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# Literacy, Discourse, and Identity: The Working-Class Appalachian Woman Academic

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**LITERACY, DISCOURSE, AND IDENTITY: THE WORKING-CLASS  
APPALACHIAN WOMAN ACADEMIC**

A Thesis submitted to  
the Graduate College of  
Marshall University

In partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

English

by  
Sarah Marie McConnell

Approved by

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Marshall University  
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*For my mother, whose voice gave rise to my own.  
And for my brother, who shared in every moment of my childhood.  
Long live the Three Musketeers.*

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## Abstract

Drawing on conversations about the politics surrounding literacy acquisition, I take a deeper look into the effects of obtaining membership within an academic discourse community on Appalachian women from the working class. The tensions that develop between the two opposing discourses promotes a sense of loss as they create distance between these women and their home community, alter relationships, and disrupt identity. Working-class Appalachian women occupy the borderlands between discourses: one foot in their Appalachian community; the other in their academic community. They negotiate their fragmented identities in order to play the appropriate role within the appropriate context. Their status in the academic community is precarious at best, limited and potentially jeopardized by affiliation with their primary discourse community; simultaneously, their participation in the Appalachian discourse community is called into question by their attempts to move into the academic realm, rendering these women strangers in their homeland. Examining the narrative of a woman who has transcended the binary of either/or, I will theorize what I have named the *androgynous outlander*, a third form with a third discourse.

## **“DIE, AIN’T, DIE!”**

*You can’t be a voice box for your own feelings and experiences, much less for those of your place, if you’ve accepted the teaching that your first speech was wrong. For if you abandon or ridicule your voiceplace, you forfeit a deep spiritual connection....It is nature, humor, memory, vision. It is what we must get back to in order to know ourselves, the “first voice” that teaches us to speak.*

—George Ella Lyon, “Voiceplace”

My earliest recollection of being aware that my way of speech was different from that of “everybody else” stems from our brief move to urban Florida during my second-grade year, when the other kids quickly, though not unkindly, pointed out that I “talked funny.” Although I knew I sounded different than my classmates, I did not yet understand *different* to mean *bad*—and besides, to me *they* were the ones who sounded funny. I would not understand that to sound Appalachian meant sounding ignorant, uneducated, and “hickish” to others, that my mother tongue was an undesirable weed to be plucked out, until I was seventeen and a senior in high school.

A lethal contagion, snickers spread like wildfire across the classroom, and each of us tried in desperation to swallow our smiles as the awkward, lanky boy in the third row stood next to his chair, stomped the floor three times in succession, and half-heartedly called the cadence, “Die, ain’t, die!” The ritual, unique to this native Appalachian English teacher, reflected his passion for stomping the ignorant speech of the backwoods bumpkin out of each of us.

I’ll never forget the day the harshness of that spotlight shone on me. I said the word before I even tasted it on my tongue. I tried to bite it off, swallow it, choke on it even, but out it came in all of its ugliness. I gasped audibly and flung a hand over my mouth as though to prevent any other vileness from spilling out. Honestly, you would have thought I’d



dropped the “F bomb” or inadvertently slandered someone’s dead grandmother or blurted out something hideously sacrilegious—anything more unthinkable that might justify my reaction.

I threw up a silent prayer that I hadn’t been heard and, just in case that plea fell on deaf ears, promised my soul to the devil in the next breath. No luck. The teacher stood staring at me expectantly and I, hand still clamped over my mouth, shook my head vehemently. In response, he only nodded with equal fervor. Feeling as though I climbed a scaffold, I drug myself out of the chair. Standing, with all heads swiveled in my direction, I lightly tapped my foot on the ground three times and mumbled, “Die, ain’t, die.”

I moved to sit back down when I noticed his hand cupping his ear; my foot fell a little heavier on the floor and the cadence of “die, ain’t, die” rang out a little louder. But still that hand remained at his ear. Heat flooded my cheeks and I knew my face was a shade of scarlet; I mustered every bit of strength left in me, drove my foot into the floor once, twice, three times, and bellowed, “DIE, AIN’T, DIE!” I didn’t look to see if the teacher’s hand had fallen away from his ear; I threw myself into my desk and kept my eyes trained on its surface until the bell rang. I seethed with anger and more shame than I had ever felt. And for the first time, I understood—really understood—that to be Appalachian was to be “different,” and I understood that *this* different was bad: I understood that to be Appalachian meant I was—somehow—less than the rest of non-Appalachian America.

This sense of difference remained with me from that day on and only increased when I left home for college. Even though I had not technically left the Appalachian region, I had the distinct feeling of leaving the mountains. Perhaps it was the more urban setting, but Huntington became a place that was, to me, *in* but not *of* Appalachia. And small things that I had not been aware were markers of my mountain heritage were quickly revealed for what

they were: Something as commonplace to me as “I reckon” or “God willin’ and the crik don’t rise” became a source of amusement for the people I encountered and even befriended. Tiny jibes and pointed comments (all made in good fun, of course) about where I came from and what I sounded like became a routine part of our interactions with one another. I heard more redneck and hillbilly jokes than I care to count, and my nickname from a close friend was “bumpkin.” Though no deliberate harm or offense hovered behind any of it, I was aware of the underlying thoughts and assumptions behind my friends’ commentary.

Slowly, I began to change the way I spoke, becoming almost obsessively deliberate with the words I chose to use and how I pronounced them. I knew I was smart, but I wanted to *sound* smart so others would know it too. Before long, I could barely recognize my voice in my speech. I began, I believe, to accept the condemnation of the mountain folk as ignorant for fact, and for a time I thought less of those I had “risen above.” I believed that to succeed I had to become like the others: not-Appalachian. Only in recent years, during my graduate work, have I begun to realize the significance of my choice to mask my Appalachian identity.

Language—voice—comes from place, and “place is not just location, geography” Lyon writes; “place is history, family, the shape and context of daily life” (171). So in rejecting my voice, I rejected much more than simply the way I sounded. I rejected my voiceplace. Furthermore, by accepting that my first voice and voiceplace were wrong, I allowed to enter and grow disconnection and distancing from place. And, with that separation, I lost sight of an integral part of myself.

The desire to rid myself of anything that could outwardly identify me as Appalachian was not a desire cultivated internally; rather, its locus was external. Appalachia is perceived to be something “other” than America, something lesser—a culture of ignorance, poverty,

and depravity. That conception of Appalachian “otherness” fuels the desire to disassociate oneself from regional markers.

## Introduction

I wish I could write for you the truth of what it means to come of age in the same mountains your mother and her mother and her mother's mother (and more generations of mothers than our white American history can account for) lived and died. I wish I could write the knowing of flesh and bone, a ken passed through the bloodline of what it is to be born of the mountains. To belong to a place and a people even as they belong to you. And what it means when a choice made takes you hundreds of thousands of miles away from it all, while leaving you standing on native soil, a stranger in your homeland. I wish these words were enough to call forth for you the ghosts I live with. But language has its limitations and can never be the conduit I seek.

Escape was never what I'd hoped for, never what I'd dreamt of. Others did (and do), I know. But I never did. Such desire takes seed within a cell, and I never once saw prison bars around me. What I sought—what I lusted after—was the power inherent in independence, the power of voice. And I was sharply aware at a young age that I *didn't* want the things I *should* have wanted. I did not want to be somebody's wife; I didn't want to be somebody's mother. I wanted to belong to myself; I wanted to be my own somebody.

In a house filled with silences, stolen voices, and buried secrets, I found this small place of resistance: I would never let a man own me, define me. I would never silence my voice, forfeit myself. I would never allow a man to commit violence upon either my person or my spirit, cow me, debase me, dehumanize me, objectify me. If my father taught me anything, it was that if you do not have power over yourself, someone will take power over you. And I made a choice: *I would have that power.*

It took my mother thirteen years to reclaim the voice that had been ripped violently from her, and it was her coming to voice—her reclamation of self and power—that made it possible for me to have a choice at all. And it was she who showed me where I might find that power. It was understood between us that I would go to college. Understood that education was the gateway to liberation. Understood that I would never have to rely on a man for anything in this world unless that reliance was my free choice.

So it was not escape from place, from people, from ways of speaking, seeing, and being—from these things that I had come to see and love as mine—that I wanted. It was not *escape* from anything that I longed for; it was *ownership*. Ownership of self.

This was the promise of knowing. The moment I set foot on the university campus I greedily and hungrily consumed every morsel of knowledge placed before me. I was fixed on this sole purpose, insatiable. What I had not reckoned on—what I still cannot fully account for—was how that knowledge would change me.

My choice brought me into my voice, but that choice has also taken parts of myself from me. These stolen pieces have rendered me a stranger in my homeland and, in some ways, a stranger to myself. And now I am left to reclaim what I never set out to lose.

## **Project Overview and Chapter Breakdown**

I grew up on stories, both listening to stories and telling a fair share of my own. When we share stories, we share lives, and, through the act of telling, the stories of others become our own, an inheritance of lives lived. In Appalachia, storytelling links us to one another, bridges past and present, keeps what's important alive, and makes us the master of our own tale. When it is *your* voice telling *your* story, it is told as *you* would have it told. Storytelling

is key to agency, and in telling your own story you take ownership over it. The same is true, I think, for working-class academic narratives.

Education, when boiled down, is a marker of class, a distinguisher between the haves and the have-nots. Simultaneously, education can be a means of traversing the boundaries of class, of leaving the working class to cross over into the middle class. However, as Jake Ryan and Charles Sackrey point out in *Strangers in Paradise*, moving between classes ultimately involves ““moving from one cultural network to another”” (qtd. in Borkowski 103), and movement between a working-class culture and an academic culture often entangles the working-class academic in a series of conflicts. According to David Borkowski in ““Not Too Late to Take the Sanitation Test’: Notes of a Non-Gifted Academic from the Working Class,” the conflict of dual estrangement is among the common themes revealed in working-class academic narratives (94).

Internalized conflict over split loyalties to two very different and opposing discourses characterizes this dual estrangement. Core elements to the working-class academic narrative are the discrepancies between both the types of work and kinds of intelligences valued by the working class and by academics. Members of the working class value physical labor, or the work of the body—work in which something is done with the hands; academics value the work of the mind, work that is often abstract and intangible—work in which nothing of *practical use* is accomplished or created (Borkowski 98-9).

It follows that the types of intelligences valued (and required) in these separate lines of work are as different as the kinds of work to which they belong. As Mike Rose writes in *The Mind at Work: Valuing the Intelligence of the American Worker*, “any discussion of intelligence is culture-bound,” and the judgments we make about others’ intelligence is done

through the kind of work we do (xix-xxii). The implication, then, is that physical labor, because it is the work of the body, is mindless, or as Rose puts it, “‘neck down’ rather than ‘neck up’” work (xvii). The separation of mind in body in this understanding of work suggests no element of intelligence (as defined by academic work) involved in work done with the body. This assumption fully discounts and devalues the multiple kinds of intelligences behind working-class occupations.

Rose provides an incredible account of the intelligences required as a waitress in *The Mind at Work*, and it threw me back to my own childhood and the time I spent in Country Valley Restaurant where my grandmother was the head cook. I can recall a fascination similar to the one Rose describes with the language of the restaurant, a language that only those on the inside knew and could wield with precision, one that instilled a certain kind of authority in the user, one that could make things happen (xiv-xvi). I would watch, slack-jawed, as a waitress’ pen would fly effortlessly across her pad, taking down each customer’s order as quickly as it was spouted off; as they balanced plates of food stacked the length of their arms while managing to cup two glasses in the palm of one hand; as they danced around each other with the flawless coordination of the spatially hyper-aware. This kind of work, Rose writes, “calls for strength and stamina; for memory capacity and strategy; for heightened attention both to overall layout and to specific areas and items; for the ability to take stock, prioritize tasks, cluster them, and make decisions on the fly” (8); yet, it is this kind of work that is labeled *mindless*.

However, as Borkowski points out, the reverse is also problematic as working-class individuals tend to have the view that academic work is not *real* work precisely because it does not utilize the body. Borkowski’s recalls that his aunt once told him that for all the time

he spent in school, he could have been a “*real* doctor” rather than the “fake one [he] became” (96). Borkowski’s aunt again exemplifies in this instance the belief that *real* work is something you do with your hands, a learned trade (99). Her dismissal of Borkowski’s work as somehow fake because it lacks a physical element illustrates that we can just as easily be called out as a fraud from “below” as we can from “above” (Borkowski 97).

The danger (and fear) of fraudulence, another common theme among working-class academic narratives, is what Ryan and Sackrey refer to as the “impostor phenomenon,” or the working-class academic’s belief that (s)he does not belong in and is unworthy of higher education (qtd. in Borkowski 96). In other words, when it comes to intellect, many working-class academics do not believe that they are cut from the same material as middle-class natives and simply cannot hack it in the academic world, and that it is “only a matter of time before the authentic scholars figure it out” (Borkowski 96). The imposter inevitably experiences a dire need to cover up or mask the working-class background, to erase any vestige of it from her or his appearance. This erasure of working-class culture further results in what bell hooks calls a “psychic turmoil” over the “loss of connection to their families and home communities” (qtd. in Beech 183).

Finally, we see the theme of “the return” appear in some, though certainly not all, working-class academic narratives (Borkowski 109). Rather than try to run from, hide, or erase their working-class backgrounds, some working-class academics “return” (physically, metaphorically, or some combination thereof) to their working-class roots in celebration and tribute. By embracing their working-class backgrounds, working-class academics are not only able to strengthen their scholarship, but also to mend the ties between family and home communities (Borkowski 109-10).



In this project I situate the working-class academic narrative in an Appalachian context. Appalachia provides a unique venue in which to stage a conversation about working-class academic narratives precisely because Appalachia is the only region of the country to have been historically othered and commodified by the rest of the nation. In “Redneck and Hillbilly Discourse in the Writing Classroom: Classifying Critical Pedagogies of Whiteness,” Jennifer Beech writes about the racialization of Appalachia through the use of terms like *redneck* and *hillbilly* that “work to identify for mainstream whites other white people who behave in ways supposedly unbecoming to or unexpected of whites” (175). Not only does this place a certain social stigma on Appalachians, but it also ignores the diversity of the region. Furthermore, even the phrase *Appalachian American* echoes a racial or ethnic label (e.g. African American) and suggests something other than *just* American. Victor Villanueva takes up this line of thought in his foreword to Katherine Kelleher Sohn’s *Whistlin’ and Crowin’ Women of Appalachia* when he writes that he once “thought of Appalachians as the color without a name” (Sohn xv).

Both outsiders’ identification of Appalachians as an American other as well as Appalachians’ sense of self-identification with and group solidarity through the label of *Appalachian* create a need for particular and focused discussion of the working-class academic narrative within the Appalachian region. Because of a unique cultural configuration composed in part by and in response to the historical othering of the region, the working-class Appalachian differs from the working class of other regions and therefore calls for individualized attention. By focusing on the working-class Appalachian academic’s narrative within the broader conversation about working-class academic narratives, I not only bear witness to my own story but voice our region’s existence. By giving voice to our stories, we

can redefine what it means to be a working-class Appalachian academic; we can tell our story as we would have it told; we can take ownership over the narrative of our lives.

In chapter one I confront the image of Appalachia by examining the so-called “discovery” of Appalachia, the origins of Appalachian “otherness” and the evolution of Appalachia as the American antithesis. I focus on the emergence of Appalachian stereotypes in the work of local color writers; these stereotypes were soon promoted and further exaggerated by the writers themselves and their editors and publishers, institutional and private missionary programs, and various forms of media, including more recent pieces, such as Diane Sawyer’s 2009 *20/20* special, “A Hidden America: Children of the Mountains,” which illustrates that these stereotypes are alive and well still today. I rely on Henry Shapiro’s work for much of the history of Appalachia; although somewhat dated, Shapiro continues to be heralded as the authority on Appalachian history for the time period of 1870 – 1920, which is the period in which the development of Appalachian otherness took place. Even though more recent scholars, for example, Allen W. Batteau and Richard B. Drake, have taken up the subject of Appalachian history, these scholars continue to rely heavily on Shapiro’s work to build their own.

Chapter one also includes an overview of the influence of northern missionaries on the development of the perception of Appalachian otherness. The work of local color writers drew Christian denominations from the North into the Appalachian region and informed the approach the various denominations took in their missionary work among the mountain folk. Additionally, this missionary work became responsible for bringing the region and its people once again under the scrutiny of the public eye. The religious and educational missionary work that took place during this time cemented the popular perception of Appalachian

otherness and deviance that remains alive and well today. Finally, in this chapter I also provide an account of Appalachian culture as it exists in reality based on my own experiences as a native Appalachian and the work of other scholars respected in the field of Appalachian studies. The goal of chapter one is to provide an understanding of what it means to be Appalachian as understood by both an Appalachian and someone outside of the region. When entering an academic discourse community, an Appalachian scholar carries not only taking her culture with her, but also others' perceptions and portrayals of the region's culture and people.

Chapter two focuses on the acquisition of literacy and membership within discourse communities. I begin by discussing what literacy is and confronting the belief that literacy is unquestionably liberating. Then, I discuss issues associated with access to literacy, the need for literacy sponsors, and the costs associated with literacy attainment. Finally, I discuss literacy as the mastery of a secondary discourse, the formality of apprenticeship, discourses as identity kits, as well as gatekeeping and the dangers of being caught pretending within a dominant secondary discourse community. James Paul Gee's definition of capital "D" Discourse is essential not only to the discussion of discourse community membership but also to the construction of the androgynous outlander in chapter three, and thus maintains its capitalized "D" in order to distinguish the term as Gee's. This chapter highlights the causes of the conflicts and tensions that arise for individuals moving between two unlike discourse communities and begins to establish how the working-class Appalachian academic is affected by dual-membership.

Chapter three works to tie chapters one and two together as the conversation turns its focus to Appalachian women entering the academic discourse community. Drawing from the

discussions of Appalachian otherness, Appalachian culture, and the necessary moves an individual must make to obtain membership in a secondary discourse community, I examine the conflicts that arise between discourses for the Appalachian woman moving between Appalachian and academic discourse communities. Chapter three acts as a record of my evolution of thought as I first posit the place of this woman as a straddler, and later move into a discussion of what I have come to call the *androgynous outlander*. I draw upon my own experiences as well as those of another woman (called “Emma” in this project) as examples of the working-class Appalachian woman academic in order to illustrate not only the conflicts of being caught between opposing discourse communities, but also to illustrate what it means to enact the discourse of the androgynous outlander.

## ***Chapter One: The “Discovery” of Appalachia: Creating the Appalachian Image***

Perceptions of Appalachian “otherness” have been a cornerstone of dis-identification for the image of the American identity for over a century and a half. Seen as a peculiar people in a strange land, Appalachia has been partitioned off as a land and a people in, but certainly not of, America. The ramifications of such segregation from the nation and its people have been visited upon the mountain folk of Appalachia generation after generation and over again.

This perception of Appalachia as something other than the rest of America has given us such characters as Li'l Abner, Snuffy Smith, and the Hillbilly Bears, each playing strongly to hard-held mountain stereotypes: simple-mindedness and naiveté, mixed with a strong suspicion of outsiders; an illiteracy that runs deep, mangling the English language and leaving speech barely discernible; no visible means of financial support, beyond moonshining of course; a gross lack of hygienic concern; and a heavy tendency toward a volatile, gun-toting personality, prone to explosive violence and feuding. Although these characters may seem to hold a certain innocence and endearment inherent in the cartoon genre, popular hits such as *Deliverance* forgo the nuance of perceived innocence and portray mountain people as something closer to animal than human.

But perhaps more infuriating and outrageous than unsavory works of fiction and entertainment are the egregiously defamatory remarks made by those in positions of political and social power. Take, for instance, former Vice President Dick Cheney's comment: During a 2008 speech discussing his ancestry in an attempt to show a distant relation to the then presidential candidate Barack Obama, the former VP confessed to having Cheneys on both sides of his family, tacking on the derogatory, “And we don't even live in West

Virginia.” Or consider the more recent declaration by Jay Leno over West Virginia University’s landslide victory against Clemson in the 2012 Orange Bowl: “West Virginia scored *seventy points*?! Huh? West Virginia?! They don’t score that high on their SAT’s!”

With a single, distasteful comment, an entire region and its people have been labeled as ignorant and hopeless before one audience and as incestuous inbreeds before another. Rather than demonstrate outrage, audiences laugh, indicating their own buy-in to the stereotypes fueling the proffered humor. Although it is considered politically incorrect, socially unacceptable, and morally repugnant to mock, poke fun at, or slap stereotypes on African Americans, Mexican Americans, American Muslims, the LGBTQ community, or any other minority group, the dehumanization of Appalachian Americans thrives unchecked—the last bastion of sanctioned discrimination and distasteful humor.

The perception of Appalachian otherness, however, is far from fresh and revolutionary. To discover its origins and what allows its persistence, and to supply ourselves with an understanding of what it means to be “Appalachian” in today’s society, we must travel backward in time to the late nineteenth century.

In this chapter, I examine the beginnings of Appalachian “otherness” and the development of Appalachian into the American antithesis in order to emphasize the significances of and the consequences associated with the misrepresentation of Appalachia in modern-day society. Then I offer an account of Appalachian folklife, mountain religion, values, and gender roles based on my own experiences as a native Appalachian and the work of other scholars in order to provide a less exploited and commercialized sense of mountain people and culture. Both the culture as it exists and the misrepresentation of mountain folk are highly significant to a conversation about literacy attainment as the Appalachian woman

entering academe does so under the full weight of both her culture and outsiders' understanding of her culture.

### ***Local Colorists and the "Discovery" of Appalachia***

In the fall of 1869, Will Wallace Harney, travelling throughout the Cumberland Mountains, wrote of his experiences and encounters in a strange land, "where unfamiliar customs prevailed among an unfamiliar population" (Shapiro 3). To Harney's trained physician's eye, the people of this region seemed to him even anatomically peculiar, physiologically different than those living outside the mountain region. Harney's account of the Cumberland Mountains was published in *Lippincott's Magazine* in 1873 as "A Strange Land and Peculiar People." Even though Henry Shapiro writes in *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920* that Harney's account of the region held little to justify its title, Harney was the first to assert Appalachian "otherness" and, therefore, was the first to "discover" the region (4). In addition, Harney's work, although bearing clear marks of his profession, was ultimately meant to entertain, marking the southern mountains and its inhabitants as available subjects for "literary treatment" (Shapiro 4).

Harney's account of the southern mountain region, particularly his emphasis on the strangeness of the land and people, heralded the arrival of the local color movement in the Appalachian region. Local-color writing, mostly published in magazines, was short, narrative, and enormously popular during the 1870s and 1880s (Shapiro 7). Allen Batteau, who builds on Shapiro's work, writes in *The Invention of Appalachia* that the new class that emerged around the mid-century, the first American gentry "composed of the second

generation born since the Revolution,” was responsible for creating the market that gave rise to the local color movement (39). This new class was concerned with expanding a literature that defined America, and, after the Civil War, which highlighted the divisiveness of the country, the first American gentry saw an opportunity to create a market that demanded an exploration and understanding of America (Batteau 39).

According to Shapiro, however, this literary form began much earlier than after the Civil War then evolved in stages over the span of the nineteenth century. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, local-color writing began as the travel sketches and scenery descriptions of naturalists and physicians, seeking to expand the knowledge of the scientific community. In the second quarter of the century, such writing took on a new tone, purpose, and focus; writers sought to entertain, the writing lost its previously objective quality and took on the personal, and the object was to offer readers a “daguerreotype” or picture of what they had witnessed. (Shapiro 9-10)

The local-color movement experienced its final shift in the 1870s and 80s, when sketches grew into short stories and “only the most obviously or grossly ‘interesting’ subjects were acceptable” (Shapiro 10). Reading audiences demanded accounts of places as they might be experienced by anyone visiting the locale written about, and as the demand for such writing outgrew the supply of ‘appropriately interesting’ locations, the line between journalism and fiction began to blur (Shapiro 11). However, audiences continued to accept local color writings as factual representations of place and people.

As the conventions of this literary genre dictate, local color writers highlight the ‘strangeness’ of the indigenous people and the ways in which they differed from the norms of urban America (Batteau 39). One of the most crucial characteristics of this literary form is



the care early writers took in “pointing to the physical, social, and cultural distance separating the locality to be described and the more familiar world which the travelers must leave in order to begin their journey” (Shapiro 12). In creating what Shapiro calls aesthetic distance, colorists are able to keep the peculiarities that make these lands strange and interesting in the first place far from the world and its concerns as known by readers (12). It is this distance that ultimately creates the initial sense of a distinction between an “us” and “not us.”

The image local colorists create of Appalachia is one of the picturesque past, a romantic rendering of yesterday’s people. Readers are provided with an exoticized and utopia where nature remains vastly unaffected by human presence and the people unchanged by the progress of modern society. To many caught up in the rush of modernity and progress, the Appalachian pastoral way of life seemed the more authentic existence. Through such depictions, the southern mountains of Appalachia became aligned with nature, and the Appalachian people nature personified (Batteau 26-29). However, Batteau explains that the popular understanding of nature at this time was “all that which is set apart from and seen as an inversion of Civilization” (28-9); so, while these texts were both written and read with a sense of wonderment and awe appropriate to romanticization, Appalachia and its inhabitants were further established as “set apart from” the civilized world and identified as something “other.”

The assertion of Appalachian otherness as a “fact independent of its perception” was something on which the “successful literary exploitation of the southern mountain region” depended (Shapiro 17), and it was to this aim local colorists turned their attention. Rather than a *perceived* difference, writers and editors stressed this difference as fact, selling the

notion that Appalachians were fundamentally different from the “us” with which their readers identified, and that those differences were part of their nature. It soon followed that Appalachia as the quintessential antithesis of America became cemented in the American consciousness. According to David C. Hsiung in his chapter “Stereotypes” in *High Mountains Rising: Appalachia in Time and Place*, William Goodell Frost, president of Berea College in Kentucky from 1893 to 1920, played an important role in the shift of Appalachia as literary fiction to a “non-American place” in reality (104). Frost was the first to propose the phrase “Appalachian American” as a way of giving the region its own name, but this move “cemented the idea of a homogenous population in Appalachia,” and it is this generalization of region-wide identity that allows for stereotypes to emerge (Hsiung 104).

With the formal institutionalization of Appalachian otherness in the American consciousness came a shift in the interpretation of and the reaction to this otherness. By 1890 the air of the romantic had all but faded, usurped by a growing concern for the long perceived discrepancies between Appalachia and America (Shapiro 5). Once considered quaint and charming, these disparities were now perceived as a threat to American unity and homogeneity—to the American identity. And at the close of the nineteenth century, Appalachia became a problem to be “fixed.”

### ***Missionaries in the Mountains***

Following the Civil War, northern Protestant churches sought control over church organizations in the South, and when it became clear that their intent to obtain permanent control over southern denominations would not become a reality, the northern churches turned their attention to work with the freedmen (Shapiro 34-38). However, as it became

evident that the churches' work with the freedmen was compromising their work among southern whites, the northern denominations turned their attention to a larger population of "poor whites" that seemed separate from both northern and southern regions (Shapiro 39).

The strong sense of Appalachian otherness that first made the region an appropriate subject for local colorists, paired with an intense desire for American unity after the Civil War, brought the Appalachian region under the eye of the home missionaries of northern Protestant churches. Just as local colorists saw Appalachia as an "unknown" region because it had not yet been made a literary focus, Shapiro writes, the northern Protestant churches viewed the region as "unchurched" because their denominations were not represented among the mountains (32). Though there were local churches in the southern mountains before, during, and after the missionary movement, they were seen to be just as peculiar and outside of the mainstream American identity as their congregations. And as the post-Civil War mission of northern Protestant churches was "the establishment of a unified and homogeneous Christian nation through the integration of unassimilated populations into the mainstream of American life" (Shapiro 32), which was in turn fueled by a sense of denominational competition, the mountains of southern Appalachia seemed ripe for the picking.

In determining appropriate spheres for benevolent work, different denominations of the northern churches held to varying identifiers of need; some cited reasons of geography, others race or nativity, and still others the "degree of American-ness" portrayed by the population under consideration (Shapiro 41). In discovering Appalachia, it seemed, they had hit triple pay dirt. Geographically isolated from the rest of the nation by the mountains lending the region its name, the degree of "American-ness" demonstrated by the Appalachian

people had already been called into question and found considerably lacking. The issue of racial difference, alluded to in Harney's "A Strange Land and Peculiar People" with his account of physiological variations—"marked peculiarities of the anatomical frame" such as "elongation of the bones, the contour of the facial angle, the relative proportion or disproportion of the extremities, the loose muscular attachment of the ligatures, and the harsh features" (qtd. in Shapiro 3)—became more formalized with the coining of the term "mountain whites," largely attributed to the American Missionary Association (AMA). This racialized term used by the AMA to classify Appalachian residents gave rise to the understanding and treatment of Appalachians as the equivalent of other minorities and, according to Erica Abrams Locklear's *Negotiating a Perilous Empowerment: Appalachian Women's Literacies*, led to the categorization of "Appalachia" as a separate ethnicity (17).

The treatment of "mountain white" as an ethnicity of its own, separate from that of non-mountain white, meant that denominational work in the region was classified as Domestic Foreign Missions rather than simply Domestic Missions. Because of this distinction, much like the work that took place with the freedmen in the South, benevolent work in the Appalachian region emphasized educating the population in not only Christian values but *American* values. The indication that Appalachians and Appalachian values were not-American—were, in fact, "foreign"—owed its existence to and reaffirmed the sense that Appalachia was not only something "other" than America. It was the American antithesis.

In truth, the perceived "needs" of the mountaineers did not drive the desire of northern denominations to extend benevolent work into the region; rather, missionary work at the close of the nineteenth century found its motivation from the search for "new worlds to conquer" (Shapiro 49). Appalachian otherness and the "needs" of the region merely acted as

justification for extending missionary work into the southern mountains and as “an immediate rationalization in terms of which the appeal for funds and workers might be made” (Shapiro 40). In fact, northern denominations methodically used descriptions of the southern mountain region produced by local colorists and the freshly formed concern toward the threat against American unity to bolster their appeal for financial support.

Furthermore, in contrast to previous work with the southern freedmen, work in the southern mountains did not begin with the perception of need. When northern denominations extended missionary work to the freedmen, they began by first establishing needs then designed programs, agencies, and rationales specific to the perceived needs of the population. However, northern missionaries gave no critical consideration to the needs of the mountain folk, implementing programs that had been previously established in some other context instead. This approach meant that in some instances these programs were altered to fit the existing context of the southern mountains, but, more often, it meant that the circumstances of the region were framed in a way that made the application of existing programs seem appropriate. In short, the southern mountains and its inhabitants were exploited for the purposes of furthering the advancement of outside organizations, and the Appalachia that the church encountered—and the image of Appalachia that they subsequently perpetuated—was the Appalachia of the local color writers.

### ***From Churchin’ to Schoolin’***

The Presbyterian denomination was the first of the northern missionary agents to establish educational work in the southern mountain region. It was their belief that religion and knowledge were indivisible from one another and their firm stance that the church could

not flourish among ignorance or illiteracy. Furthermore, they saw the discrepancies between Appalachia and America as primarily a “social problem” that could be ameliorated by introducing into the region the “two pillars of American culture”: the church and the school (Shapiro 57). If denominational agencies were successful in instituting both the church and the school in Appalachia, they would also be successful in restoring the region and elevating the mountaineer to modern American life, effectively eliminating the threat this “exceptional population” posed to American unity and homogeneity (Shapiro 57).

Education, then, became the central focus of the missionary work being done among the “mountain whites,” concentrating on relieving the region of its illiteracy, ignorance, poverty, and general degradation. According to Sharon Teets’ “Education in Appalachia,” published in *A Handbook to Appalachia: An Introduction to the Region*, the majority of these schools were fashioned after the grammar-school model, though modified somewhat to incorporate a more evangelical curriculum and the mission of “sav[ing] the mountain child from the errors of his background” (123). The missionary movement identified mountain speech, ignorance, and even values as things to be “corrected” (Teets 123), and sought to assimilate the mountaineer into American culture, erasing the blight of mountain culture from the American canvas.

Although the popular interpretation among those with their eyes trained on the region figured Appalachian culture as something to correct—foregrounding the belief that to deviate from American culture was *wrong* on a fundamental level—another kind of work did reach the mountains at the turn of the century. A segment of the educational missionary movement favored settlement schools, which took their example from similar foundations in Europe and the Northeast. Hindman Settlement School, one of the better-known institutes of its kind,

was established in Knott County, Kentucky, in 1902 by Katherine Pettit and May Stone. Both women grew up in Kentucky (though a significant part of Pettit's education occurred in the Northeast) and were active in the political and social movement that defined the Progressive Era; thus, Progressivism was at the heart of their school mission. Even so, Pettit and Stone sought to balance the improvement of the Hindman community with the preservation of mountain culture, and their school was "designed to be community based and to provide cultural and educational activities for the entire community, not just the children" (Teets 124). By structuring the mission of the school as community-based, Pettit and Stone honored what is perhaps one of the most significant elements of mountain culture: closeness of and loyalty to family and, by extension, community.

Though settlement schools sought to preserve mountain culture, Teets writes, "Some analysts accused missionaries of modifying reality to make it more worthy, in their minds, of being preserved" (124). In a sense, founders of settlement schools were actively seeking a return to the more romanticized sense of Appalachia that colored the earliest writings of the Local Color movement. One example of the settlement schools' slight revision of mountain culture can be found in music education. During the time period, the banjo was the preferred instrument; however, settlement schools introduced and endorsed the mountain dulcimer as "more appropriate to the highly romanticized image of Appalachian people as speakers of archaic English and lovers of fine craft" (Teets 124). So, although the settlement school movement perceived mountain culture as something to be fostered and preserved rather than a problem to correct, the mountain culture they actively promoted was a revised exaggeration of reality.

Furthermore, unlike the settlement schools they were modeled after, settlement schools in the Appalachian region did not confront economic and social issues but seemed to deliberately avoid and ignore these issues, such as the negative consequences of industrialization on the region. Oftentimes, settlement schools were supported by coal companies (entities almost exclusively from outside the region) and therefore “could not be openly critical of the injustices imposed on the workers in the mines” (Teets 124). Such institutions, therefore, became a means to uphold and reaffirm the social and economic hierarchy, maintaining a population easily exploited and held down. Furthermore, settlement schools marked the beginning of a series of double-edged campaigns that by outward appearances sought to advance a less fortunate and neglected people while, in truth, subtly reinforcing the existing social stratification.

### *A Campaign against Illiteracy*

In 1911, Cora Wilson Stewart started the Moonlight School project in Rowan County, Kentucky. Her program focused solely on teaching adults eighteen years or older the skills of reading and writing. Because the population Stewart worked with labored during the day, the only time available to them was the nighttime. They walked to classes by the light of the moon, lending the program its name. Stewart’s goal of effectively eliminating illiteracy across the state of Kentucky by 1930 brought her campaign to national attention, and many other states quickly adopted her methods and materials. However, the intense publicity Stewart’s program received “had the effect of casting the people of Kentucky and much of the Appalachian region as unable to read and write” (Locklear 31). And although this placed uncomfortable and unwanted national scrutiny on the region, Stewart relied on and

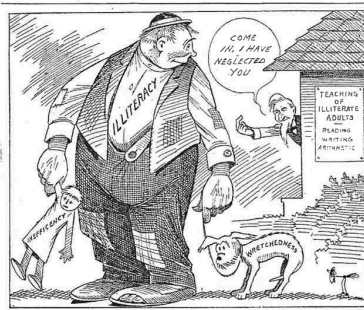


strategically used the notoriety of the increasingly popular stereotypes introduced and institutionalized by the local colorists and northern missionary movement to raise the needed funds to support her campaign against illiteracy (Locklear 32). After the First World War, Stewart went a step further and played more strongly to the nationalistic agenda with its desire for American unity and homogeneity, claiming that a literate citizen was a better citizen, turning her campaign against illiteracy into a patriotic movement (Locklear 31-5).

Though Stewart herself was a native Kentuckian, and her intentions seemed at heart benevolent, Locklear writes that Stewart still clearly “harbored inherent judgments” about the people she worked with (34). Locklear cites passages from Stewart’s own writing in which Stewart brags about the changes in mountain speech she was able to accomplish through her program: “‘the most glaring monstrosities of pronunciation were weeded out,’ and... ‘a language conscience was created where none had existed before’” (qtd. in Locklear 34). It is this conscience, Locklear writes, that stood at the heart of Stewart’s program—a conscience that internally monitored and identified mountain speech as wrong, as a “monstrosity,” a conscience that likely created identity conflicts within many of Stewart’s students.

The national attention that focused on the Moonlight School project, at least in part, took the form of demeaning characterization of the project’s adult learners and became a fixed and increasingly popular defining element of Appalachian culture as viewed through the American lens. Locklear illustrates this occurrence with two newspaper cartoons by Billy Borne, a cartoonist for the *Asheville Citizen Times* newspaper in Asheville, North Carolina.

Isn't It About Time for School?  
By BILLY BORNE



News Item: Reports of the recent National Illiteracy Conference show that there are today 5,000,000 illiterates in the United States.

Figure 1.1 This newspaper cartoon appears in the front of Della Day's scrapbook, housed in the North Carolina Collection, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, North Carolina. It was drawn by Billy Borne, a cartoonist for the Asheville Citizen-Times newspaper. Copyright 2000, Asheville, NC Citizen-Times, Reprinted with permission.

The first of the two images, “Isn’t It About Time for School?,” shows a large, simple-looking man with the word “ILLITERACY” scrawled across his front. The man’s clothes are patched, his trousers held up by a single suspender, and his toes peak through worn shoes. His right hand grasps the arm of inefficiency while his left holds the leash of wretchedness. The man glances over his left shoulder to take in Uncle Sam, who is leaning out of a schoolhouse saying, “Come in, I have neglected you” (featured in Locklear 36). Not only is Borne commenting on the degradation of the mountain folk and exploiting popular stereotypes, he is also capitalizing on the issues of citizenry Stewart writes about and the desire for nationalistic unity that has been at the core of both Christian and educational mission work in the southern mountains from the start.



Figure 1.2 “Out of the Fog” by Billy Borne, published in the July 1, 1927 edition of the Asheville Citizen Times newspaper. Copyright 2000, Asheville, NC Citizen-Times, Reprinted with permission.

The second of Borne's cartoons, titled "Out of the Fog," appeared on July 1, 1927: Locklear describes the image this way:

Here, Borne depicts a man and woman using a rope labeled "Buncombe Co. Adult Schools" to climb out of the fog of illiteracy toward a better existence, which he draws as the sun, shining its knowledge on these mountain folk. Lest viewers misunderstand the identity of these climbers, Borne attaches a tag to the back of the man's shirt that reads "Illiterate Mountain Folks," and he blocks the woman's face from view with a traditional bonnet. (38-9)

In addition to perpetuating already commonly held stereotypes of illiteracy, poverty, ignorance, low-living, and the like, Borne's second cartoon also acts as commentary on the gender roles of the mountains. The man, whose face is clear and distinct, leads the climb into the so-called "better existence," whereas the female caricature—who has no distinguishable face, suggesting that she has no distinguishable identity—follows behind the man, to whom she is tied and who, to some degree, supports the weight of the climbing woman. Given the wave of feminism more urban areas were experiencing during this time, Borne's depiction of the Appalachian woman is offered as a critique of the lack of progress as regards liberation of female identity, furthering the notion that Appalachian culture is dismally behind modern times.

Both textual and visual depictions of the men and women of the southern Appalachian mountain region continued thusly, promoting the sensation that the campaign against illiteracy was doing the work of "saving" the mountain people and uplifting them to a "better existence" (better existence, of course, meaning the existence of non-Appalachian America). By the time the 1920s drew to a close, a distinct image of Appalachia had taken

form, and, as the Second World War began, concerns about Appalachian literacy and betterment slipped from national attention.

### ***Rediscovery of Appalachia***

Though Appalachia slipped from the American consciousness for a time, the region was “rediscovered” with a vengeance in the 1960s. In the spring of 1960, Democratic presidential candidate John F. Kennedy came to West Virginia during his general election campaign. During this campaign tour, Kennedy visited some of the old coal camps and witnessed firsthand the extreme poverty and desolate living conditions of the mountain people. Moved by what he saw, Kennedy went before cameras and promised that if he were elected president he would introduce a program in Congress for aid to West Virginia within sixty days of beginning his administration (Eller 202). Richard Straw writes in “Appalachian History,” published in *A Handbook to Appalachia*, that Kennedy’s sympathetic reaction to what he saw, and the vast media coverage of his campaign in the coal camps, won Kennedy the primary and later the election (18). The coverage of Kennedy’s campaign succeeded in doing more than advancing Kennedy’s climb to the presidency; it restored the Appalachian region to national attention.

Immediately following the election, all the major television networks made their way to the Appalachian region, and for years following there were countless programs and newspaper articles focusing on the poverty and “backwardness” of the mountain people, effectively coloring the region and its people in a “uniformly negative light” (Straw 18). It was this surge of renewed interest in the region—and the distinct tone of this interest—that fueled the immediate popularity of James Dickey’s publication of *Deliverance* in 1970 and

the screenplay that followed in 1979. Dickey's depiction of the region is one of primitive wildness, and the people (if you can call them that) are shown to be ignorant and almost animalistic as they hunt down, beat, and sodomize the city dwellers. Dickey's and others' representations of the southern mountain region and its people grew out of the already institutionalized "fact" of Appalachian otherness, but added to it a more intense sense of deviancy and repulsion than before. The "rediscovery" of Appalachia during the 1960s resurrected and reinforced the image of Appalachian otherness, which has consistently maintained its place in the spotlight ever since and informs the current understanding of what it means to be Appalachian.

### ***This Place Called Appalachia***

*The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness.*  
(Psalms 72:3, KJV)

There is nothing quite like the feeling of coming home. When I come up out of that last valley, and the land on either side of the road drops off, my breath catches in my chest every time. The deep blues and purples of the mountains—*my* mountains—stand tall as gods to the left, the right, straight ahead, disappearing into the cloudbank. And I know I'm home. In that instant—every time, the same moment—I feel lighter and heavier all at once, the curious feeling that follows after a realignment of self, where certain things are brushed off and put away, and a piece of yourself you don't realize you're missing until it returns to you reattaches itself. It's a realignment—a reawakening—of the spirit, and, like the prodigal son, I feel very much like the prodigal *daughter* returning to the *Mother*.

Mountain folks have a deep love of and connection with the land that is steeped in a strong sense of spirituality. According to Deborah Vansau McCauley's chapter on religion in

Richard Straw's and H. Tyler Blethen's *High Mountains Rising: Appalachia in Time and Place*, the "biblical identification of hills and mountains as holy places to flee to, to seek refuge in, and to become closer to God in has not escaped the understandings and experiences of mountain people" (188). The land, the earth that mountain folk live on and work, is a creation of God, an extension of the Creator, and is holy in its own right. The mountains are a constant presence of spirituality, and for those of us who leave and return, they are truly places of refuge. Even though I have been few places in the world, I have been away enough to know that no other place compares. These mountains are home to a people and a culture that cannot be found outside the region, except by out-migration. Although not different in the sense of lack or deficiency, mountain culture is distinct to its people.

Appalachian folklife is a unique compilation of ancient traditions from a multitude of cultural entities whose close interactions with one another over a period of time in a geographically isolated location caused cultural boundaries to blur and, later, altogether disappear. In an essay about Appalachian folklife, published in *High Mountains Rising*, Michael Ann Williams suggests that while mountain culture is predominantly associated with an amalgamation of Celtic and British traditions, which do feature heavily, there are other notable influences often overlooked: for instance, from continental Europe came the Swedish, the Finnish, and, most markedly, those of Germanic ethnicity, who influenced log construction in the region and are responsible for the Appalachian dulcimer and the introduction of the Jack tale; African-American culture contributed the banjo and clogging, as well as influencing oral tradition; and the Cherokee, whose part in the development of mountain culture is vital, lend the essential folkways of dance, basketry, food traditions, folk medicine, and herbal lore (Williams 137). Over time the cultures of these separate ethnicities

blended and gave rise to a culture in its own right. As Appalachian culture is not monolithic and the experience of Appalachian culture varies from one individual to the next, what follows is not meant as a generalization but as a series of snapshots based on my own experiences and the work of scholars.

### ***Mountain Religion***

Christianity features centrally in the construction of Appalachian culture and in the lives of Appalachian people, and as Loyal Jones wrote, “[the people] are religious in the sense that most of [their] values and the meaning [they] find in life spring from the Bible. To understand mountaineers, one must understand [their] religion” (qtd. Sohn 55-6). Spirituality and faith are not confined to the church building and Sunday services, but permeate everyday comings and goings, from values and behaviors to systems of reasoning.

In “Religion in Appalachia,” Melinda Bollar Wagner writes that “denominational labels can be misleading,” because although Methodist churches may exist across the nation, many Methodists would be confounded by the unrecognizable (to them) United Methodist churches found in the southern Appalachian region (182); the term “Appalachian mountain religion” was, therefore, applied to the region “to signify that it is a unique form, not the same as denominations in other regions” (183). Although the list of characteristics that make Appalachian mountain religion unique is extensive, the two most important to this project are fundamentalism and puritanism.

Fundamentalism signifies the most conservative end of the “liberal-to-conservative continuum” and “is associated with a literal interpretation of the Bible” (Wagner 185). Fundamentalist Christians believe that the Bible, though written by the hand of man, was

created through divine inspiration and, therefore, is entirely “authentic and unerring” (Wagner 185). Literal interpretation informs many of the beliefs, values, and customs of mountain culture, including the construction of gender roles, but also figures heavily in the reasoning and thought processes of mountain folk. Mountain Christians’ Calvinistic emphases place the will and initiative of God first, followed by “human cooperation” (McCauley 182). This reasoning is evident in daily conversations of mountain folk, even those who do not regularly—if ever—attend church, and often appears in the following or similar ways: commonplace qualifications of “God willin’” in conversations regarding future plans and intentions, designation of the well-being of others and the recovery of the ill or injured to be left “in God’s hands,” and reliance on the will of God for improvement in trying or troubling circumstances. Human will and ability are secondary to and are often altogether replaced by divine will and influence.

Puritanism, jokingly referred to as “the fear that someone somewhere is having a good time,” is often the bedfellow of fundamentalism in mountain religion (Wagner 185). Informed by literal interpretations of the Bible, and often quoting directly from the Bible, mountain churches use Puritanism to devise a set of rules and regulations that govern the behaviors of their congregants. According to Wagner, these rules are likely to prohibit such things as alcohol, cards, and dancing, and may even include regulations about hairstyle and attire (185). Even though many mountain churches may not hold to a specific set of governing rules, particularly ones as strict as outright forbidding alcohol, cards, dancing, and the like, without doubt, distinct social expectations for church members, which also extend to the larger mountain community, exist: for example, expectations specific to the female gender; a general prohibition of inappropriate or “unchristian-like” language, especially in



public; and displaying a “Christian” attitude toward family, friends, and strangers alike—the belief of “love thy neighbor as thy brother” is expected to extend even toward those with whom individuals have less than pleasant relationships and toward whom feelings are often negative.

Although not all Appalachian churches subscribe to fundamentalism and/or Puritanism, and although not all Appalachians are regular church-goers, the influences of these belief systems have influenced daily life in a variety of ways: many shops are closed on Sundays; you cannot purchase alcohol in some counties on Sundays, and other counties are designated “dry counties” (meaning alcohol is simply not sold in the county at all); local newspapers will contain heavily religious language; local radio and television stations will often replace their regular broadcasts with a local Christian broadcast or a live feed of a local Sunday church service; a family bowing to give thanks over a meal in a restaurant is not uncommon; and phrases like “praise God” and “Lord willin” and declarations of “Lord have mercy!” are sprinkled throughout conversation (Wagner 187-8). Appalachian mountain religion is the foundation of the mountain belief system and informs many of the mountain values.

### ***Mountain Values***

Although the values that define Appalachian mountain culture may not, independently, be unique to the culture, and combinations of two or more of these may be found in other cultures, the intensity to which they exist in tandem with one another and the degree to which they are regarded create an intricately interwoven set of values that are distinctly Appalachian. At the core of mountain culture is closeness of family and

inextricably linked to the value of family is the value of place. As Katherine Kelleher Sohn writes in *Whistlin' and Crowin' Women of Appalachia: Literacy Practices since College*, “the land has everything to do with the closeness of family in the region” (60). Many families live within five miles of one another, in the same holler, or scattered across a plot of land that has been in the family for generations. Place is living history, a holder of family heritage; place is a keeper of memories, and remembers lives, voices, and stories long after the last survivor of these things has passed. Place holds us together, and holds us to one another—though I can never be sure if place is what strengthens the tie to family, or if it’s family that strengthens the tie to place.

Even so, the centrality of the familial unit in Appalachian culture implies that family is naturally the highest priority—family, not the individual, comes first, without exception. Furthermore, to clarify, the understanding of “family” is far more extensive within mountain culture than it is in many non-Appalachian cultures. Oftentimes, children grow up with cousins as their closest playmates, thinking of them more as siblings, and extend the terms “aunt” and “uncle” to include their second cousins (those who grew up closely with the children’s own parents)—in my family, the grandchildren (the way my generation is still referred to, even though some of us have children of our own) are particularly close with the great-aunts and uncles as well. These are family tendencies that already show promise of enduring, as I act the aunt to the two-year-old daughter of my own cousin (my mother’s sister’s daughter). In addition to extended family and distant kin, many close family friends are treated as honorary family members.

Closely linked to the value of family is that of modesty. In mountain culture, we believe we are just as “good” (or “worthy” or whatever adjective you wish to use) as

everybody else—no worse, and certainly no better. To think or act differently would be to put on airs or boast, a transgression of behavior that would undoubtedly spark the rebuke of “You really showed yourself this time, Marie” from my mother or grandmother. Above all, this modesty precludes the behavior of “gettin’ above yer raisin’s,” one of the most horrifying and damning accusations that can be laid at your feet, one I have been on the receiving end of more than once. Getting above your raisings, a common phrase in mountain culture, is defined by Anita Puckett as

behavior that suggests a person is evaluating himself or herself as superior to family and close kin in the community. Speaking “proper,” getting advanced education or exhibiting presumptive displays of wealth are some behaviors commonly associated with [the phrase]. (qtd. in Sohn 62)

As Sohn suggests, modesty prohibits bragging about natural talents and accomplishments, but it also precludes the *ownership* of talent and accomplishment—something I, admittedly, continue to struggle with. More often than not, the combination of closeness to family and adherence to this form of modesty can be detrimental to Appalachians, and especially so to Appalachian women, “keep[ing] them from achieving their potential, insisting on their silence when they should be speaking” (Sohn 62). Women who pursue higher education must be careful to walk a fine line, oftentimes finding themselves making hard choices between permanent loyalty to family and mountain values and a newer loyalty to the academic community.

The attitude often held toward higher education, as demonstrated by the phrase “gettin’ above yer raisin’s,” reflects the value placed on hard and honest work. In general, mountain folk are predominantly working class and equate work with physical labor—the

work of the body. Those who engage in scholarly, academic, or similar work (the work of the mind) are not engaged in “real” work that requires the work of the body. Similarly, “book learning” is not valued as “real” knowledge because it has no application to or connection with the material world (Sohn 46). Furthermore, “book learning” cancels common sense, which Victor Villanueva defines as “the commonly held conceptions of the world held by various cultures, a culture’s way of seeing and believing...carried out and transmitted by discourse” (qtd. in Sohn 46). Essentially, common sense is valued as the personal empathy and experiences that make you a member of the culture; by attaining “book learning” or, more specifically, a college degree, you erase whatever personal empathy and experiences you share with and that connect you to mountain culture. And so, behind the accusation of getting above your raisings lies the more pointed and painful implication that, in doing so, you are rejecting your home culture and your people, an assumption and phenomenon that I explore in depth in chapter three.

### ***Mountain Gender***

Gender construction in Appalachia is a curious thing; although many characteristics designate the region a patriarchy, women “figure centrally as the foundation of the Appalachian family” and many of the culture’s traditions, practices, and beliefs are transmitted in a way more typical for a matriarchal structure (Sohn 63). Even so, though strong figures, Appalachian women find themselves cast in a more traditional role, often accepting theirs as secondary to the male role. This gender hierarchy owes much of its origin to the mountain Christian’s literal interpretation of the Bible, wherein the man is designated as the head of the house and the wife must look to her husband in all things.

Women in the region are tied to their roles as wives, mothers, and caretakers, and much of their identity is defined in relation to others. Mountain culture socializes the mountain woman from birth to grow into these roles, to become a wife and mother; her place in the mountain community relies upon her dutifully stepping into these “appropriate” roles. For women in the mountain community, Linda Scott DeRosier writes, marriage is “a crucial step in beginning a ‘real’ life” and that once a woman is married “[her] identity [is] expected to be completely submerged” in that of her husband (qtd. in Locklear 109). Although the Appalachian woman is often a strong, powerful figure in both family and community, and although many marriages function—for the most part—as an equal partnership, that the woman’s place remains secondary to the man’s survives as unspoken truth.

Mountain gender roles are a site of extreme contention for Appalachian women who have entered into academia. Women who step outside of the Appalachian culture are suddenly presented with alternative options, alternative definitions of what it means to be a woman. Accepting nontraditional gender roles and, especially, moving into an alternative female role enacted within Appalachian culture threaten the stability of those roles and call into question the system of faith on which those roles reside. In addition, introducing alternative female roles into the Appalachian culture redefines the family unit, disrupting the structure of authority and reshaping the responsibilities and obligations of both the wife/mother and the husband/father by redefining the familial work as either “woman’s work” or “man’s work.” When a woman chooses to enact non-Appalachian female role, she can no longer fit within the space where the Appalachian woman resides.

### *Contextualizing Literacy*

The image of Appalachia that prevails is one of lack, of difference in the sense of deficiency, of “otherness,” of a people in need of salvation and uplift, and the same is true of the perception of Appalachian literacy. Beneath the weight of the implications of Appalachian “otherness” and in the face of stereotypes that surround the region, Appalachians pursue literacy and a voice within academic discourse. For the Appalachian woman, the weight she must work under is threefold: ethnicity (Appalachian), class (working-class), and gender (woman). Within the context of these identifiers she must blaze the path to academic credentialing. Once she has acquired these identifiers, she must learn to balance them with the still powerful influence of her primary inherited discourse.

## Chapter Two: Literacy, Discourse, and Performance

### *The Literacy Myth*

A reading campaign poster for the Dover Public Library in Dover, Ohio, depicts a scattering of books, each in various stages of metamorphosing into butterflies. The words “Freedom to Read” are scrawled in the lower right-hand corner beneath a fully formed butterfly in flight. Although the poster serves as a statement against the censorship and banning of books, a deeper message is also evident to even the most casual observer: not only does literacy, defined as the ability to read, write, and reason proficiently, hold the promise of freedom, it holds the promise of complete transformation.



The transfiguration from book to butterfly enters, consciously or subconsciously, the viewer/reader’s psyche, a representing there his or her own transformation—the possibility that (s)he can become something more than (s)he is, can even become something else entirely.

This possibility shifts the message from one of reading as a pleasurable activity providing freedom from daily stresses and obligations to one of literacy as a roadmap to transcendence of class and circumstance. Viewed in this light, literacy is the great equalizer,

the liberator of those held down by circumstances of birth, and the distributor of power, advancement, and betterment. Literacy is not just *a* tool for success; it is *the* tool. This poster suggests that by attaining literacy an individual will, without question, experience transformation, growing from ugly caterpillar to beautiful butterfly. What this image fails to depict, prompt the viewer into considering, or even hint at are the politics surrounding the attainment of literacy, the limitations placed upon its promised freedom, and the costs associated with subsequent transformation.

Another, perhaps more familiar, work seemingly immortalizing the freedom allowed to us by literacy is Anselm Kiefer's *Book with Wings*, a lead sculpture of an enormous open book with great wings sprouting from either side, supported by a tall pedestal.



However, in her publication *Defying the Odds: Class and Pursuit of Higher Literacy*, Donna Dunbar-Odom offers a reading that is somewhat different from the popular perception of Kiefer's work, writing, "Kiefer's choice of a medium is not accidental; he could have produced the sculpture in aluminum or wood or even paper, so the choice of lead is significant" (1). Rather than simple, unrestricted freedom, Kiefer's medium suggests that



literacy allows us a limited and conditional freedom only, the “flight of imagination,” for instance, and further suggests that the materiality of our lives—who we are, what we are made from, where we come from—“can never be overcome....In other words, literacy can only give us the illusion of freedom as we remain weighted, inexorable, to our material lives” (Dunbar-Odom 1).

Those things that make us who and what we are, that determine where we are situated in the world are an intrinsic part of our identity. The materiality of the Appalachian woman, for instance, includes speech patterns, class origin, mountain values and beliefs, and especially the stigma of Appalachian “otherness.” Whether we maintain these elements as active components of our identity, whether we deliberately choose to move away from them, they remain essential building blocks of our original sense of identity and, therefore, inform our current sense of self. Likewise, the materiality of our lives influences our position in the world, others’ perception of that position, and our ability to change or alter that position. Literacy alone cannot provide us freedom from the restrictions of our material lives; a nexus of factors must be at play.

American culture, however, continues to remain heavily invested in the conviction that literacy holds the key to absolute liberation and has the power to transform us from what we are into what we aspire to be. In the public eye, literacy is freedom from poverty and prejudice and oppression; literacy can move us fluidly up the rungs of the socio-economic ladder and can effectively transform the working-class Appalachian into the middle-class American (Dunbar-Odom 1). This belief, no doubt, emerges from and cannot be separated from the notion of the “American Dream.” This specific American ethos promises the opportunity for prosperity and success, a land in which “life should be better and richer and

fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement” regardless of social class or circumstances of birth (Adams 214-15). Interpretation of the “American Dream” is simple: try and you will succeed—but the unspoken thought is that if you do not succeed, the fault is your own. The reality, unfortunately, is not so cut and dry: factors beyond an individual’s responsibility can derail the mythic certainty that has come to characterize the “Dream.”

### ***Literacy as a Social Practice***

In order fully to comprehend the complex nature of literacy, we must first acknowledge and understand literacy as a social practice. Although the skills associated with reading and writing are certainly a part of literacy, they are only one aspect; literacy is not restricted to these skills, nor is it exclusively bound to the traditional sense of a “text.” Rather, as David Barton and Mary Hamilton assert in *Local Literacies: Reading and Writing in One Community*, “Like all human activity, literacy is essentially social, and it is located in the interaction between people” (3). What people *do* with literacy skills, the literacy practices they perform and partake in throughout their day-to-day lives, provide a more useful definition of literacy. According to Barton and Hamilton,

Literacy practices are the general cultural ways of utilising written language which people draw upon in their lives....However practices are not observable units of behaviour since they also involve values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships. This includes people’s awareness of literacy, constructions of literacy and discourses of literacy, how people talk about and make sense of literacy. These processes are internal to the individual; at the same time,

practices are the social processes which connect people with one another, and they include shared cognitions represented in ideologies and social identities.

(6-7)

Barton and Hamilton's description of literacy practices demonstrates the situated nature of literacy; in other words, literacy "always exists in a social context" (7). The contextual nature of literacy further suggests the multiplicity of literacy, meaning every cultural framework contains its separate functioning literacy. These cultural literacies offer differing ways of "reading" and responding to various socially based "texts"; in other words, the appropriate language, behaviors, values, attitudes, feelings, and ways of establishing and maintaining social relationships differ across cultural boundaries, and literacy practices specific to the culture(s) in which we are located provide us with the tools for successful navigation of the cultural construct. For instance, Appalachian literacy practices provide an individual with the knowledge and ability necessary for actively and appropriately participating within the Appalachian culture; the same is true for an individual participating within the academic culture.

### ***Controlling the Literacy Currency***

These practices, however, are "shaped by social rules which regulate the use and distribution of texts, prescribing who may produce and have access to them" (Barton and Hamilton 7). Herein we catch our first glimpse of the double-edged sword of literacy: while literacy holds the potential for social and economic advancement (as countless years of personal testimony assert), it also creates the means by which those in power control who is allowed (or denied) access to the tools and resources necessary for upward mobility and to

what height these individuals might climb on the proverbial ladder of success. As illustrated in chapter one, the Appalachian region provides us with the perfect example for recognizing this hierarchy of power over the currency of literacy play out. The missionaries coming from outside the region were in full possession of that power and demonstrated that fact in defining the Appalachians as illiterate and poorly educated, in setting the standards for literacy in the region, and in determining who would receive education and how that education would occur.

Deborah Brandt's *Literacy in American Lives* further "disrupt[s] assumptions about literacy's power to change personal and economic circumstances" by taking a closer look at literacy as an instrument of gatekeeping (Dunbar-Odom 2). Brandt writes:

Expanding literacy undeniably has been an instrument for more democratic access to learning, political participation, and upward mobility. At the same time, it has become one of the sharpest tools for stratification and denial of opportunity. Print in the twentieth century was the sea on which ideas and other cultural goods flowed easily among regions, occupations, and social classes. But it also was a mechanism by which the great bureaucracies of modern life tightened around us, along with their systems of testing, sorting, controlling, and coercing. (*Literacy* 2)

Brandt not only identifies literacy as a means for regulating access to the resources that allow for upward mobility: according to Dunbar-Odom, Brandt also argues that literacy "provides the means to determine the standards for what sorts of literate practices will and will not allow access to that mobility" (Dunbar-Odom 2). Individuals with a mastery of the dominant literacy and in positions of power (namely, the white-male upper-class elitist crust of

mainstream American society) determine the value placed on various literacies and set the standards for the literate practices that allow for movement between social classes and for achieving and maintaining membership in a higher class than that to which one is born.

These standards of literacy, Brandt goes on to point out, are fluid: “Unending cycles of competition and change keep raising the stakes for literacy achievement” (*Literacy 2*). Brandt expands on this idea of competition in her article “Sponsors of Literacy,” likening the attainment of literacy to the possession of land, an extremely valuable commodity in the American economy and “a key resource in gaining profit and edge” (18). The extent of the value placed on literacy as a resource is indicative of how far people are willing to go in order to secure literacy both for themselves and their children. But Brandt further argues, “It also explains why the powerful work so persistently to conscript and ration the powers of literacy” (“Sponsors” 18). Literacy, in essence, becomes a currency to hoard, ration, and control. The continuous escalation of literacy standards and expectations degrades the value of current literacies, rendering them sub-standard and virtually obsolete. This dynamic places a constant demand on people to do more and more to meet the constantly escalating literacy standards. Although such demands pose little problem to members of the dominant class who have unbridled access to the resources necessary for rising to meet new standards of literacy, these demands act to exclude the subordinate minority who have limited means and opportunity to access these very same resources.

### ***Literacy Sponsors***

What Brandt terms sponsors of literacy makes access to its resources possible. Sponsors are “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach,

model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way” (“Sponsors” 16). Sponsors are figures of power, whose wealth, knowledge, and status typically exceed that of the sponsored. The relationship between sponsor and sponsored is one of reciprocity: the sponsor lends resources and credibility to the sponsored, but in return stand to gain, either directly or indirectly, from the successes of the sponsored. Therefore, sponsors “set the terms for access to literacy and wield powerful incentives for compliance and loyalty” and serve as a “tangible reminder that literacy throughout history has always required permission, sanction, assistance, coercion, or, at minimum, contact with existing trade routes” (Brandt, “Sponsors” 16).

Exposure to and contact with powerful sponsors are essential for attaining higher literacy and are not equally available across social and economic classes. Throughout their lives, individuals born to affluent, upper-class social and economic groups have “multiple and redundant contacts with powerful literacy sponsors as a routine part of their economic and political privileges” (Brandt, “Sponsors” 19). Even though contact with powerful sponsors seems to be a birthright of the affluent, those of lower social and economic positioning, such as working-class Appalachians, are not afforded the same niceties; rather, these individuals experience less consistent exposure to and contact with the sort of sponsors that matter: socially, politically, and economically powerful sponsors with the ability to make academic and economic success possible and attainable.

Further complicating perceived innocence of literacy are the strings attached to sponsorship—the terms under which sponsors allow access to their resources and credibility. Not given freely, unattached, sponsorship exists instead within or as companion to an ideological package (Brandt, “Sponsors” 17). In order to gain permission to access the

sponsor's resources, the sponsored must accept his or her ideologies and, to some extent, adopt them as his or her own. This circumstance brings us again back within the contextual parameters of social and economic class. The ideologies presented by the sponsor are familiar in some sense to the affluent sponsored, building off of or existing in relation to the ideologies they currently hold, as the affluent sponsored exists within a similar social and economic context as the sponsor. For the less affluent, lower-class sponsored, the same cannot be said, and the stark contrasts between the separate ideologies can have lasting (and sometimes devastating) effects on those who find themselves caught between conflicting ideologies.

The interests of the sponsors oftentimes shape the literacy of the sponsored, and "obligations to one's sponsors run deep" (Brandt 20). Because the shape literacy takes is often modeled after the sponsor's interests and ideologies, certain tensions and conflicts arise for sponsored individuals whose home communities subscribe to a vastly different, conflicting set of ideologies. A most powerful illustration of these arising tensions can be seen in the movement between rural Appalachian literacy and academic literacy, where obligations and loyalties to family and family-based ideologies are in competition and conflict with obligations and loyalties to the sponsors of academic literacy and their companion ideologies.

From basic understandings of work to be valued, to methods of reasoning and the like, each faction holds to separate and conflicting estimations of the way things "should be done": mountain folk value physical labor, or the work of the body, and view "book learning" as having little to no value as "real" work; conversely, academics value intellectual work, or the work of the mind, over the work of the body, oftentimes classifying physical

labor as “beneath” their station. Similarly, academics value syllogistic reasoning whereas Appalachians typically place value in Christian fundamentalist reasoning (Locklear 123). Both the values of work and the methods of reasoning held by each community stand in stark opposition to one another, and valuing one set of premises automatically denotes the devaluing of the opposing premises. As a member of the Appalachian community, therefore being bound to its ideologies, to value the work and reasoning of the academic is to be markedly un-Appalachian; likewise, to be a member of the academic community and value the work and reasoning of the Appalachian is to be distinctly un-academic. In other words, membership in the one community (and the subscription to the ideologies of that community) precludes membership in and subscription to the ideologies of the second. To be caught in the in-between means to walk a difficult and treacherous path, as chapter three will illustrate.

### *Discourses of Literacy*

As conversations regarding the nature of literacy, how literacy is determined, attained, regulated, allowed, and withheld as well as the inextricable tie between literacy and ideology have demonstrated, literacy is a much more complex enterprise than gaining reading and writing skills. Literacy is the ability to play the right social role within and project the language, behaviors, values, beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and ways of being appropriate to a specific social context. These “saying (writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing combinations” are what James Paul Gee calls “Discourses” (526). The Discourse community we are born into is our home-based Discourse community, and our command over that Discourse—the ability fully to enact the “combinations” of the Discourse—is our first literacy. However, this project is concerned not with the attainment of home-based



literacy, but with the attainment of literacies outside of the home. And so, in regards to this project, literacy is understood as “the mastery or fluent control over a secondary Discourse” (Gee 529).

It is important, first, to note the difference between what Gee calls “capital ‘D’ Discourse” and “little ‘d’ discourse” (526). Capital “D” Discourse is the “saying (writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing combinations” referred to above; it is the ability to “say or write the right thing in the right way while playing the right social role and (appearing) to hold the right values, beliefs, and attitudes” (Gee 526). Little “d” discourse, however, is the language of capital “D” Discourse, the speech appropriate or distinct to the Discourse community. Capital “D” Discourses, then, are less about language—what is said and how you say it—and more about “what you *are* and *do* when you say it,” and are therefore the focus of this project (Gee 526). What is proffered here by Gee is the suggestion of Discourse as performance, which further suggests the multiplicity of Discourse. Just as we might have multiple literacies, so too can we obtain membership in multiple Discourse communities. While situated within a specific Discourse community, we perform the appropriate identity or role, adopting the speech of the Discourse community and acting out our membership within the Discourse community by conforming (or appearing to conform) our behaviors, ways of thinking, believing, and acting to the governing rules and expectations of the Discourse.

### ***Discourse as Identity (Performance)***

Discourses function as identity kits “complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write” (Gee 526); putting on the garb of the

Discourse—like a player on a stage—is what causes you to be recognized in appearance and in speech as a full member of the Discourse community. The function of Discourse as identity kit is especially important for individuals native to a non-dominant Discourse community functioning in a non-native dominant Discourse community, for whom putting on the “garb” of a dominant Discourse may be closer to dressing in drag than simply dressing “up.” Just as we are born to a specific language, we are born to a specific Discourse community; that native or home-based discourse is what is known as our primary Discourse, and “is the one we first use to make sense of the world and interact with others. Our primary Discourse constitutes our original and home-based sense of identity” (Gee 527). It is through our socialization in this primary Discourse community that we acquire our native speech, our initial ideologies; it is our primary Discourse that establishes our ways of valuing, believing, thinking, doing, and being; and it is within the context of our primary Discourse that we develop our initial sense of self and begin to form our identity. Much like how our first language always remains so (regardless how fluent you become in however many languages), our first sense of self is what anchors us and is a critical and enduring element throughout the lifelong development of our identity.

Secondary Discourses, it follows, are any non-home-based Discourses that we acquire after our primary Discourse; these Discourses are developed in association with institutions outside our home community, such as educational entities, larger state- or national-based businesses, agencies, organizations, and the like (Gee 527). Secondary Discourses break down further into dominant and non-dominant Discourses. Dominant Discourses are those secondary Discourses whose mastery is associated with the accumulation of what Gee calls social “goods”—money, prestige, and status—whereas non-dominant Discourses are those

the mastery of which brings about solidarity with a particular social group, but is not associated with the attainment of social goods (Gee 528). Attaining membership within a dominant secondary Discourse community, specifically an academic Discourse community, is this project's concern.

### ***Discourse Acquisition***

Because Discourses are inherently ideological, meaning they contain a set of values, beliefs, practices, behaviors, viewpoints, and the like, Discourses cannot, therefore, be obtained through overt instruction alone. The process of attaining a Discourse requires practice, the opportunity and the means to enact the Discourse within the space of the Discourse community. Discourse acquisition is, then, a matter of enculturation—and one to which the individual must have access. Gee refers to this process as the stage of “apprenticeship” wherein individuals experience enculturation “into social practices through scaffolded and supported interaction with people who have already mastered the Discourse” (527). Just as access to literacy requires sponsorship, attaining membership in a Discourse community necessitates the positioning of oneself as an apprentice to a master of the Discourse. Through the parameters of the master-apprentice relationship the individual obtains access to opportunities for the social practice of and gains provisional entrance into the Discourse community; without a master of the Discourse under whom to practice, “you don’t get in the Discourse [community]” (Gee 527). Furthermore, apprenticeship requires permission, sanction, and assistance, and the access to apprenticeship—like sponsorship—is not equally available or distributed to all prospective members of a Discourse community;

therefore, the more affluent and privileged individuals of dominant Discourses are likely to find academic Discourse more accessible than an individual from working-class Appalachia.

Apprenticeship acts as a method of gatekeeping, wherein those in power within the Discourse community allow, block, and monitor access to social practice and enculturation. In addition, the fluency of practitioners of the Discourse is constantly subjected to “tests”; according to Gee, these tests have two functions: “they are tests of ‘natives’ or, at least, ‘fluent users’ of the Discourse, and they are gates to exclude ‘non-natives’ (people whose very conflicts with dominant Discourses show they were not, in fact, ‘born’ to them)” (528). The necessity of apprenticeship and the act of gatekeeping represent a critical obstacle for non-natives seeking entrance into a dominant secondary Discourse community, and this fact is especially true for an individual moving between an Appalachian Discourse community and an academic Discourse community.

Acquiring and maintaining the status of full membership (gaining acknowledgement from the population of the Discourse community as a master of the Discourse) demands a fluent control of the “saying (writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing combinations” that construct the Discourse. For native members (those “born” to the Discourse community), these tests of fluency are meant not to question their membership but to reaffirm it, further separating them from non-natives; furthermore, the native’s status of mastery is seen as a natural aspect of inheritance as the “saying (writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing combinations” comprise, or, at the very least, are nearly synonymous with those of their primary Discourse. However, for non-native members, especially those “born” to a non-dominant primary Discourse community, such as that of working-class Appalachia, mastery of a dominant secondary Discourse will always be only performative to some extent, and,

therefore, the achieved status as “Master of the Discourse” is continuously questioned and challenged.

### ***Caught at Pretending***

The materiality of our primary Discourse community can never be fully overcome or removed from our identity; we may endeavor to rid ourselves of it, ignore it, pluck it out, cover it up, clothe it in the garb of a secondary Discourse, but it remains nonetheless. Beneath the drag of Discourse our substance is largely unchanged; you can alter the appearance of that substance but not its basic properties. Where you come from, the *what* you are made of—those “saying (writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing combinations” of your primary Discourse—inform your every thought, action, and reaction; and your awareness of those combinations, the metaknowledge that comes only from the movement between Discourse communities, informs your performance of that secondary Discourse in which you are seeking to gain membership.

The trouble with performance lies in the depth of believability; a stage is not always graced with proficient actors, but an actor is always the object of scrutiny for adept critics. It is with the business of performativity that non-native members of a Discourse community oftentimes encounter difficulty. Discourse performativity is “connected with displays of identity; failing to fully display an identity is tantamount to announcing you don’t have that identity, that at best you’re a pretender or beginner” (Gee 529). To be acknowledged as a member of a Discourse community and to engage in a Discourse, you must possess full fluency; any lack of fluency not only marks you as a non-native or a non-member, it marks you as a *pretender* to the Discourse, “an *outsider* with the pretensions of being an *insider*” (Gee 529).

Inscrutable Discourse performativity is a considerably difficult task for non-native members who hail from a non-dominant primary Discourse community whose “saying (writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing combinations” are in significant conflict with those of the dominant secondary Discourse community. An individual must not only be able to *say* the right thing in the right *way*, (s)he must also be sure that (s)he is *doing* the right thing and is displaying the right *identity*. As an individual’s identity is largely constructed by his or her primary Discourse, an individual moving into a conflicting dominant secondary Discourse community is faced with the challenge of displaying an identity that does not just disagree with his or her home-based sense of self, but outright discounts many (if not all) of the “saying (writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing combinations” of his or her primary Discourse.

Not only are there conflicts of identity, obligation, and loyalty to be dealt with in housing two opposing Discourse identities within a single vessel, but the act of “hiding” one Discourse with another is a precarious venture, and the hidden Discourse often shows through the enacted Discourse, creating disruptions within whichever Discourse community the individual is presently situated. These disruptions, or indicators of opposing Discourses, lead members of the Discourse community to question and challenge the validity of the individual’s own membership, creating difficulties for the Appalachian woman attempting to enter an academic Discourse community while simultaneously creating distance between her and her primary Discourse community.

Language, or little “d” discourse, acts as the most obvious indication of Discourse membership, of the identity we are performing, of the “what” we are and do. It is with language identification that many Appalachian women moving into an academic Discourse

community struggle, and this element more often than not marks them as outsiders to the Discourse community of academia. Although spoken language is not an indicator of intelligence, according to Victoria Purcell-Gates in “...As Soon As She Opened Her Mouth!’: Issues of Language, Literacy, and Power,” the mountain dialect is “strongly associated with low levels of education and literacy as well as a number of social ills and dysfunctions” (123).

To have your speech identified as “mountain dialect” means to have the full weight of Appalachian “otherness” applied to your character, altering the way you are perceived by those outside of the Appalachian Discourse community, and especially so when located within an academic Discourse community. The Appalachian dialect is immediately associated with inferiority, ignorance, and illiteracy; the language of mountain folk is a clear marker of their class, and those in power within the dominant Discourse community believe speakers of Appalachian dialect, like other marginalized people, “cannot learn as well as those in power—the middle/upper classes. It is believed that they ‘just don’t have it’ as far as intelligence and/or the will to learn, to achieve, to move out of their impoverished conditions go” (Purcell-Gates 133). This perception of the Appalachian restricts and even denies educational, social, and economic opportunity and advancement. Once mountain speech is detected within the setting of the academic Discourse community, the stigma of Appalachian “otherness” is virtually inseparable from the individual’s perceived character, and (s)he is marked as an outsider, a *pretender* to the Discourse.

The potential of being labeled as a “pretender” to a dominant secondary Discourse means that the Appalachian woman must go to great lengths to acculturate herself in her new Discourse community. If she allows even the smallest aspect of her primary Appalachian

Discourse to be detected while playing the role of the dominant secondary academic Discourse, she will be marked an outsider, a pretender. The removal of such a label, once placed, is highly difficult, if not impossible. To be exposed as a pretender is never to gain full membership within the Discourse community and, therefore, access to its goods. To combat this danger, the Appalachian woman must set aside, shut in, strip off, or cover up her mountain Discourse: she changes the way she speaks, biting off the drawn out “i’s,” tacking on “g’s” that were before left out, and does her best to straighten her tongue from crookedness—the wrongness—of mountain speech; she puts away mountain beliefs (debased to backward superstitions and old wives’ tales; she replaces her Christian fundamentalist reasoning with the syllogistic reasoning of the academic; she readjusts her values and loyalties; she alters the ways in which she interacts with others.

The need for total acculturation in order to become a successful and accepted member of the academic Discourse community is a way of erasing culture, eliminating what the dominant players view as undesirable or inferior “saying (writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing combinations.” As the act of setting aside the primary Appalachian Discourse happens more frequently and at increasingly lengthier segments of time, the danger is that the role of the primary Discourse will consistently decrease until it is all but supplanted by the secondary Discourse. When the secondary Discourse displaces the primary, we lose our “original and home-based sense of identity” (Gee 527). Not only are we losing sight of part of our identity, we are also losing what it is that ties us to our homeland/community/culture—we become distanced and disconnected from our Appalachian Discourse community and, with it, from the members of that Discourse community.



### Chapter Three: Becoming the Androgynous Outlander

*Education, if it takes, changes the inside of our heads so that we do not see the same world we previously saw.*

—Linda Scott DeRosier, *Creeker: A Woman's Journey*

I can remember the morning I left. Crying over an open cardboard box, begging my mother not to make me go. She held me close, held me tight, and cried with me. But then she told me that I had to go, and I knew she was right—though somehow that knowing made things more difficult; it meant that my place was in the “out there” somewhere and not the “right here” of my home. I think we both knew—we may never have given voice to it, but we knew—that it wasn't just that I was going to college: I was *leaving*. And that leaving would change me, would change how the world looked in my eyes. And I could never again fill the space that I had inhabited in the same way that I had before. My place, my position within my homeplace were shifting around us, and neither of us knew what that would mean. And so we cried for the things that we both stood to lose: closeness, understanding, belonging to one another.

It is true that education and, more specifically, literacy have the power to transform, to empower, to reveal to us the world as we have never previously known it, and to give us new tools with which to react to the world, but too they can be costly. Change, although revolutionary in incredible ways, can also affect great personal losses, especially in the act of gaining literacies not shared by the members of your primary Discourse community. The tensions that arise between literacies with conflicting value systems, like Appalachian and academic literacies, can result in palpable distancing from family, home, and the mountain culture Appalachians have known all their lives. When I began this project, my focus was

this sense of loss; it was all that I could see for the Appalachian who chose to enter the academic Discourse community. To me, the loss was inevitable and irreparable, and the best we could hope for was a lifetime of healing and coping, constantly working to keep our two halves stitched haphazardly together—a bad cut-and-paste job. But as my research and thinking progressed, I began to see coping as something a victim does—what you do when something is done *to you*.

I saw no power, no agency in *coping with* what I came to realize didn't have to be inevitable *or* irreparable losses; to me, coping seemed an act of forfeit, an admission that acceptance is the only alternative. The incredulity of that thought made me angry, made me rebel. I was rebelling against the binary of either/or, that I must be *either* an Appalachian *or* an academic; I was rebelling against the idea that there wasn't a space for both/and; and, finally, I even rejected the notion of both/and as only a prettier version of a binary, and one that could not fit my identity composition. Finally, reacting to the absence of an appropriate and viable alternative, I created my own: the androgynous outlander, a third form that modifies and hybridizes both Discourses (giving rise to a new Discourse), and enacts a third space between Discourses wherein she resides. What follows is my best approximation of my own evolution of thought, the moves I made in working through each rebellion and rejection, culminating in a discussion of what I have termed the “androgynous outlander,” an alternative to the choices Appalachians who enter academia have been previously offered.

### ***Straddling Divisions***

The institutionalization of Appalachian otherness in the American consciousness and the heralding of Appalachia as the American antithesis, as discussed in chapter one, created

and then widened a rift between Appalachia and the rest of America. This division allowed the language of identification and dis-identification to be applied to the relationship between the Appalachian region and the rest of the nation, and the mentality of “us” and “not us,” of “us versus them” rooted itself deeply into the Appalachian and American consciousness. The division came to be represented as an issue of class: Most Appalachians were unquestionably lower working class while the rest of America, in juxtaposition to the Appalachian circumstances, was middle and upper class. As Casie Fedukovich states in “Strange Imports: Working-class Appalachian Women in the Composition Classroom,” society’s methods of class identification “collapse experience into neat categories of ‘working class,’ ‘middle class,’ and ‘upper class.’ Only one choice is allowed. There is no room for nuance.... One simply *is* working class based on factors like career, access to health care, and education” (141). Society’s method of class division, especially its sense of class as fixed and singular rather than fluid and plural, further separates Appalachia from the rest of the country, and lends power to the binary of either/or: one is *either* working class *or* middle class *or* upper class, there are no degrees of gradation, only rigid categories that resist (even prohibit) movement between the categories.

Furthermore, the factors that determine class are especially important, particularly education. The designation of education as a marker of class does two things: the first is that those in the middle and upper classes come to associate the working class with a deficient education or as lacking education entirely; the second is that the working class comes to associate education and literacy with the middle and upper classes. Although the history of associating Appalachia with ignorance, illiteracy, and a lack of education is, by now, nothing new, we do see something interesting occurring in the Appalachians’ dis-identifying with

education. Rather than being identified as uneducated by others, it seems Appalachia is choosing to dis-identify with education, locating education and literacy in what Fedukovich refers to as the “middle class enemy camp of academia” (142). Education then, particularly college education, becomes a marker of the middle and upper classes, effectively disassociating education and literacy as appropriate to working-class Appalachian Discourse. The acts of identifying/dis-identifying and associating/dis-associating—the act of equating identity with category—are what lend authority to the either/or binary: one simply *is* either working class or middle class, one simply *is* either Appalachian or academic, with “no room for nuance.”

Except that this is entirely ridiculous and untrue. My own narrative and the narratives of many others serve as signifiers that the binary of either/or is impractical in application. Identity and class are fluid and plural; boundaries can be crossed, re-crossed, and even broken. Even though I immediately rejected the notion of either/or as a method for constructing and categorizing identity, at the same time I had to acknowledge that for those not caught between conflicting Discourse communities, this binary serves as a frame through which they view and make sense of the world. Even though identity cannot be so neatly labeled, color-coded, and compartmentalized, we must still function in a world that is in many ways structured by rigid categories. And it is within this context that we find what Alfred Lubrano calls “straddlers” (qtd. in Dunbar-Odom 7).

In *Defying the Odds* Donna Dunbar-Odom provides us with an excellent overview of Lubrano’s term, which holds great significance in her own work. “Straddlers” is the name Lubrano has given to individuals like himself who were born working class and then make the move into the “strange new territory” of the middle class; straddlers “are the first in their

families to have graduated from college. As such, they straddle two worlds, many of them not feeling at home in either, living a kind of American limbo” (qtd. in Dunbar-Odom 7). This is where the discussions of sponsorship and the dangers of being caught “pretending at a Discourse” from chapter two re-emerge.

As I have established, literacy requires sponsorship, and to gain entrance into a Discourse community, the individual must become an apprentice to the Discourse. Furthermore, in order to be recognized as a member of the Discourse community, and in order to gain access to and the use of the resources and the social, political, and economic power and status of that Discourse, the apprentice must in appearance and practice adopt the “saying (writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing combinations” of the Discourse (Gee 526). In the case of the straddler these combinations (the literacy) of the academic Discourse community conflict with the literacy of her primary Appalachian Discourse community, whose literacy practices she must also enact in order to maintain membership within that primary Discourse community. What results, then, is an individual who, like Lubrano depicts, is literally straddling the border between one Discourse and the other, one foot in the academic Discourse community—the community into which she seeks admission—and one foot in her primary Appalachian Discourse community.

Because of the divisions and seemingly inherent oppositions that have been constructed between Appalachian and academic Discourses, enacting any of her Appalachian literacy practices while located within the academic Discourse community would cast the straddler as distinctly un-academic; at the same time, enacting any part of her academic literacy practices while located within the Appalachian Discourse community would mark the straddler as distinctly un-Appalachian. So although the straddler can be *both* an

Appalachian *and* an academic, the very border she is attempting to straddle bisects her: the academic portion of her identity must remain located within the academic Discourse community whereas the Appalachian portion of her identity must remain in the Appalachian Discourse community. In essence, the straddler lives a half-life: functioning within either Discourse community means silencing or shutting down one half of who she is. The straddler, then, must serve two masters, trying simultaneously to fulfill the obligations and responsibilities she has as an apprentice to the academic Discourse and remain loyal to familial obligations and responsibilities.

Issues of loyalty are particularly important because loyalty and allegiance to kin and cultural values, beliefs, and ways are significant factors in the Appalachian culture. Entertaining alternative ways of believing, valuing, and doing is oftentimes viewed as a negative act of questioning and even rejecting the culture. Family is the core of Appalachian culture; family comes first—always, and this is especially true for Appalachian women, whose roles as wives and mothers are central to their identity. To place the obligations and responsibilities one has toward the academic Discourse community (even something as simple as a homework assignment) above the family flies in the face of Appalachian core values.

I have been urged to “unpack” these loaded statements, to say more about the implications of placing academic responsibilities over familial obligations, and the academic in me realizes the need also—but the Appalachian in me is struggling, hesitant. There is a need to discuss the struggle between academic and familial responsibilities and obligations, but to discuss it is also painful and perilous, because it means acknowledging that such things are present in my life, that there are disconnects still between myself and my family. I know

there are, but saying it—putting it out there—means I cannot take it back, and part of me is afraid of what it will mean when my mother reads this, as she no doubt will—and of how it will affect my own understanding of myself and my position in my home discourse community when I examine my experiences through this lens. It's the problem of the cave theory—once I've seen the real thing, I'll know the shadow of the replication for what it is—a falsehood—and I cannot go back, I cannot unlearn, unsee. And, anyway, speaking about this smells a bit like disloyalty, betrayal even.

Graduate school is where I have most noticed the changes—the differences that have arisen between myself and my family—the distancing, possibly because I have become more dedicated, more invested in my work here, possibly because graduate school separates me further from the working class my family belongs to. Betrayal or not, the truth is that it's there. In small ways usually, almost imperceptible for what they are if you do not know what you are looking for. There are many family gatherings and occasions I have missed—have *chosen* to miss—so that I might stay and complete work or even to “hang out” with my academic-based friends. It's the *choosing not* to go home that is the crux of the issue—weekends that I might spend with my family (doing nothing in particular, just engaging in the act of togetherness), breaks during and between semesters that would allow an extended visit, I sometimes pass on. The choice of not going home is tantamount to saying that I do not *want* to go home, do not *want* to be part of that togetherness, that I do want distance and separation, that I do value my academic work as a higher priority than my family. No one has ever said as much to me, of course, but they don't have to; it's said plainly enough in the guilt pushed on me every time I choose not to go.

In that guilt there is sometimes something else: resentment. Not in the malicious sense—none of it is done out of malice or conscious negativity—but in the sense that they resent I have become part of a world to which they do not belong and which we cannot share, that I share myself with others unlike them, that there are parts of me that are unlike them, that there are parts of me that they do not understand, even that I have been able to do things and go places they never even thought to dream of. It is complicated, though, because they are simultaneously proud of who I am and what I've done and overjoyed at the opportunities life has afforded me. But it creates a rift between us—and a resentment, almost, on my own part that I have to defend my positions, that I feel pulled between in the first place.

Questioning gender roles is another hotspot for creating distance between Appalachian women and their home community. Exiting the Appalachian Discourse community opens the individual to new ways of being, reveals to him or her options and lifestyle choices that were unknown or not possible before. Even though the women in my family are strong and powerful figures, their roles as wives and especially mothers almost exclusively account for the makeup of their identities. The same holds true for a woman whom I will call “Emma.” Emma comes from a family that is Appalachian in both heritage and culture, and she shared with me her own narrative of becoming distanced from loved ones, home, and mountain culture through her entrance into the academic Discourse community, as well as her assertion of agency in becoming what I have come to call “the androgynous outlander.” The contrast between mountain gender roles and the alternative roles for women she encountered outside of the Appalachian Discourse community figured heavily in the distancing Emma experienced from her family, especially her mother:



When I was forming my identity [as a woman who is both Appalachian and academic] I struggled with issues of femininity. I rejected my family's idea of what it meant to be a woman—housekeeping, cooking—how to be a housewife. I didn't know how to do any of that, and I didn't want to. I never wanted to be a housewife. In choosing more academic interests or intellectual interests, at the same time I was, in some sense, rejecting who my mom was. And I distanced myself from her, because I thought if I learned *anything* from her that I would become her. I didn't see two sides, two different kinds of women—I saw only housewife. There were no other role models that showed me another option. And so I cut myself off from so much of my own feminine identity, because I didn't realize I could take that with me. I thought I couldn't act like a woman, even, without becoming the kind of woman I had rejected. I rejected a lot of it in the way I dressed; I didn't wear makeup, which was okay because I never really have gotten into makeup—but it was important at that time to *not* wear it. It was a very deliberate choice. I thought if I dressed up and learned those things that I was allowing a standard to be put on me, something that I didn't want to be. And I didn't want that—I felt it was becoming a servant almost to some man; I felt it was giving up everything. I didn't know then that I could still be feminine and not be the women I always had known. But I rejected a lot more than just the *woman* my mom was, and I didn't learn a lot of things from her that I wished I had because of that.

So much of a woman's place within the Appalachian community is dependent on her role as a wife and a mother, and in that community to be a woman means becoming a wife

and a mother. Emma's strong disinclination to follow this prescribed path, what she describes as a conscious and deliberate determination not to become the women she had always known, led her not only to reject her own femininity but to create a distance between herself and the most important and influential feminine figure in her life. Emma further revealed that it was not only the desire to become some other kind of woman that created distance between her and the Appalachian Discourse community, but also a fear that she could not fulfill the cultural role of the woman even if she had wanted to: "I felt inadequate to try to be those things, that if I tried to step into that role, I would be exposed as someone who couldn't do it." The fear of being inadequate at filling what appeared to be the only appropriate and acceptable role for a woman in her primary Discourse community, combined with the desire to be a kind of woman for which that Discourse community had no model nor, it seemed, space for, resulted in Emma's feeling that *she* did not belong in her homeplace, that there was no space for *her* there.

One of the sharpest and most frequently felt points of conflict and distance between myself and my primary Appalachian Discourse community lies with issues of femininity and mountain gender roles as well. Like Emma, the most important and influential female figures in my childhood, and most of the female figures I came into contact with while growing up within the Appalachian community, represented in some way or another the traditional role of the Appalachian woman. Even though I know now that identity is much more complicated than any one label can account for, at the time these women were exclusively mothers and wives in my eyes. Society within the Appalachian region also tended to, and still tends to, define women relationally as so-and-so's mother and so-and-so's wife, which acts as a further signpost to the centrality of the familial unit in Appalachian culture.

I had decided at a relatively early age that this was not something I wanted; I had seen in my parents' relationship that this way of life did not work, could not work for me. I saw no power for the woman who bowed out of fear to her husband, whose voice was silenced by the thunderclap of my father's, who was ruled as much by the back of his hand as by his back-handed words. No power, no possibility; no escape, no alternative. I thought that this was what it meant to be married, so I was never the little girl who dreamed of the fairytale wedding. If no man owned me, I would own myself, and I would have the freedom to choose any number of possibilities and alternatives. Although I did not have a model per se of the kind of woman I wanted to be, I did have a mother who was (and continues to be) very supportive of my choices. My mother was instrumental in the formation of the path I would take. Like Emma, I chose—and continue to choose—more academic, intellectual, and career-based interests over becoming a housewife or a mother. I didn't think these choices would change anything—they sure hadn't changed me, I was still the person I always was; so the thought that these choices would alter my relationship to my family certainly never crossed my mind.

In retrospect, I can see that the relationship between my family unit and me was shifting for some time before I ever felt it or even became suspicious of its occurrence. I can see now that the shift began when I decided to pursue a master's degree and beyond. But I did not become aware of that shift until this past Christmas, when I was forced finally to acknowledge it. It happened suddenly—no early symptoms, no warning signs to prepare me for what was coming; it wasn't there in one moment and in the next it just was. And the way it happened: I was standing in the space between the kitchen and the living room looking out over my family sprawled across sofas, chairs, the floor, congregated in their own smaller

family units, and something just sort of clicked—the room elongated, like someone had panned the camera out, everything seemed spatially distant from where I was standing, and I realized that I was alone there. I mean, I was surrounded by family, sure, but I was the only “grandchild” who had brought neither a family nor prospects of a family with her—including my younger brother, who was recently engaged. For the first time in my life, I felt—and felt very strongly—that I did not belong there, that I did not belong in the same place as my family. And it shook my sense of identity, my sense of safety even.

Even though the choices were my own—and ones I do not regret—I was unprepared for the realization that the path I had chosen had led me in a vastly different direction than my entire family had travelled. In that moment I realized that the woman I had become (that I still am) did not fit into the space where the Appalachian woman resided. And like Emma, I felt inadequate as a woman in the context of the Appalachian Discourse community. Being a woman meant having a husband and especially meant having children—I didn’t *have* any of that, and what I did have—the accomplishments, the strides I have made in my own life—held no value in relation to what I had chosen not to have.

Again, this realization is not something expressed outright, rather implied through action, in the emphasis of value placed on a marriage or a new baby. This realization is a place of some sensitivity for me, as I feel (perhaps unjustly and childishly) sometimes unrecognized for what I have done. My family is not *unhappy* or completely dismissive of my accomplishments, but they are not source of much celebration either (though my mother is quite the exception). For instance, when I finish this thesis, it will be just another paper to most of my family. I will be congratulated, and my grandparents will look with pride on that single sheet of paper that signifies my completion of a master’s degree. Then the diploma and

all it represents will be quickly forgotten and life will be left largely unchanged and undisrupted. A baby, though—even one born out wedlock (still a source of scandal and judgment in the highly conservative Christian community of Appalachia)—or a wedding is celebrated with such all-consuming intensity and duration. The amount of energy and attention my family places on such life events as compared to the life events of the academic sends a clear message: gettin’ hitched and gettin’ knocked up trump gettin’ educated.

Although I found that who I was did not fit into the space where the Appalachian woman resides, I also discovered that I did not (and do not) fit into the space where the academic resides. As many times as I have chosen not to go home, I have chosen to place academic responsibilities on the backburner to be home and be with my family. And there are parts of myself that I cannot bring myself to share with my fellow academics for fear of being marked or thought foolish or uneducated, and so I leave those parts in Appalachia. My tie to the land—the intense spirituality I associate with the mountains—is part of what I keep quiet because it seems “primitive” to me when located in the academic Discourse community. My closeness with family is often seen as “abnormal,” and I feel “weird” when I have to turn down an invitation to spend time with my friends from the academic Discourse community because my mom is coming to spend a weekend with me, or because I am going home for a family reunion. My speech has taken on the flat and characterless quality of the educated, and I rarely slip into the thick accent of southern West Virginia anymore. And part of me mourns the loss of that speech because I love the way it sounds—alive and liquid, like a song. But I cannot find a place for it here in academia, at least not one that’s respected. And so I feel caught between, cut in half.

Inhabiting the form of the straddler not only bisects an individual's identity; it also involves playing a perilous game in which the straddler is in constant danger of being caught pretending at the Discourse. The fear of being "found out" or labeled a fraud is terrifying and at times debilitating. Even as I become more aware of the alternative choices involved in being the androgynous outlander, I am constantly fighting feelings of inadequacy and striving to prove (as much to myself as others of the Discourse) that I belong in the academic Discourse community. As a straddler, your membership in both Discourse communities is constantly questioned and challenged. Your membership in the academic Discourse community is shakily maintained because it is performative in the sense that you are hiding your working-class roots beneath a middle-class mask. If there is a flaw in the mask, if for one day it is not put on correctly your Appalachian literacy will show through—whether it occurs as an accidental twang or escaped colloquialism, as a noted unfamiliarity with specific literature of the Discourse, or as an inability to contribute to a conversation. Even if the slip goes unnoticed by others, you will not miss it. Membership is as much about believing that you belong within the Discourse as it is about gaining acceptance from other members of the Discourse, and you cannot enact membership if you believe yourself to be a fraud.

What I have come to realize, then, is that the only way to establish yourself as a (self-) recognized member of the Discourse in full is through complete assimilation or fully adopting the academic Discourse identity. In order for this assimilation to occur, you must completely dislocate yourself from your primary Appalachian Discourse. Choosing assimilation means supplanting your original sense of self, removing yourself entirely from the people and the mountain culture that has nurtured you through all your life. You smother your mountain speech, lose the drawn out "I's," tack "g's" back onto their proper places, and

make a conscious and deliberate effort to avoid mountain words and phrases; you change the way you think, abandoning faith-based reasoning for syllogistic reasoning; you reject the mountain gender roles entirely; you become more liberal, more open to alternatives where once strict conservatism would have kept those doors shut; your priorities shift from family-centered to more self-centered interests of education, career, and social capital; you relocate yourself in a space where your cultural knowledge, your Appalachian folkways, have no place, and so you forget them; you even become physically distant from your family and homeplace, going home less and less often until you rarely go at all; you transfer more and more of your life from the Appalachian world to the academic world until you have nothing left that ties you to that place. Simply put, you cut ties, and that world and who you were in it become a part of your past you pack away. Even though I understand that this is a choice some feel is appropriate for them, it is something I could never do, an option I would never entertain.

And so what am I left with? It seemed that no one had the answer I was seeking. The best I could find was the straddler, the half-life, and although I still find myself playing the game of the straddle, I do not feel as though my identity is composed of two separate halves—I don't feel halved, but whole—nor am I capable of completely shutting down one part of myself or another when located in different Discourse communities. Nor am I any longer willing to try that complete shutting down. The straddler, then, came to seem as restrictive as the binary of either/or: I could be *both* an Appalachian *and* an academic, but the two remain separated components. I wanted something more; I wanted something that allowed me to be an Appalachian academic, and I needed a space wherein I could enact this hybridity.

### *The Androgynous Outlander*

I was having lunch with a close professor friend a few days ago, and we began to talk about future plans—which always makes me a bit squirmy. As we discussed my intentions to apply for doctoral programs, I confessed to him that I didn't know if I had "it" in me to complete a doctorate. He looked completely taken aback, and I instantly felt I had said the wrong thing. "What do you mean 'it'?" I shrugged, eyes cast downward, and said, "You know, what it takes. I'm not cut from the same cloth. I don't really *belong* there, and I feel like I have to prove over and over again that I do." I don't think I will ever forget his response as long as I live: "It's not about belonging; it's about doing the work that needs to be done. You worry about the work that is important to you, the work that you think needs to be done, and you don't worry about the fuckers around you." And that's when it hit me: being the androgynous outlander was exactly about *not* seeking the stamp of approval, *not* being so caught up in obtaining the acceptance of the Discourse community based on how well you perform the literacy of the Discourse and stand up against the tests of gatekeeping, *not* silencing any portion of yourself that could mark you as un-academic. Rather, the androgynous outlander is about choice, about agency, about enacting the parts of both Appalachian and academic Discourse that you value, about doing the work that is important to you and doing that work *as you*.

The androgynous outlander provides an alternative to both the straddler and the act of assimilation: appropriation, a third choice in which "both practices and identities are modified and hybridized" (Donehower, Hogg, and Schell 55). The conscious choice of appropriation, the very act of taking agency is what gives rise to the androgynous outlander,



and the act of hybridity is what allows the androgynous outlander to transcend binaries and become a third form in its own right, and one that is located outside of the space of both the Appalachian and the academic Discourse communities. Engaging in the act of hybridizing the two Discourses, the androgynous outlander is deliberately selective in what components from both Discourses will be included in the hybrid Discourse; it is as much about rejection as it is about choosing, as much about dis-identifying as it is identifying. Hybridity, though, is not an act of creating an equal blend of the two Discourses. As Homi Bhabha states, hybridity “is the ‘third space’ which enables other positions to emerge” (211). So even though traces of the two Discourses are present, new elements, which belong to neither of the Discourses, emerge to stabilize the coming together of two unlike and conflicting Discourses; this process, then, “gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable” (Bhabha 211)—the Discourse of the androgynous outlander.

Appropriation is a tricky business; it isn’t a simple matter of sitting down with a couple of lists, one headed “Appalachian” and the other “academic,” and moving through each list checking “yes” or “no” next to the various components. Appropriation is choice enacted: it happens actively as you deliberately choose to employ mountain words, phrases, and sayings within the academic Discourse community, as you consciously inflate the flatness of your speech with a southern West Virginian drawl; it happens when you apply syllogistic reasoning within the Appalachian Discourse community in a context typically approached through Christian fundamentalist reasoning; it happens when you choose to balance the value of family togetherness with the responsibilities of academia, rather than choosing one over the other; and it happens when you make a deliberate and conscious effort to share your Appalachian-ness with your academic Discourse community and your

academic-ness with you Appalachian Discourse community, making both Discourses a part of each other's world.

Although I have determined to incorporate more of my mountain speech, something I dearly love, into my everyday life, and have come to the point where words and phrases are more easily and naturally employed, I have difficulty allowing my accent to settle into its native thickness. I slip easily into the mountain drawl when at home or with others who themselves are employing it, but the tongue of the academic automatically supplants the mountain tongue when I'm located within the walls of academia. I would like to make a place for my mountain speech in the academic Discourse community, but it will be something I will have to consciously work toward.

I have chosen to hold on to mountain reasoning as it helps me to make sense of some aspects in this world, especially those of a more emotional and spiritual bent; however, I have modified my system of reasoning to accommodate syllogistic reasoning, which often helps to create a more balanced approach of emotion and logic. Essentially, by incorporating both reasoning systems, I am able to approach situations at a slightly different angle than an individual employing only one or the other, and I am able to provide an alternative opinion. In addition, by accommodating both reasoning systems, I always have both as tools to draw on independently of one another; depending on what is most appropriate and can best serve the situation at hand, I can choose to rely on syllogistic or mountain reasoning alone.

This same kind of balancing act takes place between obligations and responsibilities to family and those I have toward academia. It is certainly more difficult to balance time spent in (and with) separate Discourse communities than it is to balance what I take from one Discourse into another, and it is also the most important of the balancing acts I take on.

Family closeness is without question the most important value of my mountain culture, and it is a value I have chosen to keep completely intact. Because I have determined to maintain the closeness I have always known with family (immediate and extended), I choose sometimes to make sacrifices in the academic Discourse community: I will sometimes create extra stress during weekdays, working harder or longer in the week so that I can afford to take a weekend off and travel home; I will occasionally pass on opportunities to socialize with friends based in this Discourse community or attend work-related or scholarly events if it interferes with family occasions (even if that “occasion” is a weekend cookout and bonfire), because nurturing those family relationships and maintaining closeness when geographically distanced is highly important.

Most important to my own appropriation of the Appalachian and academic Discourses, I actively work to create ways in which the two can interact as much as possible. By bringing my Appalachian-ness into my academic Discourse community and my academic-ness into my Appalachian Discourse community, I make each Discourse present in and part of the other’s community. I work to share my Appalachian heritage with friends and acquaintances in the academic Discourse community; I try to be open about my family structure, culture, values, and traditions, and I enjoy telling stories about growing up in the mountains and hollers of southern West Virginia. At the same time, I work to share my academic-ness with my family in the Appalachian Discourse community: I tell them about my work, engage in conversations about my life as an academic, and even introduce them to some things that I learn. The point is: I strive to bring the two Discourses together by making each actively present in the other; by tying them together (especially in doing work like this project), I make it impossible for them to be wholly separate.

Through the appropriation of Appalachian and academic Discourses, a third Discourse takes form; with the creation of third Discourse, the androgynous outlander also “sets up new structures of authority” (Bhabha 211), effectively displacing whatever authority either the Appalachian or academic Discourse had over her. Free from the authority of either Discourse, the androgynous outlander is able openly to enact her hybrid literacy practices within both Discourse communities. Being openly Appalachian within the academic Discourse community means removing the dangers of being caught at pretending to be of the Discourse, precisely because she is not *pretending* to be a member; rather she is owning her hybridity by enacting it within the Discourse community. Similarly, her hybrid Discourse allows the androgynous outlander to enact a new kind of femininity within the Appalachian Discourse community while maintaining close familial bonds and a respect for, and possibly even adherence to, other mountain values. For instance, she may choose to forego the traditional Appalachian female role (may even choose never to marry and/or have children of her own), but still value family closeness and togetherness and work to remain an integral member of the familial unit. Furthermore, just because a woman chooses not to have children of her own does not mean she cannot act as a maternal figure to children within the family. Emma, although married, has no children of her own yet displays maternal affection and care toward the children and grandchildren of her siblings, enacting a surrogate-motherhood. Likewise, I enact a similar role with my cousin’s two-year-old daughter.

Essentially, inhabiting the form of the androgynous outlander means having the freedom to make conscious choices as to what your identity looks like as well as having the power to enact that identity—the *whole* identity. Although the androgynous outlander is free to move between Discourses because she is neither wholly Appalachian nor academic like

the straddler she cannot, therefore, reside in either the Appalachian Discourse community or the academic Discourse community. However, unlike the straddler, she is not bisected by the boundary line between Discourses; instead, she enacts a third space located between Discourse communities: the borderlands.

Gloria Anzaldúa's work about the Borderlands became monumental to the foundation on which I would build what would become the third space for the androgynous outlander. Although Anzaldúa's work focuses primarily on issues of race, language, and "mixed breeds," her concept of the Borderlands instantly appealed to me as a tool that I could use (100). The Borderlands, as Anzaldúa describes it, is home to what she calls the mixed breed, individuals of both Anglo and Hispanic descent, or Chicanos. Being of mixed race, the Chicanos are not accepted in either culture, either because of their whiteness or their Hispanic-ness, and so they find a home in the Borderlands. My interpretation of Anzaldúa's construction of the Borderlands is that it is more of a no-man's-land. It does not seem to me to have become a space in its own right; rather, it is a place "sandwiched between two cultures" (100). The Borderlands is a place of "cultural collision" rather than cultural interaction (Anzaldúa 100); it seems more a place of conflict than resolution. Finally, those that belong to the Borderlands are still straddling multiple cultures and their value systems (Anzaldúa 100). So, even though Anzaldúa's Borderlands did not quite fulfill the requirements for the kind of space I was seeking, it was a start.

I needed a space that was located between Discourse communities but that allowed for the Discourses to come together, interact, and crossbreed. My borderlands needed to be a space of resolution, one that transcended the divide between Discourses. Once again, Bhabha's concept of "third space" provided me with the language I needed to tweak

Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* to fit my needs. Hybridity plays a crucial role in the structure of the borderlands of the androgynous outlander. Rather than confining the borderlands to the boundary line separating Discourses, hybridity allows for the borderlands to increase its property rights, dissolving the boundary line, and extend into the space of both Discourses. The borderlands becomes a space without borders; instead, it is a fluid and permeable space in which the two Discourses can interact, blend, and crossbreed; the borderlands become a space in which other positions can emerge (Bhabha 211).

Being the androgynous outlander is an active choice, though. It is not a choice that is made once, but a series of choices that you must make over and over and over again, and you must do so as consciously as you can. These choices are what allow you to shape and mature and protect your identity. They are also choices that may help you to reclaim what you might have lost before enacting the borderlands. In her early fifties, Emma believes that inhabiting the form of the androgynous outlander is a lifelong challenge but one that is incredibly rewarding:

My identity is much larger—much, much, much larger than it ever was before. I'm so much more comfortable being me and definitely with femininity. I am comfortable as a woman, and I have been freed of the pressure to be *real* intellectual while at the same time gaining confidence in my intellectual interests—I don't feel like they're weird; I don't feel like there's anything wrong with them. I feel more confident in the things that I've learned and in my opinions. It's okay to be me. And I feel more balanced. I'm continually more aware of my world of origination, and I can feel the presence of my mom and of my dad—and value it in ways that I never did before. And

I'm more consciously aware of the present—what do I feel right now—and make a conscious effort to not shut any part of myself down. I know now how important it is to have that connection with family, and I know that I can call on my family if I needed any kind of support. And that makes me feel better and safer and happier.

Enacting the Discourse of the androgynous outlander is a conscious exercise to feel comfortable and confident in your own skin. It allows you the freedom to determine the composition of your identity and the ability to enact a space of belonging for that identity. In the form of the androgynous outlander, you pick and choose pieces of the Discourses to fit together to create your own Discourse, a Discourse that provides you with the literacy to enact your hybridized identity of Appalachian academic.

The androgynous outlander is an active role; you do not simply roll out of bed and decide to just “be” a hybrid—you have to enact conscious hybridity. I have shared some ways in which I enact the role of the androgynous outlander, but even as this project draws to a close, I realize I have only just begun my journey. I believe my greatest battle lies in owning my academic-ness, in believing that the cloth I'm cut from comes with what it takes to make it in the academic Discourse community and much more. This project has required me to place my own identity under the microscope and has involved a great deal more self-examination and reflection than I ever anticipated. I have just arrived at the tip of the iceberg of what it means to be the androgynous outlander. But, in writing this thesis, I have written out the beginnings of my own story—given myself a name—and as Joseph Trimmer says, “To narrate is to know” (qtd. in Dunbar-Odom 4).

## Conclusion

I read once, somewhere, that you have to be lost before you can begin to find yourself. I do not think I can say that I have found myself—not quite yet, anyway—but I do believe this project has done much in the way of guiding me into the act of finding. Lord knows I was certainly lost before I began it. I wrote in my introduction, some many months ago now, that my choice of education, particularly the choice of graduate school, brought me into my voice, but that there were pieces of myself it had also taken from me. Rereading that introduction at the conclusion of this project, I almost decided to pull it from the text entirely; it seemed so full of loss and sorrow and something very close to resentment and anger, even. But I hesitated, and in that moment of hesitation I determined to keep it and to keep it intact. When I began this project, those words captured the truth of the moment; I did feel that education had taken things from me, and in truth it had. This testimony and the fact that I knew it was not unique to me alone is what sparked this project, what rekindled the flames when my fire dulled to smoldering ash. It was the beginning point, and so belongs in the beginning.

It was as I moved through the piece that the possibilities of choice and reclamation appeared to me. I had lost things, yes, but now I can *choose* to have them back, and can possess those things in ways I never could have before: on my own terms. Education may have arched me out and away from my home and my people for a time, but under my direction it has finally brought me back full circle. I can now be a voice piece for the culture, the place, and the people that I sprang from and still cling to, and I can make the Appalachian voice heard in places where it typically is absent. But education alone could not do this for me. No, it was discovering the androgynous



outlander and making a place for her that showed me that I could choose to use the tools and power of academic literacy as a companion to Appalachian literacy; through hybridity, I have begun to recover losses: closeness with family, feeling of belonging, understanding of self, self-assertion, ownership of identity.

But this project has caused me to look toward the future as much as to the past, and I wondered at the implications this project would have for my own work in composition classrooms, for the time when I move from sponsored to Sponsor. What will my own sponsorship of academic literacy look like? What would happen if we created more space for hybridity within academia?

The university campus is often a symbol of independence, freedom, knowledge—a place of coming-to-age and coming-to-self stories, a place of creativity and creation. Although amazing things can and do occur in classrooms, there are also instances of oppression, where pieces of students have no place and must be left at the door. I seek not to accuse, because I have found instances of this in my own teaching experience; rather, my goal is to open the floor for a conversation about how we as educators might actively work to create space for hybridity in our classrooms and in the academic Discourse community. By finding ways to allow and encourage our students to bring their whole selves into the classroom, by creating a space for Appalachian-ness within academia, by providing opportunities for our students to take academic-ness into their home communities, perhaps we can begin a reversal of the separation of Appalachian and academic Discourse communities. By shortening the distance between Discourse communities, we can lessen the losses, the sense of distance, the conflicts and tensions that working-class Appalachian students encounter when entering the academic

Discourse community. But to provide a space of hybridity for our students, we must begin with ourselves.

## Appendix: IRB Approval Letter



**Office of Research Integrity**  
Institutional Review Board  
401 11th St., Suite 1300  
Huntington, WV 25701

FWA 00002704

IRB1 #00002205  
IRB2 #00003206

May 3, 2012

Whitney Douglas, PhD  
English Department

RE: IRBNet ID# 326908-1

At: Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral)

Dear Dr. Douglas:

<b>Protocol Title:</b>	[326908-1] Voices of the Androgynous Outlander: Talking with the Appalachian Woman Academic	
<b>Expiration Date:</b>	May 3, 2013	
<b>Site Location:</b>	MU	
<b>Submission Type:</b>	New Project	APPROVED
<b>Review Type:</b>	Exempt Review	

In accordance with 45CFR46.101(b)(2), the above study and informed consent were granted Exempted approval today by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Designee for the period of 12 months. The approval will expire May 3, 2013. A continuing review request for this study must be submitted no later than 30 days prior to the expiration date.

This study is for student Sarah McConnell.

If you have any questions, please contact the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Coordinator Michelle Woomer, B.A., M.S at (304) 696-4308 or woomer3@marshall.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

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English Composition I (2011 – current)  
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