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Dr. Andy Doolen, Director of Graduate Studies

PATRIARCHAL TRAUMA IN APPALACHIAN LITERATURE

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By
Michelle Justus

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Pearl James, Professor of English

Lexington, Kentucky

2016

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

PATRIARCHAL TRAUMA IN APPALACHIAN LITERATURE

Patriarchal Trauma in Appalachian Literature examines the effects of subjugation on women as it is represented in three novels set in Appalachia. I define *patriarchal trauma* as an act causing mental anguish to a woman and perpetrated against her because she is a woman. I use the term to encompass violent, catastrophic harms but more particularly to pinpoint the traumatic effects of the quotidian, systemic deprivation of women's autonomy. Reconsidering classic texts such as James Still's *River of Earth* and Robert Morgan's *Gap Creek: The Story of a Marriage* as narratives of women's trauma establishes a lineage on the subject, which culminates in Lee Smith's more recent *Guests on Earth*. This project eschews authenticity as an analytical tool, turning instead to modes of argument in feminism's toolkit to delineate the potentially grim outcomes for women whose agency is constricted or usurped. While patriarchal control mechanisms such as domestic violence and sexual abuse inflict readily observable injuries on women, I argue that common, everyday subordination to men can exact a similar emotional toll, especially on women who strenuously defy male dominance. These traumatic states, I further contend, have previously been read as inevitable acquiescence or a genuine desire for subjugation in *River* and *Gap Creek*, respectively, while experiences of trauma in *Guests* are directly portrayed as mistaken interpretations of madness. Reassessing women characters' numb, compliant, depressed, or enraged emotions as responses to patriarchal trauma challenges the practice of pathologizing women's rebellion.

KEYWORDS: patriarchal trauma, Appalachian literature, trauma theory, subjugation, gender, women

Michelle Justus

May 4, 2016
Date

PATRIARCHAL TRAUMA IN APPALACHIAN LITERATURE

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To Ed

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Chapter One: Introduction

> As I try to write women into Appalachian history, insert them into the populist narrative of settling the frontier, fighting the coal operators and stopping the polluters, the stories of my female ancestors contradict me. Nothing I set down on paper seems authentic; nothing captures their experiences, although they are certainly Appalachian women.
>
> —Barbara Ellen Smith

Trying to uncover real women's role in history is difficult for a number of reasons, according to Barbara Ellen Smith in "'Beyond the Mountains'": The Paradox of Women's Place in Appalachian History." One hindrance is that historical narratives often veil the actions of women, privileging instead stories of conquest that foreground men's actions, what Smith calls the "mesmerizing logic of patriarchy as historical truth" (2, 4). This might be because official records of events have long been under the purview, primarily, of men. The problem is especially acute for Smith as she attempts to elucidate the part that Appalachian women, in particular, have played in history, since Appalachia is surrounded by preconceived notions that constitute a nearly impermeable wall. These "monolithic constructs of Appalachia," according to Smith, "have long inhibited vigorous investigation of women's experiences" in Appalachian history (2). So much so, in fact, that when Smith tries to reconcile Appalachian women activists with her own female relatives who did not, apparently, engage in social campaigns, she is at least temporarily stymied. Furthermore, when those same women relatives do not fit neatly into other conventional constructs of Appalachian womanhood, such as the staunch matriarch or loyal agrarian, Smith once again can find "no established historiographic tradition" with which to examine their lives (2).

The same problem arises in the critical discourse on Appalachian women in fiction, which has focused largely on the question of authenticity. Although much of this

scholarship has worked to debunk negative stereotypes of the region, the search for an authentic, paradigmatic fictional character against which all others can be measured has been no more fruitful than Smith's quest for a real, historically accurate version of the Appalachian woman. The hardworking mountain woman, for example, has become a readily recognizable, positive representation in Appalachian literature and is usually accorded authenticity in scholarly analyses, despite the widely variable traits in the trope's iterations. So, despite being a positive representation of Appalachian womanhood, the hardworking mountain woman trope is also profoundly limiting, because its status as *the* authentic role played by women in the region is used, ultimately, to characterize in oversimplified and even caricatured terms more nuanced literary portrayals. Once a fictional character is deemed authentic, as is the case with James Still's Alpha Baldridge, it is extremely difficult to parse her intricate experiences, for the gloss of authenticity disguises complexity underneath its sheen of general truth. Claims of authenticity serve highly charged functions in Appalachian literary criticism: authenticity is both the badge worn by those who would expose the literary exploitation of Appalachia and the banner under which others tally up what are considered essential—and not always flattering—characteristics of a large group of people. In *The Romance of Authenticity: The Cultural Politics of Regional and Ethnic Literatures*, Jeff Karem argues the essentialism of the late 19th century considered "dead in contemporary cultural studies" is actually alive and flourishing "having gone incognito under the rubric 'authenticity'" (9, 15, 209). In analyses of Appalachian literature, authenticity remains the kindling of critical fervor because the literary exploitation of Appalachia persists, but it is a misleading paradigm

because it winds up creating essentialist representations of people, which in most cases, is exactly what it sought to refute in the first place.

Exposing essentialism, even when it goes "incognito," has become a major task for critics and scholars of Appalachian literature and culture. For instance, in *Dear Appalachia: Readers, Identity, and Popular Fiction since 1878*, Emily Satterwhite critiques the extent to which Appalachia has always been subject to standards of authenticity. This measure derives from the authors' perceptions, the material concerns of the publishing industry, and readers' expectations, according to Satterwhite, who contends that regional fiction has always been conflated with the real and evaluated for its accurate or inaccurate reflections of a perceived reality (15-18, 214). Satterwhite goes on to echo Karem, arguing that readers of regional fiction, in particular, have a "romance with authenticity" and play a part in its construction (133). She suggests the Appalachia found in fiction is not authentic at all but an imagined place often offered to readers as reality, and those readers, in turn, consume it and interpret it to fit their various desires for authentic places, people, and even events.[1] *Dear Appalachia* reveals the essentialist nature of authenticity, as well as readers' complicity in its perpetuation. Alan Banks, Dwight Billings, and Karen Tice have similarly argued that investing too heavily in the concept of authenticity can lead to what they alternately call "universalistic" or "essentialistic thinking." In "Appalachian Studies, Resistance, and Postmodernism," Banks, Billings, and Tice explain that as scholars of all things regional, we are perpetually cognizant of the tools of marginalization and are therefore conditioned to separate cultural representations into binaries, such as authentic versus inauthentic: "In Appalachian Studies, we are accustomed to thinking in terms of such oppositions as

Appalachian/non-Appalachian, insider/outsider, scholars/activists, culture folk/action folk." For Appalachian literary scholars who strive to promote a fair view of the region's people, these seductive juxtapositions engender a tendency to criticize a negative stereotype and praise what is perceived to be a positive character, but this strategy can backfire, reifying an image that is every bit as essentialist as the offensive stock portrayals. As Banks, Billings, and Tice point out, "thinking in terms of such oppositions" disguises the overlap that always exists between categories of Appalachian people, or people in general, for that matter (292).

I will not be using authenticity as an analytical paradigm in this examination of women's representation in Appalachian literature. I will not identify, explain, refute, or trace the origins of stereotypes in the novels under consideration, except where necessary to critique an author's or a scholar's reliance on authenticity. I will not evaluate a particular character or the work as a whole based on its inclusion or exclusion of stereotypes. I will not be categorizing the authors of the novels as insiders or outsiders, a practice that not only essentializes the authors and their work but also leads, I argue, to scholarly missteps. In order to make this point, as well as examine some of Appalachian literature's motifs, I will necessarily critique the concept of authenticity because of its position of primacy in critical discourse.[2] The false binary of insider/outsider, for instance, continues its salience as a way to ascribe authenticity to authors of Appalachian literature, which is then transferred to their work.

I will pay particular attention to what is arguably the shakiest criterion for evaluating Appalachian literature, which is an author's status as an insider or an outsider. The goal of this type of hierarchal analysis is to establish authenticity, which is

problematic, in itself. Moreover, in most cases, there are too many variations of an author's identity to definitively categorize him or her as an insider or outsider. Furthermore, even if a writer's geographical association and cultural lineage, among other qualifications, seem fairly concrete, they are sometimes surprisingly debatable. James Still is a case in point.

There is hardly a critical analysis of Still's work to be found that does not begin with a careful arrangement of the author's biography, the relevant facts laid out in a particular way in order to emphasize that he is first and foremost an Appalachian. Often mentioned are his long residence on the poetically named Dead Mare Branch in Knott County, Kentucky, his lack of resources, his humility, his work ethic, and his isolation. If the biographical facts of Still's life are lined up in a different way, however, his status as an outsider is just as valid: he was born and raised in the cotton-growing part of Alabama, his family was financially successful, he held three college degrees, and he enjoyed the financial support of a wealthy patron.[3] While the first set of traits account for his insider status, the second set could be used to label him as an outsider to Appalachia, which shows the arbitrary, subjective nature of the categorization process.

Yet Still's work, set in Appalachia, is indisputably important to the canon of Appalachian literature, which demonstrates that a writer's status as insider or outsider does not determine, and is much less relevant than, the artistic merit of his or her work. Moreover, both sets of traits used to determine Still's status essentialize Appalachian people in the same way, rendering them all as poor, humble, uneducated, underprivileged, hardworking, and isolated. Furthermore, weighting an author's status as

insider or outsider with too much importance when examining a piece of literature can narrow or even mar otherwise insightful critical analyses.

Danny Miller's *Wingless Flights: Appalachian Women in Fiction*, for example, divides authors into outsiders who created and recycled stereotypes in their work and insiders who wrote what he considers authentic narratives of Appalachian life. Miller's work is an important contribution to the history of Appalachian literature, especially the early literary exploitation of the region. His argument about Appalachian women, both real and fictional, is weakened, however, by its reliance on an author's position as insider or outsider to determine the real traits of an Appalachian woman. More specifically, once Miller designates an author as an insider, not only is his analysis of that writer's work wholly positive, it is at times simply inaccurate.

For instance, in *Flights*, Miller lists fictional women characters whose features he states "work together to define the nature of Appalachian womanhood" (3). Among those characteristics, he claims, "mountain people are not very communicative and men and women talk little to each other about the significant events in each others' lives" (8). He goes on to support this assertion with evidence from a highly dubious non-fiction account written in 1905 by Emma Bell Miles, whom Miller designates as an insider (7-8, 81).[4] Miller also categorizes Still as an insider, and he states that in Still's novel, *River of Earth*, "Alpha remains silent" when her husband's relatives freeload off the family, pushing them to the brink of starvation (8, 123).

Miller reads Alpha as a silent woman character despite the fact that the first line of dialogue in the novel is spoken by Alpha to Brack, her husband, and concerns the situation with his relatives: "'It's all we can do to keep bread in the children's mouths' . .

. 'Even if they are your blood kin, we can't feed them much longer'" (3). Moreover, Alpha speaks firmly and directly to Brack repeatedly about the subject, telling him over and over in the first few pages of the narrative that she will not tolerate the relatives indefinitely (3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9). Miller's contention that Alpha is silent is simply perplexing. Perhaps his reasoning goes something like this: an insider, Miles, said that real Appalachian women do not to talk to their husbands, so that must be true; Still, another insider, created an authentic, fictional woman character in Alpha, and therefore, Alpha must not talk to her husband (Miller 123). In any event, when Miller states that Alpha is silent, he does so despite the enormous amount of evidence to the contrary. Such unshakable faith in insider observers like Miles to describe real women and in insider authors like Still to create authentic fictional characters, then, can prejudice an analysis, causing an otherwise perceptive scholar to miss an opportunity for deeper critical inquiry.

I critique the use of authenticity to argue that not only is the determination of an author's status as insider or outsider arbitrary and essentialist, the more significant problem is the insulation from trenchant examination that insider status can afford an author's text. I contend that jettisoning the false dichotomy of insiders and outsiders makes room for deeper critical inquiry into the ideological concerns in Appalachian literature.

In order to reframe the scholarly conversation, this dissertation is grounded on feminist models of literary analysis. As Banks, Billings, and Tice explain, feminist scholarship offers a way out of essentialist thinking because "feminist scholars have grown deeply suspicious of any descriptions of women and men, minorities, or humanity in general—and here we should add regions and regional populations—that rely on a

universal image, model, norm, or method" (292). Scholarship based on this type of healthy skepticism reconsiders "assertions that repress multiplicity and diversity" as ideological contentions instead of either negative or positive representations. Rather than organizing my analysis of women's representation around the juxtaposition of stereotypes with purportedly authentic characters, I will consider depictions of female trauma in patriarchal society, an examination with implications far beyond the region of Appalachia.[5]

This dissertation is concerned with women's capitulation to patriarchy, their fight against patriarchy, and the damages they sustain in the clash. Women characters who resist male domination but wind up in subordinate positions at their narratives' end underscore the potential harms inflicted on women by a persistent patriarchal culture. Indeed, much of the Appalachian fiction from the 1940s to the present day suggests that subjugation can rise to the level of trauma for some women, especially those who struggle most fiercely to gain equality and independence. The traumas under consideration here are perpetrated by men against women because they are women, including emotional abuse and physical violence, both of which are readily recognizable. What might be less obvious, however, is that subjugation in the particular form of the deprivation of autonomy can also prove traumatic to women.

Acts or conditions causing mental anguish to a woman and perpetrated against her because she is a woman fall under what I will be calling *patriarchal trauma*. Although I use this term to pinpoint the traumatic effects of the systemic usurpation of women's agency, physical violence—particularly sexual abuse—is often used as a tool to accomplish that very goal and therefore falls within the term's definition. Whether the

source of the pain is violent or non-violent, explosive or subtle, unusual or quotidian, or any combination thereof, it can prove to be traumatic to some women. Patriarchal trauma can be psychological or physical but one is almost always inextricable from the other, for the abuse of oppression often manifests as both psychic and physical affliction, and it is safe to assume all physical trauma carries with it an emotional impact often proving psychically traumatic. I argue that the novels under consideration here show that for some women, sustained subordination can be as traumatic as physical violence.

This dissertation turns to feminist models of literary analysis to uncover women's subjugation in James Still's *River of Earth*, Robert Morgan's *Gap Creek: The Story of a Marriage*, and Lee Smith's *Guests on Earth*. It examines a moment when modern change inspired but raged against women's desire for autonomy and interprets the dire effects of autonomy's deprivation. Mine is an interdisciplinary approach, relying on the works of feminist literary critics such as Susan M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Cultural Studies scholars like Janet Galligani Casey, and Gender and Women's Studies intellectuals, including Elaine Showalter and Barbara Ellen Smith. I also borrow freely from the field of feminist psychology and trauma theory.

I am shifting the dominant analytical categories of Appalachian literature to position it within a broader dialogue about what women's representation has to tell us about trauma. The texts under examination in the present study stage a debate about women's experience in patriarchal society, which has relevance far beyond the perceived boundaries of Appalachia, and my goal here is to underscore that broader relevance.

The study of trauma has yielded a wealth of new insights into human response. After psychiatry's recognition of post-traumatic stress disorder in 1980, theories

surrounding trauma burgeoned. In 1995, Cathy Caruth's landmark work *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, a compilation of interdisciplinary essays that delineate and expound upon what might be called individual and cultural trauma, sparked a blaze of examination into trauma's theoretical underpinnings (4). In her early work, Caruth notes a number of claims with continued salience in trauma theory; among these is the idea that "the [traumatic] event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time" by the person undergoing the trauma; therefore, there is always a latent effect of trauma. Also, Caruth argues, there is a difference among victims of trauma, namely that events "may not traumatize everyone equally" (4-5, 7, 153). Trauma is therefore inscrutable for at least two reasons: it has latent effects and those effects are inherently and widely variable.

In Caruth's subsequent work, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, she cast trauma theory as an important analytical tool in the examination of literature "because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is at that specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet" (3-4). Literature is a powerful means to recover the story of trauma, thus helping a victim to retrieve and narrate experiences too painful to otherwise relate, especially given the latency involved with the recall of trauma, which positions writing to function not only as a record of remembered events but also as an archaeological tool of sorts, one useful to unearth memories (91).

Any examination of trauma in literature must recognize that, as feminist analyses point out, the concept of trauma has long been gendered, both professionally and culturally. Historically, the examination of trauma focused on men, and male-dominated

power structures gendered the concept in order to maintain the status quo, thus limiting and narrowing the category of trauma. For example, traumata that fit neatly under a masculine paradigm have long been considered obvious, war being at the forefront of examples. Psychically damaging events considered most prevalent among women, however, have taken a comparatively slower route to inclusion as trauma, according to psychologist and writer Laura S. Brown. In "Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma," Brown argues that women and girls who have been subjected to sexual abuse such as incest can suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, a claim that went against the grain of official psychiatric and legal dogma at the time of the essay's publication in 1995 (100-01).

Even at that late date, according to Brown, male therapists and clinicians for the most part could not imagine themselves as victims of sexual abuse, and therefore did not recognize it as truly traumatic: "'Real' trauma is often only that form of trauma in which the dominant group can participate as a victim rather than as the perpetrator or etiologist of the trauma" (101-02). Brown urges a more inclusive, feminist view of trauma that includes the often secret pain considered a woman's issue.

In "Feminist Paradigms of Trauma Treatment," Brown lauds feminists in the psychiatric profession for helping to change the gendered conception of trauma: "Feminist practitioners identified interpersonal violence as a source of trauma; feminist theory moved the locus of the problem of interpersonal violence from its historical location in the victim's personality to the misogyny of the culture expressed through the actions of perpetrators of violence" (464). Thus a feminist analysis of trauma helps avoid the placement of blame on the victim of trauma.

While feminist therapists such as Brown have won victories in the struggle for a more equitable definition of trauma, stumbling blocks to fair treatment remain a source of further pain for traumatized women. For example, while the effects of violent acts such as sexual abuse have now been widely accepted, there has been more resistance to the claim that trauma is not always an explosive, shocking, or rare event (Brown, “Not Outside the Range” 111). Repetitive emotional abuse, for example, can be traumatic to some people, but the tendency, according to Brown, is to deny that, because such actions are often subtle, veiled, or unremarkable and represent the status quo, they can be traumatic. The resistance to categorize all-too familiar but egregious discriminatory actions based on race, class, gender, and sexuality as traumas, Brown contends, feeds the beast of oppression:

> To admit that these everyday assaults on integrity and personal safety are sources of psychic trauma, to acknowledge the absence of safety in the daily lives of women and other nondominant groups, admits to what is deeply wrong in many sacred social institutions and challenges the benign mask behind which everyday oppression operates. (“Not Outside the Range” 105)

Brown describes the case of a working-class woman who was injured on one of the low-paying, dangerous jobs she held, the last of which she needed desperately to keep but that involved a boss who verbally and emotionally abused her, to illustrate her point about how “everyday oppression” operates (“Range” 105). Under a feminist model, therefore, situations do not need to be unique or staggering to qualify as traumas. For instance, a woman forced by economic necessity to not only endure the daily threat of physical harm from a job but also the continuous onslaught of a boss’s demeaning verbal assaults can undoubtedly be traumatized by the situation.

The psychiatric profession, however, is often mired in sexism, according to Brown, and therefore fails sometimes to recognize the gravity of a woman's reaction to oppression: "A collusion of the mental health professions with this oppressive dominance can be found in the rigid insistence that these events, regardless of their felt and lived impact, cannot be 'real' trauma" ("Range" 105). In the case of the woman in the traumatic work situation, the false accusations, threats of firing, and fear of injury that accompanied her job produced the symptoms of trauma, including nightmares, hopelessness, and "psychic numbing and withdrawal," but the treating psychiatrist—a white, middle-class, well-educated man—blamed the woman for her circumstances, instead, insisting she had a "characterological disorder" ("Range" 105). This is a textbook case of a mental health professional not only disregarding the "felt and lived impact" of traumatic events in a poor woman's life but also pathologizing her reaction to the events. Moreover, the professional disagreement between Brown and her male colleague underscores the gendered nature of trauma within the psychiatric profession.

The debate within the field of psychology about the status of women's trauma is highly visible in Appalachian literature. The case of the woman who was traumatized by the demeaning job, for instance, is an analog for Alpha in *River of Earth*. Both Still's Alpha and the real-life working woman Brown posits as an example are targeted by the men in their lives because they are women, both withdraw from their hopeless situations, and both are numbed by their complete dependence on domineering males who view them as inconsequential.

Another aspect of trauma that confuses its diagnosis is that not everyone responds to a situation—no matter how unequal it appears—in the same way. While some people

might be traumatized by verbally abusive language, for instance, others might not be similarly affected. Innumerable variables weigh on human response. In "Reconstructing the Impact of Trauma on Personality," Maria P. P. Root offers a "feminist reconstruction of the impact of trauma" to argue that trauma is subjective: "Central to this conceptualization is the tenet that trauma is a very personal experience, the upheaval, stress, and pain of which can only be judged subjectively and in a psychosocial context. As such, what is deemed traumatic is determined by the traumatized person rather than the observer" (230, 235, 237). That is why credence must be given, according to Brown, to women in emotionally corrosive conditions who evince the symptoms of trauma, what Brown calls the "traumatogenic effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment but that do violence to the soul and sprit" ("Range" 107). Therefore, the deprivation of agency that springs from gender inequality can be traumatic to a woman, because even if she is physically safe, such oppression can chip away at her self-esteem, ambition, intellect, and hope. In other words, a lack of autonomy can crush a woman's soul and destroy her spirit, leaving her traumatized. Although this type of trauma might be difficult to quantify, literature brings it to the forefront by charting those crushing emotional moments that add up to trauma.

Re-conceptualizing trauma to include "those everyday, repetitive, interpersonal events that are so often the sources of psychic pain for women," changes our worldview, according to Brown ("Range" 108). When a continuous, common condition as opposed to a startling episode is recognized as potentially traumatic, the cultural institutions that perpetuate power hierarchies are suddenly less palatable; for example, the pain of subjugation, as well as the practical inequalities that result from it, can be more easily

acknowledged so that what Brown calls the "traumata of being a woman" can be validated ("Range" 109).

Both Brown and Root argue that an ongoing situation can be traumatic, and Root cites what she calls "insidious trauma" as a major source of psychic pain for various marginalized groups:

> Insidious trauma is usually associated with the social status of an individual being devalued because a characteristic intrinsic to their identity is different from what is valued by those in power, for example, gender, color, sexual orientation, physical ability. As a result, it is often present throughout a lifetime and may start at birth. (240)

In other words, oppression can rise to the level of trauma for some women, even women who are not victims of sporadic, violent abuse. Because it can begin at birth, it is an inherent part of social relationships, determining the way a body is perceived in the social world, regardless of how that body actually behaves in society. Insidious trauma, therefore, is built into social hierarchies. I will be describing a particular kind of insidious trauma, patriarchal trauma, which is inflicted on women living in patriarchal hierarchies.

Just as real women can be traumatized by the deprivation of autonomy, literary characters who experience the same sort of seemingly mundane oppression need to be read as traumatized in order to expose even the darkest nooks of patriarchy to light. That sort of trauma is writ large in the texts under consideration, here, allowing me to examine not just an explosive instance of trauma but an entire cultural system of trauma. I use the term *patriarchal trauma* to describe both types of oppression, physical and mental, and to examine how gender functions within oppressive structures of patriarchy.

I argue that patriarchal trauma molds the ways the novels under consideration in this analysis represent women's resistance to male domination, idealized subjugation, and

madness. The novels were published across a span of time, 1940 to 2013. The settings in the novels, though, represent a much more cohesive period, from the turn of the century through the 1930s, what might be loosely termed *modernity*, and all of them are set, at least in part, in rural Appalachia. These texts show shocking moments of violence and loss but also adumbrate systemic violence in women's lives. All three authors return to this moment of change in Appalachia, suggesting the time period is central to the examination of gender in the region's literature, especially to consider how women participate in modern cultural shift. Reading the novels in terms of patriarchal trauma trains a spotlight on women's subjugation and the ways they resisted and defied it, thus connecting the narratives closely to one another.

Chapter two analyzes women's resistance to industrialism's predilection for male superiority in modern rural spaces in James Still's *River of Earth*. Usually considered a chronicle of an idyllic agrarian lifestyle giving way to ruthless industrialism, I argue that concerns about gender compete with the juxtaposition of agrarianism and industrialism at key moments in the text; in fact, I read Alpha Baldridge's alleged longing for a simple, pastoral life as a desire for autonomy. Despite her brave resistance, however, the active and outspoken Alpha is subjected again and again to the crushing blows of male dominance, so that at the end of the book, she is a passive woman without a voice, traumatized by patriarchy. *River of Earth*, then, narrates the infliction of patriarchal trauma, criticizes its effects, but simultaneously hints that it might be inevitable for any woman who strives for independence in a patriarchal culture.

Chapter three examines the sexist ideology in the immensely popular and critically acclaimed *Gap Creek: The Story of a Marriage*, by Robert Morgan. If *River of*

Earth suggests that women are destined to lose their fight for autonomy, *Gap Creek* denies their desire for it. Morgan writes from a female protagonist's point of view in this book, and through that adopted voice, normalizes and approves women's subjugation. The novel's problematic stance is obscured primarily, it seems, by Morgan's insider status. I strenuously object to the novel's assertion that women desire subordination to men. For example, Morgan's Julie derives contentment through work, which is bound up in the trope of the hardworking mountain woman, a staple in Appalachian literature; however, her labor is often degrading and always determined by men. Because the character passively accepts men's exploitation of her labor, she is part and parcel of a troubling epistemological hegemony dictating that mountain women are to be valued primarily for their submissiveness and strong backs.

In another example, the novel also eroticizes violence perpetrated by a man against a woman when Julie becomes sexually aroused after her husband humiliates her and hits her in the head. This is a potentially harmful representation because it not only approves male violence against women, it rewards abuse with sex. According to Morgan, then, the story of marriage is a story of hierarchy in which women work like men but submit like women, underscoring the novel's heavy investment in conventional representations of an allegedly inferior femininity. Because Morgan creates Julie as a woman who wants to be controlled and abused, the patriarchal trauma inflicted on her does not come from her domineering, abusive husband but from her male author. While Still's Alpha evokes commiseration for herself and respect for her author because she goes down swinging, Morgan's Julie elicits pity for herself and frustration, anger, and downright disgust for her creator because he makes her oblivious to the fight.

Chapter four considers Lee Smith's *Guests on Earth*, a novel about women's madness and its relation to patriarchal trauma. The narrative is set primarily at a mental hospital located in the Appalachian Mountains of North Carolina, which intermittently houses the fictional protagonist, Evalina, and the real, famously but dubiously mad Zelda Fitzgerald. Zelda epitomizes the early-twentieth century woman's fight against patriarchal trauma, and in this book, she does so beside women from various backgrounds, classes, and regions of the country, thus defying the notion that such differences mitigate or deflect subjugation; for all these women, the traumatic effects of oppression—regardless of the ways they manifest—are the same. *Guests on Earth* does not answer the question concerning women's fate in the changing modern culture, but it most clearly suggests that the deprivation of autonomy can be traumatic for some women. Evalina, for example, fails in her attempt to negotiate the patriarchal strictures of society at large, as well as the replication of patriarchal ideology inside the asylum.

As the following chapters demonstrate, Appalachian literature is not a unified canon lamenting the loss of an Edenic agrarian community. Rather, it engages with cultural issues that have been misread as familiar regional concerns, and it offers sharp insights into controversial ideologies, even when they are disguised as positive exposition, such as women's subjugation in patriarchy. Examining the implicit and direct ways texts represent women's fight for autonomy allows us to reconsider Appalachian literature as a vital, articulate voice in the critical discourse of gender equality.

Chapter Two

Farming for Autonomy in *River of Earth*

> Now, what peculiarly signalizes the situation of woman is that she—a free and autonomous being like all human creatures—nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other.
>
> —Simone de Beauvoir

American society was patriarchal during the early part of the twentieth century, and James Still's Eastern Kentucky setting in *River of Earth* reflects the subjugation of women prevalent in the country at the time.[1] *River*'s male characters ignore, dismiss, belittle, smear, prey upon, objectify, and dominate women characters. I argue that the novel condemns this prevalent sexism in various ways. First of all, Still uses nature to convey and problematize Brack's domination of women, and even though women's association with nature is a conventional motif, the novel troubles the essentialized notion by showing not only Alpha's utilitarian view of nature but also her eventual betrayal by the natural world. Secondly, the novel questions rigid gender roles through motifs of work, femininity, and masculinity. Thirdly, and most significantly, the novel criticizes women's subjugation through a sympathetic portrayal of Alpha's degenerative transformation: she goes from a strong, outspoken woman who fights for agency to a weak, silent woman whose lifelong confrontation with patriarchal trauma leaves her broken.

Women have long been more closely associated with nature than men. Whether it is the earth, the environment, or the processes of the body, these elements have conventionally been gendered as feminine and womanly. Establishing such a relationship allows for the idea that woman, like nature, must and should be tamed and dominated in

order for mankind to progress. In other words, men must conquer the virgin wilderness, as well as the virgins, to further civilization. Thus, reductive juxtapositions of woman against man develop in a series of false binaries: open/contained, simple/complex, domestic/public, wild/civilized, emotional/reasonable, and on and on. In "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" anthropologist Sherry Ortner examines such dichotomies to argue that women are subordinated by men in all cultures, at least per Western interpretation of those cultures, and that woman's association with nature facilitates their oppression:

> [T]he pan-cultural devaluation of woman could be accounted for, quite simply, by postulating that woman is being identified with, or symbolically associated with, nature, as opposed to man, who is identified with culture. Since it is always culture's project to subsume and transcend nature, if woman is a part of nature, then culture would find it 'natural' to subordinate, not to say oppress, her. (11-12)

In an attempt to avoid an oversimplification, Ortner goes on to qualify her argument: "That is, culture (still equated . . . with men) recognizes that woman is an active participant . . . but sees her as being, at the same time, more rooted in, or having more direct connection with, nature" (12). Upon its publication in 1972, Ortner's argument was popular in feminist studies, and it has found continued pertinence in the field of ecocriticism.[2] In addition to its presence in the real world, the idea of nature gendered as woman or woman as the sex more closely linked with nature is a familiar trope in Western literature, as well.

For rural women characters in fiction, the association of nature and woman is a particularly prevalent trope; indeed, in Appalachian literature, most of which focuses on rural, poor, or working class women, it is ubiquitous. For instance, in *Wingless Flights,* Miller categorizes the trope as the most prominent feature of Appalachian women

characters: “The first and most obvious attribute of women in Appalachian fiction is undoubtedly their close, almost mythic, relationship with the natural world” (3). Yet, Miller’s argument does not take into account the problematic aspects of the trope, focusing instead on the juxtaposition of inside and outside authors.

In *Wingless Flights*, Miller examines Appalachian women characters appearing in texts from the late nineteenth century through 1950 to argue that outside authors helped establish stereotypes of Appalachian people, but those he terms “native writers” wrote with a “voice of ‘authenticity,’ providing “‘truer,’” accounts of mountain life as it was really lived in Appalachia (79-80). Published in 1996, Miller’s text added a wealth of insight to the conversation regarding the literary exploitation of Appalachia; however, I argue the time is ripe to acknowledge that, in large part, the practice of dichotomizing authors as insiders or outsiders is riddled with inconsistencies and is invariably debatable, due to the number of variables involved in such categorization and how they are interepreted.[3] In addition to my claim that there is a lack of sensible criteria for evaluating an author as insider or outsider, I also claim that even when judged as an insider, such a status should not shield an author’s text from incisive critical inquiry, primarily because no writer is immune from pervasive ideological constructions. Emma Bell Miles’s *The Spirit of the Mountains*, on which Miller relies for much of his argument regarding authenticity, is a case in point.

For example, Miles maintains as much distance as possible from, and a position of offensive superiority to, the native mountain people she uses as subjects:

> Of course, many habits of cabin life would seem uncleanly to dwellers in a better civilization. But this existence is nearly as primitive as that of the Dark Ages, and primitive life is necessarily dirty, if for no other reason

> than that it is lived close to the ground. Nearness to the soil is not so much a mere figure of speech as we are apt to imagine. (20)

Yet, Miller deems Miles an insider who is "able to attain an insightful balance in her descriptions of the people and the 'spirit' of the mountains," noting in particular that she "captures a balanced portrait" of "mountain women," even though, according to Miller's own evidence, Miles sketches older women as primitive slaves and younger women as simplistic, passive, unkempt victims (81, 84-85). These portrayals are patronizing at best; certainly, they lack the insight and aptness with which Miller credits them (82). Miles's insider status, then, should not lend unquestioned authenticity to her derogatory representations of native mountain people, especially when authors with outsider status, such as Mary Noailles Murfree, are condemned for similar characterizations.[4]

Furthermore, while Miller expresses respect and even reverence for native authors' fictional women characters, his argument conflates them with real women: "They give faithful portraits of mountain women, whose influence is so strongly felt in the daily lives of the mountain people" (80). While it has been important in the past to note the literary exploitation of Appalachian people, accepting a common association in more sympathetic but still fictional accounts as a true characteristic of a large group of individuals amounts to little more than the essentialism such an argument condemns, even if the shared feature is cast as a positive one. It is possible that Miller's esteem for certain authors' insider status leads him to recognize but not question woman's association with nature in their works.

Even though Miller points out that feminist critics argue woman's association with nature is a "facet of patriarchal Western civilization," he does not go on to question the trope's validity; in fact, he accepts it as both a literary motif and an actual condition

of real life, even though it essentializes women in a hierarchal way: “Whereas woman’s impulse is to protect and save nature, of which she is a part, man’s is to subdue and conquer it” (4-5). Miller then bases a number of his claims about the features of Appalachian literature and real Appalachian women on this alleged relationship. Throughout *Wingless Flights*, it is clear that not only does Miller accept the conflation of woman and nature, he also considers it a positive attribute, even a compliment, to women, one that endows them with admirable sensibilities and the capability to save a man, to effect “an almost mythic reconciliation between man and nature” (5-6). Miller’s exploration of the trope seems to sincerely laud woman’s alleged connection to nature in both real and fictional Appalachian women, but praise for woman’s symbolical and simplistic association with nature actually reinforces the hierarchal opposition of man over woman. Moreover, even if a novel associates women with nature, it does not necessarily do so in a wholly conventional way. For instance, in *River*, the connection between Alpha and nature separates her from her husband, Brack, instead of facilitating his salvation. Furthermore, her affiliation is more utilitarian than aesthetic. Finally, nature betrays Alpha, further complicating Still’s portrayal of the trope.

Still constructs both Alpha and her daughter, Euly, as females enmeshed in the natural world around them. For example, when given the opportunity, Alpha raises fowl, plants a garden, tends the crops, and preserves the harvest (169-173, 184). Also, using nature imagery to suggest life, death, and the fragility of womanhood, Still has her decorate a dead tree with eggshells. Animals also function as symbols for Alpha. One is the guinea hen that Brack wants to “ground for life” by cutting the joint of its wing, just as he wants to keep Alpha dependent on him (49). Another is the pregnant mare being

ridden by two men who are condemned by Alpha's brother, Jolly: "Two on a mare, and her in a bearing way. Liable to drop a colt any time. A shame, and I spoke it" (153). Jolly calls the men's callous treatment of the mare a "'shame'" in much the same way he criticizes Brack for quitting his job and planning to move while Alpha is pregnant: "'Begrabs. Your woman called to straw, and it hard times'" (240). In Jolly's view, Alpha is the perpetually pregnant mare Brack cruelly rides from mining camp to mining camp.

Like Alpha's character, Euly is conflated with nature as she runs "silently as a fox over the hill," and "about the coves like a young fox" (22, 171). She also builds a "playhouse . . . in a haw patch," using corncobs, rocks, and mud to form her play family and their furniture (171). Here, Euly is twice connected to nature, doing what is held to be natural for a girl within a natural woodland setting. Her father, though, is as disconnected from nature as possible, and proves to be just as dismissive toward Euly's appreciation for natural things as he is to her mother. For example, while Brack seems to truly suffer from terrible allergies, he becomes inordinately furious at Euly's efforts to decorate the house with the flowers he blames for his rhinitis (174). If nature and femininity are conflated in *River*, then Brack is the masculine destroyer of both.

Brack repeatedly makes his intolerance for farming and nature clear (35, 50-52, 69, 182, 241). Brack ignores his wife's wishes and the symbols of nature which represent her, including the recently decorated egg tree, which Alpha and Euly fix together, and he also is oblivious to the "blossoms beside the steps" (174). Moreover, Brack never wants to give nature a chance to mature, is indifferent to young, growing things, and even wants, repeatedly, to eat the young. For example, in the spring garden, Brack "would pull a bean and break it impatiently between his fingers . . . 'I figure they're fair ready for

biling' . . . 'They hain't nigh ready,' Mother would say . . . 'Wait till they've had their full growth'" (14). He then gives all the young beans away to some of his unemployed miner friends, despite the fact that it means his own children will go even hungrier, and although his burst of misguided generosity seems sincere, by giving away the food he gets to play the charitable neighbor to his male friends, and in this instance, simultaneously assert his dominance over Alpha by disregarding her decision (18).

In another example of his indifference or intolerance toward nature, Brack kills a pregnant rabbit and forces Euly to clean it. She discovers four babies in its womb and becomes so upset she "never ate wild meat again" (13). While it is true that necessity has a right to override sentimentality, in this episode, Brack violates the tacit code of hunters by hunting in the springtime, when pregnant mothers abound. In another instance, when the crops do well and he has had his fill of vegetables, Brack turns to the guinea chicks: "'I bet one would be good battered and fried, tender as snail horns' . . . 'They're not nigh big enough,' Mother said." (58). Brack's philosophy is that not everything or everybody lives to old age, anyway, so there is no need to protect or save the young: "'Guineas are hard raising. Bounden to lose some. It's the same way with folks. Hain't everybody lives to rattle their bones'" (57). Brack's nonchalance toward the death of the young extends even to his own children. For example, while Brack at times shows concern for his infant son, Green, the novel leaves little doubt of the father's impassive stance toward the baby's well-being: "Father held the baby in the flat of his two hands. Little Green stared into his face. 'Take me,' Father was saying. 'I never tuck natural to growing things'" (47). Brack is ostensibly referring to farming, here, but the imagery is unmistakable; indeed, after Green dies, Brack's reaction to Alpha's decision to hold a funeral for the

baby further reveals his indifference to the death of young things: "'Green hadn't even larnt to walk. There hain't any use for a big funeral'" (59, 80, 90, 174). Brack the Baby Eater has little regard for the natural world's progeny, which at times includes even his own children. It is difficult to imagine a male character more disconnected from nature than Brack Baldridge, and the novel works through nature to illustrate his cruelty and male dominance. Instead of using the woman—nature trope to save a male character, then, Still uses it to separate husband from wife, and father from daughter.

Another way Still complicates the trope is by rendering Alpha's connection to nature more utilitarian than aesthetic. *River* does not support Miller's assertion that Alpha finds "a source of sustenance and beauty" in nature (4). Miller rightly points out Still's use of "maternal imagery," including the egg tree, as well as the seasonal nature of farming and life, to show that Alpha is connected to the natural world, but Alpha's wish to farm and quit moving about does not necessarily indicate Miller's interpretation that she has some sort of spiritual "kinship with nature" or even a "love of the land" (114, 6, 112). Throughout the narrative, Jolly, Euly, and the narrator all express appreciation, even reverence, for nature (37, 133-34, 13, 22, 50, 20, 24, 135, 149, 171). Alpha's relationship to the land, however, is more utilitarian. The "lush growth" of grass in a creek bottom means the "finest hayfeed ever was" to Alpha, hay to feed a non-existent cow that, in turn, would provide milk and butter for the family. Moreover, she wants to live on a hill, a "lonesome place" not for any aesthetic pleasure, but so she can get away from the crowded coal camps where neighbors are a bother (49-51). During all her exchanges with Brack about staying on a farm or moving to a coal camp, Alpha does not

rhapsodize about any potential beauty in nature, nor does she turn an artistic eye toward farming as some sort of simple but noble pastoral scene.

To Alpha, farming means food to alleviate her family's needs. What she does emphasize in her dialogues with her husband is that she is exhausted and craves a permanent home in a lonely spot where, she believes, she can farm and raise enough livestock to provide only for her family, which she paradoxically wants to isolate and protect from the entire world yet expose to modern advantages such as education (80, 89). She has no knowledge of the herbs so often associated with Appalachian women characters, nor a recipe for the miraculous tonics they all allegedly know how to brew (54, 68). Without a sentimental word, she cuts "the head off of fifteen dommers" and the "last guinea" to feed her guests at Green's funeral, for flora and fauna, to Alpha, mean food, not romanticized metaphor (179). So, even though Still clearly creates a woman character who is more closely connected to nature than her male counterpart, her relationship to the land is based on its potential to provide space and food for the body, not the soul. Furthermore, the fact that Still creates male characters, like the narrator and Jolly, who are connected to nature and attuned to nature's aesthetics rescues the narrative from a purely conventional stand. This is not to suggest that Alpha—or for that matter, the real Appalachian women with whom Miller equates her—does not glean satisfaction, pride, and a sense of accomplishment from working in her garden and preserving food, but Miller's assessment of Alpha's character as one who has a special "kinship with nature" because she is female is only a compliment under the paradigm of conventional patriarchy.

Yet another complication of the trope is that instead of an affable cohort, nature sometimes represents an inherent threat to females, both human and animal, as well as babies: the neighbor, Clabe Brannon, has a mare who is "sorrowful" and trembles "in her agony," during a difficult birth, and the narrator's Aunt Rilla is too "sick" to travel as it is "getting near her time" (32, 104). Even more significantly, a high percentage of babies die, including Green, four of Alpha's seven siblings, and the colt promised to the narrator (166, 120, 32). Expectant mothers are thus repeatedly imperiled in the novel, and young life is precarious, at best. Alpha, too, confronts nature as an adversary more often than not.

Though connected to nature, Alpha is ultimately betrayed by it. At the end of the book, Alpha's body, indeed, her life, is threatened by the biological act of giving birth. As labor approaches, Alpha is forced to lie in bed with what the narrator calls "sick spells" while Euly tries to do the housework and take care of her mother, too, without any help from Brack, the narrator, or her little brother Fletch, all of whom are male and thus excused from domestic chores (198, 218, 223-24, 218). In February, shortly before Alpha goes into labor, her body is "swollen until she could scarcely walk," and the narrator tellingly terms her condition an "illness" (224, 232). When Jolly brings the body of Alpha's recently deceased mother, Cordia, to the Baldridge house, Alpha nearly faints, but despite her precarious condition, goes on to arrange Cordia's hair while a concerned friend, Nezzie Crouch, watches over Alpha "uneasily" (237). After she finishes preparing the corpse, a deathly pale Alpha goes into labor and Nezzie sends for women in the camp who might help with the birth (187, 212, 238-39).[5] *River*'s resistance to the strictly

conventional use of the nature—woman trope demonstrates the novel's Modern concern for gender issues.

In *A New Heartland: Women, Modernity, and the Agrarian Ideal in America*, Janet Galligani Casey argues that certain Modern writers purposely disrupted conventional, nostalgic portrayals of the woman's body and its cultural imaginings. Casey draws specifically from the work of Edith Summers Kelly to claim that the author troubles "the hackneyed but still prescriptive link between agrarian paradigms and the maternal-domestic ones" (130). Unvarnished scenes of painful childbirths, according to Casey, "leave little room for conventional images of maternity" that do nothing more than try to establish a link between a productive land and a productive woman (132). By representing the very real dangers that go along with a woman's labor, Casey asserts, such novels suggest that if women and farming are going to be linked, then images of loss are more apt than fecundity: "Thus birthing and raising babies becomes a labor no more promising, no more fulfilling, than the pointless round of planting and harvesting that circumscribes the poor farmer's existence" (132). In *River*, neither the land nor the woman's body can assuredly promise life in an unreliable modern world. Still refrains from a blow-by-blow description of Alpha's actual labor, but Nezzie's worry, Alpha's collapse, and the fact that her pregnancy has proven unusually debilitating are ominous portents.

However close her relationship with nature, in the end, it is the natural world that betrays Alpha. The novel suggests that because she has fulfilled her destiny by providing two sons for the industrial machine and a daughter who seems likely to survive long enough to also work and give birth, she is no longer necessary; as a matter of fact, she is

hardly present at all while she is hugely pregnant, especially to Brack, who by now dismisses her entirely. At the onset of labor death is a likely outcome for Alpha, and if she does die, the narrative hints, it will change very little. Brack will move the remaining family to Grundy, live in a company house, and Euly will do Alpha's work until Brack marries another "doughbeater" (40). As for the infant, it matters even less, for it is likely to die, as Green did, with or without a mother. The baby's cry is the last image in the last line of the book, and following as it does closely upon Cordia's demise, it clearly represents the cycle of birth and death. Simultaneously, though, the newborn's crying accompanied by what is absent from the narrative in the final scene—namely, any sound from or mention of Alpha—also represents the peril faced by so many pregnant females and babies in the text. If the Baldridge baby symbolizes humanity's intractable determination to live, the sheer number of newborn and child deaths in the novel suggests the futility of the infant's willpower.

Women and nature might be connected in the narrative, then, but they certainly are not allies. Although *River* relies on woman's connection to nature in conventional ways, it simultaneously disrupts the trope by refusing to sentimentalize woman's connection to the natural world; in fact, the association is adversarial at times. Furthermore, even when used conventionally, the trope functions as a way to question sexism. Similarly, the novel criticizes the devaluation of the feminine through gendered work.

Work is divided by gender in *River* so that women assume responsibility for anything and everything hinting of the domestic. Relegated to the home, they there find their efforts overlooked or misunderstood, epitomized poignantly when Brack, after

giving away the food desperately needed by his starving family, "helps" Alpha by hanging too many clothes on the line and then tightening it too tightly, causing it to break. Instead of asking Alpha *how* to help with the clothes, he does as he sees fit, like he always does, and all she can do is start over on the wash: "And Mother ran too, swinging her arms in dismay, for she had heard the clothesline break, and the clean garments now lay miserably in the dirt" (19). Obviously unacquainted with this sort of woman's work, his effort is meant to indicate a great sacrifice on his part, one that will make up for his unreasonable exercise of authority over the garden, and the fact that he is a man is supposed to excuse him from doing it right. Excluding her from any real power by allowing the neighbor men to take the beans, Brack can only offer an awkward, perfunctory gesture as consolation.

This division of work is learned early on; for example, at the schoolhouse, the male teacher sends the boys with carbide lamps—symbolic little miners—into the narrow, dark attic to chase away the bats, while the girls stay below. Reserving this adventurous work for the boys while dismissing the girls to the literal and metaphorical subordinate place has nothing to do with age or physical condition, because it pertains even to the narrator, the "'little man'" only seven years old, and Euly, who is 14, strong and athletic (94). The male schoolteacher's delegation, which the students do not question, illustrates that dividing work by gender is common, albeit irrational.

Even though the women characters in *River* are relegated to the domestic realm, they are valued for their ability to accomplish physically demanding work and endure hardships in the manner of men. This paradoxical status makes perfect sense in a male-dominated culture: women are less than males, so they are constrained to what is

considered less than manly, that is, womanly, behavior, but then can only be esteemed for traits reserved for men, such as strength and stamina. To credit women's work or to perceive strength as both a masculine and feminine quality would raise women's status perilously close to men's dominant hierarchal position, so the paradox persists. In pre-industrial Appalachia, the arduous work of raising a garden was largely shared by men and women; however, after the timber and coal industries established work that was off-limits for many women, the garden came under the purview of women, at least for much of the year, and those who were physically capable of performing this often back-breaking job were valued for their ability to "work like a man," a loaded phrase that became all too common in much of Appalachian culture.[6]

To work like a man but not be a man, a woman must be able to do heavy work while retaining her femininity; thus, she has to maintain the home, the family, and her womanly appearance while simultaneously performing the outside tasks that harden her muscles and cause general disarray to her hair, clothes, and so forth. Thus, Alpha is a highly eligible single woman because as Cordia brags, she was able to do not only "housekeeping," but also "field work": "'She could trash any of her brothers in a corn row.'" Alpha was pretty, though thin, according to Cordia, but it was the combination of her appearance and her ability to work like a man that offered her her choice "amongst the fellers" (128). Once she marries a coal miner, however, her ability to raise a productive garden is irrelevant during the times spent in the coal camps.

According to Ron Eller in *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930*, before the industrialization of Appalachia, women occupied a central position in their families and the larger society:

“In the preindustrial social setting, the woman was the most important figure in the basic social unit, the family. Her role and responsibilities within the domestic realm granted her significant authority over the household, respect in the community, and a strong sense of identity and personal gratification” (32). Although Eller’s generalized historical view homogenizes Appalachian women—especially his assumption about “personal gratification”—it seems safe to assume his perception was accurate for a number of women in the region before the industrial reign. In the initial stages of industrialization, Eller contends, women’s position remained integral within their families and communities because it was then that thousands of local men left farming and flocked to mining jobs, leaving the farm under the sole direction of women, who supervised their families during the planting and harvesting times, and then often preserved the food practically on their own. Although men who farmed at all still did most of the heavier tasks, such as the spring plowing, women and children accomplished the rest (16-19). Although this type of work was arduous, it opened up routes to increased authority for women who had to make autonomous decisions as they assumed the sole responsibility for what went on the table at mealtimes.

As industrialized coal mining picked up speed, however, small, marginal mines were swallowed up by major corporations that owned the mineral rights to hundreds of thousands of acres each. During the first two decades of the twentieth-century, for example, coal production in Eastern Kentucky rose at a phenomenal rate, becoming an important component of the national and global economy. During this time, there was hardly a hollow in Eastern Kentucky without a mine, and coal camps became a dominant community structure.[7]

Once entire families left their farms to live in mining camps surrounding drift mouths of centralized mines, woman's role as the capable family farmer diminished or disappeared altogether. For women who moved back and forth between mining camps and farms, it could become an especially cruel psychic flip-flop of subjugation and assertion of self. This is not to suggest that women became entirely independent during the time spent on the farm, but they were freer to exercise a greater amount of agency in their daily existence. Alpha exemplifies the Appalachian woman undergoing this cycle of assertion and subjugation as she moves between farm and mining camp. If there were real women who successfully negotiated this situation, Alpha does not represent them; rather, she is a woman traumatized by the untenable tug-of-war between at least a fledgling autonomy and its total loss.

Euly is another example of a female character whose value is contingent on her ability to work like a man. Euly follows in her mother's footsteps, for she was "thin and quick like Mother," according to the narrator, and with a tone of envy, he admits she could "trash us all with a corn row," using the same language Cordia uses to describe Alpha (128, 169). Likewise, Cordia attempts to do farm work at 78 years old and does not like to be reminded of her diminished capacities, even for demanding jobs like hoeing and harvesting (104-05). Working like a man earns value for women in the narrative, therefore, but only within the constraints of male dominance. The phrase "work like a man" is just one example of language used to maintain the hierarchal status quo of sexism.

Much of the language men use in *River* denigrates and objectifies women. Brack, Darb Sorrels, and Jolly all refer disparagingly to women as "doughbeaters," reducing the

entire female sex to nothing more than kitchen automatons, good for cooking and possibly, sex, for references to a “doughbeater,” especially those between Jolly and Brack, are surrounded with sexually connotative language: “‘You need a doughbeater to put the clamps on you,’ Father said. ‘Aye . . . I’m ripe as a peach to get married. If’n a pretty girl blowed her breath on me, I’d fall off and squish. And they’s one I’d be right willing to have shake my tree . . .” (40). Although Jolly says he is ready “‘to get married,’” his comparison of himself to a ripe peach that squishes after contact with a pretty girl’s breath suggests erection, sex, and satisfied flaccidity, where marriage is incidental, at best. Here, a doughbeater who will “‘put the clamps’” on a man settles him down to steady work, certainly, but also provides him with sex so that he will not be “‘rag-tagging with the Law’”—fighting over women—like Jolly (34-40). Similarly, when Jolly finally decides, unilaterally, to marry Tina Sawyers, he equates union with her with his renewed efforts to make the Middleton farm productive: “‘I’ve got me a young mule, new ground cleared, and soon to have a doughbeater fair as ever drew breath. Bees to work my red apple trees . . .” (242). While it is possible that Jolly has deeper feelings for Tina, here he merely associates her with images of fertility, just another requirement, albeit an important, pretty one, in the ritual act of farming: buy a mule, plow the earth, get married, make honey.

Other examples of sexist language include Brack’s admonition that “a man ought to rack his own jennies,” meaning, literally, that each man should keep his female donkeys constrained, and figuratively, that men should keep their women under control (90).[8] Another example is the ever-charming Tibb’s comment that the mine foreman ordered Harl and him to dig a vein of coal “not thick as a flitter” (202). The word *flitter* in

local dialect refers to a woman's genitalia and is used to negatively designate something as flat, that is, without a protuberance.

Language is not the only means men use to devalue the feminine in the novel. Making all the important decisions for his wife and children, Brack rules the women in his family authoritatively, using shame as a weapon against feminine expression; for example, he is especially hard on the teenaged Euly, angrily tossing her decorative flowers out of the house, making her "ashamed of her vain-wishing" because she wants cosmetics, and disdainfully spitting and grunting while scorning both her and Alpha because they are self-conscious about their shabby dresses and bare feet while attending a church service (174, 15, 74).

Like Euly, Toll's wife, Rilla, who never actually appears in the narrative to defend herself, suffers criticism for expressing femininity, mainly from Jolly, who is amazed at what seems like nothing more than devoted housekeeping on Rilla's part: "'His [Toll's] woman's got the fanciest notions I ever seed or heered tell of. A chist of drawers never sets in the same corner one week to the next. Little do-dacks here and there . . . flower pots . . . when I walked in that house, she come a-sweeping a broom behind'" (39). Reading through the tortuous phonetic spellings, it becomes clear that Rilla simply cleans assiduously and enjoys decorative items. At base underneath Jolly's insults to Rilla is his perception that she has Toll "'under the screw of her thumb'" (39). Therefore, it is Jolly's assessment of what he considers an outlandish gender dynamic—one in which a woman might have a voice—between his brother and sister-in-law that really riles Jolly. Cordia, too, unfairly insults Rilla.

When Luce promises to visit Cordia and help with her garden but fails to show up on time, she automatically points the finger at Rilla: "'It's Rilla that's keeping him away,' Grandma said. 'Luce's woman was always sot agin him doing for his ol' mommy'" (102). When he finally visits, Luce explains that Rilla is pregnant with her fifth child and "near her time," and that all four of their other daughters have chicken pox. Also, he adds that his own crops failed and he has been forced to work a logging job. Missing the import of Luce's perfectly valid reasons for the delay and revealing the extent of Cordia's influence on her grandson, the narrator states that "Uncle Luce was full of excuses" (104). Rilla represents the hardships and criticism faced by women struggling to be acceptable wives, mothers, and workers in a male-dominated society.

Moreover, in what seems to be an attempt to prevent any sort of feminine solidarity, Brack even prohibits Alpha from visiting her mother, perhaps because he will not brook his mother-in-law questioning his authority, like Jolly does when he comments on the too-thin, and later very pregnant but overburdened, Alpha (182, 33, 240). Similarly, men dismiss Alpha's defense of a woman, Coonie Todd, who becomes a target for male slander and misuse.

One of the most blatant cases of a man's exploitation of a woman is Uncle Samp's manipulation of Coonie Todd near the end of the narrative, after the Baldridges have moved once again to Blackjack. Coonie is a widow whose husband was killed in a mining accident. She owns her own house, which seems to be situated near or in the mining camp. She walks about the camp, making a little money by telling fortunes and distributing pamphlets containing a poem about the death of her husband. In Coonie, the shiftless and opportunistic Uncle Samp, who is freeloading once again on the Baldridges,

recognizes an easy mark. Samp begins talking regularly with Coonie, and before long Harl—who, along with Tibb, is also again taking advantage of Brack's misplaced hospitality—is needling Samp with ribald remarks, referring to Coonie as "that queen bee who peddles ballad verses" and disparaging her reputation: "'Her man's been dead three years,' Harl said. 'Three years buried and she hain't married another.' He looked slyly at Uncle Samp. 'I don't figure she'll be taking up with jist any ol' drone.'" Comparing Coonie to a "'queen bee'" implies she is having sex with a number of men, of which Samp is just another "'drone.'" Alpha's remarks directly contradict those of the men. She states that Coonie is a "'good woman,'" who owns a "'homeseat her pure own,'" but she makes no impression on Harl and Tibb, who ignore her defense of Coonie, as well as her dig about home ownership, which is obviously directed toward them and Samp, whom Alpha views as truculent leeches (206).

Samp proceeds with his scheme, talking with Coonie repeatedly and apparently spending nights with her, as well (203, 206-07). Samp soon announces, with a red face in front of the family who knows his parasitic ways, that he and Coonie plan to marry. He eventually leaves Blackjack with Coonie, to the amusement of the men in the community, who predict the "'widow woman'll woe the day'" (207, 215, 225, 227-28). No doubt Coonie has rued many a day before meeting Samp, and if his continuous mooching is any indication, she will probably rue many more.

Though the cousins imply that Coonie is promiscuous and Samp states that she is "'fair as a picture-piece,'" based on the narrator's and Euly's initial reaction to Coonie, it is unlikely that she is either: "She came hobbling, her uncombed hair tucked beneath a coat collar; she was old, old, and the seams of her face were like gullied earth. Euly drew

back, speaking under her breath . . . I shook, though not from cold. My teeth struck together" (195, 211). Even allowing for young people's often mistaken perception of age, such extreme reactions suggest that Coonie is simply an old, seemingly unkempt, and possibly sad woman instead of the wanton beauty described by the men. The narrator even gives up the idea of questioning Coonie about the ballad, and Euly suddenly decides to forego having her fortune told, even though she had been eager to find out the identity of her future husband and the details of her wedding (196). Euly is definitely put off by Coonie's superficial appearance, but it is also possible that Coonie, a bedraggled widow who lost her husband to the dangerous job of mining coal in poorly regulated mines and then became a target for male derision and gossip, represents a potential outcome for any young girl growing up in a coal camp, socializing with young boys most likely destined to become coal miners. Euly perhaps shies away from Coonie because she is afraid to envision her adult self in similar circumstances. Thus her sudden aversion to finding out any information about a potential husband.

In another crystal-ball moment regarding Euly's future, young females are put in close proximity to an early death. As the students await the teacher one morning in the schoolyard, the boys play an active game of marbles while "Euly went into the graveyard with the girls" (82). At first, it can be assumed that the girls have made the odd choice of the cemetery as their playground simply due to its proximity to the school, but then, after lunch, the "girls went into the graveyard" again, and Still's repetition of this particular diction and imagery, if not a case of clear foreshadowing, at least suggests the hazards of being female in an environment dominated by male action and values (87).

In *River*'s world, men occupy a superior position in the social hierarchy, and they use language, shame, and exploitation, among other tactics, to contain and regulate women's behavior. This lopsided gender dynamic is not celebrated in the novel; in fact, gender inequality is subtly criticized through Still's sympathetic portrayals of women. Indee, although the novel includes many characters, like Brack, Fletch, Harl, and Tibb, who exhibit traditionally gendered behavior, the novel also troubles essential notions of biologically predetermined gender roles by suggesting that societal institutions, such as industrialism, have the capacity to shape inclinations.

In *River*, industrialism allows new masculine archetypes to spring up in the Appalachian coalfields: the coal miner whose work aids the national and global economy; the coal miner who is the sole provider for his family; and the coal miner whose hard work can be understood and appreciated only by his male buddies. Without detracting from the significance of these representations to the men who embody them, it is important to realize that fulfillment of these male roles is contingent upon the exclusion of women from public affairs, the job market, and the camaraderie forged among men doing dangerous, physically taxing work. Coal mining not only fortifies male hegemony, therefore, it also affords men new modes of authority. For instance, when Brack brings home the groceries he bought on credit from the commissary, he pulls "himself tall and straight," proud to be the provider for his hungry family, regardless of the debt incurred. Alpha reaches toward the food with a "lean hand . . . blue-veined and bony" and then, overcome with emotion, she throws her apron over her head and turns away in near silence (70). Although Alpha's behavior is likely indicative of her relief—the crops have not done well or matured, and she and Green, especially, are practically starved—her

reaction also reveals the profound loss she feels over this store-bought food; after all, she did not plant a successful crop, or harvest it, or preserve it in order to provide this food for her family. Brack, the miner, has become the sole provider of the food Alpha, the would-be farmer, has failed to produce. Gone is her feeling of accomplishment, her pride, and her agency in her marriage, all lost to the industrialism that helped cement a dominant masculinity in her family and community.

Joining the great industrial movement in America meant the adoption of an ideology that equated progress with machine power; as a matter of fact, support of industrialism was a prerequisite in order to be considered a true American, according to Leo Marx in *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (181, 218). In Appalachia, those machines, including the trains, sawmills, and mechanized mining cars, for example, were operated by men, comprising a society dominated by metal, muscle, and assertion of conventional masculinity. Because most or all miners were men at the time, they became the only source of money, housing, food—in short, survival—for Appalachian mining families, solidifying their already dominant role and not only relegating women to jobs inside the house but also increasing the difficulty of those jobs by adding the dust, dirt, mud, and permanent overlay of blackness associated with coal to the floors, walls, ceiling, furniture, clothing, and bodies inside a mining camp. Although exploitation of Appalachian people by both outside and local mine owners was common to both men and women, men aligned themselves with national and global economic interests, as well as each other, and therefore claimed partnership in the American ideology of progress in a much more direct way than women, thus forming a community based on pride and patriotism. Members of this

community in the novel are under the sway of the national dogma of progress and are oblivious to—or willfully ignorant of—coal mining's blatant exploitation of their labor.

Brack informs his family several times that coal mining is a viable career because it is part of a national and international concern. While arguing with Alpha, he states with seeming admiration that the mine owners are "'stocking the storehouse'" in anticipation of a rising need for coal, which will be shipped internationally from the Great Lakes. When Euly asks where the Great Lakes are located, Brack tells her: "'A long way north. It's onreckoning how far'" (50). Still's construction of the Baldridges as grossly ignorant aside, Brack's remarks indicate his reverence for Eastern Kentucky's connection, and by extension, Brack's connection, to the world through the coal mining industry. This conversation is repeated shortly afterwards, as Brack and Alpha's old argument picks up where it left off (66-67). Finally, despite all the misery he and his family have suffered due to the unreliability of the coal business, Brack again predicts a boom in the industry, based on its connection to larger economic interests: "'Hit's a sight how good the mining business is getting,' he said. 'Big need for bunker coal up at the lakes, afar yonder'" (192-93). In his insistence that good economic times are just around the corner for coalminers, Brack is either oblivious to coal mining's maltreatment of its employees, or he stubbornly refuses to admit its realities, despite his own personal acquaintance with institutionalized exploitation. Either way, he is true acolyte of industrialism, a faithful adherent to the American ideal conflating industrialism with progress. Coal mining not only fleshes out his male privilege by connecting him to a global economy, it adds clout to his authority in his home. Moreover, the job cements his solidarity with other men, and it creates a mystique around his masculinity, as well: the harder it is to perform the job,

and the more dangerous it becomes, the more respect and importance it earns for the miner.

Mining boosts male solidarity within the community, and Brack chooses to align himself with his physically strong and potentially violent cousins, Harl and Tibb, and with the man who holds the most direct power over his fate, the mine foreman, Darb Sorrels: "'I was raised up with Darb, and figure he'll take on any of my kin if I just say the word'" (193). Brack is successful in using his influence for his cousins, much to Alpha's dismay, and has "'got Harl and Tibb Logan put on'" at the mine, ensuring that the hateful pair will once again live with them in a repetition of the miserable situation that led to Alpha's burning of the house at the beginning of the narrative.

Brack repeatedly brags about his association with Sorrels, even to a co-worker, Kell Haddix, who is rightfully more worried about the arbitrary firings inherent in the boom-or-bust cycle of mining than Brack's shallow, and rather pathetic, boasting, as he makes clear by interrupting Brack: "'Hit don't make sense, this cutting down and taking on. Begod!'" (199). Haddix is cognizant of industrial exploitation, and as he goes on to further criticize the mining company's unfair treatment of miners, Brack quickly defends it, even declaring that Haddix is "'a little touched'" in the head, although Haddix has not said anything remotely nonsensical—he simply refuses to defend mining (201). Because Haddix expresses his anger at the mining company's exploitation of its workers, Brack immediately marginalizes him by pronouncing him not quite right, mentally. He is confident about readily excluding a fellow worker like Haddix, because Brack is firmly entrenched within the community of coal-mining males. In *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century Volume I: The War of the Words*, Sandra M.

Gilbert and Susan Gubar point out that male characters are commonly portrayed as members of closely-knit, exclusively male communities, despite the type of tie that binds them together. Even when the bond is dangerous, grueling work, like coal mining, men are depicted as supportive to one another (112). Brack is right that Sorrels gives preferential treatment to Brack, which Brack upholds as fair, even though it is as arbitrary as the mining company's layoffs (226-27). Brack, then, in his defense of the company and Sorrels, is an extension of mining companies' practices, exemplified by his quitting his job and planning to move to Grundy with no thought of consulting Alpha or the children, because he "'tuck a notion'" in exactly the same way the mining company took notions to fire and hire at its discretion, without any consideration for the workers or their families (240).

Near the end of the narrative, at Blackjack, Brack takes pride in meeting the physical demands of mining, as well as confronting its dangers, which he, Harl, and Tibb recount for each other and the family during snatches of conversation recalled by the narrator, who relates them without attribution: "'I loaded fourteen tons today if I shoveled one chunk.'" "'I heered a little creak-creak, and by grabbies if a rock size of a washpot didn't come down afront o'me. Hit scared my gizzard, I tell you.'" "'I set me a charge o' powder, lit the fuse too short, and got knocked flat as a tape'" (195). Here, Brack's family uncritically accepts this version of a coal miner: he is strong, hard-working, and brave, so much so, in fact, that a potentially fatal mistake with a fuse seems only to increase his heroism. No one questions how long Brack will be physically able to do the work, whether or not he will be disabled or killed by the unsafe conditions in the mine, or what will happen to the family if he is killed in a roof-fall or other mining catastrophe. Indeed,

when Samp criticizes mining, “the others would listen as though a child had spoken” (195). While it is true that Samp is lazy and dependent on others for support, the family patronizes him, here, because he refuses the dangerous job of a coal miner and fails to acknowledge the boost in masculinity Brack gets from doing it. Samp is therefore excluded from male camaraderie within the coal camp, but the novel suggests that even Brack’s rash decisions are rationalized and his masculinity fortified by the other males around him because he is a member of the club.

The novel thus shows how industrial work like coal mining facilitates masculinity. A man who refuses or merely criticizes the work is somehow feminized: Samp is infantilized, and Kell Haddix is labeled as weak-minded. Like the women in the novel, neither man is respected and both are summarily dismissed. The narrative, however, resists strictly dichotomizing masculinity and femininity. Jolly, for example, is openly critical of mining and eschews it altogether, yet there are no aspersions cast on his masculinity, perhaps because he drinks, chases women, and fights like a man (should). Moreover, Still troubles the notion of strict gender roles further by rendering the likeable male protagonist into an ambivalently gendered narrator.

The child narrator in *River* tries and fails repeatedly to meet gender expectations in the text. During the difficult birth of the foal at Clabe Brannon’s farm, the narrator suffers exceedingly when he runs from the barn, unable to watch the labor: “I knew then the pain of flesh coming into life, and I turned and ran with this sight burning before my eyes, and my body cold and goose-pimpled . . . I was ashamed of my fear, though I could not go back until it was over. My humiliation was as loud as the guinea fowls crying in the young grass . . . ” (27). The narrator’s shame is worsened by the fact that Oates

Brannon, a little older but still a child, watched the entire birth and "hadn't turned a hair" and then proceeds to call the narrator a coward and beat him with a stick (26-27, 30-31). A similar queasiness overcomes the narrator when the family tries to save the calf from choking on the cob lodged in its throat. He cannot bring himself to help hold the calf, refuses to stick his hand down its throat, and cries "shameful tears" while holding a lamp to shed light on the makeshift operation. Exacerbating his shame, this time, is the participation of his mother, Euly, and even the five-year-old Fletch, whom Brack commends for his efforts: "'Here's a feller would make a good doctor,' he said" (61-65).

Ironically, it is the narrator who wants to become a veterinarian, or "'horse-doctor,'" though he is obviously unsuited—albeit still very young—for any profession involving the blood and guts of distressed animals, whether they be farm stock or humans, for that matter. For example, he fails to take any action at all above asking someone else to alert his father when Fletch blows his fingers off, becoming nearly paralyzed from looking at the two bloody stumps, "not being able to move" (218-19). Afterward, though he tries his best to watch Brack cut off the shreds of Fletch's fingers, he "chilled with fear, and backed away" (221). Fletch, meantime, again demonstrates his courage by not crying, and again earns the praise of the men around him. Fletch, then, seems to have no trouble fitting into the expected gender roles for males in the community, while the narrator struggles to meet the requirements for inclusion in the masculine realm. By the end of the narrative, however, the narrator makes an abrupt turn toward approved masculinity.

The narrator is met on several occasions with the assumption that he will grow up to be a coal miner. Even Kell Haddix, a miner who reviles the poor treatment of miners

and views the job itself as a soul-crushing enterprise, gives up any hope for his own sons or Brack's to do anything other than mine coal: "His shoulders sagged, his face became limp and resigned. 'Oh, they'll be miners, I reckon. My chaps and yours'll be miners. Brought up in the camps they got no chance. No chance . . .'" (201). Despite the narrator's litany throughout the book that he "'hain't a-going to be a miner,'" an episode near the end of the story suggests his aspirations might change, just as his close relationships with his mother and his grandmother are likely to end, as well (173).

When Alpha expresses her dismay at the imminent arrival of Harl and Tibb at Blackjack, the narrator displays masculine solidarity with his male relatives, unusual for his character: "I could not think why Mother would want us to live lonesome and apart. I thought of Harl and Tibb and Father sitting before the fire on winter evenings, legs angled back from the blaze, speaking after the way of miners" (194). The cousins' selfish appetites, ridicule, smug laughter, vicious kicks, and even the cruel joke they played on Uncle Samp that angered him so much he flung the narrator against a wall have all been, apparently, forgotten by him and replaced by wonder at a woman's silly wish to avoid such brutish behavior (6-10, 194). This remarkable change in the narrator's perception, along with his misplaced longing to be a vet, suggests his family and neighbors foresee his future occupation more clearly than he does, himself. Moreover, with his change in sensibilities and loyalties, the narrator is becoming a man by losing touch with the feminine and joining in comradeship with other males.

While Fletch, therefore, seems to possess a seamless masculinity as a young child, the narrator does not readily fill conventionally masculine roles during his early childhood. As he matures, however, he cannot help but notice that the males who mine

coal are the people with the power, at least within his family. Whatever his initial desires for his future, by the end of the book he begins to identify with the successfully masculine coal miners around him. With this significant change in the narrator, then, Still disrupts the idea that masculinity is always innate. Industrial work, like coal mining, the novel suggests, can actually inculcate masculine behavior, even in a young boy whose proclivities lie elsewhere. *River* strongly indicates, then, that gendered behavior can be socially constructed instead of biologically determined, and it also illustrates, through Alpha, the potential misery of trying to break those social constraints. This dire estimation of women's chances at gender equality is represented by Alpha's decline throughout the course of the narrative.

Brack and Alpha disagree in an obvious way about whether to farm or mine coal, but in addition to the practical questions at stake, Alpha's autonomy is also waged in the bitter struggle between them. It is significant that Alpha's very first line of dialogue in the novel is a declarative sentence in which she states outright the fact that she will not feed Brack's three parasitic relatives, Harl, Tibb, and Samp, indefinitely (3). When Brack ignores her decision, she burns down the house, forcing the three freeloaders to leave. This act is extreme, even though the house is a "'leaky shack,'" because it reveals Alpha's determination to assert agency and to have a voice in her marriage that her husband must hear or suffer the consequences (11). Burning the house, though, is only a temporary gain for Alpha.

Brack's rebuttal to Alpha's repeated argument to farm instead of mine coal makes his authority clear: "I *choose* mine work, the trade I know. I *choose* to follow the mines" (52, emphasis mine). No matter how persuasive Alpha's reasoning, Brack counters with

the fact that he holds the power of choice, while she is subject to his will. During a similar disagreement, when Alpha tells him she and the children are going to stay on a farm for the winter while he lives in the coal camp, Brack becomes angry, turning red in the face, hitting his shoes together, and bluntly telling her he "hain't aiming to be a widow-man this year" (182). A "widow-man" has no wife to cook, to clean, to have sex with, to boss around, and Brack, therefore, chooses to keep his near him; after all, he will not perform woman's work or he will lose part of his masculine persona. Similarly, if he has no one to dominate generally, his authority is lessened. As Gilbert and Gubar point out, men's authority derives from dominance over women, and their "maleness ultimately requires a primacy based on female secondariness" (10). Alpha's plan to live apart from Brack is radical, therefore, not only because it threatens Brack, personally, but also because it disturbs greater cultural assumptions of the time, including reproduction and gender norms. Wives simply did not dream of living apart from their husband/masters, yet Alpha dares to suggest it to Brack, who predictably responds with ire.

Yet, although Brack is domineering and overrules Alpha with oftentimes unreasonable decisions, she continues to defy him; for example, she resists his command about the guinea hen, which symbolizes Alpha, herself, when Brack wants to cut the joint of the bird's wing so that she will never fly again, choosing instead to clip its feathers, leaving the bird's potential to fly intact (47). Similarly, in her own effort to rise, Alpha announces to Brack that he will not regularly "'be eating fancy victuals'" for lunch, because she plans to spend time teaching herself to read better instead of preparing meals. Significantly, she makes this declaration while sitting "high on the poplar logs" of the woodpile, "out of the baby's reach," symbolizing her decision to distance herself, be it

ever so slightly, from the domestic duties that fill her every waking moment. Of course, her plan to educate herself comes to a pitiable end, thanks to the prideful, unreasonable action of a man who shoots, or shoots at, the teacher (88-98).

Another example of Alpha's defiance of Brack occurs when she holds a funeral for Green, inviting the entire community, much to Brack's dismay. After she tells him of her plan, which she has irrevocably put into action, Brack counters her resistance to his authority by announcing the family will be leaving the Little Angus farm—where the baby is buried—and returning to the Blackjack mining camp. His unilateral decision devastates Alpha, and her triumph in the matter of the funeral is suddenly deflated by her defeat in this much more momentous matter (174-85). The funeral does go forward, and afterward, Alpha again tries to oppose Brack's insistence on moving to a mining camp, but Brack's instantaneous anger squelches her idea of living apart. To seal his dominant position, Brack, once again, forbids Alpha to visit her mother (182).

The family goes to Blackjack in October, and Harl, Tibb, and Samp all eventually move back in with them. Alpha is horribly upset at the thought of the unwanted company, especially Harl and Tibb, but she knows how futile her wishes are in a home ruled by Brack. Sure enough, the cousins continue their brutish behavior. For example, they are endlessly greedy over food, despite the obvious fact that the Baldridges simply do not have enough to feed everyone. During their first protracted visit, Alpha began feeding her children between meals so they would not starve, but Harl and Tibb simply give a knowing "chuckle without saying anything" because they were secure in the foregone conclusion that Brack's decision to allow them to remain, eat what they want, and generally do as they wish was the only one that counted. For example, during their

second stay, they gobble up the half-cooked beans Alpha admonishes them against eating without so much as a word in answer to her protests (4, 204).

During this time at Blackjack, the images of Alpha, who is pregnant again, emphasize her as a weak domestic figure only, one who cooks and cleans seemingly without end. When she finds out that the cousins are going to move in with them, again, just as Samp has done, she does not bother to say anything but her consternation is apparent: “Her mouth opened in dismay . . . Mother’s eyes hollowed. Her hands grew limp about the dishrag. . . Mother’s lips began to tremble. She hung the dishrag on a peg and went hurriedly out of the room . . .” (191, 193-95). What is not stated in the text but is implied, here, is that Alpha’s workload increases exponentially every time another man enters the house, symbolized by the dishpan she dries while unsuccessfully trying to talk Samp out of moving in, and the dishrag in her hands when she learns that the cousins are coming back, too. Alpha’s response comes nowhere near overreaction; in fact, considering that Samp is entirely dependent on her, and Harl and Tibb eat what they want and leave the rest of the family to starve, torment the children, and sneer at Alpha, she might have reasonably lashed out at Brack for inviting the uncle and pair of bullies to stay with them. But what would be the point? She knows she has no say in the matter, and that realization leads to her intense physical reactions: silence, trembling, and wide-eyed misery.

In addition to the unwanted company, it is around this time when Alpha’s pregnancy incapacitates her, making her “ill and often abed” (198, 218, 223-24). As if those things were not enough, she then suffers a number of violent emotional shocks: Fletch takes dynamite from his father’s supply and blows off two of his fingers, miners

are being fired right and left, Cordia dies, and Brack quits his job and decides to move to another mining camp (218-19, 223, 232, 236, 240). Alpha's resistance to moving has become resigned acquiescence; in fact, the last time it is discussed, the exchange between her and Brack is humiliating, a mere parody of her former outspoken assertions, for in a "hollow, inquiring" voice, Alpha meekly asks Brack's permission for the family to return to the Little Angus farm where Green is buried, but Brack does not even bother to argue with her, "impatiently" dismissing her request as nothing more than foolish reverie as he harshly tells her the farm has been destroyed (232-33). It is significant that Alpha does not say another direct word in the book. Beginning the narrative as a strong-willed woman of action, Alpha winds up a sick, subjugated figure whose diminished voice disappears altogether. Her resistance, then, is only intermittent, sporadic, and futile, while her defeat, in Gilbert and Gubar's words, is "inevitable and eternal" (84).

Alpha is not a victim of physical violence. Brack does not beat or rape her. He does, however, demand her obedience. Distilled to its most basic component, Brack's authority rests on gender: he subordinates Alpha because she is a woman (Root 240). His means to accomplish this end are evident every time he makes a unilateral decision: when to move, where to live, whom to tolerate, what to eat. Moreover, any adult man in Alpha's life possesses the same sort of privilege, should he choose to exert it. To Alpha, these acts comprise the soul-crushing oppression that causes her so much misery on a continuous basis. In fact for her, it is precisely because the subordination is common and unrelenting that it has the capacity to traumatize her, for any attempt to exert agency on her part ultimately fails or is met with a swift reprisal, or both. I argue that these acts of subjugation enacted against Alpha by men are patriarchal trauma: they are emotionally

violent, perpetrated against her because she is a woman, and cause her intense misery. Alpha's flat emotional state at the end of the novel, therefore, can be read as her response to patriarchal trauma: she easily acquiesces to Brack's authority, she is meek and withdrawn, and most significantly, she is has lost both her literal and figurative voice.

River of Earth posits a gendered view of the modern rural landscape. Despite capitalistic industry's inherent exploitation of male workers, it simultaneously strengthens hegemonic masculinity, affirms men's sense of dominance, and cements their role as the familial autocrat in the narrative. For women, however, industrial change means the same subjugation through additional means, as domestic and farm work slides more rapidly downward on the value scale and any agency they possess recedes as surely as a mine disappears into blackness a few feet past the driftmouth. Contextualizing *River of Earth* as a narrative of rural modernity, then, allows for a reconsideration of its concern for gender, especially the role of women traumatized by patriarchy.

Chapter Three: The Literary Assault of *Gap Creek*

> A final paradox of the metaphor of literary paternity is the fact that in the same way an author both generates and imprisons his fictive creatures, he silences them by depriving them of autonomy (that is, of the power of independent speech) even as he gives them life.
>
> —Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*

In the title of Robert Morgan's *Gap Creek: The Story of a Marriage,* any number of adjectives would fit squarely before the last word to pin down the type of relationship presented in the narrative: unequal, exploitative, abusive. Yet, the novel depicts the violations perpetrated by the husband against his wife as negligible, inevitable, and justifiable. The book was published in 1999 but set a century earlier, so as the protagonist, Julie, relates her story, it becomes a journey into an imagined past when industrialism happened nearby but out of sight and when women were women and knew how to help men become men, in the purest patriarchal sense of the terms. Unlike James Still's *River of Earth*, which foregrounded a rural space as the center of modern change, *Gap Creek* posits a farm as remote from modernity as possible. The novel, then, is a way of going back, of returning to a rural landscape that is demanding but untouched by industrial chaos, and of reviving a male-female hierarchy in which men reign supreme and women are imagined to be content with their subjugation.

Yet, the sexism in the novel has not been a subject for extensive critical inquiry. In fact, in addition to its immense popular appeal, the novel has been lauded by scholars of Appalachian literature for what they consider its authentic portrayal of a woman's point of view on marriage, work, and sex. In contrast, I argue that Morgan's use of a female point of view is a simplistic authorial strategy that falls far short of the mark, and his representations of women's work and women's sexuality are fundamentally sexist.

Furthermore, I argue that Morgan's insider status has shielded the novel from all but positive analysis. The native North Carolinian does indeed display a familiarity with rural spaces in the novel, but it seems that his detailed portrayals of chopping wood and killing hogs have buried the book's patriarchal ideology beneath a gloss of purported authenticity.

The novel is set primarily on one farm near the border between North and South Carolina at a precise, significant moment in time, 1899. At the turn of the century, timber, textile, and coal industries were descending on Appalachia in droves but had not quite permeated the most remote of hollers. The women's movement was also gaining momentum, but first-wave feminism was still in the building stages. By moving his couple into an isolated geographical space on the cusp of but not immersed in widespread political and economic change, Morgan creates a plausible world physically and psychically removed from modernity. This extreme isolation, however, is constructed only for Julie, for her husband works at a textile mill, visits his family, and otherwise travels to and from the secluded farm where the couple begins their married life. Meanwhile, she does demanding work on the farm in addition to all the domestic work inside the home. Thus, in *Gap Creek*, the nostalgia for a bucolic farm life is dependent upon female labor.

Moreover, survival means arduous work and tough economic decisions for the couple, but the novel's early twentieth-century setting is infused with a late twentieth-century longing for the allegedly unproblematic good old days when women knew their passive, compliant place. Morgan, therefore, creates in Julie a woman character who is a repository for the American ethos of a particular type of rejuvenation, not only or even

primarily for the return to a simple, pastoral homestead—the couple makes the land productive again, though it is a precarious enterprise—but for a revival of the male's hegemonic stranglehold, which underwrites their economic status.

Indeed, Morgan relies so heavily on the cultural prescription for women's subjugation that the book reads like a checklist in a patriarchal how-to manual, and Julie's husband, Hank, ticks off each item, from the Adamic naming of their baby to physical abuse. Through a litany of such regulatory measures, which also includes isolation and exploitation, the subordination of women emerges most starkly through Morgan's depictions of work and sex in the novel.

Julie Harmon is a physically strong but weak-willed woman who does all the domestic chores inside the home and *works like a man* outside it. The phrase "works like a man" has been and remains popular in the region as a compliment, but it is a backhanded one, at best, because it reinforces the idea that only women who display conventionally masculine traits such as physical strength, stamina, and working outside the home can be, ironically, worthy wives and mothers inside the home. Morgan's Julie, whose parents, siblings, and husband, among others, rely on her because she "'can work like a man,'" is a case in point (4).

Early in the narrative, Julie grudgingly takes the place of her ailing father around her family's farm, taking on the heavy outside work by day and then nursing her father by night (21, 23). Julie does not want these responsibilities but never refuses any of them, so she winds up complaining mostly to herself as she carries water, chops wood, hoes corn, tends the stock, and butchers the hogs: "I hated how everybody expected me to do the outside work" (3, 4, 18, 21, 23). In fact, she dislikes working on the family farm so

much that she is resentful even when called upon to perform a task that would more likely elicit pity and a willingness to help; for example, when her father volunteers her to go with him to take her dying brother to the doctor, she "tried to get out of" it. Yet, once she takes on a job, she does it to the best of her ability, and even finds solace in the heavy work load as her father is dying (28). Morgan, therefore, does not romanticize Julie's attitude toward work, nor the work, itself; in fact, he details tasks for pages, emphasizing both the difficulty and the sometimes disgusting nature of work. However, work is redeemed, as it were, through Julie's ultimate acceptance of it in every case, especially after she marries and moves from North Carolina to Gap Creek, South Carolina. While Julie's reliance on work as a touchstone in distressing times is understandable, the spiritual connection she sometimes experiences from toil is contrived.

For example, near the end of the novel Julie equates a childbirth that nearly kills her with work, ordained by God as the rightful punishment for women (283-84). Shortly afterward, when Julie is deathly ill from giving birth, she has a vision in which Jesus and her father are conflated to deliver an odd message that is a reiteration of the master-slave dictum: work is love and will get you to heaven (299). Thus, Julie performs her father's/Father's work because she wants to be an obedient woman and earn salvation through submission. This grace through toil, though, primarily saves her from the negative emotions, like resentment and anger, which are engendered by the work in the first place.

A positive connection between work and salvation is a common theme in Morgan's writing, according to John Lang: "In contrast to those who view work as a curse, one of the consequences of humanity's fall from grace, Morgan sees work as

redemptive" (222). Lang states that Morgan, himself, spent his early years on a mountain farm and "experienced firsthand the rigors and satisfactions of agricultural labor" (221). *Gap Creek* reflects this disposition when Julie repeatedly throws herself into task after task in order to stave off despair and ultimately find spiritual comfort (28-30, 61, 298-300). However, work is divided by gender in the novel, and there is not one single instance of a man doing the types of demeaning jobs Julie performs. It is the work and the exploitation of her labor, then, from which Julie needs to be saved, for Hank and their landlord, Mr. Pendergast, foist the most degrading jobs upon her, the type that can hardly be described as "agricultural labor" (Lang 221). Julie does not state her objections to the exploitation aloud, nor does she refuse any type of work, no matter how revolting the job.

Her work experience makes her a much desired commodity to Hank, who carefully measures Julie's ability to work before he proposes to her on their first date. He walks her home from church, gets her by herself after dinner, and embraces her several times. Julie, who has never kissed a boy, is overcome with passion and fancies herself in love, immediately. After determining that Julie is sexually responsive, Hank then walks around her home, assessing the garden, especially noticing the cornfield where so much heavy work was required to plant, tend, and harvest the staple crop: "'Who did all that work?' Hank said." Finding out that Julie, her mother, and one sister had raised the huge garden, Hank remarks, "'You will make somebody a good wife'" (44). Like Alpha in *River of Earth*, Julie is considered a worthy wife by how much field work she is capable of accomplishing, and even though Morgan shows how vital a woman's work is to the well-being of her family, Julie's labor is controlled, commodified, and exploited by Hank and other men while she passively endures one backbreaking chore after another.

The day after her wedding, Julie follows Hank to a house on Gap Creek: “Hank said he wanted to live there because it was a pretty place, and because it was cheap . . .” (50). At some point, however, Hank must have revealed to her that “cheap” meant he had traded her labor for rent (51). Hank and Pendergast come to terms without ever even mentioning their deal to Julie, who is still in the dark about it months later: “I had never knowed exactly what the arrangement was” (161). What it amounts to is that in order for them to remain in the house, Julie must cook and clean at the bidding of the two men, who command her to perform a wide range of tasks, from typical housekeeping to chores of a much more personal and demeaning nature.

No matter how degrading the job, the novel justifies it as an inherent part of a wife’s duties, even when Julie’s labor is commodified by her husband but falls under the direct authority of the landlord, whom she readily accepts as a second male boss: “If waiting on him was part of my married life, then I had got it started that morning” (61). Moreover, through Julie, Morgan excuses Pendergast’s nasty living conditions right off the bat: “His wife had died three or four years before, and he had let the house go the way most men would” (51). By lumping Pendergast with “most men,” the “filth” that would “turn your stomach” and the “pile of clothes up to [Julie’s] waist” become nothing more than normative, if stereotypical, outcomes of a single man’s poor housekeeping, instead of the vile habits of a particular male (51). The rent might be cheap for Hank, but for Julie, it is a costly hell of dirt, odors, and stale bodily fluids.

To his credit, Morgan endows Julie with the thought of leaving Hank and going home to her family instead of becoming a servant to the two men, but in the end, she decides to stay because she has to work hard at home, too, and she wants to avoid the

"shame of a failed marriage" (57). Morgan makes her choice clear-cut: perform the work dictated by the men or leave to face society's condemnation. Speaking up for herself to negotiate the terms of the work, or flat out refusing to do it never occurs to Julie, even when she is forced to wash Pendergast's foul clothing.

The entire house is grimy, but Pendergast's dirty laundry is particularly disgusting, and Morgan spares no detail of Julie's necessarily intimate touching and smelling of Pendergast's clothes, particularly his noisome underwear: "I looked in the front bedroom where Mr. Pendergast slept and you never seen such a mess . . . The room smelled of pneumony salve and camphor . . . of dust also, and clothes that hadn't been washed in a long time . . . With my arms loaded I tried not to smell all that sour cloth and soiled long handles" (59-60). There are six references to Pendergast's underwear in this scene, more than any other particular item of clothing, and Julie's handling of it emphasizes the depth of her immediate submission to the old man, a stranger she has known for a few hours. The novel again rationalizes Julie's lack of protest by endowing her with equanimity: "I didn't know what to say to him, but if washing his stale clothes was part of my job, then I had done it" (61).

Julie soon discovers that Pendergast's disposition is no pleasanter than his living habits. He is unreasonable, offensive, and lewd, complaining about Julie's cooking, ordering her around like a servant, and leering at her (55-56, 58, 59-61, 62, 64). However, despite her revulsion at cleaning up after Pendergast, Julie decides that work is both her burden and her solace: "Much as you hate it, doing washing makes you feel you're starting out new . . . . I felt a little better. For even Mr. Pendergast and his grumpy manners couldn't keep me from getting things done . . . if washing his stale clothes was

part of my job, then I had done it. If waiting on him was part of my married life, then I had got it started that morning" (61). Surprisingly, after finishing the wash, Julie regards Pendergast's dictatorial commands and filthy way of living as nothing more than "grumpy manners," thus the novel not only normalizes male dominance it praises female acquiescence (61).

It is significant that Morgan chooses laundry as Julie's saving grace, for the task not only epitomizes what is considered woman's work, it is in many instances imposed on women as a regulatory or punitive measure. In "Washed Away: Ireland's Magdalene Laundries and Religious Incarceration," Jessica Scarlata examines the role that the Catholic Church's laundries played in controlling and punishing unruly women, especially those deemed guilty of sexual misconduct. In fact, laundry is so closely tied to a woman's body and disposition, according to Elaine Showalter, that it was "highly touted by the Victorians for its therapeutic effects" in insane asylums where the most volatile female patients were put to work doing the wash, often for 10 hours a day, six days a week. It is no wonder they grew calmer in temperament; they were obviously too exhausted to express anything other than fatigue (82-83). Likewise, any anger Julie might feel at having to do Pendergast's laundry is wrung out of her by the time she pours the two washtubs of dirty water into the grass. In an unconvincing simile, Pendergast's previously soiled shirts and disgusting underwear now "looked like angels" hanging on the clothesline, and Julie, with raw and red hands, turns her attention to dinner (62). Julie's eventual pleasure and satisfaction in doing the laundry, so convenient for the two men who refuse so-called woman's work, goes far in defending patriarchy, for it means that when it comes to exploitation, she is asking for it.

After toiling all day, Julie's evening is spent listening to Hank and Pendergast fight about mastery. When Hank hears Pendergast insult Julie, he tells the older man: "'You hadn't ought to call her a fool.'" This reprimand sparks an argument between the two men, during which it becomes apparent that Hank is not defending Julie so much as asserting his property rights over her: "'This is my house,' Mr. Pendergast said. 'And she is my wife,' Hank said. 'Don't nobody give her orders but me'" (65). The argument ends in a stalemate between Julie's two bosses (66).

Despite Julie's reluctance to work and the resentment she almost always feels about having to work, the novel suggests that as long as men are giving the orders, a woman is not at liberty to refuse them; in fact, she can derive contentment and satisfaction—even salvation—through work, no matter how undignified the job. *Gap Creek* foregrounds women's labor, then, but also suggests women are complicit in its historical invisibility.

If Morgan's treatment of Julie and work in the novel is a troubling denial of women's agency, his construction of Julie's sexuality is an even more disturbing fantasy of male domination. It is Morgan's representation of Julie's *willingness* to be controlled and abused that renders her sexual experiences all the more agonizing. Julie is a seventeen-old virgin when she gets engaged to Hank. From the moment of their first physical interaction, not only is Julie's sexuality regulated by Hank, it is also on display for other men.

When Hank officially calls on Julie for the first time, their interaction quickly becomes physical. Julie willingly returns the more experienced Hank's kisses, and a strong sexual attraction springs up between the two. Surrounding this passionate scene of

a woman's sexual awakening, however, is a threat of male violence, embodied in jealous neighbor men who are lurking behind trees and bushes, watching the couple's every move. Julie is concerned from the first moment she sees Hank at church about violence from "the Willard boys." These gun-toting hillbillies, Julie warns Hank, will not "let boys from any other community come to court girls on the mountain" (37). Sure enough, the "rough, mean" Willards are all around Julie's house while she and Hank, who also carries a pistol, walk outside after dinner (44).

> It was the oddest feeling, to open my eyes after my first kiss, after an otherworldly kiss, and see somebody staring at us from among the oak trees. It was like waking up from a sweet dream and finding somebody studying you . . . He must have been watching us all that time . . . if he was watching us, the rest of them must be watching us too. There might be half a dozen Willards spying on us. (43)

The repetition of "watching . . . watching . . . watching" and its synonyms, "staring, studying, spying," creates an uncomfortably voyeuristic air of perversion surrounding Julie's first kiss, a harbinger of worse things to come. Here, in addition to his direct portrayal of the male gaze's power to disquiet a woman, Morgan also hearkens back to an offensive stereotype in local color narratives set in Appalachia, in which a young but sexually aware woman is considered the possession of the males closest to her, sometimes her relatives, who are more than willing to perpetrate violence to maintain ownership of their property.[1]

I call attention to this stereotype to question authenticity's usefulness as an analytical tool. If Morgan's portrayal is interpreted as an accurate rendition of an Appalachian community, it could serve to bolster the novel's authenticity, but if it is deemed an offensive stereotype, it detracts from its authenticity; thus, the subjectivity inherent in authenticity as a standard of measure of a novel's merit dooms it to fail. I

argue that what is more significant in this particular scene of the novel is that it essentializes not only Appalachian women but *all* women as pieces of property owned by males and subject to their scrutiny.

As Hank and Julie walk around the farm, the Willards call back and forth to each other with animal noises, subtly at first, and then blatantly, intruding upon the couple's whirlwind courtship. As the threat of male violence increases, so does Hank's determination to own Julie, and he rushes to propose after hearing a "bobwhite call, and a fox bark, and then a wildcat scream" (46). While Hank's attraction to Julie seems sincere, despite his careful calculation of her capacity for hard work, his actual proposal seems spurred more by an animalistic, Darwinian desire to win a male competition over a sexually ripe female, than any sort of burgeoning true love, what René Girard calls "mimetic desire" (246-47). Though couched within the framework of consensual courtship, therefore, male surveillance and male ownership of a passive piece of female property actually override Julie and Hank's relationship. The association of sex and male violence is significant in *Gap Creek* not only because it is a trite convention in Appalachian literature but also because it is part and parcel of patriarchal hegemony. In other words, the association is a cultural concern, not just a regional stereotype. Indeed, as the number of incidents connecting sex and violence increases in the narrative, so does Julie's subordination to men.

After arriving at Pendergast's house, Julie and Hank finally retire to their attic bedroom and have sex for the first time. Julie is an eager virgin who is not "scared or worried like so many brides are supposed to be" at the prospect of intercourse; however, her participation is entirely passive: she simply lies there and giggles while Hank has sex

on top of her. While Julie's lack of action might be attributed to her inexperience, the oscillation between "stop" and "Don't stop" in her thoughts is a troubling echo of *no* means *yes*, the phrase so often used to justify rape of women. Again, it could not be clearer that this particular woman character consents to sex; it is the language Morgan uses to convey her point of view that is unsettling: "Stop, I wanted to say. You stop that. But I couldn't. You quit that, I thought of saying, but I didn't . . . You'll have to stop this . . . Stop that, I thought. Or maybe it was: Don't stop. Don't stop now. Don't stop . . . Now quit this, I thought . . ." (53). Perhaps the confused refrain in Julie's head suggests only the trope of the good girl who has been taught to abstain from sex, but the number of repetitions draws attention to itself, and I strenuously object to the significant and offensive implication that in *Gap Creek*, when a woman thinks "Stop," she actually means "Don't stop" (53). In addition to her troubling ambivalence, another instance of male surveillance occurs on her wedding night, underscoring the dominance of Julie's sexuality by males.

Unbeknownst to the couple, Pendergast had rigged their attic bed to break easily, and once the three of them retire for the night, he lies below in anticipation of their lovemaking, listening to them and laughing when the bed finally falls apart (52, 54, 57). Although Julie is mortified at Pendergast's voyeurism, she engages in intercourse with her new husband and finds it pleasurable. In fact, she proves multi-orgasmic in what some women would consider an unusually successful first time, and in what some men would likely consider a testament to their own prowess (52-54). In spite of her satisfaction, though, Julie is acutely conscious of Pendergast's presence throughout the event: "And I was afraid Mr. Pendergast was right below us listening to every sound we

made . . . I was more worried about waking up Mr. Pendergast than anything else . . . I thought of Mr. Pendergast below listening . . . We've got to stop or we'll wake up old man Pendergast . . . I thought I heard somebody laughing below" (52-54). As an isolated incident, Pendergast's action might be nothing more than the crude joke of a randy old man, but in conjunction with the Willards' aggressive intrusion into Julie's sex life, Pendergast's surveillance represents male presumption of the right to women's sexuality. Moreover, when neither Hank nor Julie confronts him about his behavior, he ramps up his sexual aggression toward her.

The next day, as Pendergast orders Julie about the house, he subjects her to sexually connotative commands, offensive sexual innuendoes, and direct leers (57, 62). Just as laundry is unconvincingly represented as therapeutic and redemptive, it is also weirdly eroticized in the novel. A woman doing the wash is inextricable from stock representations of females, who often bend and straighten, work their chests up and down, expose their arms and legs, and smile and splash about seductively in the romanticized images. It looks fun and sexy; what it actually is, of course, is hard work. While the novel idealizes neither the job nor Julie's physical performance of the work, it still manages to eroticize the situation. For example, while doing his laundry, the placing of her hands on Pendergast's dirty underwear brings her into unwanted contact with his body, albeit indirectly, especially since she is touching the cloth that covers his genitals while Pendergast is "standing on the back steps watching" her as he carves the figure of a woman with hypertrophied sex organs: "He held the pine woman up to the sunlight, and I could see how rounded her behind was and how big her breasts was" (62). She continues,

however, to calmly—and incredibly—complete the wash in the atmosphere of sexual aggression created by Pendergast.

Pendergast continues to stare at Julie, and he grins while purposely showing her the figure, which is a stand-in for Julie, herself, as well as for all women, who are, the novel suggests, sexual objects to be created by men and then handled, controlled, and used for the male's pleasure. As Pendergast fondles the wooden woman's body, he is symbolically assaulting Julie. Moreover, as an authorial strategy, the carving allows Julie to be metaphorically violated while preserving the male character's claim of innocence: he never lays an actual hand on her. As Julie looks at his handiwork, though, Pendergast's "face flushed a little," evincing his sexual arousal, as well as his self-satisfaction at successfully communicating his lust to Julie in a roundabout but obvious way (62).

Sexually excited and intent on intimidation, Pendergast then comes up stealthily behind Julie as she is about to go into the dark, cobwebbed root cellar to gather potatoes for dinner (63). Pendergast uses her descent into the forbidding underground storage room as another opportunity to unsettle Julie by refusing to offer her a light or warn her that there is a snake inside the cellar. Julie spots the animal lying on a shelf, flicking its tongue at her, and quickly exits the room, hitting her head on the door's crossbeam in her hurry.

Long associated with human sexuality, particularly male genitalia, the snake in this instance symbolizes Pendergast's penis, and he is practically gleeful at successfully placing Julie close to it: "'Did you see my pet snake?. . . . He's a cute litter feller . . . about three feet long'" (64). In *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the*

Problem of Domination, Jessica Benjamin argues that men use the penis to objectify and establish control over a woman through difference, effectively establishing a master-slave dynamic: "Finally, the symbolization of male mastery through the penis emphasizes the difference between them and her. . . . The penis symbolizes the master's resistance to being absorbed by the thing he is controlling; however interdependent the master and slave may become, the difference between them will be sustained" (57-58). By alluding to his penis, therefore, Pendergast makes it clear to Julie that first of all, he is the master who can order her to perform any type of lowly work, and secondly, that the female body—her body—is an object that must submit itself to his gaze and his sexual impulses. Thirdly, he shows her the carving that lacks a penis and then puts her near the snake that symbolizes his penis to emphasize a hierarchal difference between them. If the novel were an indictment of patriarchy, this event would serve well to condemn male domination.

Yet, the tone does an immediate about face and not only does the embarrassed Julie deny seeing the snake, she perkily dismisses the ultimate symbol of male power over women as nothing more significant than a practical joke: "I didn't want him to think he could get my goat" (64). When Julie responds to Pendergast as a jackanapes and dismisses his threatening sexual acts as "grumpy manners" and harmless pranks, the novel normalizes male sexual aggression (61, 64). As a matter of fact, it underscores the cultural assumption, a problematic tendency in American culture, according to feminist writers who agree that the conflation of male aggression with sex is potentially dangerous for women, contributing not only to their subjugation but also to their possible

victimization.[2] Indeed, when Hank hits Julie and she becomes sexually excited as a result, the novel actually endorses eroticized violence.

Hank Richards is a big, physically imposing man (33, 75, 90, 223, 224). He is also volatile and domineering, and after he hits Julie in the face, she redoubles her effort to keep her mouth shut and let him have his way in any and all matters. Within the world of this novel, hitting a woman's face is framed as a teaching tool, and an effective one at that, for it quells Julie into obedience, making her responsible for managing Hank's potentially dangerous temper tantrums. The incident that leads to Hank's abuse is innocuous enough.

After Pendergast dies, Julie gets bamboozled by a man who shows up at the farm and pretends to have a claim to Pendergast's pension money. She gives him the money in order, she thinks, to save the farm from a bank foreclosure. After Hank gets home from work, Julie tells him what happened, and he calls her a "'stupid heifer.'" Then, she narrates, he "swung back and hit me across the face. My cheek stung and my head rung . . ." (129). Morgan's description of the force Hank put behind the hit and the ringing in Julie's head that results from it contradict the later claim that she "didn't hardly feel it" (129). Afterward, Hank again tells her she is a "'dumb heifer'" and disappears out the back door (130).

Julie goes through a panoply of emotions following Hank's assault, but she winds up sexually excited. Not only can Hank exploit Julie, demean her, and make her feel shame and degradation, if he hits her in the face, she becomes sexually aroused. In other words, physical abuse makes this woman hot: "I don't know what it is about a quarrel that stirs a body so . . . my flesh was going wild and glowing . . . as I listened to Hank

rage I had got warmer and warmer . . . the shame had spirited something inside me. . . . I quivered . . . as he laid down" (134-35). Morgan's description of Julie's sexual longing goes on for five pages, paragraph after paragraph (134-38). All the pain and shame suddenly transfigure from humiliating violence into exuberant desire, for not only does Julie fail to reproach Hank for his abuse, she revels in it, much as she relishes revolting work instead of refusing to do it. With her reaction, the novel eroticizes violence against women, thus promoting dangerous ideals of both masculinity and femininity: the more aggressive the male, the more right he has to copulate with the passive female.

Still, after Hank finally joins her in bed, she is careful not to betray how desperately she wants to have sex with him, knowing that he would perceive her passion as a threat to his fragile masculinity: "Would Hank touch me?. . . . I wanted to reach out to him, but I knowed that wouldn't do. I was sure he didn't want me to do that. . . . I had seen him do it so many times, just make up his mind all of a sudden that he wanted to be loving" (135-36). Hank chooses this moment to tell Julie he got fired from his job, which she interprets as an apology, and even more disturbingly, as a justification for his abuse (136). After Hank puts his hand on her hip, she becomes bolder, exploring his body before he climbs on top of her, but she is able to demonstrate her desire only after he initiates sex (137). Constructing her as simultaneously lustful but predominantly passive, Morgan renders Julie the ideal woman in a (heterosexual) male's fantasy of domination.

As the two engage in sex, it becomes apparent that it is Hank's size and his ability to cause pain that so entice Julie: "He was so much heavier than me. . . . The dark got bigger, and everything in the dark got bigger. Hank's shoulders and elbows and hands got bigger. The seconds groaned with bigness. Every inch of flesh was large and hurt, it felt

so tender" (135, 137). As in all other aspects of their marriage, Julie wants to be dominated during sex and to worship Hank's apparently well-endowed form. Julie's sexual pleasure in Hank's infliction of pain places her character squarely within a demeaning, harmful representation of women that promulgates the false notion that they like to be hit by men.[3] Moreover, it underscores a related gender stereotype that an inordinate number of women are only attracted to so-called bad boys, men who are callous, primitive, and potentially or actually violent. Morgan emphasizes this notion when Julie's sister Lou tells her "'it's the bad in boys we like,'" where the "'we'" specifically indicates Julie and her, but generally includes all women (177).

This is the only incident in the novel in which Hank actually strikes Julie, but according to bell hooks in "Violence in Intimate Relationships: A Feminist Perspective," it is a mistake to excuse anyone for hitting another person *only* one time, "as if it is not really significant for an individual, and more importantly for a woman, to be hit once" (282). This is a common misconception—it is not a problem until a man beats a woman repeatedly—used to rationalize male violence against women, but one blow not only changes a relationship forever, it can also lead to further abuse, as hooks explains:

> The focus is on extreme violence, with little effort to link these cases with the everyday acceptance within intimate relationships of physical abuse that is not extreme, that may not be repeated. Yet these lesser forms of physical abuse damage individuals psychologically and, if not properly addressed and recovered from, can set the stage for more extreme incidents. (282)

Julie's casual dismissal, what hooks calls the "everyday acceptance," of Hank's abuse indicates the novel's nonchalance towards violence. Indeed, despite the novel's insistence that Hank's physical abuse of Julie is insignificant, it goes on to show that the assault

undoubtedly increases Hank's sense of power over her and then implies it is incumbent upon her to manage the outrageous proprietary privilege he assumes in her life.

He exercises this privilege when, later in the narrative, he makes the same error in judgment that Julie made with the swindler. A couple of imposters descend on the young couple, claiming to be Pendergast's heirs, and Hank gives practically all the household goods to them. When Hank and Julie realize the mistake, he blames her entirely, and she maintains the façade of his superiority over her, because, she says, he "never liked to admit he had made a mistake. Men are like that. . . . It made him mad that I knowed he had been suckered just as bad as me. . . . I seen how he felt and tried to soothe him." Hank disingenuously lets her take the blame, going so far as to again disparage her intelligence: "'Any fool could have seen through them,' Hank said." Julie joins him in the farce, helping to protect the ego he shelters well enough, on his own: "I wanted to make it sound like I was taking part of the blame . . . If I let Hank criticize me it would make him feel better and then he wouldn't be so mad at hisself" (168). When Julie makes it "sound like" she takes the blame, she is taking the blame, yet Hank gets angrier and angrier during their conversation, despite Julie's willingness to humiliate herself for his sake. He shouts at her, glares at her threateningly, and shatters a bowl of sugar against the stove while she remains calmly agreeable (169). This incident evokes Hank's blow to Julie's head, but her submissive response is framed not only as a strategy to avoid another hit to the face but also as progress in her role as wife because she has learned how to be verbally abused without incurring physical violence.

By continuing to intimidate Julie, Hank maintains his position of power in their marriage. Worse still, Julie is constructed as a woman who wants it that way. When Hank

hits Julie in the face and the novel fails to interrogate the violence, it in effect condones it. Furthermore, when she becomes more sexually aroused than ever before after he hits her, the novel morphs into a male sexual fantasy cataloging the acts that can be perpetrated against a woman's body with her consent.

Morgan again eroticizes violence during the climax of the novel, when Gap Creek overflows its banks. As the water rises, Hank insists that they get out of the house and struggle across the yard to the barn. On the way, Hank lets go of Julie's hand—on purpose, apparently—and she nearly drowns (217, 219). Once she finally makes it to the barnloft, she finds a safe but despondent Hank, upset because he left her to drown, and because he has no job and no security. Ominously, he holds a shotgun, and as his self-pity intensifies, he threatens to murder her and then kill himself. He almost makes good on his threats, firing the shotgun twice into the air. Here, the expectation for Julie to finally stand up for herself is overwhelming. After the degrading work, the emotional abuse, the hit to her face—after enduring all that, surely even this supremely subjugated woman character will fight back when confronted with her own murder, but she does not. Instead, she placates him by telling him not to blame himself for anything and then curls up with him in the hay (219-22). The text barely even acknowledges this latest violation, treating it as an insignificant blip in the story of a marriage.

Violent threats, however, are heinous even when not carried out, according to feminist scholars such as Carol J. Sheffield, who argues that physical threats are, in themselves, violent acts perpetrated in the name of patriarchy: "Violence and the threat of violence against females represent the need of patriarchy to deny that a woman's body is her own property . . . Violence and its corollary, fear, serve to terrorize females and to

maintain the patriarchal definition of woman's place" (110). The novel, then, replicates the complacent attitude that is so dangerous to real women.

After Hank is quiet and no longer threatening to kill her, Julie takes him back to the house as he cries "like a baby." She then gets down on her knees, appropriately, and he allows her to undress him "like he was a sleepy baby" (224). They climb into bed and the pregnant Julie gives her nipple to Hank as she would a suckling infant: "Hank turned and put his face against my breast, and I pulled the gown to the side so the nipple was exposed. The nipple got hard and long and he put his lips to it. . . . He leaned his head over and nibbled at my other breast, like he was hungry. He was so hungry he could never be filled" (225). In *A New Heartland*, Casey notes that the woman's body is often the site of hierarchal contestation in which the female is posited as the source of sustenance for the dominant male, "thereby reframing the maternal body as a means of ideological propagation, making visible the (rural) female's assumed role as nurturer for a body politic that is inheritably male" (10). By in effect suckling Hank, Julie's character reinforces this convention: she is both mother and lover to Hank, voluntarily offering her simultaneously maternal and sexual body to sustain weakened manhood and restore its potency.

She then continues to comfort and console Hank during a long, sexually-connotative description of a storm, which rages, builds to a climax, and then abates somewhat as a "wind brushed the house like it had been released by the thunder" (226). Here, the natural elements of wind and water represent the passionate sex taking place between Hank and Julie, which is just one instance of such symbolism in the novel, according to Rebecca Smith (43). More to the point, with this scene, the novel's imagery

once again naturalizes a woman's sexual availability as the result of male violence or violation.

After the waters recede, Hank's threats of violence have served the purpose Sheffield describes, namely, teaching Julie her place, which is that of a silent workhorse and amnesiac doormat (110). Indeed, she directly states that she "tried to forget him standing on the ladder in the barn firing the shotgun" (237). She even assumes responsibility to "help him out" because he was "embarrassed by the way he had acted in the flood" (241). Within a few days, therefore, the threat of murder becomes just another opportunity for Julie to help Hank become a better man.

Indeed, throughout the narrative, Hank's volatile temper is framed as a highly successful strategy to warn Julie into submission. Time and again, Julie assumes responsibility for Hank's moods, rationalizing his dictatorial, self-centered behavior because "men are like that" (168). Even when they are near to starving after the flood and he refuses to allow Julie to preserve the meat from a dead cow, she does not dare defy him: "I didn't want to argue with Hank, now that he was calm" (228). Julie would rather go hungry than risk Hank's ire, despite the probability that Hank's firing of the shotgun in the barn caused the cow to hang itself in the first place (222). The novel, then, champions Julie's strategy of submission, depicting her rationale as normative in the face of what is represented as inevitable but excusable male conduct: Hank has no choice. He is just doing what is natural to a man.

The novel rarely misses an opportunity for a man to threaten a woman sexually or at a minimum, subject her to sexual aggression, and each time, the man's demeaning acts are casually dismissed. As Pendergast lies dying from burns, for example, he confesses to

Julie that he masturbates, once again forcing her to become aware of his sexual impulses. Right afterward, the snake symbolizing a man's penis makes another appearance, apparently chasing a rodent, much as Pendergast has been stalking Julie since Hank lodged her in the old man's house (106-07). In his delirium, Pendergast then hits Julie in the face but she does not react at all to the violence. Similarly, nearly every time Timmy Gosnell, the drunk, comes near Julie, he calls her a whore (69, 234, 315). The book infuses each episode involving Gosnell and Julie with the threat of sexual violence, but Gosnell's primary function, ultimately, is not to show that Julie is vulnerable to male violence but to demonstrate Hank's eventual control of his temper. Gosnell's verbal abuse of Julie, with its sexual connotations, is dismissed as easily as Pendergast's sexual aggression and hit to her face. The narrative makes it easy to assume that as he dies, Pendergast is out of his head, that he is weak and does not strike Julie with much force, or that Julie is so much the ministering angel that she does not feel it when Pendergast swings and hits her in the face. Indeed, the novel represents both Pendergast and Gosnell as benign characters who never actually do anything violent to Julie; in fact, the novel strongly suggests that both men's sexual aggression toward Julie be given a pass, Pendergast because he is old and Gosnell because he is an alcoholic. The book's insistence, however, on repeatedly conflating sex, violence, and a woman's subjugation and then failing to interrogate any of it strongly suggests that a wide river of misogyny engulfs *Gap Creek*.

In another justification of male dominance, Hank demonstrates his insouciant presumption of entitlement to Julie's loyalty, as well as his utter disregard for her feelings, when he lays sexual claim to her sister, Carolyn, under Julie's very nose. The

novel represents Hank's deplorable act as another marital lesson for a wife: if your husband wants to have sex with your 14-year-old virgin sister, it is best to pretend it did not happen. When Carolyn stays with them a few days, she flirts with Hank in the manner of little girls, but Hank seems oblivious to her immaturity, responding to Carolyn's experimental coquetry by abandoning his usually morose demeanor for lighthearted romps about the farm (191-94). As Hank makes his attraction to Carolyn blatant and the two connive to spend time alone, Julie begins to rationalize his behavior: "A man will pay attention to any woman that flirts with him. A man won't understand how a woman knows how to play up to him" (193). Suddenly, the young person who still wears ribbons and little girls' dresses, the "little sister" whom Julie regards as "a silly girl" becomes a manipulative "woman," a seductress who is taking advantage of an innocent, unwitting man (192-93).

The pregnant Julie tries not to leave the two alone together, even trudging along after them when they insist on burning the stubble in a garden. Hank and Carolyn ignore Julie's common-sense advice about changing winds and firebreaks, and predictably, the fire gets out of control. Carolyn, who is wearing a frilly dress, twirls too close to the flames and they ignite her "full pink skirt," sending her on a panicked run through the field. Catching her, Hank throws Carolyn down on the ground and he and Julie manage to smother the flames before they do any bodily damage to Carolyn. The fire, here, symbolizes the sexual attraction between Hank and Carolyn, one that poses a real danger to Carolyn's innocence, and the flames "climbing up toward her waist," symbolically burning away the child's pink skirt to reveal the woman's genital area, are a portent of things to come (197-98).

Sure enough, Julie wakes late at night to discover Hank has left their bed and is downstairs with Carolyn. She hears what seems to be the two of them having sex, moaning and knocking and then a "moan again, like an 'Oh' drawed out" (199-200). Julie waits long enough for them to finish whatever they are doing and then goes downstairs and surprises them, noting that Hank has his arm around Carolyn. All the events of Carolyn's visit have led to this moment of apparent betrayal, and it seems unlikely that Hank has restrained himself from adultery with Julie's sister. Carolyn's part in the incident, however, is nebulous.

The story Hank feeds Julie, that Carolyn has a stomachache and he is ministering to her, seems to be nothing more substantial than a flimsy lie to cover up his possible rape of Carolyn. In any event, Carolyn has not fared well: "'I have a pain down here,' Carolyn said and rubbed her lower belly. . . . 'I just feel bad,' Carolyn said. There was tears in her eyes." Julie indicates she thinks Carolyn might be menstruating, but considering all the banging and moaning that preceded Carolyn's symptoms, she is more likely experiencing the aftermath—given her pain—of her first intercourse. Also, it does not seem at all likely that Hank would be comfortable nursing Carolyn if she were having a period. His only reason for being downstairs with Carolyn so long is to have sex with her (199-200). Julie stays up with Carolyn, taking care of her, and for the very first time, Carolyn speaks maturely to Julie: "'You have been good to me' she said," indicating her guilt at whatever has transpired between Hank and her. Ironically, now that Carolyn has been inculcated into the adult world of sex, Julie reverts to her initial feelings toward Carolyn: "'You are my little sister,'" suggesting that she, rightfully, bears no grudge against her for whatever part she played in the scenario (201).

However, Julie never so much as mentions the event to Hank, either. She even acknowledges her willful ignorance of Hank's deception: "Maybe I didn't want to see what was happening. Sometimes it's better to let well enough alone" (200). Not only does Julie submit to Hank's abuse, herself, she meekly suffers his abuse of her own sister, as well. And it is abuse, for given Hank's age and experience, Carolyn's consent—if she gave it—is irrelevant. After Carolyn leaves, things continue much as before between Hank and Julie, as if his monstrous act never happened. Indeed, Carolyn disappears, along with any damage Hank's actions inflicted on her, and the girl's absence from the narrative is a glaring mark of its indifference toward women's pain.

When Morgan portrays Julie as willingly acquiescent to, or even desirous of, Hank's abuse, he asserts his authorial ownership of the female character who is subject to her creator's expectations and assumptions. Male authors writing unflattering, sexist, or even misogynistic representations of women is nothing new. In *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, Gilbert and Gubar argue that there is a long lineage of a masculine "metaphor of literary paternity" that "reflects not just the fiercely patriarchal structure of Western society but also the underpinning of misogyny upon which that severe patriarchy has stood" (13). Thus, as Morgan forms Julie into a subordinate woman, he incarcerates her within the confines of a reductive, male-authored text; in other words, she is his property, as all women characters in male-authored texts are the possessions of their creator, according to Gilbert and Gubar: "Having defined them in language and thus generated them, he owns them, controls them, and encloses them on the printed page" (12-13). So in the fictional world of the novel, when Hank asserts his ownership of Julie through isolation, threats,

emotional cruelty, and physical abuse, the real violence being perpetrated is by yet another male author against any challenge women might make to the masculine literary tradition in Western culture.

Because Morgan owns Julie, he determines her state of mind. If he dictates that she suffers little or no mental anguish from the violent events that take place between her and Hank, or from the constant, daily subordination by Hank, she cannot be traumatized by the physical and emotional acts of violence perpetrated against her by Hank. Morgan created Julie, a fictional character in a fictional world that can spin on its axis only at Morgan's behest, so simply put, if he writes that she does not like ice-cream, then she does not like it. In the same way, because Morgan writes that the character he created, Julie, is sexually aroused by being threatened and hit, is content to offer up her sister to Hank, and in short, is happiest when Hank controls her, then she is all those things. That does not mean, however, that she is not traumatized at all. I argue that the patriarchal trauma Julie sustains is committed against her not by her fictional husband but by her creator, Morgan, precisely because he constructs her as a willing victim of abuse.

Gilbert and Gubar explore male authors' ownership of their female characters, again, in *No Man's Land*. Looking at major works by both male and women writers in the twentieth century, they argue that many texts can be read as forays into the battle of the sexes; for example, they illustrate that the sexist works of many male Modernists express a "fear of emasculation" by females and can therefore be read as a response to first-wave feminism (43). Similarly, male authors in the postmodern era continued the backlash to the imagined "loss" present in male Modernist writing, according to Gilbert and Gubar: "No doubt at least in part as a response to such feelings of disintegration, many literary

men, from the 1940s through the1970s, sought to reintegrate themselves through fervent and often feverish reimaginings of male potency" (43). Literary men, they suggest, use the power of literature to denigrate and subordinate women in retaliation for the real and imagined gains by women in society at large, such as male authors in the 1950s who struck back at the large-scale entrance of women into the work force during World War II: "In other words, just as more and more women were getting paid for using their brains, more and more men represented them in novels, plays, and poems as nothing but bodies, as if to repress by erasing, rather than denouncing [women's] . . . ambitions" (47). Just as literary men swiftly retaliated after first-wave feminism and then again in the postmodern era, their heirs used their pens to strike back at women following the second wave of feminism, as well, which started in the 1960s and picked up momentum in the 1970s and 1980s.

The later movement, according to Gilbert and Gubar "was at least as disturbing to men as the first wave" because women were "now demanding considerably more than the political power emblematized by the vote: they were asserting, and often achieving, professional, economic, and sexual equality—and sometimes they even appeared, to their nervous male contemporaries, to be claiming superiority" (*No Man's Land* 46). This newly charged fight for equality was apparent in women's literature, according to Gilbert and Gubar: "With the second wave of feminism, not giving in becomes more than ever before a possibility about which women writers can dream" (*No Man's Land* 115). For example, in 1988 Lee Smith created a strikingly autonomous woman character in *Fair and Tender Ladies*. The protagonist, Ivy Rowe, frees herself from patriarchal strictures such as unequal marriage and sexist religion, despite the fierce resistance required to do

so. Contextualized within Gilbert and Gubar's feminist framework, *Gap Creek,* with its prevalent images of woman's willing subjugation disguised as strength, can be read as a male author's oblivious immersion in the structures of male dominance or as his subtle, defiant response to feminism in general, and more particularly, to agentic women writers. Smith's Ivy is everything Morgan's Julie is not: independent, creative, sexually liberated, and cognizant. If *Fair and Tender Ladies* can be read as a preeminent claim to women's equality, then Morgan's *Gap Creek*, published about a decade later, can be read as retaliation from one of Smith's "nervous male contemporaries."

Morgan's strategic maneuvers in the novel are predictable but historically effective. For example, in the cellar scene when Morgan reconstitutes the penis as a snake in the dark, he adopts a well-worn convention of male-authored texts, according to Gilbert and Gubar, who argue that male writers often represent the organ as a weapon of domination, such as a "pistol with which to shoot women into submission" (*No Man's Land* 46). Morgan uses another of these male-authored conventions when Hank hits Julie in the face and she gets turned on more intensely than ever. With this scene, *Gap Creek* espouses what Gilbert and Gubar term the "theology of the cunt," especially since the incident is contextualized within Hank's denigration of Julie's intelligence (*No Man's Land* 43). The purposefully "explicit physicality" of this "doctrine" depersonalizes the woman and reduces her body to the extreme limits of objectification, according to Gilbert and Gubar, who argue that male authors can take malicious pleasure in creating women characters whose stupidity is erotic (*No Man's Land* 46). When Julie is fooled by the con man, Hank insults her intelligence, hits her in the face, and has sex with her, all in short order. She might be an idiot in Hank's eyes, but that does not detract from her sexual

desirability; in fact, it increases his ardor because he can erase everything about the "'stupid heifer'" except her vagina, which is all he needs for intense sex (129). The novel, then, simultaneously eroticizes women's passivity, women's stupidity, and male violence.

Moreover, despite all the shivering, quivering, and itching Julie does in anticipation of sex after being hit, she understands that she can in no way initiate sex with Hank: "There was nothing for me to do but wait for him to make up his mind" (134-36). Julie is passive but panting for it, exemplifying an "idealized woman's desire" that spells sexual availability but is no more intimidating than a complacent cow, according to Gilbert and Gubar (*No Man's Land* 46). Therefore, even the language—Julie is a "dumb heifer," a dimwitted, mute cow—with which Morgan endows Hank reveals the deeper message of sexual objectification in the novel (130).

Blaming the mother for a son's faults is yet another ploy popular among male authors of sexist texts, and *Gap Creek* is rife with it. Throughout the novel, the character of Ma Richards is cast as a meddling mother-in-law who insults Julie at every opportunity (50, 76, 77, 81, 87). Not only is she a conventional source of strife for her daughter-in-law, she also functions as a scapegoat for all of her son's shortcomings. Through the character of Julie, blame for Hank's temper is repeatedly heaped on his mother; for example, after Hank tells Julie he lost his job but lies to her about the reason, she suggests he look for another one, which makes him unreasonably angry. A penitent Julie, who "froze inside" with fear because Hank hit her in the face the day before, quickly casts down her eyes and shuts her mouth: "He would get scared and mean if he thought he wasn't the boss. When he was angry it was better for me not to say nothing,

even if I was mad too . . . It was having the last word that was so important to him. Since he was raised by Ma Richards it made sense he would feel that way" (140-4). Blaming Hank's mother for his violent temper allows Julie to justify not only her submission to it but also her determination to fix it.

The text even suggests Hank's mother is at fault for the physical violence he perpetrates against Julie; for instance, during Ma Richards' first visit, when Julie asks him to build a casket for the dead Pendergast, he tells her, "'I'll decide what I do, and when I do it'" (110). His outburst frightens Julie, but she quickly defends him: "It was the surprise of Mr. Pendergast's death, and Ma Richards being there, that made him lose his temper." Ma Richards, however, urges Hank to reinforce his words with action: "'Hank,' she said, 'you've got to *show* who's wearing the britches in this house'" (111, emphasis mine). Despite his mother's prompting, Hank does not strike Julie, this time, but the embarrassment he suffers in front of his mother simply because Julie dared to suggest he help with the corpse is inordinate—and ominous. Indeed, as has been noted, he later hits Julie and threatens to murder her.

With its insistence on what Gilbert and Gubar term "castrating maternity," *Gap Creek* takes its place alongside other texts with the same motif. Indeed, blaming the mother for a litany of male vices became a common theme among postmodern male writers, who according to Gilbert and Gubar "asserted antithetical moral priorities, praising women for compliant sexiness while blaming them for prudish frigidity and castrating maternity" (*No Man's Land* 47, 55).[4] Morgan continues this postmodern sensibility in *Gap Creek*, in which it becomes the wife's responsibility to instill in her husband the work ethic, self-esteem, and strength that his castrating mother has

diminished. Hank, however, bears no obligation to ward off his mother's attacks against Julie.

Ma Richards criticizes Julie mercilessly and Hank never speaks up for her. When Hank disregards, as usual, Julie's wishes and brings his mother to help with Julie's sickly baby, the two women quarrel about a number of things unresolved between them, and Julie narrates that it "felt good to talk angry" (275, 301-02). Just when it seems she might be claiming a little agency, at least with her mother-in-law, Julie thinks of Hank, who is out of earshot, and worries: "I didn't want him to hear me quarreling with Ma Richards." It is permissible for her to express anger to another woman, an equal, but not to a man, who is always her superior. Hank's authority, his temper, and his utter control of Julie's behavior are present even when he is not. The remainder of the women's argument centers on Hank and the problems Julie accuses his mother of causing him.

Julie goes on to defend Hank, asserting he can only "'put up with'" his mother's bossiness because he is "'a good man,'" and that Ma Richards is "'the cause of most of his troubles,'" even blaming Hank's mother because he does not have a job, never mind that by his own admission, Hank lost his job because he hit his foreman "'upside the head'" (267, 303). Finally, the text's position on motherhood manifests even more concretely when Julie tells Ma Richards: "'I blame you for the way Hank's world is'" (303). As women, Ma Richards must wear the yoke of Hank's faults and Julie must bear the burden of fixing them.

Even though Julie attempts to keep the argument a quiet one, their shrill quarreling intensifies and Hank walks into the house and overhears them. This is the point in the text when a change in Hank's personality takes shape, for instead of yelling

or hitting Julie, he decides they must all three pray, which quickly subdues the shrewish, screaming women and shames them into submission, especially when he insists, "'I want you all to kiss each other.'" In the ideally masculine world of *Gap Creek*, the husband has no real faults, just a few stumbling blocks placed by his manipulative mother on his path to perfect manhood. A little religion, along with the right wife, one who is properly submissive and learns her place quickly, can correct any damage done by the mother, and Julie gladly makes it her responsibility to gently nudge Hank toward his destiny of dominant masculinity:

> The boldness that had took over my tongue melted away. I sunk down on my knees to the kitchen floor . . . I had never heard Hank talk so dignified and wise . . . he was sounding like a deacon that led in prayer and was the head of the family . . . I felt proud that he was a man I could rely on and trust . . . he could show me what to do when I got all worked up and beside myself with disappointment and resentment. (305)

Julie's admiration and relief are palpable, but she is not consoled because she avoided degradation and physical abuse, she is grateful because now, as long as she submits, Hank will tell her exactly how to behave in order to please him. As long as she submits. Because Hank uses the dictates of patriarchal religion instead of violent physical force to dominate the women in his life, he has come into his own as a man, and Julie once again assumes the duty of stroking Hank's ego, as well as appeasing his temper, just as she has done repeatedly throughout the narrative in order to "make Hank feel good about hisself, to make him feel strong and in charge of things" (154). Once again, she expresses no expectations of Hank, no demands for fair treatment, no questions about his logic, no resistance to his dictatorial commands.

As a matter of fact, Julie submits not only to her husband but also to an entire community of dominant males: father, neighbors, landlord, minister. Thus, the novel

normalizes community-sanctioned violence against women and represents male solidarity as a successful strategy to contain, demean, and control women while simultaneously making them complicit in their own subjection. It is Julie's obligation, even a rational choice, therefore, to determine everything about Hank's personality, and then police her own actions in order not to provoke him to sullenness or violence. Morgan constructs her as an apt student of the immature, narcissistic male psyche; however, even though she "had learned Hank's ways" after a few months, she cannot prevent all of his abusive acts, so when he becomes resentful, angry, or violent despite her efforts, she immediately resorts to conventional rationalization of his behavior, narrating time and again that his acts are simply "like a man" (250-51). Condoning male dominance of Julie and her acquiescence to, or pleasure in, it is an act of patriarchal trauma committed by the male author against his female character.

This is no doubt part of the veil that obscures the sexism in the novel: Julie's resignation, affability, reason, and maturity are repeatedly juxtaposed with Hank's indignation, hostility, hysteria, and juvenile behavior. Learning how not to get abused, however, is the opposite of equality; moreover, it is a failed strategy because it places the burden of abuse on the victim instead of where it rightly belongs, on the perpetrator of violence (Sheffield 122-23; hooks 283). Other devices that disguise the gender hierarchy in the novel are Morgan's use of point of view and the trope of the hardworking mountain woman, while critical approbation stems primarily from his celebrated insider status. For all these reasons, there is a lack of critical attention to the troubling ideological message in the novel.

Morgan's use of a woman narrator who is sincere, reliable, and contentedly submissive obfuscates the book's heavy investment in conventional cultural representations of gender, namely, that men are and should be active agents while women are and should be passive subjects. In other words, the point of view in the novel might be female, but the ideological stance in the novel is decidedly sexist. Critical analysis of Morgan's use of point of view, however, is wholly positive.

For example, in "Robert Morgan's Mountain Voice and Lucid Prose," Cecelia Conway argues that Morgan has mastered the female perspective: "Morgan comes into his own . . . after he shape shifts and begins writing convincingly and fully from a woman's point of view" (289). Similarly, in "Authority, Details, and Intimacy: Southern Appalachian Women in Robert Morgan's Family Novels," Nicole Drewitz-Crockett argues that Morgan's "use of first person narration gives . . . female characters an unparalleled presence in their own stories" (119). Surprisingly, according to Drewitz-Crockett, Morgan's ability to "cross genders" is not the result of "listening to storytellers, relying on his own experience, or doing research," but is rather "an imaginative act wherein he *becomes*" his woman characters (119, emphasis mine). Thus, both Conway and Drewitz-Crockett imply that Morgan has the ability not only to adopt the persona of a female character but to somehow transform himself into a woman to tell a woman's story. Accepting the idea that a woman can be contentedly subservient to a man as springing from a woman's head, though, is perilously close to complicity in a patriarchal paternalism that dictates that men know what women need better than women, themselves. Furthermore, there is little room in such arguments for a reminder that the author is, after all is said and done, a man speaking for a woman.

I argue that much of Morgan's viewpoint is decidedly masculine. The most significant and most troubling portrayals of the female point of view, such as the idea that women are content to be controlled, that they like bad men, and that they get turned on by male violence, have already been noted. Other examples of Morgan's masculine perspective are found in some of his poetic language, as when Julie's labor pains manifest in male-inflected symbols of tools and machinery: "The pain drove down into my belly like a steel spike hammered into my groin, a long steel spike drove on and on" (281). Also, during the birth of her child, Julie "rode the pain like it was a bucking horse," a comparison that seems more closely linked with male sexual fantasy than childbirth (281).

Other problematic representations of a female point of view occur when Julie espouses essential notions about women: "In a house full of girls there is always disagreement about the work, about who is to do what" (23). Like Julie's tangle with Ma Richards, this observation promotes the tired idea that women are querulous and prone to shrewish behavior, and in this particular instance, it also implies that a house full of boys would be immune from such pettiness. This is yet another moment in the text when it is vital to remember that a man wrote the book, for even though some women might accept cultural assumptions about gender, others definitely do not, and it is important to know with whom one is disagreeing. In this case, it is a man, Robert Morgan, not a woman, who is constructing a problematic image of womanhood.

Every time Julie willingly submits to male surveillance, to the exploitation of her labor, to sexual aggression, to threats, to emotional and physical abuse, and to eroticized violence, the novel not only normalizes subjugation, it endorses the cultural assumption.

Unquestioned faith in Morgan's point of view as female, then, helps protect *Gap Creek* from deeper critical inquiry, as does his use of tropes common in Appalachian literature.

In addition to his use of a female narrator, Morgan's familiarity with Appalachia and its literature is another aspect that often obscures the troubling hierarchies in the book. Morgan's Julie Harmon is a late rendition of the hardworking mountain woman trope, a staple in mid-century classics like *River of Earth* and *The Dollmaker*. Although the image might have continued relevance to the real lives of some Appalachian women, the representation's more simplistic and demeaning facets have roots in spurious sociological and historical accounts, as Miller explains in *Wingless Flights*. The character's lineage in Appalachian fiction can be traced from similarly offensive versions in local color narratives through more complicated figures like Still's Alpha or Harriette Arnow's Gertie Nevels, as Miller points out (24-26). Still and Arnow transformed the representation from the invariably wasted old hag or comely but dumb and dirty young girl into a positive type who works hard in her home and on her farm but also has other talents and aspirations, even if her fight for autonomy fails in the end.[5] On the one hand, refining and recasting this character brings recognition to the importance of women's work, which is a long-standing issue that, as Gwen McNeill Ashburn notes, has particular salience for rural women:

> [A]ll women who have supported their families, mothered multiple children, done all the domestic work expected of women, while also having to work as hard or harder than men in boarding houses, farms and textile mills, should be admired . . . Yet even in the twenty-first century, many people fail to recognize the importance of women's work and their undocumented contributions to community and culture. Most Southern mountain women never had the means to be Southern Belles or Victorian ladies, pampered and protected. (133)

Certainly, it is important to acknowledge all women's work as the cornerstone of family, as well as the larger community—indeed, the very world—it fosters. On the other hand, however, Appalachian women characters of this ilk who passively accept their subjugation propagate the
disturbing notion that mountain women's positive identities are grounded only on their willingness to work hard without protest. When Julie passively accepts Hank's and Pendergast's exploitation of her labor, performing any degrading task they put before her, her character crumples the more positive pattern of the hardworking mountain woman trope, becoming instead a late twentieth-century aberration of earlier but more progressive versions.

Yet, Drewitz-Crockett commends Morgan for his "deft handling of the heroic Appalachian woman," contending that "native writers like Morgan have given us . . . 'homestead heroes' . . . a character type clearly distinguished from overworked wizened crones and romantic lithe wildflowers" (118-19). While it is true that Julie is not a stereotype modeled on those found in local color narratives, if the criteria for hero status is expanded, Julie is found wanting. In fact, her willingness to be exploited sets Julie apart from many contemporaneous Appalachian women characters. For example, in addition to the previously noted Ivy Rowe in *Fair and Tender Ladies*, another positive rendition of the hardworking mountain woman trope that precedes Julie Harmon can be found in Denise Giardina's *Storming Heaven*, published in 1987. Texts with other complex versions of mountain women appearing immediately after *Gap Creek* include Silas House's trilogy: *Clay's Quilt*, *A Parchment of Leaves*, and *The Coal Tattoo* all published between 2001 and 2004. One of the most recent novels to expand and flesh out

the trope is Amy Greene's *Bloodroot*, published in 2013. With not only her lack of resistance to but her desire for subjugation, then, Julie stands as the opposite of many characters in the works of Morgan's contemporaries. Julie is not a heroic, hardworking mountain woman, she is a victim of patriarchy, both within the context of her fictional surroundings and within the real world of authorship. I argue that Morgan's status as an Appalachian insider has shielded the novel's alliance with patriarchy. Whether written by a native writer or not, Appalachian novels should be subject to the same critical standards governing evaluation of all literature.

In their seemingly universal acclaim for *Gap Creek*, literary scholars have made much of Morgan's insider status, crediting his childhood in western North Carolina in large part for his ability, in Drewitz-Crockett's words, to "trace the very fabric of life in the mountains for a hundred and fifty years" (117).[6] Morgan undoubtedly displays a well-researched familiarity with farm life in the novel; however, while it remains important to acknowledge Appalachian authors who have deeper insight into the region than literary tourists who perpetrate offensive acts of literary exploitation, it is imperative to recognize that fiction is fictional, whether from the imagination of so-called outsiders or insiders. A veneer of authenticity should not protect the perpetuation of negative representations of women, Appalachian or not, such as *Gap Creek*'s contention that Julie wants to be subjugated. In other words, accurately detailing the way laundry was commonly done by Appalachian farm women at the turn of the century does not validate the suggestion that they derived contentment from it. Celebration of a text can be important, when merited, but wholehearted adulation without trenchant examination not only lessens the impact of critical analysis, it also diminishes the complexity of the literary work, itself.

In "Objecting to Insider/Outsider Politics and the Uncritical Celebration of Appalachia," Satterwhite argues that wholesale acclaim for a native writer because he or she is native obscures "lessons about power relations within the region" (70). Because Appalachian literature is so often used to distinguish offensive depictions of the region from more positive portrayals, it is important to see past the fogbank of insider status, especially in the case of a novel like *Gap Creek*, which champions a hierarchy in which one group is marginalized and exploited in order for another to profit. For example, near the end of the novel, Julie expresses relief because Hank "could show [her] what to do" (305). Yet, Conway contends that Julie's character has changed for the better, becoming more assertive toward the end of the book (293). I argue just the opposite: Julie is as weak at the end of the novel as she is at the beginning. In fact, she is more submissive than ever; for instance, she overcomes her scruples about taking the last $20 of Pendergast's money because Hank justifies it, she meekly agrees to leave behind the food she preserved through exhausting toil, and she sublimates her sexual impulses entirely to Hank's needs, becoming a mouthpiece for male prerogative: "It's a man's desire that stirs a woman's desire most" (320, 322).

In another example of critical tunnel vision, Conway claims that at the end of the novel, Julie and Hank's marriage is progressing "toward . . . genuine intimacy and playfulness" (293). My examination, however, reveals that the "playfulness" in Julie and Hank's late exchanges is contingent upon Julie's implausible ignorance and Hank's paternalistic condescension. For example, in the incident with the wildcat that "squalled on the mountainside," Hank might be joking, but Julie is actually frightened: "'What was that?' I said. 'Just a wildcat,' Hank said. 'Or maybe a painter?' I said. 'Just a little

pussycat,' Hank said. 'You want me to call it up?' 'Don't you dare,' I said and shivered" (324). Not only is Julie genuinely worried, she also connects the event with the sad occasion of her brother's death. Moreover, Morgan constructs Julie, here, as ignorant so Hank can be knowledgeable, and as fearful so Hank can appear brave. She grew up in the exact same environment as Hank, so why on earth would she need anyone to identify the call of a common animal for her? Yet, she had to ask her father the same question about the same animal at the beginning of the book, and while it is conceivable that as a young girl she might not be able to identify the call of every animal in the woods, her continued ignorance shows the static nature of a character who serves as a foil to the knowledge and strength of men (9).

Despite his presumption of superiority, Hank has changed from a violent tyrant to a tolerant one, but even this negligible difference in his character is only possible because Julie has helped him cement his position of absolute power in the dynamic of their marriage. A novel that sincerely depicts a woman who neither has nor wants agency, then, invites challenge, regardless of the author's geographical and cultural relationship to the novel's setting.

Conway's assertion that during the course of the narrative Julie "has learned to state her reticence and speak beyond it" is an even more perplexing claim, for silence is foremost among Julie's submissive traits (293). The number of times throughout the narrative that Julie remains silent when faced with conflict is staggering, so many in fact, that an extended explanation of each occurrence is hardly necessary to conclude that she has no voice at all in her marriage. When Hank commodifies her labor, for example, she is silent: "I figured I better keep my mouth shut" (65). When Hank volunteers her to help

butcher a hog, she resents it but says nothing (81). When Hank loses his job and has to go hunting to provide them with food, he directs his anger at Julie, but her reply is no reply at all: "The best way I could show him how helpful I was to keep my mouth shut and fix the turkey" (153). Most egregiously, after he hits her, Julie "couldn't think of a thing to say" (132).

Julie's silence throughout the text is a disturbing redundancy of paramount significance, especially the justification for her mute acceptance of abuse: "I didn't say anything to Hank that I didn't have to say . . . I was ashamed that I couldn't think of what I wanted to say. So I just kept quiet while he fussed and fumed . . . By keeping quiet I was throwing him off balance. It was the first time I seen what power I had over his blustering bad temper" (133). Calling silence "power" collapses the fictional world of the novel and reifies the ideology of male privilege at work in the book.

Julie's silence is not power, it is fear disguised as strength, yet her silence is not framed as a survival tactic but as a commendable strategy to make him a better person, which is a common outcome for women subjected to abuse, according to hooks: "Within patriarchal society, women who are victimized by male violence have had to pay a price for breaking the silence and naming the problem. They have had to be seen as fallen women, who have failed in their 'feminine' role to sensitize and civilize the beast in the man" (283). Under the sexist paradigm at work in the novel, if Julie cannot prevent Hank's abuse, it is her fault, so she immediately assumes the responsibility of placating Hank and preventing him from hitting her again; as a matter of fact, the next day, the first time Julie says something Hank does not like, all he has to do is look her way to scare her into silence: "He put his coffee cup down and looked angry at me. I froze inside . . . I

didn't say nothing else. I looked at my plate . . . He would get scared and mean if he thought he wasn't the boss. When he was angry it was better for me not to say nothing, even if I was mad too" (140). Thus, Julie is trying to "civilize the beast" in Hank, because she is scared of him, not because the process is empowering (hooks 283). When Morgan endows Julie with the actions of someone who is fearful—she freezes and becomes instantly silent—but then tries to reconstitute those signs as power, he commits an act of patriarchal trauma against his character.

It is Julie's silence, her utter lack of fight, that makes the novel so difficult to read, like watching bruises multiply across a meek sister's body. In real life, women who worked on farms in the early twentieth century were publicly expressing their disgust with the inequality often perpetuated in farm work. In fact, according to Casey, early farm women noted not only the intolerable work load they bore but also the relatively small comfort to be gained from their efforts, complaining specifically about the lack of recognition from their husbands and other men (32, 39). Their labor might have been exploited but they certainly were not silent about it. Furthermore, it can be assumed that many of the women who did not find public expression for their resistance to subjugation most definitely found means to challenge inequality in private. As Barbara Ellen Smith explains, women across time often adopt both covert and direct strategies "to contain the inequities of gender and set limits on male privilege, self-importance, and authority. Such strategies of gender defiance are not simply individual, symbolic, or folkloric. They are historically embedded and agentic" (13). Morgan constructs Julie, however, as a woman who never resists subjugation; in fact, her goal is to relinquish agency to Hank. As a matter of fact, Julie's silence is so complete that it is the character trait that most strains

credulity. As the novel champions her silence over and over again, it disciplines her, teaching her to be a passive victim who, in Gilbert and Gubar's words, "must learn the arts of silence" and aspire to be nothing more than "a silent image invented and defined by the . . . male-authored text" (*Madwoman* 43). Morgan's insider status as an Appalachian author in no way compensates for the literary assault on Julie's voice.

The celebration of women's subjugation in *Gap Creek* prompts a reconsideration of the marriage dynamic normalized in the novel. Because the text is considered an authentic Appalachian narrative, it is especially important to interrogate its sexist ideology in order to destabilize potentially regulatory terms—like *authentic* and even *Appalachian,* itself, when it is used to narrow women's representation. What is important about *Gap Creek*, therefore, is not its true-to-life portrayal of life in Appalachia, it is the opportunity it provides us to examine our own conceptions of an enduring myth: the authentic Appalachian woman.

Even though Julie is conventionally cast as the strong Appalachian woman who is to be admired for her physical strength, maturity, and devotion to home, family, and church, what lies underneath her more admirable character traits is the novel's approbation for her subservience, sexual availability, and silence in the face of abuse. She is subject to egregious acts of patriarchal regulation and punishment, yet these acts are framed as inconsequential events in the life of a woman. Furthermore, this deplorable male behavior is ignored, accepted without question, or worst of all, justified by the woman narrator. Time and again, when these acts are perpetrated against her, a sense of outrage builds in the narrative, and then Julie dismisses them as nothing more than an annoyance, a normal part of married life, her rightful punishment, or an insignificant

quirk in a man's personality for which she will gladly take responsibility and fix. The novel not only usurps women's autonomy, therefore, it denies the existence of their desire for it. I argue that *Gap Creek*, then, does not contain patriarchal trauma, it is patriarchal trauma.

Chapter Four: The Madness of Patriarchy in *Guests on Earth*

> She had a strong sense of her own insignificance; of her life's slipping by while June bugs covered the moist fruit in the fig trees with the motionless activity of clustering flies upon an open sore.
>
> —Zelda Fitzgerald, *Save Me the Waltz*

Like its dominant symbol the kaleidoscope, Lee Smith's *Guests on Earth* is a bricolage of women's madness that resolves finally into a dark, troubling picture of a woman struggling to reconcile the life she leads with the culturally prescribed image in her head. Though a meticulously researched historical novel ostensibly about Zelda Fitzgerald, the story of the wholly fictional narrator, Evalina Toussaint, quickly supersedes the Modern Age icon's presence in the book.[1] Therefore, despite its foregrounding in the factual timeline of Zelda's stays at Highland Hospital, an asylum, the protagonist's narrative extends well beyond Zelda's famous struggle with insanity to provide a much wider view of mental illness. Because that view comes from a believably mad woman's memoir, it is fragmented; because that memoir is fictional it is ultimately comprehensive and coherent.[2]

After years of mental instability, Evalina sits downs to write an account of her life, especially those portions she spends at Highland, but the story quickly gets away from her. As a narrator, therefore, she is unreliable, gleaning events as she does from her sketchy, latent recall of their occurrence. The resulting memoir not only resists linearity, it is replete with Evalina's omissions and often euphemistic renderings of horrific occurrences. Compounding the complexity of the fragmented structure, Evalina constantly tries to shift the focus of the story away from herself and onto other people; however, most of the women characters endure so much of the same violence, loss, and

subjugation in their lives that they tend to blend, morph, and reconstitute to the extent that they all represent, finally, one story: woman's struggle to survive patriarchy.

Madness is a gendered concept. The suffering is real but the labeling is skewed. Historically, more women than men have been labeled mad in order to regulate women's behavior. *Guests On Earth* presents a panoply of women who are billeted along a spectrum from what is considered sane to mad, but just as they are unruly in their life choices, they constantly defy the constraints of medical diagnoses. There are no fixed positions in sanity or madness, then, for most of these characters; indeed, the novel destabilizes the very terms. For example, some of the characters who are patients at Highland enter the asylum because they are unhappy and dissatisfied but quite lucid and stable. Others, like Louise Toussaint and Flossie Bascomb, who do not have monetary resources for treatment should they desire it, reside in society at large although they exhibit the same symptoms as the most unstable Highland patients. Moreover, there are male characters, such as Arthur Graves, who also evince the same behaviors as the allegedly mad women but whose sanity is never called into question by official entities. What *Guests* suggests, then, is that crazy is relative to perception and money and gender are the deciding factors in many cases.

Women's so-called essence has long been touted as an identifiable quality and the primary cause of their madness. Such an absurd idea, monstrous in its misogyny, received a great deal of backlash, especially during second-wave feminism of the 1970s. In *Women and Madness*, Phyllis Chesler argued that there was nothing essential about a woman that predisposed her to madness but that men's subjugation of women could actually make them crazy. Chesler points out that the very symptoms of mental illness,

including depression, anxiety, and hysteria, have been deemed female characteristics; thus any woman exhibiting such emotions, although they are considered inevitable when they surface, can be considered insane. Moreover, women who reject a conventional female role, such as the happy wife and ecstatic mother persona, can also be deemed mad. For women in patriarchal Western society, then, there are "penalties for *being* 'female,' as well as for desiring or daring *not* to be," according to Chesler (16). Chesler goes on to distinguish between the "genuinely (or purely) mad women" of which she argues there are "very few" and the women who are "driven mad" because they are "categorically denied the experience of cultural supremacy" (26, 31). In giving a nod to women who are "genuinely" mad, Chesler is perhaps attempting to differentiate women who suffer from some sort of genetic mental illness from those who have been deemed crazy for their resistance to subjugation. In any event, genetic mental illness and its concomitant diagnoses and treatments will not be examined in this analysis, because *Guests on Earth* is not about that sort of suffering. Each of *Guests*' women characters under discussion in this chapter has been made to suffer mental anguish—madness—from some form of male dominance.

There are many such women in *Guests*, and those who struggle most fiercely against subjugation evince the most remarkable symptoms, ranging from unhappiness to immobilizing depression.[3] As Elaine Showalter explains in *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980*, at a time when the psychiatric profession was dominated by the belief that "rebellion against domesticity was itself pathological" both Freud and Josef Breuer recognized more than a century ago that mental illness, especially hysteria, afflicted women who were "*more* independent and assertive than 'normal'

women" (145, 158). Indeed, in *Guests*, especially rebellious women characters like Zelda and Dixie Calhoun return again and again to Highland, seeking a cure for the depression that even they, themselves, believe is their fault. Because their defiance of acceptable gender roles is in itself a criteria for women's insanity in the novel, labeling them as mad amounts to nothing more than pathologizing rebellion.

Furthermore, women like those in *Guests* whose resistance land them in a mental hospital often risk exacerbation of their condition by the male-dominated psychiatric establishment. Showalter explains that despite reforms to the care of the mad, there has been no significant change in the gendered perception of madness: women go mad because they are women, while men are afflicted mentally only by a tangible, horrific experience, such as war. Showalter claims the very term *madness* is conflated with *woman* in our culture: "Changes in cultural fashion, psychiatric theory, and public policy have not transformed the imbalance of gender and power that has kept madness a female malady" (19). Showalter also details the treatments for women's madness, explaining that some of them do more damage than good. Evalina witnesses such "curative" measures at Highland: "Of course dire things were always happening." These "dire things," imposed on patients by the autocratic administrator, Dr. Carroll, include rest cures, solitary confinement, hypothermia bags, and shock treatments (42).

Many of these treatments are tailored to restore or promote essentialized feminine behaviors, despite the potentially damaging side effects, such as the memory loss that often accompanies insulin, metrazol, and electric shock treatments.[4] Dr. Carroll firmly believes these treatments will render his unruly women patients docile, compliant wives and mothers (35). Carroll represents the danger inherent in the replication of patriarchy

inside a mental institution, for his decrees, like those of a powerful father in a conventional family structure, are incontrovertible at Highland, despite the damage caused by the treatments, and despite the changes in therapeutic practice that might be taking place elsewhere in the profession (43, 57, 132). Even after Carroll steps aside and Highland is taken over by Duke University, some of these treatments remain in vogue at the hospital (289). Carroll or a similarly paternalistic figure remains the head of Highland's organization.

In its familial simulation, Highland is no exception among asylums. As Michel Foucault explains in *Madness and Civilization*, the patriarchal family order was foregrounded more than two centuries ago inside the asylum as the bedrock of reason, the opposite of any social structure outside the bounds of family, the "antithesis of that 'milieu' which the eighteenth century saw as the origin of all madness" (253). The family structure, according to Foucault, thus constitutes itself "both as truth and as norm for all relations that may obtain between" madness and sanity: "The entire existence of madness, in the world now being prepared for it, was enveloped in what we may call, in anticipation, a 'parental complex.' The prestige of patriarchy is revived around madness in the bourgeois family" (253). For women, the harm in such a model compounds offensive paternalism with a more ominous restriction of their autonomy, for any behavior deemed to be directed toward a goal other than the perpetuation of the family is unreasonable and unconscionable: "Henceforth, and for a period of time the end of which it is not yet possible to predict, the discourse of unreason will be indissociably linked with the half-real, half-imaginary dialectic of the Family." Moreover, not only is any goal other than a conventional family model untenable, it will be considered, after adoption of

this structure inside asylums, a direct assault on the father in his unimpeachable role as head of the family: "So that what . . . it was once obligatory to interpret as profanations or blasphemies, it would henceforth be necessary to see as an incessant attack against the Father" (253-54). Women, therefore, who dare to resist the patriarch by desiring, for example, financial independence or sexual agency are not just enemies of family, they are insane enemies of the omnipotent father. They must be quelled, therefore, by reintegration into the family, which is what they are rebelling against in the first place.

In asylums like Highland, then, whatever the prescribed treatment, the gendered nature of madness leads doctors to seek acceptance of a socially constructed femininity as the goal. In other words, if a woman acts like a woman, she is cured. This holds sway in the novel's setting despite the phenomenally high rate of recidivism among women mental patients. Thus Evalina, Zelda, Dixie, and others at Highland travel through a revolving door of sickness and health (212, 222, 25, 287).

Through a feminist approach to women's madness, then, it is revealed as a highly charged label, often false or simply convenient as a catch-all for a myriad of individual, diverse situations and problems. Critical studies from the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries corroborate the earlier work by Chesler and Showalter, upholding the idea that women's madness has long been used as a tool of subjugation. Jane Ussher's 1992 study, *Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?*, for example, concludes that the "discursive practices which create the concept of madness mark it as fearful, as individual, as invariably feminine, as sickness; and they function as a form of social regulation" (12-13). Moreover, women who have recorded their experiences with madness in narrative form testify that psychiatric therapy is often more destructive than

curative, according to Susan Hubert in *Questions of Power*: “Women’s madness narratives illustrate how psychiatric practice has served the interests of patriarchal society and helped maintain existing power structures” (138). Thus, even though *Guests on Earth* is set in the early twentieth-century, its representation of the gendered nature of women’s madness and its ineffectual or abusive treatments is relevant now and will remain so until real change takes place in patriarchal structures of power both inside and outside mental asylums. Indeed, the novel acknowledges the actual suffering experienced by women who are subjugated, whether they are officially deemed mad or not.

The trope of the madwoman in literature has a long lineage. In their groundbreaking analysis, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar show the madwoman as the woman writer’s angry mirror image, an expression of the frustration felt by the female artist besieging the stone wall of a male-dominated creative tradition. Simultaneously, note Gilbert and Gubar, the madwoman also functions as a double for the woman protagonist, who can freely rage at oppression through her “secret self” while maintaining a façade of feminine decorum (348). Bertha Mason thus represents both Charlotte Bronte’s frustration as a woman author struggling to gain respect for her artistry and Jane Eyre’s fury at societal limitations on women, according to Gilbert and Gubar. In the nineteenth century, it was acceptable for Bronte to express these conventionally masculine emotions—worries about her career and a desire for autonomy—only through a cryptic figure such as the madwoman.

Twentieth-century woman writers moved the figure of the madwoman from a secondary, though important, character in the attic to the protagonist’s central position in fiction. In 1962 Doris Lessing, for example, uses the trope as a vehicle of synthesis in

The Golden Notebook, whose protagonist, Anna, writes through her madness to fuse what she sees as the fragmented versions of her self into a unified whole. In 1999, Jean Rhys revives Bertha Mason to refute the idea that she is biologically impaired, showing instead that her madness quite logically follows exploitation and abuse from the men who control her, namely, her brother and Rochester, as well as forces inherent in the broader colonization at work in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

The trope of the madwoman, then, troubles the notion of gender while simultaneously questioning the already amorphous definition of madness. Increasing the multivalence of the trope, it is nearly always bound up with the question of trauma. For instance, a contemporaneous audience might have seen Rochester's incarceration of Bertha as a regrettable but reasonable solution for her madness, while later readers more readily recognize the potentially traumatic effects of such confinement.

Guests on Earth does not offer clear-cut resolutions to any questions surrounding trauma and oppression, but it does indicate that patriarchal trauma as I define it is a reality in women's lives, whether it constrains them through physical violence, sexual abuse, the deprivation of autonomy, or the imposition of an unattainable, contradictory feminine goal, such as idealized subordination. The novel also shows how the effects of trauma in women's lives have been categorized as madness. In fact, trauma and madness are so closely linked in *Guests on Earth* that the state of being traumatized and what is called insanity are often one and the same. Smith turns to the trope of the madwoman to show how trauma—startling or situational, psychic or physical—can destroy any woman. Because Evalina sustains traumatic oppression throughout her life and also lives through

a number of horrific events, the structure of her memoir reflects the fragmentation of a traumatized mind.

Evalina grows up in a small apartment above a bar in New Orleans' French Quarter, where her mother, Louise, a stripper and prostitute, tries for a while to shelter Evalina from the harsher aspects of such a lifestyle; indeed, Evalina says she was "being very carefully raised," although that statement, like much of what Evalina tells her audience, is open to speculation (5). As she gets older, there is no question about Evalina's raising: it is punctuated by traumatic events, and it is also continuously constrained by systemic trauma. When the wealthy, married Arthur Graves makes Louise his mistress, he moves her and Evalina to a house outside of town. Once ensconced there, Louise has a baby and Evalina endures her mother's son preference and consequential neglect, the eventual death of her sickly infant brother, Graves's physical abuse of Louise, and Louise's drug addiction and depression. Finally, she finds her mother lying dead in a pool of blood from her slit wrists and, chillingly, climbs into bed beside her. By placing her own body next to Louise's corpse, Evalina reclaims the mother who abandoned her in favor of her half-brother while simultaneously re-enacting the trauma she experienced when Louise became unresponsive and numb to Evalina's needs for love and care (10-12).

After her mother's death when Evalina is 13 years old, she is initially committed to Highland through Graves's intervention. Eventually, she is deemed well enough to leave and live outside its walls. Her life is marked, however, by so much trauma, including sexual violence, loss, and psychic shock, that she is willing to trade recollection for what she considers recovery, returning to Highland as an adult and accepting the

insulin shock treatments that scatter her already fractured memory but help quiet her chaotic mind. *Guests on Earth*, then, is a narrative of trauma.

In *Trauma Fiction*, Anne Whitehead relies on what she calls the "affinity of literary criticism with trauma theory" to argue that various authors, such as Toni Morrison, have published a number of contemporary novels that express the historical trauma perpetrated against, for example, their racial or ethnic group (1-4, 29). Reading novels as narratives of trauma is a relatively new development in literary criticism, according to Whitehead, springing as it does from late twentieth-century trauma theory (4). Whitehead's work relies heavily on Caruth's, especially the idea of latency. The latency inherent in trauma, according to Whitehead, is vital to understanding its ramifications on memory:

> Caruth formulates the structure of trauma as a disruption of history or temporality. The traumatic event is not experienced or assimilated fully at the time that it occurs, but only belatedly in its insistent and intrusive return, and hence is not available in the usual way to memory and interpretation. Caruth's description emerges out of Freud's famous account of trauma . . . in which the event returns after a period of latency. (12)

Through this delayed effect, according to Whitehead, a "distortion of traumatic events" often occurs (84). It is not surprising, therefore, that the trauma affecting Evalina in *Guests* is often obfuscated.

Although Whitehead explains that it is difficult to limit trauma narratives to a set criteria, she goes on to lay out three literary techniques often found in narratives of trauma, namely, "intertextuality, repetition and a dispersed or fragmented narrative voice," that "mirror at a formal level the effects of trauma" (84). *Guests on Earth* includes all three of Whitehead's stylistic criteria, suggesting it is analytically fruitful to

read it as a trauma narrative; indeed, when the book is read in this way, the multiplicity of voices, the lapses in memory, the resistance to linearity, and the understatement of horrific events suddenly coalesce into a unified, profound story belonging not only to the woman narrator but to any woman traumatized by physical acts of aggression or societal mandates for behavior.

Of the three literary techniques marking trauma fiction, fragmentation is the most prominent in *Guests*. Evalina's voice is unsure on the very first page of the narrative as she acknowledges her confusion about whose story she is telling. She finally claims the story as her own, yet compares her role as narrator to that of F. Scott Fitzgerald's Nick Carraway, claiming that she and Nick both relinquish their own story in some way by focusing on other people. At first glance, Evalina's comparison seems mistaken, for she relates more intimate details of her life, especially her early years, than does Nick, and she ultimately dominates the narrative in a way Nick does not in *The Great Gatsby*. However, Evalina's memory is full of gaps, she misleads her audience and the other characters in the book, and she often represses or palliates the terrible events in her life as she attempts to process them and still cling to reality. As a narrator of trauma then, Evalina does indeed resemble Nick.

In *The New Death*, Pearl James argues that Nick Carraway's critically famous unreliability is not simply a character flaw but can be more accurately interpreted in terms of a repressed or partial memory of psychic wounds resulting from "his unelaborated and implicitly traumatic war experience" (63).[5] As the chapter title, "The Story Nick Can't Tell: Trauma in *The Great Gatsby*" indicates, it is not that Carraway purposely misleads his audience, exactly, it is that he is unable to relate the atrocities of

war in a straightforward manner, so he masks it as a different kind of tale, according to James: "Though he does not dodge the war, he dodges its narration" (68). Similarly, Evalina reveals her trauma but she sometimes is unable to or refuses to *tell* it fully. Smith's direct assertion that her protagonist is modeled on Fitzgerald's most famous narrator suggests that while Zelda's husband wrote from and within masculinist paradigms such as the traumatic experience of war, Zelda, like countless women in the early twentieth century, negotiated a more subtle but no less detrimental form of trauma: patriarchy (3).

In telling the story of her life, Evalina sporadically metes out pieces that must be patched together to form a coherent narrative. The first portion of her memoir reveals a seemingly sanitized but linear version of her early childhood (4-8). When Evalina returns to New Orleans as an adult to search for clues regarding any remaining family she might have in the area, however, a major disjuncture in her narrative occurs. With both her mother and Graves long dead, Evalina goes to the Graves home to question his family about her past. Unsurprisingly, she gets no farther than the doorway, where she is confronted by Graves's daughter, Alicia, who blames Evalina and Louise for the ruination of her family following her father's infidelity and eventual suicide. Alicia spitefully tells the pregnant Evalina that her child will be "a monster . . . Just like you, Evalina—the child of your mother and her own father" (130). The chapter ends, here, without further elaboration, and the next one begins with a misleading statement: "Thus I found myself in the place I had perhaps been heading all along, the top floor of the Central Building of Highland Hospital, being administered a course of insulin shock

treatments" (131). She does not, however, proceed straight to Highland after her confrontation with Alicia.

It is not until Evalina reaches a crisis point at the hospital that she reveals that actually, she did not suffer some sort of mental break and wind up at Highland immediately after hearing Alicia's pronouncement about her birth; in fact, she apparently returns to the aptly named Temps Perdue boarding house where she spends the last few months of her pregnancy and is "happy" with her room, her considerate neighbors, and her job as an accompanist at a nearby church school (126, 242, 244).

The serious mental break comes after she is sexually assaulted while pregnant and immediately goes into labor, giving birth to a baby girl who dies three days later, memories she apparently blocks out for years. In any event, Alicia's pronouncement might have been news to Evalina or it might have been something she knew but repressed; either way, it is undoubtedly disturbing, but it is not the sole, precipitating event that accounts for her return to Highland. The narrative disjuncture, however, still suggests the traumatic nature of the news: to go in search of family and wind up confronting the fact that she was born from incest could hardly have improved Evalina's flagging sense of kinship.

Discovering or acknowledging that her mother was impregnated by her own father is surely a shock to Evalina, but the actual trauma of the incestuous relationship—the rape, pregnancy, and birth—happens to Louise, not Evalina. According to Whitehead, however, literature portrays instances in which trauma is not circumscribed to its victim but "can leak across generations . . . a traumatic event which is experienced by one individual can be passed on so that its effects are replayed in another individual one or

more generations later . . . for what returns to haunt is the trauma of another" (14). So, whatever mental trauma Evalina experiences due to her cognizance of the incest, she also inherits her mother's trauma, as well. Again, though, she seems to repress this trauma at the time Alicia flings it in her face, not confronting it until much later in the narrative, when she is finally able to tell the truth to her doctor/boyfriend, Freddy (229).

After the euphemistic, understated rendering of her traumatic childhood offered early on in her memoir, Evalina's abrupt disjuncture, here, suggests she is forced to reconsider her very identity: instead of being the beloved daughter of an adored courtesan, she sees herself and her mother, even if just for a moment, through Alicia's eyes: "'You are that crazy girl, the whore's daughter . . . you ruined my family, you and your mother, that horrid slut'" (128-29). The narrative disruption of her memoir after revealing the details of her encounter with Alicia is a textbook example of the victim's response to inherited trauma, according to Michelle Balaev: "A central claim of contemporary literary trauma theory asserts that trauma creates a speechless fright that divides or destroys identity. This serves as the basis for a larger argument that suggests identity is formed by the intergenerational transmission of trauma" (149). The confrontation with Alicia is traumatic because it forces Evalina to reevaluate what it means to be a child of incest in terms of an adult perspective, causing her to question not only how she sees herself but also how she appears to others.

The novel's abrupt interruption, then, might not be entirely misleading after all; indeed, it suggests that whatever Louise suffered from incest did not end with her death, for this is Evalina's memoir, and the structural disjuncture reveals the depth of her psychic turmoil over her lineage. In short, as a child born of incest, the violation that

happened to her mother just as surely happened to her, in a way, and she is traumatized by it.

Trying to impose a linear sequence on the memories of a traumatized mind, such as Evalina's, is difficult, for as she reminds her audience repeatedly, "in the world of the mad, time is not a continuum but a fluid, shifting place relative to nothing," and the structure of her memoir reflects the fragmentation of her memories (137). For example, the epistolary section of Evalina's memoir, constituted by her letters to Mrs. Carroll, forms another structural disjuncture in the novel. The hospital administrator's wife, Grace Carroll, was a famous concert pianist before giving up a life as an artist to foster her husband's career. When she discovers Evalina's musical talent, she gives her piano lessons and eventually, after Evalina is deemed sane enough, sends her to the Peabody Institute, a conservatory and prep school in Baltimore. Evalina regards Mrs. Carroll as a substitute mother of sorts, but in her letters to Mrs. Carroll during the six years she attends Peabody, it is revealed that Mrs. Carroll's interest in Evalina is purely conditional.

Mrs. Carroll sends Evalina to Peabody to become a great pianist so she can vicariously experience the recognition of a famous artist. When Evalina chooses to play for hire and become a dorm counselor so she can earn some much needed money, Mrs. Carroll withdraws her approval and affection, despite the fact that it is Mrs. Carroll, herself, who withholds money from Evalina, even refusing to pay for Evalina to visit Asheville during her first lonely Christmas season at Peabody. In fact, it appears Evalina is not allowed to return to Asheville for two years, and the Carrolls exert this tight financial control over Evalina even though it is not their money paying Evalina's bills but

a small inheritance from Graves, money Evalina seems to be unaware of for years and years (103-114, 326). As she writes her memoir, then, it is apparently easier for Evalina to convey Mrs. Carroll's betrayal through her letters rather than state directly the pain it causes her.

By refusing to acknowledge that Evalina needs money to remain at Peabody, Mrs. Carroll in effect sabotages the musical career she ostensibly wants for Evalina. Evalina, though, in effect relinquishes her artistic aspirations voluntarily when she decides to live with and support a famous opera singer, Joey Nero. Knowing the morally superior Mrs. Carroll will of course condemn such a scandalous relationship, Evalina, in a doomed attempt not to disappoint her, lies to her about Nero, calling him her fiancé and going so far as to describe a non-existent engagement ring. This section, then, is not only a radical disruption in the form of the novel, it is also replete with omissions and falsehoods that mislead the reader and do not come to light until Evalina later tells the more forthright version of her relationship with the callous Nero (121).

While the novel as a whole is fragmented, between Evalina's confrontation with Alicia and the story of her baby's birth and death, there is a linear section of her memoir, in which she describes the treatments she received at Highland, the change in regime there, and the gradual return of her partial memory, as well as her relationships with the hospital staff. Interspersed throughout her story, however, are the stories of other women patients—Zelda, Dixie, Amanda, Myra—as they leave and return to the hospital (147, 232, 239, 251-52). This substantial amount of deflection away from her own story increases the piecemeal nature of her story, as Evalina tries unsuccessfully to remain "always the accompanist" and avoid the spotlight; however, her fate remains vitally

important to the narrative precisely because she and the other characters' experiences are so similar (111, 197, 280, 326). Early on in her memoir, she acknowledges the story's stubborn insistence to have its head: "Perhaps you feel that I am straying from my announced subject, which is Mrs. Fitzgerald. Yet it is impossible, as you see, for me to single her out from among all those others who composed the larger picture of our life as we lived it there upon that mountain at that time" (42). Just as Nick and Gatsby shared the trauma of war and its lingering effects, Evalina and the other women characters have trauma and their reactions to it in common, so much so that their stories are inextricable, one from another. Evalina's memoir is a scattered account, difficult to parse, but Smith's novel, on the other hand, is ultimately coherent as the subtext of a traumatized mind.

Intertextuality is another aspect of trauma narrative also prominent in *Guests*. In Smith's description of catatonic or nearly catatonic women, the author evokes one of her earliest, most well known characters, Crystal, in *Black Mountain Breakdown*, published in 1980. At 12 years old, Crystal is raped by an uncle who fell and "did something to his head" when he was a child (29). Shortly after the rape, Crystal becomes a sexually-active teenager and then engages in a bohemian college lifestyle, as well. She eventually becomes a high-school teacher in her hometown, and it is this work that seems to be her salvation, but she quits to marry a politician. Traumatized by the rape and the enormous pressure to conform to idealized domesticity, she has sex with a severely retarded man while visiting a mental institution with her husband and his entourage (228-30). Following this event, which prompts her to remember the early rape in detail, the novel ends as Crystal quickly slips into catatonia and lies motionless and mute in her childhood bedroom.

Similarly, after her son dies and the façade of domesticity with Graves ends, Evalina's mother becomes a drug addict who gradually slips away, without "a flicker of interest in her eyes" when Evalina tries to reach her. She does, however, entertain a number of unsavory characters, and Evalina is forced to do the housekeeping and more, while Louise is seemingly paralyzed: "I had to do everything, even wash Mamma off sometimes, and clean up certain messes" (11). Like Louise and Crystal, Evalina also suffers from a "virtually catatonic state" when she is returned to Highland after a sexual assault and the death of her child (137).

Also, Evalina's friend Amanda feigns catatonia in order to escape her husband, the "sex fiend," who was "also crazy," and return to the relative safety of Highland (252). For Amanda, catatonia is a convincing ruse that breaks her husband's constraints, and she willingly adopts it although or perhaps because it lands her back at a mental hospital, which is paradoxically both a refuge and a torture chamber. In any event, Smith's continued representation of women's paralysis in the face of trauma suggests its very real effects on women's bodies and minds.

More than 20 years after *Breakdown*'s publication, Smith again explores women's mental illness in *The Last Girls*, the story of four women who, as college students, rode a raft down the Mississippi River with several more of their friends. They reunite as adults to repeat the adventure and scatter the ashes of a dead classmate, Baby, who suffered from bouts of mental illness throughout her life, illness that surfaced as cutting, possible anorexia, and an apparent suicide attempt in her teens, which some of the characters believe she succeeded at as an adult (124, 127, 172-73, 316, 363-64). Baby is a Southern debutante who winds up generally, chronically depressed in a picture-perfect life. The

loss of her brother—also a possible suicide—is just one source of Baby's complicated mental illness (131). Similarly, loss has a huge impact on another member of the group, Anna, who enters a mental hospital following the death of an infant during childbirth, for which she blames herself (270). Many of these elements, including the mental instability, loss of a child, suicide attempts, and the death of an immediate family member, reverberate in *Guest*s. Even the plantations that provide the setting for so much of Baby's and Dixie's unrest—their Southern Belle Syndrome—are both aptly named El Destino in the two novels.

The protagonist of *The Last Girls*, Harriett, never stays in an asylum, even though there is one located near her home in Staunton, Virginia and she works there, temporarily. She is, however, an emotional train wreck throughout the narrative. Although Harriett blames herself for other people's tragedies, the more concrete source of her mental anguish is sexual abuse (310-11, 369). The only direct mention of sexual abuse occurs when Harriett moves back home because she is "sick" following the death of Jeff, the boy she loved. The latest in a long line of her mother's live-in lovers, a Dr. Piccolo, attends Harriett, medicates her, and then rapes her. Harriett is not catatonic, exactly, during the sexual abuse but "pretended to sleep" because it "seemed easiest" (311-12). This is the most disturbing account of Piccolo's abuse, but there are suggestions it is not an isolated event; for example, even before the rape, Harriette tells Jeff not to visit her mother's house, for "it would not have been good, she felt, for Jefferson Carr to run into Dr. Piccolo who was still in residence" (152). Jeff knows all about Harriett's mother's string of boyfriends, his father being one of them, so it is not embarrassment on that count that causes Harriette to caution Jeff away, it is something

about Piccolo that leads her to think a meeting between the two men would be a bad idea. This revelation, coupled with Harriett's revulsion toward Piccolo, suggests that his molestation of Harriett possibly began at an early stage of his residence in her mother's house (132, 152, 312).

With Harriette's character, there are other, even more ambiguous suggestions of sexual abuse, some of them occurring much earlier; for instance, when she was a child around five years old, she, just like Evalina, was always "nice to Mama's men friends" (32). These men included the ne'er-do-well, Hal Ramsey, who takes her on a fishing trip. There is nothing remarkable about the trip, other than its novelty, yet the very young Harriette "remembered how the sun looked, coming up, and how the fish looked coming out of the water, and how it had turned from every color in the rainbow to dull, dull gray while she held it in her hands" (32-33). The troubling image of the fish slowly dying in Harriett's hands suggests that she recalls the trip as a ghastly one but has possibly repressed a recollection of the underlying event precipitating her grim, adult memory.

In addition to the loss, sexual abuse, catatonia, and depression found in both novels, *The Last Girls* contains other precursors to *Guests*, as well. There is the "famous old asylum" that looms near Harriet's home in Staunton, most likely referring to a real mental asylum, Western State Hospital, actually located in Staunton and very similar to Highland in its clientele of rich residents (33, 312). Also, there is a brief account of a war veteran who, like Charles Winston, is shell-shocked; an impeccably dressed alcoholic who evokes F. Scott Fitzgerald by dropping dead of a heart attack while drinking in the ship's bar, manned by none other than a bartender named Nick; and even a child named Scotty (42, 227, 327, 329-31). Moreover, before elevating the symbolic kaleidoscope to a

leit motif in *Guests*, Smith chose it to represent Harriet's confused sexual impulses toward both Baby and Jeff in *The Last Girls* (123, 151).

Both *Black Mountain Breakdown* and *The Last Girls*, then, constitute an intertextual foundation for *Guests*, marking the latter as a trauma narrative, because just as a trauma, according to Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience*, "returns to haunt the survivor" again and again, so can an author's intertextual leanings represent cultural trauma that lingers in literature (4). This is especially true, according to Whitehead if the trauma "was not exorcised at the close of the previous novel," which strongly predicts it will return "to haunt succeeding generations" (85). In this way, *Guests* suggests, traumas linked to women's madness remain very much a part of contemporary culture.

A specific aspect of intertextuality that indicates a text's traumatic element is repetition, which "mimics the effects of trauma, for it suggests the insistent return of the event and the disruption of narrative chronology or progression," according to Whitehead (86). In *Guests*, for example, the kaleidoscope is clearly a symbol for the often jumbled way Evalina perceives the world; however, it is the repetition of this image—indeed, the seeming overuse—of the symbol that points to the well-worn groove of a traumatized mind (66, 93, 301, 321). The kaleidoscope thus accrues so much symbolic power that by the end of the novel, when Evalina's mind appears to wander into a world that makes less and less sense, she does not have to write the word *kaleidoscope* for the reader to understand that it is a jumbled, kaleidoscopic idea she is trying to resolve: "Oh hurry, hurry, hurry up, the azaleas and jasmine and bougainvillea are blooming now the parade is almost constant it's time it's time it's almost carnival time when he will appear at my door his face like a flower" (328). Evalina remembers versions of Pan, here, that she

wishes would constitute themselves into a solid image, much as Mrs. Fitzgerald's flowers took form for Evalina as she played the music for the dance routine (321).

In its fragmentation, intertextuality, and repetition, then, Evalina's memoir is a trauma narrative, and its appearance as a twenty-first century novel suggests that trauma is an ongoing reality in women's lives. Many of the women at Highland have similar histories of traumatic episodes springing from their subordinate positions in patriarchy. Trauma theory, then, provides a ready framework for interpreting the women's depression, rage, numbness, memory gaps, and latent pain as the effects of trauma. Moreover, *Guests on Earth* does not stop at violent, shocking trauma, for the novel refuses to ignore the trauma of common, everyday subjugation.

Evalina's traumatic reaction to male dominance occurs early in her life, at age 13. Following Louise's grisly suicide, a newly devout Graves in effect buys Evalina from a Catholic orphanage and moves her into his home, which is seething with his family's rage toward both Louise and Evalina. Suffering from misplaced guilt over her mother's death and her intolerable living situation, Evalina develops anorexia (14-15). Anorexia was long thought to be a manifestation of an adolescent girl's fear of adult sexuality, but as Ussher points out, even though it oversimplifies a complicated affliction, a more recent feminist contention is now prevalent, namely, that a woman deprived of autonomy might exhibit anorexia's dramatic symptoms as a protest against oppression (*Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?* 77, 90).[6] Evalina did not want to leave the orphanage, especially to be forced by Graves to live in an atmosphere of hate and resentment, but Graves is rich, white, and male; his dominance of the poor daughter of a

prostitute is a given. Struggling against this patriarchal trauma, Evalina attempts to seize power over the only thing left to her: her own body.

Ironically, refusing to eat as a protest against subjugation leads to the frail, weak, thin body idealized and criticized as a feminine characteristic; thus, anorexia pushes "patriarchal definitions of 'femininity' to absurd extremes," according to Gilbert and Gubar (*Madwoman* 54). By literally fading away through anorexia, it is true that Evalina diminishes her bodily presence and becomes child-like in her weakness, exhibiting a hyperfemininity, of sorts; yet, the iron will required to starve feels like an exertion of power, even a sense of superiority over those whose "weakness" forces them to eat food. Moreover, by losing weight, she makes herself a smaller target while simultaneously claiming a place, of sorts, in the Graves household. It is hard to ignore someone who is starving to death. Even though refusing to eat appears passive, the quelling of an overpowering physical demand is quite an active process that precipitates further action from those around the anorexic.

Indeed, for Evalina, anorexia sets off a chain of events that profoundly alter her life, for after she becomes dangerously thin and a disastrous force-feeding episode fails, Graves ships her off to Highland (14-15). At the hospital, she is immediately drugged and given a rest cure, a regimen of compulsory bed rest, fattening, and deprivation of stimulation. Though it might seem relatively harmless, the rest cure is a replication of patriarchal trauma within the walls of the mental asylum; in fact, Ussher compares its forced isolation and infantilization to "solitary confinement," and calls it an "oppressive regime" used to control "strong and outspoken women" (*Women's Madness* 76). The rest cure was made infamous in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," in

which a woman goes insane from the forced regimen of doing nothing. In *Literary Trauma: Sadism, Memory, and Sexual Violence in American Women's Fiction*, Deborah M. Horvitz calls the rest cure a "sadistic treatment" that practically ensured, ironically, a mental breakdown in women: "They were regressed to infancy, humiliated, and expected to be grateful for it." Creative, ambitious, or simply strong-minded women often became targets of this punishment when the men who controlled their lives handed them over to doctors in hopes they would be "quiet and subdued" upon their return, according to Horvitz (126). Evalina must endure this paternalistic, punitive measure despite the fact that, once she is out of the Graves home, she immediately recovers, apparently, from anorexia, ravenously eating a muffuletta during the train ride to Asheville (24-25).

Evalina's bout of anorexia is a traumatic reaction to her lack of independence, and once she is removed from the Graves household, she is more than willing to eat. Evalina's route to a mental institution, then, is a result of patriarchal trauma rather than an inevitable outcome of her own mental condition, as are many of the conditions that land a woman in an asylum, including artistic oppression.

Artistic women who are not allowed to develop their creativity, especially wives of artistic husbands, have attracted much attention from women writers. Among women suffering the ill effects of such patriarchal trauma, Zelda Fitzgerald remains the quintessential representative of those driven mad by it. The Fitzgeralds' glittering beginning as a couple, her husband's eventual canonization in American literature, and her sad demise have made her life a matter of public record, public scrutiny, and personal tragedy.[7] It is therefore no wonder that, in 2013, Lee Smith, a woman writer so heavily invested in the representation of women's fight for autonomy, turns to Zelda not only to

historicize women's madness from patriarchal trauma but also to suggest its continued relevance in women's lives during what some mistakenly call the postfeminist era.

All the curiosity about Zelda's roles as Southern belle, New Woman, ballet dancer, painter, writer, wife and mother are overshadowed by one question: Was Zelda Fitzgerald mad? A recent biographer, Linda Wagner-Martin, makes it clear that Zelda's male contemporaries heaped the blame for Fitzgerald's failures, both social and literary, on Zelda, joining Fitzgerald, himself, in making her a scapegoat for his alcoholism and eventual creative difficulties. Thus, she was painted in the extreme as a demanding, envious wife whose deluded artistic aspirations drove her husband to drink and ultimately crushed his genuine artistic genius. Wagner-Martin, however, calls this representation of Zelda nothing more than "a stereotypical narrative, the troublesome woman wreaking havoc with the sensitive, educated, talented man" (93, 107). In fact, Wagner-Martin points to Fitzgerald as the one intent on squelching his spouse's artistic endeavors to serve his own ends: "The irony of the Scott-Zelda relationship from the start . . . was that Scott regularly usurped Zelda's story" (123). Recovering Zelda in this way, Wagner-Martin argues that her so-called madness was a convenient label, one historically applied to women rebelling against a narrow, domestic role.

Yet, Zelda did suffer from very real mental anguish that she, herself, recognized as a type of malady that improved during times spent in various institutions, especially Highland, where she always went voluntarily, according to Wagner-Martin (211).[8] She recognized, it seems, that the efficacy of questionable treatments notwithstanding, a few months away from her husband was the real cure for her illness, as she told Fitzgerald during a recorded consultation with a doctor in 1933: "'It is impossible to live with you. I

would rather be in an insane asylum, where you would like to put me'" (Wagner-Martin 170). So, the real debate is not necessarily about whether she was crazy or not but about the source of her suffering. It was most definitely not, according to Wagner-Martin, biological destiny, but a lack of autonomy in her marriage that worsened as "she saw that she was in the control of her husband: Scott had the money, he had the power, he had the reputation" (84). Zelda, then, typifies the woman whose experience of patriarchal trauma unfairly earns her the moniker, *madwoman*.

Smith's representation of Zelda in *Guests* shows the paradox gripping the oppressed woman artist, revealed in a conversation between the art teacher, Miss Malone, and Evalina on the occasion of Zelda's imminent return to Highland:

> 'Arriving next week, I'm told. For another *rehabilitation and reeducational program*'—Miss Malone's expression told what she thought of this—'plus deep-shock insulin, of course . . . Though [painting] would do her more good than any of that other. Her husband may have stolen her words—and her life, for that matter—but he can't steal her art. She's safe here.' (212)

Miss Malone fails to see the irony in her declaration that Zelda is safe from her husband in an asylum that administers, by her own admission, deleterious treatments set up to make her accept her husband's appropriation of her art. It is true, though, that Zelda usually arrives at Highland disheveled and overwrought but becomes confident, energetic, and assertive while painting, dancing, and choreographing ballet (213, 284). Wagner-Martin claims Highland fostered Zelda's painting: "At Highland, Zelda had found encouragement beneath its institutional regime, an encouragement that allowed her to find her own way of seeing, and being in, the world" (194). Highland thus offers Zelda a temporary space to liberate her creativity, just as the institution functions as a safety valve for Amanda's apparently volatile marriage, but Highland does nothing to change

the power structures that usurp both women's agency in the first place; in fact, the asylum is one of those hegemonic patriarchal forces that maintain the status quo. If all the resources that went into bolstering institutionalized mandates for feminine behavior during the early twentieth century had gone instead into supporting women artists' creative outlets, the lingering question about the Fitzgeralds might not be, Was Zelda mad? but, Was F. Scott Fitzgerald mad? After all, it seems what she needed for mental stability was creative freedom, but what he needed to prevent his self-destructive behavior, which according to Wagner-Martin escalated to a suicide attempt, is murkier.[9]

Most of the critical work examining Zelda focuses on the suppression of her artistic talents as the most detrimental form of her subjugation. Chesler examines several such cases, including the famously mad Sylvia Plath and Zelda, both of whom, Chesler asserts, were "uncommonly stubborn, talented, and aggressive," which created monumental conflict with their domineering artist husbands, who oppressed their wives through collusion with the powerful male psychiatric establishment (5, 9, 12). So, while any woman might be "driven mad" by the deprivation of autonomy, according to Chesler, those women who are endowed with artistic genius must fight for expression within an extra dimension of male dominance (26).

More recent critical work also examines the oppressed woman artist, but does so through an elitist lens marginalizing all but rich women. In *Readings of Trauma, Madness, and the Body*, Sarah Wood Anderson argues for hierarchal class distinctions in mental suffering:

> The very condition of the (upper class) female life restricts and limits female creativity. With a husband or a family trust fund to provide financially for the family, a woman need not be concerned with money, as would a woman of the lower class . . . . Faced with a life spent producing

> nothing (except for children, perhaps) and contributing nothing (except support for a working husband), these women all go a little mad. (164-65)

Anderson's implication is that a "woman of the lower class," is as immune from precipitating artistic oppression as she is from the resulting madness, with said immunity stemming from housework, an assumedly low-paying job, worries over money, or caring for a child (164).

Guests, I argue, suggests that it is of course possible for any woman, regardless of socioeconomic position, to be traumatized by an ideology that not only denies her creativity and intellect, but also pathologizes her rebellion against culturally mandated, conventional femininity. A primary part of *Guests*' significance is that is shows women from divergent echelons of society, whether endowed with artistic genius, intellectual prowess, or simply a strong will, experience the same traumas, thus confounding and troubling socially constructed class boundaries.

For example, Evalina is born poor, grows up with what seems to be only a small amount of money left to her by Graves, but for a while, receives tutelage from the upper-class Mrs. Carroll; therefore, she occupies a liminal class space. Her lack of wealth, however, does not preclude her experience with artistic oppression, which occurs as she sacrifices her own musical career in favor of a doomed domestic arrangement with the narcissistic opera star, Joey Nero. While Evalina's potential for stardom as a classical pianist is never confirmed by the narrative, it is only after Nero blatantly exploits her to further his own ambitions and then obliterates whatever delusions about marriage and family with him she might have entertained that Evalina's public performances come to an end. She does not even play piano for a year, and then takes only jobs as accompanist and teacher, or plays for events within the cloistered halls of Highland, refusing any

attempt to put her into the spotlight, even when Ella Jean offers her a chance to go on the road and play keyboards for her country music band (107, 121, 126, 295, 323). It seems that her experience with Nero solidifies her estimation of her talent as nothing more than secondary, despite the contradictory assessments of Ella Jean and Zelda, both of whom tell Evalina she has great musical gifts (287, 295).

Flossie Bascomb is another example of a woman outside the upper class who suffers patriarchal trauma in the form of artistic oppression. Ella Jean's older sister, Flossie, is desperate to achieve a musical career and a romantic relationship, but her desire for the latter impedes the former. Evalina meets Flossie while visiting with Ella Jean at the Bascomb home. When Flossie shows up only to announce her intention to move away, it is clear she has unwisely pinned all her hopes for a successful future on a man, Doyle, who is unsavory and unlikely to help Flossie in any way. Indeed, while Flossie packs her things, Doyle perpetrates a violent sexual assault on Evalina not far from the house (87). Flossie goes to Knoxville with Doyle but predictably, the relationship does not work out, and she winds up back in Asheville cooking in the Highland kitchen, the same job held by her mother: "And now look at me, here I am, slopping up soup for crazy people, just like Mama" (194). Flossie is embittered at the sorry state of her life, especially in light of Ella Jean's phenomenal success as a musician.

Flossie does possess a considerable musical talent; in fact, her artistry might actually equal or surpass, as Flossie repeatedly claims, that of her sister, according to Evalina's reaction to an impromptu performance that Flossie and Pan give at Highland: "For a moment on that bright sunny day everyone else fell absolutely silent; we knew we were hearing something rare, something wonderful. It was a moment caught in time and

space that would not come again" (192). With such considerable musical gifts, it is surprising that Flossie achieves no professional success whatsoever while Ella Jean's musical career soars, but Ella Jean is not encumbered by visions of domestic bliss.

The main difference between Flossie and Ella Jean—other than, possibly, several IQ points—is Flossie's seeming inability to separate a career in music from a romantic relationship: "'You think I want to be over here working in this here kitchen? You think I don't want to be riding around in a custom-built silver tour bus with all the boyfriends and hundred-dollar bills I can handle? She wasn't the one—I was the one. She didn't have no talent to speak of. I had the talent. And the looks'" (194). While Flossie's perception of her beautiful, musically gifted sister is definitely skewed by envy, she repeatedly conflates professional recognition with romance, working herself into a state while talking with Evalina: "Her speech became more rapid, more incoherent and hostile, as she spoke . . . It struck me that Flossie might well be crazier than many of these hospitalized here at Highland . . ." (194-95). Despite her artistry, Flossie cannot break away from the culturally prescribed feminine role of girlfriend/wife. To her detriment, when she envisions herself in a different life, the picture always includes a man. She cannot even imagine, it seems, an autonomous life, even one in which she is a famous musician, outside culturally sanctioned domesticity. Flossie, then, shows what artistic oppression looks like in a woman outside the upper class. She has internalized the strictures of patriarchal ideology so completely that she, like Evalina, imagines fulfillment in a conventional, unequal marriage dynamic, without cognizance of it as a potential source of misery. Artistic oppression, then, cannot be severed from the type of patriarchal trauma that makes it so effective: idealized subordination. In other words,

patriarchal ideology dictates that a woman's role is that of wife and mother, not artist or anything else, for that matter. Flossie's and Ella Jean's very different outcomes confirm that it is not the structure of mountain communities that deprives women of autonomy but the larger, systemic subjugation of patriarchy.

It is the subtlety, therefore, of idealized subordination that makes it so debilitating. Indeed, as Betty Friedan taught us more than 50 years ago, it can even become a goal for women, who are told by the power structures surrounding them that regardless of their ambition, talent, and intelligence, what they should want *in order to be normal* is to be only a good wife and mother. When some women achieve that role and wind up miserable, they are conditioned to look inside themselves for the cause of their anguish. Moreover, women who are subjected to it in its most effective disguise of normativity must bear not only its appropriation of autonomy but also—for those whose symptoms lead to intervention—its treatment, which at Highland is a course of femininity training designed to teach or remind a woman how to be a content wife and mother—and nothing else. In *Guests*, Dixie Calhoun epitomizes a woman who has it all: a loving husband, two adorable daughters, money, intelligence, beauty, and a debilitating experience of patriarchal trauma.

Evalina meets Dixie while the two of them are undergoing shock treatments on Highland's infamous "top floor," where such "bizarre, grotesque" practices are administered matter-of-factly (139). During the course of her memoir, Evalina differentiates among the metrazol, insulin, and electroconvulsive shock treatments administered at Highland: she never receives electroshock, and Zelda, in a substitute mother role, saves her from the metrazol. She does, though, undergo the controversial

insulin shock therapy after a sexual assault and the death of her baby (98-100, 137-39). Regardless of the delivery mechanism, the goal of shock treatment is to purge the memory and promote compliance. Although Evalina agrees with the doctors that some of the patients "were getting better" following the insulin shock, she is witnessing a temporary effect, at best, for the spasms and coma that result from the insulin shock do not permanently erase the patient's memory of the "severe trauma, injury, illness" or whatever induced the mental instability (131, 137). Indeed, even though she wants to forget the trauma, shock treatments do not selectively suppress memories, they randomly repress them, which is hardly bearable to Evalina: "If this was recovery, I wanted no part of it" (136). Moreover, according to Showalter, all these controversial treatments are administered more often to women than men, and the insulin shock, in particular, which reduces the patient to a blubbering, incontinent, feeble condition, has long been used as a harsh means of controlling and infantilizing women (205-06). Like the rest cure she endured upon first entering Highland, Evalina's course of insulin shock is designed to numb her and even out her negative emotions instead of working through them. Once she finishes the regimen, she becomes friends with Dixie, whose malady is deemed severe enough to be treated with electroshock therapy (156).

Like Evalina, Dixie was not born into a wealthy family. Due primarily to a mother determined to push her daughter into a higher social class but also in large part to her intelligence, beauty, and charm, she breaches the upper class twice: once after receiving scholarships to prestigious women's schools, which led to her debut at the *Gone with the Wind* Ball in Atlanta, and a second time after marrying into the landed gentry of Georgia (181).

Dixie possesses a keen intelligence, but her mother focuses instead on her daughter's beauty as the means to climb the social ladder into a better life. Dixie, like the real-life Zelda and most young girls given the opportunity to attend glittering dances and other stimulating social events, takes the plunge and is swept up into the superficial world of the high-class Southern belle whose only goal in life is to land the right sort of husband. As a consequence, Dixie defers college but is soon underwhelmed by her easy attraction of admirers and the endless repetition of parties (182). On one of these occasions, she has sex for the first time with an older boy who mistakenly believes she uses birth control, and the sad result is a pregnancy that irrevocably changes her life. Her family forcefully tries to abort the fetus, and when that fails, they lodge her in a home for unwed mothers where she is coerced her into giving up the baby for adoption. Her punishment for asserting sexual agency is obviously harsh, but Dixie never regrets her claim to independence (180). The loss of her baby, however, is a different matter, and she does not seem capable of jettisoning the guilt she feels over the traumatic event (190).

In addition to this overpowering sense of loss, Dixie continues to chafe at the confines of a conventional feminine role, for she soon marries and becomes a rich wife and mother, after all, and is expected to be happy about it. Ironically, the intelligence that paved her way into Agnes Scott and positioned her to become a belle proves a detriment in her life as Mrs. Calhoun, plantation wife. She does not possess any particularly brilliant artistic genius, but she has a superior mind and nothing to do with it (156, 178). Her husband sends her to Highland to get her mind right, as it were, and she tries to explain her complicity in her husband's strategy to Evalina and the Overholsers, a married couple on staff at Highland, who encourage her to go to college: "'Oh no,' Dixie

said quickly. ‘Frank wouldn’t like it . . . you know that’s not the purpose of therapy at Highland, don’t you? That’s not why he sent me up here. I am being “reeducated, retrained” . . . For marriage, I guess . . . I wasn’t very good at it before’” (178). Here, Dixie’s self-blame reveals her immersion in the power structure of patriarchy. She has internalized the idealized, socially constructed role of femininity, accepting that her depression and misery are her fault.

Hubert notes that such self-implication by women in their own mental anguish is common in twentieth-century madness narratives: “Lacking a strong alternative discourse, women accepted the interpretations of psychiatric professionals . . . and testified against themselves” (58). Dixie genuinely believes that she and her husband both want the same thing, the right thing: “‘He just wants me to shut up and quit being sick and do what I’m supposed to and quit bothering everybody . . . Now don’t get me wrong. Frank loves me, he really does, or he sure wouldn’t have put up with me all this time. He just wants me to calm down and be satisfied. That’s what I want, too. I’m sick of myself’” (179). As Hubert explains, rebellious women, especially those whose rebellion manifests as largely passive depression, are often considered cured when they accept domestic duties as their only function in life (74). Dixie’s defense of her husband, indeed her justification of culturally prescribed domesticity, reveals her conviction that she is making herself sick, and that with the right treatment, she will get over her self-inflicted problem and become a content wife and mother. She is fully under the sway of what Hubert calls a “misogynist psychiatric discourse” (58). In fact, she is so convinced that subordination of her own desires is the answer to mental instability that she, ironically, advises Evalina to marry well and adopt the same course (233).

No matter how willing Dixie is, however, to purge her mind of all but domestic ideals, she continues to experience depression, eventually winding up back at the hospital for more electroshock treatments. Even the doctors acknowledge that Dixie's loss of a child should not produce this level of mental illness, as Dr. Schwartz explains to Evalina: "'I think it may have been a factor, certainly, but most people get over such loss, or grief, or even traumas we can't imagine. In fact most people will experience periods of depression in their lifetimes, and then they will get better eventually . . . I'm saying that the problem is that there's no problem" (288). The trauma Dr. Schwartz "can't imagine" in the setting of the novel is patriarchal trauma, and the problem that is "no problem" is in fact a seriously debilitating experience of it.

Dixie's trauma springs mainly from the oppression of her intellect and the loss of her child, despite the fact she had to fight off an apparent sexual assault before her marriage (188). Other women in *Guests*, however, barely survive more savage sexual violence.

One of the most graphic, disturbing forms of patriarchal trauma in *Guests* is sexual violence done to a woman by a man. When Evalina is eight months pregnant, she is raped or nearly raped and goes into premature labor immediately afterward. The account of this horrific event is clouded by Evalina's delayed, partial recollection. On the day her baby was born, she does remember trying to get home from work during a terrific storm and being viciously attacked by a man while taking a shortcut through a rough part of town. She does not remember, or does not provide, anyway, enough detail to determine if she was actually raped or not, but the reaction of a woman who intercedes on her behalf suggests the worse: "'You crazy thing, what you do, what you doing to her, oh

Mother of God! You damn fool, what you doing here? Oh God, what you done?'" (246). Evalina goes on to relate that she was "fighting him off" and able to get to her feet after the woman came to her assistance, but then she is attacked again from behind and knocked to her knees.

She says she was in labor when she "woke up," so the time between her falling to her knees—which suggests consciousness after the blow—and the time she awakens during childbirth is lost, perhaps because her mind simply refuses to process the trauma. Also, she assumes she asked the "river people" to bring her to Temps Perdu, again suggesting she was conscious after the attack but does not remember it. Significantly, Evalina does not mention her probable rape again in the narrative, suggesting it is repressed or perhaps squelched by the treatments designed to do just that. The fragmentation and the obvious loss of time in the narrative mirror the effects of trauma on the mind, as well as the consequences of insulin shock treatment, which "rob you of your immediate memory," as Evalina notes (131).

Moreover, even when she does remember traumatic events, Evalina sometimes softens the sharp edges of assault, as she does when she relates what Doyle did to her when she visited Ella Jean. She initially describes the attack, which stopped short of rape thanks to Wilmer's intercession, in detail: "I was grabbed from behind, one strong arm around my waist and another around my neck, a hard fist in my mouth . . . I could not speak, for now he was choking me as his other hand moved under my blouse . . . I could not move or breathe" (87). When she recalls the event much later, however, she describes Doyle as "the one who had tried to kiss me in the dark woods" (192). Here, although she describes Doyle as "that horrible man," Evalina transmutes the memory of Doyle's attack

into nothing more than an attempted “kiss,” giving the impression that she escaped a flirtation instead of “the dark woods” of a violent sexual assault. Evalina’s repression of the brutal event is a classic symptom of trauma and reflects the crazy quilt of her mind.

In contrast, Jinx Feeney apparently remembers a great deal of detail about the sexual violence perpetrated against her, primarily by her uncle, a deacon of the church and a member in good standing of the KKK, who beat her and raped her repeatedly while threatening to shoot her in the head (208). She is in the custody of this monster and her simpering aunt because she is orphaned at only 15 years of age. Accustomed to the freewheeling lifestyle she lived with her father, a tinker, Jinx bristles at her relatives’ strict rules but reacts mildly at first; however, even a relatively harmless infraction like skipping school results in a beating from her uncle (207). Things escalate accordingly, and when Jinx tells her aunt about the rapes, the aunt accuses her of lying and begins to beat her, too. Jinx runs away with her one friend, a young black man, Orlando. This racial transgression gives her uncle and aunt the ammunition they need to bring in the North Carolina authorities and make sure anything Jinx says about her uncle will be dismissed. She is sent to a reformatory and forcibly sterilized “for the public good” because as one official put it: “The duty of the state is to protect the race” (200). By exercising sexual agency, and by asserting it outside racial barriers, Jinx threatens both sexist and racist ideology, bringing her under the authority of the law. In *Sexual Reckonings: Southern Girls in a Troubling Age,* Susan K. Cahn points out the lengths to which legislatures would go at the time in order to control the sexuality of teenage girls:

> Beginning in the late 1920s and lasting through the 1960s, southern states aggressively regulated the sexuality of young women charged with criminal offenses or with mental incapacity. Nationally, numerous reformers committed to ‘girls’ work’ had developed remedies for . . .

> assertive adolescent sexuality. When these failed, state governments turned to incarceration in criminal reformatories or colonies for the feebleminded and insane. But soon they resorted to a more cost-effective measure: the surgical sterilization of young women whom the state deemed 'mentally defective'; and 'socially inadequate.' (157)

Because she is an orphan girl with no money who refuses to conform to societal standards for behavior, it is easy for her uncle, who is sadistic and hypocritical but loaded with cultural capital, to have her incarcerated and sterilized when she defies him.

Smith, then, rather obviously constructs Jinx to fit the profile of the unruly young woman who is ultimately victimized by a number of traumatic stanchions of patriarchy.[10] What is more subtle and more significant about Jinx, though, is that she represents the rage and assertive sexuality that Evalina and Dixie suppress. After stints in a reformatory and a jail, Jinx lands at Highland simply because the powers that be do not know what else to do with her. While Jinx does not seem to suffer the bouts of depression that plague most of the other patients—in fact, she is invariably upbeat—she is definitely angry and has been for a long time. For example, after one episode of rape by her uncle, when her aunt questions her about her blood-stained panties, asking her "what is going on," Jinx replies, "Nothing . . . Not a goddamn thing," irately anticipating her aunt's refusal to believe that her uncle is raping her (208). Another instance of Jinx's anger occurs when she is sent to the reformatory, where she sets her mattress on fire and as a consequence, gets sent to jail; while there, she writes a letter to a local judge alleging that the reformatory staff systematically abused her (209). At Highland, she continues to exert sexual agency but manages to channel her energy, angry and otherwise, into creative activities, such as dancing (286). So, even though Evalina implies Jinx lack morals, she perhaps does so because she has spent years accepting Highland's institutional dictates

regarding women's behavior. Indeed, Smith characterizes Jinx as a woman fighting back, furiously (253).

In contrast, Evalina never directly expresses anger to anyone who mistreats her: when Graves thrusts her into his hateful family, she stops eating and burns her own arm; when Joey Nero exploits her, cheats on her, and assaults her when she gets pregnant, she simply leaves him; she does not respond at all to Doyle; and her reaction to the man who attacks her when she is in labor is a mental breakdown of some sort (14-15, 118, 121-122, 125). It is not that her reactions are weak; in fact, they might be seen as protests. She sometimes wishes, though, that she could be more forthright and uninhibited, like Jinx.

For example, Evalina envies Jinx's easy manner and effortless friendship with Zelda: "I felt a bit jealous. I had known Mrs. Fitzgerald for years, and never had such rapport" (272, 289). Evalina is also jealous of Jinx's possible relationship with Pan, becoming "suddenly, deeply furious" when she finds two of Pan's carvings under Jinx's bed, even though Pan represents sex without obligation to Evalina (263, 307). Typically, Evalina never tells Jinx she is angry at her. Finally, Evalina's desire to be more like Jinx is evident when she is choosing a gown to wear on her trip with Freddy. As her other friends suggest pink "ruffly chiffon" gowns or "demure but . . . sophisticated" blue numbers, Evalina is drawn uncharacteristically to the "silver lame gown with a low, scooped neck and swirly circular skirt" that Jinx proposes. Evalina wants to be more like Jinx, so much in fact, that there is some question about Jinx's actual presence during this event. Though it is true that Jinx enters other conversations "suddenly out of nowhere, as was her wont," no one in the dress scene exchanges a word with her, and her only line is "Ooooh, goody!" when Evalina chooses the silver gown. Here, Jinx possibly seems real

to Evalina simply because she imagines herself as Jinx—a sexy, uninhibited, stylish woman who is never the accompanist but always the center of attention (276-77). Jinx might or might not be actually present when Evalina chooses the risqué gown, but in any event, Evalina envies her and tries to act like her. Jinx, then, represents the muffled rage Evalina suppresses within herself, as well as the desire for recognition she refuses to admit.

Though at first glance Jinx's experiences with sexual violence seem extraordinary, the brutal things done to her by men happen as a matter of course to women in a male-dominated society.[11] Horvitz points to patriarchal ideology as the reason behind the prevalence of sex crimes against women: "Only in a culture that sanctions heterosexual misogyny can sexual violence proliferate" (15). Indeed, on the day Jinx is brought to Highland, Evalina listens to the police, who are determined to destroy Jinx's credibility, repeatedly attack her character: "Never trust her . . . Jinx Feeney is a dangerous girl" (201). This official discourse is both retribution and a preemptive strike against any allegations of abuse, sexual or otherwise, Jinx might levy against men with power, leading Evalina to rightly conclude: "'*They hate her . . . They really hate her*'" (201). Of course they hate her. Jinx's sexual agency represents rebellion against a culture so intent on male domination of women that it sanctions the ripping out of her internal organs as punishment for her defiance.

In fact, the instances of sexual violence in *Guests* invariably represent what I see as men's discipline of women's sexuality. When Jinx's uncle rapes her repeatedly, he does not do it because she had sex, he does it because she (presumably) had sex with someone other than him (207-08). When Doyle sexually assaults Evalina, he does not do

it because he thinks a “city girl” will be somehow different, he does it because as a town girl, in his mind she will have sex with a town guy instead of him (87). Even when the man rapes or attempts to rape the very pregnant Evalina in New Orleans, he does not do it because she obviously had sex with a man, he does it because she obviously had sex with a man other than him (246). These men use violence to warn women: if you’re going to have sex, you going to have it with me. In other words, men bent on domination of women do not hesitate to use sexual violence to codify women’s sexuality as pieces of property, pieces up for grabs among each other.

The advent of psychotropic drugs to treat the symptoms of patriarchal trauma in women has diminished their confinement within mental asylums like Highland. Now, according to Ussher’s latest work, *The Madness of Women: Myth and Experience*, women are numbed to dissatisfaction and misery through easy access to medications, especially anti-depressants, for what is still considered mental illness (57-60). In large part, therefore, the treatment has changed, but the gendering of madness remains the same, according to Ussher: “If all we do is label women’s responses as a psychiatric illness, and then prescribe drugs (or ECT) to dull the pain or (or the memory), we are limiting women’s capacity to . . . find lasting solutions” (187). Like Zelda, then, contemporary women who resist subjugation must still confront powerful ideological forces of patriarchy that pathologize women’s rebellion in order to numb them into submission.

Smith returns to Zelda as the most familiar, indeed iconic, madwoman of the early twentieth century to showcase how women responded to patriarchal trauma at that time: as the oppressive backlash to first-wave feminism escalated, so did women’s resistance to

it. Moreover, by focusing on Zelda's stay at an asylum populated by women from all over and located in the Appalachian Mountains, Smith minimizes the alleged differences between the subjugation of women in a metropolis and a regional patriarchy: the traumatic effects of oppression are the same, although they might manifest differently.

After Highland burns down, killing Zelda, Dixie, and others, Evalina moves to New Orleans and lives on her own; however, her journal entries suggest she is anything but stable (326-28). Smith leaves Evalina in a state of uncertainty at the end of the novel to suggest that just as pathologizing women's rebellion to subjugation has historically forestalled an answer to patriarchal trauma, the same ideology bars solutions now, as twenty-first century women continue to negotiate retaliation to second-wave feminism. Yet, even though Evalina is mentally shaky at the end of her journal, the act of writing a memoir at all can be interpreted as an empowering act of defiance, or even as effective therapy, according to Hubert, who claims "the act of writing allows the author to begin to come to terms with abuses that she . . . experienced" (52). For example, in her memoir Evalina records that she tells Dr. Sledge that her "father was a rich man" who sent her to Highland after her mother's death (218). At this point in the narrative, the reader knows that Evalina is either lying or has created a false memory to fill in a traumatic gap; however, she does not clarify her falsehood by providing a reason for the telling of it. It is not until later that she can tell or write down the truth: "'After my mother's death I learned that I am the child of her and her father—her father was my father . . .'" (229). This moment of evolution in Evalina's memoir testifies to the power to be derived from the potentially defiant act of writing.

Evalina's defiance throughout the narrative is important, even when it appears passive; for example, anorexia inflicts harm on the woman who refuses food, but it shows there are no limits to her willpower in the face of male domination. Evalina also resists in more obvious and less physically dramatic ways, such as her refusal to marry Freddy.

Evalina never explicitly states her reasons for ending the relationship, but she most likely has difficulty reconciling the boyfriend Freddy's "Midwestern" provincialism and sexual inexperience with the doctor's role of authoritative professional (228, 281). No matter how much more sophisticated Evalina is than Freddy, when it comes to her mental state, the well-meaning Freddy's attitude verges on the paternalistic, as when they stand before a hotel window after having sex together for the first time: "'Everything will come to you in time, honey. It will, I promise'" (281). Freddy's innocuous remark might suggest to Evalina that their future happiness together is predicated on her continued progress toward what is considered normalcy; in other words, not only toward the conventional role of wife and mother but also toward an arrangement in which she will always be a submissive patient following a wise doctor's orders. In any event, when he presses her to settle their plans, she balks at marriage: "We stood inside the white lattice walls of the rose arbor . . . spring was here, but suddenly I felt as if I were in a prison" (314). By turning down his marriage proposal, Evalina avoids the potential harms of rigid domesticity, the tragic fate of a doll in a dollhouse, of a "princess in a tower," which Zelda repeatedly warns her about (33, 35, 231).

It is ironic, then, that as she ends her memoir, she has is obsessing about moving Pan into her city apartment, marrying him, and having a baby with him. Part of her

seeming obsession with him springs from his lack of mental acuity and the other part from his sexuality.

During a short stay in Pan's woodland shelter, Evalina apparently reveals more of her history to him than she ever told to any of her doctors at Highland, including Freddy: "I . . . went on talking and talking, telling all those secrets I'd been so good at keeping" (260). No matter what she tells him about herself, Pan does not see Evalina as damaged, nor does he analyze Evalina's life in order to fix her, such mental acrobatics being beyond him; therefore, Pan is the opposite of Freddy, who is empathetic to be sure but is a doctor, when all is said and done, one bent on curing Evalina (281).

Evalina finds Pan's lack of intellectual understanding as reassuring as she finds his uninhibited sexuality nurturing: "Though his eyes stayed right on me, bright as a bird's I knew he didn't understand most of what I was talking about, but it didn't matter . . . I was more myself with Pan in his lair than I had ever been before, or ever been since" (260). Pan accepts Evalina's mental incapacities without judgment or a desire to make her better and he also offers her sex without expectations or promises, which is why she is so drawn to him. Pan, however, like his mythological namesake, is so closely tied with the woods that he would be a different creature altogether outside of them. Pan will never move to New Orleans and settle down with Evalina, for by doing so, he would in effect no longer even exist; he would become Billy Ray Moss, "The Boy in the Cage," a violently abused person with an unusual "temperament" (170-71).

It is merely a fantasy, therefore, for Evalina to picture a conventional future with Pan, especially since she imagines happiness within the narrow role of wife and mother that has caused so much misery in the lives of the women around her, and that she has

rejected, herself. She refuses to be subject to this societal mandate, but like Flossie, she cannot divest herself of it. Along with the oppression of her musical gifts and the sexual violence perpetrated against her, the simultaneous acceptance and rejection of idealized subordination has traumatized Evalina. The prevalence of such patriarchal trauma in *Guests on Earth* foregrounds it as a formidable reality in women's lives.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The proposition in this dissertation is that three diverse novels set in Appalachia all narrate the damages women can sustain in patriarchal culture. My examination of the traumatic effects of patriarchy confirms that Appalachian literature is a verdant landscape in which to debate women's subjugation, especially specific concerns such as idealized subordination. *River of Earth* acknowledges that rural women embrace modernity's opportunities for gender equality with eager optimism, only to discover that industrialism's masculinist paradigms prop up the old hierarchies of male dominance while simultaneously erecting new ones. Alpha's character emphasizes, however, that waging the battle for gender equality is a significant contribution to the overall cause, regardless of the outcome.

Instead of predicting women's ultimate defeat at the hands of patriarchal modes of control, *Gap Creek* refuses to admit that women dare to defy male hegemony or even that they want autonomy at all. In *Gap*, both physical and emotional acts of violence that would likely traumatize some women are sanctioned and normalized, or worse, represented as justifiable and rewarding for the woman protagonist. Protected by its author's insider status, which lends it an alleged authenticity, the narrative blatantly denies that women can be traumatized, and it is in effect, therefore, trauma, itself.

Guests on Earth directly represents the patriarchal trauma the other two novels gesture toward. The text unites diverse women—rural and metropolitan, southern and Southern Appalachian, working class and genteel—in their fight against subjugation. The novel testifies, then, that the systemic restraints of patriarchy differ across lines of region and class only in their manner of manifestation.

As one of the earliest, most esteemed Appalachian novels of the twentieth-century, *River of Earth* mythologized Appalachian womanhood. Women characters in the literature that followed Still's masterpiece reflected parts of Alpha's intricate representation in a steady stream of homage to her powerful figure. Not every reflection of Alpha retains her complexity, however, and *Gap Creek* is arguably the culmination of an offensive reductionism, not just of Appalachian women but of all women. *Guests on Earth* recovers and transcends Still's complicated version of the feminine. Smith's novel has little regard for purportedly authentic iterations of Appalachian women. Rather, the novel levels the playing field for a multiplicity of diverse women characters, exploring their differences but simultaneously acknowledging their common suffering from patriarchal trauma. If *Gap* and *Guests* are talking back to *River*, it is in two distinctly different voices: Morgan's novel whispers; Smith's roars.

Reading these novels beyond questions of authenticity turns critical discourse to significant matters previously unplumbed. The trope of the hardworking mountain woman, for example, can be read as something other than a realistic portrayal of rural life or a barometer of a woman's morality and worth; indeed, the trope's usage can indicate certain intricacies of the ideological message in a text. Thus, Alpha's nostalgia for an idyllic agrarian life is superseded by her desire for the autonomy that accompanies her work on a farm. Reading *River of Earth* in this way shows that it condemns industrialism not because industry usurped an idealistic way of life in rural Appalachia but because it bolstered an already privileged masculine hierarchy. Similarly, Morgan's use of the trope, which commodifies and exploits Julie's labor in order for men to benefit, is more complicated, and much less palatable, when read outside admiration for Julie's brute

physical strength. Read within a feminist framework, her willingness to perform demeaning jobs at the behest of men indicates her subordination instead of a wish to man-up and pull her weight around the farm. This new consideration of *Gap Creek* turns previous analyses on their head, exposing the dark, troubling underbelly of a novel that celebrates erotic violence and praises women's alleged inferiority.

Reading *Guests* as a chronicle of patriarchal trauma rather than an exposition of women's genuine mental illness complicates our understanding of madness as a form of protest against subjugation. In this novel, if women's madness can be reinterpreted as the symptoms of patriarchal trauma, the condition, especially among women who most strenuously resist male dominance, is no longer pathological but an identifiable, even reasonable, response. Whether they seek treatment for their affliction or not, because these women are enmeshed in culturally sanctioned patriarchy, they are sometimes hindered from determining a source of their anguish other than their own perceived failing to achieve proper femininity. Reconsidering women's madness in *Guests* as patriarchal trauma validates women's dissatisfaction, depression, and anger not as temporary symptoms that can be fixed by learning how to be a good wife and mother but as inevitable effects of subordination to men, for the characters in Smith's narrative and others, as well. For example, reading Amy Greene's *Bloodroot* within a critical framework of patriarchal trauma would bring a different perspective to its seemingly mad woman protagonist.

The present work has implications for Smith's entire corpus. In large part, my examination of *Guests* traces the damage that idealized subordination can inflict on women, especially those who lack the objectivity to recognize they are struggling toward

an inferiority they abhor. Although I briefly chart, in the previous chapter, the intertextual connections among *Guests* and two other novels by Smith, the novels' preoccupation with patriarchal trauma suggests that other works by Smith might also represent the ways women work through—or fail to negotiate—traumatic experiences imposed on them by patriarchy. As a critical framework, patriarchal trauma could offer fresh insights into Smith's oeuvre.[1]

This dissertation seeks to establish a different means to interpret Appalachian literature. I do not contest the scholarly need to refute stereotypes of the region and its people when they are propagated in art; however, I resist the continuation of authenticity as a hegemonic paradigm for critical discourse, especially when an author's insider status shields a text from vigorous inquiry. Reconsidering women's representation in the present texts as part of their fight for autonomy enlivens our sense of Appalachian literature's contribution to culture.

Notes to Chapter One

1. Chief among these desires, Satterwhite argues, are constructions of race, class, and to a lesser extent, gender. For more on authenticity, identity, and essentialism, also see *Back Talk from Appalachia: Confronting Stereotypes*, edited by Dwight B. Billings, Gurney Norman, and Katherine Ledford, especially Darlene Wilson's essay, "A Judicious Combination of Incident and Psychology: John Fox Jr. and the Southern Mountaineer Motif" 98-118.
2. In addition to Satterwhite's *Dear Appalachia*, another work that necessarily engages authenticity in an argument about broader issues is *The Tangled Roots of Feminism, Environmentalism, and Appalachian Literature*, by Elizabeth S. D. Engelhardt.
3. For several essays emphasizing Still's insider status, see *James Still: Critical Essays on the Dean of Appalachian Literature*, edited by Ted Olson and Kathy H. Olson. I am not suggesting that the facts of Still's life are misrepresented in these analyses, but the efforts to endow Still with an Appalachian identity are obvious, especially in works by Kohler, Turner, Boggess, Miller, Cadle, and Crowther. Also see Claude Lafie Crum's "Constructing a Marketable Writer: James Still's Fictional Persona," for an alternative viewpoint.
4. See Miles's *The Spirit of the Mountains*.
5. My contention is that Appalachian culture is not any more or less patriarchal than society at large.

Notes to Chapter Two

1. For a sampling of reading on patriarchy in Appalachia, see Engelhardt's *Tangled Roots*; *Beyond Hill and Hollow: Original Readings in Appalachian Women's Studies*, a compilation of essays edited by Engelhardt; *Back Talk from Appalachia*; and Ron Eller's *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930* and *Uneven Ground* 23, 198, 204.
2. See, for example, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*, by Susan Griffin.
3. The questions that arise are innumerable, some of them geographical, some of them ideological; in any case, not only are the answers sometimes muddled, the relevance of each is debatable when trying to categorize an author as an insider or outsider. For example: Was the author born in Appalachia? Did the author live there? How long? What sort of Appalachian community does the author hail from? The mountains? Coalfields? A farming community? Small town? City? Where is the author's fiction set? From the same place the author hails from? Nearby? What class is/was the author a member of? What class do the author's characters represent? Can an author become an Appalachian? How? Just what is an Appalachian person?
4. See Chapter 2 of Miller's *Wingless Flights*.
5. It is unclear whether or not Alpha is attended by a midwife, sometimes referred to as a granny woman in local vernacular. When the family first arrives in Blackjack, Euly, most likely thinking of her mother's pregnancy, wonders if a "granny woman" resides there, but the question is not resolved. There is mention of a "granny woman" who is present when Harl and Tibb blow up the mine, but the context is open to interpretation, for here, *granny* might simply indicate an old woman, or a midwife who could perhaps be helpful if someone was injured.

6. See *Daughters of the Mountains: Women Coal Miners in Central Appalachia* by Suzanne E. Tallichet.
7. For more information on coal production in Eastern Kentucky, see Chapter 4, "Ascendency of Coal," in Eller's *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*. For more information on coal camps, see Chapter 5: "Coal, Culture, and Community: Life in the Company Towns."
8. Brack is referring to Hodge Mauldraugh's unreasonable defense of his son, Bee, when he uses the phrase, indicating that Hodge should not, in Brack's opinion, interfere with the schoolteacher's discipline policy. So, Still's usage of the phrase, here, suggests that he misunderstood the local dialect or that he based his usage on a generalization of the vernacular that had developed over time, a common occurrence in language. In any event, the phrase is an example of sexist language.

Notes to Chapter Three

1. For a particularly egregious portrayal of the stereotype, see *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine*, by John Fox, Jr.
2. See Edwin Schur's *The Americanization of Sex*; the widely published works of Catherine MacKinnon; and *Gender Violence: Interdisciplinary Perspectives,* edited by Laura L. O'Toole and Jessica R. Schiffman.
3. An exploration of widely divergent sexual proclivities and practices is well beyond the scope of this argument; however, it is safe to assume Julie is not involved in the extremes of sexual experimentation within the context of this novel.
4. I do not categorize Morgan as a postmodernist male thinker, here, but try to show that *Gap Creek* continues what Gilbert and Gubar characterized as the postmodern effort to construct mothers as potential monsters to their sons.
5. See any of the local color narratives published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by Mary Noailles Murfree and John Fox, Jr.
6. In addition to Drewitz-Crockett's "Authority, Details, and Intimacy: Southern Appalachian Women in Robert Morgan's Family Novels," for further commentary on Morgan's insider status, see John Lang's "'He Hoes Forever': Robert Morgan and the Pleasure of Work"; Cecelia Conway's "Robert Morgan's Mountain Voice and Lucid Prose"; Rebecca Smith's "The Elemental in *The Truest Pleasure* and *Gap Creek*: Nature as Physical Force and Spiritual Metaphor"; and Gwen McNeill Ashburn's "Working Without Nets: Early Twentieth Century Mountain Women in Fiction."

Notes to Chapter Four

1. For a recent biography of Zelda, see Linda Wagner-Martin's *Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald: An American Woman's Life*.
2. The term *mad* immediately evokes innumerable cultural connotations that belabor its usage. Evalina uses the word and its synonyms in the context of the novel's early twentieth-century setting to categorize her own state and that of others, so in order to avoid confusion and lengthy clarification at every turn, I will use *mad*, and Evalina's synonyms for *mad*, in this analysis with the understanding that I do not use them derogatorily.
3. This analysis does not examine madness as a medical condition but rather as suffering with identifiable causes. Therefore, I will not attempt to diagnose the characters in *Guests*

as mad or sane in order to relegate their behaviors into false dichotomies such as normal or abnormal, nor will I attempt to pin a degree of mental instability to each character.
4. The present analysis is not a detailed examination of medical practices, psychiatric or otherwise. Both Chesler and Showalter include discussion of treatments for madness in their texts. For more information, also see Jane Ussher's *Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?* and her more recent *The Madness of Women: Myth and Experience*. Also, see *For Her Own Good: Two Centuries of the Experts' Advice to Women* by Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English.
5. See, for example, Kent Cartwright's "Nick Carraway as an Unreliable Narrator."
6. Also see Showalter's *The Female Malady*, Chapter 5 "Nervous Women: Sex Roles and Sick Roles."
7. In addition to Wagner-Martin's biography, also see Zelda's letters to F. Scott Fitzgerald in *Zelda Fitzgerald: The Collected Writings*, edited by Matthew J. Bruccoli.
8. Wagner-Martin suggests that despite Zelda's willing entrances, at times F. Scott Fitzgerald controlled her exit from mental hospitals 134.
9. Wagner-Martin relates Fitzgerald's innumerable mental problems, including his alcoholism, his monumental insecurities, and his megalomaniacal attempts to possess Zelda specifically and dominate women in general. She also sets forth a doctor's exhortation to Fitzgerald that he was as much a patient as Zelda (166).
10. Lee Smith mentions Susan K. Cahn's *Sexual Reckonings* as an historical source for *Guests on Earth*.
11. See the latest national statistics published to date by the Centers for Disease Control, which show one in five women is raped and one in 20 is sexually assaulted in some other way during their lifetimes: www.cdc.gov. These statistics are even more shocking in light of the fact that most sex crimes still go unreported in this country, according to the *Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network* https://rainn.org/get-information/statistics/reporting-rates.

Notes to Chapter Five

1. See "Siblings and Sex: A New Approach to the Fiction of Lee Smith," by Martha Billips.

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