

1981

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Recommended Citation

Lyon, George Ella (1981) "Contemporary Appalachian Poetry: Sources and Directions," *The Kentucky Review*: Vol. 2 : No. 2 , Article 2.
Available at: <https://uknowledge.uky.edu/kentucky-review/vol2/iss2/2>

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Contemporary Appalachian Poetry: Sources and Directions

George Ella Lyon

At the beginning of 1960, you could have counted the important Appalachian poets on both hands. Since then, over seventy collections of Appalachian poetry have appeared; anthologies and little magazines have featured it, and scholars have written essays about it. This sudden flowering is impressive, and, because some of the earlier poets are out of print, may seem miraculous. But it has its roots in work that came before, in individual voices, and in what they expressed for the region as a whole.

I

Ballad of the Bones, *Hounds on the Mountain*, *Song in the Meadow*—the titles of these books of Appalachian poetry from the thirties and forties reveal its origin in closeness to the earth and love of song. These collections by Byron Herbert Reece of north Georgia, and James Still and Elizabeth Madox Roberts of Kentucky, are rooted in tradition, formally as well as thematically. They contain sonnets, ballads, song cycles, and carefully reined free verse, often with a biblical cadence. While they employ less dialect than Ann Cobb's groundbreaking *Kinfolks: Kentucky Mountain Rhymes* (1922), they show a kinship to those poems, to Roy Helton's *Lonesome Waters* (1930), and to Jesse Stuart's *Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow* (1934), in that they wish to examine and most often to preserve the stories and values that have been islanded within the culture as a whole. As James Still writes in "White Highways":

I have gone out to the roads that go up and down
In smooth white lines, stoneless and hard;
I have seen distances shortened between two points,
The hills pushed back and bridges thrust across
The shallow river's span.

To the broad highways, and back again I have come
To the creek-bed roads and narrow winding trails
Worn into ruts by hoofs and steady feet;
I have come back to the long way around,
The far between, the slow arrival.
Here is my pleasure most where I have lived
And called my home.

O do not wander far

From the rooftree and the hill-gathered earth;
Go not upon these wayfares measured with a line
Drawn hard and white from birth to death.
O quiet and slow is peace, and curved with space
Brought back again to this warm homing place.¹

Still's "homing place" is quiet in the world's sense, a cove away from the scream of machines and rapid transit, but it is lapped in music: "The dulcimer sings from fretted maple throat" ("Mountain Dulcimer"), we hear "the mellow banjos of the hounds' throats", and "shrill notes of a sheep's horn billow down the mountain" ("Fox Hunt"). Most importantly, the human songs are handed down and sung, and the *song* comes to symbolize identity, not just personal but cultural, the unbroken strand of life. Byron Herbert Reece not only writes of those singing the ballads, but also casts many of his poems in the ballad mold, emphasizing the timelessness of his themes, the beauty of song, and its power of renewal:

Mountain Fiddler

I took my fiddle
That sings and cries
To a hill in the middle
Of Paradise.

I sat at the base
Of a golden stone
In that holy place
To play alone.

I tuned the strings
And began to play,
And a crowd of wings
Were bent my way.

A voice said
Amid the stir:
"We that were dead,
O Fiddler,

"With purest gold
Are robed and shod,
And we behold
The face of God.

"Our halls can show
No thing so rude
As your horsehair bow,
Or your fiddlewood;

"And yet can they
So well entrance
If you but play
Then we must dance!"²

Song is a loom for weaving together the joys and sorrows of the earth, for shaping the human story. And narrative threads its way through the lyrical work of these poets, as though the ballad has not yet split into written forms of lyric and narrative. Notice how the light dance of rhythms in "When Daniel Was a Blacksmith" by Elizabeth Madox Roberts prepares us for a new look at the story of Daniel Boone and plays against the heaviness of our standard image of him. In form and fable quality the poem is reminiscent of Blake:

When Daniel Was a Blacksmith

When Daniel was a blacksmith
He fitted for the dray horse,
He shod the little wild colt,
And shod the dappled gray.

When all the nags were fitted well,—
Blow, flame, thump and tap,—
He bent the iron on the forge
And pounded out a trap.

When D. Boone was a blacksmith
He waked before the rising suns.
He blew the flame and bent the steel
And mended rifle guns.

And the wild beasts in a thousand hills,
And in a thousand valley-prongs,
They lifted up their quivering ears
To hear his anvil songs.³

Roberts, best known for her fiction (*The Great Meadow*, 1930), is a central Kentucky native whose work often deals with Appalachian themes and experiences. In "Love in the Harvest" she writes of "a song in the meadow and a song in the mouth."⁴ Certainly her fellow poets—Still, Reece, Cobb, Helton, and Stuart—find in nature's song, the "song in the meadow," the impulse for human expression, the "song in the mouth." Jesse Stuart makes this relationship explicit in his introductory poem to *Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow* (1934), a collection which further illustrates the strain of romanticism in Appalachian poetry. If his proclamation seems defensive or willfully provincial, consider that he was launching his poems on the same stream as Hart Crane and T. S. Eliot. A literary world which had seen *The Bridge* (1930) and *Ash Wednesday* (1930) was not likely to praise the "farmer singing at the plow":

Sir:

I am a farmer singing at the plow
And as I take my time to plow along
A steep Kentucky hill, I sing my song—
A one-horse farmer singing at the plow!
I do not sing the songs you love to hear;
My basket songs are woven from the words
Of corn and crickets, trees and men and birds.
I sing the strains I know and love to sing.

And I can sing my lays like singing corn,
And flute them like a fluting gray corn-bird;
And I can pipe them like a hunter's horn—
All of my life these are the songs I've heard.
And these crude strains no critic can call art,
Yours very respectively, Jesse Stuart.⁵

Louise McNeill's *Gauley Mountain* (1939) marks a change in this pattern of poets singing the land, for its impulse is more narrative than lyrical, and the story of the land emerges through the stories of the people. The relationship between the two is still crucial, but the emphasis has changed. With the focus on story comes a new concern with character, not just of heroes or ballad figures, but of everyday people. Here is an exchange between the Gauley mail rider and a Washington postal clerk, based on a letter that once hung on the wall in a West Virginia post office. Note how the mountaineer's tall-tale humor works to give him the last word:

Jed Kane

The Gauley mail was overdue
When Jed who was to drive it through
Cheat Mountain Pass to Staunton Run
Got special word from Washington—
In which a postal clerk inquired
Why Mr. Kane who had been hired
To drive the course at post haste rate
Was not in yet, though three months late.

And now on a high-glazed marble wall
In the postal building Jed Kane's scrawl
Hangs framed in silver: "Respected Sir,
You ask the reason and this be her—
If the gable end blowed out of hell
Straight into the drifts of a snow that fell
Last fall on the ram's horn point of Cheat
It would take till Easter for brimstone heat
To melt a horsepath. So I remain.
Your obdt. svt., Jedson Kane."⁶

The poem with which *Gauley Mountain* closes brings the human

stories, with all their urgency, to rest in the hill's shadow, but there is evidence already of the difference human values are making in the landscape:

The River

Now they have bridged the canyon of the Gauley
And built a lock above the Swago shoal
To float the barges past the lazy shallow
With loads of river sand and mountain coal.

Along the shore where passing Mingo warriors
Built drift-wood fires to parch Ohio maize
Coke ovens glare red-eyed upon the darkness
And belch their cinders at the fevered days.

.....
. . . White herons sleep, their folded wings unstained
By all that blood the savage Gauley drained
From pale-faced men whose kindred now possess
The last dark current of the wilderness.⁷

The uneasiness evidenced in this poem increases as we come closer to our own time, and the relationship between nature and song in Appalachian poetry changes more profoundly. It is not just that the poets are disconnected from the land—though some are, and clearly that is the movement of the culture—it is that the land no longer presents itself as a constant, the hub of the wheel of seasons, of present and past, of birth and death, struggle and fulfillment. Improper road-building, damming and timbering, as well as the onslaught of strip mining, have changed the land and the lives lived on it dramatically. Lifting up one's eyes unto the hills becomes less comforting when the hills stand in need of help. Folksinger Jean Ritchie chronicles the change in "Black Waters":

O the quail, she's a pretty bird, she sings a sweet tongue;
In the roots of the tall timbers she nests with her young.
But the hillside explodes with the dynamite's roar,
And the voices of the small birds will sound there no more;

And the hillsides come a-sliding so awful and grand,
And the flooding black waters rise over my land.

Sad scenes of destruction on every hand;
Black waters, black waters run down through the land.⁸

Alongside the exploitation of the land has come an accelerated modernization of life in the mountains. The speed and scale of this change, along with the economic roller-coaster of coal production and increasing industrialization, make for a very unstable way of life. As Mike Clark explains in his foreword to *Voices from the Mountains*, "The real story of Appalachia today is the attempt by mountain people to retain the humanistic elements of the old culture and at the same time to adapt to the pressures and demands of a technological society."⁹

As in James Still's "White Highways," the road is often seen as both a symbol and an agent in this transformation. Billy Edd Wheeler, West Virginia poet, playwright, and songwriter, whose *Song of a Woods Colt* appeared in 1969, gives one version of this in "The Coming of the Roads":

O look how they've cut all to pieces
Our ancient poplar and oak
And the hillsides are stained with the greases
That burn up the heavens with smoke

We used to curse the bold crewmen
Who stripped our earth of its ore
Now you've changed and you've gone over to them
And you've learned to love what you hated before

Once I thanked God for my treasure
Now, like rust, it corrodes
And I can't help from blaming
Your going
On the coming
The coming of the roads¹⁰

Kentucky poet Lee Pennington captures a more ambivalent attitude, this time toward the railroad which hauls away the life-

product of the Harlan County train watchers and gives only
longing in return:

Train Horn

The L & N shoves a load of coal
into the Black Mountain night
and Poor Fork fights the sounds
of train horns by carving stillness
and washing noises down toward Harlan.

.....

I have seen them down at the crossing,
their eyes dug out with silence,
their mouths hanging caves on faces
and their feet tapping rhythm of train horn blow.¹¹

II

The movement of contemporary Appalachian poetry, then, is from a rooted, traditional body of work to a more volatile, politically active, and varied offering. Not that there was not political awareness before, most obviously in Georgia poet Don West's *Clods of Southern Earth* (1946), a collection which exposes the condition of workers in factories, on sharecropped farms, in the mines, and in the steel mills, where West himself worked. But the political considerations which inspired songwriters like Florence Reece had not been a major source of poetry in the mountains. From the mid-sixties on, not only labor movement questions but also the old interest in and involvement with the land demanded more political thinking. It became clear that Granny had to walk uphill just to throw water off the back porch, and, as Jim Wayne Miller, poet, critic, and one of the central voices of the seventies, tells us, possession of a small farm turned into a countercultural act:

Small Farms Disappearing in Tennessee —*Headline*

Sometimes a whole farm family comes awake
in a close dark place over a motor's hum
to find their farm's been rolled up like a rug
with them inside it. They will be shaken onto
the streets of Cincinnati, Dayton or Detroit.

It's a ring, a syndicate dismantling farms
on dark nights, filing their serial numbers
smooth, smuggling them north like stolen cars,
disposing of them part by stolen part.

Parts of farms turn up in unlikely places:
weathered gray boards from a Tennessee burley tobacco
barn are up against the wall of an Ohio
office building, lending a rustic effect.
A Tennessee country church suddenly appeared
disguised as a storefront in Uptown Chicago.
Traces of Tennessee farms are found on the slopes
of songs written in Bakersfield, California.
One missing farm was found intact at the head
of a falling creek in a recently published short story.
One farm that disappeared without a clue
has turned up in the colorful folk expressions
of a state university buildings and grounds custodian.
A whole farm was found in the face of Miss Hattie Johnson,
lodged in a Michigan convalescent home.

.....

The Agriculture Agency of the state
recently procured a helicopter to aid
in the disappearing farm phenomenon.
"People come in here every week," the Agency head,
Claude Bullock reports, "whole families on tractors,
claiming their small farm has disappeared."

Running the Small Farms arm of the agency
is not just a job for Bullock, born and brought up
on a small Tennessee farm himself. "We're doing

the best we can," says Bullock, a soft-spoken man with a brow that furrows like a well-plowed field over blue eyes looking at you like farm ponds. "But nowadays," he adds, "you can punch a farm, especially these small ones, onto computer cards. You can store them away on magnetic tapes. So they're hard to locate with a helicopter."

Bullock's own small farm, a thirty-acre remnant of "the old home place," disappeared fourteen months ago, shortly before he joined the Small Farms arm of the agency.¹²

Given these opposing forces at work in Appalachian life—the long-lived isolation which preserved ignorance along with strong family ties, the volatile coal economy with its exploitation of human and natural resources, the accelerated modernization and the accompanying loss—it is not surprising that its poetry offers varied and often contradictory visions. While one can say that in general it is less traditional in form, less given to the use of dialect, and more diverse in voice and rhythm than the poetry which led up to it, it is difficult to characterize more specifically than that. Two things can safely be said. First, it most often concerns itself with reevaluation or reclamation of the past, which includes a strengthening or at least an exploration of the bonds between generations. Second, its strong tie to the land has continued, whether in the pastoral work of poets like Jeff Daniel Marion, Robert Morgan, Fred Chappell, and Maggie Anderson, or the more consciously political poems of Jonathan Williams, P. J. Laska, Mary Joan Coleman, and Bob Snyder.

This recognition of the bond between generations (usually the speaker in the poem and someone older), while it may be celebratory, painful, angry, or a combination thereof, is a way of remapping the land, reforesting so that the past does not erode into floods of present isolated ego. We see examples of this in the work of two young West Virginia poets, Bob Henry Baber and Mary Joan Coleman, who were part of the Soupbean Collective, a group of writers at Antioch College/Appalachia in Beckley, West Virginia.¹³ A stubborn integrity, a continuity, is handed down in Baber's "Roofing for Aunt Pearl":

"They want me t' move t' town,"
 bent over her cane and squinting
 up at me covered with stop-leak and tar,
 holding hot rolled roof,
 "but a told 'em,"
 her palsied hand's finger
 pointing to the soil,
 "that I'm Cold Knob born,
 Cold Knob bred,
 'n' when I die, by God,
 I'm gonna be *Cold Knob* dead!"¹⁴

Exploring one's connections with the past is a kind of self-
 discovery and definition of wrongs, as well as a delineation of what
 is valuable. This is evident in Mary Joan Coleman's description of
 her father's relationship with the world in "the man of stones":

my father wrote a poem forty years ago
 about laying stones for a wall
 i found it when i was yet too young
 to decipher the lost tongue
 of this man's extinct hope;
 he was a stranger on summer porches
 singing in a tender voice i never recognized,
 shadows coursed like poison streams
 down the deep furrows time had plowed
 from his nostrils to his dour mouth
 i knew if my mother would take the hatchet
 from the pickled bean shelf in the cellar
 and strike his breast the steel
 would ring upon solid rock,
 i have read his statement of stoning
 a hundred times since childhood
 he moves now through dust-laden still life
 a lone grey figure with the pervasive odor
 of stale anger and aged bitterness
 like vinegar gone flat
 we do not speak of songs he sings no more
 we seldom speak; but in the vacuum
 i often hear the undeniable
 crumble and groan
 of old stones shifting.¹⁵

Where Baber's and Coleman's poems have the active quality of film, Tennessee poet and editor Jeff Daniel Marion's work is closer to still life. Contemplative, generally low-toned, his poems approach the past and the joining of generations in a different way from Baber and Coleman, but the poets share many of the same concerns. Marion writes in "Ebbing and Flowing Spring":

Coming back you almost
expect to find the dipper
gourd hung there by the latch.
Matilda always kept it hidden
inside the white-washed shed,
now a springhouse of the cool
darkness & two rusting milk cans.
"Dip and drink," she'd say,
"It's best when the water is rising."
A coldness slowly cradled
in the mottled gourd.
Hourly some secret clock
spilled its time in water,
rising momentarily only
to ebb back into trickle.
You waited while
Matilda's stories flowed back,
seeds & seasons, names & signs,
almanac of all her days.
How her great-great-grandfather
claimed this land, gift
of a Cherokee chief
who called it "spring of many risings."
Moons & years & generations
& now Matilda alone.
You listen.
It's a quiet beginning
but before you know it
the water's up & around you
flowing by.
You reach for the dipper
that's gone, then
remember to use your hands
as a cup for the cold

that aches & lingers.
This is what you have come for.
Drink.¹⁶

"This is what you have come for": the past as a source or way to a source of life is accessible in "Ebbing and Flowing Spring" at least in the rhythms of the earth, of the rising water. The speaker is able to carry out the commands of the past because basic facts of the landscape have remained constant and he has kept his life tuned to them. A life tuned to the stripped landscapes of eastern Kentucky or West Virginia is apt to produce more jagged lines. The threat of overburden is constant, as many protest songs tell us. Mike Kline's "Strip Away," based on "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," is particularly effective:

Strip away, big D-9 Dozer,
Comin' for to bury my home,
I'm a-gettin' madder as you're gettin' closer,
Comin' for to bury my home.¹⁷

The wedding in this song of an old hymn of hope with a vision of future hopelessness is significant, an effort to graft present powerlessness onto the strength of the past and thus regain power. And some power lies in declaring the truth, whether or not action is possible. This is a recurring message in the poetry of P. J. Laska, West Virginia writer, socialist critic, and editor of *The Unrealist*. His "Follow-up Report from Farmington" deals with the devastation resulting from deep mining, reminding us that the enemy is more subtle than dozers or the enormous power shovel called Big Bertha:

First the high school cracked,
one whole wing separated,
and the kids had to be bussed
to schools in nearby towns.
The basements of the houses
began to crumble,
and floors sagged;
a few walls leaned precariously.
The field on the hillside
behind the cemetery opened up—
a deep narrow hole

with no bottom.
Sanders' horse wandered there
to graze
before they fenced it off
and fell in.
By the time they hauled him out
he'd suffocated.
Bethlehem Steel wouldn't pay anything
because those worked out sections
under the town
filled up with water,
and now nobody can go down there
to prove that they pulled out
those pillars of coal
they were supposed to leave standing.
Everybody here knows they did it,
because the men that worked
that part of Idamay mine
under Farmington
have said so.¹⁸

The force of this poem is its revelation of a truth that victims know but can do nothing about. The situation is a little more hopeful in Lillie D. Chaffin's "Old-Timer to Grandchild," despite its recognition that to some extent mountain people have signed on the dotted line of their own destruction:

And so our kinfolks let themselves
be sweet-talked into believing
that things would be the same.
They let some Philadelphia lawyers
tell them they could sell the yoke
and keep the egg, and with that few cents
they built a room onto the house
or somesuch. And now the yoke owners
are claiming their gold, and squashing
the shell and letting it fall howsumever
it falls. Let folks talk about our
backward ways. I like it. If forward's
what's been coming in right here lately,
I'd go into backup if I could. Back up

to the little creeks with fish in them,
the trees with birds, the caves with
animals, the air clean and smelling
of hay and apples. If forward's now,
then I feel sorry for the ones who'll
never know. But you will remember
a little bit. You tell them birds
do fly low before a storm.¹⁹

The hope here is in the communication of values from one generation to another, as in Marion's and Baber's poems, and in the warning of the last two lines.

While it is evident that people cannot "go into backup" on any large scale, at least not unless the economy collapses, they can offer a personal resistance by declaring the truth, as in "Farmington" and "Old-Timer," and by "holding onto their rights, both mineral and otherwise," as Lee Howard says in the dedication of her book *The Last Unmined Vein* (1980). The speaker in the title poem refuses to sell coal from under his farm "to make steel in Ohio / turn on the lights in New York City / and heat houses in Detroit" because he knows the consequences:

I know how they come
with their mouths full of promises
and leaving with every one
of your fields full of ruts
and the mud sliding down the hillside
right onto your back steps
and the money
just don't mean that much to me
I done seen all I need to see
about where that money goes
and what's got with it
Last thing this county needs
is another new mobile home
with a four-wheel drive truck
parked on a mudbank in front of it
and that's it
and not another thing to show
for where and what your mammy and pappy
and their mammy and pappy

not to mention your own self and family
always had

So when that man in his new suit
and smooth as silk talking
came to my door
I didn't even ask him in

.....

Of course, I know he'll be back
but probably after I'm dead and gone
and if the children want to be so foolish
as to put an end
to what came long before them
ain't nothing I can do about it then
but I been laying plans
to remind them
of what it's gonna cost them
I done got my marker
and laid out the lines for my grave
right smack in the middle
of that vein
They gonna have to chip out the coal 6 foot by 6
and then put her right back on top of me
and that will be the end of that²⁰

The best the speaker (and the poet) can do is "remind them / of what it's gonna cost them," the speaker by his own dead body and the poet by the body of her work.

III

That the acceleration of change in the mountains is also an acceleration of loss is clear. Why this change and loss should result in a burgeoning of poetry in the last decade is not so obvious. If there are ten names that must be mentioned in discussing Appalachian poetry up to 1960, there are at least thirty of significance since then, most of whom published primarily between 1969 and 1980. There are complex reasons for this. Along with the increased political awareness characteristic of the nation as a whole

in the sixties came the growing consciousness of Appalachia as a region, a realization from within that its distinctiveness and importance were being distorted and sold in the *Beverly Hillbillies* market and praised and misunderstood by outreach programs, governmental and religious; that the people, like the land, were being stripped of their ore. From the outside, Appalachia attracted mercenaries and missionaries; from the inside, Appalachians wondered if the War on Poverty were being waged against them, if their lives were both quaint and deplorable, like the little shellacked outhouses sold in Mountain Kraft stores. A cultural crisis resulted, and it is still going on.

Poetry, so often considered impractical, a luxury, is in fact a natural human response in dealing with this loss and distortion of value, because poetry is a valuing process. Through its intense selectivity in imagery, in rhythm, in sound and in word, poetry imparts value; its light shines on the few things chosen till they become luminous, radiating a truth long locked within. North Carolina poet Robert Morgan, whose books *Zirconia Poems*, *Red Owl*, and *Groundwork* span the seventies, has many poems which illustrate this process. Language circles, analyzes, polishes, and explores in "Stove":

The fire whines its distant
siren and the stove door grins like a jack-o'-lantern
chewing its mouthful of flames.

The family gathers
like petals around the hot
black stem, bees returning.
Once a week the stove is cooled and polished
like leather, the flightdeck top
disassembled revealing
the depths the coals inhabit.

The stove is an extra digestive tract,
a vehicle for translating
the ancient vegetable
heat to the present.

Inside the fire runs its circuitry
and subroutines making split-second chemical
decisions.

The stove is motor.
Tobacco juice ferments in the bucket of ashes.

Later the heat returns and vanishes
through the coals.
The campfire dies while the hunters
are off hunting.
A sour wet silence pours down the stairwell.²¹

By the sheer act of naming, poetry declares what is lasting and eases the mortality of people and places it is concerned with. By rendering us speechful, poetry incants us, and the incantation both recognizes and bestows value.

The obvious question is, why poetry? Isn't this valuing process part of all literature which is essentially, however desperate, an act of affirmation? Certainly, but poetry is the logical vehicle here for many reasons. To begin with, its intensity matches the feeling of crisis and its immediacy—it is not, after all, as time-consuming as fiction—matches the urgency of the situation. Poetry dresses the wound on the spot rather than waiting for the tests, prep, and major surgery of a novel. Poetry is also a natural development of expression in a song- and story-fed culture.

More importantly, poetry is rooted in paradox, and paradox is as indigenous to Appalachia as the coal: wealth and poverty (personal, cultural, ecological), beauty and ugliness, the stereotype with its wink of truth. The violent good neighbor, loving father who puts a fork in his boy's arm at the dinner table. Steady, wise hill farmer who would like to burn up all the kids in the university before they burn it down themselves. Straight-forward corruption—revivalist who saves a new wife every night. People so poor their new baby sleeps in the box of their color TV, people starving to death behind the wheel of a car, people whose lives are up on blocks, gutted, rusted out. All these leaves and seeds of paradox fall down that steep air and rot into rich ground where poetry can take hold, for the energy of poetry lies in language and paradox. The force of metaphor comes from its wedding of like and unlike to make something new without destroying the separate identities of the old. It is easy to see how this approaches the dilemma of Appalachia itself.

Poetry offers, then, some healing, a map of relatedness amid the fragmentation and isolation of modern life and the template sameness that is its deadening connector. Furthermore, its recognition of paradox, its mission work among the irreconcilable forces in our lives, is a form of healing. And, to the extent that to

name and *to tell* are to know and thus to control, poetry gives us a measure of power over those forces.

NOTES

¹James Still, *Hounds on the Mountain* (New York: Viking Press, 1937), p. 45.

²Byron Herbert Reece, *Ballad of the Bones* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1945), p. 56.

³Elizabeth Madox Roberts, *Song in the Meadow* (New York: Viking Press, 1940), p. 98.

⁴Roberts, p. 26.

⁵Jesse Stuart, *Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1934), p. 3.

⁶Louise McNeill, *Gauley Mountain* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1939), p. 40.

⁷McNeill, p. 98.

⁸Jean Ritchie, "Black Waters" (New York: Geordie Music Publishing Co., 1967).

⁹Mike Clark, "Appalachia: The Changing Times," Foreword to *Voices from the Mountains*, collected and recorded by Guy and Candie Carawan (New York: Knopf, 1975), p. ix.

¹⁰Billy Edd Wheeler, *Song of a Woods Colt* (Anderson, S.C.: Droke House, 1969), p. 106.

¹¹Lee Pennington, *Scenes from a Southern Road* (Smithtown, N.Y.: JRD Publishing Co., 1969), p. 45.

¹²Jim Wayne Miller, "Small Farms Disappearing in Tennessee" in *Voices from the Hills: Selected Readings of Southern Appalachia*, ed. Robert J. Higgs and Ambrose N. Manning (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1975), pp. 350-51.

¹³Baber's book, *Assorted Life Savers*, appeared in 1976 and Coleman's *Take One Blood Red Rose* in 1978, but both poets' work had appeared earlier in the Antioch/Appalachia literary magazine *What's a Nice Hillbilly Like You . . . ?* and in works published by the Southern Appalachian Writers Cooperative, which they helped to found. SAWC sought to form a network of writers in the region in order to overcome the problems of isolation, the reluctance of publishers, and the obstacles to truth-telling which they all felt. In 1977 they published *Soupbean: An Anthology of Contemporary Appalachian Literature and New Ground*, an anthology co-published with *Mountain Review*, the Appalshop magazine out of Whitesburg, Kentucky. In 1978 SAWC published *Mucked*, a collection of writings and photographs in response to the 1977 flooding of Appalachia.

While the Soupbean poets are no longer a group, SAWC is still holding on, most recently with the help of the Appalachian Poetry Project, a year-long effort, supported by a grant to the University of Kentucky's Appalachian Center from the Witter Bynner Foundation, to encourage

poetry in the mountains. To date, the project has held seventeen reading/workshops in a five-state area. Many of these were led by old Soupbean and SAWC poets whose work appears in the most recent SAWC publication, *Strokes: Contemporary Appalachian Poetry* (1980).

¹⁴Robert Henry Baber, *Assorted Life Savers and Poems from the Mountains* (Beckley, W. Va.: Troy Baber, 1976), p. 32.

¹⁵Mary Joan Coleman, *Take One Blood Red Rose* (Cambridge, Mass.: West End Press, 1978), unpagued.

¹⁶Jeff Daniel Marion, *Out in the Country, Back Home* (Winston-Salem, N.C.: Jackpine Press, 1976), p. 65.

¹⁷Mike Kline, "Strip Away" in *Voices from the Mountains*, p. 36.

¹⁸P. J. Laska, *Songs and Dances* (Prince, W. Va.: Unrealist Press, 1977), p. 30.

¹⁹Lillie D. Chaffin, "Old-Timer to Grandchild" in *Mucked*, ed. Bob Henry Baber and Jim Webb (Williamson, W. Va.: Hesperus Press, 1978), unpagued.

²⁰Lee Howard, "The Last Unmined Vein" in *The Last Unmined Vein* (Washington, D.C.: Anemone Press, 1980), pp. 50-51.

²¹Robert Morgan, *Red Owl: Poems* (New York: Norton, 1972), p. 46.