter form to Ivy's dead sister Silvaney (and to us, the readers of the text). However, Ivy does not necessarily guard this memory out of resistance to tainting its cultural purity as her father may have done. Ivy's preservation of the experience is different than her father's preservation because Ivy's preservation is a life-giving one that relies upon performance to maintain everyday existence. When Ivy recovers her ability to share stories and histories with Honey Breeding, she recovers an everyday set of performances that enable her to function. Where John Arthur cannot make distinctions regarding preserving and sharing memories, Ivy makes the distinction on the basis of everyday use value. If the performance has a necessary functionality to her own daily emotional and psychological existence, then Ivy does

guards it as her own. If it will be “used” by others around her in the way it was meant to be used, then she loans and shares with others. Examples of this would be Ivy’s mountaintop experience and writing letters to her dead sister. Both experiences are life-sustaining for Ivy in the long-term sense. They are the sources of creative performance that allow Ivy to constantly revise her own memory and in turn collective memory.

While Ivy preserves the everyday use value of certain performances for herself, she also demonstrates how and when certain experiences may be shared collectively. In sharing these experiences, she offers them up to be adapted and changed by collective memory. In other words, when the experience or performance no longer has an everyday use purpose, it can then be offered up for revision and reformulation so that it regains an everyday use. A tangible example of this transformation is Ivy’s mother’s burying quilt whose purpose is adapted and actually restored to everyday use (rather than violated) through collective sharing.

Where the experiences Ivy keeps private enable her own constant revision and refreshing of memory, some experiences must be shared in order to retain their life-giving everyday use. When Ivy returns to Sugar Fork as a newlywed, in a scene that reads oddly close to Alice Walker’s own essay “Everyday Use,” Ivy rediscovers her mother’s burying quilt stashed away in an old chest. The quilt was never used because her mother’s family demanded she be buried in their family burial plot in the city away from the mountains. Her family retrieved the body and buried it without respect for the custom of the burying quilt. Ivy responds by reappropriating the quilt for everyday use as a bedspread:

And I thought to myself, now Momma is dead and buried in Rich Valley these many years, so she will not need her burying quilt, and I am alive and making a house here with Oakley Fox, and we need a pretty quilt the worst in the world,

and so I just snatched it up and aired it out and put it on our bed, now it is the prettiest thing in the whole house! (Smith 188)

Ivy reinvents the quilt's purpose from one of fixed funeral memorial to active life-giving bed throw that honors her mother's memory in an active, everyday way that interweaves her own memories into the fabric of the quilt. The quilt then becomes an active agent in transmitting Ivy's fluid sense of adaptable memory, and she passes on the life-giving artifact to another young newlywed couple when her husband dies. By sharing the family heirloom with another mountain family, Ivy ensures the quilt's everyday use and adaptability. This type of inner-circle sharing is important because the quilt's alternative life would be to hang in an exhibit organized by Ivy's daughter Joli. As Paula Eckard has noted in her book *Maternal Body and Voice in Toni Morrison, Bobbie Ann Mason, and Lee Smith*, when Joli asks her mother to borrow the family burying quilt for an exhibit, Ivy denies this piece of sharing. Eckard interprets this act of preservation in terms of preserving Ivy's individuality: "The quilt represents the culture and values of a traditional way of life that should be integrated into daily life, not just hung as a cultural reminder," (Eckard 104). While Smith is making a direct link to Alice Walker's essay "Everyday Use" down to the mention of the quilt (12), she adapts Walker's work to focus on the *sharing* of the quilt with the young couple. In Ivy's adult process of distinguishing what can be shared to ensure its daily use and what cannot, Ivy's is a choice to preserve the quilt's active potential to create new memory.

While so far we've analyzed mainly public performances (oral and orature) in terms of Ivy's recovery of creativity and adaptability of the forms for revising personal and collective memory, one of the most vital "performances" Smith offers is Ivy's letter-writing to her dead sister Silvaney. This self-performance allows Ivy a medium through which to revise her own

memories from childhood to death. To destroy the privatized aspect of these letters would be to destroy Ivy's personal memorialization of both herself and her sister. While Ivy likely knows her sister died in the mental institution upon being removed from Sugar Fork by the authorities as a child, she continues to perform the gesture because the letter-writing allows her to see herself and revise her own memories. When Ivy's brother sends word that Silvaney has been dead for years, Ivy acknowledges her life-giving connection to preserving Silvaney's memory:

I have felt like I was split off from a part of myself all these years, and now it is like that part of me has died, since I know she will never come. I feel like she has gone to a foreign land forever" (181-2). Ivy receives this news right around the same time she returns to Sugar Fork with Oakley, and it is soon after that Ivy degenerates into depression for ten years without a letter to Silvaney. In Ivy's separation from Silvaney, Smith points out the clear benefit for having someone with whom can write to She resumes the letters only upon recovering her creative voice on the mountaintop with Honey Breeding.

Ivy's "dialogue" with Silvaney is an important way Ivy reconstructs her individual memory throughout Ivy's life. Though Silvaney does not respond, Silvaney is the necessary audience and provides half-formed methods of exchange necessary to Ivy's negotiation of memory. Silvaney can be understood in terms of Joseph Roach's theory of the effigy, which he writes may be defined as "effigy fills by means of surrogation a vacancy created by the absence of an original...they consist of a set of actions that hold open a place in memory into which many different people may step according to circumstances and occasions" (36). Roach cites examples of actors, dancers, singers, celebrities, priests, and corpses to underscore his argument that the effigy exists in corporeal forms that function as ciphers of memory for the living. Here is where my reading of Silvaney as effigy diverges from Roach. Silvaney is obviously not a real

living body; but she does indeed serve as a substitute for a real “living” community for Ivy through her childhood. Silvaney is the abstract effigy that is filled with living bodies of her children and grandchildren later in life. It is notable that Ivy goes a ten-year span with no contact to Silvaney after the illusion of the effigy’s performance is shattered when Ivy’s brother confirms that Silvaney died early on in being admitted to the mental institution. Only through storytelling recovered with Honey Breeding does Ivy resume her correspondence with Silvaney but this time fully aware of the self-performative, artistic role her letters are serving. Gradually, Ivy becomes more invested in her family and grandchildren as a community that takes up her time in constructing and passing on her revised family memory so that the dialogue with Silvaney becomes less necessary. Ivy eventually finds living bodies with which to create a collective consciousness to anchor her own individual memory for creation of what Halbwachs calls the necessary “social framework of memory” (24). But Silvaney as a step in that process of sharing with community is an important one in Ivy’s lifetime of memory revision.

Silvaney’s memory remains private because she is also the mirror through which Ivy sees her own revision of memory taking place. Ultimately, Silvaney’s memory converges with Ivy’s to fashion a personal memory based on drawing strength from collective pain. Society kills Silvaney, but a part of Ivy refuses to let her memory die. Ivy integrates Silvaney’s painful memory into her core as the ultimate integration of personal and collective. Ivy’s self-performance of writing to Silvaney is life-giving in that it allows Ivy a constant reminder to resist the violations of their childhood past. In the letter-writing to Silvaney, Ivy then not only recovers her own version of memory, but her correspondence becomes a daily act of creating healing art in memory of Silvaney’s death.

Much like Ivy's protection of the burying quilt for necessary everyday use, Silvaney's memory is too close to Ivy's everyday personal existence to be shared tangibly—whether in oral stories or in letter form. Unlike John Arthur's guarding of memory and tradition in an unrealistic, limiting way, Ivy's guarding of Silvaney's story works precisely because Ivy does not see Silvaney as a memory in terms of something of the past inaccessible to the present; to Ivy's day-to-day presence, Silvaney is very real. Once shared, the memory runs the risk of being shelved as a *past* example open to scrutiny when its *present* relevance is still alive, viable, and changing. Silvaney's memory is at its most collective as an avenue for Ivy's artistic self-expression and way for deconstructing dichotomies to blend spirit with human. However, as a repository for Ivy's self-expression Silvaney ultimately transcends the personal and becomes part of a spiritual collective less tangible than oral or written forms. Ivy writes to her daughter Joli of burning the letters:

With every one I burned, my soul grew lighter, lighter, as if it rose too with the smoke. And I was not even cold, as long as I'd been out there. For I came to understand something in that moment, Joli, which I had never understood in all these years.

The letters didn't mean anything.

Not to the dead girl Silvaney, of course—nor to me.

It was the writing of them, that signified. (Smith 313)

For Ivy, neither the tangible letters nor what they contain is important. What “signifies” is Ivy's *process* of storytelling, of writing, of developing, of negotiating, and of revising.

CHAPTER THREE

Poor Wayfaring Strangers: Creating Collective Celebrity and Recovering the Lost Individual in

The Devil's Dream

*Went back home Lord, my home was lonesome
Missed my mother she was gone
All my brothers and sisters crying
In our home so sad and alone*

“Can the Circle Be Unbroken,” The Carter Family (1935)

The Devil's Dream is a novel that explores the beginnings of country music from the Bristol sessions in 1927 to the Grand Ole Opry in the 1970s. Through the telling of multiple perspectives from the performers of multiple generations of the fictional Bailey family, Smith emphasizes that the sharing of memory and collective community is vitally important, not only in the construction of individual memory and family memory, but also in the role of individual memory within the creation of a celebrity image that exists in public memory. Where *Fair and Tender Ladies* isolates Ivy's negotiation of personal memory and collective sharing of memory on a primarily personal/family scale, *Devil's Dream* considers the complexity of recovering a loss of that personal memory that is suffered for the sake of collective public memory on the celebrity stage of the Grand Ole Opry.

While critical emphasis has centered almost exclusively on Smith's protagonist Katie Cocker and Smith's crafting of an integrated female artist in control of her own public image (Wesley 68), we cannot neglect to examine more closely the family *roots* Katie comes from in order to probe Smith's negotiation of individual and collective memory in the novel. Through Smith's portrayal of the family patriarch R.C. Bailey and the family's exclusion from the collective family memory on account of his Melungeon heritage, Smith destabilizes the idea of recoverable, tangible origins. Though R.C. Bailey is meant to be the fictional equivalent to A.P.

Carter, Smith invents R.C. as the son of a Melungeon—a mixed race group with unclear ethnic origins. Racist lore portrays Melungeons as “Indian” in appearance, though many married into white families. During the era of Jim Crow, a Melungeon was considered a “free person of color,” and this resulted in discrimination and disenfranchisement (Schrift 107). Smith complicates collective memory in this novel by showing how family memory’s exclusion of difference leads to a cyclic trap of R.C.’s attempt to recover his origins and gain access to the family memory that excludes him. The collective’s denial of his recovery of racial identity leads him to create the celebrity image of the family that Katie inherits and must recreate to assert her individuality within this public image framework.

I propose an approach to Smith’s negotiation of individual and collective memory in this novel with a blend of Halbwachs’s work on the individual’s need for social frameworks in which to construct memory and Joseph Roach’s theory of the celebrity. Halbwachs notes that families will reconstruct past memory in order to “insure the family’s cohesion and guarantee its continuity” (83). Therefore, the past is often distorted in the act of reconstructing it for cohesion in the present. However this reconstruction of group memory involves a distortion of individual memory because the “individual calls recollections to mind by relying the frameworks of social memory” (Halbwachs 83). Similarly, Roach’s argument of the duality of the celebrity body is a useful concept for examining public versus private personas. While Roach focuses on eighteenth-century portrayals of celebrity figures (namely monarchs), this same idea is applicable to R.C. and Katie as celebrity figures. Roach describes the celebrity as having two bodies: one is the corporeal body “natural” that decays and dies that is in tension with the body “cinematic” preserved in public imagination as “immortal” (36). The imperishable, immortal body is a performed construct—a manufactured image for the public—while the corporeal body

is the individual's everyday existence. Yet, like Halbwachs's theory, both the forms are co-dependent.

If we use Roach's duality of the celebrity body, this facilitates a reading of Katie's self-fashioning of a celebrity image that resolves the dilemma of recovering personal memory while participating in collective family memory/roots. In light of the duality of the celebrity, we can see how Katie actually recovers and develops her everyday, corporeal self through the artistic construction of a celebrity immortal image that allows her this fluid duality. By contrast, R.C.'s creation of celebrity fails to exist in a dual form in part because his collective family withholds his individual memory of his Melungeon origin. Where Katie recognizes *the process of recovery* itself as an intangible art form, R.C., associated with alienation in the folk hymn, "Wayfaring Stranger," fixates on recovering, rather than artistically shaping, his origins. R.C. then allows us to see Katie's "success" as underscoring Smith's destabilization of fixed origins amid a recording industry climate that generates the production of fixed, recordable art.

To understand the more nuanced workings of collective memory and Smith's demystification of tangible origins in relation to R.C., we must first read Katie's character who is more than a successfully integrated female artist capable of assimilating past memory into the present and balancing family and individual as is the traditional reading. As Rebecca Smith argues, Katie's success as a character occurs particularly because she is able to debunk some of the traditional patriarchal tenets of both religion and early country music. She notes that Katie reacts against the tenets "that women's voices need to be silenced, as they were in the early fundamentalist churches in the Appalachian mountains, or that women need someone else, mainly men, to create their image, as happened in early country music" (R. Smith 71). Furthering this claim of Katie's embodiment of balance between patriarchal religious roots and inventive

musical artistry, Debbie Wesley argues that Katie represents the “balance between the pursuit of self-expression and obligation to others” citing Katie’s consciousness of respecting whatever community surrounds her at every stage in her life, whether that be her family, her in-laws, the Nashville recording community, or new rising artists (89). Certainly, the image Katie finally creates for herself is one of seamlessly integrated self and community, art and religion. But to see Katie only as an integrated female artist in control of her own public image is to dismiss the more complex feat Smith accomplishes in reconciling the problem of avoiding “lost” individual memory with the creation of a self that exists in public memory as a celebrity.

Katie Cocker’s approach to balancing her individual artistry with her collective family occurs because she is able to recognize the necessity of collective experience to her own individual art and in turn recognizes the habitual, everyday experience to be what makes up collective experience. In writing on family memory and how family memory is constructed and sustained, Halbwachs says that families “project a singularly vivid image on a screen of an obscure and unclear past” (60). As it is easier to remember habitual actions and patterns than a memory full of isolated events, Halbwachs writes that the reconstructed picture of the past a family creates is one based on “habitual actions and moments over time” (60) and not necessarily all of the specific events. The picture is then a summary of collective feelings and reflections.

Given Katie’s attention to the everyday habitual moments of childcare throughout building her career, Katie represents what Halbwachs would call a memory based on habitual actions and moments over time. Therefore, Katie’s *art* is not only in creating a celebrity image for herself, but what Smith seems to point to as her greater or more successful art is building her memory based on the everyday moments with her family and interactions with her close community in her rise to fame. Indeed, Smith spends more time showing us the *process* of

Katie's songs she writes rather than the *product*. Katie is always more concerned about making a steady paycheck for providing for her daughter, Annie May, who Katie had at eighteen. She uses the money from a hit song "New Eyes," which she herself says isn't very good, to pay for Annie May's operations that will help her recover from polio (Smith 257). This art based in habitual actions that informs her songs is similar to Roach's framework of the corporeal body. Whereas Katie's celebrity performances are isolated events just as each song she records are isolated moments of art, Katie's real art is in nurturing her living community. This echoes the Alice Walker's "everyday use" concept also at work in *Oral History* with Sally's emphasis on the utility of her storytelling and in *Fair and Tender Ladies* with emphasis on the utility of orature that is not yet ready to be shared publically. The everyday use model Katie enacts allows her to participate in an artistically constructed collective family memory marked not by its celebrity events but by habitual fluidity. This version of memory reconstruction is Katie's realization that she needs her family community in order to remember and in order to create individual meaning in her art. As Halbwachs writes, individual memory cannot exist without a social framework in which to exchange discourse (24). Katie's attention to her habitual family life is the discourse that enables her songwriting and art.

R.C.'s complex relationship with the inability to recover his individual origins that leads him through such angst heightens Smith's creation of Katie, whose public image itself depends on the process of assimilating past collective family memory while recovering her own individual memory. Starting out as an indistinguishable piece of the three-person collective dumb show unit with her cousins. Katie recalls: "...we were supposed to be just short of retarded, and our act consisted mostly of telling dumb jokes to each other, such as the knock-knock jokes and Little Moron jokes that were real popular them" (Smith 225). Katie is born into a collective

family memory that, in the words of Halbwachs, “forgets” (69) the corporeal individual for the sake of a public performance of a cohesive family unit. Even in the three-person family unit, Katie’s performances and the “flat-out in your blood” (Smith 241) need to perform stems from her need to recover the loss of her corporeal self and individual memory that is lost to the collective cohesion she is born into. While these collective performances create a public image primarily controlled by her aunt Virgie, Katie slowly recognizes her process of recovery of her corporeal self as an artistic form. At the key moment in Katie’s early career when she takes the stage for the first time alone, she makes a change in her performance at the last minute that reconciles the corporeal with the immortal image: she changes her song choice to save an original song she has written for herself and instead performs a family song passed down through collective memory:

I stepped up and grabbed the microphone like I’d been doing solo acts on radio all my life. “Actually it’s just me by myself,” I said into it. “My name is Katie Cocker.” Then I stopped cold for I just couldn’t do it, I couldn’t sing “It’s Either Her or Me.” I had never sung it for *anybody*, much less for thousands of people on the radio. Nobody but me had every heard it. I swallowed hard. Then I heard myself saying, “And I’m going to entertain you tonight with a real old song that my family has been singing down through the years. We call it “The Cuckoo Song.” (Smith 246)

This instant of self-preservation is a reaction against the loss of the everyday corporeal experience by making a conscious recognition that her public/collective persona is distanced from her corporeal, everyday self. Even with all the subsequent images Katie tries on until her final one, she maintains a preservation of individual memory distanced from the collective and

public persona. Katie's final act in her artistic process of creating her "cinematic" self is trading her celebrity individual in for the survival of the collective memory of her family. However, this is not another sacrificial loss of the individual to the collective; rather, her celebrity body (made distinct from her corporeal self in a lifetime of artistic process) is subsumed by the collective celebrity image her family represents.

Katie is therefore the first individual in the Bailey family (after the family's rise to celebrity) to not only fashion a body cinematic separate from the body corporeal but to create a body cinematic that is itself a collective representation of the entire family's past memory and contributions. However, the reasons other characters "fail" at coming to Katie's resolution to the dilemma of individual, collective, and public memory is because they fail to recognize the *process* of negotiating the body natural with the body cinema and recovering individual memory from collective family memory as an artistic one.

However, Katie's balancing of the family memory and participation in the collective is inherently different from R.C.'s ability to participate in the collective family memory the same way in part because of R.C.'s community that excludes him. Where Katie's art focuses on the habitual fluidity because those moments are more or less relatable to the rest of her family (and Katie is not a direct descendent of R.C. as his niece), R.C. focuses on the moments of individual celebrity and song-recording *because* his collective community defines him based on a crucial defining individual moment in his life that in no way fits with family habit—R.C.'s Melungeon parenthood. If, as Halbwachs says, individual memory only develops within the discourse of social frameworks (24), then R.C.'s own social framework denies him access to individual memory from the beginning in the interest of keeping up this collective cohesion of memory.

R.C. therefore knows no other way except the construction of his own image through celebrity performance.

A primary tenet of Halbwachs's collective memory theory is that families will distort their past memory to create equilibrium for the present (183), and this is precisely what the Bailey family does to "forget" R.C.'s racial heritage. The Bailey family cannot change the present state of R.C.'s Melungeon race, but they can modify the past memory to overlook the fact that R.C. was not the son of Zeke Bailey. R.C. must interact with a wider collective that has different memory than the Bailey family in order to recover his autobiographical memory, which Halbwachs refers to as being "always rooted in other people. Only group members remember, and this memory nears extinction if they do not get together over long periods of time" (24). While R.C.'s family tries to keep the discourse extinct, R.C. meets with it only when he leaves his family home to work in the settlement camps and dialogues with other men that form the wider collective memory.

From the beginning of the celebrity-making process of the Bailey family, the collective "knows" more than R.C. knows/remembers about himself. It is the community that teases R.C. about his parentage. It's a nameless character who informs R.C. of his own history: "My grandma was Missus Rice that used to run the boardinghouse in Cana...and she tole it for a fact that yer mamma done took up with a Melungeon man that was staying up there in her boardinghouse..." (Smith 84). R.C. responds in disbelief: "Liar," I hollered, and I lit into him, and he liked to change my looks afore they pulled him offen me" (Smith 84). R.C.'s response to the community's collective knowledge that is greater than his own is telling in that R.C. recognizes if the ambiguous collective "they" hadn't separated the fight, then the man would have "changed my looks." Even the subtleties of the language here indicate the tension between

collective forgetting and remembering. The namelessness of the man is representative of the collective knowledge circulating about R.C. and is reinforced by the indefinite communal “they” who separate the two. R.C.’s response and recognition that the man would have hit him so hard as to have changed his appearance is important because it alludes to the collective community trying to change the circumstances. An attempt at violence certainly would disfigure R.C. but that disfigurement phrased in such a way as to suggest “change” represents the collective’s frustration at being unable to completely “forget” R.C.’s real corporeal identity—an identity that cannot be forgotten because, in the eyes of the community, it carries the gravity of racial tainting.

The collective cannot forget something as “threatening” to its basic cohesion as race, and as the community quips suggest, the collective seeks to ostracize difference. Even when the situation temporarily dissolves, neither the community nor R.C. himself can let it go. He pursues the “lie” with the lumber worker Tom Kincaid, who refuses to tell R.C. the truth: “I am not telling you but what’s the God’s truth, you had best fergit this whole business, and get on back home and help yer pa” (Smith 85). Stein interprets this moment as emblematic of the characters’ inherent racism and criticizes Smith for not taking a more active narrative role in her characters’ fear of the Other. He notes that R.C.’s “anger and pain over the discovery of his Melungeon father illuminate the deep fear of the racial Other he retains outside of the hollers. Because of his hatred for the non-white blood in his heritage, and because of the racist attitudes common among Appalachian mountaineers at the time, R.C. is unlikely to focus his narration on racial interaction” (Stein 147). I would not go so far as to say that it is necessarily racial “hatred” R.C. feels, but rather a spiraling confusion that propels his rootlessness throughout the rest of the novel. I would argue R.C.’s anger is more in response to not *knowing* his origins and having them kept from him by his family. Though, indeed, R.C. and the fellow lumber workers do exhibit the fear of

Other and enact racist othering throughout the novel that Smith does not seem to counteract. However, in this instance, the “racism” and denial of race R.C. enacts is, for our purposes, a more complicated repression of memory—a necessary “forgetting” to use the language of Halbwachs (32). The collective memory surrounding R.C. wills to forget the origins for racial reasons, and this draws attention to Smith’s implicit work to make origins themselves more fraught, artistic constructions. If we analyze R.C.’s origins in their most literal corporeal form (biological race), then Smith makes an important point that even that biological, corporeal origin cannot be fully *recovered*, and nor should it matter to the individual’s artistic construction of duality of images as Katie represents.

Stein demonstrates that, despite Smith’s agenda of reinventing history and memory by giving voice to those who have traditionally been shut out of storytelling and history-telling, Smith neglects to do this work in *Devil’s Dream* by denying reinvention of memory to include African American voices and their perspectives. He argues that the brief encounters her characters *do* have with black characters are left unresolved, ambiguously sanctioning the racism of the 1920s because of Smith’s absent narration: “By removing herself from the surface of the text, and by shrouding in mystery the modes of textual production that stand behind the work, Smith produces an illusion of seemingly independent and historically accurate speech acts uttered by her semi-historical narrators” (Stein 153). Due to the inability to find Smith in the text, Stein argues that the racial encounters the white country singer characters do experience are left unresolved and therefore Smith misses an opportunity to incorporate the role of African American music in country music’s beginnings: “we can understand the concept of denial in Lee Smith’s fiction as a continuous repression of memories of (racial) conflict that the narrators have not been able to resolve and which remain a significant disturbance in their lives” (Stein 141).

This idea of “repression” of memories is most useful in examining the Other influences in the novel. While certainly Smith does miss an opportunity to acknowledge and rewrite a history of roots music that includes a more representative cross-section of those roots, the peripheral and performative roles of race that do exist further support the loss that occurs in collective memory construction’s process of “forgetting.” The presence of racial Otherness in a Lee Smith novel *at all* is notable and here serves at a most basic level to destabilize the white origins on which country music is historically painted. In reflecting the racial biases and racial amnesia that her characters would have likely participated in, Smith draws even more attention to the “loss” that occurs in the transfer from fraught individual memory to what becomes public memory. She advocates for a return to origins in order to examine them, but by creating a Melungeon past as the Carter Family equivalent, Smith is destabilizing the idea of “collective cohesion” itself.

Therefore, the mystery surrounding individual and collective memory of R.C.’s past seems to be Smith’s way of destabilizing the very concept of recoverable corporeal self and origins, opting instead for an artistic construction of individual natural memory. Even the confirmation R.C. receives of his mixed heritage ends up being murky. R.C. recalls his conversation with Uncle Willie Malone: “So then Uncle Willie Malone told me what folks said about Mamma and the Melungeon, and by then it had growed so dark that it was like I wasn’t talking to a man atall, jest a old voice coming from noplac, from the night and the mountain itself” (Smith 86). Here even the “truth” comes from a collective source enshrouded in darkness, indistinguishable to the point of simply a “voice coming from noplac.” Notably, the voice in the dark echoes the community urging to simply “forget.” After confirming the truth, Willie Malone says: “And now, if I was you, I’d fergit the whole thing...for yer daddy raised you as hisn, and used to trot you on his knee and walk you of a night and play with you by the hour” (Smith 86).

The collective community's access to R.C.'s individual memory and urging to forget what is known then sends R.C. into a spiral of recovering his individual self in the world the collective community has constructed for him; his restless quest to recover his origins is then itself a performance in acting out his perceived individuality and marks the beginning of his quest to prove and perform his new-found identity.

R.C. goes about *performing* his Melungeonness in an attempt to further recover his original identity outside of the collective family memory he knows. He says: "Best I can recall, my thinking run kindly along these lines. Mamma is a whore, and I am a bastard, and so by God I set out to prove it" (Smith 87). Like his mother Nonnie, R.C. uses the racial Other as a way of performing difference and uniqueness—an attempt to recover individual memory lost to his forced fit with the white collective. He physically leaves Grassy Branch drinking, fiddling, and sleeping his way north to West Virginia, where he eventually wakes up in cheap motel room to the sound of a baby crying in a chest of drawers and a woman he can't recall sleeping with covered in vomit next to him. This particular drunken morning-after is notably different than the series of others R.C. experiences, because it is the first moment he cannot *remember*. He gets up shaking so badly he can barely buckle his belt and notes, "I don't know if she was a whore or not. I don't know how I got there. I couldn't remember nothing about the baby. I couldn't remember nothing about the whole week prior, in fact" (Smith 88). Suddenly his drunken whoring life is unfulfilling precisely because he has lost access to memory. He says in that moment he hears his mother speaking to him to "go on home now, son." His return home is then a complicated acceptance of forgetting of what is useful to forget and what is useful to remember. By returning home and accepting his surrogate father as his father and taking care of his father and the rest of the family, he implicitly participates in the collective memory's forgetting of his Melungeon past

for the sake of maintaining a cohesive social unit. Memory operates in a complicated way here because it is the shock of forgetting that turns R.C.'s life around, yet it is his acceptance of the collective "forgetting" that allows him to return to his family role at home.

R.C. returns home because he needs a collective family framework to recover memory for himself. Without a collective memory to exist in, his individual memory literally fails. He returns home because he needs the community to make meaning for himself despite his family's continuing the unwillingness to openly acknowledge R.C.'s difference. While R.C. takes his deceased father's place in the patriarchal role of the family and moves into the family home and marries Lucie, his restlessness embodied in repeated failed business plans suggests he can never fully integrate himself or participate in the collective that still denies him his individual memory. Unable to wedge himself in a collective memory even when he himself is the overseer of that memory stability, he does what he knows. He artistically constructs an identity just as his family has done in selecting what moments to include in their collective memory. With all hope of recovering his corporeal self and individual memory gone, he turns to constructing a family celebrity through performance.

Of course, without access to individual memory and without memory based on the habitual everyday living of their family, R.C. is doomed to fail even in the artistic constructions of his family's celebrity. To use Caruth's terms of the "unknowable" loss, R.C.'s life-altering discovery of his race and his family's exclusion of him creates a wound—a trauma of identity—that he did not even know he was missing until late in life. Caruth writes, "It is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (Caruth 4). Unable to understand why both the collective memory spheres of his family and his wider community can create a collective that excludes people of their

choosing while he cannot create a collective himself of *his* own, R.C. copes with his “wound” by adopting a “wayfaring stranger” persona that conflates his celebrity performance with his corporeal self so that there is no separation. As the song vocalizes, the only hope for collective community he can hope for is his “heavenly home,” which he expedites through suicide. Due to his inability to recognize identity construction and assimilation of memories as an artistic *process* like Katie sees it, R.C. ends his life in the barn on Grassy Branch listening to “Melungeon Man” “thinking about his mamma, whose love for the Melungeon marked his life there forever in the outer dark” (Smith 309).

While R.C. does agree to “forget” what he knows in order to uphold the family continuity and care for his surrogate family, he does not fully “forget.” In fact, as a result of examining, running from, and returning to the collective memory, he forges an individual memory based on the facts of his Melungeon origins rather than a reinvention and artistic construction of his individual past. With a restlessness that will become a steady trait for all the Baileys, R.C. still longs to be a “wayfaring stranger.” This desire manifests itself in the lyrics he sings of the song “Wayfaring Stranger” and in a song he writes called “Melungeon Man.” These songs in particular become the bread-and-butter for the starting acts of the Bailey family as R.C. gains more publicity for his family singing enterprise. While the urge to write, sing, and perform publically originates out of financial necessity, the will to perform and share the songs about his unstable origins becomes the collective memory that is the Bailey family past and is the version of memory transmitted to the younger generations. R.C. sets a precedent that being a wayfarer—a loner—is a way of asserting individual experience amid a collective memory that necessitates sharing at the family level and at the public level.

R.C.'s performances of these songs, while they are attempts at recovering what he has lost in his family's constructed collective paradigm, fail to recover individual memory because he sees this recovery only in terms of an origin that is in fact *recoverable* rather than artistically constructed. R.C.'s gradual alienation of himself from the family collective is then symptomatic of his inability to reconcile the celebrity he creates and the natural self he seeks to recover because the recovery process is so inherently tied up in the cycle of performing for constructing celebrity. Unlike Katie's recognition that recovery and construction of individual memory is an artistic process distanced from her cinematic body, R.C. sees all performance as a way to construct celebrity only and neglects the process of identity formation itself as an art form. So fixated on the recoverable corporeality of his Melungeon origins, R.C. throws himself into performing his "Melungeon Man" and "Wayfaring Stranger" songs not to reinvent his individual past but to use his individual past to alienate himself from the rest of the collective. R.C. cannot artistically conceive of a physical past or everyday individual memory that is anything other than his traceable racial heritage that both asserts his individual corporeal past but also alienates him from the collective family memory.

As a result, music in general further supports Smith's destabilization of resolute origins and recoverable authenticity. R.C.'s songs "Wayfaring Stranger" and "Melungeon Man" commemorate R.C.'s own rootlessness, which is at the foundation of his own racial origins. But through public performance of this rootlessness, R.C. attempts to constantly recover and assert his individual self even as he creates a collective and public image. The "Wayfaring Stranger" song itself illustrates R.C.'s tension between rootless alienation and simultaneous adherence to a unified collective identity:

I am a poor wayfaring stranger
While traveling thru this world of woe

Yet there's no sickness, toil or danger
in that bright world to which I go

I'm going there to see my father
I'm going there no more to roam
I'm only going over Jordan
I'm only going over home

I know dark clouds will gather round me
I know my way is rough and steep
Yet beauteous fields lie just before me
Where God's redeemed their vigils keep

I'm going there to see my mother
She said she'd meet me when I come
I'm only going over Jordan
I'm only going over home

The song's oscillation between alienated wandering "thru this world of woe" on a way "rough and steep" and the contrasting communal reunion with return to home, mother, and father mirrors R.C.'s own rootless wandering yet inherent urge to return to unattainable origins he seeks. The difference between R.C.'s use of performance of this song and, say, Katie's performance, would be that R.C. performs only with fostering the *celebrity* image in mind. While he certainly has a connection to the song, he neglects to view the process of recovering his corporeal memory itself as an artistic form; through repeated performance, he is performing his origin attempting to recover it, but his race is a construction that is ultimately irrecoverable. He must artistically accept and mold his own past, but instead he sees it almost exclusively as a way to display his public celebrity. Given his association with this song, R.C.'s public persona is even inherently unstable given the wayfaring stranger's tension between questing for individuality as well as adherence to community and sharing.

Smith's use of the classic hymn-turned-folk song associated so closely with R.C. also runs an effective parallel to music as an example of the intangibility of specific origins. Similar

to how the “Fair and Tender Ladies” ballad works in the other novels as an adaptable form open to fluid interpretation and varied use throughout different generations, music and particularly this song, serves to model the fluidity of art and its purposes in the novel. This song in particular carries a more loaded weight given the history of its development in the American folk imagination. Coming from ambiguous African spiritual and/or Irish origins (Willentz and Marcus 121), the song has since been recorded and adapted by Burl Ives, Doc Watson, Johnny Cash, and Dolly Parton, to name only a few. Each adaptation of the piece mirrors the quest for asserting individual uniqueness while participating in the collective essence of the song. Its durable adaptability proven by constant new recordings reinforces Smith’s objectives with inventing a memory that is collaboratively fluid and purposefully intangible so as to resist complete ownership and commodification. It is also probably no accident that Smith invokes this title also in reference to *Wayfaring Stranger* as the title of Burl Ives’s 1949 album that compiled a series of traditionally “Anglo-Scottish-Irish” ballads and airs (Willentz and Marcus 232). In the decades of ballad collection so heavily driven by “proving” folk origins and tracing ballad origins, this hymn’s own ambiguous origins and association with R.C.’s Melungeon origin resists the tendency to name exact origins for the purpose of privileging and constructing strata of varying cultural capital. Each song’s creation and adaptation throughout the novel underscores Smith’s emphasis on the *process* of artistic creation, which includes artistic construction of self—both everyday corporeal and immortal cinematic.

Whether or not R.C. is aware of his lack of distinction between his corporeal self and his celebrity self or whether or not Smith makes R.C. conscious of the reasons he identifies with the “Wayfaring Stranger” and his racial exclusion from the collective memory is open for debate. But if these questions weren’t enough for R.C. to contend with, Smith underscores R.C.’s

inaccessibility to collective memory construction not only because of his racial origins but because of the Bristol sessions' confusions signal to artists like R.C. that origins are recordable and recoverable. This brings me to my second major point about R.C.'s anxiety about his inaccessible origins.

Given the 1927 Bristol recordings that gave rise to commodifiable songs to be recorded in the moment and then sold, the loss that occurs in that transfer drastically changes the collective memory theory that places importance on habitual actions over time being the foundation for collective memory so that the actual events are most times forgotten for the sake of repeated occurrences. Suddenly the recordability of this everyday art form creates a traumatic breach of the continual, fluid past and present by the ability of an art form—an art form that is itself a conduit for the fluidity of individual and collective memory—to stand static in time. Lucie Bailey best illustrates the loss experienced at the moment when memory becomes transformed as public memory, in this case when Lucie's husband R.C. Bailey takes the family to the Bristol recording sessions to perform and record:

Head down under pretext of tending to the baby, Lucie cries softly. For it seems to her that they have just given up something precious by singing these songs here to these strangers, and she feels a sudden terrible sense of loss. (Smith 124)

Lucie realizes the creation of celebrity occurring, but more importantly, she realizes the loss of the everyday habitual self happening, too. When she first arrives on the streets of Bristol, she is overwhelmed by the city buildings and cars, feeling trapped: "Oh, Lord. Lucie says as it hits her what they are about to do. She looks all around at the city buildings, the city cars. She's got beans to put up, back home" (Smith 120). This is not a stereotype-feeding moment of a sheltered mountain woman going to the city for the first time. This is a moment about the stark

juxtaposition of the creation of the celebrity at the expense of the habitual corporeal, gardening self. Lucie, like Katie, is invested memory constructed from the habitual, everyday actions of family life, which Lucie realizes is markedly different from the music recording world the family will enter.

On a symbolic level, the ability for Ralph Peer and his recording studio to identify, record, and disseminate “original” music is precisely the myth of static recovery R.C. is searching for. The recording industry circulates the myth that fluid, collaborative art forms can be recorded and exist in unchangeable form, lending to R.C.’s quest to forever seek his own racial origins in a way that is similar to the recovery of musical “origins” Ralph Peer “discovers.” While I have talked generally about racial discrimination of Melungeons, it is perhaps helpful to underscore that even anthropological studies today are inconclusive as to the ethnic origins of these people to show just how untraceable and irrecoverable R.C.’s origins actually are. The best the anthropologists can do even today is to say, “they originate from a mixed-race group of people resulting from intermarriage among underclass whites, black slaves, and rebellious Indians” (Schrift 108). Though other theories have made the case for Portuguese background, sailors and slaves from Spain, Turkey, Libya, Morocco, Greece, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. Unlike the traditional work of folklorists and ethnomusicologists who trace music back to an original form or culture (such as Lomax or Ritchie), Melungeon origins are still disputed today. However, notably, those theorists who argue the Melungeons descend from Turkish connections cite the Turkish phrase “melun can,” which means “lost or cursed soul” in English (Schrift 108). Smith’s parallels between R.C. and the inaccessibility of cultural origin through R.C.’s cyclic performance of “Wayfaring Stranger” cannot be clearer attempt to recover that which cannot be recoverable.

A look at Johnny Raines—the non-blood relative of R.C. who brings the Bailey family legacy into the 1950s—underscores the anxiety Smith presents in result of the recording technology’s effects. Johnny Raines is Smith’s not-so-subtle fictional portrayal of Johnny Cash, complete with drug addictions, affairs in taxicabs, and sleazy motel stays. He marries R.C.’s daughter Rose Annie, who shoots and kills Johnny in their Nashville home. Johnny is the ultimate “wayfarer” in the novel given his reckless pursuits all over the south getting further and further away from himself in his fulfillment of the celebrity image he created. Johnny feels unfulfilled by his cheap performances and mediocre songs but is too restless for the confines of his mountain home. Because Johnny’s alienation from community is not entirely the same as R.C.’s alienation (Johnny is not *racially* alienated), he serves as a counter example to R.C.’s inability to integrate an individual memory with a collective one because of the family’s rejection of race. However, while Johnny is a counter example on the race point, he affirms my second point that the Smith portrays the anxiety of the individual as a result of the recording industry’s creation of static, frozen art that generates the myth that origins are fixed and recoverable. The narrator describes writing the hit that made him famous, “Five-Card Stud”:

Like most good songs it came easy, came one day when Johnny wasn’t doing shit but riding around in his car with a girl, and she said something about her daddy being a compulsive gambler or something, and all of a sudden he remembered playing blackjack around the old claw-foot kitchen table in Lucie’s kitchen with R.C. dealing...and him saying to R.C., “Hit me,” and “Hit me again.” (Smith 169)

Johnny’s hit is an original one, grounded in the habitual memory of playing poker with R.C. and written in Johnny’s habitual mode of “riding around in his car with a girl that characterizes the restlessness of most of Johnny’s life. This everyday experience is then commodified when it is

recorded. His friend accuses him, “Where’d you say you got that song, Johnny? You bought it offa some guy, didn’t you? Come on, man, come clean” (Smith 169). The next line reads, “But the song was *his*, and as soon as Sam Phillips heard it, he knew they had something too” (Smith 169). Not only is the driving force for originality evident here, but in one sentence the song leaves Johnny’s ownership and becomes owned by a collective “they.” It is notable that both R.C. and Johnny, the men who feel the most anxiety and confusion at having their everyday art commodified, are not integrated into the family circle at the end of the novel. Johnny is shot—the ultimate act of the collective’s “forgetting” and exclusion of an individual. And R.C. shoots himself—the ultimate destruction of self that the collective has driven him to.

It is fitting that the last scene of the novel ends with the collective family’s *live* performance that is recorded, but it is recorded in front of a live audience. Thus by the end of the novel, Smith solves the quandary she has made of the recording industry’s creation of fixed, static origins. Not only is the last scene a family reunion of sorts—two notable men not in attendance of course—performed live in front of a live audience, but the kind of music they perform is varied and with ensemble performances, solo performances, and most notably a mix of hymns, ballads, and songs the family has written throughout the decades. The inclusion of the hymn, and title of the last section, “Shall We Gather at the River,” is notable because the traditionally hymns the family grew up with before the Bristol sessions likely would have been more audience-driven and participatory than recorded studio songs. George Lipsitz notes the differences between Euro-American musical traditions and African traditions: “...the African tradition...values dialogue and conversation between artists and audiences to adapt old text to new situations. The audience participates in the creation of this music by responses to the leader...” (240). While the hymns the Bailey family perform live are probably not directly

African spirituals, the hymn format is likely similar at least in the sheer presence of an audience who can participate by singing along. Additionally, the particular hymn “Shall We Gather at the River,” is a purposefully communal version of “Wayfaring Stranger” in terms of its theme of heavenly reward after sojourning to the river. But unlike “Wayfaring Stranger,” the walk is a communal, joyous one because of the collective experience. This is an important aspect of the musical tradition for Smith to highlight at the end because the live performance makes the music once again a communal, fluid experience with a practical purpose of building community with the audience. As such the final performance offers a healing for the anxieties inflicted by family’s early relationship with recorded music.

By the end of the novel, the immortal image that prevails for the family legacy is not one of R.C. Bailey’s perpetual cycle of loss and inability to recover fluid origins, but the borderline nostalgic ending is quite the opposite. Even as the tragedy of R.C. Bailey comes to an end simultaneously to the family’s reunion at the Opryland Hotel, the scene is one of almost excessive nostalgia. But the third person narrating lens saves the ending scene from nostalgia by documenting what an onlooker or outsider would see and hear. The subtle shift from characters’ voices narrating events to an outside narrator’s commentary on the reunion event is an important narrative move that serves to liken the reader to the narrator’s same outsider perspective; by the end of the novel, the reader is put into the position of the public for whom the cinematic image will be immortalized. Even in this distanced image, the tension between the corporeal and the cinematic is in play—with the cinematic collective superseding the individual members of the family. In a literal corporeal sense, several members of the Bailey family are old and physically failing. For instance, “Rose Annie has gotten old all of a sudden...with wispy hair hanging down in her face, hunched shoulders, veiny blue hands sticking out the sleeves of her old coat” (Smith

308). Most notably, during the reunion the narrator notes R.C.'s suicide and that "even now R.C. is dying" (Smith 310) as the family loads up on the bus to record their show at the Grand Ole Opry. The corporeal loss that occurs simultaneously with the creation of a new celebrity image of the collective Bailey family taking the place of Katie's celebrity image is a final reinforcement of the transformative process of art and image creation.

The public image of the collective family at the end is the eternal image that survives in the public memory. Unlike collective memory's obliteration of individual memory experienced by R.C. and the earlier generations' imposition of forgetting in order to collectively enact a surrogate memory, Katie's generation creates a successful means for "forgetting" and offers a surrogate memory that retains the corporeal art of each individual family member's distinct artistic construction of their individual selves. Mama Tampa is still telling outlandish stories her own way in her own style, Virgie is busy telling Katie how the show's lineup should be performed, Sugar tells the family about her doctoral deconstruction studies at Duke, and Katie hugs everyone having successfully constructed a collective community of made up of individuals who practice their own art in their own everyday, corporeal ways. Yet collectively, the Bailey family stands as an eternal image in public memory not based on individual celebrity nor collective memory that violates individual memory but a collective memory that still dictates the everyday lives the individuals within the family.

CONCLUSION

As each of these readings are loosely attached to what at first may seem to be the periphery of the novels—an epigraph or a passing reference—the role of music and songs are foundational to Lee Smith’s own destabilizing of the traditions she uses and out of which she writes. Each fragment of a folk song, line from a hymn, or title from a ballad performed in the text carries with it a loaded history of cultural memory. Often the “history” of each is so tangled in a web of collective performance and collaborative artistry that the actual origins are unidentifiable. Each piece of oral folk performance is then infused with murky origins and layers and layers of cultural influences. In this way, they mirror R.C. Bailey’s Melungeon ancestry.

Smith uses the centuries-old ballads and song fragments as conduits for reimagining the past in ways that do not completely discard the past as an unproductive model. Instead, Smith works with the cautionary ballads and works with the religious hymns to reinterpret their words and meaning for promises of counter-memories. Historian George Lipsitz’s definition of counter-memory is helpful here, and should not be confused with Foucault’s definition, which consists of singular events outside the monotonous. For Lipsitz counter-memory looks to the past “for the hidden histories excluded from dominant narratives” (213). The focus on “hidden histories” is important because it suggests that counter-memory is more pervasive under the surface than simply not represented at all. This rings true in the analysis of the “Fair and Tender Ladies” ballad, which if read with an eye for the subtle yearnings and impulses for flight, actually *does* carry themes of power and agency that Smith’s women characters retrieve, live out, and therefore reinvent the interpretation of their cultural past.

As analysis of Smith’s work in this way suggests, the ballad in particular is an important conduit of cultural memory that offers a method with which to approach texts that utilize such

oral forms. In this project the ballads have provided a way into the texts from a different angle than the standard gender readings that exist in current scholarship on Smith. The fluidity and collaborative nature of musical and lyrical oral traditions not only allow reinterpretations of past collective memory through continuous reinterpretation with every performance, but the long history of ballads serving as cultural commodities themselves summons what Smith posits to be the harmful effects of commodification and ownership of these fluid forms. To make these ballads commodities means that they lose the value of their everyday utility for the sake of recording for economic benefits or recording for capturing the authenticity of a fading culture. Smith chooses to use the ballad as a connection with the past recognizing the past cannot be simply erased or forgotten. But she also uses the form as a key into itself for unlocking its “hidden” counter-memory for reinterpreting the past to include more voices and revising the present performance. This is a model for ways into other texts that may deal with ballad or songs; it is important that we recognize the cultural processes behind such forms in order to appreciate the form’s adaptability and fluidity and its valiant attempts at resisting static commodification. These forms must have the freedom of daily use to reach their full adaptable, revisable, shareable work of making collective memory construction a continuous process. Ballad and songs are routinely adapted, covered, and performed in live venues, not to mention often recorded by different artists. This culture of adaptability and ability to add new techniques to each piece make songs and ballads ideal forms for representing the process of memory reinvention itself.

The intersection of ballads and literature is productive because it allows for an exploration of the loss—the cultural wound—created when cultures place an emphasis on recoverable origins and authenticity. While to some extent the national public memory *needs* the

collective cohesion of its folk culture, particularly in an Appalachian regional repository of folk culture, the quests for authenticity and origin seem to result in losing the essence of the ballad form—the act of sharing in fluid collaboration through performance. Without fiction’s space and development to question cultural memory, its processes and its commodification, we cannot understand and experience what is *lost* when the culture does become commodified.

While Alan Lomax’s contributions to the folk collection movement are valuable for the preservation and remembrance of the roots that define American cultural origins, in keeping the social science fields separate from the literary we miss opportunities to understand the other side of the coin with regard to cultural loss. Certainly, the collective memory loss would be greater without projects like *Smithsonian Folkways*, but it is worth noting that the selective process of institutions that sift through and decide what culture should be considered “authentic,” leaves wounds knowable only to the under-represented who do not fit the Anglo, Euro-centric foundation of American roots.

While Jean Ritchie seems to represent the model of transatlantic authenticity as she provides the cultural link between her family’s Appalachian songs and her family’s Old World songs from Ireland, the quest for connecting with recoverable, overseas origins could be misunderstood by the public that in order for “culture” to have value, it must be legitimized by proven links to European culture. Jean Ritchie’s work is certainly valuable to understanding her family heritage’s folk influences and connections; I am not discounting this. However, when we have precedents set and reinforced by Anglo-Irish connections, the cultural signal we send is that a cultural product is valuable if it can be recovered through transatlantic memory, when, as Smith posits, music and song is rarely recoverable if its true essence is to be appreciated.

Finally, A.P. Carter's relevance as an artist who sparked American country music is a story that actually represents a more varied past as to his association with country "origins." In a music industry that emerged in the 1930s known *then* for its whiteness as so many of the original recorders were looking for ways to distinguish between "hillbilly" music and "nigger" music—Bristol recording manager Ralph Peer's 1927 terminology (Nager 112). As much as original recorders sought to separate the two, even the country music industry today—the great-granddaughter generation to A.P. Carter now—represents itself as predominately white-centered, not only in its performers but generally in its audiences as well. What the public image and memory of the Carter family and the American public tends to "forget" collectively, is that the actual roots of country music were much more varied than it appeared to be then and appears to be now.

A back-to-the-ballad approach lends itself to thinking about the social context of the history of commodification and collecting the songs themselves. Not only did the "hillbilly" recording industry come out of a wave of recordings that first centered on blues, jazz, and ragtime from African-American influences, but we find that alongside A.P. Carter in his travels seeking "original" song material was black guitarist Leslie Riddle. Riddle would learn the melodies and then teach the bass-picking to Maybelle Carter, who made this specific style of bass-picking a distinguishable "Carter-style" bass-picking (Nager 114). At the same time the Carters were recording in Bristol, Jimmy Rodgers was also recording his "original" work that is rooted heavily in the African American blues tradition. As a member of a medicine show and water boy to predominately black railroad workers, Rodgers learned to play and sing from these cross-racial influences (Nager 113). The quest for origins and isolating strains of authenticity is a complicated process that, in the end, is bound to leave out some piece of the oral history. While

the cohesion of collective and public memory is necessary for national cultural identity, we cannot access the unknowable loss of what is left *out* of the public memory unless we access it through literature's realm of knowable and unknowable (Caruth 15) or through closer looks at the social-historical processes for the transmission of cultural memory itself.

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