

Appalachian Modernism

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Abstract

This dissertation argues that instead of being stuck in time as it is so often characterized, Appalachia experienced the same forces of modernization as the rest of the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As a result, during the period of roughly 1900-1950, Appalachia produced novels, poems, buildings, and bureaucracies that stand as significant works of American modernism and reflect the changing Appalachian culture and landscape that created them. Some of these were written or crafted by people outside Appalachia about Appalachia, some by artists who remained in the mountains. These works, including Frank Lloyd Wright's *Fallingwater*; Martha Graham and Aaron Copland's *Appalachian Spring*; Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel*; James Still's *River of Earth*; James Agee's *A Death in the Family*; and the planning and construction projects of the Tennessee Valley Authority, have been analyzed as works of modernism *or* of Appalachia, but rarely have they been presented as examples of Appalachia's being a location of modernism. Something about our definition of Appalachia rejects an association with modernism and vice versa. And yet, the major narratives of Appalachia depend on modernity and modernization: resource extraction and industrialization (and now de-industrialization), coal production and its mechanization, outmigration, and mass media dissemination of both Appalachian music and stereotypes. This dissertation recognizes Appalachia as a site of modernism; expands the canon of Appalachian Literature to include examples of modernism and experimental works inspired by modernism; and broadens the Appalachian Studies idea of Appalachia to include a wider range of art and experience. Modernism offers Appalachian Studies a conceptual framework to develop the Appalachian identity beyond victim or survivor of economic and environmental aggression.

Modernism complicates Appalachian Studies' binaries such as insider/outsider, Appalachian/American, authentic/stereotypical, and perpetrator/victim. Appalachia offers a modernism that both relies upon and reshapes the idea of and the reality of nature; defines and deconstructs the idea of home; and struggles to preserve an old way of life while embracing change.

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Introduction:
Appalachian Modernism

Every hour changes something forever.
Or changes something for another hour.
Watch the clouds at the far end of the sky,
how slowly they move toward you,
how the blue above seems inviolable.
Watch for an hour and the mottled
streak of gray-threaded horizon
reaches over like a lid across a box
The box you are in feels like history,
Permanent change and no warning,
Myths of cycles and repetition.
The loop you are in is imaginary;
It's a new world every hour.
No history here.

– Jesse Graves, from “History”

In 1929, Carolina Tar Heels recorded a song called “Peg and Awl” that tells the story of a shoemaker¹:

In the days of eighteen and one, peg and awl.

In the days of eighteen and one, peg and awl.

In the days of eighteen and one

Peggin’ shoes was all I done

Hand me down my pegs, my pegs, my pegs.

Years and verses pass until the days of eighteen and four, when the shoemaker says he’ll “peg those shoes no more.” The reason: “They’ve invented a new machine/Prettiest little thing

¹ The tune, recorded in Atlanta for Victor Records, feature two singers, two guitars, a banjo and a harmonica. By the time this recording appeared on Harry Smith’s *Anthology of American Folk Music* (1952), Carolina Tar Heel and Bristol, Tennessee native Clarence Ashley had given up music and worked as a manual laborer. The popularity of the *Anthology* enabled Ashley to return to music. Between 1960 and 1962, Ashley recorded two LPs that introduced Doc Watson. By 1963, he appeared at the Newport Folk Festival and can be seen sitting between John Cohen and Doc Watson as they listen to newcomer Bob Dylan.

you've ever seen." The machine can "Make a hundred pair to my one/peggin' shoes it ain't no fun. Throw away my pegs, my pegs, my pegs." The workers in the song have been out-performed and made obsolete by the coming of machines. The song follows a similar story to that of John Henry², the steel-driving man, who raced the steam-drill to tunnel through a mountain. Though they share a setup, these songs pay off in different ways: John Henry beats the steam-drill, but in doing so dies with "a hammer in his hand"; the shoemaker welcomes the machine that puts him out of business, and throws away his peg and awl because "peggin' shoes it ain't no fun." These two reactions to modernization date from the late nineteenth century: shoe-making sewing machines entered regular use closer to 1880 than the 1801 mentioned in the song, and the Big Bend Tunnel in West Virginia, the likely source of "John Henry," was completed in 1870 ("Jan"; Hasbrouck 873). By the time these songs were recorded in the 1920s, they were already old but still timely, and they illustrate two ways people in the mountains reacted to changing times: some resisted, some relented³. These recordings also show that at the height of the modernist moment, Appalachia responded to modernization with an innovative musical melting pot of banjo, guitar, and fiddle; a burgeoning capitalist music industry; and mass media recording and broadcast technology. In short, Appalachia took part in a vernacular modernism⁴ we now call old-time music.

² Recorded in St Louis for Okeh in 1927. Solo vocal, two guitars, fiddle. Appears on Smith's *Anthology* as "Gonna Die With My Hammer in My Hand," without the steam drill. John Henry gets sick and his partner, Sally Ann, picks up the hammering. John Alexander Williams reports that steel-driving has sexual implications.

³ I have to mention Uncle Dave Macon's take on Dan Emmett's "Jordan Am A Hard Road to Travel," a song that presents Appalachian Modernism better in three minutes than I could in three hours: "Public schools and the highways are raising quite an alarm/get a country man educated just a little and he ain't gonna work on the farm."

⁴ This useful phrase is borrowed from Miriam Bratu Hansen, who coined it to describe modernism in Hollywood and global cinema. See "Tracking Cinema on a Global Scale" from *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*.

This dissertation argues that instead of being stuck in time as it is so often characterized, Appalachia experienced the same forces of modernization as the rest of the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As a result, during the period of roughly 1900-1950, Appalachia produced novels, poems, buildings, and bureaucracies that stand as significant works of American modernism and reflect the changing Appalachian culture and landscape that created them. Some of these were written or crafted by people outside Appalachia about Appalachia, some by artists who remained in the mountains. These works, including Frank Lloyd Wright's *Fallingwater*; Martha Graham and Aaron Copland's *Appalachian Spring*; Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel*; James Still's *River of Earth*; James Agee's *A Death in the Family*; and the planning and construction projects of the Tennessee Valley Authority, have been analyzed as works of modernism *or* of Appalachia, but rarely have they been presented as examples of Appalachia's being a location of modernism. Literature that is seen as high modernist becomes branded as southern instead of Appalachian, or realist instead of modernist. Architecture that is too modernist is described as intruding on its mountain setting. Something about our definition of Appalachia rejects an association with modernism and vice versa. And yet, the major narratives of Appalachia depend on modernity and modernization: resource extraction and industrialization (and now de-industrialization), coal production and its mechanization, outmigration, and mass media dissemination of both Appalachian music and stereotypes.

The goals of this dissertation are to recognize Appalachia as a site of modernism; to expand the canon of Appalachian Literature to include examples of modernism and experimental works inspired by modernism; and to broaden the Appalachian Studies idea of

Appalachia to include a wider range of art and experience. Modernism offers Appalachian Studies a conceptual framework to develop the Appalachian identity beyond victim or survivor of economic and environmental aggression. Modernism complicates Appalachian Studies' binaries such as insider/outsider, Appalachian/American, authentic/stereotypical, and perpetrator/victim. Appalachia offers a modernism that both relies upon and reshapes the idea of and the reality of nature; defines and deconstructs the idea of home; and struggles to preserve an old way of life while embracing change.

Trump Country Breakdown

Every so often, Appalachia experiences a moment in the national sun, when something from or about Appalachia captures national attention. Some examples, like the films *Deliverance* (1972) and *Coal Miner's Daughter* (1980), remind America of the otherness of America's mountaineers, where hard rhymes with tired and you should paddle faster if you hear banjo music. Others, like the novel *Cold Mountain* (1997) and the soundtrack from the film *O Brother, Where Art Thou* (2000), highlight Appalachia's natural beauty and centrality in American folk culture. Sometimes these moments prompt an Appalachian backlash, as when the play *The Kentucky Cycle* (1992) won a Pulitzer for drama and sparked *Back Talk from Appalachia: Confronting Stereotypes* (2000). Appalachia's current moment comes not from literature, film, or music, but from politics⁵. J. D. Vance's *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* (2016) and Appalachian Trump voters inspired dozens of articles in national

⁵ Frederic Jameson describes postmodernism as a time when culture and economics become inseparable. Whoever writes the book on this time will have to add politics.

media, which crystalized an ongoing debate about the victimhood or agency of working-class white people. It has also, thus far, led to two statements of pushback from Appalachian Studies: Elizabeth Catte's *What You Are Getting Wrong About Appalachia* (2018) and the Anthony Harkins and Meredith McCarroll-edited collection *Appalachian Reckoning* (2019). I begin with this to say with some envy that J.D. Vance's book has created more energy and engagement in Appalachian Studies than the following 250 pages on Appalachian Modernism ever will, and also to claim that this project engages in similar work as Catte and the who's who of Appalachian Studies in *Appalachian Reckoning*: examining, questioning, and revising who, what, where, and when is Appalachia?

Catte aims *What You Are Getting Wrong About Appalachia* at outsiders, particularly media elites who either embraced Vance's "uniquely tragic and toxic region" of Appalachia thesis or want to blame Trump's victory on the region's being "'out of time' and out of step with any contemporary present, much less a progressive future" (Catte 8; Engelhardt, qtd in Catte 9). Catte's book speaks for the Appalachians overlooked by these narratives: "nonwhite people, anyone who cares about progressive politics, those who care about the environment, LGBTQ individuals, young folks" (Catte 9) and those who "struggle to arrest environmental destruction, to secure workers' rights, to demand clean water, and to preserve folkways" (15), priorities that align with those of much of Appalachian Studies. These descriptors, however, belie a fundamental conflict: the scholars, activists, and artists that speak for Appalachian Studies in the twenty-first century study, represent, and advocate for a majority of Appalachians who share few of their political and ethical values. When the activist media group Appalshop made the film *Justice in the Coalfields* (1995) about the 1988 United Mine Workers

of America Pittston Coal Company strike, the strikers and the filmmakers likely voted for the same candidates, but 1996 saw the last Democratic Presidential candidate win Kentucky, West Virginia, or Tennessee⁶ (Jenkins). Catte speaks for a minority of Appalachians, but a vocal minority resistant to being lumped in with Trump Country.

Lest it seems that I am arguing that Vance's porridge is too hot and that Catte's is too cold, I am not. Appalachia needs more Cattes and fewer Vances, but Appalachia remains Trump Country by a comfortable margin, and we should be honest about what Appalachia looks like. Appalachian Modernism does not tell the story of all of Appalachia any more than Vance or Catte does, but it offers an opportunity to revise our idea of Appalachia in a more productive direction. This project might be subtitled "what you are getting wrong about Appalachia," but the argument takes aim at some of the assumptions in Catte's book and Appalachian Studies itself, such as how we have perpetuated myths about Appalachian difference and ignored the parts of our story that do not fit our political or cultural agendas. Appalachian Modernism does not describe the dominant literature, architecture, and music of Appalachia, and Catte's politically progressive coalition does not speak for the majority Appalachian electorate. But Appalachia's reputation and frequent self-definition as a homogenous zone of common political, economic, and artistic interests is overdue for a revision. Appalachian Modernism may speak for a portion of Appalachia more connected to national and global trends in culture, but this connection makes them no less Appalachian.

⁶ Democrat Rick Boucher held onto the Congressional seat in southwest Virginia's ninth district until 2010.

There's No Tomorrowland At Dollywood or The Flaneur of Pigeon Roost

Appalachian Modernism sounds like an oxymoron, and two enduring narratives about Appalachia explain why: first, Appalachians are stuck in the past; and second, Appalachians are poor. These ideas endure because people inside and outside Appalachia perpetuate them, and because they contain truth. Pigeon Forge, Tennessee's Dollywood, named for country music star Dolly Parton, advertises itself as a theme park. The theme might be summed up as Appalachian Disneyland, part nostalgic mountaineer village and part whimsical nature fantasyland. The park boasts two extraction-themed rides, the Mystery Mine and the Thunderhead, where "an old sawmill once moved lumber out of the mountains at Thunderhead Gap" (Dollywood), as well as a steam train and areas called Craftsman's Valley and Country Fair. The website invites guests to "step back in time" and enjoy a "glimpse into the Smoky Mountain culture and history" (Dollywood). One of the newest areas of Dollywood, Jukebox Junction, takes visitors back, or up, to the fabulous fifties, the last point in the timeline that fits the theme of Dollywood. The park gives the impression that Appalachia – or at least the Smoky Mountains – connotes a time as well as a place, and that time ends in the early-to-mid twentieth century, the era of modernism.

Appalachia's mismatch with modernism goes beyond Dollywood and regional stereotypes, however. Charles Baudelaire described modernity as "the transient, the fleeting, the contingent," and "one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immovable" (107). Appalachians like to resist the self-definition of transient, fleeting, and contingent; like Elizabeth Catte, we prefer to think we "preserve folkways," (15) or live in a nature of "mountains for eternity, clouds ever passing," (Graves 247), identifiers more connected to the eternal and

immovable. Evidence suggests, however, that Appalachia, like the rest of the country in the first half of the century, produces numerous examples of transience. The most-read works of Appalachian Literature, by Denise Giardina, Harriett Arnow, and James Still, show Appalachians of this era chasing modernity in the guise of the cash economy or the coal camp or outmigration.

Another incongruity between Appalachia and modernism exists in large part because of the region's association with poverty. Barbara Ellen Smith places this assumption at the headwaters of Appalachian Studies: "Scholars have formulated cultural paradigms of Appalachia as responses to two quite different types of questions: (1) Why is the region impoverished? And (2) What makes the region distinctive?" (44) Appalachian Studies quickly – and rightly – pushes back against culture-of-poverty images of Appalachia in the broader culture: *The Beverly Hillbillies* or Charles Kuralt's "Christmas in Appalachia," etc. We have been less adept at locating Appalachia in fine art forms such as architecture or ballet; we claim Jed Clampett as a subject of Appalachian Studies but not Martha Graham or Frank Lloyd Wright. Though many of the heroes of modernism lived as starving artists – Wright among them – modernism carries its own connotation of being a movement for the sophisticated, urbane, and cosmopolitan⁷.

Appalachia's poverty and the view of the region as behind the times plays a direct role in its modernism by way of the Tennessee Valley Authority, whose original mission went far beyond flood control and electricity production to education, agricultural revitalization, and cultural evolution. Appalachia's ambivalence to TVA and later government assistance programs

⁷ See Janet Lyon, "Cosmopolitanism and Modernism." *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*.

like the Appalachian Regional Commission make for oversimplified narratives of insider-outsider conflict. TVA's planning, design, and execution constitutes a distinctly Appalachian Modernism of globally significant architecture and reimagined nature: wilderness to garden on a massive scale. The success of TVA enables Appalachia to play an oversize role in the most radical technology of the twentieth century, the atomic bomb. Oak Ridge signals the end of modernism – and isolation – in Appalachia. Appalachia's perceived backwardness and poverty continues to shape depictions of the region in books like *Hillbilly Elegy*, but Appalachia Modernism argues for the region's complexity and participation in the American twentieth century.

Appalachia as a Place in Times

To define Appalachia as it appears in this project, I begin with some geography. For many years on the University of North Carolina's website, David Whisnant maintained a collection of maps of Appalachia (Figure 1) that showed various boundaries of the region beginning with folklorist John C. Campbell's *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland* (1921) and ending with the Appalachian Regional Commission's (ARC) 1967 outline. These overlaid map images seen below suggest agreement on the core and disagreement over the margins. Appalachia's geographical boundaries may be uncertain, but the mountainous regions of West Virginia, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and North Carolina and a bit of Georgia compose Appalachia.

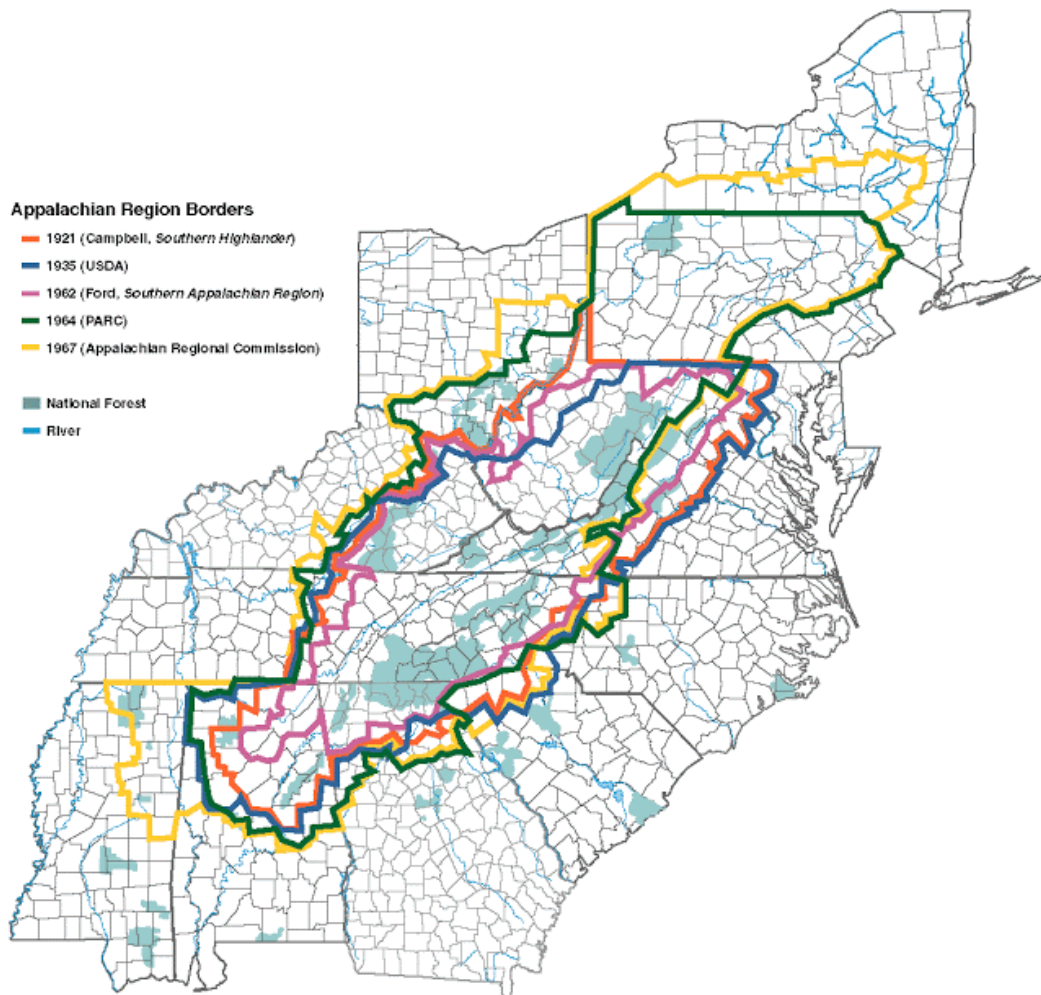


Figure 1. Appalachian Region Borders.

source: David Whisnant

John Alexander Williams' *Appalachia: A History* makes a similar move in his introduction, overlaying maps and referring to the ARC Map as "official" Appalachia and the six states I mentioned above as "core" Appalachia. The Appalachian Studies Association embraces the ARC map, which comprises 420 counties in 2019, and in the last decade has held their annual conference in Ohio and Pennsylvania. Since Whisnant's online maps have disappeared, Virginia Tech's Stewart Scales, Emily Satterwhite, and Abigail August have created the useful Mapping Appalachia Digital Collection, which houses images and explanations of a dozen or so scholarly

and governmental drawings of the region. I have but one quibble with their work. Scales, Satterwhite, and August cite Williams' idea of "consensus Appalachia" from his article "Counting Yesterday's People" (1996) in their map of Consensus, Core, and Loosely Constructed Appalachias. None of these includes any of Pennsylvania, though the *Encyclopedia of Appalachia* does, and so does Williams in his *Appalachia: A History* because "it was from Pennsylvania that industrializing forces spread southward during the nineteenth century, and it was there that the socioeconomic issues raised by deindustrialization emerged to make the entire region a focus of policy concern in the twentieth" (12-13). I understand the impulse to locate Appalachia in the south⁸, but the arbitrary quality of the Mason-Dixon line reveals itself on a drive from West Virginia into Pennsylvania. The two main texts I examine in Chapter One come from Fayette County, home of Fallingwater; and Alleghany County, birthplace of Martha Graham (and Gertrude Stein), and I join the "minority of scholarly studies," that consider these places to be in Appalachia (Williams 12). Williams cites Henry Shapiro and Allen Batteau as analysts who "argue that Appalachia does not exist except in the imaginations of people who want it to" (15), but I do not believe that Appalachia's commonalities with the rest of American culture negate the reality of Appalachia.

The image of overlaid maps provides a useful metaphor for defining Appalachia. This project takes for granted that Appalachia exists as a place, a space on a map where people live and work, and therefore a location of births, deaths, arrivals, and departures. Smith asks the

⁸ The debate over Appalachia's location in the south or not mostly comes from literary circles. Chapters Two and Four deal with this question in good detail, my summation of which is this: Appalachian Literary critics believe Southern Literary critics see them as poor cousins, so Appalachian Literary critics have fought for their own discipline and space. They were only marginally successful. Appalachia has a fine literary journal, *Appalachian Heritage*, and the Emory and Henry Literary Festival that produces the *Iron Mountain Review*, but Appalachian Studies thrives as its own discipline, and Appalachian Literature exists as a healthy-enough subset.

right question: “What makes the place distinctive?”⁹ and at least one answer to that question, and the one with which this project wrestles, involves Appalachia’s relationship with time. Just as Whisnant superimposed a version of Appalachia from 1967 onto a version from 1921, so Appalachia may be defined as a place where ideas from different times lie on top of each other. This may not sound distinctive in a world where Florence, Italy has an Apple Store. The distinctive lies in Appalachia’s embrace and self-identification as a place of the past and the values of the past.

Williams hints at this idea of Appalachia as overlaid moments of time in his Introduction to *Appalachia: A History*. He briefly names traditional Appalachia, modern Appalachia, and postmodern Appalachia as three ways of defining the region. Williams uses these three terms referring specifically to how scholars and interested parties have drawn the physical map of Appalachia and characterized the people within the lines. The terms traditional, modern, and postmodern as they relate to Appalachia will be extensively unpacked throughout this project. My work with these terms will complicate, but not contradict, Williams’ approach. To define what I mean by Appalachia in Appalachian Modernism, I want to expand Williams’ definitions here and suggest that all these Appalachias continue into the current conversation between Vance and Catte, and Appalachian Studies more broadly. These Appalachias – traditional, modern, and postmodern – are all ways Appalachian Studies has answered the question “what makes the place distinctive?” I suggest that these definitions are not mutually exclusive and to

⁹ Or, as Thomas Haddox asks, “how can one affirm Appalachian distinctiveness as anything but an expression of personal taste, tribalism, or branding, if in fact Appalachian people and places are just like people and places everywhere else?” (257).

understand Appalachia as I use the term and as a distinctive, we need to lay these three ideas of Appalachia over each other and consider the picture that emerges.

Loyal Jones' *Appalachian Values* (1994) epitomizes traditional Appalachia. The book combines Jones' 1973 essay on eleven markers of Appalachian identity – religion; independence, self-reliance and pride; neighborliness; familism; personalism; humility and modesty; love of place; patriotism; sense of beauty; and sense of humor – with Warren Brunner's photographs of Appalachian people and places. The book works like a *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* if the text and photographs were by a loveable grandfather instead of activists. The book celebrates; it does not question or raise awareness. Only a few photographs imply poverty; all suggest dignity, rurality, and strength. The people in the photographs tend to be older, white, and well-kempt, except for the coal miners who are covered in dust and the African-Americans, of which two are children, two are being visited by "War on Poverty officials and local politicians," and one appears to be a War on Poverty official (Jones 69). The photographs show women making quilts, men playing the banjo, sharpening axes, and trading knives. "We mountain people are the product of our history and the beliefs and outlook of our foreparents. We are a traditional people, and in our rural setting we valued the things of the past," writes Jones (13). "More than most people, we avoided mainstream life and thus became self-reliant. We sought freedom from entanglements and cherished solitude. All of this was both our strength and our undoing" (Jones 13). In the twenty-first century this version of Appalachia invites reproach for its simplicity and homogeneity, but a complete picture of Appalachia must include traditional Appalachia not just as a quaint artifact of the past or as Gatlinburg tourist snare, but as one of the identifiers that continues to shape

narratives of Appalachia from inside and outside the region. Jones's book continues to resonate with Appalachians, and many members of the Appalachian Studies Association define Appalachia in this way. This picture of Appalachia must be laid on the map.

On top of traditional Appalachia, we lay the outline of modern Appalachia, and it becomes clear how much these two ideas need each other. "Modernity invents tradition" writes Susan Stanford Friedman (434), so that it may declare its independence from the past, and in Appalachia, that works both ways: traditional Appalachia deliberately sets itself apart from modernity. As Williams writes,

Although the traditional approach to Appalachian regionalism originated at least partly in antimodernism, it relied on the definition of region as established by geographers at the end of the nineteenth century: a territory set apart from others by an enumerated set of attributes, features that could be mapped in their distribution from regional core to periphery. (12)

Appalachian Studies creates a version of modern Appalachia through this study of what makes Appalachia distinctive. Beyond a value system, this version of modern Appalachia includes the economic, sociological, and environmental forces that have shaped twentieth century life in the mountains. Appalachian Studies' modern Appalachia includes the dominant narratives that this project hopes to revise: the fixation with combatting every negative image of the region in popular culture, the view of Appalachia as internal colony and thereby victim of the twentieth century, and the belief that Appalachia has rejected national narratives of progress in favor of preserving folkways while also being left out of national narratives. Sharp critics of this version of Appalachia have accomplished this work of pushing back better than I

will, and I owe my skepticism about modern Appalachia to Tess Lloyd, Jim Wayne Miller, and Barbara Ellen Smith. Smith writes in her essay “Representing Appalachia: The Impossible Necessity of Appalachian Studies” (2015),

Among the most powerful dynamics reinforcing simplified depictions of Appalachia are not only the tiresome repetition of hillbilly stereotypes within popular culture but also our counterassertions regarding Appalachian identity. Pejorative depictions of the region tend to call forth a righteous indignation that most commonly focuses on restoring the dignity but not fundamentally challenging the singular and simplified social identity of Appalachians. (Smith 46)

This gets to the heart of what Appalachian Studies often get wrong about Appalachian art. Instead of looking for the best literature, music, architecture, and film about the region and asking what hard truths these excellent works might show us, we look for the most “authentic” or the most affirming and argue over how authentic and affirming they are. As Smith suggests, this limits the range of authentic experiences – including experimental modernism – that should be considered Appalachian. Neither traditional Appalachian nor modern Appalachian narratives allow for the possibility of modernism since, the argument goes, Appalachia never chose to take part in modernization. The narrative of traditional Appalachia suggests that Appalachia stayed out of modernizing in the twentieth century, holding on to the old mountain values. The story of modern Appalachia would argue that the twentieth century colonized Appalachia, victimizing the region’s economy and people. Appalachian Modernism counters both of these claims, pointing to Appalachia’s active participation in modernizing and modernism.

Onto these two ideas of Appalachia, we lay our last idea of Appalachia, what Williams calls postmodern Appalachia. This approach focuses not on “a specific set of cultural or socioeconomic or environmental markers,” but sees Appalachia as “a zone of interaction among the diverse peoples who have lived in or acted upon it” as well as “their interactions with the region’s complex environment” (Williams 12). What makes Appalachia distinctive, then, becomes the way people in Appalachia have interacted with each other and the environment, not their inherent value system or their connection to place or their identity as salt-of-the-earth people who have endured hard times at the hand of outsiders. Smith calls for this approach to bring groups from the “margins of Appalachian studies” into the conversation about who composes Appalachia (50), so that “nobody gets a pass as normal, unmarked, or exclusively worthy of attention. We are all implicated” (52).

Appalachian Studies looks to be heading in Smith’s desired direction. The 2020 conference theme, *Appalachian Understories*, and the text explaining this theme, exemplifies how these three ideas of Appalachia – the traditional, the modern, and the postmodern – combine to define what Appalachia means in the twenty-first century. Full of tree metaphors or puns, depending on how one reads it, the conference description celebrates connection to the land, acknowledges stereotypes about the region, and invites diversity¹⁰: “In addition to native forests and forest-based human experiences, this gathering will highlight stories of Black Appalachians, women, gender, and sexuality, health and healing, and hope spots” (*Appalachian*

¹⁰ “We human Appalachians are fortunate to have the world’s richest temperate forests grace our region. Inspiration for the 43rd Annual ASA Conference is rooted in these forests, and particularly in the easy-to-overlook portion of the woods known as ‘understory.’ In the forest understory, plant and animal life grows between the earthen ground and the more visible canopy, in both shade and sunlight” (*Appalachian Studies*).

Studies). Postmodern Appalachia, then, holds to no creed or system, but includes J.D. Vance and Elizabeth Catte, Trump Country and Appalachian Studies, and Appalachian Modernism. Overlaying these three Appalachias – traditional, modern, and postmodern – give the clearest idea of what I mean by Appalachia.

Modernism: Old Definitions, New Locations

What I mean by modernism comes largely from Susan Stanford Friedman and Frederic Jameson, whose distillations of the world changing show up in every chapter. It is easy to see why Jameson's formulation of modernism as "the coexistence of realities from radically different moments of history" (307) fits the Appalachia I describe above. Friedman's understanding of the relationship between modernity and tradition provides a starting place to understand what happens in the mountains from the late nineteenth to the middle of twentieth centuries. As a function of his work on postmodernism, Jameson defines modernism economically, as the cultural logic of a capitalism beginning to absorb all aspects of life. Modernism sees "handicrafts alongside the great cartels, peasant fields with the Krupp factories or the Ford plant in the distance" (307), and in the following pages, hand-hewn stone will sit among molded concrete and steel at Fallingwater. In *A Death in the Family*, Jay Follett will have to ferry his Model T across the river on his way from Knoxville back home to the Powell River Valley to see his father. TVA-generated water will irrigate land where farmers plow with mules and laboratories where scientists experiment with uranium. Modernism does not only include economic and industrial concerns, but the changes that come to Appalachia during modernization often arrive as agents of expanding capitalism.

Susan Stanford Friedman's "Definitional Excursions" into the sundry and sometimes contradictory meanings of the terms modern, modernity, and modernism begins with three anecdotes that describe first, how quickly modernism's rebellion and rupture turned to elitism and establishment once it became an academic discipline, and second, how different disciplines see the term. For the cultural critic, modernism connotes "the (illusory) break with the past, a willed forgetting of tradition, continuity, order" (Friedman, "Definitional" 494). For the social scientist, modernism implies "state planning...centralized system... 'Progress,' 'Science,' 'Reason,' 'Truth'" (Friedman, "Definitional" 494), a culmination of Enlightenment thinking. I will use the term modernism to mean both of these definitions: as a label for innovative literature and art that responds to a breakdown of older narratives of meaning. And also, in discussing the TVA and the Manhattan Project, I will use modernism to mean bureaucratic planning and progress enacted as a response to infrastructural and social challenges. In both cases, I associate modernism with experimentation and invention, and whether enacted by artists or activist bureaucrats, modernism means here, as it does in many places, the creative response to modernity. I also assume, as Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane do, that this experimentation and invention has come about because the function of previous forms – the ability of artists to make art that spoke for their time – and the reliance upon convention to govern human interactions, had ceased working¹¹.

¹¹ "In or about December 1910, human nature changed" writes Virginia Woolf in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown." "All human relations have shifted – those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature" (Woolf 4).

Modernism would seem to be the point at which the idea of the radical and innovating arts, the experimental, technical, aesthetic ideal that had been growing forward from Romanticism, reaches formal crisis – in which myth, structure, and organization in a traditional sense collapse, and not only for formal reasons. The crisis is a crisis of culture. (qtd. in Friedman “Definitional” 495)

As for rebellion and rupture, modernity as I use it will imply a period of relatively rapid change, though some of the changes depicted in these works – the development in Wolfe’s *Altamont*, for examples, or the transitions I describe in Appalachia such as electrification – happened over decades¹², and that process will be labeled modernization. I use the phrase “the modernist moment” to mean the period of modernism, roughly between 1900 and 1950.

In the last couple of decades, Modernist Studies has expanded to include locations of modernism beyond Europe and the United States, and Friedman proposes expanding into “wherever and whenever the conditions of rapid change flared up, or the reflexive consciousness of newness spread” (“Definitional” 503). Additionally, Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz describe a “vertical” expansion, “in which once quite sharp boundaries between high art and popular forms of culture have been reconsidered” (737-738). Modernist Studies now encompasses enough width, breadth, and depth so that even Appalachia may now be considered a site of modernism. But Appalachian Modernism does not depend on the larger umbrella of the New Modernist Studies. Perhaps my earlier claim that *Carolina Tar Heels*, *The*

¹² Lisi Schoenbach’s *Pragmatic Modernism* argues for a “rigorously gradualist approach to understanding and implementing change within modernity” (68).

Williamson Brothers and Curry, and Uncle Dave Macon create vernacular modernism does¹³, but the majority of what follows looks like good old-fashioned periodized-between-1900-and-1950 modernism: formally experimental, thematically engaging questions of a rapidly changing culture, and narratively open-ended.

What Makes Appalachian Modernism Distinctive?

Modernism in Appalachia reacts to the same period of change as modernism in the rest of the country, but in Appalachia, older narratives of meaning continue to define identity. Throughout this dissertation, nature, home, and family appear repeatedly, but reimagined and redefined. As Jack Higgs argues, Appalachians refuse to say the Hard No to these values. However, the homeplace and the family, and nature itself, undergoes radical change during the period of modernism. The Holston River creates the South Holston Lake; the log cabin gives way to Fallingwater. The homeplace becomes a theme park. Many Appalachians embrace modernization, preferring to live on credit in the coal camp than to starve on the farm or to trade the uncertainty of devastating floods for the reliability of electric washing machines. Some changes prove too much for the mountaineer and instead of relenting, she refuses, dying like John Henry, with a hammer in his hand. Since these changes occur in the mountains, there are songs, about unions, about TVA, about satellite dishes in front of mountain shacks. And there are poems, about lame Appalachian novels, about being more shell-shocked by TVA than

¹³ Mao and Walkowitz: “novel technologies for transmitting information: telegraph, radio, cinema, and new forms of journalism not only reconfigured culture’s audiences but also helped speed manifestos, works of art, and often artists across national and continental borders” (742).

World War II, about mountain people in the twentieth century who “floated like rafted logs towards the mainstream” (Miller). These poems and songs color the following chapters.

“Chapter One: Two Myths of Appalachia and Two Appalachian Springs” argues that Appalachian Studies holds onto two myths about Appalachia: the Outsider Myth and the Insider Myth. The Outsider Myth says that Americans view Appalachia as a permanent other, first an imaginary place of untouched nature populated with older versions of Americans, and then, because of these people’s refusal to adapt to modernity, a problem for America to solve. The Insider Myth sees Appalachia as a place victimized by the extraction of resources, exploitation of people, and stereotyping of culture. I argue that both myths contain truth, but both rely on the false premise that Appalachia missed or rejected modernization. I use examples of modernism about Appalachia to challenge these myths. For the Outsider Myth, I look at how poetry by Hart Crane and William Carlos Williams and how Martha Graham and Aaron Copland’s ballet and score of *Appalachian Spring* view Appalachia not as a version of America’s past, but as a touchstone for America’s future during a time of collapsing narratives of country and culture. Frank Lloyd Wright’s Fallingwater complicates the Insider Myth by reimagining the Appalachian house as a piece of architecture that works with nature and not against it, and I complicate this myth by viewing E. J. and Liliane Kaufmann, Wright’s wealthy and architecturally savvy patrons and Fallingwater’s owners, as Appalachian.

In “Chapter Two: Reading Modernism in Appalachian Literature,” I survey the beginnings of Appalachian Literature scholarship looking for discussions of modernism and find very little. Both to separate Appalachian Literature from Southern Literature, as Fred Chappell suggests, and to preserve an idea of Appalachian Literature as an authentic mountain craft, Appalachian

critics go out of their way not to label Appalachian Literature as modernist. This chapter includes a Franco Moretti-inspired graphing of Appalachian novels as they appear on twenty-five syllabi from 1990 – 2012 to determine what the most-assigned novels in Appalachian Literature and Appalachian Studies courses say about the field. The chapter closes with readings of Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929), an example of Appalachian Modernism that has fallen out of fashion in Appalachian Literature courses; James Still's *River of Earth* (1940), the second most read novel in Appalachian courses, which I claim as a highly-stylized piece of modernism; and James Agee's *A Death in the Family* (1957), a novel compiled and published posthumously with a deliberately modernist structure. These books stop short of delivering what Jack Higgs calls a "Hard No," the refusal to abandon narratives of family, religion, and country. Each of these books experiments with style and form, and each describes a changing Appalachia, through urbanization, industrialization, or education. Wolfe's Eugene Gant, Still's Brack Baldrige, and Agee's Jay Follet embrace the pull of fleeting modernity in the face of rural, traditional Appalachia.

"Chapter Three: TVA's Electrifying Appalachian Modernism" examines the impossible reshaping of nature becoming possible through the power of a massive government bureaucracy. This chapter argues for the Tennessee Valley Authority as a tangible example of Appalachian Modernism, first through the philosophies of its original three directors, Arthur Morgan, Harcourt Morgan, and David Lilienthal, and then through the planning and execution of TVA's flood control, electricity production, and agricultural initiatives. TVA also eradicated malaria in Appalachia and constructed monumental examples of a specific Appalachian modernist architecture in which plasticized concrete and sleek signage and design dovetail with

artificial land and waterscapes constructed from nature. On both the grand scale of dam construction and the domestic scale of electrified home appliances, TVA shows an American example of the kind of modernizing bureaucratic initiatives happening at the same time in western Europe and the Soviet Union. The chapter closes with a reading of TVA novels including Eleanor Buckles' *Valley of Power* (1945) and Amy Greene's *Long Man* (2014); Jason Isbell and Sam Quinn's TVA songs; and films and poems about TVA that articulate the radical change enacted by TVA both from the perspective of TVA activism and the Appalachia upended by TVA modernization. From both perspectives, some Appalachians resist, some relent, and some embrace the future.

In "Chapter Four: Appalachian Postmodernism; Appalachian Metamodernism," I continue the timeline of Appalachian Modernism from TVA to Oak Ridge, arguing that Appalachia, too, produces examples of postmodernism and metamodernism that reflect Appalachia in the late twentieth century. The end of World War II, the realization of the holocaust, and the anxiety of atomic weapons marks the end of modernism, according to Malcom Bradbury and James Agee. In Marianne Wiggins's *Evidence of Things Unseen* (2003), the transition from TVA to Oak Ridge also ends a belief in American progress. This chapter argues for periodizing literary modernism along the lines David James and Urmila Seshagiri propose, roughly 1890-1940, which raises a question for Appalachian Literature: what do we call experimental literature that deals with times of rupture and change when it is written late in the twentieth century? Frederic Jameson calls this period postmodernism, the logic of all-encompassing capitalism, when economics and culture become inseparable and artists recycle previously meaningful images into postmodern pastiche for the purpose of critiquing the

commodification of meaningful images. Lee Smith's *Oral History* (1983) exemplifies this style of postmodernism by taking aim at the commodification of Appalachian images, narratives, and values in a novel more hilarious than heartrending. Mas'ud Zavarzadeh helps to answer the question of out of time modernisms with his term metamodernism, which I define as a reaction to the same ubiquitous capitalism as postmodernism, but with the intention of repurposing narratives of meaning like home, instead of drawing attention to their commodification and meaninglessness. The two examples of Appalachian Metamodernism I discuss, Cormac McCarthy's *Child of God* (1973) and Jo Carson's play *Daytrips* (1989) both take the loss of home seriously, and they both break with Appalachian notions of the past in ascribing meaning to their characters. McCarthy places his murderous antihero Lester Ballard in a long chronology of nature instead of community while affirming his membership in humanity. Carson's main character Pat is split into two characters played by different actors, and has to burn down the past in order to get home. These narratives of murder and mercy defamiliarize ideas of home, nature, and family.

In the conclusion to *Appalachian Modernism*, Barbara Ellen Smith tells the story of Appalachia's defining myth: the serpent of capitalism enters into the garden of Appalachia precipitating a fall and the curse of the internal colony, leading to exile outside the mountains or in the cursed garden and a hope for return: "to discern what went wrong, driven by a longing to put it right" (Smith "Legends" 14). Jim Wayne Miller's "Brier Sermon" offers a hope for Appalachian Studies' salvation: "You Must be Born Again," if we have ears to hear.

Before jumping into *Appalachian Spring* and *Fallingwater*, consider the rest of Jesse Graves' poem "History," and how small Baudelaire's transient, fleeting, and contingent looks in the story of eternal and immovable Appalachia.

Mountains for eternity, a few scattered

tribes, hunting and gathering,

supplanted by farmers, also hunting,

gathering, and going hungry most days,

then a railroad, a teachers' college,

highways and chain restaurants.

When it all disappears, deer and coyotes

will stake out new feeding grounds,

trout will flourish in cold, swift streams,

mountains for eternity, clouds ever passing. (Graves 247)

Chapter One:
Two Myths of Appalachia and Two Appalachian Springs

“That vision of the past is also a prophecy of the future, for in the Platonic, circular time-system that underlies the poem’s view of history, the ultimate destiny of America is a return to its origin.”

--John T. Irwin, *Hart Crane’s Poetry*

“Appalachia – read about Appalachia, personally experienced Appalachia, laughed-at Appalachia, inspired-by Appalachia – is just as much a social construction as is the Cowboy or, for that matter, the Indian.”

--Allen Batteau, *The Invention of Appalachia*

Two myths of Appalachia persist in Appalachian Studies; I call them the Outsider Myth and the Insider Myth. The Outsider Myth, first proposed by Henry Shapiro and Allen W. Batteau, suggests that the idea of Appalachia began as an invention of the American imagination. A place untouched by time and the home of our contemporary ancestors, Appalachia embodied a popular notion of early America as the country modernized; later in the twentieth century, Appalachia became a problem that America needed to solve. Conversely, the Insider Myth comprises the assumptions Appalachian Studies makes about Appalachia: that its land and people have been exploited since capitalism and mass media came to the mountains in the late nineteenth century. Coal, timber, and folk culture have been exported to the rest of the country along with the profits from those resources. To make this harvest palatable to American culture, Appalachian people have been marginalized as ignorant hillbillies.

Modernity enabled both myths: Susan Stanford Friedman suggests we only recognize a modern culture in contrast to a traditional one. By this logic, there can be no traditional culture without modernity, no Appalachia without twentieth-century America and its trappings. Global capitalism accounts for immigration to Appalachia and the resource-extraction industry. Mass

print and broadcast media make stereotyping possible. Yet, though the idea of Appalachia comes about in modernity, the myths of Appalachia, both as a place untouched by time and as a victim of America's twentieth century, posit Appalachia as anathema to modernism.

Admitting that Appalachia experiences modernism, with its ambivalence towards the future and the past, its grappling with rapid economic and social change, and its aesthetic complexity, undoes the basic premises of these myths. If Appalachia experiences modernization and modernism along with the rest of the country, then it becomes unstuck from the past, exploding the Outsider Myth. If Appalachia takes part in modernization as a partner with American progress, and possesses the intellectual and artistic capacity to reflect on the losses and the gains from that process, then it loses its right to the victimhood of the Insider Myth. This chapter considers Martha Graham and Aaron Copland's *Appalachian Spring* (1944) and Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater (1939) as two pieces of modernism unclaimed by Appalachian Studies that complicate and expand the idea of Appalachia and its myths.

Appalachian Spring contains the essential elements of the Outsider Myth: archetypal American characters, images of home and nature, and an appeal to romantic national origins. However, Graham's ballet, Isamu Noguchi's set, and Copland's score place this work on the edge of aesthetic invention, and in a movement of modernist mythmaking that acknowledges the conflict in modernity, that looks to the past and the future with trepidation. Graham and Copland set out to provide a myth of America, and inadvertently created a myth of Appalachia. Their myth is congruous with the Outsider Myth's view of Appalachians as older versions of Americans, but also sees Appalachia as part of America and not separate from it. Graham's

young and hopeful Appalachians look forward as much as they look backwards; they represent America's best selves instead of its worst.

Fallingwater challenges the Insider Myth by joining the idea of home and nature with experimental design in order to create new forms of Appalachian architecture. Combining elemental Appalachia with the outer edge of modernist possibility explodes the myth of Appalachia as a place stuck in the past, but only if we embrace Fallingwater as both Appalachian and modernist. The log cabin, the hillside farmhouse, and the ramshackle shack belong in a narrative of resilient Anglo-Saxon and Scotch-Irish farmers left behind by modernity, but not Wright's domestic sculpture commissioned by wealthy urbanites. Under the insider/outsider rubric, Graham and Copland, and Wright and his patron E. J. Kaufmann sit distinctly outside.

Shapiro and Batteau's work began the conversation about the Outsider Myth of Appalachia: that Appalachia fulfilled a need in the American imagination as a location of the nation's contemporary ancestors¹⁴, America's "folk." This myth may be found in the broader culture, and specifically in the literary culture, from the late nineteenth century until today, but it also made its way into the narratives of Appalachian writers and scholars. In his introduction to a collection of poems by Byron Herbert Reece (1945), Jesse Stuart describes Reece as "speaking for a people of old American tradition who, owing to the lack of schools and natural barriers, have not taken to modern civilization as rapidly as the peoples in other sections of our

¹⁴ See William G. Frost's "Our Contemporary Ancestors in the Southern Mountains," *Atlantic Monthly* 83 (March 1899).

country” (11). This belief of American culture but also of Appalachian writers, has its roots in modernism, as this chapter will discuss.

The second myth, the Insider Myth, may also be called the Henry Caudill myth or the victim/survivor myth, and Lisa Alther sums it up here, “Americans needed to see Appalachians as ignorant hillbillies in order not to feel guilty for having plundered our timber and coal, wrecked our environment, and exploited our labor” (27). Or as William Schumann recently wrote, “Appalachia is by and large on the receiving end of...manifold practices of socio-environmental genocide” (19). In this version of Appalachia, the region and its people are mostly defined by their status as a sacrifice zone for the rest of the country.¹⁵ The nation needs Appalachian timber and coal, and so the mountains and mountain people have no choice but to give up Appalachia’s natural resources and its people’s dignity to satisfy the never-ending need for energy under capitalist expansion. Appalachia, therefore, produces poor people whose resilience and folk culture provide some tonic to the tragedy of the twentieth century. Its mountains stripped, its people stereotyped as ignorant hillbillies, its culture exploited, Appalachia exists either as victim or survivor of economic and environmental aggression.

This essay takes for granted that the Insider and Outsider Myths of Appalachia contain seeds of truth: that Appalachia has served as a “strange land with peculiar people”¹⁶ for many Americans; that Appalachians live hard lives but are resilient; that modernization took and continues to take Appalachia’s resources and leaves behind environmental devastation; that the coal industry stymied economic diversification; that independence, family, and religion

¹⁵ See Rebecca R. Scott’s “Hillbillies and Coal Miners: Representations of a National Sacrifice Zone” from *Removing Mountains*. U of Minnesota P, 2010.

¹⁶ See William Wallace Harney’s “A Strange Land and a Peculiar People” in *Lippincott’s* 12.31 (October 1873).

continue to be foundational to the Appalachian identity; that folk arts tie communities together. But these myths must not contain the fulness of the Appalachian experience. They exclude Appalachia's cities, its universities, its economic and racial diversity, and its nationally recognized artists. Including examples of modernism from Appalachian writers and artists in Appalachia's self-definition blurs the lines between Appalachian and American culture; contextualizes Appalachian social and economic history in the narrative of twentieth-century American history; and expands the Appalachian identity in new directions of class and aesthetic inclusions.

It was no accident that these myths of Appalachia have their genesis in the modernist moment. A number of modernist writers and artists perceived that the fracturing of old narratives of western culture necessitated or provided an opportunity for the rewriting of national, cultural, and personal myths for a new time. Like these modernist myths, the myths of Appalachia that began during this period do not rely on facts for their validity. One modernist mythmaker, the poet Hart Crane, provided the title for Graham's *Appalachian Spring* in his poem *The Bridge*, which attempted to create a modern myth of America. R.W.B Lewis describes Crane's mythmaking this way:

In the guise of bridging the distance between the modern American world and the old Indian world, Crane is in fact re-uniting the modern consciousness (that is, *his* modern consciousness) with the mythic sensibility. The latter is simply postulated, for the sake of the poem, as a quality of the Indian age; and whether it really was or was not is beside the point. (Lewis 313)

Lewis's point informs the way this essay uses the term myth: the power of these myths of Appalachia lies not in how closely they resemble authentic or historical or true experience or facts, though they often do, but in the myth's ability to capture the imagination, to order disorder, or in some cases reflect disorder and complexity. Many major works of modernism include the ambition to adapt and create myths for the modern world. Eliot praises *Ulysses* for its use of *The Odyssey*; Woolf adapts the sacrificial death of Christ for *Mrs. Dalloway*; Fitzgerald turns the discovery of New York into man coming "face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder" (189). In modernist works, however, these myths accentuate complexities. Leopold Bloom must accept a faithless Molly instead of the faithful Penelope that waits for Odysseus. Septimus Smith's death saves Clarissa for only a day; Fitzgerald both believes in the American Dream and sees through it. The Insider and Outsider Myths would benefit from this type of modernist complication, to blur the insider/outsider binary, to complicate the romanticized past and devastated present assumption, and to demonstrate to scholars and students the wide spectrum of Appalachian experience and expression.

Beyond Social Construction

In the twenty-first century, the term myth has given way to scientific sounding terminology¹⁷. Appalachia, the South, America, have become social constructions and inventions, and this idea stands as an orthodoxy for many literary and social critics; scholars

¹⁷ And, Appalachian Studies often uses myth to mean stereotype, as in Elizabeth Catte's *What You Are Getting Wrong About Appalachia*.

already look past it to what is next. If no essential South exists, or no essential Appalachia exists, then what do we study when we study Appalachia? This chapter takes up that question by looking back to modernism as a time of mythmaking, when the cracks in the façade of the idea of America became too big to ignore, and artists attempted to create new American myths.

Appalachian Studies should consider myth and belief alongside authenticity and experience in defining Appalachia, or at least acknowledge that we already do. Appalachian Studies differs from Southern Studies in that it is only beginning to see itself as a location of multiple Appalachias¹⁸; Appalachia still believes in itself as a place and an idea with a culture largely held in common by various stakeholders, and that culture has expanded to include Northern Appalachia and Affrilachia. The idea of Appalachia has expanded geographically and racially, and I hope to expand Appalachia further by considering Appalachia as a location of modernism.

To understand how myth provides a possibility for moving past the language of social construction, I draw upon ideas developed by Thomas Haddox in his essay “Literature” from *Keywords for Southern Studies* (2016). Haddox cites Stanley Fish’s point from *Professional Correctness* that if everything is socially constructed then the idea of social construction has no meaning: “The larger the asserted scope of social constructedness, the less it matters,” writes Fish (ix). Indeed Batteau in *The Invention of Appalachia* goes so far as to say that “face to face experience is no more real than any other text” (11), though later in his book he differentiates

¹⁸ See Silas House’s “The Road Back: Appalachia as Internal Colony” *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 22.1 (2016): 65-68; and Obermiller, Phillip J. and Michael E. Maloney. “The Uses and Misuses of Appalachian Culture.” *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 22.1 (2016): 103-112.

between the authenticity of folk culture and Folk Culture. If Folk Culture, what's left behind when authentic folk culture is destroyed in the "shattering of nature, and the removal and exhibition of a folk song, a handicraft, a mountaineer's quaint speech," is socially constructed, then so, too, must be the accent, the folk song, and the idea of nature present in folk culture (Batteau 84). In Fish's formulation, "it can hardly be a criticism of something that it is socially constructed if everything is" (ix). Declaring Appalachia to be a social construction does nothing to revise our idea of Appalachia, which is the work of Appalachian Studies.

Haddox describes the "irreducibility of belief" as a factor in how scholars read books and approach ideas and in how we revise our thinking. Using Benedict Anderson's extremes of love and skepticism as two ways critics approach ideas, Haddox wants scholars to acknowledge our arguments are shaped by our beliefs. The language of belief fits much of the conversation in Appalachian Studies, in which personal experience and identity play a large role in how writers and critics understand the issues that face the region. Belief also helps to explain conflict: my Appalachia and your Appalachia may not line up, and my loves and skepticisms may be the reverse of yours. This compelling language of belief may be applied to Batteau's categories, "read about Appalachia, personally experienced Appalachia, laughed-at Appalachia, inspired-by Appalachia," and allows us to see them as more than just social constructions, but as systems of belief for which I am using the term myth. As Barbara Ellen Smith writes, "Mythic constructions of the region, especially created by those who have lived there, may have something to tell us...about the deeper structures and meanings at stake in the many human experiences that compose Appalachia's past" (12). Myth, in this sense, requires belief, since the truth it imparts

may not always square with facts and data. But as Smith suggests, myth also tells us something about who we are, what we want, and what we hope.

Some myths of Appalachia linger in the national imagination. For example, NPR visited Appalachia in April 2016, and of all the issues facing the region in an election year, Steve Inskeep reported on economic difficulties as the coal industry suffers under changing times. Appalachia continues to be mythologized as the land of coal even though fewer than 50,000 coal miners (underground and surface) existed in Appalachia in 2013 (NME.org) among a population of around 25 million (US Energy “Average”, Appalachian “Census”). Wyoming produced more coal in 2014 than all of the Appalachian states combined, though the impact of coal in Appalachia is much greater because Appalachia continues to have hundreds of mines to Wyoming’s eighteen (US Energy “Coal”). Coal mining plays a part in empirical Appalachia, but because of its history and representation in literature, it plays a much larger role in the myth of Appalachia, as any student who has taken an Appalachian Studies or Appalachian Literature class or any teenager who has read the *Hunger Games* believes. Especially for those in the Humanities, the study of an idea like Appalachia or Appalachian Literature brims with myth, with ways of understanding narratives that are informed by facts and data, but also by story, experience, and belief. Myths of America, of religious communities, of Appalachia, provide ways of making sense of the complexity of what we read and what we learn of the lives of others through storytelling and literature. Scholars must continue the work of revising those myths, considering their contradictions, and proposing better ways of articulating the truths they help us see.

In Appalachian Studies, some of these revisions are gaining momentum. The Spring 2016 *Journal of Appalachian Studies* focuses on sustainable economic development, continuing the work of Appalachian scholars like David Whisnant and Ron Eller who have considered the modernization of Appalachia through social sciences of economics and politics. In these articles, we begin to see cracks in the Insider and Outsider Myths. Steve Fisher and Barbara Ellen Smith report that they “have come to believe that blaming ‘outsiders’ for regional economic problems is an over-simplification, if not outright distortion” (47). Silas House argues that some of the blame for Appalachia’s problems “rests upon our shoulders¹⁹” (67) before quoting Jim Wayne Miller’s “Brier Sermon.” Like House, this project sees wisdom for what ails Appalachia in the fields of literature and art, where myths, narratives that tell people who they are and what their lives are like, may be as true as facts. To expand these myths, we have to redefine and rediscover Appalachian literature and art.

Speaking to the 2016 Appalachian Studies Association Conference, poet Frank X Walker suggested that Appalachia may claim August Wilson and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., along with several of the musicians Jeff Biggers celebrates in *The United States of Appalachia*, like Nina Simone and Kathleen Battle. Walker’s Affrilachia movement gives voice to African American and other underrepresented voices in Appalachia. A recent call for papers from UNC’s *Southern Cultures* included this statement: “We understand Appalachia to be a diverse region with many communities and interests and seek to expand the conversation beyond the traditional (and sometimes limiting) lenses of coal mining/environmental degradation, poverty, the holler, or

¹⁹ Before this admission, however, he places blame on the shoulders of the coal industry, politicians, and the media.

‘exotic’ others.” Emily Satterwhite, Niki King, Beth Newberry and others have written about Urban Appalachia: Charleston, West Virginia; Knoxville and Chattanooga, Tennessee; Asheville, North Carolina; and Roanoke, Virginia. The call to expand the definition of Appalachia inside Appalachian Studies came from critics like Jim Wayne Miller in the 1970s, but the boom in Appalachian Literature with writers like Lee Smith, Denise Giardina, and Barbara Kingsolver in the 1980s and 1990s and the popular interest in bluegrass and old-time music in the first decade of the 2000s has reinforced many of the traditional (and sometimes limiting) self-definitions of Appalachia.

Political theorist Herbert Reid wrote to expand Appalachia’s self-definition a over a decade ago, and used Shapiro’s book as a jumping off place in an essay called “Appalachia and the ‘Sacrament of Co-existence’: Beyond Post-colonial Trauma and Regional Identity Traps” (2005). Reid argued with the Appalachian Studies’ orthodoxy that Appalachia should view itself exclusively as the economic and environmental victim of American economic modernization. He focuses on the “varied impact of corporate globalization on Appalachia, America, and the rest of the world” (165) in the decades since Shapiro’s first edition, and rightfully so. The idea of Appalachia as a distinct region, separate from the rest of America culturally and economically, becomes more tenuous than ever in the era of global media, the world wide web, and unprecedented access to consumer goods. If, as Shapiro suggests, the idea of Appalachia owes more to the projection of American culture in the early twentieth century than to the identity of an Appalachian culture in the decades since, why does Appalachian Studies continue? One answer is the two myths of Appalachia, a set of beliefs about the idea of Appalachia perpetuated by Appalachian Studies. Reid puts it more strongly: “this imagery has

sold well, and still sells, especially in its literary and cultural studies forms” (172). He goes on to describe some scholars of Appalachian Studies as “Professional Hillbillies launching tours from commercial centers of cultural and literary commodification” (172). Both the Insider and Outsider myths of Appalachia see the region as separate from America, not just because of space but because of time, either operating on a different time line or suffering from the transition to modernity.

According to Shapiro, in the Outsider Myth, Appalachia must be pre-modern, since that myth relies on Appalachia as a place stuck in time. Shapiro and Batteau place the invention of or the formation of the idea of Appalachia at the eve of the modernist moment, as a phenomenon of American culture moving into the modernity. Here, Modernist Studies illuminates an Appalachian Studies’ belief. Modernist scholar Susan Stanford Friedman suggests that the formation of the idea of a folk or traditional culture relies on a perception of modernity:

Modernity invents tradition, suppresses its own continuities with the past, and often produces nostalgia for what has been seemingly lost...As a result, periods of modernity often contain tremendous battles between ‘modernizers’ and ‘traditionalists,’ those who promote the modern and those who want to restore an imagined and often idealized past. (434)

Friedman speaks to both the Outsider and Insider Myths. Reid and Eller argue that Appalachia doubts the American idea of progress. This plays into the Outsider Myth: Appalachians reject moving into the machine age with the rest of the country because they favor tradition over change, or because they lack the ability or desire to adapt. The Insider Myth idealizes the past

as a foundational truth. A number of canonical Appalachian texts celebrate Appalachia before the coming of modernization. Friedman's idea implies that the romanticizing of pre-industrial Appalachia is as much a function of modernity as mechanized coal production or the TVA. The most popular example of this comes in Denise Giardina's *Storming Heaven*, in which Carrie spends the book daydreaming of the family farm, the "Homeplace." The coal wars and the airplanes that bomb striking miners in the novel symbolize modernity and equate it with corruption and destruction. Friedman suggests that modernity facilitates Carrie's idea of the Homeplace as an impossibly idealized past. If "modernity invents tradition," by differentiating the past from the present, then modernism invents a mythology tied to the past to cope with the challenges of the present.

Appalachian Spring and the Outsider Myth

An example of this modernist mythmaking, and the most famous example of Appalachian Modernism, may be *Appalachian Spring* (1944), a Martha Graham ballet with a suite composed by Aaron Copland that debuted in Washington, DC. Graham toured the ballet throughout the United States, and the music won a Pulitzer Prize for dramatic composition in 1945. The ballet invokes early American pioneer mythology supported by a main theme of Copland's score, the Shaker hymn "Simple Gifts." In *The United States of Appalachia*, Biggers begins a chapter on Appalachian music with a discussion of *Appalachian Spring* to support his thesis of Appalachia as vanguard to the rest of the country. Biggers describes how Graham's ballet and Copland's accompanying suite "*sounded* Appalachian" and the "naïve characters at the wedding party *seemed* Appalachian" to Washington, DC and New York audiences;

Appalachian Spring “provided a transient country with a much-needed reminder of the great American pastoral still embedded in the Appalachian region” (Biggers 1,2; emphasis in original). In this interpretation, *Appalachian Spring* incarnates the Outsider Myth of Appalachia.

Graham’s ballet is set in early nineteenth-century Western Pennsylvania, a stand-in for a mythic American pioneer landscape. The minimalist set designed by the sculptor Isamu Noguchi featured thin wooden planks implying a platform, a church pew, a fence, and a farmhouse with a rocking chair. The music itself has no connection to Appalachia outside the title. In the second volume of Copland’s memoir, he writes that Graham’s original script for the piece was called *House of Victory*, and included references to the Civil War and an Indian girl as a character (Copland 32). Copland writes that the script began: “This is a legend of American living. It is like the bone structure, the inner frame that holds together a people” (Copland 32). The title and script changed dramatically before completion, and through the various drafts, Copland called the piece “Ballet for Martha.”

Only after he had completed the music did he hear the title *Appalachian Spring* or learn of the Western Pennsylvania setting. When he asked Graham if the ballet had anything to do with the title, she said “No...I just liked the title and used it” (Copland 34), though Graham grew up in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, the same Pittsburgh community where E.J. Kaufmann, patron of Fallingwater, was born. According to Copland, he mispronounced the title until a 1972 trip to West Virginia when he heard that Appalachian should be “pronounced with a flat a” (36). So many people told Copland how much the ballet reminded them of Appalachia and spring that in an interview at the Library of Congress in 1980, Copland joked that when he heard the music, “I’ve begun to see the Appalachians myself a little bit” (“Appalachian”).

Graham borrowed the title *Appalachian Spring* from Hart Crane's long poem *The Bridge* (1930), an exemplary work of American modernist mythmaking. *The Bridge* wears its American mythology and its debt to Walt Whitman proudly.

There was a bed of leaves, and broken play;
 There was a veil upon you, Pocahontas, bride –
 O Princess whose brown lap was virgin May;
 And bridal flanks and eyes hid tawny pride. (Crane 62)

Sometimes read as Crane's optimistic American answer to *The Waste Land*, *The Bridge's* lyrical poetry, romanticizing of the American story, and impassioned tone connect the poem more closely to *Song of Myself* or "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry." Crane's poem opens with an ode "To Brooklyn Bridge," and at the end of the "Cape Hatteras" section, a direct dialogue with Whitman, the narrator walks off hand in hand with the American Bard. In places, like in "Cape Hatteras," *The Bridge* updates Whitman for modernity. New Yorkers used to take the ferry; now they have the Brooklyn Bridge. Whitman celebrated the "thick-stemmed pipes of steamboats," Crane the "sinewy silver biplane" (Whitman 68; Crane 79). The real similarity in these two poets lies in their shared ambition to create a story of America, to forge an American mythology. In "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" (1856), Whitman looks to the present and the future, "fifty years hence...a hundred years hence," for connection between himself and all Americans. Crane, aware of living in the "Years of the Modern!", looks to the past, to a symbol of virginal American nature, Pocahontas.

The Appalachian Spring Crane describes comes in the section of *The Bridge* called "The Dance," and it is a stream, one of the many bodies of water in the poem, not the season after

Appalachian Winter. The narrator has left a village, canoeing in pursuit of the Indian princess.

As she climbs a mountain, he leaves the river to scale a cliff:

I took the portage climb, then chose
 A further valley-shed; I could not stop.
 Feet nozzled watery webs of upper flows;
 One white veil gusted from the very top.

O Appalachian Spring! I gained the ledge
 Steep inaccessible smile that eastward bends
 And northward reaches in that violet wedge
 Of Adirondacks! – wisped of azure wands,
 Over how many bluffs, tarns, streams, I sped! (Crane 63)

Critics describe “The Dance” as the interaction between Crane and the princess during this chase – as she moves, he follows – and propose several partnerships at play: female and male, Indian and white, past America and present America. “The Dance” sits in *The Bridge* between “The River” and “Indiana,” and in all three poems, Crane takes a catch-all approach to American geography and identity, visiting the Dakotas, Ohio, and the Ozarks, before riding the Mississippi to the Gulf. Cross-cultural American references flow, too: “Old Kentucky Home;” “Casey Jones;” “Deep River.” The mythical topography suggests that the Appalachian Spring need not be an actual body of water that also flows through the Adirondacks, a separate and younger range (Weidensaul IX), though the Hudson River could be described as an Appalachian Spring that northward reaches the Adirondacks (Weidensaul 86). Pocahontas would be more at home

in Virginia, but Crane's approach is to include all of America in this story so as to include all of America in this myth, the way Virgil's myth of Rome includes Trojans, Latins, and Etruscans. Crane celebrates all American regions, and here Appalachia is neither more nor less American than Indiana. Crane's combination of diverse locations suggests, however, that the American myth transcends these localities to become, like Rome, greater than the sum of its parts. John T. Irwin connects the flowing of water with the season of spring in *The Bridge*, noting that when the narrator first sees Pocahontas in this section, "She spouted arms; she rose with the maize – to die" (Crane 62). Crane's chasing after a symbol of America's pre-colonial nature projects onto Pocahontas a grounding in history lost in the fury of modernity.

William Carlos Williams makes a similar connection between Indian ethnicity and American identity and places Appalachia at the center of his modernist view of America in "To Elsie" (1923). Williams sees the "mountain folk of Kentucky" as part of the American landscape and not a special case in a poem that presents a version of modernity more *Waste Land* than Whitman. Originally included in *Spring and All*, a numbered collection that includes the poems we now call "Spring and All" and "The Red Wheelbarrow," "To Elsie" compares America to a driverless car, a "pure product" with no humanity at the wheel. The reasons for this isolation from and desolation of the American identity include "imaginations which have no/peasant traditions to give them/character." Williams opens with descriptions of Appalachians straight from the Outsider Myth, except that along with the "mountain folk from Kentucky," he includes folks from "the ribbed north end of Jersey," dividing the country not into Hillbillies and Yankees, but into poor people who have lost their "peasant traditions" and the middle and upper classes

who have fared no better, “degraded prisoners,” who see “the earth under our feet” as “an excrement of some sky.”

Williams connects the mountains in Kentucky with those in New Jersey not to make a point about Appalachia²⁰, but about America; the first line “The pure products of America/go crazy” refers first to these “folk” before transforming to mean the “gauds” that have replaced gods. America has no ideas, the poem suggests, even in things. The titular Elsie, one of the “young slatterns/bathed in filth” comes from these places, and contains “a dash of Indian blood,” which places her among the most desperate of modern situations, in need of rescue by “an agent” to be “reared by the state.” For Williams, connection to America’s native past has been lost along with the traditions that should spark the peasant imagination. Seven years before *The Bridge*, “To Elsie” describes an America in deep need of a new mythology, a new system of belief. Williams’ use of two Appalachian locales implies that of all places, Appalachia should have maintained some ties to its past, but in the modernist moment, Appalachia, like all of America, has lost its past. Williams’ modernist analysis includes Appalachia as a place taking part in the American struggle with modernity instead of isolating it as a special case of premodern America.

Crane attempts to create those missing ties to the past, though opinions differ on the success of the mythmaking in *The Bridge*. In a massive study, Irwin gives the poem the same treatment Don Gifford gives *Ulysses* and sees it as that major of a work, full of allusions and echoes between modernity and classical and Christian imagery and ideas. The airplane

²⁰ The Appalachian Mountains go through Kentucky and New Jersey; the Appalachian Trail goes through New Jersey but not Kentucky. The highest point in Kentucky is Black Mountain at 4145’; the highest point in New Jersey, High Point, is 1804’.

becomes Leonardo's dream of flight and Columbus's sailing off into the unknown (Lewis 35).

Reviews of *The Bridge* in *The New York Times* see less import, calling *The Bridge* a piece of cubism "spurious as poetry" in 1930 and "overlong, overbearing, overwrought, a Myth of America conceived by Tiffany and executed by Disney" in 2007 (Hutchinson, Logan), Tiffany and Disney having popularized their own mythologies and American gauds. Allen Tate and Yvor Winters described the poem as a location of great lines and stanzas, but as a whole, a magnificent failure, according to Winters, who accuses James Joyce and Williams of the same formal weaknesses.

Graham reached for the same connection to America's past as Crane, but instead of a catch-all approach to American locality, Graham created a specific place in America's mythic past that came, through the title and the setting, to be viewed as Appalachian. In the *New York Times'* first review of *Appalachian Spring*, John Martin called it both "a piece of early Americana," and understood that "There is throughout the work a very moving sense of the future, of the fine and simple idealism which animates the highest human motives." Graham's ballet and Copland's score nod to simple versions of the American story with clear melodies and archetypal characters – the Wife, the Husband, the Pioneer Woman, the Preacher and his congregation – a mythic folk version of American history. Graham's title conveniently, though somewhat coincidentally, tied that myth to Appalachia; Americans were primed to connect this folk idea to Appalachia since, according to Shapiro, decades of literature and missions had convinced them of Appalachia's place in national culture as the land of America's ancestors. In the uncertainty and wartime anxieties of the early 1940s, Graham's story in dance and Copland's repeated invocation of a tune whose lyrics are "'tis a gift to be simple/ 'tis a gift to be

free” provided a modern identity for Americans: tied to the past, affected by the trauma of the present, but hopeful about the future. However unintentionally, the modernist work *Appalachian Spring* reinforced the Outsider Myth of Appalachia as the location of an older and simpler way of American life. However, Graham’s American ancestors portray Appalachians differently than in Shapiro’s formulation, as modern Americans, ambivalent about changing times and what lies ahead.

Shapiro proposes that the idea of Appalachia as a region of America with its own exceptional culture and people formed between 1870 and 1920. In Shapiro’s history, local color writers and missionaries, religious and secular, propagated Will Wallace Harney’s description of “A Strange Land and Peculiar People,” at a time when American culture began to coalesce around a perception of itself as regionally diverse but nationally unified. Following the Civil War, an emerging publishing market of newspapers, magazines, and books helped create Americans’ view of themselves and their country²¹. Shapiro ties the pluralism of American culture and the distinctiveness of Appalachian culture to their literary representations. In local color writing and popular literature, which includes stories, sketches, journalism, and travel writing, the idea of Appalachia formed; in missions, the idea of Appalachia developed into a problem to be solved. Shapiro’s formulation codified a number of canonical Appalachian Studies assumptions called here the Outsider Myth: that Appalachia was defined more by those outside it than in; that the American idea of Appalachia revealed more about the American identity than the Appalachian identity or reality; and that Appalachian and American culture often share an adversarial relationship.

²¹ See the “Introduction” to Bill Hardwig’s *Upon Provincialism*.

Shapiro argues that the idea of Appalachia as the location of a place and a people stuck in time serves the American imagination by providing America with “folk,” an alternative to the dangers of the twentieth century. In the 1920s, “the Americanness of the mountaineers was established. No longer could they be viewed as deviants from a monolithic American civilization. In the American postwar present, they were only deviants from a dominant *modern* civilization” (Shapiro 261; Shapiro’s emphasis). Appalachia differs from the rest of America not just geographically, but temporally, and the acceptance of Appalachians into American culture continues that distinction. Appalachians became accepted as Americans, according to Shapiro, because of Alvin York, whose mountain raising enabled him to be an American World War I hero; and Cecil J. Sharp, Emma Bell Miles, and Olive Dame Campbell, who identified in Appalachia an indigenous folk tradition of music and dance closely connected to English ancestors. Appalachian folk culture provided a root system for American folk culture, albeit one that accentuated America’s connection to England, Scotland, and Ireland at the cost of America’s connection to Africa, continental Europe, or the indigenous people of the American continents.

Graham draws from that well of folk tradition and dance as well, but as a modernist. Graham’s choreography, which may be seen in the twenty-first century thanks to a filmed production for WQED in Pittsburgh from 1959 in which Graham dances the part of the Wife, challenges the idea that the past was simple. “All Graham dances are mysteries,” writes an unnamed reviewer in a clipping from the Library of Congress’s Graham collection, and the complexity of *Appalachian Spring* lies not in the plot but in the internal lives of the characters.

Conflict abounds as the Husband and the Wife begin their lives together, at first under the watchful eye of the Preacher and the Pioneer Woman, and finally in their home alone.

The ballet opens with the juxtaposition of the Preacher on his dais and the Pioneer Woman in her rocker in her house, signaling both the public and the private, the male and the female, and the spiritual and material realms into which the couple will make their life together. The Wife enters, taking her place in the home, and the Husband enters, passing the home and the church to take his place at the fence, looking out at the possibilities to come. Between the couple's first moments together and their wedding, the Pioneer Woman passes her strength and experience to the Wife in the form of a baby. Eventually both the Preacher and the Pioneer Woman give their blessings to the new union, but the conflicts continue. As the husband looks to the future, the wife looks back to the Pioneer Woman and home.

The "Simple Gifts" music plays as the lovers celebrate their marriage in a joyful, athletic dance. Then, amidst the stillness of prayer from the Preacher and the four female dancers that compose his congregation, bursts the kinetic fury of a fire and brimstone sermon, as if to keep their bliss in check. In the final moments, the Wife stays outside the house taking in their new life, hesitating before joining the Husband inside. As she sits in the impressionistic rocking chair, he places a hand on her shoulder and she reaches up to take his hand, but with the other hand she reaches out, and the two look to the future. The music and the choreography affirm the union, the community, and the frontier spirit, but *Appalachian Spring* is far from a Disney and Tiffany account of early Americana. The ballet's portrayal of Appalachians, or of American ancestors, teems with aesthetic and, at times, emotional complexity. Looking back on the piece in 1975, Graham's described it this way,

It's spring. There is a house that has not been completed. The bare posts are up. The fence has not been completed. Only a marriage has been celebrated. It is essentially the coming of new life. It has to do with growing things. Spring is the loveliest and saddest time of the year. (qtd in Copeland 53)

The music walks a similar line between simplicity and complexity and between the traditional and compositional innovation. Copland makes it clear in his memoir and in interviews that any connection between his score and Appalachia is purely coincidental. Graham may have had a setting and a particular place in mind, but Copland mostly had Graham and her evolving script in mind as he composed. An early draft included a description of the set that included “the framework of a doorway, the platform of a porch, a Shaker rocking chair with its exquisite bonelike simplicity” (qtd in Copeland 40). The Shaker simplicity made its way into Noguchi's set and into Copland's score that uses the Shaker Hymn “Simple Gifts” as a main theme. For centuries, folk melodies served as classical themes, but in America, the arrival of Antonin Dvorak to head the National Conservatory in New York in 1892 began a new era of mixing high and low musical styles. In the spring of 1893, the Bohemian-born Dvorak began hearing African-American spirituals sung by his assistant, the baritone Harry T. Burleigh, and gave an interview to the *New York Herald* in which he declared that “In the Negro melodies of America I discover all that is needed for a great and noble school of music” (Peress 24). Dvorak's *Symphony Number 9 in E Minor (From the New World)* (1893) incorporated “Swing

Low, Sweet Chariot,” and inspired American composers to add African-American and Indian melodies into their work (Peress 23-24)²².

A straight line of influence between Dvorak and Copland may be difficult to draw, but Rubin Goldmark connects the composers of *The New World Symphony* and *Appalachian Spring*; Goldmark was a student of Dvorak’s and Copland’s first composition teacher. Goldmark also briefly taught George Gershwin and worked as head of Composition at the Institute of Musical Arts, which became the Julliard School, from 1924 until his death in 1936. Goldmark encouraged Copland to study the European masters instead of American modernists like Charles Ives, and in his memoir, Copland writes, “I never remember his discussing the subject of nationalism or folklorism, and he certainly never suggested them to me as possible influences” (Copland, 1900 28), though nationalism and folklorism figure prominently in Copland’s most famous pieces. Gershwin and Copland incorporated jazz harmonies and rhythms into their compositions in the 1920s and 1930s, Gershwin more successfully than Copland.

In his memoir, Copland writes that during the late thirties and early forties, he had begun using folk melodies, particularly in cases where a commission or an idea needed to reflect a certain culture. Describing his score for the film *The North Star*, which was set in Russia, he writes, “I had adapted Mexican folk material in *El Salon Mexico*, and American Cowboy tunes for *Billy the Kid* and *Rodeo*. By using the same technique with Russian folk songs, I developed fragments of a few carefully chosen tunes until they became very much my own, while still retaining a sense of their Russian derivation” (Copland, *Since* 15). Copland gives no

²² According to Peress, Dvorak loved Longfellow’s “Hiawatha,” and sometimes confused the origins of African American and Indian melodies, perhaps because Burleigh had an Indian grandmother (24, 42).

indication of Dvorak's influence in this direction, but in the forty years between *The New World Symphony* and *Appalachian Spring*, musical ideas as radically new as Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* (1913) and Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924) declared a musical modernism open to inspiration from a variety of sources. By the time of *Appalachian Spring*, Copland had evolved into something of a musical populist. Elizabeth Crist sees a political motivation in Copland's move away from dissonant and jazz-inspired angular modernism and towards "imposed simplicity" in the late 1930s and 1940s, the period that produced his most famous pieces such as "Fanfare for the Common Man" (1942), "Hoedown" from *Rodeo* (1942) and *Appalachian Spring* (1944) (410). According to Crist, Copland intentionally composed for a wider audience because he saw a responsibility as an artist to empower the masses instead of pushing musical boundaries in ways that only elites would understand.

Given the specific requirements and parameters of Graham's commission, the Shaker hymn "Simple Gifts" fits as source material both melodically and thematically. Copland writes that the hymn was "previously unknown to the general public" and that he "did not know that there have never been Shaker settlements in rural Pennsylvania!" (*Since* 32-33). Graham heard portions of the piece during its composition, and encouraged Copland in the direction he envisioned. Once completed, she repurposed some of the music written for "children at play for the Revivalist's dance," but was pleased with the score. Copland, who did not see the music with the choreography until the dress rehearsal, was pleased with the ballet (Copland, *Since* 34).

If Copland's music had no intentional connection to Appalachia, even the tangential one of Graham's ballet, then what exactly "sounded Appalachian," as Biggers writes, about

Appalachian Spring? One answer is that the “forced simplicity,” to use Copland’s phrase, appears obviously in Copland’s variations on “Simple Gifts.” In the ballet, the “Simple Gifts” section appears after the halfway mark when the husband and wife dance together at the beginning of their wedding. In Copland’s concert version of the suite for full orchestra,²³ which shortens the piece to eliminate some of the longer dance passages, he teases the “Simple Gifts” melody earlier. Another answer appears from the beginning in the openness provided by the repeated use of two chords. These simple inversions of major chords²⁴ begin the piece and appear throughout in different tempos, sometimes as the melody and sometimes as the structure under the melody, according to Robert Kapilow (“Appalachian”). For most listeners, “Appalachian Spring” is hardly simple, but for a piece of twentieth-century concert-hall music, it has a directness, a clearness, in that it tells the listener at each moment what they should be listening to without many harmonic or counter-melodic distractions. Many of those moments feature melodies of long slow notes, which are easy to follow, or quickly stated passages such as the “Simple Gifts” melody that repeat so often that by the end, the few important themes sound familiar even after a listen or two.

A connection to American folk music comes from the harmonic intervals that appear throughout *Appalachian Spring*. In a celebration of the piece on NPR, Michael Tilson Thomas describes how Copland uses open fourths and fifths, harmonic intervals common in American folk music instruments. For example, on a guitar in standard tuning, all the strings except one are tuned four notes above the string below it. On a mandolin, the strings are tuned five notes

²³ The ballet score was orchestrated for a thirteen-piece ensemble (Copland, *Since* 33).

²⁴ The chords are A major with the C# in the bass and an E major with a B in the bass.

above the string below it. To my ear, these notes played in “Appalachian Spring” do not sound particularly folky, but as Copland described in his memoir and in interviews, if one borrows American folk songs for themes, then one’s music will sound American. If we consider Shapiro’s idea of Appalachia as America’s “folk,” then a melody or harmonic interval that reminds a listener of something quintessentially American – as in containing a fifth intangible element – could understandably be interpreted as Appalachian, especially if the idea is planted by the title and the ballet. Copland included American musical vernacular in service to Graham’s vision and also to his desire to create pieces with populist appeal. If this Americanness connotes Appalachia, then it affirms Shapiro’s thesis.

However, the ballet and score also speak to Appalachia’s role in America’s changing perception of itself during the period of modernism. *Appalachian Spring* presents a highly stylized myth of America and Appalachia, not as a place stuck in the past but as a function of collective nostalgia and narrative-forming, and places Appalachia as a part of the American story, not an exception to it. The examples of Crane, Williams, Graham, and Copland complicate Shapiro’s description of Appalachia as “in but not of America” (4); these modernists make Appalachia an American idea, not separate from it, but essential to it. In these works of modernism, Appalachia is not, as Shapiro suggests, stuck in a pre-modern past, but struggling with the rest of the country to navigate a modern present. Appalachian Studies should embrace this connection to American Modernism to expand and complicate the Outsider Myth and the Insider Myth. The characters in *Appalachian Spring* are neither victims nor survivors; they are archetypes, not stereotypes. As Edwin Denby wrote in 1945, *Appalachian Spring* “is no glorification by condescending cityfolk of our rude and simple past; it is...a credible and

astonishing evocation of that real time and place” (qtd. in Copland, *Since* 47). The modernism of Crane and Williams, Graham and Copland did not separate Appalachians from the struggles of rapidly changing America, they made Appalachia central to them. The positive reception of *Appalachian Spring* both as a ballet and as a piece of music and the popular belief that they reflect a reality of Appalachia provides an opportunity, at least, to claim a more nuanced public perception of Appalachia. Appalachia becomes unstuck in time; instead of looking to Appalachia as a place of a nostalgic other, Appalachia imagined by American modernists becomes a place in which Americans can see themselves coping with the anxieties of modernity.

Fallingwater and the Insider Myth

The second Appalachian spring in this essay, western Pennsylvania’s Bear Run, is the site of Frank Lloyd Wright’s Fallingwater, which explodes an idea of Appalachia central to both the Insider and the Outsider myth by answering the question “What does an Appalachian home look like?” Publications about Appalachia that mention Fallingwater view Wright with some skepticism. An Architecture Issue of *Now and Then* magazine, a publication of the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services at East Tennessee State University, presents the insider/outsider boundary in stark relief. A story is recounted of how Pennsylvania Contractor Herman Keys showed the famous architect Frank Lloyd Wright a flaw in his plan for Kentucky Knob, a house that Wright had designed and Keys was building. The eighty-six-year-old Wright, who had a reputation for being prickly, kindly acknowledged the error, and the two men solved the problem together. Upon returning to his office, Wright lambasted his staff for letting

“some mountain man show them up” (Woodside 2). Jane Harris Woodside, who edited *Now and Then’s* architecture issue presents the story as an example of how the city folk underestimate the “intelligence, skill, ingenuity, and craft of Appalachian builders” (2), as Wright likely did. Woodside should be credited with including Wright’s designs in a publication about Appalachian architecture, but the focus on Wright’s biases instead of Wright’s work in Appalachia reinforces the Insider Myth instead of expanding it. Kentuck Knob (1956) was Wright’s second design for the Laurel Highlands of Western Pennsylvania; the first was Fallingwater (1939). The final section of this chapter will show how Fallingwater models Appalachian Modernism, and argue that the Kaufmann family’s story should be considered Appalachian.

Fallingwater sits forty-five miles north of Morgantown, West Virginia and seventy-two miles south of Pittsburgh by car in Fayette County, which lies in the heart of Northern Appalachia. The Kaufmann family, who built Fallingwater, owned the site for many years before they decided to build a house there, and they ran it as a summer retreat for the workers at the large downtown Pittsburgh department store they owned.

Fallingwater hangs over a stream. This stream, Bear Run, seen in Figure 2, is one of several streams or “runs” that begins in the Laurel Highlands of southwest Pennsylvania and feeds the Youghiogheny River, which flows north from West Virginia and eventually meets the Monongahela, which meets the Allegheny, flows into the Ohio and into the Mississippi (Toker 79). The four-mile stream begins about 2500 feet above sea level and joins the Youghiogheny at about 1070 feet above sea level (Hoffman, *Fallingwater* 3). Its most dramatic single fall comes at about 1300 feet above sea level, at the site of Fallingwater, when it falls twenty to

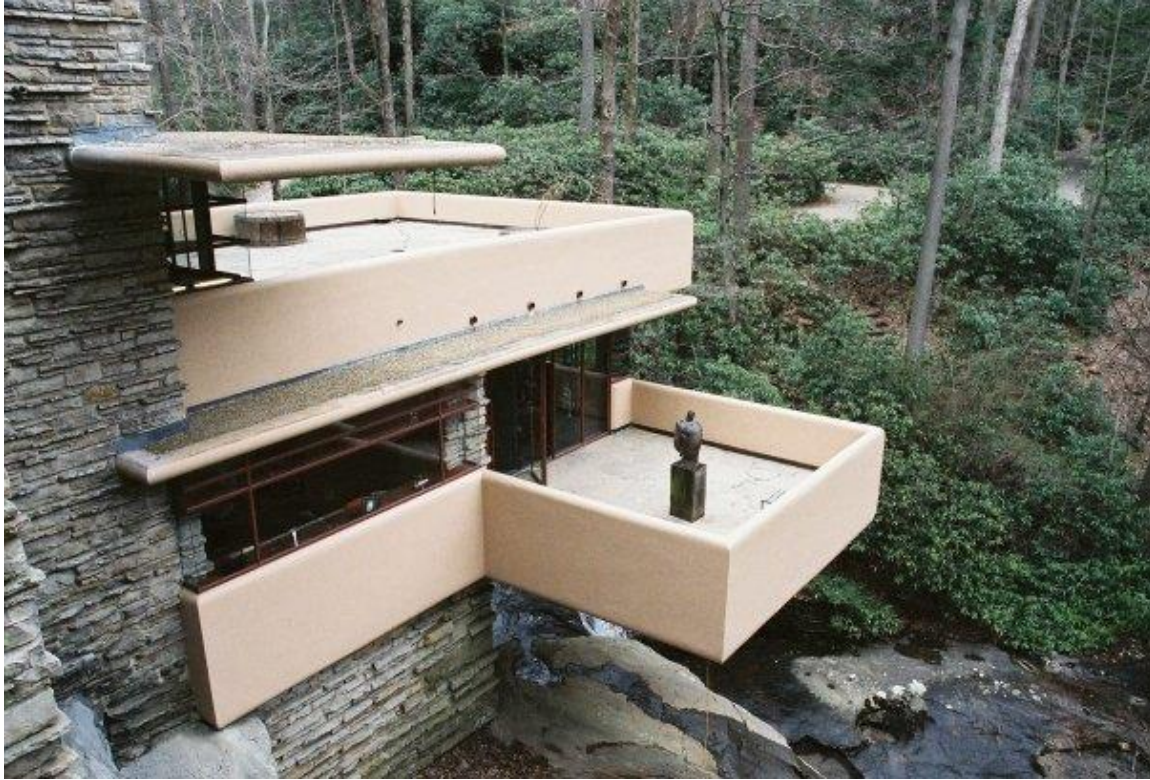


Figure 2. Fallingwater over Bear Run.

photo: Mariel Story

thirty feet, depending on whose book one reads, before it joins the Youghiogheny about a quarter mile away (Toker 78; Hoffman, *Fallingwater* 3,4). The banks of the stream are wooded, rocky, and filled with mountain laurel, which, according to Donald Hoffman, “flourish from the moisture of the stream, the shade of the taller trees, and a soil enriched by fallen oak leaves” (7). In the early 1930s, Chestnut Trees killed by the blight of the 1920s were removed and hundreds of Norway Spruce Trees were planted on the site (Hoffman, *Fallingwater* 10). The Kaufmann family, aware that their over-1500 acres of land on Bear Run constituted a special location and destination, set about preserving and conserving this land before they planned to build their one-of-a-kind weekend house (Hoffman 10).

It is easy to understand why the Appalachian Studies community shows uncertainty about Fallingwater as an example of Appalachian art and design. Fallingwater gets a positive nod in the *Encyclopedia of Appalachia* from Carroll Van West's introductory essay on Architecture, but more ambivalence from Camille Wells' entry on the house, which celebrates the Appalachian elements but not the modernist design. Both identify Fallingwater as International Style, a label Wright strongly disliked, preferring Organic. International implies Fallingwater came from somewhere else to the mountains, while Organic connects the design with its place. Wells refers to the house as a "landmark of Appalachian culture²⁵," but one owing "less to Wright's design than to the structure's distinctive materials and site. In fact, one of Wright's unexecuted ideas – concrete walls covered in gold leaf – would have rendered the house a visually worrisome intruder in the mountain landscape" (747). Wells seems to suggest that Wright's modernism is the visually worrisome intruder in the mountain landscape. Frederick Law Olmsted and Richard Morris Hunt receive no such grief in Jennifer F. Martin's *Encyclopedia* entry on Biltmore, as if French Beaux Arts style belongs in the mountain landscape but not American cubism (Martin 740-741). This chapter intentionally takes up the case of the Kaufmanns, not the Vanderbilts. The story of the Biltmore also belongs in a narrative of Appalachia during modernity, but as a piece of art, the Biltmore is no work of modernism: it looks to the past and to European traditions. Fallingwater looks to Appalachia and to the future for its inspiration. It follows no tradition, and resembles no design except Wright's own Laura Gale house (1909) in Oak Park, Illinois, according to Franklin Toker, whose *Fallingwater Rising* presents a comprehensive and authoritative biography of the house (Toker 163).

²⁵ This should be true, but is not.

Wright's label for his method, Organic Architecture, relies on connecting the design to the site. When Wright built in Scottsdale, Arizona, as he did with his Taliesin West, as seen in Figure 3, he created an exterior and interior that was desert-like. Rough-hewn walls of desert stone and concrete gradually rise out of the ground, giving the impression that the structure appears naturally from the desert while the same walls give the interior the color, texture, and experience of the desert.



Figure 3. Taliesin West.

photo: Mark Peterman

According to Wright,

It is in the nature of any organic building to grow from its site, some out of the ground into the light – the ground itself held always as a component basic part of the building itself. And then we have primarily the new ideal of building as organic. A building dignified as a tree in the midst of nature. (*The Natural* 50)

With his characteristic obtuse prose, Wright suggests that the site of a building dictates the design of that building. This idea began in the first half of Wright's career with the Prairie House. Wright, a native of Wisconsin whose career began in Chicago, rethought the house of his day – the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – with horizontal lines that matched the rural midwestern landscape in which he was designing. The "Prairie House" was designed to look as if it belonged on the prairie, as a part of the prairie. It drew attention to width and flatness instead of height and pointedness, as the Heurtley House (1902) illustrates (Figure 4).

Though critics take Wright's debt to the desert and to the prairie for granted, few credit Fallingwater's Appalachian inspiration, though many argue that Organic Architecture reaches a zenith with the home on Bear Run. The design of the house mimics the landscape itself, blending in with the waterfall in the front and bluff behind. The famous view of Fallingwater from below the waterfall shows the house to be most like a waterfall, which makes its boldest statement from below. From the side, the house hugs the hill, becomes the hill, like architectural kudzu (see Figure 5), and from inside, the house often feels like a tree house with a floor of river rock, that this is what it is like to live in the woods.



Figure 4. Heurtley House

photo: Annette Gendler



Figure 5. Fallingwater's covered walkway to the Guest House.

photo: Mariel Story

The materials at Fallingwater naturally blend into the site because they came from the site. The stone in the house was hand quarried about 500 feet from the front door. The use of materials from the site, or as close to the site as possible, demonstrates another principle of Organic Architecture. The second most used material – glass, came from the closest source, Pittsburgh, probably because of Kaufmann’s connection to Pittsburgh Plate Glass (Toker 224). The steel window sashes used in the windows that open were from New York City. The wood in Fallingwater is black walnut from North Carolina, used sometimes in solid pieces, as in the trim work, and sometimes as a veneer over built-in furniture, a favorite feature of Wright’s. The last material used in Fallingwater is concrete reinforced with small steel strips, like little pieces of rebar. This concrete proved too weak to hold the weight of the massive overhanging cantilevers, and was repaired in 2001 during an extensive renovation of the home through a process called “post tensioning,” during which steel cables raised the outside edges of the cantilevers. The color at Fallingwater apart from the painted concrete, a beige color called “ocher” (Hoffman 61), is a Frank Lloyd Wright signature that he called “Cherokee Red.” In his later years when Wright began signing his works, his signature would be on a small tile of this color that would be attached to a building. According to Wright historian Donald Hoffman, “Wright asked the Du Pont company of Wilmington, Delaware to mix the paint to a ‘Cherokee red.’ He sent along an Indian pot as a color guide” (61).

Architecture historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock says in his book *In the Nature of Materials* that at Fallingwater,

Never...has architecture as the product of man been so perfectly balanced and contrasted with the natural setting. For never has the natural setting been

wilder or more superb in its original condition, and never has the work of man been bolder or in a sense more arbitrary in its placing. But, so perfect, so apparently inevitable, is the juxtaposition that one cannot imagine such a house in a different setting or a different house in this setting. Ordinary questions of functionalism receive new answers, not because this is a practical house to live in, but because it is so pre-eminently a comfortable house to live in over a waterfall. (91)

This is a way to say that Fallingwater is the house that grew out of this site, a distinctly Appalachian site, and the house is literally formed from Appalachian stone and Appalachian glass. The house and its site are linked aesthetically and materially. This Appalachian landscape – with its thick woods, dramatic change in elevation that enables the waterfall, and sandstone and river rock – yields an Appalachian house that is also a quintessentially modernist invention.

Fallingwater makes such a bold statement that informed opinions about the success of Wright's project differ greatly. Some critics argue that the house dominates the site instead of fitting within the site: in this reading the house is more modernist and less Appalachian.

Landscape Architecture scholar Charles E. Aguilar writes "*Fallingwater overwhelms nature,*" and argues that the house represents a violation of Wright's Organic Architecture principles for the sake of making a flashier design. Aguilar, however, finds the finished effect compelling, though to explain how the juxtaposition of such outlandish structure and natural setting work together, as seen in Figure 6, he cites landscape architect John Simonds, who points to Fallingwater's geological and topological Appalachian elements:

Perhaps because the massive cantilevered decks recall the massive



Figure 6. Fallingwater as modernist statement.

photo: Mariel Story

cantilevered ledge rock. Perhaps because the masonry walls that spring from the rock are the same rock tooled to a higher degree of refinement. Perhaps because the dynamic spirit of the building is in keeping with the spirit of the wild and rugged woodland. (qtd. in Aguar 231)

Whether critics think the design works with nature or works against nature, all agree that the house reflects its site, a particularly Appalachian site. However, architecture critics outside Appalachia do not describe the site as Appalachian, though Wright's work in other specific locations like the desert or the prairie nearly always inspire critics to reflect on how his structures fit into their regional southwestern or midwestern topographies. In his *Now and*

Then article on Kentuck Knob, Dave Zuchowski identifies both Wright's Western Pennsylvania designs as Appalachian, and Camille Wells' *Encyclopedia of Appalachia* article embraces the Appalachianess of Fallingwater, if not the modernism. Biggers suggests that when an artist or an artist's work become part of the national conversation, regional connections lose their place in the work's story.

Yet, the log cabin never lost its regional connection, and, fitted into a site and constructed of natural materials, may fit Wright's bill of "Organic Architecture," simply because the building materials were the only ones available to Appalachian homebuilders. Cabins throughout Appalachia are perched on ledges and in hollows just as precariously as Fallingwater is perched on Bear Run. But, Fallingwater modernizes the Appalachian home, or in Hitchcock's words, "questions of functionalism receive new answers" at Fallingwater (*In the Nature* 91). Wright brought Appalachia inside the house as much as he brought modernism to Bear Run.

In his 1953 book *The Natural House*, Wright writes, "We have no longer an outside and an inside as two separate things. Now the outside may come inside, and the inside may and does go outside. They are of each other" (50). The outside space, the site of the building, in this case a rocky waterfall, defines the interior space. Of Fallingwater's 5300 square feet, almost 2500 square feet is outside on one of the four terraces (Salant). Waxed flagstone floors reflect the stream's smooth river rock and meet existing boulders so that the site literally becomes the interior of the home. The windows in the corners of Fallingwater open all the way, so that the corner of the house disappears when they are open. Many of the large windows in the house are frameless, so that the glass runs directly into stone wall, and outside

appears to be just beyond the wall. The stunning stonework, the same on the interior and the exterior, is stacked to be random and ordered at the same time, like nature itself.

The timing of Fallingwater, both in Wright's career, and in the chronology of modernist architecture, played a significant role in the audacity of its design, according to Toker. In the middle of the Great Depression, Wright was a washed-up American architect with no work whose European contemporaries like Le Corbusier and Richard Neutra became famous for updating the designs Wright viewed as his own creations. Beginning in the early 1920s, Wright, according to Hitchcock, "the long-term leader of modern architecture, the forerunner whose vital contributions everyone admitted, was cast critically and professionally into a minority" (*In the Nature* 72). In his definitive history of nineteenth and twentieth century architecture, Hitchcock writes that the early modernist architects maintained a great deal of individuality throughout their careers, defying easy generalizations (*Architecture*, 420), though the label "modernist" coalesced around a collection of common elements: modernists reject ornament; they expose structural elements; they plasticize concrete, molding, curving, bending and shaping it (Hitchcock, *Architecture* 418 – 434). Two schools of Modernism developed from 1900 to 1930 (Hitchcock, *Architecture* 434). One is the Organic Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright and the other the Bauhaus-inspired International Style of Walter Gropius and Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe. There is a century-long argument over which came first, but by the 1930s, the Internationals ruled the day, due in part to a 1932 Museum of Modern Art Exhibition curated by Hitchcock (Toker 31). In it, Wright was considered a quaint grandfather of modernism, praised for his early works, but irrelevant next to the new generation of Europeans. Feeling marginalized, Wright shot back at Hitchcock,

I warn Henry-Russell Hitchcock right here and now that, having a good start, not only do I intend to be the greatest architect who has yet lived, but the greatest who will ever live. Yes, I intend to be the greatest architect of all time. And I do hereunto affix “the red square” [Wright’s logo] and sign my name to this warning. (qtd. In Toker 32)

At stake in E. J. Kaufmann’s Appalachian weekend house was the reputation of Frank Lloyd Wright as the “greatest architect of all time,” as well as the mantle of leadership of the world’s architects from Europeans to Americans.

Firmly modernist, though Wright would have preferred “organic,” the house is almost devoid of ornament. Only the interior woodwork, which curves around the ceiling, draws any attention to itself, and nowhere in Fallingwater does a structural device hide behind artifice except in the cantilevers that hold up the first story floor, and even they are hinted at by the bolsters that jut out from the rocks. The interior ceiling looks like molded concrete because it is molded concrete. The stacked stone that makes the outside wall also makes the inside wall. Mechanical elements like plumbing and heating are obscured in cabinets and built-in furniture, but at Fallingwater, form ever follows function, in the words of Wright’s early mentor, Louis Sullivan. The natural materials, the site, and the design, itself a mimic of nature, provide the sights and sounds of Fallingwater, reclaiming modernist architecture as a natural style instead of an industrial one. Donald Hoffman called Fallingwater the “great machine in the forest,” but it is a machine in which nature takes the lead (Toker 156). This idea, that modernism could work with nature instead of dominating it or destroying it, provides a template for a new way of thinking about modernization in Appalachia, both for those that harness Appalachia’s nature

for energy and profit, and also for those that eschew development and industrialization under any circumstance.

Wright recognized the process of modernization and like many Appalachians looked back to a pre-industrial moment for inspiration: “Faith in the natural is the way we need to grow up on in this coming age of our culturally confused, backward twentieth century. But instead of ‘organic’ we might as well say ‘natural’ building” (*Natural* 5). This distinction Wright attempts to draw between international and organic or natural and industrial does not come strictly from its Appalachian site, since much of Wright’s work reaches for the same ambition; however, “Organic architecture” or natural modernist architecture finds its fullest expression in Appalachia. Modernist architecture is no more out of place in the mountains than in the desert or the prairie, and as later chapters will argue, neither is modernist literature. The recognition of modernism in the mountains and the acceptance of Appalachia as a part of the story of American modernization – not as separate from it, and not as a victim of it – requires a comprehensive reconsideration of our myths of Appalachia.

Fallingwater’s Appalachian design conquered twentieth-century American house design. A 1938 public relations campaign by the Kaufmanns and to some degree Wright himself flashed pictures of this house of the future in front of millions of Americans and landed Wright and Fallingwater on the cover of *Time*, and in dozens of architecture, homemaking, and decorating magazines. Fallingwater earned Wright his own show at the Museum of Modern Art (Toker 268), and according to Toker, “speculators selected certain elements of Fallingwater – the rock-faced stone, the uninterrupted horizontal lines, the window-walls and the flagstone-covered patios – and marketed them with an acute understanding of their potency as symbols of a

richer life” (Toker 403). Toker’s analysis of Fallingwater’s lasting popularity with Americans concludes that many of us “grew up in its ranch and split-level copies” (403). This Appalachian exterior was exported to the rest of the country and copied for years to come. The structure has been commandeered to fight Nazism and Communism, to encourage a belief in American ingenuity, and as a symbol of American modernism (Toker 290-291). That Appalachia has fallen so completely out of this story speaks to the perceptual distance between Appalachia and mainstream American culture and Appalachia and modernity.

Modernist Pittsburgh

Wright’s status as an Appalachian outsider, even if he designed Appalachia’s most famous (or perhaps second most famous) house, makes sense, but E. J. Kaufmann, the patron of Fallingwater, and the son of one of Pittsburgh’s most famous families, should be considered an insider. Geographically and politically, Pittsburgh sits in the heart of Northern Appalachia, which has recently garnered more attention from Appalachian Studies scholars and Pittsburghers have also embraced their place in Appalachia²⁶. Kaufmann’s uncles Jacob and Isaac came to America from Germany in the 1860s, and according to Toker, “started by peddling clothes southeast of Pittsburgh, through the farms, villages, and coalfields of the Youghiogheny Valley” (34). By 1885, brothers Henry and Morris, E. J.’s father, had joined Jacob and Isaac in Kaufmann Brothers, a department store located in the Golden Triangle, a prime commercial district in downtown Pittsburgh (Toker 36). Kaufmann’s Clock, a downtown landmark first erected in 1887, continues to be a popular rendezvous point in Pittsburgh. When

²⁶ See O’Neill, Brian. *The Paris of Appalachia*. Carnegie Mellon UP, 2009.

E. J. was born in 1885, his family lived in Allegheny, at the time an independent town, now a neighborhood in Pittsburgh, where Gertrude Stein was born in 1874, and Martha Graham was born in 1894. From 1901-1906, Willa Cather taught at the Allegheny high school.

After returning from a year apprenticing at large department stores in Europe, Kaufmann bought and operated a general store in Connellsville, Pennsylvania in Fayette County, as Toker highlights, working in the same rural community that his uncles had when they first came from Europe. Family deaths, help from his father, and a savvy marriage to his first cousin Lilliane helped Kaufmann consolidate his power in the family and led to his majority share in the Kaufmann Department Store by 1913 (Toker 45). Five Kaufmann cousins opened a rival store in Pittsburgh. Over the next thirty years, Kaufmann made his store into a Pittsburgh destination and massively successful operation, and also poured time, money, and energy into making Pittsburgh a great city. He also built two of America's most famous houses: Fallingwater (1939) and the Richard Neutra-designed Kaufmann Desert House (1946).

Three factors explain why Kaufmann does not rank as a prominent Appalachian: he was urban, he was Jewish, and he was rich. As the next chapter on novels set in Asheville and Knoxville will show, Appalachia continues to hold some unease with the role of cities in its myths, since the Insider and Outsider myths assume Appalachia relies on pre-industrial-development nature for its identity. Also, Appalachian Studies embraced Northern Appalachia fairly recently, so important Pittsburghers are rarely considered important Appalachians, and books from Appalachian Pennsylvania like *Life in the Iron Mills* and *Out of this Furnace* make their way onto Appalachian Literature syllabi, but not as often as they should. Though an underrepresented subject, Urban Appalachia fits in current narratives of the field.

A more obvious obstacle to Kaufmann's being considered Appalachian is his ethnicity. Throughout his life, he faced anti-Semitic discrimination. Toker quotes an article about Kaufmann from a Pittsburgh paper in which Kaufmann was "branded ... with the usual code words reserved for Jewish businessmen in the 1930s: 'sharp...hard featured...socially, politically and financially ambitious'" (34), and he and Lilliane were excluded from social clubs and even hotels. Appalachia's race mythology – that Appalachians constituted a specially preserved group of Anglo Saxon whites – has been employed for political purposes even before Appalachia as an idea existed: indirectly, to combat immigration in the late-nineteenth century (Batteau 61); and directly, to give American poverty a white face after Harry Caudill (1962) celebrated the Anglo Saxon heritage of the mountain whites. The Appalachian Scotch-Irish connection continues to play in documentaries like Nashville Public Television's *The Appalachians* (2005), which also mentions German immigrants and their distinctive barns. In the past three decades, this myth of Appalachia has been revised. Appalachian Studies, through the work of Frank X. Walker, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., William Turner and Edward J. Cabbell, and the fiction of Denise Giardina, Liza Alther, et al. has accepted racial diversity as part of its self-identity. The J.D. Vances of the world may still see Appalachia as a bastion of British-isles whiteness, but E.J. Kaufmann's Jewishness is no obstacle to his being Appalachian.

It is perhaps Kaufmann's identity as a wealthy businessman that presents the greatest obstacle to his inclusion in Appalachian narratives. Poverty remains an essential element of both the Insider and Outsider myths. It is important to the Outsider Myth because in it, Appalachia represents a pre-global-capitalist America; in the Insider Myth, Appalachia is the victim or survivor of global capitalism, not the oppressor or the exploiter, and naturally the

victim of economic oppression is poor. Toker enumerates the wages Kaufmann paid the unskilled laborers who quarried the rock for Fallingwater, and they ranged from slightly above average late-Depression wage at seventy-five cents per hour to well below it (204; Petro). Kaufmann easily falls into the role of outsider taking advantage of hard-working insiders, but more accurately, Kaufmann is an insider taking advantage of insiders, who may have been happy to have the work. Appalachia needs to face the possibility that a successful lover of architecture who paid low wages could also be Appalachian, and that his lasting modernist contribution may be Appalachian, and that Appalachians were exploited in its construction. In other words, the economic myths of Appalachia are more complicated than we would like to admit.

The facts bear out Appalachia's reputation as a poor region, but perhaps not to the degree that the mythology suggests. The Appalachian Regional Commission reports the national poverty rate from 2010-2014 as 15.6%; Appalachia's poverty rate for the same period was 17.2% (Appalachian "Poverty"). Both numbers are too high, but Appalachia's poverty is higher than the national average by less than two percent. More telling, perhaps, is the average per capita income from the same period, during which Appalachians made a little over 80% of the amount average Americans made. For example, in 2014, the average American per capita income was \$46,049; the Appalachian \$37,260 (Appalachian "Personal"). Appalachia continues to be poorer than the national average, but not every Appalachian story is one of poverty. Wealthy Appalachians exist, too, yet the music and literature of Appalachia features

poverty and struggle at the center of most of its narratives²⁷, as Jim Wayne Miller observed in the mid 1970s (Miller 87). If wealthy characters appear, they are outsiders, as in Mary Noailles Murfree's "The Star in the Valley" or Lee Smith's *Oral History*; villains, as in Hazel Dickens' "Black Lung," or Ron Rash's *Serena*; or caricatures, eating in a fancy dining car, probably drinking coffee and smoking big cigars. If wealthy, Appalachians should be humble and modest, as Loyal Jones suggests in *Appalachian Values*, not interested in hiring the country's greatest architect to build a country house. The ambition of Fallingwater, and therefore of Kaufmann, may be its least Appalachian characteristic. This assumption of Appalachian Studies, that all Appalachian art should reflect the modesty and humility of an oppressed people, may be the one most ready for revision. As long as Appalachian Studies claims the sales girl but not the store owner, the log cabin but not the modernist house, the buck dance but not the ballet, as a reflection of its richness of experience, then we only tell part of the story, and we risk becoming the Professional Hillbillies Reid describes.

The Appalachian story of modernization, like all stories, includes heroes and villains of all social classes. Not all of the heroes are from Appalachia, and not all of the villains are from northern cities. If, in making the case for Appalachia as land of the oppressed, we exclude Appalachians with wealth or who have written great modernist novels or whose contributions to American art and culture have transcended the region, then we oppress Appalachia by censoring its story to fit a narrow, albeit well-meaning, political agenda.

²⁷ Consider the heroes of *Storming Heaven*, *River of Earth*, *The Dollmaker*, and *Fair and Tender Ladies*, or the narrators of "The Old Home Place," "Freeborn Man," "I've Been All Around This World," or "Coal Miner's Daughter."

“Appalachians, just like Americans everywhere, use their buildings – especially their houses – as a way of telling the world how they’d like to be regarded, where they see themselves in the pecking order,” writes Woodside, and she and writer Dave Zuchowski deserve credit for claiming Wright’s Appalachian designs, Fallingwater and Kentuck Knob as Appalachian (Woodside 2). Zuchowski’s *Now and Then* article focuses on the stonework of Jesse and Jesse, Jr. Wilson, who laid all stones in Kentuck Knob’s massive exterior and interior walls, and Woodside calls them collaborators with Wright, “whether he saw them that way or not” (2). Her observation that our buildings, especially houses, tell the world how we see ourselves, speaks to the importance of including Fallingwater in the Insider Myth of Appalachia. Fallingwater’s national significance, elite patron and architect, and modernist design make the house no less Appalachian.

One last thought about *Appalachian Spring* and Fallingwater that speaks to the next chapter. Just as Woodside calls our attention to the centrality of houses in our conception of who we are, the idea of home plays a central role in these works. On one level, *Appalachian Spring* tells the story of the creation of a home: two people come together with the blessing of their community to begin a life together. By the end of the ballet, they live together in a house on the edge of the frontier, a picture that fits both the Insider Myth and the Outsider Myth. Fallingwater presents a more troubled idea of home, and a more complicated one since Fallingwater served as a country house for wealthy Appalachians and not a homeplace in the traditional sense. E. J., Liliane, and son Edgar each have their own rooms and spaces in Fallingwater, and as a few critics have pointed out, part of the genius of Wright’s design is that he created three floors for three very different personalities. In the period of modernism, the

idea of the family and home fracture all over European and American Literature, not just in Appalachia. The idea that the Appalachian home suffered duress from outside forces but not internal conflict and the vicissitudes of modern life is a myth worth revising. The three modernist novels discussed in Chapter Two, Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward Angel*, James Agee's *A Death in the Family*, and James Still's *River of Earth*, tell stories of Appalachian families in crisis, and Appalachian homes coming apart, but these stories speak for their country and their time as much as their region. Home – the search for it, the loss of it, the trouble in it – remains a central theme in nearly every work of Appalachian Literature, and these three novels show the modernist roots of this Appalachian concern.

Chapter Two:
Reading Modernism in Appalachian Literature

Appal Lit scholars were trying to make sure their good stuff wasn't confused with Grit Lit, with southern literature. But in setting it so far apart from its nearest neighbor, they also set it apart from *all* literature.

– Fred Chappell, “The Shape of Appalachian Literature to Come:
An Interview with Wil Hickson”

When he looked at his image in those novels
people packed with swimsuits and suntan lotion
So they could read of mountains at the beach,

He saw himself jerked along – moonshiner, feudist,
speaking Elizabethan English – through plots
that, like old newsreels hurrying people here
and there, made clowns of kings and dignitaries.

Yellow-paged thrillers. Comfortable people used to keep
Them under their pillows with a neatly-folded nightshirt.
Drowsy episodes of wittys, mountain
maids, granny women. – And so to sleep.

– Jim Wayne Miller, “The Brier Reviewing Novels”

In Jim Wayne Miller's poem “The Brier Losing Touch With His Traditions,” the Brier, an Appalachian living in the second half of the twentieth century²⁸, makes chairs and earns a reputation as “an authentic mountain craftsman” (Miller, “Losing” 44). When demand for his chairs exceeds supply, he moves from eastern Kentucky to Cincinnati to be closer to his market and buys power tools to keep up with orders. A magazine publishes pictures of him clean-shaven, wearing a flowered sport shirt, and using his new tools; business dries up. So, the Brier moves back to Kentucky, prints a brochure of himself “using his hand lathe,/bearded, barefoot, in faded overalls” (Miller, “Losing” 44),

²⁸ Midwesterners call Appalachians who migrated north “Briers.” It is a cousin to “hillbilly” or “redneck.” Don Johnson calls Jim Wayne Miller's Brier “the enlightened Appalachian who laments what is happening to the world that nurtured him” (130).

Then when folks would come from the magazines,
 He'd get rid of them before supertime
 So he could put on his shoes, his flowered sport shirt
 And double-knit pants, and open a can of beer
 And watch the six-thirty news on tv
 Out of New York and Washington.

He had to have some time to be himself. (Miller, "Losing" 44)

Miller's Brier poems play with an Appalachian anxiety: how to maintain an Appalachian identity while conforming to a modernized American culture. His Brier dresses, drinks, and watches television like other Americans, but feels a conflict in that lifestyle from outside expectations and perhaps from within himself. This same conflict exists in the development of Appalachian Literature as a field. Fred Chappell describes how, in separating itself from Southern Literature, Appalachian Literature separated itself from "*all literature*" (Chappell 58; emphasis in original). Critics and scholars rarely call a book Appalachian if it belongs to any other canon. Critics have been arguing over what should and should not be considered Appalachian Literature since the 1970s, and Chappell speaks to Appalachia's practice of limiting membership to books unclaimed by Southern or American literary studies.

This is not to say that scholars and authors perceive that Appalachian novels, stories, poetry, and plays lack literary qualities such as complexity, ambiguity, or ambition. Chappell's example, Lee Smith's *Oral History*, a kind of Appalachian *Absalom, Absalom!*, reimagines a dozen tropes of Appalachian fiction: witches and curses, the city-born outsider who falls in love

with the mountain girl, home missions, snake handling, a boarding house, a mining disaster, and the exploitive gaze of the photographer. In case the reader had any doubt about her subversive intentions, Smith turns the homeplace, Hoot Owl Holler, into a theme park, revealing her purpose as more Pynchon than Faulkner, more postmodern pastiche than modernist experimentation. Appalachian Literature from all over the map – Gurney Norman to Jayne Anne Phillips, Barbara Kingsolver to Jo Carson – walks a line that Miller describes in his essay “A Mirror for Appalachia” (1978): “The main task of cultivating an appreciation for what is good in Appalachian life will fall upon these teachers who have a knowledge of two worlds – of Appalachia and mainstream America – and who can walk, like a plowman in spring, with one foot in the plowed ground, the other in unbroken sod” (Miller, “A Mirror” 448). The best Appalachian literature negotiates and even accentuates this tension, but Appalachian Studies as a field – the criticism, anthologies, and college course reading lists – preserves an Appalachian identity depicted as sequestered from an American one, even as life and art in Appalachia interact more and more with life and art outside the region. To avoid the Brier’s conflict over floating “like rafted logs toward the mainstream,” we too often present our works of literature as authentic mountain crafts.²⁹

Appalachian Literature scholars and critics differentiate the Appalachian canon from Southern Literature and American Literature in one way by avoiding or at least overlooking a discussion about modernism in Appalachia. William Faulkner and the Agrarians link Southern Literature and modernism, and modernism plays a starring role in the pre-World War II American literary canon because of the Lost Generation, a number of important poets, and

²⁹ See Miller’s “Brier Visions” and “The Brier Losing Touch with his Tradition.”

William Faulkner. However, reading criticism, syllabi, and anthologies of Appalachian Literature might give one the impression that modernism missed Appalachia, or that Appalachia missed modernism. Borrowing Henry Shapiro's narrative of Appalachia's birth in the American imagination and Susan Stanford Friedman's notion that "modernity invents tradition," Chapter One began with the idea that modernity enabled both the Insider and the Outsider Myths of Appalachia. The Outsider Myth says that Appalachia remains an unmodernized version of America, and the Insider Myth sees Appalachia as a victim or survivor of the American twentieth century, not an active participant. As different as these myths are at times, neither allows for locating modernism in Appalachia.

Chapter Two examines how the field of Appalachian Literature itself reinforces those myths, inadvertently and intentionally, when it avoids describing its early twentieth century literature as modernism. Since the formation of the Appalachian literary canon, works by Thomas Wolfe, James Still, and James Agee have been cited by critics as Appalachian, but described as various shades of realism. In the first half of the chapter, I propose three reasons for this. First, early Appalachian scholars worked to differentiate Appalachian Literature from its closest cousins, Southern and American Literature. Second, the view of Appalachia as an internal colony led to a belief that modernization and therefore modernism reached Appalachia later than it did the rest of the country. Third, borrowing a term from Emily Satterwhite and TJ Jackson Lears, Appalachian Studies has held to an antimodernism, the belief that the region's literature should reflect an authentic mountain tradition unspoiled by too much outside influence. Aligning the Appalachian Literature of the early twentieth century with realism separates this body of work from both the William Bartram-style proto-romanticism and Mary

Noailles Murfree's regionalism that defined literature about Appalachia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As a reaction to romanticism or local color, labeling Appalachian literature as realist implies that these works provide a more authentic portrayal of the region, a documentary truth³⁰. But the term "realism" also differentiates Appalachian works from their American and Southern contemporaries and suggests that authentic Appalachian writing is somehow pre- or anti-modernist.

The second half of the chapter argues that Appalachia offers its own version of modernism, exemplified by Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929), James Still's *River of Earth* (1940), and James Agee's *A Death in the Family* (1957). As I will discuss, Wolfe and Agee have been considered Appalachian in the past but have fallen off of Appalachian reading lists. Still's novel is taught as an exemplar of Appalachian Literature, but not as a work of modernism. Each of these novels tackles popular themes in the Appalachian canon: changes to home, place, and family. They do so using modernist techniques such as experimental prose, stripped-down narrative voices, and non-linear structures to describe moments of cultural, economic, and personal upheaval. These works of Appalachian Modernism embrace the tension between being Appalachian and being American instead of fencing off Appalachian Literature from outside influences and associations. The goal of this chapter is not merely to add to reading lists, but to revise the timeline of Appalachian Literature to include modernism. Reading Wolfe, Still, and Agee as modernists expands the definition of Appalachian Literature to include nationally recognized authors, urban Appalachians, and stories that place American modernization in an Appalachian context.

³⁰ Bill Hardwig's phrase.

New Books and Old Battles

Miller's "Appalachian Literature" (1977) urged the inclusion of Wolfe and Agee among Appalachian authors as early as the mid-1970s. Miller proposed that Appalachia had "passed beyond its pioneer phase" (82), and he meant pioneer not in the *Appalachian Spring* sense, but to suggest that Appalachian Literature and Appalachian literary scholarship could move on to the kinds of anthologies, criticism, and questions expected in any canon of literature. Miller looked back to Cratis Williams' massive dissertation *The Southern Mountaineer in Fact and Fiction* (1961), reprinted in the mid-1970s in *Appalachian Journal*. Miller built on Williams' three periods of representation of the mountaineer: through 1880, when Appalachians were truly seen as pioneers; from 1880-1930, the period of Mary Noailles Murfree and "her imitators"; and from 1930 to 1960, "the emergence of more native writers" (84). Miller could not know that a renaissance of Appalachian Literature lay just before him: from 1977 to 1997, Denise Giardina, Lee Smith, Barbara Kingsolver, Charles Frazier, Fred Chappell, Cormac McCarthy, and Jayne Anne Phillips would all publish important Appalachian novels. In the twenty-year period from 1997 to 2017, Frank X Walker, Ron Rash, and Silas House published poetry and novels to great acclaim, and a new generation of Appalachian writers like Robert Gipe, Jesse Graves, and Jessie Van Eerden give hope for a promising future.

The Appalachian Literature boom did not, however, send the field in the direction Miller advocated in 1977. Despite a number of nationally popular titles and ambitious literary works, Appalachian Literature came to be defined by a few books and authors that reinforced the

insider version of Appalachia as victim³¹, the outsider version of Appalachia as pining for an impossible past or problem to be solved, or some frightening combination of the two such as James Dickey's *Deliverance* (1970) or Robert Schenkkan's Pulitzer Prize winning drama *The Kentucky Cycle* (1992).³² Appalachian Literature and Appalachian Studies courses include books from a wide swath of periods, authors, and genres, but when it comes to novels, we keep assigning the same three or four again and again.

Franco Moretti's quantitative approach to literary study offers a way to understand this trend. Moretti argues in *Graphs Maps Trees* that a quantitative approach – literally the counting of texts – can tell us something about literature and literary study that a qualitative approach – the close reading of texts – cannot. Moretti writes that graphing a particular literary question, for example, the gender breakdown of British novels published between 1800 and 1829, illustrates Peter Garside's premise that "the publication of Jane Austen's novels was achieved not against the grain but during a period of female ascendancy" (qtd in Moretti 28). The graphing of cycles and the counting of texts in a particular genre show the "hidden tempo" of literary development and in Moretti's words, "suggest some questions on what we would call its internal shape" (29). In a young field like Appalachian Literature, identifying what books are assigned on college reading lists shows both the margins of the field – the least-assigned texts in an Appalachian Literature class may still be called Appalachian Literature – and the

³¹ My survey of Appalachian Literature syllabi showed *Oral History* on four reading lists, *Saving Grace* on five, and *Fair and Tender Ladies* on three. Lee Smith's snake-handling and folklore novels are assigned twice as much as the postmodern one.

³² *The Kentucky Cycle* received national attention, but Appalachian Studies pushed back hard against Schenkkan's portrayal of the region. See *Back Talk from Appalachia*, edited by Dwight B. Billings, Gurney Norman, and Katherine Ledford.

center of it – what books experts in the field repeatedly read as examples of Appalachian Literature.

Counting the novels assigned in twenty-five Appalachian Literature and Appalachian Studies courses taught between 1990 and 2012, from twenty different professors at sixteen different colleges and universities reveals forty-one different novels assigned from thirty-two different authors³³. For a young field like Appalachian Literature, that represents a respectable amount of diversity, and the range, from Rebecca Harding Davis's *Life in the Iron Mills* to Gurney Norman's *Divine Right's Trip*, shows the wide array of experiences scholars attribute to Appalachia.

But instead of embracing that diversity, Appalachian Literature keeps coming back to the same stories. Fourteen of twenty-five classes read Denise Giardina's *Storming Heaven*, eleven read James Still's *River of Earth*, and twelve read something by Lee Smith³⁴. Both *Storming Heaven* and *River of Earth* tell stories of the social, economic, and environmental effects of coal mining. The ubiquity of these novels on reading lists gives coal mining a place in Appalachia's mythology that it does not occupy in most Appalachians' reality. The popularity of Lee Smith in these courses probably owes something to the range of subjects she tackles and the poignancy and comedy in her most famous narrative voices: Ivy Rowe in *Fair and Tender Ladies* and Florida Grace Shepherd in *Saving Grace*. In Emily Satterwhite's *Dear Appalachia*,

³³ On methodology: I used all the syllabi available on the Appalachian Studies Association archive, syllabi available online, and syllabi I requested from professors I knew. Multiple syllabi from the same professor were counted if course topics or reading lists differed significantly. The study was limited to novels, not poetry, short fiction, or non-fiction books.

³⁴ Full disclosure: I regularly assign *Storming Heaven*, *River of Earth*, and something by Lee Smith when I teach Appalachian Literature or Introduction to Appalachian Studies.

which analyzes reader responses to popular Appalachian fiction, her chapter “A Sweet Land That Never Was” opens by talking about *Fair and Tender Ladies*, and goes on to describe how Smith’s work, along with *Cold Mountain*, *River of Earth*, *Kinflicks*, and other novels serve as “Appalachian Studies 101,” in the minds of Appalachian literary fiction fans. Our Appalachian Literature course reading lists suggest that we keep coming back to a core group of texts – *Storming Heaven*, *River of Earth*, and something by Lee Smith – to explain to our students what it means for a novel to be Appalachian. The Appalachian Renaissance,³⁵ the boom in Appalachian Literature, narrowed instead of expanded what is read in Appalachian Literature courses.

Smith’s complicated narration calls to mind Dolly Parton’s joke that it costs a lot of money to look this cheap: it speaks to Smith’s literary prowess that her characters seem so authentic, and Smith treats the trickiest Appalachian subject matter – e.g. snake handling and haunted homeplaces – with respect while still making them funny and more real than fantastic. The most commonly assigned Lee Smith novels contain their own Appalachian Studies 101 theme and particular narrative voice: *Oral History* features multiple storytellers of the same family in a book that takes on overused Appalachian local colors; Florida Grace Shepherd narrates *Saving Grace*, a story of the rebellion and possible redemption of the daughter of a serpent-handling preacher; in *Fair and Tender Ladies*, Ivy Rowe writes letters to tell the story of her life in the mountains from youth to old age. The novels by Giardina, Smith, and Still speak to specific Appalachian lives and experiences, and they belong on syllabi and on lists of

³⁵ I borrow the dates for this term from *Appalachian Literature: An Anthology*, forthcoming from U of Kentucky P, which includes some works from the 1970s, but focuses on 1980-2000. Jesse Graves begins a bit earlier, with the publication of the first collections by Charles Wright, Fred Chappell, and Robert Morgan.

Appalachia's best fiction. However, few Appalachians will mine coal or handle snakes, and in the minds of readers, and in classrooms, they often define life in Appalachia as local colored, poverty-stricken, and culturally peculiar.

The conversation about including works from the modernist period in Appalachian Literature reading lists involves present challenges and past battles from the beginning of the conversation about Appalachian Literature as a field. Every year, new Appalachian fiction and poetry appear in bookstores and on Amazon, and this remains one of the joys for the critic or fan of Appalachian Literature. Many literary specialties mine a closed set of books and authors for new discoveries and scholarly possibilities, but for those who read and write about Southern Literature or Contemporary Literature or Appalachian Literature, the constant possibility of something new and important lends energy to the field. The Appalachian canon feels forever elastic. For instance, in my own courses, I try to assign something from the last five years to underscore the idea that Appalachian Literature still happens. Because of this, sometimes books drop off the early end or the middle of the timeline. Only three novels published before 1980 appear more than twice on the twenty-five syllabi I surveyed: *River of Earth* (1940), assigned eleven times; Harriette Arnow's *The Dollmaker* (1954), assigned seven times; and Wilma Dykeman's *The Tall Woman* (1962), assigned five times. This means that in addition to *Look Homeward, Angel* and *A Death in the Family*, James Dickey's *Deliverance* (1970), Cormac McCarthy's *Child of God* (1973) and *Suttree* (1979), and Lisa Alther's *Kinflicks* (1976) appeared one or two times each.³⁶ Giardina and Smith's novels work exceptionally well at telling

³⁶ Barbara Kingsolver is the only author after 1980 besides Giardina and Smith to have a book assigned in more than two classes. *Prodigal Summer* was assigned for three.

important Appalachian stories about coal, religion, storytelling, stereotyping, and the idea of home. They should, however, be read alongside novels that tell other Appalachian stories of diverse and even more universal experiences.

A new *Anthology of Appalachian Literature* is forthcoming from the University of Kentucky press, and editors Theresa Lloyd, Katherine Ledford, and Rebecca Stephens include a section on Modernism in Appalachian Literature. In addition to selections from Arnow's *The Dollmaker* (1954), Dykeman's *Return the Innocent Earth* (1973), and others, they include portions of *Look Homeward, Angel* and "Knoxville: Summer of 1915," the prose poem that opens the 1957 version of *A Death in the Family*. This is the first anthology to describe Appalachian Literature as having works of modernism. In *Voices from the Hills* (1975), the first anthology of Appalachian Literature, selections from Wolfe and Agee help compose the "New Dimensions of Realism" section. Alison Ensor also refer to these writers' work as "realism," (640) and Cratis Williams describes books that resemble Faulkner and Hemingway as "symbolic fiction," and "new psychological fiction" (380), though he does not include Wolfe or Agee in his roundup of *Southern Mountaineers in Fact and Fiction*. Lloyd, Ledford, and Stephens' *Anthology* could – and should – return Wolfe and Agee's work to discussions of Appalachian Literature, and in the twenty-first century era of inclusion, naming them Appalachian may not start many arguments, as it did in 1975, in response to their appearance in *Voices from the Hills*.

Following the publication of that first Appalachian anthology, W. H. Ward commented on the back and forth between Jack Higgs, who had co-edited the collection with Ambrose Manning, and Southern specialist C. Hugh Holman, who had reviewed it for *Appalachian Journal*. Ward's essay "The Rush to Find an Appalachian Literature," (1978) argued that "James

Agee's *A Death in the Family* is not in any important respect 'Appalachian'" and made a similar, but less stringent case for the works of Thomas Wolfe (624-5). He reasons that Appalachian Literature should be "writing about the southern mountains or writing which can plainly be shown to bear the impress of those mountains, and the kinds of life they have nurtured" (624). Most Appalachian scholars would agree, and ask what it means to "bear the impress" and what "kinds of life" Appalachia has nurtured. Ward believes Appalachian Literature scholars want to include these writers because of their national reputations, since much of Appalachian Literature is "distinguishable," but not much is "distinguished" (Ward 628). *Voices from the Hills*, with its inclusion of Wolfe, Sherwood Anderson, and Agee, makes a case for some nationally distinguished writers as Appalachian, but more importantly for defining the field, Jack Higgs took on the idea of distinguishable in Appalachian Literature in response to Ward.

Higgs identifies in Wolfe, Agee, and Still something common to Appalachian writers: they defy meaninglessness. He argues that Appalachian writers stop short of delivering the "Hard No," an idea Leslie Fiedler borrowed from a phrase Melville wrote to Hawthorne: "There is the grand truth about Nathaniel Hawthorne: he says No! in thunder; but the devil himself cannot make him say yes" (qtd. in Higgs 13). Leslie Fiedler takes Melville's "No! in Thunder" and applies it more broadly in American Literature. Higgs turns the "No, in Thunder" into the "Hard No":

The writer of the Hard No, such as Twain on occasion, sees all affirmations relating to family, home, country, and religion as cultural lies, a short-circuiting of truth, which, when faced head on, is invariably

bitter and hard as presented in *The Sound and the Fury* and *The Sun Also Rises*. (Higgs 42)

Instead, the Appalachian writer delivers a Hard Maybe, in the words of Jack Branscomb, or even a Yes to ideas like home, family, and religion. Writing in the early 1990s, Higgs believes the room in Appalachian Literature for affirmation has created opportunities for women novelists who see the Hard No as elitist or essentially male (9), and he names Flannery O'Connor and her theological understanding of humanity as literary antecedent to Arnow and Giardina; he could include Smith. Higgs changes the distinguishable in Appalachian Literature from the inclusion of mountaineers or "mama-and-biscuits" as one scholar recently opined³⁷, or coal mining or poverty, to an attitude about life and an openness in aesthetic choices:

In his defense of freedom of style and in his practice of the combination of modes, Nay Saying and Yea Saying, Wolfe is the prototype of the modern Appalachian novelist, neither entirely Southern like Faulkner nor modishly continental like Fitzgerald but one finding his own voice and vision on native ground. (46-47)

The ambivalence Higgs identifies in Wolfe appears in Agee and Still as well, and suggests a reason Appalachian Literature might not be an easy fit with modernism. The best Appalachian Literature rarely delivers a Hard No, but like Wolfe, Agee, and Still, affirms some meaning in family, home, or at least a shared sense of community purpose. In one of the most quoted passages from *Look Homeward, Angel*, Eugene reflects on his late brother, "We can believe in the nothingness of life, we can believe in the nothingness of death and of life after

³⁷ It was Tess Lloyd.

death – but who can believe in the nothingness of Ben?” (Wolfe 465). Agee and Still also question the nothingness or meaninglessness of family tragedy by creating stories in which religious faith and family connections provide comfort, and challenge, to Agee’s *Follets* and Still’s *Baldrigges*. Higgs correctly identifies a thread in Appalachian Literature that defies meaninglessness, but mistakenly, to my reading, assumes that Hemingway and even Faulkner embrace meaninglessness. What is called high modernism may have a reputation for being post-meaning but the symbols of and struggles with “family, home, country, and religion” (Higgs 42) appear throughout modernist literature, even if their meanings have changed³⁸. Wolfe’s particular formulation: the “nothingness of life” versus the “nothingness of Ben” captures this perfectly, and makes Wolfe an example of how these Appalachian writers grapple with modernist questions.

Unfortunately, Ward prophesied correctly: Appalachian Literature tends to include the distinguishable over the distinguished, and the inclusion of Wolfe and Agee raises the level of the Appalachian canon in a way that the inclusion of more distinguishable novels might not. Wolfe and Agee should be read as Appalachians, though, not just because their books are good, but because their books work exceptionally well at telling Appalachian stories about home, family, and loss. Agee’s *Follets* and Wolfe’s *Gants* bear the impress of the mountains in their loyalties, their biases, and in the change they experience. Their one foot in America does not negate their one foot in Appalachia. Still should be read not because his book condemns the injustices of coal mining in Appalachia; it does not. He should be read because he tells the story

³⁸ Pericles Lewis’ *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel* makes a convincing case that modernist novels express the continuing influence of religion and rely on the language of religious experience.

of how the coming of the coal mines and coal camps created a particular dilemma with broad implications: is it better to struggle living off the land or to struggle living by the vicissitudes of the coal economy? He should also be read because his innovative prose captures the human cost of this moment of modernization.

Missing Modernism

So many Appalachian novels, including those by Wolfe, Agee, and Still, address the modernization of the mountains, but rarely do scholars describe or read them as examples of modernism. In making the case for Appalachian Literature being separate from Southern Literature, Alison Ensor writes

If the canon is to be opened to Appalachia as well, then it seems appropriate that we deal with the way in which Appalachia participated in the literary movements which swept the United States during the nineteenth century and which continue to make themselves felt today.

(631)

He uses the literary godfather of Appalachia Sut Lovingood, Sut's creator George Washington Harris, and Murfree and local color to describe a pre-realism Appalachia and then cites a number of twentieth-century Appalachian writers such Mildred Haun, Arnow, and Smith to demonstrate how realism came to Appalachia and stayed. These works make a convincing case for Ensor's point, that Appalachia takes part in American realism through its rejection of romanticism, an interesting development for a place so connected in the imagination to nature. His timeline, however, which includes Wolfe, Still, and Agee, leaves little room for Appalachia to participate in literary movements of the early twentieth century, particularly modernism.

In differentiating Appalachian Literature from Southern Literature, a generation of scholars such as Miller, Higgs, and Ensor include Wolfe, Still, and Agee as Appalachian, and acknowledge Wolfe's connection to modernism, often while complaining about his writing. Perhaps, though, to draw some lines between his work and the Southern canon, so connected to modernism because of Faulkner and the Agrarians, they inadvertently separate Appalachian Literature from its closest neighbor. Arguments like Higgs' – modernists like Hemingway and Faulkner deliver Hard Nos, Appalachian writers like Wolfe and Agee Hard Maybes – and Ensor's –Appalachian Literature continues to be realist after American and Southern Literature move to modernism – differentiate Appalachia Literature from Southern Literature. They suggest that while Southern Literature embraces modernism, Appalachian Literature stays rooted in the nineteenth century.

Recent essays that survey Appalachian Literature minimize modernism in Appalachia by acknowledging its existence, but placing it on a later timeline than Southern or American modernism. Wolfe, Agee, and Still continue to be described as realist instead of modernist. Ted Olson's "Literature" essay in *High Mountains Rising* (2004), which updates Williams' dissertation and Miller's 1977 article, describes works by Wolfe, Still, Arnow, and Stuart as "much more realistic – their authors more keenly familiar with the subtleties of regional culture – than the local color writing of the previous historical period" (171). By realism, Olson means less romantic and quaint, and these writers are, but accentuating their realism overlooks their modernist aesthetics and themes. Describing poets between 1930-1960 he writes, "In general, poets from Appalachia rejected the high modernist aesthetics of abstraction and indirection

and instead used simple, dialect-inspired language, emotional directness, and often traditional prosody" (171)³⁹.

Chris Green's *The Social Life of Poetry: Appalachia, Race, and Radical Modernism* (2009) does not refute this evaluation, but complicates it by describing Appalachian poetry by Still, Jesse Stuart, Muriel Rukeyser, and Don West as part of a movement by progressive publishing figures in the 1930s to expand the American literary identity to include African-American, Jewish, and Appalachian poets. In a fascinating study of these poets' publication and reception, Green makes connections between Appalachia and American modernity that suggest Appalachia participated in American modernism, albeit with its own voice. In describing Still's collection *Hounds on the Mountain*, he asks,

Was Still propagating and sustaining fantasies that America held about a difference between a learned, exterior, benevolent culture and its mindful affirmation of America through aid rendered to an illiterate, interior, primal culture? Or was Still aiding in the contact, appreciation, and inevitable transformation of both cultures? (152)

³⁹ Olson does argue that evidence of modernism appears in Appalachia fifty to seventy years after the advent of American modernism. He describes the 1970s and 1980s as a time when more Appalachian works bear modernist aesthetics, which he describes as "more minimalist and ironic and less nostalgic" (172). His examples include Breece D'J Pancake and Pinckney Benedict, and he groups *Storming Heaven* in this category, perhaps because its multiple narrators create the feeling of a story told by "an entire community united in a moral struggle" (173). Chapter Four will examine this idea, that late twentieth century works of Appalachian Literature show the influence of modernism, in the work of Cormac McCarthy and Jo Carson, both of whom Olson names as Appalachian but not in his discussion of modernists.

Green pushes the second interpretation, and the difference is significant. If the former, Still becomes another example of Appalachia's pre-modern character; if the latter, Still demonstrates Appalachia's literature playing a role in American modernism.

Appalachian scholars also overlook modernism because so much of the conversation about Appalachian Literature revolves around stereotypes, representation, and authenticity. Instead of discussing how specific works fit into literary movements or periods, a recent overview from *A Handbook to Appalachia*⁴⁰ (2006) focuses on how Appalachian Literature has portrayed the region. This essay identifies *Look Homeward, Angel* as an unnatural fit for the label Appalachian because of its urban setting and because "it does not deal with the typical Appalachian backwoods people" (201). The writers go on to say that "a serious misconception of the Appalachian region is its homogeneity of experience, with the rural stereotype as the norm" (Miller et al. 201). This misconception continues, not just as a stereotype but in how Appalachian experience is reinforced in the novels Appalachia identifies as its own. For example, *A Death in the Family* is described by these authors as "often seen as defying its regionalism" (202), and Lisa Alther, Dorothy Allison, Jayne Anne Phillips, and Annie Dillard are "not often identified in literary circles as Appalachian" (202). This only tells part of the story; they are also not seen in Appalachian circles as Appalachian, at least according to reading lists and critical attention. These books defy their regionalism in the best ways when they address the intellectual, spiritual, and emotional lives of human beings who, though shaped by place, share the same stories as people throughout the country and the world. Their one foot in America does not negate their one foot in Appalachia, but few books that receive broad cultural

⁴⁰ By Danny Miller, Sandra Ballard, Roberta Herrin, Stephen D. Mooney, Susan Underwood, and Jack Wright

acclaim, like *Kinflicks* or Dillard's Pulitzer Prize-winning nonfiction *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, find a place back home in Appalachian Literature.

Even in our best Appalachian literary scholarship, modernism goes missing. The excellent batch of essays in *An American Vein: Critical Readings in Appalachian Literature* (2005) includes two on Arnow, Dykeman, Miller, Norman, Smith, Carson, one on Giardina, McCarthy, and the Affrilachians, but no mention of Agee, and few mentions of Wolfe. Still's poetry gets two essays. Modernism does appear as a topic in an essay on how Jesse Stuart and Ezra Pound both won awards from the Academy of American Poets, Stuart in 1960 and Pound in 1963. Charles H. Daughaday sees in the timing of these awards "an appropriate place to locate a significant turn in the history of American poetics and its canon" (40), with Still representing "traditionalist poetry" and Pound representing "high modernism," (41-42) but Daughaday also suggests that Pound's award represented an attempt to "rehabilitate his reputation" after he allied himself intellectually with fascism. In other likely places to mention modernism, essays on Jo Carson's play *Daytrips* and Fred Chappell's poem *Midquest*, writers Anita J. Turpin and John Lang describe modernist conventions, but do not mention modernism. Turpin writes, "Structurally, *Daytrips* breaks with realistic theatrical conventions of both characters and staging," (232) and according to Lang, "Like Eliot's various personae, Ole Fred seeks to escape the spiritual desolation of contemporary life, its emotional aridity and lack of connections" (241). Here, it seems, would be a place to nod to modernism. This collection states among its goals "to exemplify the quality and range of Appalachian literature"; "to provide representative essays that illumine the work of leading Appalachian authors of the twentieth century"; and "to present Appalachian literary criticism as a vital part of the

American literary tradition,” (Miller, Hatfield, Norman xvii) but overlooks Wolfe and Agee and shies away from identifying modernism in Appalachia.

One recalls Eli Cash, the novelist from Wes Anderson’s *The Royal Tennenbaums* asking, “Why would a reviewer make a point of saying someone’s not a genius?” These scholars, syllabi, and anthologies suggest that modernism does not exist in Appalachian Literature, or that modernist aesthetics and themes did not appear in Appalachia until the 1970s. Why would Appalachian literature avoid a discussion of modernism in its reading lists and scholarly conversation, especially when the topics of modernization lie at the center of so much Appalachian Literature? For example, *Storming Heaven*, *River of Earth*, and *The Dollmaker* tell stories of Appalachia changing in the first half of the twentieth century through mining and outmigration, and Miller, Smith, McCarthy, Phillips and others have written poetry or prose about Appalachia’s economic, social, and cultural changes in the second half of the century. Modernization, or what happens in the mountains when the world changes, remains a central topic in Appalachian Literature and Appalachian Studies, but modernism, the “expressive dimension of modernity” according to Susan Stanford Friedman, appears rarely and late in the discussion of Appalachian Literature (“Periodizing” 432). Why?

Internal Colony and Antimodernism

I have two theories: the internal colony theory and the antimodernism theory. The first suggests that Appalachia develops modernity later than the rest of the country because Appalachia exists as an “internal colony” throughout much of the twentieth century. This theory involves combining a major storyline of Appalachian Studies, Appalachia as internal

colony, with an idea by Friedman, that “the centrality of colonialism and postcolonialism for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries requires a new geography of modernity and modernism” (“Periodizing” 427). Modernity reached colonial locations throughout the world at different times than it reached western Europe and North America. Friedman believes that limiting the period of modernism to when it reached the West (roughly 1890 to 1940) excludes non-Western colonies from experiencing modernism and potentially mislabels their modernism as postmodernism or something else. In short, multiple modernities create multiple modernisms on multiple timelines. Friedman’s idea could explain why Appalachia sees so much experimental literature from the 1970s and beyond in the work of McCarthy, Carson, Chappell, Smith, Don Johnson, Charles Wright, and others. Aesthetic experimentation as a strategy to describe the rupture of traditional understandings of family, religion, and landscape appears in a number of works of Appalachian Literature fifty or so years after that same trend in American and Southern Literature⁴¹.

If Appalachia can be called an internal colony, then Friedman’s idea accounts for a boom in late twentieth century Appalachian modernism, and Wolfe, Agee, and Still belong to a different timeline, or they represent a liminal precursor between Southern and Appalachian Literatures or American and Appalachian Literature, a possibility for which her theory also accounts, since she views “boundaries between multiple modernisms as porous and

⁴¹ This is the first hypothesis I had for this project. I thought Appalachia experienced modernism after the rest of the country because life in Appalachia changed on a different timeline than the rest of the country. Slowly, I came to think that instead, Appalachia ignored or denied that it had changed at the same time as the rest of the country. Another possibility is that different regions and populations of Appalachia modernize at different paces.

permeable” (“Periodizing” 428). The late blooming of Appalachian Modernism also explains the tendency to label early twentieth century Appalachian fiction as realism.

The problem with this theory lies with the idea that Appalachia is an internal colony, which assumes a reductionist relationship between Appalachia and the rest of the United States. *Colonialism in Modern America: The Appalachian Case* (1978),⁴² a collection of scholarly essays, journalistic articles, and editorials edited by Helen Matthews Lewis, Linda Johnson, and Don Askins, codified the idea of Appalachia as an internal colony. This idea says that the outsider ownership of Appalachian resources – particularly coal, timber, power-production – and the characterization of Appalachians as backward and ignorant by outside forces – mass media – led to economic oppression, environmental devastation, and a negative Appalachian self-image. A look at the facts confirms the ubiquity of economic, environmental, and cultural oppression in Appalachia; however, the injustices of Appalachia’s extraction industries and the stereotyping of poor Appalachians do not isolate Appalachia from the forces of change and upheaval in the early twentieth century, nor from the intellectual, cultural, or commercial trends that accompanied modernization.

A March 2015 roundtable at the Appalachian Studies Association conference, the highlights of which were reprinted in the *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, examined the efficacy and relevance of the internal colony model for understanding Appalachia. Organizers and editors Steve Fisher and Barbara Ellen Smith write that

⁴² An Appalachian Studies classic, this volume includes a wide range of styles, subject matter, and anecdotes. In addition to codifying the model of Appalachian scholar as activist, this book also includes information and opinion on everything from how the TVA went wrong to how farmers felt when the Mast Store in Valle Crucis changed their lunch menu to target second-home Appalachians.

as emotionally satisfying as this perspective can be, we, along with a number of others, have come to believe that blaming “outsiders” for regional economic problems is an over-simplification, if not outright distortion. When we focus on where people are *from*, as the main problem, we run the risk of exonerating everyone *in* the region as good and implying that we who live here are, in this most fundamental respect of residence, all the same in our righteousness. (47)

I agree that Appalachia’s development and economy demonstrate characteristics specific to the region like mining and domestic agriculture, but not an exceptional identity that means it modernized on a different timeline than the rest of the country. Other writers on the panel offer alternatives to the internal colony theory to understand Appalachian history and poverty. Mary Anglin sees Appalachia as one of several American poverty zones like the Ninth Ward of New Orleans and the city of Detroit (55). Dwight Billings advocates a postmodernist take that starts with a neo-Marxist view that “regions do not exploit regions; rather, classes exploit classes,” but nuances the Marxist view by delineating class as one factor, but not the “essential motor of history” (58-59), and also describes class as an activity performed by processes and not an identity held by groups, allowing single individuals to take part in more than one “class story” (60). One may be involved in a process of capitalist exploitation (mining coal), local agriculture (growing and selling vegetables), and altruism (mowing the lawn for an elderly neighbor) all at the same time.

Not everyone is ready to leave the internal colony theory behind. As cited in Chapter One, Silas House writes that Appalachians themselves share the blame for the region’s

problems with a number of outside forces and the politicians Appalachians choose to represent them. In their conclusion, Smith and Fisher report the resistance to and the challenges of moving past the internal colony model in Appalachian Studies, particularly that so much of Appalachian Studies assumes this characterization. However, the idea that Appalachia somehow missed modernism in the first half of the twentieth century because Appalachia's connection to the United States is analogous to India or South Africa's relationship to Great Britain, or that outside ownership of Appalachian resources prohibited Appalachia from experiencing change and upheaval in the early twentieth century has fallen out of favor with scholars because it describes a small portion of Appalachia; because it minimizes Appalachia's agency in its own economy and culture; and also most convincingly from my perspective, because it assumes an isolation economically and culturally at odds with Appalachian history and art. Though scholars are beginning to rethink or revise internal colony theory, its dominance in Appalachian Studies combined with Friedman's multiple modernisms on multiple timelines helps explain why critics argued that Appalachia missed modernism in the first half of the twentieth century.

The second theory as to why Appalachian Literature avoids talk of modernism and the books that might begin that conversation has to do with the idea of antimodernism. Emily Satterwhite's *Dear Appalachia* analyzes fan mail about books with Appalachian settings to determine how readers of popular Appalachian fiction viewed Appalachia from 1878 to 2003. She reports that "over the course of a century and more, readers embraced a surprisingly static view of Appalachia"; perhaps not surprisingly, readers "conceived the region as a rooted, rural place populated by simple whites with a rich and colorful heritage protected from mass

culture” (Satterwhite 2). Satterwhite discusses Lears in the context of John Fox, Jr.’s *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (1908), a bestseller about family loyalty, feuding, and the coming of coal to the Appalachians. In addition to her discussion of the novel as an early example of fiction about Appalachia’s transition to modernity, with both the advent of industrial capitalism and “law and order” (Satterwhite 62), she also contextualizes the reception of the book as fitting into both the contemporary ancestor narrative and as a reassurance of America’s whiteness in a time of immigration and social change: “Fox’s ‘authentic’ white mountaineers therefore offered antimodernist tonic and respite” (Satterwhite 65).

The antimodernism described in Lears’ *No Place of Grace* (1981) mostly takes place in the minds and communities of wealthy urban Americans for whom modernity threatened a comfortable or privileged way of life or self-identity. This formulation does not easily apply to Appalachia, but some of the specifics of Lears’ characterization of antimodernism do, and the idea, that simplicity, nature, and traditional religious values and family structures could provide some escape or solace or “tonic and respite” from modernity help explain why Appalachian Literature continues to avoid too much conversation about its modernism both in the early century and in the 1970s and 1980s. In his introduction, Lears writes that during modernization, “Industrial workers from agrarian or craft backgrounds often resisted factory discipline; embattled farmers sometimes imagined an agrarian paradise lost; backcountry fundamentalists raged against urban vice” (xiv), which describes an antimodernism more at home in the mountains. His discussion of the Arts and Crafts movement makes it clear that furniture maker Gustav Stickley had little in common with Miller’s Brier besides building chairs, but the quest for the “authentic” lies at the heart of both Stickley and the Brier’s marketing

plans, and at the heart of Lears' book. Modernity felt morally and physically weightless, according to Lears, using Nietzsche's description of the post-Christian West (Lears 41), and the eclecticism in modern urban environments felt unreal, leaving city dwellers anxious for the relative uniformity and order of colonial development. In his Epilogue, Lears writes that "yearnings for the authentic, the natural, the real pervade American culture" (305). In the last several decades, Appalachian Literature has attempted to construct or to preserve some authentic, natural, real Appalachia in its development, and in doing so, minimized literature too far outside those boundaries.

In Appalachia, not About Appalachia

The second half of this chapter analyzes how *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929), *River of Earth* (1940), and *A Death in the Family* (1957) demonstrate literary modernism at work in Appalachia and serves as illustration of my contention in the first half that Appalachia and Appalachian fiction experienced the same early and mid-twentieth century as America and the south. Modernization in the mountains brought about by economic, cultural, and technological change provides the backdrop for Wolfe and Agee's novels and is the central theme of Still's. Wolfe's stream-of-consciousness pastiche, Still's hardscrabble narration, and Agee's prose-poetry and character consciousness-jumping exemplify the aesthetic innovation of the time. These books break from the realism of the nineteenth century and align with the stylistic experimentation of Faulkner, Joyce, Hemingway, and Woolf in the twentieth.

Though each work takes place in particular Appalachian settings, their conflicts transcend local and regional concerns. In *A Death in the Family*, the religious beliefs that divide the Follets are not Pentecostal or Holiness but Catholic. Education-level and class aspirations

create tension in the Gant family in *Look Homeward, Angel*. In *River of Earth*, the Baldridges face disagreements between generations and within a marriage over pursuing agricultural or industrial work and over settling in the country or in the town. Old ways of life fade and new ways appear. Some people change with the times and some stay rooted in the past, and these books present those choices for the reader to parse. Not every decision to leave results in tragedy and not every character connected to the past connotes moral purity.

Storming Heaven, The Dollmaker, and a number of other Appalachian texts point to outside economic, social, and environmental forces coming in to Appalachia and taking away the life Appalachians used to lead. In *Look Homeward, Angel* and *A Death in the Family*, on the other hand, life changes from within. Brothers and fathers die. Families fall apart and carry on broken. Life changes, as it does in the rest of the country and the world, and the literary representations of these family dramas change as well. Admitting that Appalachia undergoes the same changes as the rest of the country, and that Appalachia produces literature that wrestles with these changes, undermines the narrative of Appalachia as victim of the twentieth century, but it enables a complex and diverse literary identity for Appalachia in line with the variety of lived experiences during the period of Appalachia's modernization.

Look Homeward Angel, River of Earth, and *A Death in the Family* could all be described as father-son stories, stories of boys coming of age, or stories of families in transition. Though such stories could be set anywhere, Appalachia provides more than backdrop; it defines the contours of the books' central familial relationships. The Gants, the Baldridges, and the Follets come from the mountains of North Carolina, Kentucky, and Tennessee respectively, or they represent mixed marriages of Appalachian insiders and outsiders. In *Look Homeward, Angel*,

Eugene Gant's mother Eliza Pentland is an Altamont native; his father W. Oliver Gant moves there from Pennsylvania by way of Baltimore and Sydney, Wolfe's Raleigh stand-in. Brock Baldridge and Alpha Middleton of *River of Earth* both have family near the Eastern Kentucky setting. In Agee's novel, Jay Follet's people come from outside of Knoxville and some, like Great Aunt Sadie and Jay's great "granmaw," still live in the mountains in an old cabin. The parents of Jay's wife Mary, who have relatives in Michigan and are likely Michiganders themselves, live in Knoxville and look askance at the Follets. Cratis Williams wrote that Appalachian "literature has treated only one relatively small class of mountaineers: the most isolated, the least educated, the most likely, therefore, to perform certain symbolic functions" (qtd. in Shelby 34). While this observation may have an element of truth, the Appalachians in these novels represent different social classes, educational aspirations, and relationships to the region.

Wolfe's Appalachia

Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel* contains enough material both to fulfill the twenty-first century expectations of an Appalachian novel and to explode them. The book teems with scenes of mountains, family conflict, and young love, but also turns some expectations of the Appalachian novel upside down. Eugene, the character at the center of the *bildungsroman* wants to leave the mountains; the father who represents an old way of life comes from outside the region, and the mother from Appalachia so embraces capitalism that she sells out the family home and the idea of land for profit. Wolfe's Altamont shows an Appalachia in transition from quiet mountain village to twentieth century town; Eugene experiences romantic rapture and modernist alienation; and the Gant family suffers through substance abuse, greed, the

death of two sons, and divisions in education and aspiration between the older children and the younger. This all takes place in Appalachia, not through the workings of an outside malevolence, but through the processes of internal modernization. The Gants and Altamont react to the forces of modernization that exist both inside and outside Appalachia. Some characters embrace these changes; others fear them, but Wolfe does not paint a picture of opposing sides in a war between the mountain past and the modern present because the battle lines are blurry and because Eugene's loyalties to and longings for each ebb and flow. He both admires and finds solace in the nature of the mountains, but also longs for a life of intellectual pursuit outside of Altamont.

Despite the rapid pace of change in his family and town, Eugene roots himself in the enduring mountains: "The mountains were his masters. They rimmed in life. They were the cup of reality, beyond growth, beyond struggle and death. They were his absolute unity in the midst of eternal change" (Wolfe 158). Eugene's strong connection to the mountains suggests that Appalachianness extends beyond the backwoods to urban places, and Eugene's depiction of the immutability of the mountains sometimes sounds like the outsider's romanticizing an unchanging Appalachia. But Wolfe's narration denies to human beings the option of remaining static, and in a modernist moment of speed and dislocation, describes

So many of the sensations that returned to open haunting vistas of
fantasy and imagining had been caught from a whirling landscape
through the windows of the train. And it was this that awed him – the
weird combination of fixity and change, the terrible moment of

immobility stamped with eternity which, passing life at great speed, both the observer and the observed seem frozen in time. (Wolfe 159)

Echoing Whitman's Brooklyn ferry crossing of simultaneous stillness and movement, Wolfe juxtaposes the pace of modern life in America with the immobile backdrop of the Appalachians, and perhaps something more. Blurring the lines between the static mountains and his own frenetic "passing life," Wolfe destabilizes the difference between the two. By the end of the book, the mountains have moved, too, becoming a destination to which he journeys instead of the place where he begins. In this novel, the mountains, like Eugene, change.

Wolfe's changing relationship to the mountains as a symbol and to Appalachia as an idea has long intrigued scholars both inside and outside Appalachia. Ruel Foster's "Thomas Wolfe's Mountain Gloom and Glory" (1973) charted the evolution of Wolfe's relationship to the mountains and its people, and though the word Appalachia does not appear in the article, Foster's reference to hillbillies, poor whites, and the Blue Ridge all demonstrate consciousness of the novel's Appalachian context. Foster writes that in Wolfe's early work, the people of the mountains represent the provincial lack of horizons that Wolfe wanted to escape. Higgs, Manning, and Miller used Foster to defend their inclusion of Wolfe in *Voices from the Hills* in "More on Appalachian Literature" (1977). Anne Shelby uses Wolfe in her useful companion to the Williams (1961) – Miller (1977) – Olson (2004) history of Appalachian Literature, and *Voices From the Hills* debates in her "Appalachian Literature," which adds "and American Myth" (1985) for parts two and three. In other words, a vigorous conversation about Wolfe and Appalachia took place years ago when Appalachian Literature was being defined, and in the twenty-first

century, Wolfe has garnered renewed attention for his connection to the land – what Robert Taylor Ensign calls his “greener modernism.”

In claiming Wolfe for Appalachia, these scholars agree that Wolfe’s Appalachia differs from Wolfe’s South. Wolfe’s Appalachia does not carry the burden of history that the South does; the South connotes former glory for Wolfe, but Wolfe links Appalachia more closely to American nature (Shelby 45-46). And though Eugene Gant grows up in Dixieland, he describes his trips out of Altamont as a journey to another place: “Eugene voyaged year by year into the rich mysterious South,” (Wolfe 126) particularly Florida, Georgia, New Orleans, and South Carolina, where he travels with his mother Eliza and reports, “His feeling for the South was not so much historic as it was of the core and desire of dark romanticism” (Wolfe 127). Eugene creates his own myth of the South, and as Shelby and others note, his own myth of Appalachia when he retreats to the mountains around Altamont. Eugene connects himself with the mountains, and the South remains an imaginative other: “Thus did he see first, he the hill-bound, the sky-girt, of whom the mountains were his masters, the fabulous South” (Wolfe 133). Wolfe identifies as a hill-bound, and his Appalachia contains the mountains and his romantic relationship to them, but also Altamont, the town from which he longs to escape.

Wolfe’s ambivalence towards Appalachia, a place he feels connected to but also trapped by, appears throughout the novel and in the scholarship about the novel. Shelby sides with Shapiro that Appalachia constitutes a mythical American idea, but nuances that argument by delineating more than one Appalachian myth. Higgs, Manning and Miller and Shelby agree with Foster that Wolfe’s attitude toward Appalachia softened in his later works, so that in *The Hills Beyond*, a novel Wolfe died before finishing, the mountains and its people become a potential

savior for what ails modernizing America. As early as his third novel, *The Web and The Rock* (1937), Wolfe “echoes the perception of Appalachia as ‘the essential America’”⁴³ (Shelby 45).

In this novel, Eugene’s attitude towards Altamontians and Gants demonstrates Wolfe’s conflicted feelings, and Eugene’s desire to escape comes both from the push of a family dynamic that Eugene and his siblings resent and from the pull of the possibilities of life and education outside Altamont. Eugene looks to leave Altamont, partly because of its provincialism⁴⁴, but also because modernization in the town and the changes it brings about in the family, both embodied in Eliza’s burgeoning capitalism and W. O. Gant’s drunken hold on an older way of life, make Eugene miserable. Eliza Pentland Gant, the Appalachian insider, represents the commercialization of Altamont through real estate speculation based on the earning potential of modernization; W. O. Gant, the outsider who finds a home in the mountains, resists change, keeping his little tombstone-carving shop on a prime piece of downtown real estate long after he might have sold it for a sizable profit. Eugene’s parents pursue their own agendas to the detriment of their marriage and children, whose help they enlist in their projects. Brother Ben tells Eugene, “You’ve never had a chance to hold your head up in your own home town, so make the most of your chances when you get away” (Wolfe 327).

At the core of Eugene’s misery lies Dixieland, Eliza’s boarding house, and the pursuit of material wealth it represents. The monetization of the Appalachian homeplace shows up as a

⁴³ Appalachia as essential America is an idea also implied in William Carlos Williams’ “To Elsie” and Martha Graham’s *Appalachian Spring*, as discussed in Chapter One.

⁴⁴ Foster writes, “the general literary mode prevailing at the time which said that the country, the small town, the mountain world was niggardly, Babbitt-like and cramped the human spirit” (641).

common theme in Appalachian Literature, in *Storming Heaven* as a tragedy and in *Oral History* as a wry joke. But, in *Look Homeward, Angel*, it becomes a symbol of his mother's choosing profit over parenting:

Eugene was ashamed of Dixieland...He hated the indecency of his life, the loss of dignity and seclusion, the surrender to the tumultuous rabble of the four walls which shield us from them...There was no place sacred unto themselves, no place fixed for their own habitation, no place proof against the invasion of the boarders. (Wolfe 112)

Wolfe ties this impulse in Eliza to both her identity as a Pentland, and the commercialization of Altamont. This may not be the central story Wolfe sets out to tell in a novel that spends so much time on the Gant family dynamic and Eugene's coming of age, but Eliza's story provides strong evidence that Appalachia experienced modernization at the same time as the south and the country as a whole. The Pentlands, an old and poor family of Appalachian insiders, see themselves as superior to many of the mountain families in their community. Because of bouts with poverty following the Civil War, they possess a strong frugality and desire for property. In modernizing Altamont, Eliza sees her opportunity, and Wolfe describes her as having a map of the town in her head and a running tally of property values. Eugene's oldest brother Luke, who moves in and out of Altamont as Ben grows up, also embraces the changes coming to the mountains as economic opportunity. When Luke takes a job with an auctioneer, he prophecies Altamont's rapid move into the twentieth century as a part of his sales pitch:

Are you men of vision? Think what Ford, Edison, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Julius Caesar would do. Obey that impulse. The town is coming this way...Own your own home in beautiful Homewood, within a cannonshot of all railway, automobile, and airplane connections. Running water abounds within a Washingtonian stone's throw and in all the pipes. Our caravans meet all trains. (Wolfe 212, 213)

The Gants' story reflects larger historical and cultural patterns of the teens and twenties and shows the effect world and national events had on everyday life in Appalachia. Luke fails out of college and in a move that prefigures decades of outmigration from the mountains, moves to Dayton, Ohio to work in a factory revving up for World War I. W.O. embraces motion picture shows, Coca Cola, and tourism by car. The Gants' world changes and they change with it. Gant sometimes pines for the past, but the rest of the family looks for opportunity in the future. Through the loss of two sons, continual tension over money and business, and a kind of rivalry between Eliza and W.O. over who will best care for Eugene, the Gants model a non-traditional marriage, living separately while maintaining a strong bond of equal parts attraction and revulsion. Wolfe seems aware of the connection between the changing times and his changing family: "The Gants, after initial surprise, moulded new events very quickly into the texture of their lives. Abysmal change widened their souls out in a brooding unconsciousness" (314). It is young Eugene, not W.O. or Eliza, who continually looks back while also looking to the future when he can leave Altamont behind.

Just as Wolfe shows that that modernization came to the mountains, his novel shows how literary modernism came to Appalachia. His nostalgia shows up most pointedly in his most

experimental moments, in the poetic passages of loss that seek to conjure from memory the life Eugene has lived and also wants to leave. Wolfe scatters these throughout the book, aided by the pacing instincts of his editor Maxwell Perkins, and pours out the most concentrated, least realist prose in the final pages of the novel. In a walk around Altamont's town square, where the faded name of his father's shop still appears in a moonlight vision, Eugene meets his dead brother Ben. Eugene tells Ben that his father's shop will be torn down to make room for a skyscraper: "Everything is going. Everything changes and passes away" (Wolfe 518). Wolfe tries to capture Ben's life in these paragraphs, like Duchamp capturing in an image the act of descending a staircase; the conflict between the unchanging and the rapidly rupturing finds a human personification in Ben:

And through him the Square, unwoven from lost time, the fierce bright
 horde of Ben spun in and out its deathless loom. Ben, in a thousand
 moments, walked the Square: Ben of the lost years, the forgotten days,
 the unremembered hours; prowled by the moonlit facades; vanished,
 returned, left, and rejoined himself, was one and many – deathless Ben in
 search of the lost dead lusts, the finished enterprise, the unfound door –
 unchanging Ben multiplying himself in form, by all the brick facades
 entering and coming out. (Wolfe 518)

Wolfe's text breaks Ben apart into a multiplicity of moments in an attempt to capture the complexity of Ben and also Eugene's imagination and memory of Ben in a clear, if

unintentional, echo of Duchamp⁴⁵. The more outrageous ambition in this passage, to render life from lifelessness, makes a strong case for the novel as modernist experiment, far removed from any kind of realism.

Ben's death, a personal tragedy for Eugene, also marks and becomes the passing of an era in the life of Eugene's town, Altamont, and his family, the Gants. Altamont continues to exist, but the place Eugene inhabits, and that Wolfe spends so much of *Look Homeward, Angel* recreating, goes away when its time ends and a new time begins. Like all families, the Gants grow old, their children move away, they endure irreplaceable loss. The mountains provide no protection from the modernization of their town or the mutability of their family life. And yet, as Eugene finishes his conversation with Ben and begins his journey away from Appalachia, Altamont, and the Gants, Wolfe reframes the mountains. Instead of being a source of unchanging stability in Eugene's life, they become a symbol of the life and the person to come: "he was like a man who stands upon a hill above the town he has left, yet does not say 'The town is near,' but turns his eyes upon the distant soaring ranges" (Wolfe 522). Wolfe chronicles a young man, a town, and a family adjusting to a changing America, and also captures the complicated calculus of a modernizing Appalachia.

⁴⁵ Compare Wolfe's description of Ben to Duchamp's description of his famous painting: "Painted, as it is, in severe wood colors, the anatomical nude does not exist, or at least cannot be seen, since I discarded completely the naturalistic appearance of a nude, keeping only the abstract lines of some twenty different static positions in the successive action of descending" (qtd. in Judovitz 28-29).

Agee's Changing Appalachia

Based on its inclusion in the southern and American canon, James Agee's *A Death in the Family* (1957) is a tougher sell as an example of Appalachian Modernism. *Look Homeward, Angel* has long been considered modernist and often Appalachian. *River of Earth*, which will be discussed last, continues to be a core text of the Appalachian canon, though as a novel about coal and not an example of modernism. *A Death in the Family*, on the other hand, displays few conventional Appalachian qualities as Hugh Holman argues and lacks the overt modernist stylings of *Look Homeward, Angel*. In addition, its late publication date strains the edges of the modernist timeline, a discussion I will pick up in Chapter Four with the discussion of metamodernist works from Appalachia.

Further complicating matters, Agee's novel has recently received a scholarly makeover from Michael Lofaro, whose analysis of the manuscripts left behind by Agee when he died in 1955 revealed the extent to which the 1957 *A Death in the Family* was shaped by its editor David McDowell. The Lofaro-edited *A Death in the Family: A Restoration of the Author's Text* differs greatly from McDowell's, most obviously and pointedly in its introduction and structure. Lofaro's edition produces a more Appalachian *A Death in the Family*, but also a more realist one, with Jay more a presence than an absence, and Rufus's relationship with his father more explicit than McDowell's italicized fragmented memory passages that close the first two of the original edition's three sections. Lofaro's sequential ordering of events produces a less experimental novel than McDowell's, but my discussion of *A Death in the Family* considers the McDowell edition the likeliest version for students and scholars to read, and so my quotations come from and my discussion refers to that version. Lofaro's analysis and insight, however,

particularly from his “James Agee’s *A Death in the Family*: Personal Identity and Conflict in an Emerging Appalachia” inform my argument that McDowell’s *A Death in the Family* constitutes an important work of Appalachian Modernism.

McDowell decided, unilaterally at the time, but in retrospect to general approbation, to begin Agee’s novel with his previously published prose poem “Knoxville: Summer of 1915,” which, as a number of critics note, sets a gentle elegiac tone for the *A Death in the Family* that won the Pulitzer in 1958. Lofaro’s edition (2007) begins with Rufus’s dream – Lofaro calls it a nightmare – of carrying the body of John the Baptist, recently killed by an angry mob, through the streets of Knoxville to a particular resting place, a lot in the city where Rufus often sat with his father. Upon waking, Rufus realizes that the body, which decomposes along the way and loses its head as they reach the lot despite Rufus’s care with the corpse, must be his father’s; at least, the dream inevitably leads him to a remembrance of his father. The tone this scene sets, of mysterious horror despite Rufus’s best efforts, colors Lofaro’s longer, chronologically-structured restoration of the novel just as much as the image of Knoxville’s fathers watering their lawns in unison colors McDowell’s version.

However, Lofaro’s argument that the novel takes place at the crossroads of a modernizing Appalachia, a moment of conflict between the past and the future, reveals that McDowell’s *A Death in the Family* cannot help but be set in the same place. In the first chapter of McDowell’s version, after a trip to downtown Knoxville for a Charlie Chaplin movie, Rufus and his father take a break from walking to sit on a rock in a vacant lot where his father likes to look at the city and the valley beyond. The introductory “Knoxville: Summer of 1915” has already placed the Follets in urban Knoxville, and Chapter One situates Knoxville in the

mountains, as Jay and Rufus sit silently together, semi-consciously aware of their deep belonging to one another:

There were no ideas, or formed emotions, of the kind that have been suggested here, no more in the man than in the boy child. These realizations moved clearly through the senses, the memory, the feelings, the mere feelings of the place they paused at, about a quarter of a mile from home, on a rock under a stray tree that had grown in the city, their feet on undomesticated clay, facing north through the night over the Southern Railway tracks and over North Knoxville, towards the deeply folded small mountains and the Powell River Valley. (Agee 19)

Agee ties the moments of connection Rufus and Jay experience in this lot to Jay's desire to look back on the place his family comes from in the Powell River Valley. To see his homeplace, Jay has to look through the city. Moments before, when Jay stops in to the tavern for a drink, Rufus notices his father searching for anyone he might know from his home community. Jay lives with one foot in the town and the other in the country.

In the long impressionistic italicized passage at the end of Part Two, Jay, Rufus, and the Follets travel back to the mountains in Jay's Model T to visit great aunt Sadie and Jay's great grandmother⁴⁶. The cabin they visit sits far back in a "long, narrow valley" between "dark ridges" and none of the Follets know exactly where they are going, so long has it been since they visited their rural relatives (Agee 211). Agee's use of dialect during this section places the

⁴⁶ McDowell turned Agee's straightforward memory-narrative, found in the early chapters of the Lofaro edition, into sections of Faulkner-esque impressionistic fragments to close the first two parts of his edition.

conversation outside of Knoxville and down in the valley: “*Bin a coon’s age since she seen so many folk at onct....Mought skeer her if ye all come a whoopin up at her in a flock*” (212). Jay’s moving to Knoxville from the Valley does not signal so much a change in place as a change in the nature of life in Appalachia. In his book *Knoxville, Tennessee: A Mountain City in the New South*, William Bruce Wheeler describes Knoxville in the twentieth century as “a product of the struggle between innovators and traditionalists, between those who embraced change and those who were threatened by it” (2), and the Follets illustrate this. As more opportunities emerged in the city, young men left the farm, and the tension, between a rural life and an urban one, between staying and going, lies under the more present dilemma of Jay’s not being around to take care of his sick father and his drinking brother⁴⁷. This trend of urbanization enabled by transportation, technology, and spurred by economic development peaked in the mid-twentieth century when moving from the cities to the suburbs became more common (Gregory 540-51). The Follets of Knoxville follow a trajectory common to the country, not just Appalachia. Jay’s telephone and Model T allow the modern convenience of the quick visit to his father’s house, but to get there, Jay still has to wait for the ferryman to carry him and his car across the river. The conflict between the old and new – Jay’s father and Jay’s children, the ferry and the Model T, Knoxville and the farm – lies at the heart of the accident that kills Jay. Agee fictionalizes his own father’s death, but could not have created a more effective symbol of the modernizing Appalachian dilemma. Jay drives his new car from the Powell River Valley to Knoxville, from the home of his parents to the home of his children. His car crashes either

⁴⁷ Wheeler writes “Rural whites and blacks who moved from agriculturally overpopulated and increasingly troubled hinterland in search of employment soon learned that urban life threatened to cut them off from the culture and institutions they valued so highly” (2).

because of mechanical failure, a problem of modernity, or because of Jay's being drunk, a leftover from his life on the farm. Agee presents this conflict between the old and the new not through melodrama or polemic about the dangers of losing the old ways, but through the liminal modernist moment where the past meets the present. Speed kills, but so does torpor, as Jay's brother and father suggest.

McDowell's decision to include "Knoxville: Summer of 1915" as an Introduction also creates a narrative complication between Rufus being a child and being "so successfully disguised to myself as a child" (Agee 3), between the events of the book happening in the present and happening in memory. As Chapter One begins, the first person narration of the introductory poem turns to third person close narration that follows one character at a time, rarely dipping into free indirect discourse. After the prose poem, the first chapter follows Rufus, a narrative choice that enables the novel to pursue two different storytelling agendas simultaneously: first, it establishes the novel as being about Rufus's experience of his father's death, even when we do not hear from Rufus for many chapters. Second, the book expresses the grief of the family individually and collectively as the narrative elegy moves from Jay's wife to aunt to in-laws, each describing how the anticipation and confirmation of this tragedy affects them differently. This close narration also reveals the conflicts, explicit and implicit, between family members. McDowell's decision to turn Agee's memories of his father, chronologically recounted in Lofaro's version as Chapters One through Six, into italicized impressionistic childlike narration after Chapters Seven to end Part One and Chapter Thirteen to end Part Two, ties these narrations to "Knoxville: Summer of 1915," largely through effective editing. McDowell's beginning the book with "Knoxville: Summer of 1915" increases the emotional

scope of the novel since it shows how these events and this tragedy have stayed with Rufus and connects his acts of recollection in the prose poem with those in the novel.

The styles of these recollections differ in narrative perspectives: the narrator of “Knoxville: Summer of 1915” speaks in the first person, addresses the reader, and offers a clear, but distant memory of a common childhood event. The speaker’s self-reflection, the separation he feels from himself, and a little play with repetition and structure, point the poetic introduction in the direction of experimental modernism. Philip Stogdon writes that “Knoxville: Summer of 1915” “is predicated on estranged realities” (161), and McDowell picks up that tone for the italicized passage that ends Part One. Using the same third person narration as the rest of the book, the narration alternates between following Rufus closely through episodic moments of childhood understanding and sharp pangs of fear and embarrassment, and Jay through self-doubt and gratitude for his life and family⁴⁸. Also italicized, these sections verge on stream of consciousness, or at least they demonstrate a rugged, fragmented style that prefers modernist impression over realist representation:

*A great cedar, and colors of limestone and of clay; the smell of wood
smoke and, in the deep orange light of the lamp, the silent logs of the
walls, his mother’s face, her ridged hand mild on his forehead: Don’t you
fret, Jay, don’t you fret...How far we all come. How far we all come away
from ourselves. So far, so much between, you can never go home again.
You can go home, it’s good to go home, but you never really get all the*

⁴⁸ Philip Stogdon on this difference in tone between the poem and the book: “This is the predicament likely to the experience of a child just as the authority with which Agee commands ‘the book’ is external and adult” (151).

way home again in your life...Just one way, you do get back home. You have a boy or a girl of your own and now and then you remember, and you know how they feel, and it's almost the same as if you were your own self again, as young as you could remember. (Agee 87)

Jay feels the distance between his home on the farm and his life as an adult, and the closest connection to that home he feels comes through the experience of Rufus. Rufus remembers his father as tied to the mountains, and in Rufus's memory, Jay's home outside of Knoxville remains a defining and compelling particular of his father's identity. The italicized section of Part One and "Knoxville: Summer of 1915" place the relationship between Jay and Rufus at the center of the book, though outside the italics, Jay appears only in the first few chapters and Rufus only in the last few. In an article connecting the restored novel to Appalachia, Lofaro argues that this relationship takes place in the specific context of changing Appalachia: "His child's (Rufus's) sense of home becomes tied to an early exposition of the virtue and vice of emerging industrialization in a part of America that to many observers served as an exploited internal colony due to its geographical and cultural isolation and its wealth of natural resources" (Lofaro 108). This broader extrapolation of Appalachia as internal colony fits better with Lofaro's edition, but the conflict between Knoxville in Jay and Rufus' present and the Powell River Valley in Jay's past also demonstrates Appalachia in a particular moment of modernization that directly affects the Follet family's daily life, as Jay's father's illness and family ties see that he keeps one foot in the valley and one in the town, or one in the past and one in the present. This tension creates the situation of Jay's death: leaving his family in the Valley necessitates his late-night trip. The telephone and the Model T make it possible to live

two places at once, within limits. They might also be responsible for Jay's death, or perhaps Jay's drinking – a tie to his past – causes his accident. *A Death in the Family* does not judge. Instead of moralizing about Jay's life or Mary's grief or Joel's (Mary's brother) anger, the novel tells the story of Rufus, a boy from a particular place – Knoxville, Tennessee – who lives at a particular time – “towards the middle of the twentieth century” in the words of the beginning of the Lofaro version. Neither does the novel judge the changing times or landscape, but sits with those changes, showing how they color the experience of the Follets. Lofaro's version goes a step farther: “As set against the backdrop of the city of Knoxville, Rufus's quest and his parents fiery relationship likewise symbolizes Appalachia at the crossroads of tradition and modernization” (Lofaro 110), pointing to the book's being not just in Appalachian but about Appalachia. The McDowell version, set firmly in Appalachia, tells the story of a family, not a region. It also tells the story of a time when life in Appalachia changed to include urban landscapes and economic possibilities beyond the farm. McDowell's decision to complicate the text to capture the confusion of Rufus's experience of losing his father accentuates Agee's impressionistic moments, making the work much more modernist than realist. *A Death in the Family* does not end with impressionistic italics or fragmented memory, but the ending of Part Three continues the modernist themes of Parts One and Two by refusing to resolve conflict, settle grief, or answer questions. Offering Hard Maybes at best, the book points Rufus toward home, walking with his Uncle Joel to a familiar place made unfamiliar by a new time.

River of Earth's Agrarian Modernism

Unlike *A Death in the Family*, the Appalachianness of James Still's *River of Earth* (1940) has never been questioned. Along with *Storming Heaven* and books by Lee Smith, the novel has defined Appalachian Literature in classrooms and scholarly articles since its reprint by the University of Kentucky in 1978. Variations on its subject matter, the economic and cultural transition of life in Appalachia from a difficult agrarian one that had lasted for hundreds of years to an equally tenuous industrial one, continue to dominate Appalachian Studies in the twenty-first century. Fine scholarship from Ted Olson and Douglas Reichert Powell on *River of Earth* describes the book as an Appalachian *Grapes of Wrath*⁴⁹ (1940) – a story of Depression-era economic migration that should have gained the national attention of Steinbeck's larger, more popular book, but for its timing one year too late and on the eve of World War II. This chapter ends with a discussion not of *River of Earth's* subject matter, but of its style. In the voice of his nameless boy-narrator, Still moves seamlessly between childlike observation, reflection and almost imagistic description and narration beyond the years of the boy, and dialogue strewn with dialect that presents economic forces at play in the most basic decisions about life. How this aesthetic choice reflects the work of the novel, how its form is its function, make *River of Earth* a close analogue to Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater, an example of Appalachian literary organic architecture: a novel whose voice could only come from its place – Appalachia – at this time of stylistic experimentation – the modernist moment.

⁴⁹ Dean Cadle, in his introduction to the 1978 version, notes that both books were published by The Viking Press within a year of one another. *The Grapes of Wrath* won the Pulitzer in 1940, and Cadle writes "The major difference between them is that Steinbeck's story deals with a calamity that has struck America only once in its lifetime, while Still is writing of the struggles that have plagued the mountain people since the country was settled" (viii). Perhaps, but though conflicts over coal continue, the coming of the mechanized coal industry to Appalachia remains a singular event.

As *River of Earth's* first chapter ends, the unnamed narrator's mother Alpha, tired of her husband's cousins eating what scant food she has to feed her own children, moves the family's furniture into the yard and the smokehouse and burns down their house, leaving no place for the cousins to stay: "Mother stood among the scattered furnishings, her face calm and triumphant" (Still 11). This event sets the tone for the novel: generosity, hospitality, and even the idea of home become luxuries their survival cannot afford. Still's prose reflects this dilemma and eschews prodigality, especially in portraying the human toll of the Baldridge's life. When the narrator and his brother get a chance to go to school, he writes, "Euly picked up the baby and ran around the battling block with him, running with joy. Fletch squatted on a broad chip, knowing he was only five, and too young to go. He cried a little, soundlessly" (Still 81). Still's form becomes function as human emotions become facts more than feelings: hardscrabble prose for a hardscrabble life. That these moments often concern the disappointments, difficulties, and wellbeing of children make the juxtapositions between these experiences and their renderings all the more poignant. Early in the novel, on his seventh birthday the narrator hopes to get a colt that his father Brack, an amateur veterinarian, has delivered for a neighbor, but the colt dies. Later, he holds perfectly still though tears stream down his face as he assists while his father cuts open a calf's throat to remove a stuck corn cob. Every creature, human and animal, struggles to survive, and Still's writing closes the distance between the reader and the characters with elemental, bedrock prose. The one bit of luxury Alpha allows, over the objections of Brack, is a funeral for their baby, Green:

The floors were scrubbed twice over with a shuck mop, and the smoky walls washed down. Jimson-weeds were cut in the backyard; the

woodpile was straightened. Mother cut the heads off of fifteen dommers
and our last guinea. The stove stayed hot all day Friday, baking and frying.
Cushaw pies covered the table. (Still 179)

Ted Olson comments on the hard facts of the novel and how they differentiate Still's style, full as it is of Appalachian images, dialect⁵⁰, and customs, from what came before in many works from Appalachia, and I would add, many works that came after: "...its author intimately understands his subject and possesses an artistic mind capable of shaping fact into highly original fiction, *River of Earth* is anything but a 'local color' novel" (Olson, "This" 85). Not only does *River of Earth* lack the "mama and biscuits" charm of popular Appalachian fiction, but Still's style strips away literary luxuries as well. A conversation between the boy and his Grandma illustrate how Still uses Appalachian customs but elides, almost Hemingway-like, explanations or expositions that make Appalachia's folklore the point of the narrative. The richness of Still's nouns and verbs make even this dialogue imagistic, the ideas in the things:

One morning I saw a redbird sitting in a plum bush, its body as dark as a wound. "Spring's a-winding," I told Grandma. "Coming now for shore."
"Even come spring," Grandma said, "we've got a passel of chills to endure: dogwood winter, redbud, service, foxgrape, blackberry...There must be seven winters by count. A chilly snap for every time of bloom."
I wished for the thaw and greening, for I longed to go home. (Still 127)

There is an easy and effective metaphor in a "passel of chills" for every bloom, but instead of making a meal of it, Still uses this conversation to reveal the boy's desire to go home from

⁵⁰ "Dommers" is a rare regionalism for dominicker or dominique chickens.

Grandma's to be with his family. Dean Cadle writes in the Introduction to the 1978 University of Kentucky reprint: "There are no games, no literary or historical allusions, no puns, no symbolism, sentimentality, didacticism, or redundancy. He gives no motives, airs, no theories, states no beliefs" (Cadle x). This makes the novel a counterpoint to Appalachia's most famous coal book, *Storming Heaven*⁵¹, but more than that, shows how Still worked in *River of Earth* to do something new: to craft a novel deeply rooted in Appalachia without the baggage of sentimentalism, and a novel of economic hardship without polemic⁵². Modernism is expected to lack sentimentality but not puns, allusions, and games. Again here, form is function: instead of a realist novel about a family whose life lacks luxuries, Still uses imagism and economy to incarnate the scarcity the Baldridges experience.

Still's innovation in *River of Earth* is to craft a style that reflects the story he tells, not just in the narrative voice of the boy, but in mountain dialect and description. Nearly every critical article on *River of Earth* comments on its style as the true accomplishment of the novel, and that praise usually groups the novel with other modernists, away from realists and the Appalachian novels of its time. The Southern modernist poet Allen Tate called it "a masterpiece of style"⁵³ (qtd in Olson, "This" 86), and H.R. Stoneback compares it to "the finest work (especially that which employs a boy-narrator) of Sherwood Anderson, Faulkner, Hemingway, and Twain" (13). Diverging from what Stoneback calls "the sentimental deployment of the Appalachian myth" found in the work of Still's Lincoln Memorial University classmate Jesse

⁵¹ Though Fred Chappell writes *Storming Heaven*'s "finest ambitions are artistic," the novel is also unapologetically political (Chappell *LA Times* Review).

⁵² "Few writers have been as free of the polemical temperament as has been Still. Readers will look in vain for agrarian exhortation in his work" (Stoneback 6).

⁵³ Allen Tate: "The subtle modulations between the mountain speech of the dialogue and the formal, yet simple, diction of the narrative is masterly" (qtd in Olson, "This" 86).

Stuart, Still instead employs “a discipline, a precision, a restraint, and an economy” (Stoneback 8). Stoneback identifies Vanderbilt Agrarians⁵⁴, not LMU Appalachians, as Still’s literary peers, and Still displays his modernist aesthetic and economy in describing the first signs of life after a hungry winter:

The garden grew as by a miracle, and the blackberry winter passed with the early April winds, doing no harm. Beans broke their waxen leaves out of hoe-turned furrows, bearing the husk of seeds with them. Sweet corn unfurled tight young blades from weed mold, timid to night chill, growing slowly and darkly. (Still 13)

River of Earth functions poorly as agrarian manifesto since farming in the mountains offers no more stability than the mines, but Still captures in the daily dilemmas of the Baldrige family this particular moment of modernization in Appalachia, and the cost of the coming of coal. In the case of the Baldriges, the cost is rootlessness or constant movement, like a river. Late in the book, Alpha stands her ground against another move to a coal camp:

Since I married I’ve been driv from one coal camp to another...I’ve lived hard as nails. I’ve lived at Blue Diamond. I’ve lived at Chavies, Tribbey, Butterfly Two, Elkhorn, and Lackey. We moved to Hardburly twice, and to Blackjack beyond counting. I reckon I’ve lived everywhere on God’s green earth. Now I want to set me down and rest. (Still 179)

Of course, Alpha does move to another coal camp, into a company house whose trees have shallow roots.

⁵⁴ Still earned an MA at Vanderbilt from 1929-1930.

The tension prominent in modernist texts between the past and the rapidly approaching future, between agrarian economy and industrial, repeats as a topic of conversation among the adults in the book, particularly between Brock, who sees himself as the family's provider and the mines as the most promising means of provision, and Alpha and her brother, Uncle Jolly, who advocate living off the land instead of the company. The complex economic forces of the day find a proxy in the basic question of where the Baldridge family will live, in the mountains or in a coal camp: "No use stirring the top of the ground if you're going to dig your bread underside," says Brock (Still 35). Uncle Jolly replies, "I wouldn't work in a coal mine if there was gold tracks running in. I'll be buried a-plenty when I'm dead. Don't want bug-dust in my face till then" (Still 35). The questions of past and present, of agriculture and industry, find no easy answers in the book, however, since a move to the coal camp also means easier access to school and food for the Baldridge children. The afternoon before Brock begins a new job in the mines, he comes home carrying bags of groceries: "There was a five-pound bucket of lard with a shoat drawn on the bucket. Brown sugar in a glass jar. A square of sowbelly, thin-rinded and hairy. A white-dusty sack of flour, and on it a picture-piece of a woman holding an armful of wheat straws...We looked in wonder, not being able to speak" (Still 69). As descriptions of food go in Appalachian Literature, this one is modest and tame, but in the economy of the Baldridge family's food ways, these bags of store-bought supplies represent unimaginable wealth. A drawn pig adorns the lard bucket and a woman holding an armful of wheat decorates the sack of flour. The Baldridge's have not yet bought into the corporate economy of Jim Wayne Miller's "Brier Visions": "Wrigley's and Lucky Strike, Ford and Goodyear." But they are beginning the

process in Appalachia of floating “like rafted logs toward the mainstream” (Miller 26) by shopping in the company store.

The price of this modernization comes in the often commented-upon sermon by Brother Sim Moberly that gives the novel its name, and the image that reads more like prophecy than sermon in the twenty-first century:

I used to think a mountain was the standingest object in the sight of
God...These hills are just dirt waves, washing through eternity...Oh, my
children, where air we going on this mighty river of earth, a-borning,
begetting, and a-dying – the living and the dead riding the waters?
Where air it sweeping us? (Still 76)

The tide Sim Moberly describes vernacularizes Psalm 114’s images of God stopping rivers and moving mountains, but in the context of the novel, the removal of coal, and in the context of Appalachia’s twentieth century, the strip mining and (later) mountaintop removal methods of extracting coal, give that power formerly reserved to God to human beings, particularly to Brock Baldridge, an Appalachian who sees the removal of coal as his best hope for keeping himself and his family alive. An ecological disaster looms in the imagery of the Psalm as well: “They hain’t a hill standing so proud but hit’ll sink to the low ground o’sorrow” (Still 76). As Brock embraces this life and this economy, so will parts of Appalachia. Alpha’s mother, the representative of the agrarian tradition dies, and Uncle Jolly and Alpha continue to work a land forever changed. This rapid and dramatic upheaval of agrarian life and Appalachian land described in dialect through the turning upside down of biblical imagery by a mountain preacher comes as close to the definition of Appalachian Modernism as one may find.

Stoneback sees this image in terms of another American moment of modernist mythmaking:

“River of Earth provides the grim epitome of a pervasive image in Appalachian and American literature, with its version of the befouled “green breast” of the hills, something – to paraphrase F. Scott Fitzgerald’s Nick Carraway – commensurate to man’s capacity for horror” (Stoneback 21). *River of Earth* localizes and humanizes a shifting economic and cultural reality in modernizing Appalachia through aesthetic invention and innovation by creating a narrative style fit for a season of struggle and unprecedented change.

Reading Modernism in Appalachia

Look Homeward, Angel, *A Death in the Family*, and *River of Earth* capture moments of change in family dynamics, shifting patterns of rural to urban migration, and dramatic upheaval in the economic and cultural lives of Appalachians. To dismiss these books as too Southern or American to be Appalachian, or to overlook their aesthetic and thematic modernism means leaving out an important chapter in Appalachia’s literary and cultural history: how Appalachia responded to modernization and modernism. Chapter Three will continue this exploration by considering the Tennessee Valley Authority’s role in Appalachian Literature and History and arguing that this massive government initiative represents an example of modernism at work in Appalachia. Admitting Appalachia exists as a site of Modernism means recognizing how the region took part in the changes the rest of the country experienced throughout the twentieth century.

Chapter Three: TVA's Electrifying Appalachian Modernism

We have these three elements: a picture of the world as it might be, which gives purpose to our lives; our ethical principles, which determine our manner of action; and emotional drive, which leads us to put our whole energies into conforming our actions to our ideas.

– Arthur E. Morgan, *The Making of the TVA*

What the TVA set out to do was a new and modern task.

– David Lilienthal, *TVA: Democracy on the March*

Plan is a four-letter word here.

– Wilma Dykeman, *The Electric Valley*

The Saturday plenary session at the fortieth annual Appalachian Studies Association Conference, held at Virginia Tech, featured the title “Rage and Renewal.” Barbara Ellen Smith and Stephen L. Fisher, the conveners, described the session as “intended as a provocation – designed to tap into our anger at the many forms of exploitation in Appalachia as well as our strategic visions for how we might reinvent the region together.” In March 2017, a number of attendees felt a tangible amount of anger and anxiety. Folk singer and activist Sue Massek opened the program with Sara Ogan Gunning’s “Come All You Miners,” the second verse of which goes

Coal mining is the most dangerous work in our land today

With plenty of dirty slaving work and very little pay

Coal miner, won’t you wake up and open your eyes and see

What the dirty capitalist system is doing to you and me

The articulated grievances of the presenters and audience included the colonization of Appalachia, the lack of arts instruction in the region’s schools, the fact that the academic elite did not speak the language of the people, and the fact that Appalachians had to code-switch to

be successful outside the region⁵⁵. A few audience members expressed a dissenting rage at the demonization of the coal industry and at the notion that public health and economic growth were mutually exclusive. Rich Kirby, a fixture of Whitesburg, Kentucky's Appalshop, led the audience in Florence Reece's "Which Side Are You On?" and as the presenters tried to turn from rage to renewal somewhat unsuccessfully, Tyler Hughes closed the session with a traditional song, "Come and Go With Me To That Land." The experience of seeing and hearing people stand up and articulate raw, honest concerns about Appalachia's communities, children, environments, and economies and of singing songs of protest and promise in a group of several hundred people two months into Donald Trump's America felt like a revival meeting, even though it was an academic conference. It also served as a reminder of the inextricable links between Appalachian scholarship and Appalachian activism⁵⁶.

Appalachian scholarship and activism often coalesce to analyze and criticize the work of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) as an example of internal colonialism, resource exploitation, and wrong-headed sociological experimentation. This chapter argues that the TVA represents a tactile example of Appalachian Modernism, in both conception and execution, in both its literary and literal constructions. This chapter does not attempt to make an explicitly political argument⁵⁷, but a discussion of TVA, particularly its use of eminent domain and its connection to coal extraction, comes pre-loaded with a political charge. Scholarship on TVA

⁵⁵ Presenters included Helen Lewis, who edited *Colonialism in Modern America: The Appalachian Case* and Robert Gipe, one of the brightest stars of new Appalachian Literature, as well as Amelia Kirby, a community organizer, and the poet Richard Hague.

⁵⁶ In June 2018, Emily Satterwhite, a faculty member at Virginia Tech, locked herself to construction equipment working on the Mountain Valley Pipeline in West Virginia and southwest Virginia (Schneider). This link between scholarship and activism in Appalachian Studies continues.

⁵⁷ As James Agee writes below epigraph from Marx and Engels to *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*: "neither these words nor the authors are the property of any political party, faith, or fiction."

and its leadership and rank and file show the strongly progressive political motivations of the early days of the project and the Appalachian activist backlash to much of its work from the 1950s to now. The activist implication of Appalachian scholarship has long been an asset to the field and to the region. This chapter does not counter this activist scholarship and assert that TVA represents a good instead of an ill for Appalachia; as poetry, essays, and novels about TVA's role in Appalachia suggest, it has been both.

The story of TVA provides ample fodder for an insider/outsider narrative that casts TVA as a group of elite outsiders that came into Appalachia to solve problems that insiders did not know they had. The lack of electricity and navigability of the Tennessee River were not obstacles to the good life for many Appalachians in 1933, though flooding and failing farmland were. Another formulation of the TVA story might say that TVA produced winners and losers, the winners being the farmers whose yields improved under TVA tutelage, the workers who fed their families building TVA projects, and the communities for whom TVA provided employment, recreation, and of course, electricity. The losers, then, would be the farmers whose farms now lie under TVA lakes, families whose homes and interred loved ones suffered relocation or inundation, and a way of life disconnected from macro-concerns like the price of electricity and the nuclear age. I would also add that TVA after 1950 exacerbates a divide within Appalachia itself between the Tennessee Valley and Coal Country.

The story of the TVA in Appalachia is much more, though, than a story of insiders and outsiders, winners and losers. The massive body of literature and scholarship about the TVA, from the apologetics of TVA Directors Arthur Morgan and David Lilienthal to the Appalachian criticisms of the Authority by David Whisnant and Ron Eller to the literary representations by

Don Johnson and Amy Greene to celebrations of the TVA's design and aesthetic by architects Tim Culvahouse and Christine Macy identify the establishment of TVA as a turning point in Appalachian history and culture, a dividing line between the time before and the time after. Each of these writers, speaking for the TVA or the mountaineer or both, wrestles with the central conflict of the TVA, articulated in 1933 by James Agee: "TVA knows that it is, among other things, a passel of smart Yankees descended to improve a tetchy people: knows also the limits of its power; knows also that the more independently a man helps himself, the better off he is" (64). The massive building projects, unimaginable valley flooding, and prodigious electricity production of this story serve as the setting for an equally epic human drama: modernization, in the guise of an activist federal government and a belief in American progress, came to the mountains on a large scale, and everyone's lives changed. This chapter seeks neither to praise the TVA nor to bury it, but to identify it as a symptom of American modernization, and to suggest that in its conception, design and execution, the TVA creates a flowing, humming, electrifying Appalachian Modernism that usher Appalachia and the country into the Atomic Age.

In Chapter One I argued, building on Susan Stanford Friedman, that modernity invents tradition, and defined Appalachian Modernism as groundbreaking American music, choreography, and architecture such as Martha Graham and Aaron Copland's *Appalachian Spring* and Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater, works inspired by Appalachian settings that sought to reframe our national mythology. Chapter Two defined Appalachian Modernism as literature that used formal innovation to chronicle personal upheavals during social and economic modernization in North Carolina, Kentucky, and Tennessee, particularly in Thomas

Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel*; James Still's *River of Earth*; and James Agee's *A Death in the Family*. In this chapter, I argue that TVA's experimental bureaucracy, reordering of nature, and modernist aesthetic make it another example of Appalachian Modernism. In this chapter, my argument is informed by Fredric Jameson's definition of modernism as an "uneven moment of social development...the coexistence of realities from radically different moments of history" (307). Art about TVA depicts this era as a liminal space of old and new ways of life in the mountains. People in Appalachia respond to these changes in multitudinous ways, as individuals, not as a unified bloc of "mountaineers," but with the variety of human reactions to change. These varied reactions give evidence to a theme of this dissertation: that Appalachia, too, experiences American modernization and modernism.

This chapter divides into thirds: the first considers the backgrounds and philosophies of Arthur Morgan, Harcourt Morgan, and David Lilienthal, three key architects of TVA, in relation to James Agee's portrait of the Appalachia into which TVA came. The second section argues that TVA demonstrates modernism at work in three distinct registers: first, as a large-scale experimental bureaucratic solution to a regional issue; second, as an example of rupture and change through the massive restructuring of nature by human ingenuity and power; third, as a deliberate embodiment of modernist architecture and aesthetics in the design of TVA structures and visitor experiences. The third part of the chapter shows how fiction, poetry, films, and songs use TVA to demarcate the end of an old way of life in the mountains and the beginning of the new. Jameson's definition of modernism as uneven stages of development shows up repeatedly in these works that imagine a changing life and landscape as modernity comes to Appalachia. I do not argue that these writings by Don Johnson, Eleanor Buckles, Amy

Greene and others should be considered examples of Appalachian Modernism, but that they are about the modernization of Appalachia in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. The chapter does argue that they depict how TVA worked for these very different artists as an agent and symbol of the movement from an older way of life to the one we know now, or at least the one before digitalization. Their work also describes a spectrum of responses and adaptations by Appalachian people to the American twentieth century. Taken as a whole, this chapter considers TVA as metaphor for demarcating the past from the now, but also argues the TVA as a tactile piece of Appalachian Modernism.

The scope of the TVA project, to unify a 44,000-square-mile tract into a system of flood-controlled, power-generating, and agriculturally productive land (Agee, “Tennessee” 3), and the ambition of an agency that “touches and gives life to all human concerns” (qtd in Whisnant 43) in the words of Franklin Roosevelt, requires this chapter to limit the topic of the TVA to manageable temporal boundaries: from 1933 – 1946. During these years, three directors, Arthur Morgan (1933 – 1938), Harcourt Morgan (no relation, 1938 – 1941), David Lilienthal (1941 – 1946), maintained much of the Authority’s original mission to shape life within the valley, not just to produce power. These years also show TVA at its most experimental, ambitious, and modernist. This changed when the Eisenhower administration gained control of the TVA’s governing board (Couto 232). These years also parallel the timeline of American modernism used in the rest of this project⁵⁸. This bracketing does not ignore the TVA’s role in

⁵⁸ So far, this discussion of Modernism in Appalachia has considered Thomas Wolfe’s *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929), Frank Lloyd Wright’s *Fallingwater* (1939), James Still’s *River of Earth* (1940), Martha Graham and Aaron Copland’s *Appalachian Spring* (1944) and James Agee’s *A Death in the Family* (1957). The TVA and its representations in non-fiction, poetry, and fiction belong in a discussion of Appalachia as much as the works cited above. Of this list, only *River of Earth* receives regular attention in the narratives of Appalachian Studies because it fits the Appalachia-as-internal-colony and Appalachia-as-victim/survivor narratives.

the nuclear production and coal extraction for which they would receive their most poignant post-diluvial criticisms. David Lilienthal left the TVA in 1946 to manage the brand-new Atomic Energy Commission, cementing the bonds between these two agencies, and in attempting to change the economy of the Tennessee Valley to one dependent on electricity, the TVA created a massive demand that soon outmatched their hydroelectric capacity, which led to the boom in strip mining in the fifties and sixties (Eller 39, Whisnant 49). The unintended consequences of the TVA – nuclear power and coal-production overdrive – could hardly have been foreseen by the idealist architects of the TVA in the mid-1930s. The arc of American modernization that runs from the beginning of FDR's New Deal to Truman's bomb, from Norris Dam to Oak Ridge, runs straight through Appalachia geographically, and runs just as deeply through the heart of its literature. Appalachia provides more than a site for TVA; it provides the raw materials: nature, people, and culture.

The Idea of the TVA: Experimentation, Technology, and Bureaucracy

The first three directors of the TVA--Arthur Morgan, President of Antioch College and former administrator over a flood control plan in the Ohio Valley; Harcourt Morgan, President of the University of Tennessee with expertise in the industry and agriculture of the valley; and David Lilienthal, a young attorney who had worked to revise the public utility statutes for Wisconsin--met for the first time on June 16, 1933 in a Washington, D.C. hotel room (Droze 20). Their backgrounds in flood control, electricity, and Tennessee farming formed a perfect confluence of specialties for the mission of the TVA. They were uniquely positioned to reshape nature, electrify the valley, and upend the culture of the mountain South. These three

individuals, backed by the faith and resources of the United States government, radically reshaped the landscape, economy, and culture of Appalachia.

The political will for TVA had been building for some time. In 1916, President Wilson signed a National Defense Act on the eve of American entry into World War I that funded a construction project on the Tennessee River near Muscle Shoals, Alabama: the Wilson Dam; two nitrate-producing facilities – one for fertilizer, one for explosives; and an electricity-producing power plant (Martin 18-19). None of the projects were completed before the end of the war, and most members of Congress considered the site a white elephant. The progressive Republican Senator George W. Norris of Nebraska began drafting bills to bring the Muscle Shoals project under federal control and ideas for how the government would administer such a project evolved in a number of failed bills Norris tried to pass throughout the 1920s (Martin 24-25). This decade saw the possibilities of the project – flood control, river navigability, electricity production and transmission, and agriculture – considered by federal agencies but ultimately rejected by Congress or, once it passed, by President Hoover in 1930 (Martin 24).

In 1933, Franklin Roosevelt signed the bill providing for the creation of the Tennessee Valley Authority, which differed from earlier bills in that it sought to unify the entire Tennessee Valley under a planned system with electricity production as a central component (Martin 25). The federal government had entered the power business. Arthur Morgan served as the first Director, but was forced out in 1938; Harcourt Morgan took over, and then Lilienthal in 1941. Their different foci and philosophies led to conflict that eventually pitted Harcourt Morgan and Lilienthal against Arthur Morgan, and Arthur Morgan's utopianism against Lilienthal's pragmatism. Morgan, Morgan, and Lilienthal all believed TVA could employ the best of modern

ideas to solve the problems of a region suffering from repeating past mistakes. They all worked deliberately to modernize the Valley. These three men may also be seen as representing different strains of modernism that all overlapped at TVA: Arthur Morgan the experimental, Harcourt Morgan the technological, and Lilienthal the bureaucratic. A brief understanding of each man's expertise and vision for the TVA illuminates their competing visions for the TVA's mission and direction and explains why their collaboration resulted in a distinctly Appalachian Modernism.

Arthur Morgan, called *FDR's Utopian* in a book of that name written by Roy Talbert, brought to the TVA a closeness or at least common cause with Roosevelt and a vision for the Authority that went far beyond helping farmers or producing power or creating a navigable river (Talbert 103). Morgan writes in *The Making of TVA* (1974) that he knew he wanted to work as TVA director when FDR pitched the job as "not about dams or electric power or fertilizer, but about the quality of life of the people of the Tennessee Valley" (Morgan 7). *The Making of the TVA*, written more than thirty years after Morgan's dismissal from the TVA, reads as a response to Lilienthal's book, *TVA: Democracy on the March* (1944) and a substantial piece of scholarship on the conflict, *Morgan vs. Lilienthal: The Feud Within the TVA* (1970). The book repeats as a theme one of the oft-cited reasons for Arthur Morgan's ejection from the TVA Board: his distaste for politics and for the political compromise of ethical principles, even in the pursuit of noble aims. One gets the idea that Morgan would have been happier working for Eleanor than Franklin, since she had the drive to effect change without the responsibilities to win elections and build coalitions (Morgan 8-9). Morgan viewed his work in government as a function of his humanist philosophy:

I came to see that mankind was in the process of gradual emergence, and that Christians, Buddhists, Zoroastrians, and Stoics were evolutionary breakthroughs to a new and better order of living, but the deeply embedded heritage from mankind's animal ancestors repeatedly corrupted and obscured these promising advances. The rise of humanity to higher levels of social consciousness depended on such breakthroughs becoming established and dominant. The best aspects of modern life seemed to be furthering this gradual emergence. (41)

The specific articulation and application of Morgan's philosophy appear in a chapter called "Vagaries," the term used in the congressional hearings that resulted in Morgan's ouster (Morgan 55), and it addresses practical plans for the TVA's work to affect not just infrastructure or economics but culture. Implicit in Morgan's plans for forestry, farming and canning techniques, recreation, and race relations⁵⁹, among other concerns, is the assumption that the mountaineers have mishandled their resources and relations. In the TVA, Morgan saw a way to raise Appalachia to "higher levels of social consciousness" not through electricity or flood control, but through "the best aspects of modern life." Erwin Hargrove describes Morgan's view of TVA as "a laboratory for social experimentation that would serve as a beacon to the nation" (92), and Richard Lowitt writes that Morgan "envisioned it as an experiment in regional reconstruction" (39). Arthur Morgan's modernism operated on a massive scale and sought to reimagine the American story through the implementation of social and natural sciences. Paul Conkin calls Morgan "an early version of Buckminster Fuller – full of enthusiasm, innovative,

⁵⁹ Morgan considered this one of his failures, and Lowitt agrees. See Lowitt 58-61.

almost utopian in his dreams, yet always a bit superficial – Morgan wanted to shape the larger philosophy of TVA and to bring a kind of uplift or even redemption to the people of the Valley” (31). Morgan sought to use modern ideas, science, and social practices to change the relationships in Appalachia between people and land, people and work, and people and other people.

If Arthur Morgan brought to TVA a vision to redeem the Appalachian farmer, then Harcourt Morgan brought an intimacy with the life and work of the Appalachian farmer. Knoxville historian Jack Neely describes Harcourt Morgan as “the founding director who most closely linked the federal corporation with the people actually living in the region – who respected their opinions, valued their advice and made TVA as much of the people as for the people.” Harcourt Morgan was serving as the President of the University of Tennessee when he was recruited by Arthur Morgan because of his expertise in southern agriculture and his long history with southern people. Morgan began his career at Louisiana State University and was the first Dean of the College of Agriculture at Tennessee. Born and educated in Canada and then at Cornell, Harcourt Morgan combined scientific research – mostly as an entomologist – with a hands-on love of farming (Neely). Both Arthur Morgan and David Lilienthal credit Harcourt Morgan with translating TVA policies and ideas into practical, workable solutions for farms and farmers (Morgan 132-133; Lilienthal 80-81). His relationships with land-grant colleges in the state allowed TVA money – in the form of phosphate fertilizers from Muscle Shoals and education – to flow to the region without political interference (Morgan 132; Lilienthal 80-81). Lilienthal describes Harcourt and TVA’s agricultural work as “new, modern technical tools: a concentrated mineral phosphate, and the experts’ generalized knowledge of

what science could do to help increase the productiveness of the land” (82). Harcourt Morgan’s southern farming *bona fides* earned him enough trust with Valley farmers and educators to ensure that TVA’s agricultural initiatives brought real change to land use and cultivation.

Like his predecessor, Harcourt Morgan also situated his work at TVA into his governing philosophy. Morgan called his system Common Mooring, and Neely describes it as the belief that “everything was interconnected, everything was interdependent, and human beings should accept their place in a vast and partly divine natural plan,” though Neely admits Morgan did not articulate this idea very clearly. Lowitt takes a less charitable view, and frames Morgan’s work in terms of winners and losers. Lowitt describes Common Mooring as a “vague, ambiguous approach,” and suggests that by the time Morgan’s ideas made their way to farmers, only the ones who still owned their land – and not sharecroppers nor those dispossessed by TVA – benefitted, causing the “more prosperous and better-educated” to become even more so (40). Even if Arthur and Harcourt Morgan’s ideological explanations for the work of TVA differ – uplift vs interdependency, the belief and the practice remained the same: TVA, a massive bureaucratic enterprise, came to the mountains to solve local, individualized problems through experimentation and technological implementation.

Thirty-four-year-old David Lilienthal was a midwesterner who had graduated from Harvard Law School and quickly earned a reputation as a public utility official. He was also the member of the original TVA triumvirate that most represented bureaucracy and the future. The first line of Lilienthal’s *TVA: Democracy on the March* (1944) is “This is a book about tomorrow” (xi). Roosevelt, not Arthur Morgan, chose Lilienthal, who was a protégé of Senator Robert M. La Follette of Wisconsin, a progressive Republican (Morgan 23, 24). Hargrove writes

that in addition to being the TVA's man in Washington, Lilienthal focused from the beginning of his time at TVA on electric power production, particularly on selling it as necessary to a good life (Hargrove 98-100).

TVA: Democracy on the March (1944), reads at times like a modernist manifesto written by a technocrat – an articulation of belief in the power of technology and bureaucracy to move mountains, transform daily life for the better, and manage that work efficiently and under budget. Chapter titles include “New Life from the Land,” “A New Way – An Old Task,” and “Modern Tools for a Modern Job.” Like Arthur Morgan, Lilienthal also rose to rhetorical heights to describe the work of the TVA:

For the first time in the history of the nation, the resources of a river were not only to be “envisioned in their entirety”; they were to be developed in that unity with which nature herself regards her resources – the waters, the land, and the forests together, a “seamless web”... What God had made one, man was to develop as one. (48)

The supernatural metaphors extended to the people whose lives he sought to change with electricity: “Lilienthal was pictured as Prometheus bringing light to the dark valley” (qtd. In Hargrove 99), according to one TVA worker.

The battle lines between Lilienthal and Arthur Morgan cannot be easily drawn, but in the case of electric power, Morgan sought to work more with regional utility companies while both Harcourt Morgan and Lilienthal argued that TVA should be the power company and sell low-cost power to municipalities (Hargrove 94-95). Arthur Morgan wanted TVA to provide a way for local communities and individuals to help themselves; Lilienthal saw the TVA as

providing the help the people needed. This analysis could quickly become an oversimplification, but Lilienthal's political expertise, Washington connections, and ability to be pragmatic instead of idealistic easily enabled him to wrest control of the TVA's board even before Arthur Morgan's departure in 1938 since Harcourt Morgan and Lilienthal often voted as a bloc against Arthur Morgan. This resulted in a shift in the mission of TVA from a project of cultural improvement and uplift through modernizing infrastructure to one of consumer training through modernizing infrastructure. Hargrove writes that Lilienthal "was the most creative of all the TVA chairmen in his ability to unite technology and politics. He made the power program the central theme of TVA and created a continuing tension between the multipurpose idea and actual reality" (101). Lilienthal spent his last years at TVA working, like the rest of FDR's government, to win World War II through the creation of power for manufacturing plants and to enable the Manhattan Project at Oak Ridge (Hargrove 100). Arthur Morgan, Harcourt Morgan, and David Lilienthal envisioned different futures for the Tennessee Valley, but they shared a belief that innovation, experimentation, and technology would transform their constituents' lives for the better.

*In This Enormous Machine the Balance Wheel is Human*⁶⁰

In two articles for *Fortune*, James Agee described those constituents as particularly Appalachian. Agee paints the Appalachia into which the TVA came as a place of social and economic diversity: a mix of cities, towns, farms, and "the open country itself...some of the loveliest and most somber and some of the cruelest and most haggard you will find in America"

⁶⁰ Agee, "Tennessee" 9

("Tennessee" 3, 5). Though he does not use the term Appalachia, preferring instead the Tennessee Valley or the "heart of the Southeast," Agee identifies a number of Appalachian distinctives, including the mountaineer and the abundant resources available for extraction, including coal, iron ore, limestone, and timber. Industry, like International Harvester and Aluminum Co. of America, also features in his survey of the mountain south.

The Tennessee River begins in Appalachia⁶¹, where the Holston and French Broad rivers meet east of Knoxville, but by the time it leaves Muscle Shoals, Alabama and begins heading back north through Tennessee to meet the Ohio River in Paducah Kentucky, the river and the Authority are well out of the mountains. The Authority secured its Appalachian identity by targeting the people of the southern mountains as the population it intended to serve and by locating its headquarters in Knoxville, the closest city to its first big project, Norris Dam. In his *Fortune* articles (October 1933 and May 1935), Agee identifies the TVA as an Appalachian project or at least a project with an Appalachian setting. Agee's chronicles of the TVA and the first moments of the Atomic Age in *Fortune* and *Time* walk a line between journalism and advocacy. The idea for the TVA and many of the bureaucrats and designers came to the region from outside. The natural resources, labor, and outcomes, however, came from and returned to the mountains and nearby valleys.

Agee's articles provide a non-fiction account of the situation imagined in the poems and novels this chapter considers: the condition of Appalachia in the early phases of modernization, or in the cases of some Valley farmers, before modernization and the shift that comes with

⁶¹ Trivia: TVA built the Apalachia Dam on the Hiawasse River in North Carolina from 1941 – 1943. It is named after the nearby railroad stop.

TVA. Agee details a character for Appalachia defined both by its place in time and its relationship to the broader United States. Thirty years before Appalachian Studies and only a few decades into an understanding of Appalachia as a distinct cultural region, Agee articulates a character for Appalachia that is still recognizable in portraits of the region today.

The distinct qualities of the region that the nascent TVA plans to address show up again and again in Agee's articles: flooding, over-farming and bad farming, and crude extraction industry practices, to name a few:

Careless fires and unregulated cutting have ruined and are ruining great stands of timber on watersheds where trees should have stood forever.

Because natural resources which should have sustained local industries indefinitely have been shipped away in crude form and exhausted, whole communities have been and are being pauperized, abandoned.

("Tennessee" 5-6)

The implicit criticisms of the unscientific Appalachian farmer continue throughout both articles, but so does the celebration of the mountaineer's history, pride, and culture.

The first article (1933) paints in broad strokes and the second (1935) in more detail. In both,

Agee relates that the mountaineer stands among the greatest challenges of the TVA project:

"Many of them are illiterate; many are lawless in the bad sense and the good of that word.

They never heard of Margaret Sanger and they have little interest in Mazda bulbs and little respect for this century of progress" ("Tennessee" 7). But these articles also register the

inevitability of the change coming to the mountains. As early as 1933, Agee sees that TVA means more than just dams and electricity; it also means more connection with the rest of

America: “slowly the sawmills and the mines and the railways and the highways and now the TVA burn seclusion from about them” (Agee, “Tennessee” 7). Parts of Appalachia had already begun plugging into the national infrastructure and economy; TVA arrived to complete the job.

In these articles, Agee writes as insider and outsider, the Tennessean with a father from the valley and a mother from Michigan, who went to high school in Knoxville and at Phillips Exeter. Agee’s attention to – though not his expertise in, according to Paul Ashdown – the economic concerns of 1930s Appalachia make him an especially adept reporter of Appalachia’s transition into modernity with the TVA. Many definitions of modernization and modernism – including Jameson’s – speak to the evolution of economies and communities from local to national (Ashdown xxiii-xxiv). The unification of the vastly disparate localities in the Tennessee Valley into a system of centralized planning⁶² and control stands at the center of the TVA agenda. Economics informed the TVA priorities of farming, flood control, and electricity production, and in both of his articles, Agee frames the TVA story around the Appalachian, the mountaineer, and the land. Agee’s 1933 article records a time when the TVA constituted more dream than reality, and had begun putting people to work managing forests, building Norris Dam, and laying out routes for railroads, power lines, and highway (“Tennessee” 13-14). He describes the work of the TVA with cautious hope and idealism:

people will move out from the cities and work the land and the machine
as well...what the TVA is after is a decentralization of industry, regional
planning on a large scale, a well-wrought and well-controlled balance

⁶² Though the goal of “decentralizing” the power and control of big businesses like utility companies shows up repeatedly in TVA literature. Lilienthal, in particular, advocated for local, community ownership of public utilities and saw TVA as a guarantor of low prices to make that possible (Agee 16).

between the Jeffersonian dream of an Agrarian democracy and the best characteristics of what so many people like to call the Power Age. (Agee, "Tennessee" 9)

Agee articulates here the Appalachian-style modernism that Arthur Morgan, architect Roland Wank, and even David Lilienthal believed the TVA could make possible: democratic agrarianism infused with modernity and technology. When Agee addresses the mountaineer, however, his ambivalence shows, and he holds nothing back in his criticism of the mountaineers who will act as beneficiaries and stewards of this visionary gift. Consider these two passages, one from the first essay, one from the second: "These mountaineers muse be raised and reconciled to higher standards of living as obtain in more prosperous parts of the valley. They must also be taught responsibility to society. On the other hand, the more prosperous valleyites must be raised to that high standard of Americanism which is particularly the mountaineer's" (Agee, "Tennessee" 9). Agee labels Appalachia both individualistic, an apparent virtue, and isolationist, a modern vice. His second essay reveals further doubts about TVA and the mountaineer: "What TVA also knows but may not realize seriously enough...is that generations of poverty and habit breed a quite indescribable inertia; that hopeful and faintly skeptical apathy and an almost childlike dependence are in general very possibly the liveliest attitudes than can be hoped for without very considerable guidance from above" ("TVA" 65). Not Agee's finest moment of English prose, but his estimation of Appalachia in the 1930s as a place of childlike dependence and faintly skeptical apathy about its own economic and social future reinforces the TVA's narrative of uplift and rescue. This is an offensive and highly unpopular generalization to make about Appalachia to Appalachians, and when these characteristics show up in TVA novels by writers

from inside and outside the region, they represent the most stubborn minority of mountaineers. He also labels Appalachians resistant to change, which continues as a characteristic of Appalachia in the popular and scholarly imagination, but resistance, according to the novels we will discuss and the rate at which Appalachia electrified, does not hold for long. The pace of change overwhelmed the valley and eventually Agee himself. In 1933, he wrote about the coming of a new era in Appalachia; with the advent of atomic weapons in 1945, he believed that era had already passed.

Ron Eller's *Uneven Ground: Appalachia since 1945* begins where this survey of TVA in Appalachia ends. His last chapter, "The New Appalachia," could be read as a bookend to Agee's cautiously hopeful TVA articles. Eller repeatedly combats the image of Appalachia as isolated, arguing that "modern Appalachia...increasingly reflected the social divisions and the divergent dreams of the larger society," and that "Appalachian problems were fundamentally those of the rest of the nation," (222-223). He identifies those dreams and problems as divides of rural versus suburban and urban, middle versus working class, and long-term residents versus "neo-Appalachians," but he also leaves some room for an older Appalachian identity of people who "kept gardens, visited neighbors, and attended family churches" (Eller 222). One need not be Appalachian to practice these activities, but in Appalachia the gated communities of second homes often sit in close proximity to the trailer homes parked on old family farms. Since Agee's time, farming, manufacturing, and mining have all taken hits in Appalachia, but Appalachia's

economic horror stories, including the overview in “The New Appalachia,” come largely from coal country⁶³.

In the context of this discussion, these numbers suggest a divide within Appalachia itself, geographically and economically; this divide was exacerbated by the TVA. The Tennessee Valley in the early twentieth century was riddled with poverty, but also blessed with the Tennessee River and enormous tracts of farm land. The mountains of West Virginia, Eastern Kentucky, and Southwest Virginia, alternatively, contained an abundance of coal. The large-scale utopian vision for the Tennessee Valley depended on the sustainable and renewable resources of water and farmland, but the reality of TVA as a power generator necessitated extraction and as a byproduct exploitation of land and people. In this way, Appalachia models the same capitalist matrices of production and consumption as the rest of the country. If Appalachia may be seen as an internal colony of the United States, a discussion Eller takes up discussing Harry Caudill’s *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*, then coal country may be seen as an internal colony of Appalachia, a relationship exacerbated, at least in part, by TVA.

TVA as Experimental Bureaucratic Modernism

As we have seen, Morgan, Morgan, and Lilienthal’s expertise laid the groundwork for TVA as a modernizing force, and Agee situated TVA in Appalachia geographically and also culturally. Now, I want to argue that TVA until 1945 may be seen as Appalachian Modernism in

⁶³ “While poverty rates in northern and southern Appalachia were only 12.8 percent in 2000, slightly above the national average of 12.3 percent, rates in the heart of Appalachia were 22.1 percent, almost twice the national average. Eastern Kentucky and southern West Virginia contained five of the poorest twenty-five counties in the United States” (Eller 233).

three ways: first, as an experiment in utilizing big bureaucracy to address local problems; second, as a reordering of and collaboration with nature; third, as an exemplar of modernist architecture in public spaces to represent the notion of progress.

Morgan, Morgan, and Lilienthal may clearly be considered modernizers, but they also acted as modernists. Fredric Jameson offers relevant shading on these two terms and a framework for understanding the work of these early twentieth century bureaucrats as modernism:

If...modernization has something to do with industrial progress, rationalization, reorganization of production and administration along more efficient lines, electricity, the assembly line, parliamentary democracy, and cheap newspapers – then we will have to conclude that as least one strand of artistic modernism is anti-modern and comes into being in violent or muffled protest against modernization, now grasped as technological progress in the largest sense. These anti-modern modernisms sometimes involve pastoral visions or Luddite gestures but are mostly symbolic, and especially at the turn of the century, involve what is sometimes referred to as a new wave of anti-positivist, spiritualistic, irrational reactions against triumphant enlightenment progress or reason. (304)

TVA – and Appalachian Modernism – combine two of Jameson's seemingly contradictory characteristics of modernization and modernism. TVA represented industrial progress, electricity, efficiency and reorganization under a bureaucratic authority and at the same time

sought to create a pastoral vision undergirded by quasi-spiritual philosophies. TVA attempted to create “a picture of the world as it might be,” not by replacing farms with factories or moving people from the country to the city, but by attempting to make a garden of a wilderness, to revive dying farmland through enlightenment, and to transform a river from a menace into an economic engine⁶⁴. A charitable view, like the one James Agee reported for *Fortune* magazine, saw the directors of TVA embracing progress and reason in the pursuit of improving and continuing life in the Valley, not revolutionizing it or ending it. Jameson’s more famous formulation of modernism could have been written to describe TVA: “Modernism must thus be seen as uniquely corresponding to an uneven moment of social development...the coexistence of realities from radically different moments of history – handicrafts alongside the great cartels, peasant fields with the Krupp factories or the Ford plant in the distance” (307). The “synchronicity of the non-synchronous⁶⁵” created by TVA in the 1930s – a hydroelectric dam pumping water and electricity downstream to farmers plowing with mules – may still be seen today in the juxtaposition of TVA lakes like Norris, Holston, and Watauga, their shores untouched by modern development but their structures and signage reflecting a 1930s and 1940s projection of the future.

Wilbur Dam in Carter Country, Tennessee, as seen in Figure 7, sits just downstream from the Watauga Dam and illustrates this juxtaposition of forward-looking electro-mechanical and ancient-looking natural landscape . Built in 1912, Wilbur Dam predates TVA, but when TVA acquired the dam in 1945, it rebuilt the powerhouse, added the gate-controlled spillways, and

⁶⁴ This sentence borrows a quotation from Arthur Morgan, the idea of developing the river as a unified economic landscape from Lilienthal, and the application of technology to farming from Harcourt Morgan.

⁶⁵ Ernest Bloch’s phrase translated and borrowed by Jameson (307).

raised the height by five feet to accommodate the run off from Watauga Dam (TVA “Grand”).

The proximity of Wilbur and Watauga dams to each other allows visitors to see TVA’s landscape and constructed design on large and small scales, and creates a visual narrative of TVA’s design capability. To reach Watauga, visitors first encounter Wilbur and its exposed power-generating equipment. Modernist architects revealed and incorporated structural elements in and into their designs, and TVA showcases the mechanics of electricity for visual effect. Technology and concrete announce that at Wilbur Dam industrial progress sits alongside pastoral wilderness.



Figure 7. Wilbur Dam.

photo: Brandon Story

The simple word Wilbur, seen in Figure 8, illustrates the stylization and standardization of TVA's visual rhetoric. This lettering identified TVA structures by single names such as Norris or Hiawatha, sometimes artfully incorporated into building design. Steven Heller describes the modern sans-serif font as "streamlined" (106) a symbol of the emerging machine age. Streamlining locomotives and airplanes gave them the tangible benefit of wind resistance and implied movement and speed (Heller 103). Streamlining letters, and later appliances, attempted to evoke that same forward thinking.⁶⁶ These letters also appeared on walls inside TVA power stations or visitor's centers to spell out TVA's maxim from inside the turbine room at South Holston Dam, as seen in Figure 9. This statement of intention locates the large-scale government bureaucracy of TVA within a national and populist context characteristic of industrialized nations of the time.

In the space between Wilbur and Watauga dams, the Watauga River makes choreographed turns that facilitate recreational fishing, small boating, and camping. Instead of a raging river, TVA has turned the Watauga into a carefully controlled visitor-friendly experience. Ascending the mountain to the Watauga Lake, shown later in the chapter, reveals a wholly crafted artifice that combines mountain, water, and finely-crafted modernist architecture. Recent scholarship has connected the large-scale government programs of the 1930s and 1940s in Germany, England and Ireland, the USSR, and the United States to artistic and bureaucratic modernism. In *Public Works*, Michael Rubenstein considers Irish infrastructure and postcolonialism in modernist Irish literature. Michael Szalay's *New*

⁶⁶ Heller notes that streamlined font reduced ornament, in this case serifs, but that the style was "not as pure in its rejection of ornament as members of the Bauhaus would have liked" (103).



Figure 8. Wilbur Dam's simple, streamlined lettering.

Photo: Brandon Story

Deal Modernism explores FDR-era insurance and security in modernist American literature, and Peter Fritzsche's article "Nazi Modern" explores the fascination with futurist aesthetic and technology in the Third Reich. These writers see the modernizing work of large bureaucracies in these decades working to solve local and individual problems as either a kind of modernism, as being fascinated with modernism, or fodder for modernist writers and artists. Steven Heller

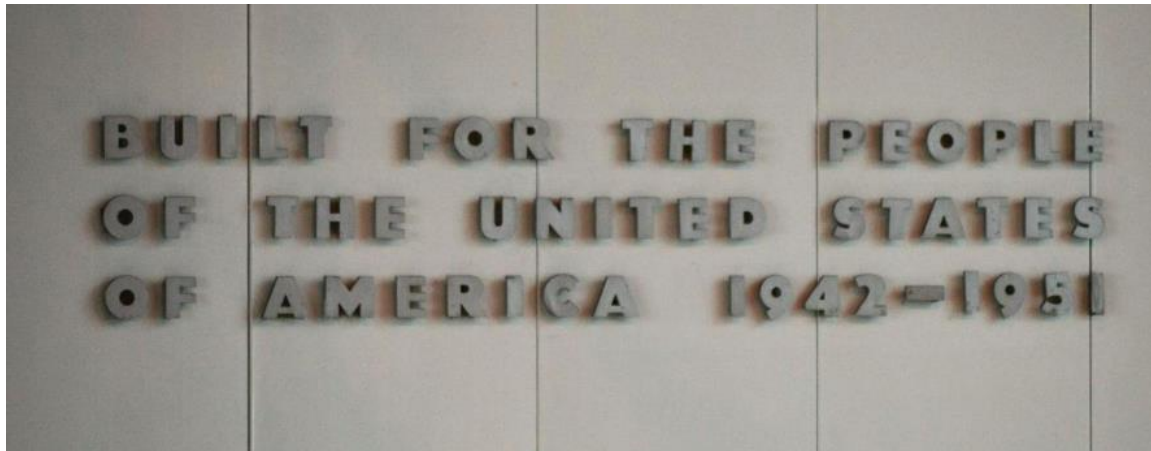


Figure 9. TVA's maxim from South Holston Dam.

Photo by David Crigger

cites the “curious, if unsettling, parallels” between the TVA’s public art and logo and the “overt or stylized heroic realism” used to promote public works projects in Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia (107). The TVA combines the goals of providing infrastructure and security and promoting a vision of the future defined by technological wonder and aesthetic innovation. Additionally, the Authority may be seen as modernist in its experimentation, fascinated with modernism in its aesthetic, and inspirational to modernists such as Le Corbusier (Culvahouse 25).

No template for the bureaucracy of TVA or director of the TVA existed, and both FDR and Arthur Morgan saw the work of the TVA as a reshaping that would affect all facets of life in the Valley. In addition to utopian, scholars frequently use the word experiment to describe Morgan’s work. Experimentation remains a key word for definitions of artistic modernism, and a term that Fritzsche uses to define Nazi modernism. His argument for the Third Reich’s modernism differs not so much from the language and mission of TVA. Germany in the thirties, Fritzsche writes, was not modernist

because it adopted and celebrated automobiles, airplanes, and other futuristic technology, but because it conceived of Germany as both the object of the social and economic forces of industrialization and, thanks to those same forces, as a potential subject that possessed the capacity to reorganize political life and prosper amid dangerous conditions. The Nazis were modernists because they made the acknowledgment of the radical instability of twentieth-century life the premise of relentless experimentation. (2)

Quoting and critiquing Marshall Berman's definition of modernists as people who become "subjects and objects of modernization" (qtd. In Fritzsche 2), Fritzsche sees modernists as objects of a time of economic and industrial change and potential subjects capable of adapting successfully to life in modernity. The TVA directors, the thousands who aided with various aspects of it, and millions affected by it fit this description, and certainly Morgan and to a lesser degree Harcourt Morgan and Lilienthal pursued relentless experimentation in their planning and implementation.

In his essay "Ideology and Engineering in the Tennessee Valley," Barry Katz sees TVA as a part of the same modernist moment in history that produced the Nazis and the Soviets, as a democratic alternative to the far right or far left: "Large-scale planning was not the exclusive province of the Soviet New Economic Policy (NEP), but could take place in a democracy as well; monumentality could inspire rather than subdue the individual as it did in Fascist Italy" (82).

However, Szalay makes a point worth repeating about the TVA-Nazi analogies⁶⁷: the “welfare state, bogged down in half-measures and compromise,” fails to rouse the strong loyalties of either Soviet-style Socialism or German-style National Socialism. The US, through the New Deal, WPA, TVA and welfare programs, took part in the early-twentieth century trend of centralized government initiatives designed to address the challenges of modernization. However, Szalay borrows from Irving Howe to write that the less authoritarian, more democratic US approach, full of “half-measures and compromise” meant long-term political consensus for those programs, even though the TVA and many other social programs continue to be labeled socialism by critics and targeted by conservative parties.

An example of successful TVA experimentation in applying new scientific ideas to improve the life in the Valley may be seen in the eradication of malaria, which affected thirty percent of the population of the region in 1933 (49; CDC.gov). Working with national and Alabama state health officials, TVA devised a plan to fluctuate water levels on multiuse reservoirs that served as breeding grounds for mosquito larvae (Martin 195-197), which has “essentially eliminated” the disease (CDC.gov). Besides the application of scientific research to solve a practical and dangerous health problem, *TVA: The First Twenty Years*, a book published by TVA, also cites the cooperation between state and federal health, environmental monitoring, and economic agencies as a model for inter-government collaboration (204-205).

⁶⁷ Fritzsche also writes that the Nazis were racists who murdered millions of innocent people. This comparison between the TVA and the Nazis in no way seeks to condone the work of the Nazis or to impugn the work of the TVA. The US attempted big-government solutions to the problems of economic and industrial modernization in the same decades as Germany, the Soviet Union, and many European countries. Also, the artwork used to sell these projects to the public appears strikingly similar. However, the morality of the work of the TVA should be judged on its own merits, not as a false equivalent to the Holocaust or Soviet purges. I do not want to provide an opportunity for this argument to be used in defense of the indefensible.

Experimental bureaucratic cooperation may never come to define modernism in the same way as experimental fiction or cubism, but the eradication of malaria and the establishment of health services in TVA counties (TVA 205) should be noted as a significant achievement.

Reordering Nature as Appalachian Modernism

If experimental bureaucracy worked behind the scenes to create TVA, then its most public work relied on its architectural and landscape aesthetic, in the way engineers and architects reordered nature to create a unified design. Tim Culvahouse's edited collection of essays and photographs, *The Tennessee Valley Authority: Design and Persuasion*, speaks to the attempt by TVA to sell their work to the public with a vision of the future, not just in their architectural choices, but in the way TVA land created a particular experience for visitors and recreators. A connection to nature remains a central component of Appalachian identity, and the transformation of nature during modernization is a key component of Appalachian Modernism, exemplified by Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater and in James Still's *River of Earth*. As discussed in chapter one, Wright sought to create a house that fit into its Appalachian site, a hillside along Bear Run in Southwestern Pennsylvania. Sim Moberly's sermon about coal extraction, a topic of chapter two, described a river of earth, the movement of mountains to get to the coal that lay underneath. TVA restructured the natural world on an unimaginable scale, damming and taming a river, creating a navigable waterway, and harnessing the power of the river to create electric power, all while attempting to provide stable and fertile farmland for the valley. Significantly, criticisms of TVA from Appalachian studies tend to focus on the period after World War II when TVA moved power production into overdrive. Both David Whisnant's

Modernizing the Mountaineer and Ron Eller's *Uneven Ground* give TVA a pass or even praise on its early initiatives with the exception of moving families off of their farms, which was central to the project. The act of reshaping nature to create lakes where there had been valleys and hollows comes up in discussions of the human, not environmental, costs.

Once a valley has been transformed into a lake, the work of picturing the lake as it had been, a valley or farm or town, becomes an act of memory for those who can remember or imagination for those who cannot. Before TVA flooded these valleys, the conception of TVA reservoirs also required an imaginative act. As an author or painter brings into being a thing that did not previously exist, so did the directors, designers, and workers bring into existence the new: Norris Lake; Cherokee Lake; Holston Lake; Watauga Lake, as well as the locks and channels that remade the Tennessee River. A better metaphor may be sculpture, since out of the raw materials of earth, water, flora, and concrete, TVA created a great artifice: an unnatural reality constructed almost entirely of nature.

Culvahouse's beautiful book should convince any reader that TVA design and aesthetic represent a high-water mark in twentieth-century American modernist architecture and the personal narratives woven into Culvahouse's introductory essay and Jennifer Bloomer's closing essay, "Watauga," also locate the work of the TVA in the particular American place of Appalachia. Here is Appalachian Modernism: the specific application of a modernist ideas to the particular landscape of Appalachia. In her essay for this book, "Redefining Landscape," Jane Wolff writes that for the TVA,

the landscape was its medium and its message...it reinvented the

Tennessee Valley as a collection of idealized scenes – rustic, pastoral, and

monumental. The places that the TVA created argued for its agenda.

Meant to look as if they had always existed, they declared that progress was not at odds with tradition, that old images and new technologies could be integrated, and that history and geography were continuous and coherent (52).

TVA did not need the permission of the valley to carry out its work. It had the power of the federal government, but it waged a significant public relations campaign designed to convince the people of the valley and the rest of the country that its work was beneficial and necessary. As we will see, Rootman Jonas of Eleanor Buckles' *Valley of Power* goes house to house looking for the right incentive to convince Valley famers to relocate. As Wolff and Agee report, TVA sold the idea that the landscape needed to be remade because timber extraction and over-farming had rendered a rich national resource – the valley's farmland – nearly useless: they framed TVA as rescue mission. In addition to the idealized dam locations, demonstration farms, replete with new fertilizers, electricity, incubators for hatching chicks, and appliances for the home displayed the possibilities for other valley famers (Wolff 59). Planned communities like Norris Town and Fontana Village, featuring updated versions of Appalachian cabins and stone houses in the former and prefabricated modernist box-houses in the latter, sold a new model of Appalachian living (Wolff 59). TVA presented a version of rural living to the country that accentuated the future and the possible. But, according to Wolff, the project also created a "wrinkle in time...interrupting and even erasing history" (61). The farms, graves, and villages that inhabited the valley before TVA disappeared under lakes and vanished similarly from TVA rhetoric and public relations. In reality, the handicrafts existed alongside the great TVA cartel,

but in TVA's telling of the story, the Authority absorbed, improved, and remade the handicrafters to work with the great cartel.

Modernist Architecture as Vision of the Future

If landscape provided the medium and the message for the TVA, then its architecture and technology had to fit into both pastoral nature and idealized future. TVA's architecture had to be both Appalachian and modernist to bring together experimental bureaucracy, nature, and modernist ideals. Christine Macy places TVA at the heart of modernist architecture in America through the person of Roland Wank, Hungarian-born and educated, whose study in Brno, Czechoslovakia from 1919 to 1921⁶⁸ shaped his belief that "modern architecture could express a new and democratic society" (30). After immigrating to the United States in 1924, Wank designed housing and the well-known Union Station (1929-1933) in Cincinnati. Earl Sumner Draper, director of Land Planning and Housing, recruited Wank to TVA in 1933 to work on the town of Norris. Draper, a city planner and landscape architect, was chosen by Arthur Morgan because of his extensive work designing towns in the south, including Kingsport, Tennessee (Macy 34). Draper's vision for a TVA aesthetic shows up most directly in the town of Norris, where homes fit a traditional idea of Appalachian building and design, but the community's parks, house placement, and layout reflect the ecological and communal ideals of TVA. Wank, however, fought for the more overt modernism, and so was moved out of Draper's division to work more closely with the engineers designing dams (Macy 40-41).

⁶⁸ During the same years, "the Bauhaus was established in Weimar, Germany, and the VKhUTEMAS in Moscow, Russia, both alternative schools of architecture that looked to industry as a model for design and argued for the transformative social potential of modern design," according to Macy (30).

Wank often submitted his ideas over the heads of his superiors straight to Arthur Morgan, who, along with Draper, came to support Wank's vision for Norris Dam over the Army Corps of Engineers' drawing, which employed neoclassical ornament and arches (Macy 41). As a result, Wank and his TVA architect successors played a leading role with the engineers in the design and aesthetic of TVA dams, pump stations, visitor centers, and overlooks (Macy 44). The modernism they envisioned, symbolizing the achievement of a "new and democratic society," played a major role in TVA's public persona. In 1941, The Museum of Modern Art opened an exhibit on TVA architecture, and articles appeared in *Time*, and *Nation* magazines (Macy 46). Macy cites Lewis Mumford's belief that the TVA wrestled modernism back from the Europeans, never mind that the chief architect was "a socialist-expatriate-Hungarian" (46). Reviewing the TVA show for *The New Yorker*, Mumford wrote, "Here is the modern architecture at its mightiest and best. The Pharaohs did not do any better" (58).⁶⁹ An oft-told, rarely-cited story⁷⁰ has the French modernist and master of plasticized concrete⁷¹ Le Corbusier visiting Norris Dam and being wowed by the scale and use of concrete. Christine Macy locates the story in *Le Modulor* (1947), a book by Le Corbusier. In 1946, Le Corbusier came to New York and met with Albert Einstein and Henry Kaiser (Culvahouse 25). He then travelled to Knoxville, Tennessee, where he met with David Lilienthal and toured TVA sites (Culvahouse 25). In *Le Modulor*, he writes that in the Tennessee Valley, "victorious life was regaining possession of a savaged land, performing upon it one of the greatest syntheses of modern organization" (qtd. in Culvahouse

⁶⁹ Mumford wrote that the structures of the TVA were "as close to perfection as our age has come" (58).

⁷⁰ Similarly, I have read the quote, "The Tennessee Valley is the first place in America where we can sit down and design a civilization," attributed to Arthur Morgan a dozen times in my research. I have yet to find where he said it. Every citation quotes someone else's use.

⁷¹ "Plasticized concrete" is Henry-Russell Hitchcock's term.

25). With the TVA dams, American architecture made a bold claim to its own monumental modernism, and expressed a belief in the European doctrine of socially-transformative modernist design.

Modernist architecture historians place TVA in the conversation and competition between the American organic architecture championed by Frank Lloyd Wright and the international style prominent in Europe. Culvahouse credits Frank Lloyd Wright with the original American notion that a structure should “echo the forms of the landscape in which it resides” (18), an idea significant both to Fallingwater and to TVA dams, which somehow take part in the great fiction of manmade lakes as appropriate and natural elements of the landscape. It is too much to say that TVA employed Frank Lloyd Wright-style “organic architecture,” but certainly Wank and the designers of TVA worked to unite their architecture with its natural setting. The Tennessee Valley designers were charged with the public and pragmatic concerns of building of dams and power stations, not houses and office buildings, and Appalachia provided a particular landscape for two of the most celebrated examples of American architectural modernism: Fallingwater and TVA.

The Visitor’s Center at Watauga Dam in Carter County, Tennessee, seen in Figure 10, illustrates this aesthetic with its clean lines, natural materials and architectural simplicity. Featuring modernist simplicity, the center’s only ornament is the recurring pattern of stacked stone⁷², the most often copied feature of Fallingwater, seen in Figure 11. This building sits at

⁷² Chapter One contains a longer discussion of modernist architecture and ornament. As a rule, modernism eschews ornament. TVA Visitor Centers follow this rule. “Ornament as created today,” writes Adolf Loos in 1908, “has no connection with us, has no human connections at all, no connection with the world as it is constituted” (80). He also wrote “Whoever goes to the Ninth Symphony and then sits down to design a wallpaper pattern is either a rogue or a degenerate” (81).



Figure 10. Watauga Dam Visitor's Center.

Photo: Brandon Story

the end of a long TVA road above Wilbur Dam that allows visitors and picnickers access to wide views of the lake. The seemingly random stone pattern repeats in the sidewalk. Viewing the dam requires an additional ten-minute walk into the woods, so from the visitor's center and its connected veranda, visitors can see only Watauga Lake in its beautiful mountain setting⁷³ and this modernist building; both reflect the aesthetic ideals of TVA. Modernist architecture sits

⁷³ Watauga Lake sits at the highest elevation in the TVA system at 1900 feet above sea level. Begun in 1942, construction slowed during the war and finished in 1948.

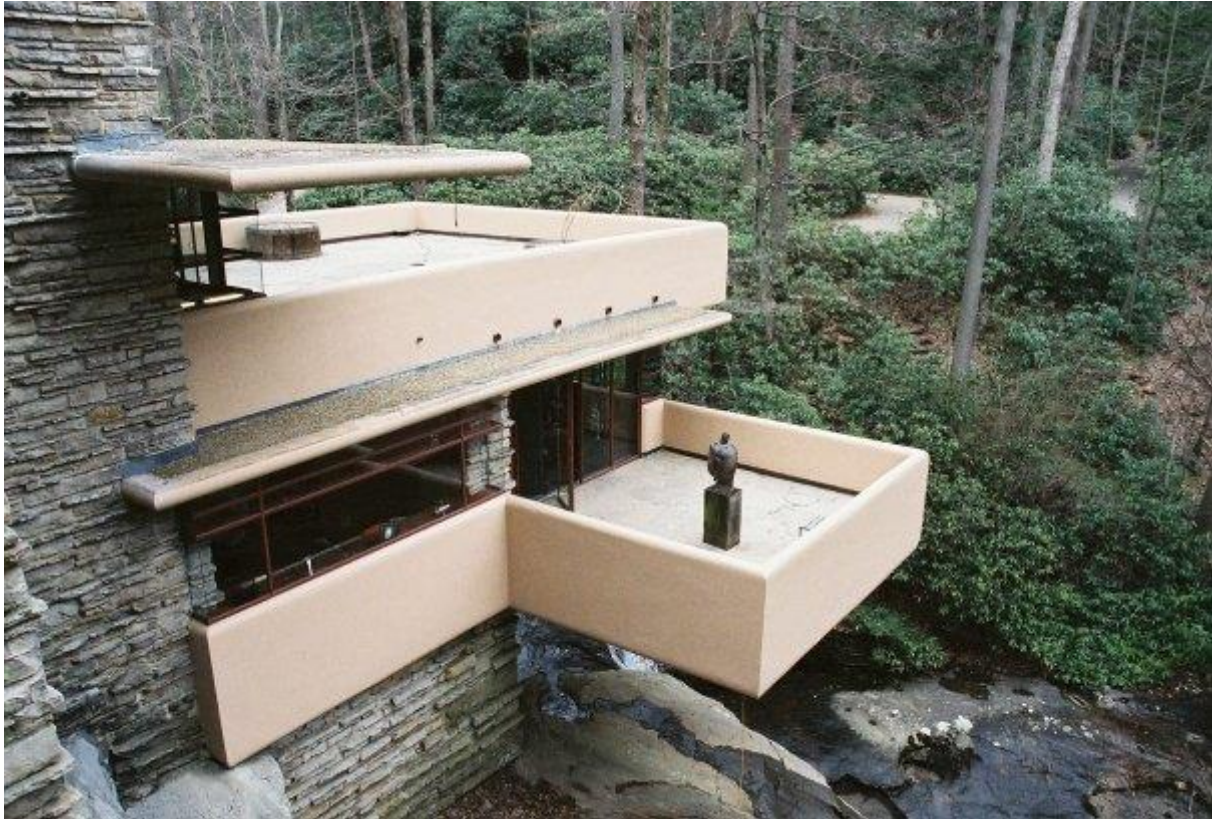


Figure 11. Fallingwater over Bear Run.

Photo by Mariel Story

alongside pastoral nature, and through proper scale, material choice, and structural design, the two work together in harmony. The building does not disappear into its landscape, but reminds visitors that both building and landscape reflect human endeavor, idealist intention, and forward thinking. Untouched nature and stylized architecture can create visually jarring effect as anyone who has seen the controversial Sugartop Condominiums atop Sugar Mountain, North Carolina would attest. At Watauga Lake and other TVA sites, the untouched nature is as designed as the architecture, and the structures – dams, power stations, and visitor's centers – set in context for maximum effect. The dams announce stability, technology, and power; this structure and others like it reflect harmony, recreation, and peace.

The vision of the future TVA offered visitors, potential customers, and skeptics relied heavily on technology and TVA technology relied on electricity. Barry Katz cites Italian futurists like Filippo Marinetti⁷⁴ and Italian-loving modernists like Ezra Pound to describe the artistic underpinnings of a vision of a good life in modernity reliant on electric power. Pound writes, “the beauty of machines (A.D. 1930) is now chiefly to be found in those parts of machines where the energy is most concentrated” (qtd. In Katz 85). TVA presented electric technology in three main platforms, according to Katz, each designed with a futurist aesthetic. The first concerned the look of the hydroelectric generators themselves, the second, publicly-accessible control stations where visitors could observe human beings using technology to control the flow of a river and the generation of electric power. Thirdly, TVA and related federal programs spent millions of dollars marketing the convenience of and providing the credit to own electric home appliances. Katz writes that the dramatically staged lighting and scale of TVA powerhouses invoked images of power not just mechanical but spiritual (85-86): “Pilgrims were ushered into serenely appointed visitors’ galleries and lofty observation decks – 1,000 per day each at Wilson, Wheeler, and Norris within a year of their completion – where they could meditate upon the divine mysteries of hydroelectric power” (Katz 86). If the new power of technology to harness nature and turn it into electricity invoked the transcendent effect of a cathedral, then the powerhouse control rooms sought to reassure observers that human beings retained complete control over the orderly processes of river control and power production (Katz 88). TVA directors decided to open these control rooms to public observation and design

⁷⁴ Marinetti: “FUTURISM EXALTS THE VARIETY THEATRE because: 1. The Variety Theatre, born as we are from electricity, is lucky in having no tradition, no masters, no dogma, and it is fed by swift actuality” (253). Also: “the energetic electric light triumphs and the soft decadent moonlight is defeated” (256).

them in such a way to visually represent their operation in such a way as to translate to the lay visitor: “switchboards were laid out like subway maps to create a schematic, diagrammatic representation of the physical installation itself” (Katz 90). Katz argues that these choices reflect a Wankian belief in the people as owners of TVA on one hand and an explicit “propaganda value of engaging the public directly” on the other (89). TVA designers may not have intended to create a public sacred space, but they certainly knew the value of capturing the imagination with monuments to progress and showcasing a vision of nature tightly controlled by human beings wielding technology.

No TVA effort brought more change to Appalachia, however, than the electrification of homes. From the beginning of TVA, Lilienthal pushed home electricity if not as the goal of TVA than as its justification (90). Flood control, improved agriculture, and public recreation could not justify the massive investment in TVA the same way that the creation of cheap electric power could. The Electric Home and Farm Authority (EHFA) subsidized and offered cheap credit for families to purchase electric appliances (Katz 91). When the low-cost, low feature appliances designed for the program failed to catch on, EHFA extended its assistance to standard model home appliances, and soon electric pumps supplied water, electric radios supplied information, entertainment, and connection, and, as Katz writes, “people would learn to freeze their leftovers, iron their clothes, and entertain their children as never before” (Katz 92). If this program conquered the valley slowly, it still conquered the valley. The Rural Electrification Administration (1936) extended loans to local cooperative power companies who set up grids and ran power to homes; TVA supplied an abundance of electricity, and the EHFA supplied loans for families to purchase electric appliances. In 1945, twenty-seven percent of

the farms in the valley had electricity; by 1950, it was eighty-three percent (Cuoto 239). A Tennessean who plugged her electric mixer into the wall socket used power generated by TVA, delivered by the REA, and an appliance financed by the EHFA⁷⁵. By cajoling or by persuasion or by accident, she found herself connected to the rest of the country through wires, through radio, and through the common experience of modernity. She had become an active participant in modernization enabled by an audacious act of American and Appalachian Modernism called the Tennessee Valley Authority.

TVA as Symbol of Change

So far, I have argued that TVA in its conception, bureaucracy, and material manifestations represents an example of Appalachian Modernism. The last third of the chapter considers how the TVA and its interactions with Appalachia depicted in novels, poetry, films, and songs also make this case. Creative works about TVA often feature the divide between insiders and outsiders and winners and losers, propagating either a pro-TVA or activist-Appalachian agenda. Whatever their political slant, these works share three ideas related to Appalachian Modernism: first, they view TVA as a dividing line between old and new ways of life; second, they involve some trade of the past for the future; lastly, they demonstrate a variety of human responses to modernization.

This discussion draws on Jameson's formulation of modernism as "uneven moment of social development...the coexistence of realities from radically different moments of history"

⁷⁵ TVA's first client: Tupelo, Mississippi, which had a municipal power company, in February 1934. Elvis Presley was born in Tupelo in January 1935.

(307), and also on Janet Lyon's discussion of "Cosmopolitanism and Modernism," particularly her formulation of Kantian or "old" cosmopolitanism as a "scenario of divided loyalties between local attachments and global ideals, in which the global inevitably wins out" (391). The opposite of cosmopolitanism by this metric is provincialism or parochialism, terms used by the powerful center to undermine the authority of those outside it. According to Lyon, modernism struggles with an anxiety about cosmopolitanism, and the recent attention to global modernisms decentralizes modernism, making possible the view that the cultural assumptions and the modernism of each locality, even Western Europe or the United Kingdom, constitutes just one more case of provincialism. The idea that modernism may have local instead of cosmopolitan loyalties provides a jumping off place for a theory of regional modernisms across the globe including Appalachia. The following works, however, clearly see the story of TVA in Appalachia as one about the local losing to the global, of Appalachia "floating like rafted logs toward the mainstream" (Miller 26).

Before looking at specific works, I want to mention two pieces of context, one generic and political. TVA-inspired work comes from all over the map of high and low, literary and popular. The most popular TVA-inspired piece is probably John Prine's "Paradise," (1971) about strip mining in Muhlenberg County, Kentucky where TVA operates the coal-powered Paradise Fossil Plant. Marianne Wiggins' *Evidence of Things Unseen* (2004), a National Book Award finalist, is perhaps the most celebrated. This fine song and beautiful novel share TVA and modernization as themes, but not much else, and neither are by artists from Appalachia. TVA has been a subject for more folk and popular artists than literary ones. I am not considering these works Appalachian Modernism; I am arguing that their depictions of TVA in Appalachia

show how TVA functions as Appalachian Modernism. Not much art about TVA by Appalachians exists from the first twenty years of TVA, so the version of the story we get from that time period comes from mostly from TVA. Perhaps the emergence of Appalachian Studies and an Appalachian identity among artists, scholars, and activists account for this. Poetry, songs, novels, and films from Appalachia about TVA come along much later, from the 1970s until now. Even the ones that use the early decades of TVA for inspiration must be considered in the context of the political and popular opinions of TVA in their time, which the following brief survey will describe.

Political sympathies and support for TVA among Appalachian activists shifted as TVA entered the coal and nuclear power business. According to Whisnant and Eller,⁷⁶ TVA enjoyed guarded support from the valley region and popular consent from progressives and liberals in its first decade and a half (Whisnant 49, Eller 39). Post-World War II, its agenda began to shift under Lilienthal and more deliberately under the Eisenhower administration away from a utopian plan to transform lives and closer to a state-sponsored power-generation company⁷⁷. The war began this shift, when TVA provided enormous energy to Oak Ridge's Manhattan Project, and 1950s anti-communism and anti-socialist sentiment continued it (Purcell xxvi). Lilienthal's aggressive campaign to electrify the valley succeeded in ways he could not have imagined, and the uranium enrichment plants at Oak Ridge and Paducah created such a demand for electricity that by the 1950s, TVA heavily invested in coal, constructing "seven of

⁷⁶ And Agee and Aaron D. Purcell in less explicit ways.

⁷⁷ To be fair, Lilienthal continued to believe that TVA should be something more than just a well-run private utility company, though he believed that TVA's mandate concerned infrastructure more than social persuasion. See Whisnant 62.

the world's largest coal-fired power plants between 1949 and 1953" (Eller 39). By the 1970s, TVA also began building nuclear power generators, and currently operates three nuclear sites, including the newest reactors in the country (1996 and 2016) at Watts Bar near Soddy Daisy, Tennessee (tva.gov). As Eller writes, "the agency that had been created to conserve the soil and improve quality of life through cooperative regional planning contributed both directly and indirectly to the further desolation of the mountains" (39). Controversy over Tellico Dam, begun in 1967 and delayed until its completion in 1979, gave Appalachians a contemporary example of government relocation, historical Indian-land inundation, and environmental recklessness⁷⁸. This non-hydroelectric dam project that allowed for development and private property on its shores seemed built for the people of the United States of America that owned boats and golf clubs.

TVA as Dividing Line between Old and New

As reviewers of Amy Greene's *Long Man* (2014) note, literary floods have demarcated the passing of the old world into the new since antiquity. *Long Man* and Ron Rash's novel *One Foot in Eden* and *Raising the Dead*, a companion book of poems, use dam building and valley-flooding to suggest the end of a period in Appalachia and the beginning of another⁷⁹. *One Foot in Eden* takes place as Lake Jocassee takes shape for the first time, and *Raising the Dead*

⁷⁸ "The endangered species wasn't the snail darter," said grocery-store owner Benjamin Snyder, referring to the little fish that held up the dam's competition. "It is the small businessman, the people who live here, and nobody cared about us" (Rawls, Jr).

⁷⁹ James Dickey's novel *Deliverance* (1970) and the Coen Brothers' film *O Brother, Where Art Thou* (2000) also use the flooded valley as a marker of time: Lewis, Ed, Bobby, and Drew want to ride the wild river before it becomes tamed by the dam; and Everett, Pete and Delmar set out to retrieve a wedding ring before it disappears forever under a dammed lake.

meditates on, among other things, the Horsepasture River and the people whose farms were taken to create Lake Jocassee. Of particular interest in these two books are the dead who remain under the lake. Rash's books, set in Western North Carolina, concern Duke Energy, not TVA, but his poetic meditations on this phenomenon of modernization work right alongside this discussion. For Rash and Greene, the old, represented by tradition, connection to land, and the graves of ancestors, must be uprooted when the very ground upon which the old life is built disappears beneath a manmade deluge of water and progress. The new life of the cash economy, electricity, and placelessness moves Appalachians from the valley into the town, or to the industrial Midwest or to other symbols of the future: education, mobility, and the mainstreaming of the mountaineer.

Long Man (2014) both reinforces and complicates images of the pre-modern mountaineer as Greene describes the days after the dam gates have closed on the Long Man River. The novel shows the last of the old ways – those hanging on to their farms until the last possible moment – and the beginning of the new – those that have moved into town or to farms outside the valley. Sam Washburn, the TVA man in this novel, comes from Appalachia, though he is a University-educated Knoxvillean. He takes the job of convincing the holdouts like Annie Clyde Dotson that they have to leave before the TVA reservoir takes it. Washburn signifies the new coming to change the old, represented by Dotson. The old includes Appalachian tropes such as Cherokee grandmothers, moonshine, and mountain mysticism in the shape of throwing bones and herbal remedies. The folks in the valley that need to move drive Model As, Packards, and Studebakers, all defunct car models or makes; Washburn drives a Dodge. The book's language locates it closer to Ron Rash's grizzly natural realism than Lee

Smith's funny and grotesque folklore, sometimes to overly self-conscious affect, as when Amos, the character whose wildness and independence will foil the TVA's removal plan, returns to the mostly-vacated town:

After another stretch of woods he came at last to a derelict cabin with a chimney mortared from hog's hair and mud, the lot choked with milkweed. A guinea hen flapped up cackling at his approach, small and ring-tailed, but there was no other signs of life. He paused to hunt out its nest and found a clutch of eggs that he pocketed to boil when he finally made camp. He rested for a spell then shouldered his bindle and walked on. (Greene 24)

Greene's narration places the members of the Yuneetah community in a decidedly pre-modern Appalachian setting of hogs-hair mortared cabins and hobo luggage.

Amos, however, plays the outsider role in the novel more than Sam. Annie Clyde may not want to move, but her husband James wants to head to Detroit, and the majority of the valley refuses to sign the petition she circulates in an attempt to build resistance. These mountaineers see modernity coming, and most willingly adapt. Their local loyalties are giving way to global ones, like the automobile industry and the electricity grid. The ones who refuse to embrace it, like Amos⁸⁰ and to some degree Annie Clyde, appear out of step with the community. Through the contrast of the primitivism of the language Greene employs to describe Amos with Sam's view of the new world created by TVA, "the electric pendant lights

⁸⁰ The TVA architecture meant to persuade the mountaineers of the promise of the future does not quite convince Amos: "He supposed the design of the dam and the buildings was meant to be modern but they reminded him of a penitentiary" (119).

hanging over their heads and the number of cars passing outside the plate-glass window, the sign above the coffeepot advertising Blatz beer on tap,” she constructs what Jameson calls “the coexistence of realities from radically different moments of history” (307). Greene does not mark the passing of pre-modern Appalachia with Rash’s elegiac poetry, but with a plain-folk acceptance voiced by Annie Clyde’s Aunt Silver, who, upon seeing the poverty that has travelled with the Dotson’s out of the valley thinks “Electricity couldn’t put right everything wrong in this valley,” and watches as the waters rise because “somebody ought to bear witness” (Greene 270-271).

Don Johnson’s “1946” from *Watauga Drawdown*⁸¹ (1990) connects the modernizing moments of TVA and World War II as events of trauma and dislocation. “1946” tells the story of a World War II⁸² veteran in a temporal no man’s land who experiences PTSD when he comes home and finds destruction on a massive scale as a dam is being built:

After Europe

he returned to a valley like the war

a town of cellar holes and stumps

where yard trees, homeplace oaks and walnuts,

had been lumbered.

Farmhouses, jacked loose

from foundations, waited like dazed refugees

⁸¹ Johnson begins the poem “Watauga Drawdown” with this note: “In the fall of 1983, Watauga Lake was drawn down to the original river level, exposing the ruins of Butler, Tennessee, the only incorporated town wholly inundated by the T.V.A.” (31).

⁸² Eller reports that enlistment rates in Appalachia for World War II were among the highest in the country (197).

for trucks.

He couldn't separate the tanks
and half-tracks that clanked and back-fired
in his dreams
from the rumble and scrape
of bulldozers under arc lights at the dam site.

The World War II veteran at the center of this poem conflates the rubble of Hanau, a German town, and the rubble of his own farm after TVA has begun moving his house. Bulldozer tracks sound like tank tracks and the “unscheduled charges” that explode up on the bluff send the man diving into a ditch. This upheaval of the old – familiar trees and home itself torn from its foundation – describes the destruction necessitated by TVA, and this poem analogizes the effect of this on human beings with the trauma of modern warfare and its implication of global power struggles. Johnson upends the look of his free verse, creating out-of-place absences where there should be text. For this veteran, both the war and this moment divide time into before and after. In this moment of modernism, his house stands off of its old foundation, not yet in the new place, but somewhere in between.

Appalachians trading Past for Future

Elia Kazan's film *Wild River* (1960) is based on two TVA novels from Alabama, William Bradford Huie's *Mud on the Stars* (1942) and Borden Deal's *Dunbar's*

Cove (1957). *Wild River* and Eleanor Buckles' *Valley of Power* (1945)⁸³ use a local color conceit as old as Mary Noailles Murfree's "The Star in the Valley" (1878): a sophisticated outsider comes to the mountains and falls in love with a young, wild woman⁸⁴. In this film and novel, as well as in *The Long Man*, which tells the same story minus the overt love affair, the outsider works for TVA and has come to remove families from their farms as TVA floods their Valley. In each case, the TVA man offers a trade: the old troubled family farm for a new farm or house or situation. Kazan set *Wild River* in Tennessee instead of the Alabama of his source material, but maintains a more-southern-than-Appalachian feel. Ella Garth, the last holdout that Chuck Glover needs to move before the valley floods, lives on an island in the middle of the Tennessee River. Her island farm represents the old through her rundown house and bound-log ferry raft. Kazan equates life in the pre-TVA valley as a holdover from another century. When Glover hires away Garth's African-American workers for TVA, he encounters pushback from town fathers fearful of an economy based on equal wages for whites and blacks. Glover offers Garth a trade: her old island farm for a new house, and a move from a crop economy to a cash economy. She sees it differently. Her farm, which had been in her husband's family for generations, represents more than a commodity: "Taking away people's souls, putting electricity in place of them ain't progress, not the way I see it." Taming the river represents a violation to Garth, who tells Glover: "I like things running wild. Like nature made it." Glover, TVA, and progress win in

⁸³ *Valley of Power* was published by Creative Age Press, which was sold to Farrar, Straus and Young in 1951. Creative Age publisher Eileen J. Garrett was an Irish-born psychic and advocate for parapsychology who edited a magazine, *Tomorrow*, that included articles about mysticism and also literary selections. Buckles' book makes no mention of spiritualism beyond a character named Numbers Bender who sees himself as an interpreter of God's signs for his mountain community. See the Long Beach, California newspaper *Independent Press-Telegram* 1 July 1951 page 9 and the obituary of Roger W. Straus, Jr, *New York Times* 27 May 2004.

⁸⁴ See also Lee Smith's *Oral History* (1983).

the end, and Garth, under the watch of the Federal Marshall, trades her farm for a new little house with a big front porch, something Glover thought would help with the transition.

Buckles' *Valley of Power* focuses on the trade of old life for new, and the lengths the TVA man will go to sell that bargain to the mountaineer. Buckles, who was born in Kansas and grew up in Boulder, Colorado, came to work for TVA in 1934 as a stenographer⁸⁵ (Purcell 27-28). She had served as amanuensis for Thomas Wolfe during the years of writing that produced his second novel, *Of Time and the River* (1935). Buckles' sister Kit, who started working for TVA in 1936, helped organize a chapter of the Communist Party in Knoxville around TVA office workers. Aaron D. Purcell's *White Collar Radicals: TVA's Knoxville Fifteen, The New Deal, and The McCarthy Era* chronicles Kit's involvement with radical politics and the attention that received from federal law enforcement through the 1950s (Purcell 178). Eleanor left TVA to work with screenwriters in Hollywood and eventually took a job with the Office of War Information (OWI).

In this novel, Rootman Jonas is the TVA man and Sandrey Ballard is the wild mountain woman whose father refuses to leave his farm. The novel reads in different places like a TVA propaganda piece explaining the engineering marvel TVA hopes to accomplish in spite of pushback from tetchy mountaineers, a zany romance where the buttoned-down government man's world is turned upside down by his adventure in the country, and a behind-the-scenes look at the rank-and-file's opinions and insights into how TVA works and should work. Root, who has lived all over the country, holds the responsibility of convincing the few remaining families to move, and as he gets to know them, he sees what he has to do: "He had to play the

⁸⁵ The cover of *Valley of Power* says she worked her way up to "the impressive if hollow title of Budget Supervisor."

hopes of the future against the strength of memories. He had to sell the mountain people a conception of what was to come, in exchange for their past. The pull of the past was strong. The promised future must be bright to compete with it" (Buckles 78). For most Appalachians, TVA offered a vision of the future without many downsides: electric lights, washing machines, and fewer floods. For the people whose land TVA needed to provide the future, TVA could only offer a trade: the past for the future, their family's history for a chance at a different tomorrow.

Buckles dramatizes the decision-making process in scenes of encounter between rural Appalachians and the power of technology, electricity, and design. Root takes Anna and Verge Starret, Sandrey, and community prophet Numbers Bender to see the dam, powerhouse, and demonstration farm. Root's pitch borrows from both Morgans and Lilienthal and echoes ideas of Frank Lloyd Wright: "We've just taken the materials the Lord put right here at hand and rearranged them to the best advantage...Man is just now getting into step with Nature. He's just now learning to work in harmony with the soil and the rivers, instead of despoiling the earth and then suffering the consequences" (Buckles 194-195). The Valleyites stand in "cathedral awe" of the powerhouse and at the inscription: "Built for the people of the United States" (Buckles 195-196). Root impresses Virge with the milking machine, electric saw, and water pump, and wows the women with "an electric hair-dryer, a pressure cooker, a quick-freezing unit for preserving vegetables" and other household labor-savers (Buckles 201). When Virge is mistaken for a TVA demonstration farmer, he steps right into the role: "Suddenly Virge no longer saw himself as an outraged victim of the dam. He was an integral part of the over-all plan" (Buckles 209). Root successfully seduces nearly all the farmers to embrace the future, and in the process comes to see the past as a component of TVA's success. He originally

believed them “a tough undigested element stranded in a modern world” but by the end sees that the future TVA promises needs their ruggedness: “the hard individualism and the headstrong taste for freedom of the mountain people had fused with an idea that demanded a new kind of cooperation” (Buckles 263-264). These two symbols past and future, the Appalachian and the TVA, exist in the same moment of modernism and need each other to thrive.

Thank God for the TVA, Damn that TVA

The depictions of Appalachians in these works suggest that instead of an Appalachian response to the TVA, there were dozens. Some embrace it, some suffer from it, and some die instead of facing it. A few hold out against the inevitable advent of modernity, but most, whether because of poverty or weariness or necessity, come around to the world the TVA promises and delivers. Within *Valley of Power's* Ballard family, three strong opinions about TVA vie for Sandrey's affections. Father Purse refuses to leave his farm, brother Abel wants a better life and goes to work for TVA, and Aunt Loos thinks TVA will ultimately provide a better life for the country and the family:

Well, your Pa talks like the devil himself sent those foreigners to build the dam and try to run us out of here, just for sin's sake. But you've got to figure if maybe what's a nuisance to a few of us might be good for a lot of other people that we've never had to look at. And in the long run, maybe it's good for us, too. A man stands or falls with his brother man. (Buckles 58).

Aunt Loos's untimely⁸⁶ death raises speculation that her sympathy for TVA encouraged God to call her home, and this leaves Sandrey torn between her father and late Aunt.

Two recent country songs illustrate well the divide felt by Appalachians then and now about the old way of life and the new. In Jason Isbell's song "TVA"⁸⁷ (2009):

My granddaddy told me when he was just seven or so,
His daddy lost work and they didn't have a row to hoe,
Not too much to eat for seven boys and three girls;
All lived in a tent, a bunch of sharecroppers versus the world.
So his mama sat down, wrote a letter to FDR,
And a couple days later, couple of county men came in a car,
Rode out in the field, told his daddy to put down the plow.
He helped build the dam, gave power to most of the South.

So I thank God for the TVA
Thank God for the TVA,
When Roosevelt let us all work for an honest day's pay,
Thank God for the TVA.

TVA here represents an extension of the values of hard work and providing already present in the valley south. Instead of upending an old way of life, TVA provides a new way to continue it.

Sam Quinn's "T.V.A." sees it differently:

⁸⁶ Though convenient for the plot, since now the Ballard family has to decide where to bury Aunt Loos: on the family land that will soon be flooded or in one of the new locations provided by TVA.

⁸⁷ Isbell got his break in the Drive-By Truckers, a band from Muscle Shoals, Alabama. Patterson Hood of the band is featured in the largely pro-TVA Documentary "Built for the People" directed by Sean Fine and Andrea Nix Fine.

I don't need no dam or no damn FDR
 Making power for some other factories
 They can have their reasons, whatever they are
 And take them back to their authority
 God the Father said Jesus Christ
 I don't know about this electricity
 Use the days and steal the nights and make my waters rise
 And try to take my job away from me

We never talked about the week
 Daddy had nothing to say
 So close your ears
 Pretty mother dear, damn that TVA

Prickly and independent, Quinn's lyrics see TVA as an interruption of life in the valley, not an extension. This character sees TVA as a thief of work, not a trading partner. FDR shows up here as villain, not hero. In a scene in *Wild River*, Ella Garth lectures her assembled African-American workers on the evils of FDR and his plans. And as Ella appeals to nature as authority in *Wild River*, electricity here suggests a violation of the natural cycles of daylight and darkness.

Some Appalachians do not make the transition of modernization. Purse Ballard travels to the dam site at the end of *Valley of Power* and has an epiphany about his son Abel who has abandoned the family to work on the dam. Just as he realizes that his son has gone on to his own life and that Abel and Sandrey "weren't Ballards, they were the new generation," he is

clipped by a steel pole and falls to his death in the dam (226-227). Ella Garth from *Wild River* makes it as far as the front porch of her new house, refuses to go in, and in the next scene we are told that she has died. *Long Man's* Appalachian reactionary Amos blows himself up trying to dynamite the dam. Beulah Kesterson, Yuneetah's midwife and thrower of bones, tries throughout the book to calm Amos's anti-dam fervor. Near the end of the novel, Amos confronts her:

"I guess you've renounced the old ways. Like the rest of the town."

She waved her hand. "I ain't renounced nothing. I reckon a body can have it both ways."

Amos looked toward the mountain where her cabin was nestled.

"How long until they string their power lines up the hollow? Did you divine that before you gave up your bones?"

Beulah looked at him. "I don't know. Might be nice to have me a washing machine. One of them electric stoves." (Greene 237)

Some resist, some relent, and some refuse, but in the end, the water rises and these mountaineers mourn what they have lost and, like good Americans, look forward to what comes next.

What came next ended the liminal space between the past and the future. That is, it ended Appalachian Modernism and probably modernism and something new began.

Throughout this project, I have argued that Appalachia experiences the same modernization as the rest of the United States, and also produces examples of modernism along the same timeline. An evidence of this argument lies in the transition from modernism, where "some

residual zones of 'nature' or 'being' of the old, the older, the archaic still exist" (Jameson ix) to what comes next. Jameson calls it postmodernism, or late capitalism, "when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good" (ix), by which he means that nature, too, becomes absorbed in capitalist production. This is a complicated argument to make for Appalachia, where history and nature continue as narratives of meaning in literature, music, and art produced by and about the region. Still, something changed around 1945, and one source of that change came from Appalachia itself, from the Oak Ridge National Laboratory. James Agee wrote about the atomic bomb that "In an instant, without warning, the present had become the unthinkable future" (Agee, "Victory," 161). TVA provided the power to create that bomb, and these two great Appalachian experiments are connected by David Lilienthal, who left TVA to chair the United States Atomic Energy Commission, and by Marilou Awiakta, whose poetry reflects on what it means for Appalachia to split the atom. The next chapter will begin with Oak Ridge as a bookend to Appalachian Modernism and jumping-off place for what came next. To get us from here to there, consider this formulation by Marianne Wiggins' *Evidence of Things Unseen* (2003):

No flood, no TVA.

No TVA, no cheap electric power.

No cheap electric power, no factories.

No factories, no aluminum.

No aluminum, no long distance bombers.

No long-distance bombers, no atomic bomb.

No atomic bomb, no Oak Ridge, Tennessee. (261)

Chapter Four:
Appalachian Postmodernism; Appalachian Metamodernism

The rational mind had won the most Promethean of its conquests over nature, and had put into the hands of common man the fire and force of the sun itself.

Was man equal to the challenge? In an instant, without warning, the present had become the unthinkable future. Was there hope in that future, and if so, where did hope lie?

– James Agee “Victory: the Peace”

Satellite shack, no you can't look back
Train goes all the way to Rockingham
Drink your water from a deep dug well
The road winds like a black snake spine
Old Mother Nature ain't kissing sweet goodbye.

Satellite shack, all the lights are black
There's a little blue from a little tube
Satellite shack, sitting out back
It's a dog scratch with the hog scraps
What you got left to lose?
– Ed Snodderly, “Satellite Shack”

Just before Bob Dylan stepped on stage in Asheville, North Carolina in November 2018, a rhythmic section from the beginning of Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* played through the loudspeakers and the house lights dimmed. The crowd at the Thomas Wolfe Auditorium erupted in applause that continued until Dylan began his first song: “Things Have Changed.” Dylan earned a reputation as an artistic shapeshifter as early as 1965. At that year's Newport Folk Festival in July, he performed a set of blues and rock-and-roll-inspired music playing an electric guitar and fronting a band that included electric blues master Mike Bloomfield. The following month, Dylan released *Highway 61 Revisited*, an album that closed with “Desolation Row,” a song that placed his music in conversation with modernism:

Praise be to Nero's Neptune, the Titanic sails at dawn

Everybody's shouting, "Which side are you on?"

And Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot fighting in the captain's tower
 While calypso singers laugh at them and fishermen hold flowers
 Between the windows of the sea where lovely mermaids flow
 And nobody has to think too much about Desolation Row

Dylan imagines Eliot and Pound fighting for control of a massive but sinking ship, and he places the Folk Revival on board by quoting Florence Reece's "Which Side Are You On?", a favorite of Pete Seeger's, which may also explain the flowers. Harry Belafonte's *Calypso* stayed atop the brand new Billboard album chart for 31 weeks (Caulfield) in 1956, making him an early folk revival success story. Prufrock's mermaids appear here, as well as something called Nero's Neptune, maybe an aquatic god that fiddles while the ship goes down. The narrator does not clarify an attitude toward the end of this Titanic. Dylan may be leaving these influences behind, and perhaps Eliot and Pound required readers to "think too much," but the desolation row that follows offers little reward or comfort. The time of Eliot and Pound, and that of Belafonte and Seeger, has ended for 1965 Dylan. 2018 Dylan still recognizes Stravinsky's modernism as the music that comes before his. The only clear message announced by Dylan's going electric, "Desolation Row," and his show at the Thomas Wolfe Auditorium in 2018: things have changed.

In awarding the 2016 Nobel Prize for Literature, the committee honored Dylan "for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition" ("The Nobel"). The committee connected Dylan to the movements that came before: "Bob Dylan's songs are rooted in the rich tradition of American folk music and are influenced by the poets of modernism and the beatnik movement" ("The Nobel"). While the committee pointed out influences from the past, it also celebrated that "Since his debut in 1962, he has repeatedly

reinvented his songs and music” (“The Nobel”). Even as Dylan nods to modernism, and sees himself working within a folk music tradition, he constantly moves forward with the work of newness and reinvention⁸⁸.

This chapter highlights examples of late twentieth and early twenty-first century writers who also work in the context of tradition – Appalachian narratives such as family, home, and nature – but, like Dylan, react to their changing times with newness and invention. I use these novels, poems, and plays to continue the timeline of Appalachian Modernism past 1945 and focus on three moments: the end of modernism, postmodernism, and metamodernism.

Marilou Awiakta and Marianne Wiggins look back on how Oak Ridge’s weaponized nature and the end of belief in progress played a part in ending modernism. Lee Smith’s postmodern pastiche paints an unflattering portrait of the Appalachia of late capitalism. Cormac McCarthy and Jo Carson’s metamodernism continues modernist-style defamiliarization and formal experimentation to rewrite notions of nature and home. In each chapter, this project has argued that Appalachia experienced modernization on the same timeline as the rest of the United States, and produced its own modernist response. This final chapter continues that timeline and examines Appalachian literature through the lenses of postmodernism and metamodernism, movements that began with the end of modernism.

⁸⁸ D.A. Pennebaker entitled his documentary about Dylan’s 1965 tour of England *Don’t Look Back* (1967), a quote from Satchel Paige and a line of a lyric from Dylan’s “She Belongs to Me” (Roberts).

The End of Modernism; Postmodernism, and Metamodernism

In his essay “What was Post-Modernism? The Arts in and after the Cold War,” (1995) Malcolm Bradbury suggests an end point for modernism, which “was either exhausted or discredited as the century came to its second major crisis in 1939 – 1945; so that when cultural affairs resumed modernism seemed over, and another epoch begun” (Bradbury 765). Bradbury acknowledges the existence of plural modernisms, though nothing so planetary as the new modernist studies consider since he limits his discussion to Europe and America, and so argues that the era of modernism(s) gave way to a time of plural post-modernisms. I will use his hyphenated term post-modernism to describe the time and movements after modernism, and I focus on two specific ones: postmodernism and metamodernism.

For the purposes of this argument, I connect the end of modernism to the bomb and Oak Ridge. Bradbury calls the first post-modernism following the collective realizations of the Holocaust and the existence of atomic weapons an age of “global anxiety and absurdity” filled with “the prospects of global annihilation” (766). Marianne Wiggins describes this transition from modernism to post-modernism in a “litany” from *Evidence of Things Unseen* (2003):

No flood, no TVA.

No TVA, no cheap electric power.

No cheap electric power, no factories.

No factories, no aluminum.

No aluminum, no long distance bombers.

No long-distance bombers, no atomic bomb.

No atomic bomb, no Oak Ridge, Tennessee. (261)

Because of Oak Ridge's role in the Manhattan Project and the dropping of the atomic bomb as a marker for an end of one age and the beginning of another, Appalachia could be said to be at the heart of the end of modernism. But unlike the TVA, Oak Ridge cannot be considered entirely Appalachian. Much of this project has made the case that American modernist architecture, music, and literature had its counterpart or example in and about Appalachia. Oak Ridge provides an example of something from Appalachia affecting the rest of the country, the world, and the ongoing conversation about how and why modernism ends. The work on the atomic bomb in remote physical locations in Tennessee, Washington, and New Mexico connected the sites of the Manhattan Project to the global struggle of World War II, and the global consequences of atomic weapons and energy limited the assumed isolation of the Appalachias of the world. Thinking of the atomic age, James Agee wrote in the August 1945 issue of *Time* "All thoughts and things were split" (160). Agee saw quickly and clearly that while the atomic age connected humanity in its wonder, it isolated all people in its horror:

When the bomb split open the universe and revealed the prospect of the infinite extraordinary, it also revealed the oldest, simplest, commonest, most neglected, and most important of facts: that each man is eternally and above all else responsible for his own soul, and, in the terrible words of the Psalmist, that no man may deliver his brother, nor make agreement unto God for him. (Agee 161)

Agee's short essay does not mention Oak Ridge, Appalachia, or the United States, but instead focuses on the United Nations. For him, the advent of atomic power makes previous divisions including the Second World War of "minor significance" and international decisions

made in the wake of this worldwide conflict “trivial dams across tributary rivulets” (Agee 160-161). The stakes could not be higher: humanity itself must now face the potential for massive good and unthinkable evil made possible by technology and scientific achievement. The defining conflict of the age, for Agee, no longer exists between nation states, but between “reason and spirit” (161). At its simplest level, this means human capability and human desire. Until August 1945, desire had outstripped capability, both for weal or ill; after August, 1945, things had changed. If, as I argue in Chapter Three, TVA stands as a monument to humanity’s ability to reorder the world to fit our purposes, the Manhattan Project takes the next step from reshaping nature to reshaping the building blocks of nature, and in doing so unleashes a power that humanity still struggles to use wisely without catastrophe seventy years later. The Manhattan Project also ushers in a new era of anxiety. If modernism responds to the unsettling idea that the world as known changes, sometimes all too quickly, then post-modernism wrestles with the idea that the world as known could end, destroyed by humanity’s tinkering with the raw matter of reality. Bradbury and Agee argue, and I agree, that this existential threat moves “cultural affairs” into post-modernisms.

Postmodernism and metamodernism require their own definitional excursions, to borrow a phrase from Susan Stanford Friedman, upon whom I have relied in defining Appalachian Modernism. Her idea that “modernity invents tradition” (Friedman, “Periodizing,” 434) provides a foundation for the notion that Appalachia, too, experiences modernity. Questions of tradition, modernization, and where Appalachia falls on that continuum show up

over and over in Appalachian Studies.⁸⁹ The premises of postmodernism and metamodernism rely on a periodization of modernism with a somewhat fixed end so that post-modernisms could emerge. Here, I break with Friedman, whose effort to rethink modernism requires “extending modernism beyond its conventional, Eurocentric post-1950 end-date” (Friedman, “Planetary” 15). Instead, I align a sense of periodization more closely with David James and Urmila Seshagiri. James and Seshagiri argue for “temporal contraction, or periodization” to counterbalance “the spatial expansiveness of the new modernist studies” (90), and cite 1890-1940 as “the chrysalis for modern literature’s form-breaking work” (91)⁹⁰. That is, as the study of modernism expands to include locations outside of Western Europe⁹¹, James and Seshagiri believe the field should create boundaries in time so that modernism does not become the study of all things in all places, or even the study of all periods of rapid change in all places.

The advent of the atomic age, the impact of the atrocities in World War II, and the rise of global capitalism suggest, as Bradbury argues, that in or about August, 1945, the world changed, as Agee suggests: “With the controlled splitting of the atom, humanity, already profoundly perplexed and disunified, was brought inescapably into a new age” (Agee 160). Agee’s formulation of humanity as already in a state of fracture assumes that post-modernism builds on modernism, and the likelihood of Virginia Woolf’s assertion that “in or about December 1910, human nature changed” (Woolf 2), a sentence that looks audacious on paper, but upon reflection reads as perfectly reasonable. Her case includes the claim that “All human

⁸⁹ See Jim Wayne Miller’s “Brier Visions,” “The Brier Losing Touch with His Traditions,” and “Brier Sermon – You Must Be Born Again.”

⁹⁰ One has to admire how in pushing back against James and Seshagiri Stanford Friedman adds ten years to their rigid period, moving the goal post just a little in her direction.

⁹¹ See Mark Wollaeger and Matt Eatough’s *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*

relations have shifted – those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature” (3). Those changes in religion, politics, and literature lie at the heart of modernist studies⁹². Agee argues that 1945 changed what humans considered possible. The dual possibilities of the Holocaust and nuclear devastation created the realization that civilization could destroy itself, and that maybe it should. The defeat of fascism and dominance of the United States in the postwar west enabled the spread of capitalism into more and more aspects of life, eventually resulting in “the new global division of labor” (Jameson xiv) that continues to spur political disagreements over trade in the twenty-first century.

If modernism ends, as James and Seshagiri suggest, around in the 1940s⁹³, then one description of what comes next is postmodernism, but as Bradbury notes, by the early 1960s, postmodernism came to be associated less with Agee-on-the-bomb-style existentialism and more with a deconstruction, “concerned with the instability of all discourses, the slippage of all meanings, and the fading of the grand narratives” (768). Jameson’s book *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* acts as an extended definition of this version of postmodernism, complete with ideologies, theories, and examples of how the age of modernism, with its utopian dreams and connection to history, has given way to something more “internally conflicted and contradictory” (xxii). Postmodernism, Jameson writes, rejects a “conveniently coherent thumbnail meaning,” (xxii) and he places its origin at the “end of the

⁹² We also seem to be in an era of hope that human relations can change quickly, since this belief enables many of our current cultural and political conflicts, particularly over LGBTQ rights, the #metoo movement, and Black Lives Matter.

⁹³ As Bradbury mentions, *Finnegans Wake* was published in 1939.

1950s or the early 1960s,” (1). For Jameson, postmodernism and late capitalism – or later capitalism, meaning the spread of capitalism after World War II – go together; Jameson writes that in postmodernism the cultural and economic “collapse back into one another and say the same thing” (xxi). That is, nothing, including culture or nature, is free from the reach of capitalism as an expression of human desire and capability.

One aspect of the postmodern aesthetic I describe repurposes commodified cultural symbols to the end of drawing attention to the idea that cultural symbols have been commodified, for example Andy Warhol’s images of Campbell’s soup. Postmodernists also repurpose cultural symbols to critique a culture in which commodified symbols stand in for meaning. A devastating example of this may be found in an image of Kim Phuc, the young girl known as Napalm Girl from the photograph by Nick Ut, taken after a United States-ordered South Vietnamese Napalm attack in 1972. In Banksy’s “Napalm (Can’t Beat that Feeling),” Napalm Girl, whose body burns with chemicals supplied by the United States, walks with, or is dragged by, or is caught between, Ronald McDonald and Mickey Mouse, as seen in Figure 12⁹⁴. Banksy’s image critiques a country that harms innocent children by dropping deadly chemicals on them, a capitalism that dresses up this violent culture in happy commodified images, and the colonialism implicit in the Viet Nam war and in opening McDonalds and Disneyland across the world. As Jameson writes, “This whole global, yet American postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world: in this sense, as throughout class history, the underside of culture is blood, torture, death, and terror” (Jameson 5). In “Napalm (Can’t Beat

⁹⁴ <https://hexagongallery.com/catalog/artist/banksy/napalm-cant-beat-that-feeling/>



Figure 12. "Napalm Can't Beat that Feeling)".

Credit: Banksy

that Feeling)," American "military and economic domination" marches hand-in-hand with a literal victim of American "blood, torture, death, and terror." Not insignificantly, Banksy also critiques the meaninglessness of an American culture that wages war to protect an idea of childhood so empty that it may be represented by the commodified images of a cartoon mouse and a fast-food clown. Banksy's image condemns violence, but it also presents a postmodernism that collapses back onto itself by using the very images it critiques to critique the images it critiques. Linda Hutcheon writes "postmodernism is a fundamentally contradictory enterprise: its art forms (and its theory) use and abuse, install and then subvert convention in parodic ways, self-consciously pointing both to their own inherent paradoxes and provisionality and, of course, to their critical or ironic rereading of the art of the past" (180). A

difference between modernism and postmodernism and between postmodernism and metamodernism is that postmodernism aims at no larger reference or meaning than itself. Its telos lies in the work of revealing the meaninglessness –or perhaps cleverness – of its own performance and references. If this sounds as bleak as desolation row, it can be, but as Jameson points out, it can also be intelligent and poignant as it is in Banksy's work.

Though Lee Smith's *Oral History* does this smart, witty postmodernist skewering on a grand scale, her *Saving Grace* provides compact examples of the emptiness of commodified culture. *Saving Grace* shows the strong influence of Flannery O'Connor, especially in its character names and grotesque representations of "Appalachian mountain religion," to borrow the phrase from Deborah Vasnau McCauley. At a low point in her journey, Florida Grace Shepherd splits with her husband Randy Newhouse.⁹⁵ Grace and Randy live in Knoxville at the Creekside Green Apartments: "There was no creek at Creekside Green, nothing green either. Nothing but cheap apartments and concrete. Somebody told me there used to be a creek but they paved over it to build the apartments, and then they named the apartments for it" (Smith 234). In moments like this, Smith establishes the state of late twentieth-century Appalachia. Nature, and, as we will see, religion has been commodified, their essence removed, and their meaningless symbols sold to Appalachians. After a particularly rough night in Gatlinburg during the Christmas season, she pulls into "Uncle Slidell's Diner: A Christian Restaurant," located just beside "Uncle Slidell's Christian Fun Golf," which tells the story of the Bible in ten holes. Grace,

⁹⁵ Randy plays in a southern rock band of construction workers. Smith may not be at Pynchon-level postmodern fictional band naming – see "The Paranoids" and "Sick Dick and the Volkswagons" from *The Crying of Lot 49* and "Holocaust Pixels," "Billy Barf and the Vomitones," and "Gino Baglione and the Paisans" from *Vineland* – but "Sheet Rockers" says a lot with a little.

who delivered a stillborn baby, follows the sound of a baby crying through the Garden of Eden hole, the Ten Commandments hole – “no adultery,[sic], no other gods, no swearing” (248) – and eventually arrives at “Number Ten, The First Christmas” (Smith 248). Grace tells us “Dirty snow dripped into His face as He lay in Mary’s lap, but the glory of God shone all around as He held out His chubby arms to me, still crying” (Smith 248). Even at a Christian mini-golf in Gatlinburg, this scene should be the spiritual climax of the book. The message could be that despite the commercialization of Christianity, God still speaks to those in need. But Smith cannot leave it at that. Grace is asked to leave, and on her way out, she asks the man holding her car door open if he is Uncle Slidell: “He laughed shortly. ‘There ain’t no Uncle Slidell,’ he said, and turned away” (Smith 249). In this moment where Grace has been at her lowest and found some glimmer of hope and healing in her faith, the novel says that nothing here is real: not authentic Appalachian Uncle Slidell and not a Christian miracle in plastic Jesus.

This project has relied on Jameson’s definition of modernism as a moment of uneven social development, one that sees past and present or past and future side by side. Postmodernism, however, makes the idea of the past irrelevant. When Kurt Vonnegut’s Billy Pilgrim comes unstuck in time, all time – his past, his future, and whatever he understands as his present – becomes his now. Postmodernism’s dissociation from the past does not connote the end of history in the Marxist sense of the end of the class struggle, but the end of history as a common linear narrative that society claims as its formational past and as a marker for understanding the meaning of a current moment. This disconnection from narrative history provides a particular dilemma for a claim of Appalachian postmodernism, since so much of Appalachian storytelling about itself connects Appalachia to a real or imagined past. Because of

this, I suggest that Appalachian texts that come after the period of modernism but experiment with form rarely rise to the level of postmodernism in terms of their disconnection from history, use of commodified cultural symbols, and ironic self-referential meaninglessness. Instead, they belong to a different category of post-1950 literature that James and Seshagiri call metamodernism.

Here another periodization dilemma presents itself, though metamodernism lacks the scholarly and cultural footprint of postmodernism, and its temporal and definitional boundaries may still be undetermined. James and Seshagiri imply that metamodernism comes after postmodernism (93); Robin van der Akker and Timotheus Vermuelen describe metamodernism as a “structure of feeling that emerged in the 2000s” (4); and Seth Abramson compares competing timelines of modernism, postmodernism, and metamodernism according to Mas’ud Zavarzadeh, Frederic Jameson, and David Foster Wallace (Abramson). Although James and Seshagiri contribute the most to my definition of metamodernism, Zavarzadeh’s periodization of metamodernism emerging in the mid-1970s fits the timeline of Appalachian works in this chapter. Looking back to say that modernism ended in the 1940s seems reasonable; including postmodernism as one of the ways of thinking that came after also makes sense; beyond this, a certain amount of ambiguity is inevitable, given how close this period remains to the present. In time, one imagines that these differences will appear more clearly.

Metamodernism describes a number of Appalachian texts from the 1970s until today that take formal and aesthetic chances and cannot be accurately categorized as postmodern. Simply, it describes a text that makes modernist moves but appears thirty or forty years after modernism. James and Seshagiri’s definition of metamodernism accounts for experimental

Appalachian literature and art that comes well after the time of modernism but shows the same formal tendencies. I would add that Appalachian metamodernism also continues the project of collapsing cultural narratives as many works of modernism. In my definition, metamodernism goes beyond being modernism out of time, or postmodernism with meaning. Instead, Appalachian metamodernism offers a reaction to its cultural moment with experimentation in form, awareness of history, and a grappling for and rewriting of narratives of meaning. Van der Akker and Vermeulen define metamodernism in ways that resonate with Appalachia here:

Metamodernism is a structure of feeling that emerges from, and reacts to, the postmodern as much as it is a cultural logic that corresponds to today's stage of global capitalism...In some ways, there is reason for optimism; in many ways we think we are even worse off than before (6).

I shade this definition by saying that yes, metamodernism responds to postmodernism but more importantly to the same economic and cultural catalysts to which postmodernism responds. As we will see later, McCarthy and Carson set their work in the same chaotic twentieth century that Jameson describes, but they also acknowledge a past, see a continuity in narratives of nature and home, and rewrite those narratives to survive their moment. Metamodernism offers another logic of late capitalism.

Mas'ud Zavarzedeh (1975) first uses the term metamodernism to describe one of a "cluster of attitudes" that he sees emerging since the 1950s (75), believing postmodernism to be too broad a category for what he sees as antimodernist or paramodernist. His exact definition describes fictional writing that blurs the line between life and art, fact and fiction

(75). James and Seshagiri and Van der Akker and Vermeulen develop that definition to include what Zavarzedeh called paramodernism – modernism that shows up after the modernist moment – but the premise of Zavarzedeh’s article speaks to the cultural conditions that lead to metamodernism and postmodernism as I am using the terms. Specifically, he writes that in the world after modernism, reality seems more fictive than real: “In extreme situations such as Auschwitz, Hiroshima or My Lai reality has been more fantastic, wild and dislodgingly incredible than dreamed-up fiction” (70) and “A fabulous reality which engulfs and overwhelms contemporary consciousness is manifesting itself daily not only in public events and statements but also in the very visual and auditory milieu which envelops us⁹⁶” (70). This diagnosis, which reads as prophetic thirty-five years later, explains the conditions that allow for postmodernism, but also the metamodernism I will describe in Appalachia. I argued in earlier chapters that if “modernity invents tradition,” then the idea of Appalachia as it is understood both in Appalachian Studies and in popular culture depends upon modernity. In Appalachian metamodernism, that conflict between tradition and modernity continues, even as modernity moves quickly beyond the Model T and TVA. Appalachia’s fraught relationship with the past and with nature shows up in these works because many Appalachian writers hold on to ideas like tradition, home, and nature even as they become harder to reconcile with the “fabulous reality which engulfs and overwhelms contemporary consciousness” (Zavarzedeh 70).

⁹⁶ Zavarzadeh’s article diagnoses a moment in the culture that reveals implications for literary study. He spends fifteen pages on where he thinks we are as a civilization and a paragraph on the theoretical jargon he thinks describes it. I submit this ratio as my suggestion for how to save the Humanities.

Ed Snodderly's⁹⁷ song "Satellite Shack" (1992) from The Brother Boys' album *Plow* addresses this Appalachian metamodernist dilemma. "It used to be how the fiddle was bowed," the song begins, describing pre-modern mountain entertainment, and goes on to address old-style information technology:

The old men walk up and down the road
 Over their shoulder a tote sack full
 Where they stop and gather you can hear what matters
 Hot steam rising from their breath
 You hear the news
 Passing down the news (Snodderly)

Information and entertainment now arrive through the airwaves: "Satellite Shack/All the lights are black/There's a little blue from a little tube." Instead of the human connection of the postman or the neighbors as a source of community information, Appalachians now have the same "visual and auditory milieu which envelops us" (Zavarzadeh 70). "What you got left to lose?" the song asks, if the satellite has already replaced the fiddle and the neighbor. "Satellite Shack" avoids the voice of the curmudgeon, however, trying to preserve the good of the past for the now.

Satellite Shack
 No you can't look back
 Train goes all the way to Rockingham

⁹⁷ Snodderly's lyrics to "The Diamond Stream" form the centerpiece of the Country Music Hall of Fame's Hall of Honor and its visitor experience: a stream begins under Snodderly's lyrics that flows through the museum.

Drink your water from a deep dug well

The road winds like a black snake spine

Old Mother Nature ain't kissing sweet goodbye.

She ain't kissing sweet goodbye. (Snodderly)

In Chapter Two, I cited Jack Higgs' assertion that Appalachian Literature rarely delivers what he calls the Hard No, the idea that writers present "all affirmations relating to family, home, country, and religion as cultural lies, a short-circuiting of truth" (Higgs, "Sut" 42). Instead, he says Appalachian writers "nay say" and "yeah say" (Higgs, "Sut" 45) like Thomas Wolfe⁹⁸, or in this case, Ed Snodderly. Postmodernists and metamodernists do not live in different cultural moments or necessarily perceive those moments differently⁹⁹. The ubiquity of capitalism, the looming anxiety of nuclear devastation, the absurdity of everyday experience, and the sights and sounds of commercial media culture exist for both postmodernists and metamodernists in Appalachia. And, as Jameson and almost every essay in the van der Akker, Alison Gibbons, and Vermeulen collection *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth After Postmodernism* suggest, both postmodernism and metamodernism blur the line between high culture and pop culture to the point of irrelevancy. The period of uneven social development has passed for both. Metamodernists, however, continue a conversation with "family, home, country, and religion" as well as with the past and nature. These interactions connect their work more to modernism than to postmodernism. The rest of this chapter considers literature from these three moments in Appalachian Modernism: the end of modernism, as seen in the

⁹⁸ "We can believe in the nothingness of life, we can believe in the nothingness of death and of life after death – but who can believe in the nothingness of Ben?" (Wolfe 465) Eugene Gant asks when his brother has died.

⁹⁹ This is a break with Jameson, see Jameson 45-46.

poetry of Awiakta and Wiggins' *Evidence of Things Unseen*; postmodernism in Smith's *Oral History*, and metamodernism in McCarthy's *Child of God* and Carson's *Daytrips*.

All Thoughts and Things were Split

Marilou Awiakta moved with her family to Oak Ridge in 1945 when she was nine. Born in Knoxville, she lived in Nashville before going to Oak Ridge, where her father worked on the Manhattan Project as an accountant. She remembers, "No one could speak of what they did, even to their families. It was as if my father disappeared into a mystery and came home from a mystery" (Awiakta, "Marilou"). In one way, Oak Ridge may be seen as an extension of TVA in that the location for the Manhattan Project's uranium enrichment was chosen for two TVA-related reasons: because TVA could provide millions of kilowatts of energy and that the Clinch River, located sixteen-miles downstream from Norris Dam, provided plenty of fresh water without the threat of flooding (TVA). As Chapter Three discussed, the TVA demonstrated a particular Appalachian identity; the Tennessee River Valley and TVA's Knoxville Headquarters shaped the project's planning and execution. Oak Ridge, however, composed but one of many sites involved in the production of the atomic bomb. Even the nickname Secret City belongs as much to Los Alamos, New Mexico, where Project Director Robert Oppenheimer oversaw the construction of the first atomic bombs, as to Oak Ridge ("Project" and Johnson and Jackson xix). Appalachia's obscurity also provided security for Oak Ridge, as did the locations of Los Alamos, and Hanford, Washington, the major sites of the Manhattan Project¹⁰⁰. Intellectual and industrial work included sites in Manhattan; Chicago; Morgantown, West Virginia; Princeton,

¹⁰⁰ Johnson and Jackson write that Oak Ridge "was the first to be established and to some extent would serve as a model for operation of the Hanford site" (xx).

New Jersey; and Wilmington, Delaware (“Project”). Oak Ridge could not help but include Appalachian influences, but the nationalized culture, ambition, and outcome of the Manhattan Project differentiates it from the regionally-focused TVA.

The name Awiakta translates from Cherokee as “eye of the deer,” and *Abiding Appalachia* bears her symbol on its cover: a stag jumping in the outline of an atom. Her work, she writes, weaves “the atom, the Cherokee, and the mountains” (Awiakta, “Marilou”). The poems in *Abiding Appalachia* feel equally at home in the natural imagery of Appalachia, the spiritual mysteries of the myth and memory of the Cherokee, and modern science’s ability to tinker with the building blocks of the universe. Awiakta’s work moves fluidly between differentiations of past, present, and future and Cherokee, Appalachia, and the atom. Awiakta’s first collection of poetry, *Abiding Appalachia: Where Mountain and Atom Meet* (1978), ponders the connection between Appalachia and the atom, and what it means for Appalachia to have played a key role in the creation of an age-changing phenomenon. Awiakta’s “Test Cow,” juxtaposes a common Appalachian farm animal with the danger of the atom,

She’d like to be a friendly cow, I know.
But she’s radioactive now and locked
behind a fence. It makes sense to use
her instead of us. But does she care
she cannot share her cream with me
to eat an apple tart? And does she know
she’s “hot” and dying? It hurts my heart

that I can't even stroke her head
 but as mother said,
 radiation's just not friendly. (Thompson "Test" 57)

The playfulness of the random rhyme scheme and the cream, apple tart, and mother imply that the poet writes from a child's perspective. The premise of the poem, however, that scientists have been testing radiation on cows instead of humans, suggests the new world that a few adults have made. In interviews, Awiakta often mentions the good that nuclear technology provides, like cancer-fighting procedures and energy, and she does not clarify the test for which this cow has been a subject. Awiakta's atom, which sometimes means an individual atom and sometimes atomic science as a phenomenon, including atomic weapons, appears as extension of and threat to the natural world. "Test Cow" paints a picture of a specific sequestered bovine, but implies the more general anxiety of the atomic age and a particular theme of Appalachian literature: what happens when progress distorts nature so far to make it unnatural and even toxic?

In other moments, *Abiding Appalachia* crossfades Appalachia, the atom, and the Cherokee in sequences of poems. "Cemetery Folks Revisited," a poem that might fit into many collections of Appalachian poetry, hopes for proximity to late friends and living grandchildren in death and closes with the quatrain "But years have passed.../times have changed/and things are arranged/in different ways" (Thompson, "Cemetery" 77). The piece that follows has no title, is written in prose, and begins "The atom was poetry in my childhood – images, rhythms – a presence beautiful, mysterious, dangerous...like the mountain. And I loved them both. Then

the atom went awry...was dangerous" (Thompson, "Untitled" 79). The next poem, "Star Vision," begins

As I sat against the pine one night
 beneath a star-filled sky
 my Cherokee stepped in my mind
 and suddenly in every tree,
 in every hill and stone
 in my hand lying prone upon
 the grass, I could see
 each atom's tiny star –
 minute millions so far-flung
 so bright they swept me up
 with earth and sky
 in one vast expanse of light. (Thompson, "Star" 81)

Awiakta, like Agee, sees the atom as uniter and divider. The atom as progress, like the one that "went awry," carries with it the potential for terrible destruction. Conceiving of (or presenting) the atom as building block of the universe allows Awiakta to see all of nature joined by its basic composition. Appalachia experiences both the creative and destructive capabilities of the atomic age: the power of the split atom does not discriminate on the basis of location, so people in Appalachia must also reckon with technology that has the power to end the world. In the essay "Sound" for the collection *Bloodroot*, Awiakta describes "the atom's powerful, ultrasonic hum" as an energy that seemed "alien to our mountains and our ways," but, she

writes that she “followed the mysterious hum as it spiraled deep into the invisible,” eventually finding a quiet where “‘mountain and atom meet’” (Awiakta, “Sound” 51). Awiakta eventually sees the atom as an extension of the tree-, hill-, and stone- of the Appalachian identity, redefining nature to include the invisible as well as the visible and also to include the implications of the inevitable science and technology of the present and future. Oak Ridge changes Appalachia not because Oak Ridge is in Appalachia, but because Oak Ridge has changed the world and Appalachia is in the world. If the atom disconnects Appalachians for Agee when “all thoughts and things were split,” it also connects Appalachia through nature and an acceptance of the present and future for Awiakta.

Oak Ridge and the End of Progress

The end of Appalachian modernism and the belief in progress unfolds beautifully and tragically in Marianne Wiggins’ *Evidence of Things Unseen* (2003). Like Fallingwater, the Frank Lloyd Wright house discussed in Chapter One, this novel makes the case for Appalachia’s participation in American modernism. Yet no review of the novel appeared in *Appalachian Heritage*, *Appalachian Journal*, or the *Journal of Appalachian Studies*. In an issue that could have included a review of Wiggins’ novel, a finalist for a National Book Award, *Appalachian Journal* instead spends thirty-five pages talking about the film *Cold Mountain*¹⁶. Wiggins does not fit the profile of Appalachian novelist, though *Evidence of Things Unseen* and its

¹⁶ The accents, they judge as bad; the depictions of slavery, judged good by Silas House, bad by John Inscocoe; the music, judged good by Tyler Blethen, bad by Silas House, etc (Arnold, et al). By good, I mean these individual’s ideas of “authentic.” They also interview Wendell Berry (not an Appalachian), which nearly makes up for the *Cold Mountain* coverage. I jest, but I jest at the tendency in Appalachian Studies to talk about negative depictions of Appalachia, or argue what is “authentic,” instead of talking about the best work from and about Appalachia.

predecessor *Almost Heaven* (1998) are set partially in Appalachia. Born in central Pennsylvania, she lived in Europe for many years, including four years in hiding with her then-husband Salman Rushdie after the *Fatwa* issued following the publication of *The Satanic Verses*. Fos and Opal, the novel's protagonists, hail from the coast of North Carolina, not Appalachia, though they spend the majority of the novel in Knoxville, on a farm in the Tennessee Valley, and in Oak Ridge. Through the lives and romance of Roy "Fos" Foster and Opal, the novel comments on Appalachia's role in American Modernism on two levels. On a plot level, the novel shows how major events in American modernization and modernism, such as World War I, TVA, and the Manhattan Project, shaped the lives of people who lived in Appalachia. More pointedly, Wiggins also uses Fos's amateur interest and faith in science to stand in for the arc of hope in progress experienced by the country leading up to the atomic age. Like the component scientists of the Manhattan Project, Fos plays with technology that has consequences well beyond his understanding and control to devastating effect.

One pleasure of the book lies in Wiggins' parallels, double entendres, and connections between Fos and Opal and natural and scientific phenomenon. An early example comes after Fos and Opal consummate their love on the beach under the Perseid meteor shower: "By the time they fell to earth they were invisible, they had burned themselves to nonexistence, combusting on their essence, skidding across heaven like beads on a griddle, riding their own melting down the fiery avalanche to earth" (Wiggins 39). The poetry of the burned-out meteor matches the arc of these new lovers' encounter, and draws lines of meaning between the experiences of Fos and Opal and the natural world. Wiggins' imagist prose keeps the

sympathetic relationships between humans and nature from falling into sentiment or romanticism.

In his *New York Times* review, Richard Eder also sees pairings in the novel, between the intangible and the corporeal:

Shooting stars and iridescence, and a wiped down-engine. They are among the counterings of body and soul, or immortal longings and mortal contrivance, in one of the most suggestively original love stories in our current fiction. These pairings serve a broader design as well, one that runs from World War I to the development of the atomic bomb. They stand as moral poles of an individual, for whom tinkering American idealism is gradually flattened by the impersonal weight of technology and economic concentration.

Throughout the book, the vicissitudes of modernity in Appalachia interrupt Fos and Opal's life so that at times Fos and Opal seem like Forrest Gumps of Appalachian Modernism. They bear witness to a changing world and stand in for all Americans and Appalachians whose lives progress upended. Fos works with chemicals in World War I, and together they observe the development of Knoxville, listen to the Scopes Monkey Trials on the radio¹⁰¹, adopt a baby left behind by Dust Bowl migrants, and work for the TVA, Fos by taking pictures and Opal by working as a rural librarian. Opal reads Frost, Cummings, Pound, and Eliot, gets kicked off her family land by TVA, and Fos gets a job at Oak Ridge. Life changes quickly for Fos and Opal, and when they are forced to leave Knoxville because of their friendship with a not un-Cornelius

¹⁰¹ Bill Gorton tells Jake Barnes that William Jennings Bryan has died in *The Sun Also Rises* (Hemingway 126). Bryan died July 26, 1925, a week after the trial ended.

Suttree-like character named Chance “Flash” Luttrell, they realize that they had grown accustomed to life in the city. As they contemplate giving up their photography business to farm land that Opal inherited from her cousin Early and his wife Karo, we are told:

The worst of it for Opal was the sense that they were going backward, burning bridges, losing ground. Disappearing from themselves. The worst of it for Fos was thinking they’d become too modern in their habits to succeed in the kind of fundamental enterprise that even Karo and Early had seemed to enjoy with no complaining (200).

Neither Opal, a bookkeeper and daughter of a glass-blower, nor Fos, a photographer, know anything about farming, but their move to the farm feels to them both a disturbance of their progress in life, even though Fos recognizes this type of progress as a failure of self-reliance. When TVA comes calling, once to hire them, and again to buy their land, they answer. By 2003, the novel could hardly be called formally experimental, but Wiggins writes with a minimalism that omits some punctuation and capitalization and switches to verse on a few occasions to make a point or to connect two points. In “A LITANY,” that draws a line from TVA to Oak Ridge, quoted above on page four, Wiggins uses shorthand to demonstrate the quickening pace of progress that goes from addressing the flooded Tennessee Valley to atomic weapons in a little more than a decade. When two TVA men see that Fos and Opal are interested in their offer of work for “*cash money*,” the sloganeering of the political becomes personal, and their temptation unfolds in a sequence of images.

A gladness seemed to spread between them.

The lustre progress generates.

The radiant of problem solving.

Lightning bolts and job creation.

Social intercourse and calories.

Make-work in the glow of a government: a New Deal. (Wiggins 212)

The pitch works on the Fosters, who trade the uncertainty of agriculture for the security of the cash economy backed by the full faith and credit of the United States. Fos goes on tour selling the electrified future TVA promises to his fellow valley dwellers, and Opal travels the valley circulating library books. In this decision and in other moments, Wiggins uses Fos and Opal as synecdoche for Appalachia and America. Their choices stand in for the decisions made by any number of rural people who lived through modernization to move off the farm or go to work in the factory or the mines. No one forces Fos and Opal to modernize. They choose it for themselves, even as they realize that they give up something in the bargain.

Through the character of Fos, Wiggins traces the path of America's fascination with progress from premodernity to modernity to postmodernity. If TVA attempted to harness nature for the modern world by reshaping rivers and mountains, then the Manhattan Project attempted a more ambitious and dangerous project: to harness the building block of nature, the atom, for modern warfare, and eventually energy and medicine. Reshaped nature changed Appalachia; reshaping the building blocks of the nature changed the world. Just as many characters in novels and films about TVA do not survive the move from the old world to the new one, and so die symbolic deaths by drowning in the flood of progress or become martyrs trying to blow up dams¹⁰², so Fos and Opal cannot quite make the transition from modernity to

¹⁰² Or beat that steam drill, in the case of John Henry.

what comes next. Fos's fascination with light and primitive modern technology compels him to make his own x-ray machine, which he demonstrates at county fairs on Opal many times throughout the novel. In his innocence, Fos plays with technology he cannot control, and realizes the danger too late to prevent harm. Wiggins times this personal realization to coincide with his discovery that Oak Ridge's secret project may win wars, but at devastating human cost. While his neighbors celebrate, he and Opal mourn their own naivete and the country's. In the novel's last parallel, in which Fos stands in for American culture, Fos cannot undo the damage his fascination with technology has caused, and the Manhattan Project cannot put atomic weapons back in the box: "You take all the genius in the world and pack in into one delivery for mankind, what could you expect? A cure for all man's ills? Palliative for human suffering? No, what you get is what you pay for – science for the sake of science, regardless of the human cost...Out of Eden, into Hiroshima" (314). Fos feels duped by the physicists he lives and works with in Oak Ridge, tricked into abetting a crime to which he never consented. Wiggins' novel tells a story of Appalachia's modernization and modernity through technology and TVA, and also shows how quickly that time came and went. Fos's faith in technology to bring about human progress ends, and neither he nor Opal survive the transition from modernity to the post-modern world. *Evidence of Things Unseen* shows the role of Appalachia in American modernism and locates Appalachia as a ground zero of the end of modernism and the beginning of the atomic era. As this chapter now makes that transition, I consider three works that redefine a fundamental Appalachian narrative: home. Smith's postmodernism commodifies home; McCarthy's metamodernism infernalizes the loss of home; Carson's separates home from the past.

Oral History as *Appalachian Postmodernism*

Lee Smith's *Oral History* (1983) reads like an Appalachian Studies survey in one novel, with topics including witches, ginseng, a city-slicker in love with a mountain girl, home missions, snake handling, a boarding house, moonshining, a mining disaster, a mine conflict over unionizing, and an exploitive photographer; those are the easy-to-spot. She also steeps the book in Appalachia-lore: ballads and songs, canning recipes, church services, cranky aunts and creepy uncles¹⁰³, places like Hoot Owl Holler and Snowman Mountain, as well as actual places like Gate City, Abingdon, and East Tennessee State University. The book does more than catalog Appalachian tropes; using first-person narratives, a third-person narrator, and a future-tense ending to tell the story of three generations of Cantrells, it also recreates a dozen or so voices that speak in, to, and about Appalachia. In this way, the novel acts like the "Oxen of the Sun" chapter in *Ulysses*, surveying and reproducing a history of language. Smith also nods to Faulkner in the way *Oral History* denies the central character Dory Cantrell her own section, the way *The Sound and the Fury* tells Caddy's story without Caddy's voice. For both its internal complexity and its popularity as a critical subject, *Oral History* may be the best Appalachian novel or perhaps the most Appalachian novel, the *Absalom, Absalom!* of Appalachia. In describing Lee Smith's *Oral History* as postmodern, I mean in its aesthetic, which I view as an intelligent and ironic send up of commercialized and commodified Appalachian culture. The

¹⁰³ See *Foxfire* 9 (1986), *Foxfire* 3 (1975), Mary Noailles Murfree's "The Star in the Valley" (1878) and John Fox, Jr.'s *Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (1908), Deborah Vasnau McCauley's *Appalachian Mountain Religion* (1995), Dennis Covington's *Salvation on Sand Mountain* (1995), Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929), Arthur Ripley's film *Thunder Road* (1958), Davit McAteer's *Monongah: The Tragic Story of 1907 Monongah Mine Disaster* (2014), Denise Giardina's *Storming Heaven*, and Elizabeth Baret's Appalshop film *Stranger with a Camera* (2000), respectively. My point is that *Oral History* includes a dozen Appalachian topics that have their own books, films, and scholarship.

novel's effect and the Appalachia it describes reads as more Pynchon than Faulkner, more postmodern than modernist.

According to Smith, *Oral History* began with her own experience of satellite shacks:

I remember the very moment I decided to write this book. I was driving into Grundy from Richlands on Route 460 sometime in the late 70's [sic] and all of a sudden I noticed those TV satellite dishes that had sprung up all over the mountains almost overnight, it seemed to me then, like big grotesque mushrooms. And in that moment I knew it would be only a matter of time before all the kids in the county would start sounding like, say, Dan Rather, instead of like their grandparents. TV is the great leveler [sic], you know. So I wanted to get it down, to preserve the older generations' colorful and poetic and precise Appalachian English. (Smith, "Author")

The opening pages of *Oral History* paint the loss of Appalachian culture – “how the fiddle was bowed” – and acquiescence to popular American culture in stark and hilarious relief. Smith defamiliarizes an early-1980s Virginia front porch with the local color device of the outsider coming into the mountains, but with a couple of twists. First, the outsider, Jennifer, belongs to the mountain family she uses as a subject of an Oral History college class. Smith's Appalachia has its own insiders and outsiders, and those that have left the holler to go to college in far off East Tennessee are outsiders. Second, a narrator tells us about the scene in the new homeplace before we switch to Jennifer's journal assignment point of view, in which she romanticizes and normalizes her family's abandoned old homeplace up on Hoot Owl Mountain. The narrator juxtaposes old and new Appalachia: Little Luther strums the dulcimer

on the front porch while his grandkids go inside to watch *Magnum, P.I.*¹⁰⁴. Luther's son Al sells Amway, and he "has never been one to stand in the way of progress. He carries a calculator around all the time" (Smith, *Oral* 3). Al still lives in the holler and knows the old songs, but he and his family have assimilated into 1980s' American culture, and if they have yet to fully dissociate from history and commodify their own symbols of meaning, it is because they have not yet had the chance. Jennifer, a postmodern native, whose father has spoiled her with a dollhouse and new Toyota, sees the real world before her eyes as products: "She sees her grandfather like a tiny little doll in the front porch swing. The van and the Toyota look like toys" (Smith, *Oral* 5). Having grown up miles away in Abingdon, Virginia unfamiliar with her mountain kin, Jennifer cannot differentiate between Luther's old songs on the dulcimer, her real family history, the homeplace, and "some kind of folklore film on ETV" (Smith, *Oral* 8).

This scene represents the first of many triangulations readers must make throughout the book to arrive at some notion of the facts or the reality of the Cantrells. One voice tells the story from point of view A and another from point of view B; the truth probably lies in the vicinity of those narratives, and sometimes later narrators repeat false information made up by earlier characters. After a particularly tall tale, Richmonder Richard Burlage says to the Appalachian Rev. Aldous Rife:

"This could be a fact of history, or it could be a country myth, a folk tale," I said.

"I know you collect them, and you know it too. I suspect you make some of them up."

¹⁰⁴ This is the Appalachia of Jim Wayne Miller's poem "Brier Visions": "the people rode the receding suck of sung commercials, floated like rafted logs toward the mainstream" (26).

“It doesn’t matter,” he said. “Nothing ever changes that much.” (Smith, *Oral* 173)

In this moment Smith lays out the terms of oral history, that memory and the way people recount memory comprises fact, myth, and tale. The idea of a truth “doesn’t matter,” and Smith’s novel will stick to these terms, but in complicated ways. Jameson describes “American ‘oral history’” as “the organic genealogy of the bourgeois collective project...for the resurrection of the dead and silenced generations” (17). Smith’s novel does exactly that, but ultimately to no end. The reader learns the Cantrell’s oral history. Jennifer, however, leaves Hoot Owl Holler not with recordings of Little Luther or his wife Ora Mae, who could tell Jennifer a great deal about her family’s history, but with a recording of the “*banging and crashing and wild laughter*” of the family’s haunted homeplace, empty of anyone who could give her an oral history (Smith, *Oral* 339). Jameson writes that in postmodernism, oral history – that collective memory – has become “a vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum¹⁰⁵” (Jameson 18). *Oral History* shows this complete process: what should be the Cantrell’s collective project is lost as Jennifer takes away from her oral history project a recording of meaningless banging and her own journal’s simulacrum of her Appalachian family.

The many voices in the novel provide fertile ground for scholars to make a case for the novel’s performing this or that move. For Corinne Dale, “Smith explores the relationship of linguistic repression and alienation” and “demonstrates the alienating nature of patriarchal language, probing its anatomical and its cultural roots” (185). Certainly Richard’s “academic

¹⁰⁵ Jameson uses Plato’s conception of the simulacrum as “the identical copy for which no original exists” (18). His example, which hurts a little bit, is the EPCOT version of China: a copy of a place that does not really exist.

father speech” appears to comprehend the mountains the least, as the outsider in many local color stories finds himself tricked, taken in, and humbled by his encounter with a region. Smith leaves the important storytelling to the women in the story like Granny Younger and Ora Mae, though their subjective biases speak as loudly as their voices. Rodger Cunningham believes the book comprises “a pastiche of different voices – so different that we eventually suspect that none is reliable. And as soon as we do so, we begin to hear the whispers of the authentic voice underneath, a voice present by erasure – a blankness made articulate” (48). In other parts of this project, I have criticized Appalachian Studies’ impulse to seek the “authentic” over the good or interesting or modernist in how we select reading lists, topics of scholarship, and fights with American and southern culture. If Cunningham does not hear an “authentic voice,” it could be that it is inaudible; it could be that it does not exist. Smith’s unreliable “pastiche of different voices” does exist, and they supply all the Appalachian authenticity the novel contains. Cunningham argues that *Oral History* speaks to structures of power and in his larger argument, how Appalachia’s power has been usurped by the “double alterity” of its being neither north, where they make money, nor south, where they make myth¹⁰⁶ (41). The novel works on enough levels that both of those readings may be true, though if Smith is grinding an ax, it seems to be with Appalachia itself, with its own loss of identity (Jennifer), its commodification of its own culture (Al), and its own romanticizing of itself. Typical of Smith, her ax is sharpened

¹⁰⁶ To paraphrase Diane McWhorter, whom Cunningham takes to task for a particularly unkind review of Pinckney Benedict’s *Town Smokes* (1987).

by wit not anger and seasoned by a love of Appalachia¹⁰⁷, not a resentment of America or the south.

In a postmodern reading of the novel, the many voices do not work together to reveal the power structures that subjugate women or Appalachians, the many voices exist because “with the collapse of the high-modernist ideology of style – what is as unique and unmistakable as your own fingerprints... – the producers of culture have nowhere to turn but to the past: the imitation of dead styles, speech through all the masks and voices stored up in the imaginary museum of a now global culture” (Jameson 18). That is, postmodern production repurposes what has already been, which, in this novel, includes specific styles of speech, and also plot devices (outsider schoolteacher falls in love with beautiful local girl), character types (the randy preacher), and settings (the boardinghouse). Cunningham rightly calls *Oral History* a pastiche, but not exactly in the Jamesonian definition. Jameson says that pastiche takes the place of parody in that it imitates particulars, but “amputated of the satiric impulse” (17), which does not exactly describe *Oral History*.

Smith’s pastiche celebrates Appalachia and collages Appalachia, but it also draws attention to and has fun with¹⁰⁸ the college-essay style of Jennifer’s terrible prose and the self-conscious transcendentalism of Richard Burlage’s narrative. Smith saves most of her satirical edge for the present-day Appalachians, but she includes a number of turns too ridiculous to

¹⁰⁷ In the same way, Talking Heads video for “Wild, Wild Life,” one of the great moments of postmodernism, reveals a love of MTV and regular people, not a disdain for them. Or, only someone who loves b-movie culture could make *Pulp Fiction*.

¹⁰⁸ In the same way, “Wild Wild Life” and *Pulp Fiction* represent a pastiche full of wit.

overlook. Richard Burlage, one character, plays two roles: both the outsider schoolteacher¹⁰⁹ and the outsider exploitive photographer. On his first trip, he falls in love with and impregnates Dory, unbeknownst to him, but leaves her behind to return to Richmond after Dory's sister Ora Mae catches him in a compromising position with Justine Poole, keeper of the boardinghouse. On his second trip, he takes a picture of his own twin daughters whom he has never known while surreptitiously looking for Dory. The photograph, as he describes it, shows "two lovely girls, apparently twins holding hands as they come down the steps, frail and angelic: they've got no business here in this darkening yard" (Smith *Oral* 270). Richard sees the mountains and mountain people only as two-dimensional images to capture, take back to Richmond, and display for people to marvel upon. In seeing the mountaineer as an image, he overlooks people in his photograph to the degree that he misses the experience of talking to his own children. This should be tragic, but it appears in a section entitled "Richard Burlage Discourses Upon the Circumstances Concerning His Collection of Appalachian Photographs, c. 1934," the language a function of the Richard's stilted character, which makes it absurd¹¹⁰.

Another tragic absurdity involves Dory, the heroine of the novel, who repeatedly asks Richard to "tell me about the train," (Smith *Oral* 180) the way Lennie asks George to tell him about the rabbits in *Of Mice and Men* (1937). Years later, Dory commits suicide in the most

¹⁰⁹ "And the hills themselves: I have never seen such impenetrable terrain," says the outsider who will fall for Dory, the wild mountain girl. See also James Dickey's *Deliverance* (1970).

¹¹⁰ Rodger Cunningham claims that "The exact central line of the book is a line of exclamation points conveying his (Richard's) masturbation subsequent to an early visit by Dory" (49).

cartoonish way possible: by lying down on the train tracks and letting the train decapitate her¹¹¹. These elements constitute what Jameson describes as

the pure and random play of signifiers that we call postmodernism, which no longer produces monumental works of the postmodernist type but ceaselessly reshuffles the fragments of preexistent texts, the building blocks of older social production, in some new and heightened bricolage (96)

Oral History does exactly this: it reshuffles Appalachian images, stereotypes, language, and plots, Appalachian literature and culture itself, past and present, to make a postmodern point: look at the mess we are in. The book also implies, in the words of Rev. Aldous Rife, that “nothing ever changes that much”: we have been in this mess for a long time.

In a particularly cynical scene that sounds some postmodern notes, the Rev. Rife enjoys some early afternoon delight with Justine Poole at the Boardinghouse. Unusually, this section, called “At the Smith Hotel,” features a third person narrator, though perhaps not the same one from the beginning of the book whose sections are italicized. “At the Smith Hotel” does not fill in the narrative as much as it comments on previous information and the motives of the narrators while showing that two of the characters have been carrying on for some time. These characters who are not Cantrells and who do not get their own sections suggest a variety of viewpoints in early twentieth century Appalachia. Justine’s reverie of her handsome husband Jake, whose death left her the Smith hotel, reminds her that she has work to do for the

¹¹¹ Smith scholar Dorothy Combs Hill writes: “Golden Dory must be sacrificed for the Secret Wound – the split between culture and nature, male and female, body and soul – ultimately the split between the sacred and the sexual. Society actually splits Dory in this novel – separating her body and soul – finally turning her into the quintessential female by severing her head from her body” (199).

boarders. If the center of her life was once love it is now business. Rife, who aided Richard's return to Richmond, describes his parishioners: "Ignorance, is what it is, and by God I can't see no end to it, to ignorance and darkness. I can't see that it does any good to preach false hope or promise some kind of golden hereafter, some happy heaven that people believe in only because the things of this world are so goddamn bleak" (Smith, *Oral* 214). Rife's Hard No foreshadows the end of the novel, in which Smith also denies the reader some kind of golden hereafter.

Fred Chappell's "The Shape of Appalachian Literature to Come," itself a kind of postmodern performance in which Chappell interviews Wil Hickson, a made-up future of Appalachian Literature, admires Smith's lack of sentimentality in *Oral History*¹¹². The interview, full of its own self-referential Appalachian in-jokes¹¹³, has Hickson say "The real insiders, the writers who were born and raised in the mountains and lived their lives there, are rarely sentimental" (Chappell 56). Of course, then, Hickson describes Chappell as sentimental, but this analysis rings true for *Oral History*. Richard and Jennifer romanticize the mountains, but the Cantrells and their community do not. Chappell names Appalachian modernists Wolfe and

¹¹² Much could be said here, about Chappell and Jim Wayne Miller's contributions to Jefferson Humphries and John Lowe's *The Future of Southern Letters* (1996). Both feature fictional Appalachians, Chappell's Wil Hickson and George Washington Harris's nineteenth century troublemaker Sut Lovingood, who allow Chappell and Miller to perform their own postmodern versions of the critical article. Chappell interviews Harris to parody Appalachian expectations and propose a future for Appalachian writers. Miller has Harris's famous "Nat'ral born durn'd fool" Sut present as he reviews *The History of Southern Literature* (1985) edited by Louis D. Rubin, Jr., Lewis Simpson, et al. Sut famously punched up and down, resisting authority and making fun of country people. Jack Higgs liked the idea so much that his review of *The Future of Southern Letters* (1996) has all the contributors, including Hickson and Lovingood, on board a ship called the *Walter Scott* as it avoids collision with two other ships, the *Paul de Man* and the *Western Canon*. Like *Oral History*, all three of these pieces demonstrate sophisticated and sharply funny postmodern pastiche, mostly aimed at Appalachian Literature's treatment by Southern Literature scholars. Smith is in on the joke, too. Penguinrandomhouse.com features an interview between Smith and the ghost of Jink Cantrell, a character from *Oral History*.

¹¹³ Hickson's two novels are called *A Bitter Thirst* (1998) and *The Slaking* (2000).

Still as writers who respectively did and did not sentimentalize Appalachia, but in the 1990s, Chappell has Hickson name *Oral History* “the seminal work for current Appalachian fiction. It’s where we all come from now, whether we know it or not. She’s the mother of us all. (Laughs)” (56).

Smith ends the novel with a violation of the Appalachian holy of holies preceded by a few other minor transgressions that show the dysfunction of the mountain outsiders and insiders. First, Ora Mae and then Al throw Jennifer off the homeplace and ask her not to come back. Then, Al lets slip the family secret, that Jennifer’s mom ran off with a high school boy who later killed her brother Billy in the old homeplace’s rocking chair. Lastly, Uncle Al gives his niece Jennifer a kiss “*so hard that stars smash in front of her eyes. Al sticks his tongue inside her mouth*” (338). The mountaineers come off pretty badly and so, too, does Jennifer’s condescension: “*The all live so close to the land, all of them. Some things are modern, like the van, but they’re not, not really. They are really very primitive people, resembling nothing so much as some sort of early tribe*” (Smith, *Oral* 339). Jennifer’s trip to her kinfolk’s homeplace has changed nothing. All that history, all those stories, all that culture is lost to the outsiders, and capitalized for the insiders. If any doubts linger about Smith’s postmodern agenda, consider the last two paragraphs of the novel, that switch to future tense. In them, Al “makes a killing” in Amway¹¹⁴ then invests in a ski run on Black Rock Mountain. This inspires him to develop the homeplace as “Ghostland,” “the prettiest theme park east of Opryland itself,” where guests can pay an extra \$4.50 to sit on an observation deck and watch the old crumbling homeplace in the evening when the ghostly laughter begins and the chair on the front porch

¹¹⁴ “What are your dreams?” he asks in his Amway-taught sales pitch.

starts rocking. In Denise Giardina's *Storming Heaven* (1987), the homeplace stands throughout the novel as the nostalgic dream of a good life, the last refuge from the modern world of mine wars and hired-gun violence. In *Oral History*, the past culminates in a capitalist opportunity. Almarine Cantrell, named after his grandfather who inherited this land from his father in the beginning of the book, monetizes the homeplace, commodifies it, and sells it to Appalachians. *Oral History* suggests that late capitalism in Appalachia looks a lot like late capitalism everywhere else.

McCarthy Defamiliarizes the Human

Al Cantrell may welcome modernity's turning his homeplace into a spectacle, but Lester Ballard does not. In the opening scene of Cormac McCarthy's¹¹⁵ *Child of God*, Ballard's homeplace goes up for tax auction and the assembled flatbed musicians, lemonade stand, and loudspeaker auctioneer, "like a caravan of carnival folk," (3) prove too much for Ballard; after a confrontation and a series of threats a man hits Ballard in the head with an axe to quiet him down. The loss of Ballard's homeplace begins his severe downward journey into the violence and deviancy that takes up most of the novel. Set in Sevier County, Tennessee and partially narrated by members of the community that have grown up with or known Ballard, the book wears its Appalachian bona fides – including dialect, moonshining, incest, and beautiful descriptions of nature – proudly. Its form, language, and tone show an early version of

¹¹⁵ McCarthy moved to Knoxville as a child when his father went to work as an attorney for the TVA (<https://www.cormacmccarthy.com/biography>).

minimalist *The Road*-style McCarthy. If *Suttree* finds antecedents in Faulkner and Joyce, then *Child of God* mixes Hemingway, O'Connor, and Rod Serling¹¹⁶:

To watch these things issuing from the otherwise mute pastoral morning is a man at the barn door. He is small, clean, unshaven. He moves in the dry chaff among the dust and slats of sunlight with a constrained truculence. Saxon and Celtic bloods. A child of God much like yourself perhaps. (McCarthy, *Child* 4)

The language reads more modernist than postmodernist, more earnest than ironic, more elegiac than zany, though Ballard performs a number of acts that would get him kicked out of the wildest carnival¹¹⁷. This raises a couple of questions: what does it mean when a novelist, indeed one of our greatest contemporary novelists, makes modernist moves well past what is often understood as the modernist moment? What does this mean for our understanding of modernism in Appalachia?

The rest of this chapter labels *Child of God* and Jo Carson's *Daytrips* metamodernist because they continue modernist-style formal experimentation, consider history, and acknowledge the endurance of continuing narratives that give order and meaning to human experience even as the renegotiate them. These works exist amidst the same culture of chaos and capitalism described by Jameson, but these writers react differently than their postmodernist contemporaries. McCarthy's minimalist, largely punctuation-free prose and its shifting between multiple unidentified narrators reads as formal experiment, but the novel's real innovation lies in the way it makes the monstrous Lester Ballard fully human. James and

¹¹⁶ Simple declarative sentences, a theological definition of humanity, an invitation to "consider this..."

¹¹⁷ Gabe Rikard notes that Ballard and Sut Lovingood both come from Frog Mountain, and that Ballard misdirects the contempt Lovingood directs at "certain social types," the honorable people of the community (137-138).

Seshagiri write that metamodernists “distinguish themselves...through self-conscious, consistent visions of dissent and defamiliarizations as novelistic inventions specific to the early twentieth century” (93). In *Child of God*, McCarthy defamiliarizes the definition of humanity by way of history and nature.

Upon first glance, the title *Child of God* as it refers to the necrophiliac murderer Lester Ballard might be seen as a case of postmodern irony¹¹⁸. Both the community-narrator voices and the main narrative voice unabashedly condemn Ballard’s actions, which include burning down a house where a child with mental health issues is inside. Towards the end of the novel, the narrator describes the now one-armed Ballard in his hospital gown as a “practitioner of ghastliness, a part time ghoul” (McCarthy, *Child* 174), and yet the novel as a whole makes a case for Ballard’s humanity, if the definition of humanity is likeness to other examples of humans. Early on, Ballard presents as sympathetic because he watches his family farm auctioned off after the county evicts him. Someone who grew up with Ballard tell us that his father “killed hisself” and Ballard watched as his father was cut down and that “the mother had run off” (McCarthy, *Child* 21). Ballard’s most human moments come in the wake of his most heinous acts, however, such as when he goes shopping for one of his murder victims, dresses her up and makes her up: “He would arrange her in different positions and go out and peer in the window at her. After a while he just sat holding her, his hands feeling her body under the new clothes. He undressed her very slowly, talking to her” (103). Ballard wants what everyone else wants: a home and someone to come home to.

¹¹⁸ Similar to Dave Eggers’ *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, which, according to Lee Konstantinou’s “Four Faces of Postirony,” is not intended to be ironic, but obviously leaves itself open to that interpretation.

In describing *Suttree* (1979), McCarthy's next published novel and his last Appalachian one, John G. Cawelti writes, "his novels are secular allegories of driven souls fleeing the devil and seeking salvation in a realm across the borders of human good and evil where it is increasingly difficult to distinguish between the holy and diabolical" (311). *Child of God* makes a similar move, though the novel makes no bones about the depravity of Ballard's actions. McCarthy makes seeing Lester Ballard as a child of God difficult work, but Ballard expresses a truth about human beings: not just that we have darkness inside, not just that we may be a few bad turns from desperate acts, but that ultimately, we are all both animals and children of God¹¹⁹. McCarthy demonstrates this also by showing the monstrosity of the humans in his community. One of the narrators did not keep nine-year-old Lester Ballard from watching as his father's hanged body was cut down. Buster hit Ballard in the head with an axe on the day his farm was being auctioned off. In addition to celebrating that auctioning, the community also showed up to celebrate the hanging of two people who murdered a couple in front of their daughter. Just after Christmas in 1900, while the decorations still hung in town, "People had started in to town the evenin before. Slept in wagons, a lot of em. Rolled out blankets on the courthouse lawn. Wherever. You couldn't get a meal in town, folks lined up three deep. Women sellin sandwiches in the street" (McCarthy, *Child* 167). The community's distaste for unsanctioned violence matches their excitement for the sanctioned kind.

In creating Lester Ballard's humanity, the novel defamiliarizes history and to some degree nature. In two moments, the narrator addresses the audience to say that Ballard is "like

¹¹⁹ And, as Agee writes, "that each man is eternally and above all else responsible for his own soul, and, in the terrible words of the Psalmist, that no man may deliver his brother, nor make agreement unto God for him" (Agee 161).

yourself” or “like you” (McCarthy, *Child* 4, 156) first to call him a child of God and then to say that “he’s sustained by his fellow men,” acknowledging religion and community as narratives of meaning¹²⁰. After the auctioning of his homeplace, Ballard moves backwards through the history of human development, going from his home to a shack that he accidentally burns down as if he does not quite have control of fire, and then to a cave. Cawelti writes of *Suttree*, “McCarthy views human life from the perspective of eternity, yet his version of eternity is the cosmic, geological, and biological immensity that derives from a purely naturalistic vision of the universe” (311). The same vision exists in *Child of God*, and that vision fails to offer to Ballard comfort or wisdom. Late in the book, he looks to the stars as the earliest people must have “for some kind of guidance but the heavens wore a different look that Ballard did not trust” (McCarthy, *Child* 190). McCarthy introduces Ballard as child of God, but he develops Ballard as animal, as dependent on killing as any woodland predator:

In the spring or warmer weather when the snow thaws in the woods the tracks of winter reappear on slender pedestals and the snow reveals in palimpsest old buried wanderings, struggles, scenes of death. Tales of winter brought to light again like time turned back on itself. Ballard went through the woods kicking down his old trails where they veered over the hill toward his onetime homeplace. Old comings and goings. The tracks of a fox raised out of the snow intaglio like little mushrooms and berrystains where birds shat crimson mutes upon the snow like blood. (*Child* 138)

¹²⁰ It is fair to struggle with the earnestness of these implications, but little in the book suggests irony and much suggests sincerity.

Child of God includes a number of pastoral moments, in which nature appears beautiful or peaceful. More commonly, however, passages like the one above place Ballard in nature as one of the dogs chasing a boar (McCarthy, *Child* 69) or an ape muttering unintelligibly (McCarthy, *Child* 159), or a fox scurrying through the snow. McCarthy offers a definition of a human being as biological instead of theological or relational. In Part I, members of the community comment on Ballard and Sherriff Fate and tell stories and tall tales, many about animals, including a carnival boxing match with an “ape or gorilla, ever what it was” (McCarthy, *Child* 58) that place Ballard in the context of the community, though as aberrant, an other that they struggle to explain. By Part II (of III), those voices disappear, isolating Ballard from the community’s story and connecting him to the story of animals, seasons, weather, and landscape.

After having his arm blown off by John Greer, the would-be victim who bought Ballard’s homeplace, Ballard escapes from a gang of vigilantes into his cave where he stays in the belly of the earth for three days trying to find a way out. If his emergence does not signal a resurrection or rebirth, it does suggest a recovery of something more human than animal. Ballard sees a boy on a school bus that looks familiar, and “it came to him that the boy looked like himself” (McCarthy *Child* 191), and returns of his own volition to the hospital and so to incarceration. “I’m supposed to be here,” he says (McCarthy 192). Ballard is sent to a mental hospital, and is “found dead in the floor of his cage” (McCarthy *Child* 194). Ballard’s body goes to the medical school in Memphis, where students take him apart piece by piece, and McCarthy reinforces the biological definition of humanity when he calls the remains by name: “Ballard was scraped from his table into a plastic bag and taken with others of his kind to a cemetery

outside the city and there interred" (194). The narrator calls a body from which brains, heart, muscles and entrails had been removed "Ballard," instead of Ballard's remains or Ballard's body, indicating that essence need not necessitate existence. In his late twentieth century Appalachian novel, McCarthy nods to modernism with formal experimentation and by problematizing the narratives of meaning provided by religion, community, and home. *Child of God* shows the deleterious effect of capitalism and the loss of those narratives on human beings, but the novel does not play with postmodern pastiche. Instead, he makes the metamodernist move of defamiliarizing the idea of a child of God, of a human being as an animal, and the past by moving Ballard backwards in time to see humanity in the context of environment as well as economy.

*Jo Carson Searches for Home*¹²¹

Jo Carson's play *Daytrips* also defamiliarizes human identity, complicates the line between the holy and diabolical, and mourns the loss of home, but moves quickly and lightly to counterbalance the heaviness of its subject matter and the strangeness of its form. The play's real metamodernist achievement lies in its formal innovation. At the center of the play, Pat takes care of her mother Irene, who has Alzheimer's, and looks after Irene's mother Rose, who lives alone in the next town over. Everything else is complicated. Two characters play Pat, one called Pat and one called the Narrator. Pat stays in the action of the play, but the Narrator

¹²¹ This project began because of two works: Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater and Jo Carson's *Daytrips*. Jo Carson died in 2011. The next year, friends, fellow artists, and former performance partners staged "A Month of Sundays" to remember Carson and her work. These Sunday night performances at the Down Home in Johnson City, Tennessee included a reading of Carson's play *Daytrips* by members of The Road Company, the theatre group that included Carson and Ed Snodderly and first produced *Daytrips*.

speaks for a future Pat who looks back on the play's events. Irene and Rose only speak to the Narrator when she, through her storytelling, plays other characters, such as the pharmacist or an aunt. Both Pat and the Narrator address the audience. Irene spends most of the play as Ree, Irene afflicted with Alzheimer's; one actor plays Irene and Ree. Carson writes in her notes that "The play is in memory time, not linear time. Real time and memory time come together towards the end of the play" (57), so episodes from different times fade in and out of each other without notice, like they do in *Death of a Salesman*, if there were two actors both playing Willy Loman at the same time. There are also ghosts. Rose often thinks Pat is Helen, her daughter and Irene's sister who has died. Pat sometimes talks to Helen's ghost when she visits Rose's house. Ree thinks Pat is Olivia, Rose's sister who has died. If this sounds chaotic, it is, especially for Pat who takes care of two women, her mother and grandmother, who fight over whether she is Helen or Olivia:

ROSE. Helen?

REE. Helen is dead.

ROSE. She is not.

REE. You want Olivia.

ROSE. Olivia's dead.

REE. She drove.

ROSE. Who are you?

REE. Irene.

ROSE. Irene's dead.

REE. She's not.

PAT. Where on earth is Pat?

REE. Pat who?

ROSE. She's dead too. Ever'body but me and I still don't get to die. Helen?

NARRATOR. Helen is dead.

PAT. She is not.

REE. You want Olivia.

ROSE. Olivia's dead.

NARRATOR. She drove.

ROSE. Who are you?

REE. Irene?

PAT. Irene's dead.

NARRATOR. She's not.

PAT. Where on earth is Pat?

NARRATOR. Pat who?

REE. (to Pat.) She's dead too.

ROSE. Ever'body but me and I still don't get to die. It's my punishment for

wanting too much. (Carson 44-45)

This exchange, which reappears in various forms throughout the play, shows that Pat also acknowledges the ghost of Helen, though the Narrator, with the ability to see past Pat's situation, says correctly that Helen is dead. Not until the middle of the play do we discover the real stakes: Pat dreams of killing Ree and Rose both because they wish it and because she cannot continue in her impossible situation.

Yet, *Daytrips* could not be farther from postmodern pastiche. By splitting its characters into different people and operating on the logic of memory and dream, it looks much more like Strindbergian modernism. But Carson goes further to create a world aware of its post-modernity. Though the play includes the humor of absurdity, it maintains a painful awareness of the past and redefines home as separate from the past. August Strindberg, whose *Miss Julie* (1888) and *A Dream Play* (1901) subverted naturalist drama to present less linear and more complex narratives, governed more by the logic of dreams than reality, wrote of his characters in the "Preface to *Miss Julie*" (1888),

Since they are modern characters, living in an age of transition more urgently hysterical at any rate than the age which preceded it, I have drawn my people as split and vacillating, a mixture of the old and the new...My souls (or characters) are agglomerations of past and present cultures, scraps from books or newspapers, fragments of humanity, torn shreds of once-fine clothing that have become rags, in just the way that a human soul is patched together. (116)

Daytrips updates this for twentieth-century Appalachia, in a time when "all thoughts and things were split." It would be easy enough to make an Appalachian play about Alzheimer's as a lesson in the tragedy of losing one's past, but *Daytrips* maintains an ambivalence with the past and the way it problematizes the present. Alzheimer's has split Irene and Ree into past and present, and Rose lives between a fear of the past, indicated by an abusive father, and an extreme discomfort with the quickly-changing present, which we know by the many locks on her doors. Pat and the Narrator show an individual split between the present and the future, between the experience of a dislocating trauma and the ability to look back on it.

I have argued that the narratives of modernism and Appalachian Studies run parallel because so much of Appalachia's thinking about itself sees modernity as either the idea that invented Appalachia or the moment that Appalachia became identifiably different than America. *Daytrips* illustrates how theories of metamodernism find a natural fit in Appalachian literature. *Daytrips* tells a specific story of three women dealing with illness and madness in late twentieth-century Appalachia. The effect of this situation, however – the dividing of individual identity, the ever-presence of past, present, and future, and the dream-like quality of daily experience – echo Timotheus Vermeulen's explanation of how metamodernism works to try to make sense of living in what Jameson describes as late capitalism and what metamodernists see as postmodernism's successor. Vermeulen writes that metamodernism is an assault, sure, on the feedback loop of late capitalism, but also, not unlikely, a by-effect of another stage of capitalism, a stage characterized less by the short-circuiting of the present than by a Marty McFlyesque dissolution of the certainties of the past and the present into increasingly atomized – and indeed, intangible, simulated rather than experiential, logical rather than rational – speculations about the future. (149-150)

For Jameson, postmodernism has lost its connection to history; Vermeulen sees metamodernism as “the return of historicity, affect and depth” (149). Pat's primary difficulty in *Daytrips* lies in Ree's losing herself to disease; confusion over past, present, and future, and therefore confusion over identity, complicate this difficulty and make the play not just about taking care of a loved one with Alzheimer's, but about losing one's identity within the context of one's family and past. Pat has already split into present Pat and future Narrator; Rose and

Ree split her into past Olivia and past Helen. Carson does not romanticize Rose's past, but by making the first daytrip to Rose's homeplace on Kyle's Ford and returning to the story later in the play, she places the present in the constant context of the past. Neither Rose nor Pat has lost her connection to the old ways or the homeplace (represented in one scene by a visit with an aunt who still lives in the country), but neither sees the past as any salve for the present.

Anita J. Turpin writes that *Daytrips* "becomes a multifaceted play about loss of identity – loss of individual identity due to the ravages of aging and disease and loss of regional identity due to the passage of time" (231). *Daytrips* could be set anywhere that used to have one pharmacy and now has four or has too many grocery stores to count, all of which upsets Rose and makes life harder for Pat. Carson's plays often grew out of community stories and oral histories – not unlike the ones in *Child of God* – not just in Appalachia but throughout the south. *Daytrips* tells a story from Carson's own life, and so is set in Appalachia. In an interview with Pat Arnow at the 1997 Emory and Henry Literary Festival that produces the *Iron Mountain Review*, Carson commented on Appalachia's role in late twentieth century America:

We've got the same Walgreens; we've got the same Coastal gas stations as everywhere else. To state the obvious, the country is getting more and more homogenized. Now there are values to this sort of change – I like having foreign films at Blockbuster's – but there are things that are lost in it. I think the whole inclination to preserve any culture comes when people begin to sense the loss of something. (Arnow and Carson 35)

Carson's book of poems *Stories I Ain't Told Nobody Yet* collects what she called "people pieces," and takes on Appalachia's assimilation into the mainstream as well as stereotypes and the

passing of a culture from one generation to the next. Douglas Reichert Powell's *Critical Regionalism* treats this book as a model for how to address big picture regional politics while fairly representing "local sites in careful and attentive detail" (148). Carson's commitment to place and work in preserving the language and oral history of a place feature prominently in her work. Reichert Powell cites the couplet that closes *Stories I Ain't Told Nobody Yet*: "When I am dead, it will not matter/how hard you press your ear to the ground" (Carson, *Stories* 93) as a lesson on paying attention to the details of inherited culture.

I point to these lines because *Daytrips* closes with three dreams in which Pat dreams of killing Rose and Ree. By the end of the play, we see that the deaths of Rose and Ree will allow Pat to let go of the past and go home. These moments play without sentiment. Carson shows Pat's fantasy of killing her mother as duty and mercy, her fantasy of killing Rose as survival and sanity. Carson does not play with these ideas in *Daytrips*; she wrestles with them. The stakes are life and death. The lives of Pat's mother and grandmother will not be dispatched like a cartoon damsel in distress as they are in *Oral History*. The Narrator tells us that her three dreams of death "are the ancient elements that made up life before the periodic chart: water, air, fire" (Carson 55), and each dream ends with the recovery of a meaningful narrative of life: home, and an end to the fragmentation of her identity, missing elements in the chaos of taking care of Ree and Rose. In the first dream, Pat takes Irene, not Ree, and Rose to Watauga Lake and invites them in to the water. Though Ree can sometimes tell what Pat is thinking, and calls Pat out for wishing Ree were dead, Ree also gives Pat permission to end her life. In this first dream, however, she has to kill her mother Irene, not her afflicted mother Ree.

NARRATOR. I am waist deep, I am chest deep, my feet no longer touch the bottom and I kick gently in my plastic shoes to stay afloat.

PAT. Come on.

NARRATOR. And they come. But they do not swim. They walk. Holding hands. They walk past me. I see their heads beneath the surface of the water.

PAT. I told you it feels good...

NARRATOR. And they walk. Further than I can see, further than I feel safe to swim and they are gone. I do not call –

PAT. come back –

NARRATOR. I say –

PAT. – goodbye

NARRATOR. And I swim back to the shore and I pick up their shoes –

PAT. – and I bring their shoes home. (Carson 17)

Pat grounds the first dream and the last in the idea of home, clarifying that her home exists beyond Rose's sticky past, Ree's challenging childishness, and the loss of her own story in the jumble of her family's. The Narrator tells us about the first dream with Pat playing her role in the action. Pat narrates the second dream and this time Ree helps her justify her actions in the moment: "I take my pillow and lay it over Rose and rest myself on top of it. Ree sees me. She wakes up. All she would have to do is say stop. I would stop. I would be glad to stop. I would like to stop. I would like her to be my mother" (Carson 46), but Ree's disease has rendered her much more a child than a mother. When Pat has killed them in the dream, she sits "in the half dark of dreams, and I hold their hands and I cry because I loved them and they are gone" (46).

Pat does not kill her mother and grandmother, though a number of vignettes feature other caregivers and former caregivers offering advice on how to without raising suspicions.

The play closes with a final dream, the dream of fire. The narrator tells us “There is no earth dream. Maybe earth is left for the real dying” (55). Irene returns for this dream, and she and Rose sit at Rose’s house talking. Pat wants to leave to go home. She makes a joke about lighting a fire under Irene, and Irene tells her to do it. She lights the fire, and Irene tells her to go on outside:

NARRATOR. I get in my car without waiting for them and I drive home.

PAT. In the dream, I am convinced I know where home is. And someday soon, I will get there. (Carson 56)

The presence of the Narrator, a Pat with the perspective of someone who can look back on these events, suggests that Pat will survive Ree and Rose, but the end of the play shows that *Daytrips* tells Pat’s story, not the Narrator’s. It leaves Pat unsettled, her story unresolved, and her identity splintered. *Daytrips* rewrites the most Appalachian of narratives, the idea of home, to suggest that no amount of dwelling on the past, mountain wisdom, or family loyalty can save Pat. Only by letting go of Rose and Ree can Pat find home.

In the late 1990s at East Tennessee State University in Carson’s native Johnson City, she visited an Appalachian Literature course that was reading *Daytrips*. I asked her during that visit if she had worried that in writing something so specific as a play about taking care of a mother with Alzheimer’s she would create something other people could not understand. Carson answered that she only knew how to write universally by writing about the specific. *Daytrips* does not function as an allegory about Appalachia with the message that Pat as young

Appalachian has to leave the past behind to keep finding home. *Daytrips* does illustrate that if Appalachia's twentieth-century problems are specific, they are also universal. The experimental impulse in art and literature required to tell stories that have not been told before, that capture a human experience in its complexity, ambiguity, and irresolvability, exists in twentieth century Appalachia as well. Appalachia produces modernism, postmodernism, and something else, too: the continuing reinvention of Appalachian stories and the resilience of narratives of meaning like nature, family, and home.

Conclusion:
Writing is Rewriting

In an essay that feels slightly misplaced in *Christianity in Appalachia: Profiles in Regional Pluralism*, Barbara Ellen Smith mythologizes Appalachia's economic and social history as the Edenic fall. Appalachia begins as a garden, an agricultural democracy that "exemplified Thomas Jefferson's vision of a democratic society" according to Ron Eller (qtd. In Smith 2), an early American pre-modern paradise. The serpent that invaded this bucolic landscape goes by many names: capitalism, extraction, absentee ownership, industrialization with asymmetrical economic development. Another name might be modernization. The curse (I am starting to embellish Smith's myth) comes in the form of poverty, and just as harmful, a reputation for poverty "featuring laziness, criminality, and sexual licentiousness" (Smith 10). Appalachians in exile move to Detroit, Chicago, Dayton, and live in "the crux of contradiction" as storyteller Anndrena Belcher says, working all week in a factory, driving all weekend to spend a few hours feeling like they are home.

Smith knows she's mythologizing a mythology, that capitalism got off the boat with the European settlers, that outsiders had long owned land in Appalachia, and that though the profits from extraction left Appalachia, many Appalachians went to work extracting. But Smith's story leads to a return from exile, if not exactly to redemption, and she proposes the act of mythologizing Appalachian history as a form of restoring Eden¹²². Jim Wayne Miller's Brier also sees Appalachia in a fallen state, and does something about it one Saturday morning, he goes downtown to preach. The "Brier Sermon" closes Miller's *The Mountain Have Come*

¹²² As Katherine Patterson, who went to college in Appalachia, once said, "the consolation of the imagination is not imaginary consolation."

Closer (1980), and also uses a religious metaphor to cure what ails Appalachia. Standing across the street from the Greenstamp Redemption Store, he preaches Appalachia's own agency in modernization:

Our foreparents left us a home here in the mountains.

But we try to live in somebody else's house.

We're ashamed to live in our father's house.

We think it's too old fashioned...

thought it wasn't pretty because it wasn't factory made...

We were too busy anyway

giving our timber away

giving our coal away

to worry about love songs

to worry about ballets

to worry about old stories (Miller 53-54)

The Brier implicates Appalachia as a culprit in the extraction industry and condemns how quickly Appalachians sold out and bought into factory-made culture. The phrase father's house points both to Appalachian folk culture and to the natural world, the two great inheritances of "home here in the mountains." Miller knows that Appalachia cannot live in the past, and even that Appalachians "don't have to think ridge-to-ridge"; they can "think ocean-to-ocean" (Miller 55). Appalachians need not continue to define themselves locally, they may define themselves nationally. But for Appalachians to shake off their twentieth-century blues, to atone for the

“forgetfulness that’s a sin against ourselves,” the Brier has a message: “You must be born again” (Miller 59, 61).

What’s it like – being born again?

It’s going back to what you were before

Without losing what you’ve since become. (Miller 63)

Appalachia is a place defined by its relationship to time, both because of its nature, which we imagine as eternal, and its culture, which we imagine as a holdover from a simpler, pre-modern era. Appalachia cannot return to the garden, and may not have ears to hear the Brier’s sermon. Acknowledging Appalachia’s role in its own story of modernization and modernism is no panacea for its conflicts and poverty, but it provides a starting place. Jim Wayne Miller and Barbara Ellen Smith, the foreparents of Appalachian Modernism, saw this clearly decades ago. With gratitude, I give Smith the last word here.

Appalachian people, like everyone else in the United States of the late twentieth century, inevitably construct a sense of place out of the flotsam and jetsam of many influences – whether soap operas, sermons, country music, layoffs, advice from the Farmers’ Almanac, etc, etc....the examination of these constructions is essential if we are to locate Appalachian people in their rightful roles, along with the coal operator, missionaries, bankers, novelists, and other players, on the center stage of their own written history. (Smith 13)

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