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Solitaire

Wayne Thomas

In a holler I long ago pretended not to know, I sit with what's left of my father, in his trailer, on his couch that feels like burlap, its threads coarse and inelastic. As a boy, I'd watch him lie here without a shirt and wonder how he did it. I just sat on the floor.

Father. He's dead, and I don't want to say "Dad" anymore.

He had sun-beaten skin, thinned-out red hair he wore in a ponytail. He didn't bathe. He didn't care.

A fighter pilot in the war. He came home, married mom, and I was born right here in this tin can. I lived on a damn mountain unreachable by car cause he didn't want to pay taxes. "I served my country," he said, real guttural. "Now they serve me." No one ever found him, ever bothered him. To the very end, veteran's benefits were sent to a post office box thirty clicks away.

He'd walk to get that government check. Then spend a few days drinking cheap whiskey in a townie dive just outside Fairmont. He'd usually forget about buying supplies, feeding himself the rest of the month, and have to live off something he killed.

There's a picture on the coffee table. It's my mother—young and still smiling. Beside it, there's a black and white of a burlesque girl holding a giant feather across her body. "She ain't wearing anything under that feather," he told me like it was high time I learned the secret.

"Your mom loved you," he said at her funeral.

Heart attack. No way to get her to the hospital. "We all die," he said. He never cried. I was eight.

We lived out here together six more years before I up and left him. We hadn't even had words. I just walked past him sitting on this damn couch and on out the door. Didn't take an extra stitch of clothing with me. He paid me no mind.

The place smells like sour mash. But he was a tidy man. Kept his garbage in the waste basket, clothes in the dresser, canned vegetables in the pantry.

No television, no radio, no books. There's an unfinished game of Solitaire spread out on the kitchen table. I tried to remember what we did out here all by ourselves and couldn't. Once, I asked him how he whiled away his days. "Think," he said. Something in his tone. I wasn't sure if it was an answer or a command.

These could be my things: a burlap couch, a coffee table, a deck of cards, pictures of my mother and a burlesque girl. I pick up Mother's picture, give it a kiss, and place it back on the table.

Outside, the wind howls. I pull the lid off the urn and shake him into it.

In the Closet With the Mountains

Rachel Swatzell

Like any other day on the side of the road in Appalachia
is a beat-up, pick-up truck with an evangelist white shirt
hanging out the window, a sign that
Sipple is coming back for her mechanical body
when she finds the strength and tools to fix it. But
by beat-up I mean there are dents in the side
from a hammer that Sipple's neighbor used to
take his anger out on because his cattle broke out the fence.
So beat-up he left silver bruises, demarking Sipple
of her identity. When her truck sputtered its last breath
she found herself looking for the broken handle on the door,
pleading, thrashing to be let out of the mildewed, dank closet.
Religion a justification for oppression
religion an excuse for change, for abuse, for silence
religion no longer about acceptance but a yodel
that Jesus should ride shotgun with his shotgun
at a LGTBQ+ protest, saving those sinning in the streets
against the Bible Belt values, #TennesseeChristianValues.
But if you looked under her hood you would find
an unapologetic queer woman who just wants
a rainbow matriarchal flag waving as an act of respect
and praying to her God, False God, Real God.

Song Suffragettes

Rachel Swatzell

I was scrolling through Twitter the other day
to find female country music artists harping
against the old boys' network who
are discriminating them of equal play,
a tweet that reads "we cannot play two females
back to back. No female against another female,
but I applaud their courage for trying."
Ol Keith on the Hill hides in *his* glass box behind *his* microphone
pressing his buttons, dominating radios
with country male dominance, *his* dominance.

One woman an hour is plenty
but what they really mean is
one woman surrounded by three men
in a group so the woman is still
disvalued for her individual artistry.

Take a look at trade publication and find
female artists make up only 13 percent of radio play
where labels are reluctant to sign a female
because we're measured by numbers not by talent.
An environment where women are pitted against each other,
Two classes established in Nashville,
the superstars and the rungs
a competition of stalled careers.
For those that still have a contract
if you're lucky, you will be sold to a man
right out from under you, left with no rights to your art.

And as a woman in the industry you scream
at the rigged systemic airplay and
quite frankly still at the lack of equal pay,
but hey, we will be here
till the end of the election, of all elections
waiting to see that light of day.
You are tossed lyrics scattered in the breeze

fueled by the inequity of our stations flipped through to
find the next cowboy Casanova cause the world
just wants to hear about beer drinkin, God lovin
dirt road kickin, and truck drivin.
We will take the fall, because our music
just expresses we said I don't love you too late in which
our names deserve to be run into the ground and
spread all over town for shutting the door on someone's forever.

Only the suffragettes have the power to break fixed perception
to move the city of elevator lights and music dreams.
It can be just a matter of time
to fix this and cross the finish line
so run
outrun, outwork,
outwork, outrun
outrun, outwork
no one is going to help you, so do it by yourselves.
Run
outrun, outwork,
outwork, outrun
outplay
outrun, outwork, outplay.

Song Suffragettes is a weekly writer's round held in Nashville, Tennessee featuring rotating female country artists. Song Suffragettes is a collective of female singer-songwriters who stand together in the face of systemic gender-disparity in the music industry.

The Appalachian Hollers Glossary

Rachel Swatzell

A little bird once told me
Beggars can't be choosers. Bless their hearts they
Can't carry a tune in a bucket. And
Don't count your chickens before they hatch because
Everything that glitters is not gold. You're
Fit to be tied and
Gettin' too big for your britches.
How do you like them apples,
I'm going to give you something to cry for, momma used to say.
Jeet yet?
Kill them with kindness and
Let the sleeping dog lie before he bites you ol'
Mean as a striped snake.
Not my circus, not my monkeys.
One man's trash is another man's treasure, especially for the
Poor as a church mouse.
Quit being ugly and
Running around like a chicken with its head cut off.
She just flew off the handle,
Three gallons of crazy in a two gallon bucket.
Under the weather, fair to middlin'.
Vittles though, ain't all she hankers for from her homeland.
We're gonna have a come to Jesus meeting.
Xenoglossia, the Southerners knowledge of a language never studied.
You better butter my butt
& call me biscuit.
Zoo wee mama!

Now we know our Southernisms,
next time won't you holler with me.

That Pretty Flower Basket Pattern

Roger D. Hicks

Just after daylight on the first of the month, Ballard swept the store, checked the temperature in the coolers, drank his first cup of coffee, and finally put in a chew of Red Man before going to his favorite hickory bottom chair on the porch to watch the sunrise before the real day began. The delivery truck from Paintsville Grocery was due to arrive any minute and just in time before the first of the month rush. Ballard heard the squeak of the hinges on Ep's door across the creek and saw his friend step across the porch for their morning visit. When he arrived, Ep leaned his chair against the wall and asked, "Are you ready for the crowd, Ballard?"

"I reckon I will be if the truck comes in on time. I'm a little low on flour and all the good patterns are gone until the new load gets here. You know how these women are about the patterns. They want the same pattern on the flour and feed sacks to make everything from curtains to drawers. Ain't nobody except maybe their husbands looking at their drawers but they still want them pretty patterns with flowers on them for everything they make." Ep laughed and asked, "Did the Widder Higgins ever get that last sack she was asking about with that little flower basket pattern on it?"

"No, she didn't,' Ep," Ballard answered. "That pattern may be out of stock at the warehouse for all I know. But I won't get no peace for the rest of my life if she don't come up with one more sack of flour in that pattern. She asks every time she comes to the store and always looks at me like I stole her sack of flour when I tell her no."

"What is she's making with that pattern?" Ep asked.
"Ep, that's the funny part. She won't ever say. But she's bought several sacks of flour in that pattern and she's dying to find one more."

"Well, I don't know about you, Ballard, but I don't want that little woman mad at me. For her size, she is downright scary when she gets that look in her eye."

Suddenly, the sound of a heavy truck engine bounced off the opposite hillside and both men turned down the creek just in time to see the delivery truck round the curve where the coal camp houses ended and private lands began. The driver made his usual swing to park with his back door in front of the feed room and brought the truck to a halt. Ballard and Ep went inside the building and entered the feed room as the driver was raising his door to unload. "Howdy, feller, have you got everything I ordered this week?" Ballard asked.

"I reckon so,' the driver responded, 'the warehouse man never said anything about being short on anything."

The driver began setting boxes, bags, and barrels on the tailgate of the truck and Ballard and Ep began moving them to their spots farther back in the feed room. Finally, the man unloaded several boxes of candy and carried them to the front counter of the store along with his order to check the inventory of the load. As he started to walk out of the feed room, Ep suddenly stopped and whistled, "Ballard, this is your lucky day. Here is a bag of flour with that flower basket pattern the Widder Higgins is wanting so bad."

All three men turned to double check the bag and Ballard patted the trucker on the shoulder in appreciation.
"Young man, you are the very feller I was looking for. I can finally get the Widder Higgins to talk about something besides that pattern on a flour sack."

Ballard checked the delivery, signed the order for the driver, and began stocking everything in its proper place. Ep returned to the porch, loaded a fresh chew, and waited for Ballard to finish. Just as the stocking was done and Ballard returned to the porch, Ep looked down the creek and saw a large woman he didn't recognize round the curve toward the store. When she stepped on the porch, neither man knew her and Ballard said, "Well, howdy, Ma'm. I don't reckon I know you. I believe this is your first trip to my store. I'm glad to see you."

With a voice a bit like sandpaper, the woman said, "My name is Myrtle Boxer. But you can just call me Pounder. I just retired as a guard from the state women's prison and moved here where my mother was born. Pounder is what the convicts used to call me. I'm used to it, I reckon." The two shook hands and Pounder walked into the store and began choosing her list of items.

As Ep turned to follow the two into the store, he glanced up the creek and saw the Widder Higgins coming toward the store at a brisk pace. Ep smiled and never said a word as he watched Pounder stalk into the store. But the thought entered his head, "I sure would like to see these two women butt heads. I bet this new woman is the only female creature on earth who might be tougher than the Widder Higgins."

Pounder walked through the store casting an eye here and there before asking, "Where do you keep the flour, sir?"

"You don't have to call me sir, Pounder! Just call me Ballard. That's what my mother called me when she wasn't mad at me. I usually keep it stacked on that counter there but the truck just got here and it is still stacked on some barrels in the feed room. Most of it will be gone before closing time and I just send people in there to get it. I reckon I'm just lazy."

They both smiled and Pounder headed toward the feed room. Ep spoke to the Widder Higgins as she rounded the porch to climb the steps. "How are you this morning, Miss Higgins? You sure are a stepping out today at a mighty strong lick. What's the hurry?"

"I figgered I better get down here before the grocery truck did so if there's a bag of flour with that pretty flower basket pattern I need I won't miss it. Every old heifer on this side of the county must be wanting that pretty flower basket pattern. I see the truck just left, Ep. I better get in there and get what I need."

Just as the Widder Higgins crossed the threshold, Pounder came out of the feed room carrying the popular twenty-five pound sack of flour in one meaty hand and laid it gently on the counter in front of Ballard. The Widder quickly saw the pattern and spoke up, "Ballard, I see you finally got some flour with that nice pattern. I better get in the feed room and get me a sack." Ballard winced since he knew there had been only one such bag on the truck but said nothing as he watched Pounder select a can of baking soda, a five pound bucket of lard, and an axe handle from the stack of tools in the corner near the door.

The Widder Higgins searched the flour piled on top of barrels and cases of canned goods in the corner of the room as Ballard added up the items Pounder had selected. "That'll be $2.35 for the flour, a quarter for the baking soda, and a dollar and a half for the axe handle. I guess that comes to $4.10, ma'm. Are you planning on clearing some ground with that axe handle?" Pounder never answered but reached somewhere inside the voluminous dress she wore and pulled out a snap change purse to retrieve a five dollar bill just as all five feet of the Widder Higgins popped out of the feed room door.

Pounder threw the five on top of the flour sack and the Widder stepped up beside her. "Ballard, you ain't got no more of that pretty flower basket pattern in that pile of flour. I told you to save me the next one that come in." Then she levelled one eye at the burly woman towering over her, "Ballard was supposed to be saving that pattern for me. I don't know you but I reckon it would be nice of you to let me have that sack of flour and you get you another one."

Pounder laid the same broad hand on the flour sack she had used to carry it from the feed room and said in a flat tone, "I don't know you neither but I just paid for that sack of flour and I reckon it belongs to me." Ballard did not attempt to hide his wince as Ep leaned against the bean barrel and grinned from the far side of the room. A long silence fell over the store.

Finally, the Widder said, “Ma’m, I been waiting on that pattern for what must be six months. I’d shore appreciate it if you’d let me have it and you get you another one.”

Pounder’s hand never left the flour sack, “I just paid for it. I own it. I just moved in down the creek and I need a bonnet to wear to church on Sundays. It ain’t for sale. Where’s my change, Ballard?” Ballard counted out 90 cents and breathed a mild sigh of relief at the news that Pounder was a church going woman. He had some hope this disagreement would not end the way most did when the Widder was involved. But he simultaneously saw the same look in the Widder’s eyes he remembered from the day Brack Johnson’s children raided her watermelon patch.

The Widder reverted to her natural condition, “Woman, I been waiting on that sack of flour for six months and I aim to have it. What will you take for it?”

Pounder had already put the baking soda in her pocket, thrown the flour over her shoulder, and was reaching for the axe handle. She didn’t even bother to reply and turned for the door. The Widder inhaled deeply, seemed to swell from some internal burst of energy and stalked out the door behind Pounder. “Jist you wait a minute, woman! I aim to have that sack of flour. My little granddaughter in Frankfort wants a new dress and I aim to mail her one with that pattern on it. I’ve already got the bodice made and I’ve been waiting on another sack for the tail for six months. I’ll buy it fair and square or I’ll tan your big hide and take it whichever you want.”

Pounder never seemed to change expression as she laid the sack of flour on Ep’s chair on the porch and turned with the axe handle in her hands. “LIttle Darling, you better rethink that racket.” But before she could blink, the Widder Higgins charged her and the force carried both of them off the porch into the drainage ditch between the store and the highway. Pounder rolled much like a professional wrestler and as she rose to her feet grabbed the Widder and threw her across the highway into the creek. The Widder rose to the surface, spat out a mouthful of water, and her hands broke the waterline with two rocks the size of softballs. The first one missed Pounder and took out a window as Ballard stepped out the door to watch the proceedings. But the Widder’s aim improved on the second throw. That rock failed to score a direct hit but barked Pounder’s left ear as it sailed into Ep’s belly on the porch. He coughed. Pounder roared and charged to the edge of the creek as the Widder stepped on the bank, deftly ducked and slid to the side to watch Pounder take her turn in the water. She surfaced with the axe handle still in her hand and seemed to literally levitate from the creek to the edge of the road. The Widder had already retrieved two more rocks and let fly again. The first parted Pounder’s hair and the second struck her squarely over the liver. She seemed to teeter momentarily, dropped the axe handle and collapsed backward into the waist deep water before sinking out of sight.

Both Ballard and Ep had leaned on the side of the store to watch with no thought of intervening since they had rightly assumed they were unqualified. The Widder quickly found two more rocks and waited on the bank for Pounder to surface. She did not. There was a foamy threshing in the creek which seemed to be moving slowly downstream. Simultaneously, all three watchers realized Pounder was probably drowning. Ballard and Ep both started to run to the creek but the Widder was faster. She jumped into the boiling stream and grabbed Pounder by the hair. She struggled to gain traction but managed to pull her considerably larger opponent to the bank where she began to cough up water as the axe handle floated out of sight. Finally, she looked up at her diminutive rescuer and said, “Thank you, Ma’m for pulling me out. What is your name?”

“Lobelia Higgins, but everybody around here just calls me the Widder Higgins. I reckon that works for me. If you’re going to live, we better get up on the porch to dry out.”
“Widder, they call me Pounder. Myrtle Boxer is my name but after 30 years in the state women’s prison as a guard I don’t answer to nothing but Pounder. I appreciate you for being a woman that knows when to fight and when to quit. You can have that sack of flour and I’ll buy me another one. In all that time in prison, I never had no woman who could whup me and you jist did. Would you like to come to my house down in the camp for supper next Sunday. I don’t know nobody around here and I like your grit. Maybe we can do some sewing together on that little dress and my new bonnet. I wonder which pattern Ballard’s going to have in there that I’ll like as much as that flower basket.”

Don West, Poet and Social Activist

Roger D. Hicks

Don West was a poet, teacher, preacher, union organizer, and social activist who was born into relative poverty on a small Appalachian family farm in Devil's Hollow, Union County, in Northern Georgia in 1906. He graduated from Lincoln Memorial University in Harrogate, Tennessee, in 1929, in a class that included two other major Appalachian writers, James Still and Jesse Stuart. As a member of a class that was so loaded with future authors, it might have been easy for West to be lost in the shuffle at LMU. However, during his stay there, he served as captain of the track team and president of six separate student organizations including the Howard Literary Society. (Paul B. Dykes). Such broad interests, an all-consuming work ethic, and boundless determination to achieve marked Don West's career throughout his life. In fact, this commitment to a work ethic is characterized in West's inscription in James Still's LMU yearbook, "The Railsplitter 1929": "Jimmie, I remember you as a conscientious worker. I enjoy knowing you" (Ibid).

After graduating from Lincoln Memorial University in 1929, Don West completed a divinity degree from Vanderbilt University and began a life of social activism that continued until his death in 1992 at Cabin Creek, West Virginia. He published five books of poetry during his lifetime: "Clods of Southern Earth," 1946; "The Road Is Rocky," 1951; "A Time For Anger," 1970; and "In a Land of Plenty A Don West Reader," 1982. In 2004, twelve years after his death, the University of Illinois Press published a somewhat less than complete edition of his collected works entitled "No Lonesome Road Selected Prose and Poems" which was edited by Jeff Biggers and George Brosi. Don West had continued to be active in Appalachian social causes until shortly before his death and was known, respected, and sought out by social activists, writers, and educators all over Central and Southern Appalachia. Thus, his career spanned more than three quarters of a century and was marked by productive work throughout.

The primary focus of this paper will be to examine the contrast between Don West, the poet, and Don West, the social activist. West continued to write and publish poetry throughout his life despite having focused much, if not most, of his prodigious energies on education, social justice work, and mentoring many younger Appalachian writers. His books were published in five different decades. But the primary focus of his work was as a social activist. His former professor, Alva W. Taylor, quoted in "The Road Is Rocky," says: "Don West was one of the most brilliant students I ever had in my classes, numbering hundreds in forty years of teaching. He has put his life and his talents courageously in defense of the 'underdog', (as the saying goes) never compromising his conscience or deserting any cause that concerned 'the least of these'. He has endured hardships, gone to jail, been maligned by conscienceless diehard editors. But he has never faultered [sp]. He could have smothered his conscience and used his extraordinary talents to have 'gone to the top' as church, political, or journalistic leader but he chose the way of righteousness, never deserting those who still labor in the 'pit'" (West, "The Road Is Rocky").

These are strong words from a professor in reference to any former student. But, when Taylor's words are considered with knowledge that West was a classmate of both Still and Stuart, they are a strong recommendation indeed. In their biography of Jesse Stuart, James M. Gifford, Executive Director of The Jesse Stuart Foundation, and Erin R. Kazee, a key employee of that same institution, address the relationships between this triumvirate of well-known Appalachian authors and college classmates

in somewhat more than a passing manner. On page 48 of that work, Gifford and Kazee reference the observation from a fourth great Appalachian author, scholar, and educator, Cratis Williams, who said that the three of them "were singing birds who began to range their octaves under the tutelage of Harry Harrison Kroll" (Gifford and Kazee). Gifford and Kazee also reference a letter on page 178 of that work which Stuart wrote to the parents of another college friend in which he said that "She and Don West are my best pals here" (Ibid). Gifford and Kazee actually devote a full chapter of the book to the relationship between West and Stuart and openly discuss the eventual breakdown of that friendship which was rooted in their deep seated political differences. Stuart was a staunch conservative and Don West was deeply committed to the struggle for social justice, union organizing, educating the poor, and seeking equal treatment for all humans. Over the years and even in the heart of the Great Depression, they sometimes lent each other money and, in many ways, functioned on almost a familial level. But that relationship eventually broke down never to be restored.

Gifford and Kazee utilized the Jesse Stuart Foundation's voluminous collection of correspondence between Stuart and his many friends to accurately and fairly document the volatile relationship between the two and quote at length from numerous of their personal letters. They also reference a quote from Jesse Stuart in which he said "I always felt as strong as a mountain alone…and as strong as two mountains when with Don West" (Ibid).

Following a thirty-year career as a teacher, school superintendent, and union organizer, West founded the Appalachian South Folklife Center, in Pipestem, West Virginia, in 1965, along with his wife, Appalachian artist Constance Adams West, who was a native of the Harlan County Kentucky coal fields. The couple worked there until their retirement following a Don West heart attack in the mid 1980's. For several years, the Folklife Center was the site of a mountain music festival which was a key fundraiser for the institution. West also travelled the country once a year doing speaking engagements and poetry readings which also provided a source of income for the organizaton. The Folklife Center served as a link between poor Appalachian families and The International Heifer Project, now known as Heifer International, to provide milk cows and other subsistence farm animals to such families. The Folklife Center also established a conduit for books to be donated to those same families and their school age children. In an interview conducted by Rick Wilson during a ceremonial return to the Folklife Center in 1988, Don West's own words corroborate those of Alva W. Taylor:

"I've always thought poetry was more than just butterfly words. It speaks of the deep hope and hurt and needs of the people and particularly of the poor people. I've dedicated my life to them" (Wilson).

Don West's choice of those words to describe his life was, in many ways, a deliberate footnote to that life. The words are a conscious reference to Roy Smith's Introduction to "The Road Is Rocky," West's second book, which had been published nearly forty years before: "…you can't separate the poet from the poetry. If you are a working man, I know you'll like these poems. If you are one who believes in the future and the rights of man, regardless of your class, I know you also will get much from your reading. They come up from the heart of the southern people. Moving and living among the people, seeing and feeling their hurt, the author sets it down in burning words. Don't look for pretty little nothings with butterfly wings" (qtd in West, "The Road Is Rocky").

In order to understand exactly what Roy Smith meant when he used those words, it is wise to examine what many students of his work consider to be Don West's masterpiece, a poem called "There's Anger in the Land". The poem is about a lynching that took place in either Georgia or Alabama sometime prior to 1950. With language that is simultaneously lyrical, angry, and insightful, the poem tells the story from the viewpoint of the victim's mother:

> "You'll not ask me why I'm silent;
> Thus the woman spoke to me.
> Her two eyes blazed forth anger
> And her throat throbbed agony.
>
> Let the wind go crying yonder
> In the tree tops by the spring,
> Let its voice be soft and feeling
> Like it was a living thing.

Once my heart could cry in sorrow
Now it lies there on the floor
In the ashes by the hearth stone—
They can't hurt it anymore."
Don West, "No Lonesome Road").

The poem was always published with an introduction that related how a black hitchhiker had told Don West the story of his brother's lynching, as they drove from Georgia into Alabama. Don West understood that the story was much more powerful when told from the viewpoint of the grieving and angry mother. The poem speaks with a cold, controlled fury that is characteristic of the best of Don West's writing. As Roy Smith so accurately pointed out in his introduction to "The Road Is Rocky," Don West was able to relate powerfully and intimately to the working poor of the Appalachian South. In an interview with Ken Sullivan that was published in Goldenseal Magazine, Don West talked of the history of the Appalachian people that connected him both to them and to the tradition of social activism:

"The heart of our cultural heritage is that we've had a people who from the very early beginnings were dedicated to human rights and freedom and independence. Before they came here, many of them—the old Celtic people—the Irish, the Scottish, and the Welsh, plus the Huguenot French and some of the German revolutionaries and so on, who came over—had been in the old country contending for human rights and for the kind of freedom that this implies. When they came here, they found themselves pretty well out of harmony with the Tidewater cavalier element and they pushed on into the frontier which was Appalachia, sank roots there, and for many, many years they were pretty well cut off" (Sullivan).

Don West had been reared in Northern Georgia with his maternal grandfather, Kim Mulkey, as the primary influence in his life. West's father had died very young and the grandfather served as the major role model for West. However, another of his most frequently quoted poems, "Funeral Notes," talks of his father's burial, ties to the land, and his apparent death due to hard work as a subsistence farmer:

"Forty years he's been digging
And plowing himself under
Along these cotton rows.
Most of my Dad is there
Where the grass grows
And cockle burrs bristle
Now that he's gone…

We're covering him in March days
When seeds sprout.
And I think next Autumn
At picking time
The white-speckled stalks
Will be my old Dad
Bursting out…" (West, "In A Land Of Plenty").

This poem clearly makes a connection between the father who died because of his devotion to the land of Appalachia and the son who would seek to improve the condition of all such poor, working Appalachians throughout his life and would frequently place in his life in danger by his activism. The poem serves to show us the poor, orphaned Georgia farm boy who would grow up to be the outspoken advocate for the poor of both Appalachia and the world. As Don West wrote, spoke out, created social service institutions, and organized unions for the working classes of the Appalachian South, his efforts did not go unnoticed by the literati of the nation. The great African-American poet Langston Hughes said of Don West:

"Don West marshals words into poetry to sing for democracy and decency, to picture and plead, to startle and shock, to point out what America is and what America can be. His are the poems of our heartbeats and our longings from the cotton South to the orange grove West, as American as Route 66" (West, "The Road Is Rocky").

This representation of Don West as the writer who chose to speak out for democracy and the working class was accurate and Don West deliberately chose to be represented that way. Near the end of the aforementioned Sullivan interview, West told a story that is highly illustrative of what he thought should be achieved by poetry:

"A few years ago I was out here on Bottom Creek just visiting with an old disabled miner; I was just moseying around and he asked me to come in. We were talking and he said, 'I used to read after a fellow named West.' And I said, 'Well, tell me a little more about that.' And he said to his wife, 'Go back there and get that book.' So she went back there and she brought out an old dog-eared copy of Clods of Southern Earth, in paperback…People bought Clods of Southern Earth that ordinarily didn't buy poetry. And that's what I mean. I want to communicate. That's my purpose—to write for people. I'm not writing for other poets, I'm not writing for smart, cute effects. That's not my purpose at all. I want to say something. I want to make it so it will touch people. And I think a poet has a responsibility for trying to sensitize his time and place to the deep hurt and hopes and needs and yearnings of just plain ordinary human beings" (Sullivan).

Another of Don West's poems, "Song of the Saw," goes directly to the heart of what he meant when he used the phrase "deep hurt and hopes and needs and yearnings of just plain ordinary human beings". The poem is a story of the life and death of another poor Georgia working man much like Don West's father.

"John was a sawyer—
Ran a hot steel saw
Sixteen hours
Thru long Georgia pines.
Loved to hear
The song of the saw
Ripping thru the guts
Of a yellow pine,
Loved to sing about
His wife and baby
Back home…

The belt slipped
That Saturday.
John's belly struck the saw.
Ripped him open
Like a yellow pine log,
Straight thru the belly…

No one wanted to go
Tell John's wife and baby
Twenty miles up Troublesome.
We pulled straws
And it fell my lot…

Nancy just looked
And said nothing—
Looked out thru the pines.
Tall yellow pines
Like John loved to saw.
I wondered if she listened
For the song of the saw." (West, "In A Land Of Plenty" 48-49).

The poem uses a skilled and highly effective technique by contrasting the sound of the saw in Georgia pines with the later, highly graphic image of its ripping John's belly open. Then we see the picture of coworkers drawing straws to send a messenger to the young widow. Again, West returns to the idyllic picture of Georgia pines as the widow and baby learn of the horrible death of the father. How better could any writer seek to know and understand the "deep hurt and hopes and needs and yearnings of just plain ordinary human beings"?

In a strikingly similar story to the one West told in his poem, the elder brother of Johnny Cash was killed in an Arkansas sawmill at the age of twelve while working to help support the poverty stricken family. That story is often given credence in discussions of how and why Cash came to be such an outspoken advocate for social justice for many of the same groups of people which Don West sought to assist (Carpenter).

This ability to place himself in the lives, aspirations, and sufferings of the common people came naturally to Don West. He was orphaned at an early age on a Georgia hill farm. He worked his way through college, and sought to be one with his coworkers all his life. Once again from the Ken Sullivan interview, Don West speaks about his life as a member of the working class:

"I've been a cotton mill worker, a coal miner. I've been a deck hand on a riverboat, on the Mississippi River. I've been a teacher, I've been a public school superintendent, I've been a university professor, and I've been a farmer" (Sullivan).

Don West obviously had the multiple work experiences to qualify himself as a member of the working class he respected so much. He seemed to know that he could be perceived as a spokesman for these people only if he was truly one of them. And, more importantly, Don West wished to be perceived as such by the working class themselves. He frequently wore bibbed overalls and continued to do physical labor long after his academic credentials would have justified his retreat to a desk. In fact, the cover photo of "In A Land Of Plenty" shows Don West in those bibbed overalls and a straw hat with a cowboy cut. In an essay called "Jesus, the Quiet Revolutionary," found in the last book published in his lifetime, "In a Land of Plenty A Don West Reader," West discusses this very issue:
"Likewise, I have scant concern for priestly religious garb… robes, frills, back-turned collars and such. Much of my work can be done in a pair of blue-bibbed overalls. I do not condemn those who feel a need for status symbols, phrases, special clothing or ceremony. It just happens that I feel no need for such" (West, "In A Land of Plenty").

Don West obviously felt that it was more important to his stated mission of "touching people" that he be able to be accepted as one of those people, than to be accepted by those people who might have been on an equal footing with him intellectually or by virtue of accomplishments in the academic world. Don West also made a point of stating many of his beliefs about poetry and the responsibilities of the poet in the introductions to his books. In the Introduction to "Clods of Southern Earth", he wrote:
"You say you want a poem with its roots in the earth; a poem that finds beauty in the lives of common people, and perhaps a poem that may sometimes show the reasons for the heartache and sorrow of the plain folks and sometimes point the way ahead. I don't blame you. I sort of feel that way too" (West, "Clods of Southern Earth").

And in what may well be the ultimate proof of just how deep-seated his beliefs were, Don West wrote at length on the topic in the flyleaf of "In a Land of Plenty A Don West Reader":
"Purposely this book is not copyrighted. Poetry and other creative efforts should be levers, weapons to be used in the people's struggle for understanding, human rights, and decency. 'Art For Art's Sake' is a misnomer. The poet can never be neutral. In a hungry world, the struggle between oppressor and oppressed is unending. There is the inevitable question: 'Which side are you on?' To be content with things as they are, to be 'neutral', is to take sides with the oppressor who wants to keep the status quo. To challenge the power of oppression is the poet's responsibility. Such action helps to preserve and build faith in humanity. Nothing raises the spirit of a people more. This is the major mission of poet or artist. Thus no copyright, no effort to restrict use. Groups or individuals are welcome to reproduce or use any or all parts of this book" (West, "In A Land Of Plenty").

Such a deliberate refusal to copyright original work is unheard of in today's mercenary world. This action by Don West was a clear manifesto stating how deeply he believed in the effort to uplift and preserve the common people of the United States in general and Appalachia in particular. At the time of the publication of the book, Don West was 78 years old. His literary estate, although not extremely valuable, was by no means worthless. He had two daughters who could have benefited from the republication rights to the work. Although neither of the daughters was poor, neither was wealthy enough to have willingly given up the rights to their father's literary estate. Yet Don West chose to leave that literary estate in the public domain so that any member of the working class which he had spent his life attempting to uplift might utilize his works in the continued struggle for Democracy. It is also quite indicative of Don West's unflinching commitment to the poor, the working class, the victims of society's ills, "the least of these," that he chose to quote the most famous line from one of his labor union friends, Florence Reece, in the aforementioned quote. His choice of the words "Which Side Are You On?" was a clear reference to the title and hook line of the most important union organizing song ever written.

Obviously, Don West was a unique, committed, and courageous individual. His place in the greater body of general Appalachian Literature may not yet be fully written. But it must be conceded that he has already carved a place for himself in the history of the effort to achieve equality for all "ordinary human beings."

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Dear Aylin

Alexa Farley

There is a legend in my hometown. I only know it because of the circumstances surrounding its birth, and it was only born because I was willing to take the risk for knowledge. I'll do my best to tell this tale objectively, but it will be hard considering that I was a part of it.

I was around ten years old when the witch woman moved into my small town. That wasn't her real name, of course. We kids only called her that because she lived in the old Barlow House at the very end of our road. A lot of us believed that the old, 20th century home was haunted. Sometimes, shadows drifted by the windows when no one was home. Strange noises scared away those who dared step closer. Reports varied, but we all agreed on one thing. No matter what time you passed by the old Barlow House, no matter if the witch woman was home or not, there would always be a presence that loomed over you. The experiences varied from person to person, but the most common accounts were these:

– A feeling of betrayal, like you had just let someone important down.

– A disapproving parent, making you feel like the scum of the earth.

– A simple, angry unease that filled the air.

To me, though, the presence never felt like anything bad. It felt like home, like a friend that would always have my back. I never told anyone this, of course. My town was a traditionalist one, and anyone that didn't fit their molds were outcast. But enough about that. The real focus here is on the witch woman herself.

Autumn Blackwood wasn't an imposing figure; that was for sure. I remember her as clear as a lake on a hot summer day. She was around 20 years old when she moved in. When I was younger, I always compared her to a stick. She had the gift that most lusted over; no matter how much she ate, she never seemed to gain any weight. An innocence shone brightly within her, it was like she had never seen even a drop of sorrow. That didn't mean she was stupid, however. Her grey eyes held sparks of determination and intelligence; those sparks were the first thing that you would notice about her. Her hair, although being practically white, never made her look any older. Quite the opposite, actually! Her snowy white hair framed her youthfulness in a way that made her seem positively ethereal. She was different, and that's why she was hated.

Let's get one thing straight. When Autumn moved into town, I was utterly clueless about the way the world worked. I believed everything that my parents ever told me was true and never thought about why it was so. They knew best after all. They said to stay as far away from the witch woman as I could.

So, I did.

For the first year that Autumn Blackwood lived in our little town, I avoided her entirely. Her house freaked my friends out anyways. I twisted myself into rationalizing it, reasoning that they would be glad that I was taking a different route home. I made it through half of sixth grade like this before curiosity began to fester within me, and with that curiosity, came change.

My old friends began to drift away, complaining of things that no longer mattered to me. Slowly, I fell in with the outcasts, the ones that dared to step out of society's mold. They encouraged me to think about what I believed, not just to believe something because my parents told me it was true. And finally, I got quieter. Eventually, I was practically

mute. The outcasts began to teach me sign language, and at home, I only spoke when I was spoken to. Through all this, I wondered. Why was everyone so afraid of Autumn Blackwood?

I made it through the rest of sixth grade before I finally had a real encounter with the witch woman. To my credit, it wasn't completely my fault.

That day, there wasn't a cloud in the sky. Determined to enjoy the sun before the insane Tennessee weather switched up again, I packed up my paints and walked to the park. Coincidentally, Autumn had been there too. I'm not sure what she was doing there, maybe picking flowers. Whatever it had been didn't matter. What did matter was that she had picked me out of the crowd, me of all people, and went to talk to me.

"What are you painting?" She had asked. I shrugged and pointed at the mountains that towered upwards in the distance. She nodded, smiled, and politely asked, "Can I watch?"

Part of me remembered what my parents had told me to do. They said that I needed to tell the witch woman to get lost, that I didn't want her anywhere near me. But another part of me, the part that you don't often see in quiet, introverted boys, was intrigued by her. That part of me overpowered the part of me that was still controlled by his parents, the part that was still controlled by his fear. I nodded and continued to paint.

I have to say, I really enjoyed myself. Autumn actually knew quite a bit about painting, to my irrational surprise. She would quietly explain small mistakes that I had made and tell me how I could improve and correct them. At times, she would also talk about different, unconventional things that I could use to assist my daily life. The more she talked, the more I listened. I looked for reasons to hate her and found none. I couldn't understand why she had joined the ranks of the town outcasts. But before long, my final brush stroke had dried, and I didn't have a reason to stay.

I smiled apologetically, starting to pack up my things. She smiled back at me with a nod, sitting cross-legged in the grass like she was meditating.

"Another time, then?" She asked. I wasn't sure what she meant by that, but I nodded anyways. Like I said, she intrigued me.

That evening, I walked by the old Barlow House for the first time in what felt like ages. The presence that everyone always felt whenever they passed by seemed to perk up when it saw me. It greeted me like one would a long lost friend, and in that moment, I wondered why I had ever left.

I went back to the park the very next day, hoping that against all odds, Autumn Blackwood would be there again. One thing you should know about Autumn, she had this wonderful little thing about beating the odds. I had barely begun to set up my paints when I spotted her twirling happily in the nearby fields of wildflowers. I couldn't help but smile. She radiated happiness, her carefree attitude making her look so much younger than she actually was. I was the opposite, my attitude made people think that I was much older than a twelve year old. She didn't seem to notice me yet, so the goal of my painting shifted.

Originally, I had been intending to paint the park, but instead, I found myself unconsciously beginning to paint the scenery in front of me. Little wildflowers popped up in an emerald green field as a tiny Autumn danced her way onto my canvas. The sights in front of me came to life in a way that I thought I had lost ages ago. As I painted the witch woman that day, I felt something that I didn't quite understand until then.

I felt *freedom*.

That feeling bled from my fingertips, guiding my brush in a way that helped shape my painting like never before. I would never again be satisfied with the life that I had been born into. My town had chained me down. The only chain that remained now was attached to a ticking time bomb. Hours flew by. I was lost in a world of emotion and paint. The only things that existed were me and my brushes. Before I knew it, I was sprawled out in the grass and waiting for my paint to dry. I wasn't the type that tried to move wet paintings; I much preferred the waiting game over a game of risk.

Autumn took her sweet time wandering over to my spot. She quietly gasped when she saw my painting.

"Is that me?" She asked with a tiny giggle. I nodded, a tired smile stuck fast on my face. The painting had taken me a decent amount of time to do, the sun was just beginning to hide behind the mountains. But to see her smile so proudly at me, it was completely worth it.

She took a few steps closer, careful not to smudge anything with the flowing sleeves of her billowing white dress, and then smiled as sparks danced across her eyes. It was right then when I found out why exactly people called her the witch woman.

Autumn stepped an arm's length away from the painting, stretching out her arms like she was calling to something. I watched curiously, the faintest hint of a disbelieving smile in my eyes. What was she going to do…?

Before my eyes, my painting sprung to life. Miniature wildflowers whirled around me in a tornado of color as a tiny Autumn danced and twirled like she was a part of the wind herself. I'm not exactly sure how to describe the mess of emotion that sung within me right then. I was amazed and nervous and happy and sad and terrified all at once. My thought waltzed around a melding pot of a complete freak-out, getting close to the edge but never daring to fall in. It was beautiful chaos, and I was addicted. All at once, everything returned to normal. Not even a tiny hint had been left behind as a clue of what had just happened to me. My jaw dropped.

"How did you do that!" I fumbled with my fingers, not being able to string together words fast enough to keep up with my racing thoughts. Autumn chuckled.

"There is life in art," She explained in her wonderful, musical voice, "An author knows when a story is worth telling. A painter knows that they don't always need to be conscious of where they lead their brush. What I do is I reach into the life that they grant their creations and urge it into the physical world for the briefest moment. In that moment, I can do amazing things." I nodded, still in a considerable amount of awe.

"I felt it." I signed quickly, "When I was painting you, I felt it." I was unimaginably disappointed that I hadn't felt it before.

"I know," She said quietly, "You and I- We're of the same breed. If you accept, I can teach you everything I know about our gifts."

I gasped soundlessly, "I can do that?"

She nodded with the faintest chuckle, confirming my question. Her gaze turned somber.

"Fair warning, there will be no turning back from this. The knowledge of life will always come at a cost." The witch woman of Kiefast, Tennessee held her hand out to me, inviting me to make my decision. I hesitated for the briefest moment.

Even back then, I knew that good things came at a cost. I had traded acceptance for the ability to think for myself. I had traded a voice in the world's problems for the ability to see the world for how it truly was. I suppose that was why I took a few moment to make what would be the greatest decision of my life.

I nodded and reached out to shake the witch woman's hand.

"I'll take that risk," I signed. She had opened up a path to freedom, and I was determined to take it. She smiled, an unreadable emotion in her eyes.

"What's your name, Kiddo?" She asked. I assumed that she meant my birth name, so I signed it out for her with a shrug. It felt wrong to do, but I had encountered my fair share of people that had refused to use it because they only saw it as a dumb nickname.

"I asked for your name, not the name that your parents gave you." Autumn chuckled. I gave her a startled look. Shocked, but also touched in the strangest way, I signed it out for her.

"Garrett."

"Garrett." She echoed, "Mighty warrior or brave spearman, depending on who you talk to." My confusion must have been clear, as she laughed when she looked back at me. "That's what your name means. The first thing you need to learn, everything has meaning. Keep that in mind as you go along."

Still confused, I nodded as I packed up my paints. Autumn turned back toward my painting, her smile turning distant. "Maybe it will be nice to have some company again," She whispered. I wasn't sure if I was supposed to hear that or not so I said nothing.

The following years that I trained under Autumn Blackwood were the best six years of my life. I learned countless things from her, not all of them related to my abilities. She helped me get through waves of sadness that I didn't trust anyone else with. She became more of a parent to me than my real parents. I didn't know what they thought about me, but frankly, I didn't care. I was finally happy. As always though, this part of my tale doesn't end happily.

Autumn's health began a downward spiral when I was seventeen. The final chain that attached me to this dreadful town would soon be broken, but the woman who had given me the will to continue on wouldn't be there to see me off. I stayed with her every day in the months leading up to her passing; I owed her that much. And finally, her suffering was over. She died the week after I turned eighteen.

The day that my mentor died was the day I left. I didn't stay for the funeral. I didn't even say goodbye. I packed up the things most precious to me, and I ran. The mountains called my name; I couldn't stay in the small town of my youth any longer.

Slowly, I faded from Kiefast's memory. The people forgot about me, which was fine by my book. An attitude of pessimism had developed within me. Humanity was full of cruel and hateful fools. It wasn't worth my time to try and change that. I was fine on my own. That was how it was for ten very long years. But as history loves to repeat itself, my solace was interrupted.

I was twenty-eight, trying to work off the depression that always came with the anniversary of Autumn's death, when the first few lines of an unfamiliar song drifted toward me. A girl had wandered into my woods. My. Woods. I couldn't help but be a little offended by that. At first, I was simply going to scare her off. It would have been easy; I was a master of illusion after all. But then, something stopped me dead in my tracks.

Life danced lazily toward me, pinging off the surface of the girls singing. She was like me, she heard the call of the mountains, and she felt the life hiding in art. My plans changed in a heartbeat.

I started up my pace again, kicking up leaves under my boots. My heart stopped when I saw her. For a moment, all I could see was Autumn. I took a few moments to collect myself.

Autumn had been dead for ten years. This girl was not her. I breathed in deeply and then brought my hands together, clapping once, twice. The girl jumped, holding her pen out in front of her as a makeshift weapon. I held back a silent chuckle.

"What are you doing here?" My words appeared beside me as shimmering lights, a fun little trick that I had picked up around two years ago.

"Sorry sir! My name is- My name is Aylin, I didn't know that anyone- that anyone lived up here. I was just looking for a nice place to sketch."

Aylin, you were good at explaining yourself away, I would give you that much. However, I could tell that you were hiding something. Just like Autumn had known that I hated my birth name, I knew that you wouldn't have climbed my mountain if you were only looking to draw. You were trying to escape something, just like I had been. There was a reason for the bruises that littered your face and arms after all.

I smiled welcomingly, "My name's Garrett. You're welcome to stick around if you'd like."

"Really? I mean- that would be great! Thank you sir!" She said earnestly. She started to scamper around my forest, much freer in her exploration now that I had given her permission to do so. It didn't take her long to ask the very same question that I had asked Autumn so long ago. How had I done that? How had I brought those words into the air like that?

I found myself echoing the very lines that Autumn had used to explain our gifts to me. I explained that the mountains all around us, the mountains of the Appalachian range, gave us our gifts. They gave us the

ability to manipulate the life inside of art, the life all around us. Finally, just like Autumn had for me, I warned her of its cost and offered my mentorship.

Unlike me, she didn't hesitate. Those deep brown eyes glinted with a determined spark that reminded me so painfully of Autumn as she reached out and shook my outstretched hand firmly.

"I want to learn." She said, quiet and resolute. I smirked, melting away the illusion that covered my home. I wasn't the cabin sort of guy anyways, so the old cabin that the illusion projected was out of the question.

Instead, a grand treehouse towered up in front of us. A narrow stair case twisted up a thick trunk, twirling up to the main building. I grinned, starting my climb upwards. "Shall we?" I asked. She nodded, her eyes wide as she clutched her sketchbook close to her chest and started to follow me up.

That, Aylin, brings us to where we are now. It's been around two years now, and I'm pleased to say that you're still going strong. Your dedication to learning is incredible, not once have you even come close to wanting to quit. I see more and more of myself in you every day.

Sadly though, I know my fate. Every time I pass on one of my skills to you, I feel myself grow just a little bit weaker. Eventually, I will die. So that's why I'm writing this to you now, Aylin. You'll know my story, after so long of bugging me for it. I suppose that I should apologize now, because if you're reading this now, it means I'm dead.

I'm sorry for leaving you so early, Aylin, but as I write this letter, I find myself not being able to regret a thing. I'm glad I met you Aylin. I'm glad that I was able to give you the freedom I so desperately craved when I was your age. Don't cry for me, please. You're too bright, too talented, to be crying over someone like me.

I love you more than words can express, Aylin. You will always be the daughter I never had.

Your friend and Mentor,
Garrett Blackwood

Rose

John C. Mannone

I am divided
between my world
and yours.
I've collected roses for you.

I try not to let the thorns
pierce my fingers, yet
I cannot escape them,
holding on too tightly
to the soft green stem
snags my flesh.

Blood rivers down my wrist
like despair. But the rain
washes the broken
flesh clean.

My mouth gapes open
to breathe, gulps air
but still chokes
on grief.
These roses,
their blush-lavender petals,
each cup a starburst

of memory, as if its heart
exploded every color
of prayer, I cradle them

in my hands the same way
sepals grace the blooms.

There's a tenderness there
in the small ring of leaves
holding up the flower
until it's time. It always knows
when to unfold its fingers
and let the petals

fall.

Her Name is Tennessee

John C. Mannone

She lives in the mountains.
At dawn, she stirs under a quilt
of stars, her eyes sparkle

in the alpine snow
bright as an apricot sun—
sweetens the horizon

with sugary light
filtered through balsam firs
and pine cones in her hair.

Her smiles mingle with
uplifted forest and valley
veiled in springtime phacelia.

Her breath,
a hint of wintergreen
mists the wonderland.

She herself is refuge
a blessing to animals:
tanagers and deer,

hoot owls and bears, whooping
cranes on her lakes—blue
gill and large mouth bass

peering through the underwater,
shimmer up to the mirage
heaven. The rainbow leaves

of fall on the surface—yellow hickory,
scarlet maple…and copper
basswood. I hear her sing:

the gurgling off-beat jazz
of a cascade—her voice
of many waters. The melody

of wind chiming through winter
crystal or the percussion
of branches swishing

their leaves. There is no mocking
bird unsated, his two hundred songs
practiced every day to the beat

of a pileated woodpecker
on her poplar drum and lazy
lilting rhythms of summer,
cicada orchestra.

I love her
mystery, more classy
than any rock

star out West, she once
had been higher
than they will every be.

When that blue gray smoke
gets in her eyes, she just winks
and says I love you back.

At a Writer's Retreat Near a Coalmining Town

John C. Mannone

Sed fugit interea, fugit irreparabile tempus.
(Meanwhile, the irreplaceable time escapes)
—Virgil, Georgics

The holly tree, bigger than any I have ever seen, looms over the backyard garden; pinches sky with pinned waxy leaves. I stand on the hill. Study every rock, every tree lining the walkway to the house. This place is as silent as English ivy creeping up the escarpment.

As silent as dirt that once was here before
it was stripped for its coal 30 years ago

Gnarled dogwoods—too early to show blossoms—pray. Their naked branches scratch sky layered as slate above the artist's bungalow: steel beams, tongue-n-groove floors, old glass sagging under its own weight. A small study with just enough room for kitchen, and a short bed.

But not as short as the hard pine cot
in the board and batten mining town shack

When it rained a few years ago, the copper roof pinged as if sand swished on it; but now, its bright metal has weathered to dull gray-green; drops simply thud when clouds bear their heaviness. I peer through windows, pensive, resolute, mesmerized by a stone sculpture in the verdant microcosm. Its base, chiseled with angelic faces, one for each corner of earth.

I imagine like the ones on stone cold miners
when the shaft caved in; prayers chiseled on their lips

The round stone, overlaid with brass, is scribed with Roman numerals, as if a clock for kings, its face watching a zodiac of gods pass by. A black scorpion gnomons the heavens, splits the gold disc in the sky, splays the shadow of fleeing sun on the dial caught between its pincers, as if to scepter time. An untimely walkway-limestone had fallen on the scorpion, killing the way it tried to hold hostage the passage of time. At the base of the pillar, a purple crocus blooms.

All gravestones are untimely
in our eyes, whether marble or coal

The Crack in the Cookie Jar

John C. Mannone

In my mother's kitchen, sunlight filtered through the window after sifting through a canopy of green leaves. A Tennessee Mountain Fig Tree planted by the creek. I was only four and I snuck in to find my favorite fruit—those figs that momma usually hid from me. I would hide behind the counter making sure that no one could see me except perhaps the shadows slipping on the floor, or on the cupboard doors. They moved like the wind; their dark edges grazed my eyes.

Soon I'd forget my fear and climb into the darkened recesses on top of the counter. A darker shadow lurked behind the white enameled door. I swung it open and light fell on a giant apple-shaped cookie jar; its yellow skin glowed, blushed with ripened reds and dainty'd with perfectly shaped green leaves from a ceramic tree. I could almost eat it.

I knelt on the countertop and reached for it with my right hand quivering. My tiny fingers stretched to hook the handle and pull the jar closer to me. A hollow sound echoed in the cabinet more empty than my memory, but my thoughts were heavy enough for me to know joy.

I shimmed to the floor before opening the jar. The ceramic top slid slowly, scraping like a coffin lid—the high-pitched sound of ghosts leeked out. I worked the jar closer to the sunlight and peered inside expecting to find a stash-pile of figs. There were none, not even the skeleton of one. But half in shadow, a single piece of fig cake edged into the light. I snatched it, which uncovered a crack in the cream white bottom of the cookie jar. I stared at it as I let the crumbs fall from my mouth, and felt a twitch of guilt.

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Today, everytime I see a cookie jar that's big and round, I look inside hoping for a fig, while imagining my mother's spirit sifting-in from the past through a crack in the ceramic. And that all my guilt would be gone. Instead, there's only the dark etch of a web—spider cracks of memory.
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Mamaw Georgie

Jamie Branam Brown

Are you aware there are people in the world that do not have a mamaw and furthermore do not even know the meaning of the word? I discovered this in my early twenties when I moved to Ohio to attend graduate school and was taken aback. Indeed, I felt a little sorrow and sadness for anyone that did not have my experience with a mamaw, specifically Mamaw Georgie.

Georgie was not her given name. Her parents named her Georgia Ida Newcome and she added the surname Branam after marrying my papaw. (I also learned there are people in this world that do not have a papaw.) Mamaw was Georgie to everyone, including her two oldest children. As a young woman she labored in hosiery mills along with her sister, Clemmie. The sisters worked and their mother, Mama Newcome, kept their children. As a matter of fact, at some point Mama Newcome kept the children of all nine of her own children. While they worked and lived nearby the grandchildren called her mama therefore they referred to their own mothers by their given names. Mamaw's youngest two children came along after Mamaw Georgie moved and they called her mama. When they dared to mimic their older siblings and call her Georgie, she would quickly tell them that was not going to start again.

Mamaw Georgie's family was close and provided a safety net for each other. Growing up in a large family required the siblings to support each other in many ways. She and her sister, Clemmie, worked and lived together for years. When they returned home from work whoever got there first would nurse both of their boys. The other one would take their turn for the next feeding. My father, Floyd, was her firstborn and Tommy was her sister, Clemmie's firstborn. After hearing their stories of growing up together it was easy to understand why my father and his cousin Tommy were as close as any brothers.

My father was born in 1926 and Mamaw Georgie struggled with Papaw to keep their family feed, clothed, a roof over their heads. She learned and demonstrated thrifty behavior— cutting buttons off of every garment that was too worn to continue to wear, cooking dishes from whatever was on hand, and making every stitch of clothing every member of the family wore. She excelled in designing and stitching garments. I would visit her as a child and she would give me catalogs and magazines to look through and find an outfit I would like to wear. She would then bring out old newspapers and cut a pattern that she created on her own. She would then take me to her fabric closet where she stored all her treasures and let me choose what I wanted to use to make the garment. She would allow me to help her cut out the garment and then she would work her magic on her sewing machine and with her hand stitching. By the end of the day I would have my personally chosen new fashion item that fit perfectly. It was a magical experience from start to finish. At times this effort included a trip to the fabric store where I could touch and examine every fabric until I found the perfect one.

Mamaw Georgie taught me to cook and create a meal with whatever we had on hand in the kitchen or the garden. When my effort went well she would brag and brag about how wonderful it was and when it did not go well she made it a hilarious joke. She would throw her head back and laugh and laugh. She would then say well that could have gone better and it will next time. No matter how big a mess I made of the kitchen she never complained. She made sure it was a great experience and we did everything together. I learned from her that every experience is a good one — either a success or a life lesson.

Growing up I was a shy child and older people often referred to me as backward. Mamaw always told me the things I did well and made me feel loved and special. She would assure me that one day I would grow out of being shy and unsure of myself and that if I did not feel like talking to strangers I did not need to feel like it was required of me. I never doubted one minute that she believed in me. She may have only completed the seventh grade but she was one of the wisest people I have ever known.

Mamaw Georgie's house was one of my favorite places to spend time. I could not wait until Christmas vacation and summer break because it meant I had lots of time with her. The cherry tree in the backyard made wonderful pies and jams; her vegetable garden was perfect for making supper and canning; her flower gardens where all over the yard and were beautiful; and her closet and plastic tubes filled with fabric and sewing notions were a treasure. She was a perfectionist but never expected perfection from me. She let me know in her own way I was exactly what she expected me to be. She had no preconceived expectations — just love, support and encouragement. It was a perfect environment for breeding creativity and security.

Mamaw Georgie passed when I was only twenty years old. The ground underneath my feat was shaken, my heart was broken, and yet I knew her spirit was with me, in me, and all around me. I have never once felt that she was not with me and guiding me through difficult times as well as joyful times. My four children never met her and they have no idea how much of her is in all of them. I was fortunate in a small way to inherit some of her talents and abilities but more importantly I strive to be the woman she believed I would become.

My youngest daughter, Sabrina, was born over seventeen years after Mamaw Georgie passed. The minutes she was born and I look into those blue eyes and inquisitive face I declared, "my land, it is Mamaw." I have raised a daughter that has so much of Mamaw Georgie's looks, talents, abilities, spirit, and love of life.

I am twice blessed.

Surrounded by Love

Lora Lovin Osburn

Growing up in their mountain home was little Sister,
And her admired Big Brother, the mister.
Surrounded by love —
They were.

Little children's laughter, the joy and the tears,
Busy days younger days led to later years.
Surrounded by love —
They were.

Then their Mother suddenly died and their Daddy was alone,
As Sister and Big Brother moved out and started families of their own.
Surrounded by love —
They were.

Big Brother stayed near his mountain roots,
Sister went North, yet they still would to the other commute.
Surrounded by love—
They were.

Their own happy homes were soon filled with little feet,
And they lived and loved and remained tender and sweet.
Surrounded by love—
They were.

On the beach, extended families would plan to meet –
Uncles, aunts, and cousins would gather for family retreats.
Surrounded by love —
They were.

The years came, and the years went —
Phone calls, visits, and letters sent.
Surrounded by love —
They were.

There were Thanksgiving turkeys and Christmas trees
And then, grand babies on Big Brother's knee!
Surrounded by love —
They were.

Then came the doctor's news "It's in the final stage."
Big Brother held Sister's frail hand on life's final page.
Surrounded by love —
They were.

Yes, the younger Sister went Home first.
A love for family, and others, they instilled as they traversed.
Surrounded by love —
They were.

They will meet again as Big Brother's breathing is a struggle now,
His gentle spirit, and weathered, much loved, sun-kissed brow.
Surrounded by love —
Again.

My Father's Last Days

R. L. Pete Wyatt

I sat with him,

sat in his bedroom
at our family home,

sat beside his frail
body that fought

and clung to life,
sat as he often

would wake,
look at me

think he was back
in childhood,

back with best friends,
and I sat with him

and became his best friend.

Red

R. L. Pete Wyatt

The sun rises between silo and red barn.

Light floods my bedroom
through the window.

I feel the warmth
bathing me in bed.

Too good to leave
this cocoon of blanket and pillows.

Mating Doves coo. Their day has begun.
The wrens search

for a spider meal along the gutter's edge.
Their toenails make a scratching noise

as they fuss and fidget.
I hear Red, my neighbor's mule,

bray across the fence.
He is alone in the pasture.

Red's gaze is fixed
toward the red barn

the sun climbs higher.
He brays again in his solitude.

Nothing is sadder than
a lonesome mule.

The Racing Feist of Chestnut Hill

R. L. Pete Wyatt

My ex-wife was a Veterinary Technician, employed at the University of Tennessee Veterinary Teaching Hospital off Neyland Drive in Knoxville. She would often be a foster mom to surrendered animals.

Those poor animals that were brought into the hospital with illness or injuries too expensive for the owners to pay for. Then, a gut wrenching decision had to be made by the family. Either pay the exorbitant medical bills or surrender the animal to become a ward of the state. It happens with the stroke of a pen.

An Italian Greyhound was brought into the hospital with a shattered left leg. A little, skinny, bird boned dog.

It seems the little puppy was trying to mimic a cat. The little fellow had jumped up on the back of a couch to joust with its feline companion. Lo and behold, the cat smacked the pup off the couch.

Frail, skinny, bird boned canids do not land on their feet, as do cats. Bird bones, like glass, shatter.

High dollar orthopedic surgeries (multiple) $$$$$$$ are now suddenly in the prospective show dog's future. The owners could not sell a broken pup. So, he was surrendered to the school.

My wife brought the happy pup home as a foster child. What a sight he was. A cone of shame on his scrawny neck, a bright orange cast covered his wee paw all the way to his shoulder. And, he looked so pitiful in the wire folding cage that would be his safe shelter for his future while he mended.

He had to be given medication every 4 hrs, walked on a leash every 2 hrs and kept away from frisky felines. Since my spouse's schedule was too rigid, I volunteered to take the pup to my office.

The little fellow was a good patient. He was quiet and reserved in his cage.

When folks came to my office he would attempt to stand up. His tail would wag in hopes that a pat on his cone covered head would happen, or at least some baby talk would be uttered his way.

I had walked him on leash twice that morning. No attacks from lurking feral felines had occurred.

Then, entered Leon Harvey into my office.

Leon was a Wildlife Technician at the Penninsula Wildlife Management Area. A lifelong resident of Sharps Chapel, Tennessee.

He had "seed most everything," 'cept a doe deer with antlers, a hen turkey with a beard, and two mules a mating." That phrase was always uttered through Leon's thick handle bar mustache.

Always followed by a loud, knee slapping, bellowing laugh. This was repeated often when he had an audience.

Today, I planned to add another never seen sight to his triad.

“By God son, what kind-of a dog you got thar?”, Leon said twisting his bushy mustache.
“It’s a racing feist Leon.”, I said, nonchalantly.
“The hell you say?” Said Leon as he squatted down to get a closer look at the caged pup.
“Yep. They race em over at Chestnut Hill on Saturday nights.” I said as I got up from my desk and moved toward the cage.
“They’s a big crowd that gathers over there. Why, they bet on em and everything. They even serve hot dogs and popcorn.” I said, trying to hold back a chuckle.
“By God, I’ve never seen such a thang.”, Leon had pushed his cap back on his head,
exposing his tractor tan line.
“Ain’t nairy even ever heered of such a thang.” He said with his brow all wrinkled, a perplexing expression, still looking at the wiggle tailed pup between the bars.
“What the hell is that damn thang on its head?” Leon was pointing at the plastic cone.
That’s a speed reduction air spoiler, Leon.”, I said, taking a deep breath as not to laugh,
“It keeps him from going too fast.”, a laugh slipped out, but not caught by Leon, still studying the mythical creature.

“The hell you say.”, he said eyes fixed on the skinny pup.
“What the hell is wrong with his laig?”, his crooked finger now pointing at the bright orange cast.
“He broke it over at the track”, I said.
“How the hell did he do that?”, Leon said with a sympathetic suttleness in his voice.
I took an extra deep breath, and steadied myself for what I was going to say next.
“Well, he was leading the race, goin’ around the last turn and the saddle came loose.”
“Saddle? What kind of damned saddle?” Leon took his eyes off the dog and was attentive to only me.
“Well, the saddle for the monkey that was riding him.” I said as the hook was set.
“A little organ grinder monkey, it was.”, I went back around my desk and sat down.
Leon’s eyes followed me.
“That damn monkey that was riding him, jumped off, poor little ol’ Lightening here went under the guard rail head over heels, all mumbo jumbo and broke his leg!”, I said, as I looked up at Leon.
“I’ll be damned!”, said Leon as he took his hat off, and scratched his head. He was twisting that big bushy mustache as he bent down for one last peek.

“A damned racin’ feist, by God. I ain’t never seen one ‘til today.” He said as he walked out the door.

Imagining Tweetsie Railroad Theme Park 1968

Seth Grindstaff

From a chair lift at Tweetsie Railroad, feet dangling
in the Blowing Rock N.C. breeze, I looked down
where Dad pointed, at the emptied circle of a castle
tower, where he said a giant had supposedly slept
when Pappaw was dad's age and dad mine.

I wondered how large the boots, hanging untied
over the edge of his two story log bed, how
high his belly rose under flannel sheets, how
loud the snore, and his breath. Face, just out of sight.

Dad told me of the wooden warning sign: *Step quietly.*
Don't wake the slumbering giant of Magic Mountain.
His axe leaned on the bedpost, its notched head
size of our supper table. He claimed

his dad had captured it on film, too fragile now
to convert to digital after decades in the attic's
dusty heat, which left me all childhood to question
just how he woke, where he stomped off to, and
what he looked like in the first place for Dad
as a kid, still known to exaggerate.

I thought he could never conceive such a grand
absence, or have need to ponder where a vacancy
so vast could run off to; why he took bed and all
with him. Figured adulthood had relieved him
of that wonder.

But on this day of my moving away, I see
him stare that same vacancy into the pink and gray
of my childhood walls, at the silver constellation left
by nails relieved of shelving the past and pointing the way

toward my closet, stuffed with sixteen seasons of recital
dresses, and shoes to match. I see him seeking
to connect the dots left in the carpet, indentations left after
rearranging the familiar nightstand and twin bed that he has

eighteen years of practice tiptoeing around, careful
not to wake me, his daughter, with a goodnight
kiss after second shift, careful not to interrupt
another bed that can't hold a dream forever.

Silent Sustained Reading

Seth Grindstaff

The fluorescent foil of fingers
fiddling into a snack wrapper instead
of Steinbeck sent me scowling
toward the back row, where two eyes
met mine for a stare down.

Numb of mind, he nibbled on a cracker
from the unsprung trap of his wooden desk.
He wrinkled his nose and continued to
crunch, knowing I wouldn't break the
brown-nose-silence of his peers.

His copy of Of Mice and Men lay open
to a random page collecting bits of bread,
like text taking on annotation, as if
he could feed hungry farm hands manna
from his mighty paws above.

The crumbs slid from his gray coat
as he snapped alert at the lunch bell
and squeaked, tail sweeping behind
his scurry out the door. He thought
he avoided the day's question, which was

"In the final chapter, who shares the fate of mice?"
But he responded truly enough
in cursive curses
written in the air around his whiskers,
hungry for a happier ending to it all.

Nature's Call

Seth Grindstaff

4 miles in to our 8 mile day hike
she had to use the bathroom. So
we scoured the autumn forest for
any dangling grace
but found branches barren as
empty rolls of Charmin.
Leaves had fallen, crumbled, dried.

All we found was risk:
White Oak — too narrow
Laurel — solid but slick
Birch — too serrated around its edges
Poplar — too hairy underneath
American Elm: rough on one side
with fine hairs for tickling on its back
Redbud: heart shaped enough
but too small to be trusted.

She knew she had married someone who
would give the shirt off his back. And
she'd never liked that white v-neck anyway.

Onions

Seth Grindstaff

In pre-marital counseling, preacher told us
one couple used a bedroom lamp to communicate
what they expected before bed: On or Off.

Simple enough. I imagined some wives might
accidentally unplug that lamp when vacuuming or
unscrew the bulb, just so, as to not make contact.

No, we take to other signs beyond our control--
such as ingredients common in American cuisine.
Garlic: On, with time to shower.
Onion: On, brush your teeth all you like
there is no denying it.

Sometimes I do order a burger "no onion"
out of respect, hoping they forget, and sometimes
she orders a burger "with onions."
Those days we order "to go."

No need to think too hard,
to peel into layers of the human psyche.
At the core of every fruit, man, or vege
is a seed needing sown.

Fragrance

Seth Grindstaff

Dating, I didn't know you wore fragrance
from a bottle. I thought it was just you
or the way you all smelled--you
being the first to let me in close to notice.

And I wasn't sure of how to take it
all in, unable to focus on your entirety.
Even at a distance your legs would lead
long as this memory tanned by summer.

Once we got married they cancelled the line.
Couldn't buy it. And since you couldn't smell
yourself, you kept throwing that bottle away.
But I've saved it and its last discolored ounce
from the trash each time we've moved.

You might not know this, but I've hid it
upstairs in the bathroom pantry, top shelf, safe
with the cap on, and in a ziplock bag.

Used to I'd check Ebay for a sense of our first date
still sealed, back when I wondered if the aura hid deep
in your ncck line, dangling like an ornament at the end
of a necklace slipping into the shadow of your v-neck,
or behind what strands of brunette it began,
fragrance shouting through its sun-bleached existence.

But now, with kids in the house, it's a presence
I still recognize by surprise each time I open the pantry
to fetch our foster kid a towel after his bath, and I'm
stripped of timeas the toddler shivering, and scent
swaddles me as I dry his hair and wrap him into the
warmth of your essence lasting.

"A Space of Crisis:"
Examining the Environmental Dystopia and the Other in Appalachian Literary

Harley Mercadal

Ecocriticism looks closely at how the environment gets portrayed in literature and how the people involved — whether it is a character, the reader, or the author — interact with the environment, which usually symbolizes something more profound than just nature itself. The Ecogothic goes one step further in that it looks to examine how that natural environment causes both fear and anxiety in typically supernatural, sublime, or surreal ways. The authors of EcoGothic explain that the concept of ecogothic as a mode of literary criticism represents the "disjunction between the utopian idealism of the project and its dystopian aftermath" (2) while simultaneously "illustrat[ing] how nature becomes constituted . . . as a space of crisis which conceptually creates a point of contact with the ecological" (3). Ecogothic criticism also often anthropomorphizes the environment by using the term "'who' rather than 'it' to describe Nature[, which] captures the Ecogothic's tendency to depict nature as a living, acting, creating, unfolding 'other'" (Scharper).

However, the concept of nature as otherworldly and 'other' is not a new concept, particularly when the Appalachian landscape is discussed. Appalachia is often described in literature as an Edenic "garden of God" or a Heaven-on-Earth type of Paradise in early works (Flint 17). On the contrary, contemporary literature portrays how the quick and careless industrialization of coal mining camps and commodity culture polluted this new paradise by using fictional characters to "blam[e] modern consumerism for the desolation of the land" (qtd. in Kroger 15). Appalachian literary landscapes become contradictory because they are portrayed as both beautiful and ugly, fruitful and barren, Edenic and Hellish in three novels about the region: *River of Earth by James Still, The Tall Woman* by Wilma Dykeman, and Suttree by Cormac McCarthy.

In order to accurately convey how the description of the Appalachian landscape becomes contradictory in literature, one must first look at the portrayal of the land in earlier texts. The Appalachian Mountains received many a description from early travel writers describing the beauty and abundance of the landscape as something akin to a new Eden. Timothy Flint's memoir from 1833 describes his journey with Daniel Boone; the group of men ends up looking down along the valleys from the Cumberland Mountain as part of their trip. Flint describes the view as "[a] feeling of the sublime" where the party could see "vast ranges, [and] of the boundless forest valleys" (15). The beautiful landscape has left the men "in thoughts too deep for words" before they descend, only to experience a different kind of beauty in the foothills with grass the color of "the freshest green" rolling over "the loveliness of the surrounding landscape" (Flint 15). It seems to the group of adventurers that everything in this unsettled part of the world is both pristine and bountiful. This sense of hope at seeing the nearly-perfect land and its fruits "draws attention to the notion of the wilderness as an ideological lens through which early settlers viewed the strange and vast landscape they found themselves in" (Hughes and Smith 10). With the land already green and lush, the settlers likely saw an opportunity to settle in with relative ease, thus cultivating an ideological hope to go along with this new vision of Edenic paradise.

A mere few pages later, Flint records another member of the party, Finley, describing Appalachia as a "wilderness-paradise[,]" which "blooms as the rose[,] and these desolate places are as the garden of God" (17). This reference to Eden no doubt piqued interest from deeply religious people of the period, especially those looking to settle some of the lands many of those people considered to be newly-found. After all, as Donna Seaman notes

in her article about ecology-centered fiction, the "[m]ountains are forever; rivers embody change, and a garden symbolizes the ideal union of the wild and the human[,]" much like symbolic representations of a person's relationship with God, where, to the average person of the time period, the ideal spiritual union lay. However, "Edenic scenes of [everlasting] virtuous bliss are nothing more than fiction[,]" since lands become settled or otherwise used by humans for profit (Kroger 21).

River of Earth by James Still begins in a section of Appalachia already in the process of Hellish decay near the coal-mining camp of Blackjack. The narrator, a seven-year-old boy, notes the landscape when he says, "[Father] owned the scrap of land our house stood upon, a garden patch, and the black birch that was the only tree on all the barren slope above Blackjack [the mining camp]" (Still 1, emphasis mine). Already the trauma inflicted upon the landscape shows in the lack of trees around the family homestead, implying that before this narration, there were "years filled with both industrial progress and the inevitable destruction of the land that follows" (Kroger 15). Due to the very nature of mining and extraction combined with the time of this novel, companies had little choice but to clear out the surrounding forests by additional logging. Companies practiced this quick timber logging to create space for both the waste leftover from the mining process, and the company's workers since many men and their families came from miles away to "dig [their] bread underside [the soil, deep in the mines]" (Still 35).

This deforestation is seen later in the novel as well when Uncle Jolly muses to the narrator, "[the l]and [is] a-wasting and a-washing. Up and down Troublesome Creek, it's the same. Timber cut off and hills eating down" (Still 134). Jolly echoes the narrator's earlier thoughts on the effects of mining and industry on the barren landscape here; however, he also goes one step further to rhetorically question the narrator, asking, "[w]hat's folks going to live on when these hills wear down to a nub?" (134). Uncle Jolly's dialogue quietly speaks to many fears people had when mining first came into Appalachia, such as food insecurity, the ruination of the landscape, and a transition of many citizens from the independent agrarian lifestyle to the industrially dependent lifestyle.

This transition of lifestyle in Appalachian citizens feels very much like a Gothic curse on both the people and the land. On the one hand, the mining companies provide jobs that seem decent-paying and thus, do not rely on crops succeeding, so families no longer have to sell or trade their goods if they need something which cannot grow. On the other hand, however, men working a mining job do not have the time nor energy to keep up with growing crops to feed their families from their backyards, and money must be used to pay for victuals. The Appalachians who grow their food and live off the land have a much stronger sense of self-reliance, independence, and connection to the landscape, while the Appalachians who work in the mines must abide by the mining companies' whims of hiring, firing, opening, and closing, thereby making them dependent. This seemingly cursed separation of lifestyles and the notion of which provides more stability shows up in the narrator's own family, forcing both parents to disagree.

Alpha, the mother, is an agrarian Appalachian who wishes more than anything her family could stay in one place and grow their victuals instead of moving around to different coal camps and relying on the mining companies for their sustenance. She wants to be "beholden to nobody" (Still 130). Alpha tells Brack, her husband, "I'm a-mind to stay on here [with the garden patch, away from the coal mining camps, because i]t's the nighest heaven I've been on this earth" (176). This dialogue of disagreement is not the first time the two speak of Alpha's wanting to stay and Brack's wanting to go to the mining work. Brack replies to one of Alpha's earlier requests by mentioning, "Aus Coggins can't get a stand o' corn on his land. Plants come up, then twist and die like they'd been burnt" (78). While contemporary readers of the text now know this crop failure comes from polluted or depleted soil, Brack's comment feels like an excuse to keep on mining. Since the Gothic in literature often contains characters covering up their problems in order to make appearances seem reasonable, this makes sense. Brack wants anyone who might care enough to look closely at their family to see him as a reliable, masculine well-to-do provider that works hard without getting above his raising. Time and time again, Brack ushers the family onward to mining camps, claiming he never took up with farming, rather than listening to Alpha's concerns and reassurances that they can grow their food and take care of their family together.

The last significant image of how decay affected Appalachia during James Still's *River of Earth* happens practically at the end of the novel. The family moved to another mining camp against Alpha's wishes; however, this time the family lives smack dab in the middle of the camp in a big house with many windows. While this may sound nice, the narrator and his older sister go out exploring to a creek near the camp and find,

> [t]he waters ran yellow, draining acid from the mines, cankering rocks in its bed. The Rocks were snuffy brown, eaten and crumbly. There were no fishes swimming the eddies, nor striders looking at themselves in the waterglass. Bare willows leaned over. They threw a golden shadow on the water." (Still 189)

The creek contains runoff from the coal mines called iron hydroxide precipitate, which turns the water yellow. High amounts of this substance do, in fact, begin to break down rocks and kill or severely sicken any animal that drinks from it, which explains why there are no fish or striders anywhere near the water source. The sludge is so thick that the trees cast "a golden shadow" rather than a dark one on the water (189). While the characters may not realize it, the coal company's pollution affects more than just the immediate coal camp, since waters always go somewhere, be it into the surrounding land or a larger body of water. This total spoiling of a natural resource shows that the coal company's "greed and focus on progress has compromised the natural environment" (Kroger 23).

However, this Appalachian landscape still retains its Edenic beauty away from the coal camps. The narrator notes early in the novel that, "[t]he [family] garden grew as by a miracle" (Still 13). The landscape provides food to eat, even against every odd, much like the biblical Garden of Eden. This sentiment combined with Uncle Jolly's comment about his plot of land later in the novel, where he says, "[a]ye, God, this land'll make . . . [i]t's rich as sin[,]" echoes more Biblical language as well as Timothy Flint's memoir as mentioned above (133). Away from industrial ruination, the Appalachian landscape continues its fruitful, beautiful production as usual. This heavy contrast of beautiful and ruined landscapes allows Still to "explore how Gothic motifs are transposed and used to raise complex, urgent environmental issues" (Hughes and Smith 6). In this case, the Gothic motif Still uses is that of the beautiful landscape quickly withering to decay via the careless industrialization's pollution and abuse of the natural world.

In *The Tall Woman* by Wilma Dykeman, the relationship of the characters to the land reflect the same split the narrator's family of River of Earth do, though admittedly to a lesser degree. The main character Lydia McQueen lies in bed and reflects in the beginning of the novel on "making ready to be Mark's wife" where she compares her current body to "a seed[,]" specifically "one of those sun-warmed seeds in the spring ground, growing, ready to give forth new life" (Dykeman 13). While pregnancy is often described as akin to flowers blooming in other works, Lydia instead feels like a seed, nestled warmly underneath the soil of her quilts. To contrast, a few pages later Lydia's mother speaks of her mother, musing that, "I was the only one remembered the softness and sweetness of her before the mountains wore it away" (16). While characters like Lydia find "[o]utdoor spaces have a specific purpose [of] solace, renewal, and protection[,]" characters like her grandmother found it challenging to be the entirely self-reliant woman and family the distance of the mountains from the cities called for (Hughes and Smith 17).

Later in the novel, Lydia and Mark build a house high up near a mountaintop on a piece of land with a freshwater spring. Unfortunately, the soil seems depleted of its nutrients and Lydia's attempts at planting crops seem to take more attention than usual. However, Lydia takes to the spring steadfastly, knowing that, beyond beauty, its water is essential for the wellbeing of her family and her crops. When Dr. Hornsby comes up the mountain for a visit, Lydia "had come to [the spring to] dip out any leaves that might have blown into the water since the last storm[,] where he asks Lydia what she is up to on "this bleak day on this godforsaken mountain" (Dykeman 176). She replies that she is "cleaning [her] spring" (176). Dr. Hornsby laughs, poking fun at her when he asks, "how do you clean a spring? Do you wash the water?" (176). Lydia shows him how clean, clear, and cool her water is, slightly defensive of this invaluable resource on her land. While not explicitly stated in the novel, the implication of how far Lydia, Mark, and the children would have to walk to retrieve enough water for cooking, washing, and drinking without the spring seems a hefty distance.

Unfortunately, one of the biggest Gothic tropes comes to haunt the novel when the beauty of the freshwater springs in Lydia's Appalachia become decayed and eventually kill her, too. Lydia becomes feverish the night before she leaves her daughter Martha's house, longing to "bury her face right now in the crystal coolness of her spring" (Dykeman 304). The next day, Lydia, while traveling from Martha's, becomes thirsty and asks her son-in-law to pause on the side of Ham Nelson's property where she remembers a spring. When she reaches the spring, Lydia sees that Nelson completely neglected the clear, delicious spring Lydia remembers dipping water out of beforehand. Lydia observes the land around the spring and reflects that

> [y]ears of rain seeping through that mound of sawdust [Nelson left on the property] had turned the water in the spring brackish. The spring itself was full of leaves, abandoned and diminished. She cleaned out handfuls of leaves, down to the sandy bed, and waited for the water to flow clear again. The trickle came so slowly she could hardly believe this was the bold, fine spring she had once dipped into with deep buckets. (305)

Ham Nelson, ever authoritative and neglectful, allowed the natural resource to become polluted and decayed from waste generated by his sawmill on the property. Because of his position of power within the community, it is doubtful many — if, indeed, any at all — mentioned the ruination of the spring to him, since presumably, someone else takes care of Ham Nelson's needs for clean water. After Lydia waits a little while, "she cupped her hands and took a drink of water. It was tepid and tasteless" (305). This contaminated water no doubt adds to Lydia's already-growing sense of illness and fever, which is later identified as typhoid fever and kills her. Lydia's death shows how, "the desecration of the natural world is met with psychological [and physical] trauma[,] and can usually be traced to an oppressive ruling power[, in this case, Ham Nelson]" (Hughes and Smith 5). Before Lydia dies, however, she and her daughter Jessie clean out the spring at their house together, as if to stress the importance of clean water to the family's survival.

Cormac McCarthy's novel *Suttree*, on the contrary, shows characters relying on the Tennessee River's dirty and polluted water for their livelihoods. Cornelius Suttree makes his home on the river in a houseboat where he fishes out of the trash-filled water to make money and feed other characters. He often watches the river go by, and near the very beginning of the novel, Suttree watches as, "gouts of sewage faintly working, gray clots of nameless waste and yellow condoms roil[ed] slowly out of the murk like some form of fluke or tapeworm" (McCarthy 7). Presumably, the main reason the river contains so much trash is due to the industrial presence on the river, where Suttree "could hear the howl of the saws in the lumber mill across the [way]" and the water passes in a "slow brown neap" (63). However, human interference presents itself, too, as Suttree himself "seized these entrails [from a fish] . . . and slung them" into the river (63-64).

Despite the disgusting decay of the river being fished from, Suttree takes his catches of fish to the market in town, where he makes a decent living, earning "a dollar bill and four cents" for two catfish and a carp (68). This flippant treatment of his waste is not to say that Suttree does not love the land he lives in; rather, he seems to have made Knoxville his place for most of the book. He is familiar with the streets, the people, and the economic ebbs and flows. Suttree often names the streets, businesses, and buildings that he comes across, showing not just a passive moving through the city, but an attention to detail for the beauty the city contains for him. At one point, Suttree even "returned to his chair and sat and wiped the mouth of the bottle with the web of his thumb and held it up and toasted mutely the city below and drank" to show his love nonverbally (McCarthy 238).

Suttree does eventually leave the city he loves in order to go on a strange pilgrimage through the woods. While this journey reflects what some critics infer as his suicidal ideations and nihilism coming to fruition, other critics see this journey as a mode of getting back to nature where "[o]utdoor spaces have a specific purpose for [Suttree]: solace, renewal, [and] protection" (Hughes and Smith 17). In typical Gothic fashion, Suttree's descent into madness begins deep in the woods, in isolation, where "[e]verything had fallen from him. He scarce could tell where his being ended or the world began nor did he care. He lay on his back in the gravel, the earth's core sucking his bones" (McCarthy 286). His declining mental state invites his body to also descend to the ground here, where the earth "becomes an avenging force" to reclaim his body

(Hughes and Smith 11). The Gothic idea of a madness in characters carried over from a familial sin shows up when Suttree draws a parallel to his stillborn twin he believes he sees in his delusional state, calling him "[s]ome doublegoer, some othersuttree[,]" an issue which haunted Suttree since he found out about both the existence and death of his twin (McCarthy 287). The editors of *EcoGothic* comment on this return to nature in hopes to solve emotional concerns, pointing out that,

> entering the wilderness . . . was tantamount to confronting the nightmarish landscape of Original Sin. Images of a desolate wilderness function as a . . . fearful space inhabited by threatening characters (or creatures) and marked by deep-seated secrets or past transgressions that threaten the status quo. (9)

Since Suttree's parents and uncle previously shut down conversations about the dead twin, one can presume the issue is a "deep-seated secret" and trying to speak of it again would indeed "threaten the status quo" of the familial dynamic (Hughes and Smith 9). Suttree's confrontation of his own "Original Sin[,]" where he feels he had something to do with the death of his twin, leads him to a desolate and fearful wilderness (9). Suttree enters the pristine and bare forest a decayed sort of individual with questionable morals, decays further both physically and mentally within the confines of nature, and re-emerges into city life, shedding his past hauntings as he realizes there is "one Suttree only" (McCarthy 461).

While all three novels discussed above contain facets of both the traditional Gothic tropes — such as family curses, insanity, the decay of something beautiful — and hyper environmental awareness in Appalachia, they also contain a "manifestation of a wide-spread contemporary cultural anxiety about nature" (Hughes and Smith 10). This environmental anxiety shows up in how each different set of characters care about the landscape and its resources, whether it is for personal or community gains. The last significant common thread the three novels share is the concept of poverty and how poverty leads to abuse of the land and its resources. As Jennifer Westerman points out in her dissertation, there is a "disproportionate burden of environmental ills on poor and marginalized communities" versus the wealthy communities, particularly those of the industrial line, and cautions that "it is critical to consider how our labor and environmental histories have shaped our national, [regional, and] cultural narrative" (5). James Still's *River of Earth* portrays nearly-always poverty-stricken characters concerned about the Appalachian community and its polluted water sources, the nutritionally-depleted soil, and the widespread timber logging done by coal companies. Wilma Dykeman's The Tall Woman portrays another extremely low-income family with the Appalachian sense of self-reliant work in taking care of the land and its resources as well as the community concern about resources like clean water for the community. Cormac McCarthy's *Suttree* writes an Appalachian who chose poverty and homelessness that embodies the contradictory nature of the region, where nature is used for personal and monetary gains as well as self-renewal and feeding of the community.

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Fishing at Clinch River Fireside

Matthew Gilbert

My grandparents teach me to catch trout with fire,
to bewitch cold tidewater with heat and sparks,
like Stronghawk had taught Cherokee boys
at spring, while grandmother sings A-du-la-di
lulling the campfire with fresh pine branches.

Grandfather wraps his worn hands around mine
— they feel like rocks the creek has not touched —
and draws the line back, past the river valley
where our ancestors pounded on deerskin drums,
in summer and sat smoking mullein roots and danced.

We cast the line and listen to it plop on the surface.
Crickets join in grandmother's song, like questions
played by children on bark and autumn reeds;
Wolves answer, howls echoing sounds of battle
calling his tribesman out to hunt, grandmother says.

I listen to the words only my grandparents understand,
mysteries of our tribe long forgotten, whispers that draw
trout to flames to keep our stomachs full, secrets of pine
that carries prayers in smoke, rising like fog,
pure as God's breath over the Appalachian Mountains.

We live by fireside, if only for two nights and a day,
filling up on smoked river trout and ramps, listening
to nature's harmony: the wolves, the crickets, and the wind,
Crackling embers and a plopping of fish. For a time,
I, too, can sing along "A-ga-ta-na-i A-du-la-di."

At Four Years Old

Matthew Gilbert

My mother converted to lightning and split our
home in two. The stillness of the chair where my father sat
splintered under the pressure of her gale, clearing out the kitchen.

I hid in the corner of my bedroom and listened to rain outside
beating to get in. I didn't know I'd left my window open that day
and the cry of winds whirled somewhere inside.

My mother amassed plates from the table. She pulled a chair
to the sink and I stood on top but didn't look her in the eyes.
Standing on the chair, the room looked much smaller.

The large table stretched across vinyl tile,
empty, but my father's plate set abandoned
to grow cold in discontent.

I couldn't imagine why my mother scrubbed so hard,
until her knuckles turned dark, but I rinsed each dish
afraid to break them in my hands.

My father's meal was the last to go, marinara dried to the plate.
My mother stared out the window for but a moment
then dumped pasta in the trash.

I never saw what she was looking for, but I learned the holes
and creaks of each room, the leaks where cold chills
found their way in. Somehow, I hid the secrets of a faulty foundation,

patched the walls with stickers and paint. The wall held
for a while. We would scrape the dishes and wash our hands,
enduring the thunder that shook the house.

Unearthing

Matthew Gilbert

The cat swats at pinecones
scampering across the lawn like fox squirrels,
after five years of owning the world inside.
He indulges his wet nose in the burn
nettle and wildfire of needled detritus
and stretches his length against the pine —
back arched, claws dipped in the sap —
measuring his pure curiosity in pinholes
and an illegible language of scratches
on the bark. I map his distance in upturned
plots of soil along the thicket of spring.
We call him inquirer, explorer, naive
for the way he lies among the heated
aperture of sunlight wallowing in the newness of it all.
For a moment, I covet his ferity,
the way sap sticks to the thickness of fur
and he paws at the earth. Soon,
he will need to soak in a bath
to wash away
the outside world.

Bios

WAYNE THOMAS

Wayne Thomas writes prose, essays, and plays and teaches creative writing at Tusculum University, where he serves as the Dean of the College of Civic & Liberal Arts. Thomas co-edited the award-winning anthology *Red Holler: Contemporary Appalachian Literature,* published by Sarabande in 2013. He has served as Managing Editor of Arts & Letters, as Editor of *The Tusculum Review,* and on the Advisory Board of *Connotation Press: An Online Artifact.*

RACHEL SWATZELL

Rachel Swatzell is a senior Creative Writing and Literature major at Tusculum University. Swatzell is published in *The Blue Route, The Mildred Haun Review, SHIFT: a publication of MTSU Write, Entropy Magazine,* and work forthcoming in *Stillpoint Literary Magazine.* She is the 2018-2020 Curtis Owens Literary Award winner for poetry. Swatzell is currently the Assistant Editor and Featured Artist Editor for *The Tusculum Review.*

ROGER D. HICKS

Roger D. Hicks is an Appalachian writer and auctioneer living in West Liberty, Kentucky. His work has appeared in *Now And Then, Bryant Literary Review, Orpheus* at Lindsey Wilson College, *True Christmas Stories From The Heart Of Appalachia, River Babble,* and *The Mildred Haun Review.* He is currently working on a final edit of a short story collection and a biography of an Appalachian coal camp town.

ALEXA FARLEY

Alexa Farley is a high-schooler that really likes to write. Her hobbies include writing, reading, photography, and occasionally playing badminton with her little brother. She has two cats, an indoor one and an outdoor one, and she loves them. Her indoor cat's old, fat and grumpy, but he's funny, so there's that. Her outdoor one has cat anxiety and likes to cuddle. They're both total sweethearts though, so that's always nice. She has one brother, the one mentioned earlier, and he's pretty cool too. When she graduates, she's aiming to become a journalist and a published author.

JOHN C. MANNONE

John C. Mannone has poems appearing/accepted in the *2020 Antarctic Poetry Exhibition, North Dakota Quarterly, Blue Fifth Review, Poetry South, Baltimore Review,* and others. His poetry won the Impressions of Appalachia Creative Arts Contest (2020). He was awarded a Jean Ritchie Fellowship (2017) in Appalachian literature and served as celebrity judge for the National Federation of State Poetry Societies (2018). His latest of three collections, *Flux Lines: The Intersection of Science, Love and Poetry* is forthcoming from Linnet's Wings Press (2020). He edits poetry for *Abyss & Apex* and other journals. A retired professor of physics, he lives near Knoxville, Tennessee.

JAMIE BRANAM BROWN

Jamie was raised in the mountains of Cocke County, Tennessee and pursued higher education at the University of Tennessee and The Ohio State University. She is a professor of Human Services and Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies at East Tennessee State University. She lived in a number of cities before returning to the mountains to raise her four children. Jamie and her husband live on a farm in Cosby where they are content with their animals, soaking in the gorgeous view while rolling out the biscuit dough like Mamaw Georgie.

LORA LOVIN OSBURN

Lora Lovin Osburn carries on the tradition of her Appalachian forefathers who were readers, speakers, and doers of The Truth. Lora blogs because she wants to help other women find their voice, and even beauty, by living, looking, and loving beyond the abuse, hurts, and sorrows of this life.

R.L. PETE WYATT

A native of Concord, Tennessee, a U. S. Air Force Vietnam Veteran, Pete spent 37+ years with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency. 10 years as a Game Warden (Wildlife Officer) in Unicoi County, in Upper East Tennessee. Pete is an Appalachian Heritage Cooking Instructor. Since his retirement in 2014, Pete has turned his skills to using native medicinal plants to make soaps and salves. He currently spends his time at either his remote cabin at the Ephraim Place atop Unaka Mountain or his 200-year-old log cabin at Burbank (Roan Mountain), alongside Toll Creek. He is writing at the present time and enjoys traveling adventures in the Appalachian region with his companion, Madam X.

SETH GRINDSTAFF

Seth Grindstaff teaches high school English in northeast Tennessee. He received his MA in English from ETSU and is a proud member of the Johnson City Poets Collective. His poetry has been honored at the John Fox Jr Literary Festival in VA and published in a variety of journals. He spends his time alongside his sun-loving wife and foster children.

HARLEY MERCADAL

Harley Mercadal is currently an adjunct in English at East Tennessee State University. She earned her Master of Arts degree in English in December 2019. Harley has been published in the 2020 edition of *The Mockingbird,* and she has been writing regularly for about five years now. Outside of school, Harley works as a textile printer and embroidery specialist.

MATTHEW GILBERT

Matthew Gilbert is a recent graduate from the M.A. program in English Literature at East Tennessee State University. He has served as the 2018-2019 editor of the student-based literary journal *Mockingbird* and currently serves as a review editor of poetry for *Great Lakes Review* and a fiction reader for Orison Books. He loves the music of written word and the movement and transformation of ideas through the poetic experience. His work has previously appeared in *Echoes and Images, Mockingbird, Red Mud Review, Delta Poetry Review, The Castle, Eunoia Review,* and is forthcoming in *Jimsonweed*.

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