

Archives
Closed
LD
175
A40K
Th

REPRESENTATION OF WORK EXPERIENCES WITHIN THE POETRY OF FOUR
CONTEMPORARY SOUTHERN APPALACHIAN POETS

A Thesis
by
CONNIE JONES AIKEN

Submitted to the Graduate School
Appalachian State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

December 2009
Center for Appalachian Studies

**WILLIAM LEONARD EURY
APPALACHIAN COLLECTION
APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY
BOONE, NORTH CAROLINA 28608**

REPRESENTATION OF WORK EXPERIENCES WITHIN THE POETRY OF FOUR
CONTEMPORARY SOUTHERN APPALACHIAN POETS

A Thesis
by
CONNIE JONES AIKEN
December 2009

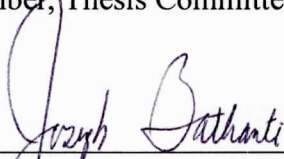
APPROVED BY:



Sandra L. Ballard
Chairperson, Thesis Committee



Patricia D. Beaver
Director, Center for Appalachian Studies
Member, Thesis Committee



Joseph Bathanti
Member, Thesis Committee



Edelma D. Huntley
Dean, Research and Graduate Studies

Copyright by Connie Jones Aiken 2009
All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

REPRESENTATION OF WORK EXPERIENCES WITHIN THE POETRY OF FOUR CONTEMPORARY SOUTHERN APPALACHIAN POETS (December 2009)

Connie Jones Aiken, B.A., University of North Carolina-Asheville

M.A., Appalachian State University

Chairperson: Sandra L. Ballard

Work experiences as they appear in contemporary Southern Appalachian poetry are issues that have yet to be explored. Critics examine the work of Southern Appalachian poets sometimes as romantic, celebrating a bygone era, rather than examining it in the context of the working class. Topics discussed in this study of working-class experiences include “women’s work” in the poetry of Kathryn Stripling Byer, “farm work” in Robert Morgan’s poetry, work in textile mills and manual labor within the poetry of Ron Rash, and social issues along with character identity through working individuals in the poetry of Bennie Lee Sinclair. Also included is a fifteen-poem collection of my own poetry and a concluding essay connecting my own work to the poetry of Byer, Morgan, Rash, and Sinclair.

This study focuses on poets who have connections to some of the southernmost regions of Appalachia (in Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina). Methods include analyzing work experiences in the poetry of Byer, Morgan, Rash, and Sinclair with close readings, research, personal communication with the poets, and recognition of the importance of culture, history, region, as well as mastery of poetic language.

DEDICATION

To

Dr. Sandra L. Ballard

For her encouragement and patience

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	iv
Dedication.....	v
Introduction.....	1
“Women’s Work” in the Poetry of Kathryn Stripling Byer.....	6
“Farm Work” in the Poetry of Robert Morgan.....	17
“Manual Labor” in the Poetry of Ron Rash.....	29
“Character Identity through Working Individuals” in the Poetry of Bennie Lee Sinclair.....	40
Acknowledging Connections.....	51
Poetry by Connie Jones Aiken.....	58
Bibliography.....	81
Vita.....	91

Introduction

The “Representation of Work Experiences Within the Poetry of Four Contemporary Southern Appalachian Poets” is a study examining working-class characters and working-class issues in the poetry of Kathryn Stripling Byer, Robert Morgan, Ron Rash, and Bennie Lee Sinclair. These four poets have all resided in the Southern region of Appalachia as mapped in John C. Campbell’s *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland* (1921). The people of this area of Appalachia are sometimes viewed as having lived a romantic agrarian lifestyle. One factor which contributed to this perception was publicity generated during the formation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (1940) and the decision of the Park Service “in the early days of park development to preserve only structures reflective of pioneer existence” (Pierce 648). Another factor contributing to the concept of a romantic agrarian lifestyle in Southern Appalachia is the variety of folk culture featured in such places as the Southern Highland Craft Guild; Bascom Lamar Lunsford’s Mountain Dance and Folk Festival; and in Beech Mountain, North Carolina, where the famous Jack Tales have been handed down through generations within the Hicks family. Tourist destinations of North Carolina’s Blue Ridge Parkway; Virginia’s Skyline Drive and Shenandoah Valley; and towns such as Gatlinburg, Tennessee; Chattanooga, Tennessee; Helen, Georgia; and Flat Rock, North Carolina, have also been a factor in shaping Southern Appalachia’s romantic agrarian image. These tourist destinations have become a large economic force in the region, edging out what was once a booming agricultural base with tobacco, peaches, and apples.

Agricultural tourism, which is common in Southern Appalachia, “helped to shape tourist perceptions about the region’s history” (Starnes 617). Agritourism, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and the strong folk culture of the region have all contributed to the misconception that people in the Southern Appalachians have led a more leisurely lifestyle than perhaps the coal miners of Central Appalachia or the steel factory workers of Northern Appalachia. These impressions of Southern Appalachia have sometimes carried over into a lack of recognition and understanding of working-class issues contained within the literature coming out of the region.

Kathryn Stripling Byer, Robert Morgan, Ron Rash, and Bennie Lee Sinclair have been recognized in journals, anthologies, and essays for their contributions to Appalachian literature. Byer is known for her poems about women, both present and past, and for her personas in the voices of these women with issues ranging from death, birth, quilting, gardening, and aging, to her more recent poems involving current global social issues as explored in “Her Daughter” about the loss of an Iraqi mother’s daughter in the “rubble” of war. Kathryn Byer is a native of southwest Georgia but has lived in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina since 1968. She graduated with a B.A. from Wesleyan College in Macon, Georgia, and from UNC-Greensboro with an M.F.A. (Ballard 81-82). Byer’s poems have been published in various journals including the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Poetry*, *Georgia Review*, *American Scholars*, and *Cortland Review*. Kathryn Stripling Byer’s poetry has received numerous citations and awards, and her latest work *Coming to Rest* received the Hanes Poetry Award from the Fellowship of Southern Writers in 2007. Byer was appointed by North Carolina Governor Michael F. Easley in 2003 as the state’s first woman Poet Laureate (<http://www.redroom.com/author/kathryn-stripling-byer/bio>).

Robert Morgan's poetry looks at the history of the region, its landscape, and people. His poetry has been studied for its sense of place in *The Poetics of Appalachian Space* (1991) and "religious motifs" and "mountain voice" in *An American Vein* (2005). Rita Sims Quillen's *Looking For Native Ground: Contemporary Appalachian Poetry* (1989) addresses Morgan's "complex system of interests" (62). Morgan was born in Hendersonville, North Carolina, and grew up in the Green River Valley of the Blue Ridge Mountains. He studied at North Carolina State University then transferred to UNC-Chapel Hill where he received his B.A. in 1965. He received his M.F.A. from UNC-Greensboro in 1968. Morgan's poetry and short stories have been published in numerous journals, and he is the author of six novels. He is the recipient of the James G. Hanes Poetry Prize, the North Carolina Literature Award, and he received an Academy Award in Literature (2007). His novel *Gap Creek* (1999) was awarded the Most Notable Book by the *New York Times* and received the Appalachian Writers Association Book of the Year Award (2000). Morgan has written twelve books of poetry, including his forthcoming 2009 book of poems *October Crossing* (<http://www.robert-morgan.com/about>).

Ron Rash is noted for his "advanced knowledge of craft and a belief in the spiritual history of the land and people of Western North and South Carolina" (Peeler 7), with poetry concerning mill people and mill villages, Civil War atrocities, TVA's dam building, folktales, and superstitions. Rash was born in Chester, South Carolina, and grew up in Boiling Springs, N.C., with family roots in Western North Carolina dating back to the 1700's. He received his B.A. at Gardner-Webb College and his M.A. at Clemson University. His poetry and short stories have appeared in over one hundred journals, magazines, anthologies such as the *Sewanee Review*, *Yale Review*, *Southern Review*, and *Longman Anthology of*

Southern Literature. Among numerous other awards Rash received an NEA Poetry Fellowship, the Novella Festival Novel Award, an O. Henry Award, and the James Still Award by the Fellowship of Southern Writers. Rash has written three volumes of short stories, four novels, a children's book, and three books of poetry. He is currently the Parris Distinguished Professor in Appalachian Cultural Studies at Western Carolina University (www.southernledge.com/southernlife/southernwriters/ron_rash/biography.html).

The poetry of Bennie Lee Sinclair (1939-2000) also speaks for the people of Upstate South Carolina by addressing "characters" often overlooked by mainstream society. She is remembered for her poems concerning family and the community of "Little Chicago," as well as her deep-rooted love and respect for the natural landscape of Southern Appalachia. Sinclair was born in Greenville, South Carolina, where her mother's family resided. Her father's family has roots dating back to the 1700's in the Bearwallow area of Henderson County, North Carolina (Sinclair, "Appalachian Loaves and Fishes"). Bennie Lee Sinclair received a B.A. in English and Philosophy from Furman University, and lived with her husband, potter Don Lewis, on a mountain wildlife sanctuary in the Saluda Mountains of South Carolina. Sinclair's poetry, essays, and stories appeared in various journals and were first published in *Foxfire Magazine* in 1968. She was an advisory editor for *Appalachian Heritage*, and her poetry book *Lord of Springs* (1990) won the Appalachian Writers Association Book of the Year Award and received a Pulitzer Prize nomination. She served as the South Carolina Poet Laureate from 1986 until her death in 2000. Bennie Lee Sinclair is the author of one book of fiction and four books of poetry (Ballard 565-66).

Byer, Morgan, Rash, and Sinclair have written poetry addressing many areas of the history and culture of the Southern Appalachian Mountains, and at the foundation of many of

those poems, laced within numerous poetic devices, are the stories of the working class of Southern Appalachia. These poets were chosen to be included in this study because of the issues within their poems concerning women's work, hard labor of farm work, manual labor in "public work," and labor defining the identity of certain working individuals. Jim Wayne Miller in his 1990 essay "A People Waking Up: Appalachian Literature since 1960" states:

Much of the poetry written during the past twenty-five years, like the prose fiction and the non-fiction, is concerned with "laying a bridge back," with discovering Appalachia's history, or some part of it, and establishing a relationship to that history.

But in the best of this work there is no sentimental dwelling on the past. (53)

The following thesis will prove that what is sometimes viewed in Southern Appalachian poetry as an agrarian lifestyle and "sentimental dwelling on the past" is in reality much more. It will address the need to closely study poetry coming out of the region, recognizing work experience through the poets' words that focus on the labor of the working class.

“Women’s Work” in the Poetry of Kathryn Stripling Byer

Kathryn Stripling Byer has been recognized for her sense of place in *Bloodroot: Reflections on Place by Appalachian Women Writers* (1998) and in the *Encyclopedia of Appalachia* (2006) for “her portrait of the mountains as a place apart from mainstream America” (Lloyd 1104). *Being of These Hills: Readings from Appalachian Writers* (2002) places Byer’s “Lineage,” “Cobwebs,” and “Easter” under the chapter heading “Kinfolks and Friends: Voices and Faces.” Robert West’s “‘That Has a Ring to It’: Song in the Poetry of Kathryn Stripling Byer” credits Byer’s use of rhyme, rhythm, and metrical feet within her poetry to create an image that is “remarkably engaged with the notion of song” (West 16-23). Ann Richman, in *Her Words: Diverse Voices in Contemporary Appalachian Women* (2000), also recognizes Byer for her way of connecting women’s voices to song in the essay “‘Singing Our Hearts Away’: The Poetry of Kathryn Stripling Byer.” Other critics have noted that Byer “focuses on the power and liabilities of solitude she finds in the mountains” (Prestridge 56).

In the essay “The Woman’s Place is in the House” published in *The Poetics of Appalachian Space* (1991), James Byer states the “interplay between labor and thought is essentially creative and generates the world just as in Taoist thought the interaction of the yin and yang generates the ten thousand things, or all there is” (170). Byer points out that Kathryn Stripling Byer’s characters have an “emphasis on endurance and survival,” and they are also the “product of work done perseveringly and lovingly over a lifetime” (170). Of the

many reviewers addressing the quality of Kathryn Stripling Byer's poetry, James Byer is one of few who has paid attention to the concept of work in her poems.

Kathryn Stripling Byer's poetry represents "women's work" from the late 1800's until the twenty-first century. Byer's first chapbook, *Alma* (1983), concerns the story of a woman named Alma living around the turn of the twentieth century in the mountains of Western North Carolina near the Tuckasegee River. The beginning poem in *Alma*, "Wildwood Flower," starts what will continue to be a force in Byer's poetry, a poetic journey into the lives of working women. In *Alma*, Byer adopts the persona of a woman living alone in the mountains, trying to survive both mentally and physically through hard work:

I hoe thawed ground
 with a vengeance. Winter has left
 my house empty of dried beans
 and meat. I am hungry

 and now that a few buds appear
 on the sycamore, I watch the road
 winding down this dark mountain
 not even the mule can climb
 without a struggle ... (1-9)

Alma is not just leisurely hoeing plowed ground for a vegetable garden, but is hoeing "thawed" (1) ground, ground that has until most recently been too frozen and hard to hoe. The reader senses from these few words that Alma has been checking the ground daily, waiting for it to thaw enough to plant some beans for survival. She is beyond hungry, for

“Winter has left / my house empty of dried beans / and meat” (2-4), Alma hoes with “a vengeance” (2), with desperation and purpose. She says, “...now that a few buds appear / on the sycamore, I watch the road” (5-6), signifying that until most recently she could not even expect to see visitors on the road, but had to wait for springtime to arrive before she could emerge from her cabin. Alma observes the road “winding down this dark mountain / not even a mule can climb / without a struggle” (7-9). With this description, she is testifying to the probability of a long time spent apart from human contact.

The fourth stanza of the poem switches from Alma’s outward view of her desolation to her inner perspective:

I begin to fear sickness. I wait
 for pneumonia and lockjaw. Each month
 I brew squaw tea for pain.
 In the stream where I scrub my own blood
 from rags, I can see all things flow
 down from me into the valley.

Once I climbed the ridge
 to the place where the sky
 comes. Beyond me the mountains continued
 like God. Is there no place to hide
 from his silence? A woman must work

else she thinks too much. I hoe
 this earth until I think of nothing
 but the beans I will string,
 the sweet corn I will grind into meal.

We must eat. I will learn
 to be grateful for whatever comes to me. (14-30)

Alma's isolation creates thoughts of "sickness" (14), "pneumonia and lockjaw" (14-15). She is starting to fear the loss of herself as a person as she says, "I can see all things flow / down from me into the valley" (18-19), and she is beginning to feel abandoned, either by God or by man, as all she hears is "his silence" (24). Alma does not resign herself to emotional loneliness, or starving from lack of food, or even spiritual isolation. Alma instead resolves to "work / else she thinks too much" (24-25) and commences to "...hoe / this earth until I think of nothing / but the beans I will string, / the sweet corn I will grind into meal" (25-28). Alma is planning for a future. She is not giving up, and rather than accept a life of misery, she looks forward with gratefulness to "whatever comes to me" (30). Kathryn Stripling Byer's *Alma* is the beginning of her "working women" poetry, portraying women as strong individuals, able to sort out what steps to take next and the ability to control their own fate.

Byer's *Black Shawl* (1998) contains the poem "Mountain Time" with two examples of women at work. One representation of women at work is Delphia, the quilter of legend; the other is a poet, the writer of words. Line eight of "Mountain Time" begins in the voice of the poet:

... Consider
 the famous poet, minding her post
 at the Library of Congress, who
 shrugged off the question of what we'd be
 reading at century's end: "By the year 2000
 nobody will be reading poems." Thus she
 prophesied. End of that
 interview! (8-15)

Kathryn Stripling Byer shared in an email that the poet referred to in "Mountain Time" is Maxine Kumin, who served as the Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress from 1981 to 1982. Kumin's statement was taken from an interview addressing the "future of poetry, of reading at all" (Byer, Personal Communication). However, Byer continues:

... Yet, how can I fault
 her despair, doing time as she was
 in a crumbling Capitol, sirens
 and gunfire the nights long, the Pentagon's
 stockpile of weapons stacked higher
 and higher? No wonder the books
 stacked around her began to seem relics.
 No wonder she dreamed her own bones
 dug up years later, tagged in a museum somewhere
 in the Midwest: American Poet-Extinct Species. (16-25)

Byer compares the poet's job at the Library of Congress to being imprisoned or "doing time" (17). The "famous poet" works indoors amidst a crumbling political system, amongst reminders of violence and war, and it is "No wonder" (21) the "famous poet" begins to believe that her job, her work dealing with words, will become "extinct" (25), thereby leading to the extinction of her own existence as a poet.

Byer explained in a conversation with this writer that she heard the story of Delphia from a friend of hers, Willa Mae Presley, who was Delphia's daughter. Willa Mae said that her mother, Delphia, was a quilter who went around to people's houses teaching others to read and that she considered it her "work" to share this knowledge of reading (Personal Communication). Thus begins Byer's story of Delphia, the quilter of legend:

now with the tale-tellers' *Listen*: There once lived
 a woman named Delphia
 who walked through these hills teaching children
 to read. She was known as a quilter
 whose hand never wearied, a mother
 who raised up two daughters to pass on
 her words like a strong chain of stitches. (37-43)

Byer establishes in this stanza that Delphia was also a working woman, yet unlike the poet who was confined indoors within a city, Delphia's work took her outdoors: she "walked through these woods teaching children / to read" (39-40). Delphia's work was not monetary, but charitable, "teaching children / to read" (39-40), making it possible for words to be heard. However, Delphia was not known for her work as a teacher, but as a quilter who never seemed to tire, combining the work of teacher and the art of quilting with that of a mother.

Unlike the poet whose words are put to paper, the quilter has “raised up two daughters to pass on / her words like a strong chain of stitches” (42-43). Byer uses the simile of “her quick thimble moving along these lines / as if to hear every word striking true / as the stab of her needle through calico” (45-47):

This labor to make our words matter
 is what any good quilter teaches.
 A stitch in time, let’s say.
 A blind stitch
 that clings to the edges
 of what’s left, the ripped
 scraps and remnants, whatever
 won’t stop taking shape even though the whole
 crazy quilt’s falling to pieces. (51-59)

Byer points to the labor of Delphia, or the labor of women, through teaching and the art of storytelling, as the catalyst for education. For as the quilter continues stitching together “ripped / scraps and remnants” (56-57) to create the quilt, providing tradition and art as the foundation of learning, so should the poet continue shaping words to create poetry, and they will together provide “This labor to make our words matter” (51).

George Hicks’ ethnographic study of the Little Laurel Valley in Western North Carolina, *Appalachian Valley* (1976), observes that even in the late twentieth century women are kept busy cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the children and “are expected to have the household as their sphere of interest and activity” (Hicks 42). Kathryn Stripling Byer’s depictions of work experiences within her poetry are not limited to women of lore and

legend, or necessarily women of long ago, but can also be found in Byer's own personal memories of her grandmother's daily tasks and simple moments as illustrated in the following poem, "Tired," from *Catching Light* (2002):

Even as she honed her butcher knife,
 she muttered, *Some days*
I want to stop dead
in my tracks and stand sniffing the air
like an old dog.

That was the last autumn she came
 to hog-killing, so tired,
 my mother said, you could smell
 death trailing after her. (1-9)

Byer emphasizes in the first line that her grandmother is a woman who considered work an important component of life: "Even as she honed her butcher knife" (1). Although the woman may "want to stop dead / in [her] tracks and stand sniffing the air / like an old dog" (3-5), to give up the ritual of the hog killing, to give up the labor of honing the butcher knife, would be to give up on life itself.

Byer continues with a description of how the odor of death might trail after someone:
 How does the odor of death
 ride on wind?
 Like a strip of confetti?
 A crow's feather?

An old woman's nightgown

blown clean off the clothesline? (10-15)

Byer uses the image of the clothesline, coupled with the honing of the knife, to frame a picture of her grandmother living a life filled with working, doing useful labor, staying busy, not wishing to be idle. The poem then moves into images of gardening smells comparing the odors of new life to old:

Who wouldn't rather smell

ferns quietly unclenching finger

by green finger

under the loblollies,

or lily-pads sculling

like open palms

over the fishpond? (16-22)

In the fifth verse it becomes evident that the grandmother also worked hard at tending her yard and that flower gardening was a very important part of her life. Byer switches to the personal pronoun "I" as she tries to identify with her grandmother's leaving a life where she lovingly worked at planting new life and moving to a life where she is now too tired to do anything except perhaps stand "there / smelling death" (35-56) as it works its way back to the "black, soggy ground" (39):

I used to tend everything

she'd planted, even the roses

she left on the edges

of every last piece of our

property. But now,
when she wants to stop
dead in her tracks
out of breath
on her stiffening legs,

I don't stop her.
I stand
till I feel how
she felt, standing there
smelling death
make its way
down the hog's belly
into black, soggy ground. (23-39)

Byer uses "Tired" to recognize the hard work of the grandmother throughout her life (hog butchering, gardening, household chores), and Byer combines these images with "smelling death / make its way" (36-37) into fertile ground, "black, soggy ground" (39), yet all the while leaving the reader with reflections and scents of "lily-pads sculling / like open palms / over the fishpond?" perhaps representing her grandmother's palm, opening up to a new birth.

While discussing the poem "Tired" in a conversation over lunch, Byer explained that women aren't supposed to show how tired they are, and she said that along with aging and looking after their own bodies, women are still expected to look after their spouses and

children. She went on to say that women's work never seems to end (Byer, Personal Communication). Byer uses images of working women throughout her poetry, some in the forms of personas, legends, ancestors, and contemporaries, representing these women as conduits for working experiences through their labor, teaching, and storytelling; and all the while, she shares with the reader examples of her own labor represented in the poems themselves.

Byer's *Coming to Rest* (2002) uses many rhyme schemes and poetic forms such as couplets and villanelles, and this collection is an excellent example of Byer's own hard work of composing. However, no example is more fitting of the effort Byer puts into her poetry than the mere use of stanzas in "Coming to Rest," for "stanza" comes from the Italian, "resting place or abode" (Packard 187); and it is in "Coming to Rest" where Kathryn Stripling Byer recognizes the importance of her own work in the following two lines:

I've already answered my email, my voice

mail, my snail mail. My real work? To take hold. (Byer 25-26)

Kathryn Stripling Byer's poetry is indeed a testimony to the stories of women from past to present through sense of place, song, and solitude and coming from within these stories are voices that speak a "steady focus on women's work, lore, secrets and songs" (Smith, R.T. 12); whether it be Byer's own work or the work of others.

“Farm Work” in the Poetry of Robert Morgan

If an old folk saying were applied to the poetry of Robert Morgan it would be “Idle hands are the devil’s workshop.” This statement could pertain to the quantity of poems Morgan has written (he has published eleven books of poetry), but it also pertains to the recognition in his poetry of the value of hard work portrayed through personal stories of the family farm.

There has been a decrease in small family farms of Western North Carolina due to the costs of production, rise in interest rates, and large agricultural business farms. These contributing factors, along with “the additional factor of the developing recreation and second-home industry” have had “a major impact on landownership, land use, and land prices” and have “accelerated the decline in agriculture” (Beaver 32). With the age of technology in the twentieth century most small farms in Appalachia developed the pattern of part-time subsistence farming, with farmers purchasing some goods instead of relying on the farm for complete production to meet the families’ needs (Walker 429). Now in the twenty-first century, between 2002-2007, the farm has further declined with 1,000 farms and 600,000 acres lost in the state of North Carolina alone (NCDACS). Along with this loss in farms and farmland comes the loss of a lifestyle experienced by the people who grew up on farms and sustained this way of life. Therefore, the importance of the stories Robert Morgan shares in his poetry cannot be underestimated as they provide the link for current and future generations to catch a glimpse of the intense physical labor of farm work and the satisfaction it can bring.

Robert Morgan and I met as a result of a card I sent him expressing how much I enjoyed his poetry and also informing him that my home resides on top of “Mt. Olivet,” an area described in his book “Gap Creek.” Morgan wrote back thanking me for my note, and this communication opened up a friendship full of stories and mentoring. Morgan has shared that he realizes the importance of his poems about growing up and working on the family farm as he is “the last generation of people who did that kind of farm work” as “most people who did that kind of thing are now dead.” He went on to say that “there are very few writers who grew up in the working class, and you can count on one hand the American poets who were ever in the working class” (Morgan, Personal Communication).

Morgan’s poetry involving farm work includes family members and community because farming is a communal endeavor due to the amount of labor required. All members of the family would be expected to participate in the development of the family garden but “products of vegetable gardens are prepared by women, not only for immediate use, but by canning and freezing for storage” (Hicks 42). “Canning Time,” from *Groundwork* (1979), is a description of the work entailed when Morgan’s mother and Aunt Wessie are canning summer peaches. Robert Morgan’s family farm was located within a few miles of the Upper South Carolina state line where production “ranks second nationally” (Rohr 430). The poem “Canning Time” is a learning experience for those who have never witnessed canning:

The floor was muddy with the juice of peaches
 and my mother’s thumb, bandaged for the slicing,
 watersobbed. She and Aunt Wessie skinned
 bushels that day, fat Georgia Belles
 slit streaming into the pot. Their knives

paid out limp bands onto the heap
 of parings. (1-7)

Morgan's first seven lines are the beginning of the canning process, the preparation of the peaches for preservation. "The floor was muddy with the juice of peaches" (1) describes the color of the peach juice dripping to the floor. Furthermore, "...my mother's thumb, bandaged for the slicing" (2) refers to the protective covering placed on her thumb enabling her to apply repetitive pressure from the thumb to the knife, as her thumb was bandaged *for* the slicing, not *from* the slicing, and was "watersobbed" (3) due to the soaking peach juice penetrating the bandage. The two women "skinned / bushels that day" (3-4) (keeping in mind that a bushel of peaches weighs approximately fifty pounds) as their knives peeled off the outer skins of the peaches, and "paid out limp bands onto the heap / of parings" (6-7). Morgan's use of the word "paid" (6) is an indication that their work will result in the compensation of eating the summer fruit in the winter season. The following lines describe the actual packing of the peaches into jars and the intense heat required for sealing:

...It took care to pack the jars,
 reaching in to stack the halves
 firm without bruising, and lowering
 the heavy racks into the boiler already
 trembling with steam, the stove malignant
 in heat. As Wessie wiped her face
 the kitchen sweated its filth.
 In that hell they sealed the quickly browning
 flesh in capsules of honey, making crystals

of separate air across the vacuums.

The heat and pressure were enough to grow

diamonds as they measured hot

syrup into quarts... (7-19)

The labor is physical and involves the strength to lower “the heavy racks into the boiler” (10) and also requires the need for a soft touch to “pack the jars” (7) as bruising the peaches causes them to soften, turn brown, and not be worth eating in the months ahead. Canning is not a job to take on with force, but rather one that combines strength alongside gentleness, and patience to endure “...the boiler already / trembling with steam, the stove malignant / in heat....” (10-12).

Morgan continues the poem with a reference to supper, because the women would have been expected to finish the canning process in time to prepare the family’s dinner:

...By supper the last jar

was set on the counter to cool

into isolation. Later in the night

each little urn would pop as it

achieved its private atmosphere and

we cooled into sleep, the stove now

neutral... (20-25)

He describes the sound of the jars sealing as they “cool” (21) and “pop” (23), a familiar process to those who have canned or have memories of canning, but a process not practiced very often in the kitchens of twenty-first century Americans. Therefore, the poem becomes a learning tool for younger generations as they are introduced to canning. The family is

“cooled into sleep, the stove now / neutral” (24-25); the heat in the home could not be cooled down as it would be today with air conditioning, but instead is “cooled into sleep” (24), because of the home’s return to normal temperature.

The poem again serves as a learning tool for future generations with the reference to “pecked clean” (26), which is the process of the chickens outside using their beaks to pick or peck bits and pieces of peaches left on the pit for their own nourishment, as nothing was wasted on a farm:

... The stones already
 pecked clean in the yard were free to try
 again for the sun. The orchard meat fixed in
 cells would be taken down cellar in the
 morning to stay gold like specimens
 set out and labelled, a vegetal
 battery we’d hook up later... (25-31)

Morgan refers to the pits within the center of the peaches as “stones” (25) because that is their common, colloquial name and because of the resemblance of the pit to a small rock. He uses multiple metaphors for the peach and/or canning process throughout the poem, such as comparing the heat from the canning process to that which forms diamonds within the earth: “The heat and pressure were enough to grow / diamonds as they measured hot /syrup into quarts...” (17-19), and the comparison of the canned peaches to “...a vegetal / battery we’d hook up later...” (30-31) results in yet another comparison of vegetation to a transformed entity, but this time the conversion is to energy.

Morgan's last seven lines pay homage to the women's hard work and to their pride of what they have accomplished:

... The women
 too tired to rest easily think of
 the treasure they've laid up today
 for preservation at coffin level, down there
 where moth and rust and worms corrupt,
 a first foundation of shells to be
 fired at the winter's muddy back. (31-37)

Morgan again uses multiple metaphors, such as the "preservation at coffin level" (34) as a comparison of the coolness of the cellar with the earth's ability to complete the process of metamorphosis. The peaches compare in both their resemblance to a curved shell when cut in two and also to the importance of the earth's outer shell, where the continued survival of humankind relies on sensible use of resources found in the crust (Encyclopedia Britannica Online). The canned peach process results in the creation of a "shell" or weapon "to be / fired at the winter's muddy back" (36-37), illustrating the importance of hard work as a defensive tool and necessary ingredient for the family's winter survival.

Robert Morgan's poem "Canning" shows the poet's respect for his mother and Aunt Wessie in the hard work involved in making sure the family was provided for during the winter months to come. The poem is also important in its educational value for future generations to understand and experience the craft of canning through poetry. Morgan uses science uniquely as metaphor to make the poem work in both literal content and figurative content.

Morgan's poems throughout his books display a focus on hard work simply with their titles, such as "Bean Money," "Bricking the Church," "Burning the Hornet's Nest," "Ghosts in the Carpet," and "Mowing." However, sometimes Morgan will title a poem in such a way that the essence of the work is hidden, as "When He Spoke Out of the Dark" from *Sigodlin* (1990), a poem concerning the poet's father as an older man sitting outside and resting after working hard all day. Morgan described the scene in a personal conversation with this writer that his father "appeared like an apparition":

When he spoke out of the dark I
 had not seen him sitting there in
 a lawn chair on the grass resting
 in his white painter's overalls
 and gray sweatshirt and cap, gray hands,
 easing after the long workday. (1-6)

There is a hint in line four from the description of the man's clothes (those a working man would wear) that Morgan is headed toward a "farm work" poem, but by line six the reader knows we have now been drawn into the grayness of the dark where the man is "easing after the long workday" (6):

For the milking was over, and
 weeds pulled for the hog, kindling had
 been cut and the painting done,
 the masonry and carpentry,
 the holes had been dug, the corn hoed,
 beans carried out of mud, the ditch

opened, the corn gathered and heaved
 into the barn loft and shelled and
 carried to the mill... (7-15)

Morgan begins listing all the chores that his father has accomplished, and he does so with a rhythm that demonstrates the repetitiveness and amount of work required for just one day in the life of the farmer. He also uses the connecting word “and” numerous times, with no commas, in order to add to the feeling of a list of chores that goes on and on and on. Then the poet switches to a different tone, a softer tone:

...And there he sat,
 tired, where I had not seen him,
 looming to my dark-adjusting eyes
 white and smokelike out of the depths
 of night, and spoke close as anyone
 in the after-supper darkness,
 rest-happy from the long workday. (15-21)

The placement of a comma before “tired” and again after “tired” results in our slowing down and experiencing the pause, and the repetition of the statement “where I had not seen him” (16) leads us to see that Morgan was looking at his father in a different light this particular evening, both literally and metaphorically, “white and smokelike out of the depths / of night” (18). The title of the poem “When He Spoke Out of the Dark” leads to the assumption that his father did speak to him, but Morgan never shares the words his father spoke, only that he “spoke close as anyone / in the after-supper darkness, / rest-happy from the long workday” (19-21). Robert Morgan recognizes in the above poem the hard work that

his father performed daily on their family farm, and he sees his father “sitting there” (2) in a different light than he had perhaps been viewing him, as a man just like “anyone” (19) tired and “rest-happy from the long workday” (21).

Morgan shares work experiences performed by his family and friends in countless poems, and he has written a few about his own hard labor as a child growing up on the farm. “Harrow,” *At the Edge of Orchard Country* (1987), is a description of the first time Morgan uses a plow alone, and he makes the chore sound simple enough until we realize that there is knowledge that has already been learned by the child concerning the task of plowing that is necessary before the plowing can take place. This is knowledge that Morgan picked up from listening and watching the work on the farm in order to prepare him for jobs he would be expected to perform. The information acquired is evident in the words and farming terms used in the poem:

This was my first plowing, to step
 behind a drag alone holding
 the long sweat-heavy lines and lean
 to gee and haw. No harm could be
 except to draw the horse in too
 close a turn and snarl hooves in the
 traces and singletree, for
 the field was just turned and the rye
 broken by the moldboard drying
 in hawsers of clods that needed
 tearing and cutting, plain wearing away. (1-11)

Beginning with the title of the poem “Harrow,” there is an assumption that the reader will be familiar with the names of the tools used in plowing the field, and Morgan refers to “This my first plowing” (1) as a simple task. However, unless the reader already has a farming background, then it might be necessary to do research in order to understand the full process. Morgan is writing from memory in the voice of a child with words the child is accustomed to using in his community. Thus, the child might view this first plowing experience as ordinary, but those unfamiliar with farming lingo realize the child must already know what is expected of him. Morgan goes on to say that he needs “...to step / behind a drag alone holding / the long sweat-heavy lines and lean / to gee and haw” (1-4). A “drag” (2) is another word for harrow, which is “a farm implement consisting of a heavy frame with sharp teeth or upright disks, used to break up and even off plowed ground,” and “to gee and haw” (4) is to speak or utter sounds which “command a horse or an ox to turn” (*American Heritage College Dictionary*). The speaker sounds nonchalant in the statement “No harm could be / except to draw the horse in too / close a turn and snarl hooves in the / traces and singletree” (4-7), but if the horses’ hooves were snarled in the “traces and singletree” (7), it would take time to unravel and turn what should be a simple task into one more time consuming. The “traces” (7) are the “one of two side straps or chains connecting a harnessed draft animal to a vehicle or a “whiffletree,” and “singletree” (7) is another term for “whiffletree—the pivoted horizontal crossbar to which the harness traces of a draft animal are attached” (*American Heritage College Dictionary*). Morgan continues with the reference to “...the moldboard drying / in hawsers of clods” (9-10). The “moldboard” (9) is the curved plate of the plow that turns over the soil, and “hawser” (10) is actually the cable or rope used on ships (*American Heritage College Dictionary*) but is used by Morgan in this instance as

portraying the clods of dirt as long and ropey, entwined together with rye and dirt. Morgan has made it clear in these first eleven lines that the child is embarking for the first time “alone” (2) to complete an important and physically demanding job on the farm. This is where the poem gets a bit more playful as the child veers away in his mind, though not in his body, from the task at hand:

So I circled the acre in
 shrinking rounds, playing the mare like
 a heavy kite that bumped and lurched
 into the March sky as I crossed
 the ridge and, turning, stood on the
 harrow frame downhill as the spikes
 bit into the stubble and combed
 out the worm-shiny clods...(12-19)

The child is turning the work into a game, and he “stood on the / harrow frame downhill” (16-17) allowing the harrow and horse to take him for a bit of a ride. He begins to feel pride in his work:

...The world
 that spring afternoon was drying
 out and needed grooming and
 leveling and smoothing until
 it shone velvet for the laying
 off and seed. And I held in soaked
 palms one great smelly horsepower

that leapt ahead to my voice
and sideways toward the eye of
the planet's newest field. (19-28)

Robert Morgan's poetry is abundant with references to work experiences on his family's farm as he offers glimpses into the physically demanding, yet satisfying labor that farming involves. He shares stories about home, family, and community as he grows up within this farming environment, coupling these stories with poetic devices which make words perform magic, such as the alliteration used in the "S" sound throughout "Harrow" to imply the sounds of melody and a young child's happiness; his use of enjambment in the poem "Canning" to create "the illusion of energy being carried over to the next line" (Packard 53); and his knack at closure, letting the ending sentences simply convey as William Packard puts it, "no false climax, no fortune cookies to take home, no phony bouquets. Just an honest job well done" (29).

“Manual Labor” in the Poetry of Ron Rash

Ron Rash has written three books of poetry: *Eureka Mill* (1998), *Among the Believers* (2000), and *Raising the Dead* (2002). However, it is *Eureka Mill* which addresses the issues of manual labor with poems connecting Rash’s family to the Appalachian South’s textile boom of the 1900’s. Ron Rash is a professor at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, North Carolina, the same college that my youngest son attends. On a visit to Western Carolina I spoke to Rash about his voice being a representation for the working class, and I was not surprised to hear him comment that it would be “self serving” of him to consider his voice “the voice of the working class” but that his poetry does bear witness to that world because so many of his family were working class people (Personal Communication).

Eureka Mill is a chapbook consisting of forty-two poems in various family voices concerning Rash’s ancestors as they leave their farming homesteads in the mountains of North Carolina and move to the textile town of Chester, S. C. Their voices “speak of the grim realities that mill workers faced in the newly industrialized South” (Peeler 7). Rash also includes poems in the voices of others besides his family, people who have been relegated to places in textile history through photographs, music recordings, and history books. Rash’s poems are strikingly truthful in their ability to describe the mill life of the early 1900’s as in the following poem “Accident”:

We were running speed frames. Mary knew
 those flyers could snatch your apron off or break
 a bone like a twig given half a chance. (1-3)

“Speed frames” (1) are part of the spinning process in a textile mill. The threads are processed on a speed frame to make them suitable for final spinning. Heavy “flyers” (2) cause the spindles to vibrate as the yarn is moved in a continuous motion of being drawn, twisted, wrapped, drawn, twisted, wrapped; then “Due to twisting[,] a continuous yarn of sufficient strength is produced then wound on bobbins on cone winding machines” (Pillai 216). Mary is aware of the profound strength of a speed frame in motion:

But her baby had been sick, kept her awake
 three nights in a row. She was so tired
 she barely kept her head up. When she did not
 those flyers grabbed her hair, would not let go
 until her scalp came too... (4-8)

Lois MacDonald, a social scientist, conducted a study of mill villages in 1928 and stated, “women on the whole appear less robust than the men. Most of them complain of being sick very often. Almost all of them seem to be overworked and prematurely old” (53). Her study of sixty-four families determined that mill village families were usually quite large, and the women were tired from working both at home and long hours in the mill (McDonald 53).

Rash’s narrator continues:

...I guess she screamed
 though who could hear her over the machines.
 I never knew a body held so much blood,

or ever wanted to know. The second hand
 calmed her down enough to get her in
 a car and over to the hospital. (8-13)

The noise in the textile mills from the machinery could be horrendous in the early 1900's; this would be before the motors in the machinery were enclosed and before workers were required to wear ear plugs. Clara Thrift states in her oral history from *Hard Times Cotton Mill Girls* (1986), "You wouldn't believe how noisy it is in there if you have never been in a mill. For years they never said anything about it, but then they went to give you earplugs which were awful to wear. They did that so you couldn't sue them if your hearing went bad, which is what happened to me. One of my ears, I can't hear out of it at all" (Byerly 118).

According to the *Classified Index to Occupations, United States Bureau of the Census*, textile mills had a chain or line of command formed by occupation in the mill beginning with the bag boys or doffers and sweepers, then semi-skilled operators which included the fly-frame tenders. The "second hand," or next tier of workers, would be someone in a higher position of management who would have the freedom to perhaps leave his post and calm "her [Mary] down enough to get her in / a car and over to the hospital" (12-13). The poem concludes with Mary's return to her job:

Mary was back at work that afternoon.
 She didn't want to lose a half day's wage.
 After the bandage came off she wore
 a wig she ordered from a catalog,
 and took care not to sleep on the job again. (14-18)

Rash's use of the personal pronouns "We" and "I" turns his poem into the believable voice of a witness to Mary's accident, as does assuming the voice of a co-worker in "We were running speed frames" (1). Also, the line "I never knew a body held so much blood" (10) contains the folk expression "a body" used in Southern Appalachia to refer to a person (instead of using "someone"), and the line refers to the person's actual "body" (10). The diction identifies the speaker with people residing in the region of Mary's accident.

Ron Rash has managed through his skill in poetic storytelling to demonstrate how tiring it was for women with families to work in the mill and, because of the exhaustion that can come with working two jobs, dangerous as well. Rash also makes clear the necessity of the wages from the mill job in the poem "Accident" and the following poem, "The Sweeper":

Ma died when I was very young.
 After that it wasn't long
 I went into the mill to sweep,
 came home for supper and for sleep. (1-4)

This is the poem of a young boy, a sweeper who worked in the mill, and Rash tells the story in first person and in the voice of a child. He uses the iambic meter, one of the most common meters in English and American poetry, and a meter familiar in children's poetry and prayers, such as "Now I lay me down to sleep / I pray the Lord my soul to keep / if I should die before I wake / I pray the Lord my soul to take." This similarity in poetic meter helps to make it believable that it is indeed a young boy who is telling us his story:

Dad shaved my head the lint was so bad,
 but I didn't cry because he said

I was the oldest child and so

must grow up faster than he'd hoped. (5-8)

The process of turning strands of cotton into saleable merchandise, such as sheets and towels, was a long, involved process in the textile mills and required a lot of different machines operating at the same time. This busy production emitted cotton fiber and lint into the air where it settled as a white coating on the bodies of the workers—thus, the nickname “lintheads” (Hall).

Southern textile mills could never seem to keep enough labor. The people were poor, and even the children felt the necessity to work: “Child labor was fairly common, with individuals as young as ten employed in the mills” (Tedesco 598). Few mill men earned enough to fully support their families, so children and wives took up what was called “public work” or paid labor (Simon 23).

Rash's last two stanzas from “The Sweeper” continue with the iambic meter and simple speech pattern of a child:

On winter mornings when I walked
 in darkness to the mill I thought
 of what Dad said and I was proud
 of being a man, of helping out.

And helping other people too,
 folks we made those sheets for who
 still slept in sheets I helped to make,
 still slept as I walked into work. (9-16)

The repetition of the phrase “still slept” (15-16) lined up one exactly on top of the other is an unobtrusive example of repetitive alliteration and word placement to bring the reader’s attention to the injustice of a small child working while others “slept.”

Jacquelyn Dowd Hall et al, in *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* (1987), points to another reason for the common practice of using women and child labor as workers in the textile mills. Hall states that “the practice spread primarily as a solution to problems of labor recruitment and as a system of socializing and controlling a prospective labor force” (Hall 53). However, whatever the various reasons were for the practice of employing children in the mills, Ron Rash’s “The Sweeper” is a moving depiction of the imprint this practice left on the children.

Ron Rash’s poem “1934” offers a different perspective to the Union Textile Workers’ strike; it is different because the poem portrays the side of the workers who chose not to go pro-union. During the 1920’s textile workers began supporting strikes to try to make a change in wages earned and hours worked, but by 1931 hopes of change had diminished due to “military power and an almost empty union treasury (Tedesco 599). The passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act (1933) gave workers “the right to bargain collectively, but textile workers, especially in cotton, became notorious for ignoring it” (Tedesco 599). Due to this lack of recognition of the National Industrial Recovery Act the United Textile Workers called for a strike on September 1, 1934, but in the South the strike lasted barely a month (Tedesco):

After the union men left town,
Old Man Springs stood by the gate.

He tried to gauge us by our eyes,
 unsure whose side we now were on.

As if we knew. It sounded good
 what organizers promised us,
 a shorter day, a better wage,
 a worker getting to boss the boss. (1-8)

Rash's use of simple words in "1934" lends to a sense of dejection and sadness amongst the workers, as in line 5: "As if we knew. It sounded good," and the spiraling down in the sound of the last word on each line as in "town" (1) and "on" (4) adds to the downtrodden mood of the people returning to work:

They told us that it was our sweat
 that bought the mansion Springs lived in.
 The time had come to share the wealth,
 they said, we've got them on the run. (9-12)

The repetition of the word "They" in line one and again in line four demonstrates the wish for the workers to place the blame on the union organizers, and the drawn out syllables in "sweat" and "wealth" bring alive the whining voices of the disgruntled workers in the stanza.

However, in stanza four with the word "But" (13) the poem does a turn around to signify the workers' questioning of the strike and gratitude to their boss for work:

But, when the other mills laid off,
 Springs made sure we had some work.

We'd watch warehouses fill with cloth
we knew there was no market for.

What did we owe him for these jobs?

A tough question, almost as tough

as how on earth we'd feed our kids

if strikers shut Eureka down. (13-20)

Rash's use of the quick short ending sounds in "off" (13) and "work" (14) show the change in the workers' demeanor to one of decisiveness instead of depression. The question mark on line 17 takes their voices to an uplift as if "Springs" is now responsible for their happiness, and line 20 "if strikers shut Eureka down" (20) brings the mood back "down" both in word and in sound with the "strikers" to blame. The following stanza completes Rash's poem:

When a flying squadron headed south

and crossed the Chester County line,

we left our shift to walk outside.

We filled our fists to welcome them. (21-24)

The term "flying squadron" (21) refers to the practice of textile workers who were pro-union to gather in numbers and drive to mills still in production. Sometimes the "flying squadrons" left at the spur of the moment, but other times they were carefully planned maneuvers, stopping at mills and encouraging workers to join the strike. The practice of "flying squadrons" was an attempt to help organize the union, but some felt that it was also an intimidation tactic against non-union employees (Waldrep 60-62). Rash's poem "1934" goes deep into the emotions of the textile workers who were faced with whether to join unions in

hopes of better future working conditions or concentrate on the present and the real dilemma of feeding and supporting their families.

Another practice of union organizers was to appeal to the emotions of textile mill workers through music, and “when they turned to music to rouse their followers they usually coupled verses composed for the occasion with tunes from well-known Protestant hymns” (Williams, John Alexander 277). Ron Rash’s poem “Listening to WBT” describes the influence of textile mill union songs on the textile workers beginning with the description of early radio:

All you had to do was turn the knob
 until the light clicked on and soon you’d find
 rising out of static was your life. (1-3).

WBT is a radio station out of Charlotte, North Carolina, that during the 1930’s “boasted a fifty-thousand-watt signal that made it the most powerful broadcast signal in the Carolina’s” with songs that “ranged from time-honored religious tunes such as ‘The Old Rugged Cross’ to Dorsey Dixon’s thoroughly contemporary ‘Weave Room Blues,’ a depression-era tune chronicling the hardships of working in the South’s booming textile industry” (Grundy 1750). Dave McCarn’s *Cotton Mill Colic No. 3* (1926) was another popular textile mill song, for “economic and social distress of those who left the mountains for jobs in the Piedmont cotton mills provided subjects for many songs” (Whisnant 864). Ron Rash recognizes the importance of the textile mill union songs in the following lines:

Everytime you heard “The Weave Room Blues”
 or “Cotton Mill Colic No. 3” you felt
 like a deer that risked a meadow, its eyes

lifted to see the barrel too late.
 Someone had caught you in his sights,
 hit you solid in the guts
 with all the things you had thought
 you didn't want to think too long about. (4-11)

Rash's use of deer hunting as a simile for the feeling textile mill workers might experience while listening to mill songs helps lend to the believability of the poem's speaker due to the regional popularity of hunting, as do his continuing lines in their regional appreciation of both bluegrass music and church music:

But days later you'd catch yourself
 humming those lines as you worked your shift.
 Maybe it was the banjo and guitar,
 the way they prettied up the words,
 that made those songs lighten up your heart
 like a deep-water Baptist hymn. (12-17)

The men who wrote the two songs "Cotton Mill Colic No. 3" and "The Weave Room Blues" were both from textile regions in North and South Carolina. Dave McCarn, writer of "Cotton Mill Colic No. 3," was born in Gaston County, North Carolina, which lies on the eastern boundary of Appalachia and in 1929 was "the Piedmont's leading textiles county" (Williams, John Alexander 276). Dorsey Dixon, writer of "The Weave Room Blues," was born in the mill town of Darlington, South Carolina. Both men began working in the textile mills at an early age and, except for a few years recording their folk songs, continued to have a "long career" in the textile mills (Paris).

Rash sums up the meaning of textile songs to the workers in the mills with his last three lines in “Listening to WBT”:

Or maybe in the end it was the words,
the bare-assed truth making a stand
in a voice that could have been your own. (18-20).

Eureka Mill is more than just a compilation of poems describing manual labor; it is also a book of stories in poetry form sharing Ron Rash’s respect and love for the people who worked hard in the textile mills of the Appalachian South. The work experiences that Rash shares are all the more vivid with his precise meter and diction, as if we can almost hear the rhythm of the machines through Rash’s voice, “a voice that could have been your own” (20).

“Character Identity through Working Individuals” in the Poetry of Bennie Lee Sinclair

Bennie Lee Sinclair, known for her poems concerning the people and land of her community in Upstate South Carolina (Mitchell), begins her first published book of poetry *Little Chicago Suite* (1971) with the poem “Sidney”:

Sidney walks these roads, towing his red wagonload
of drink bottles, hub-caps, and a car-flattened cat.
His vague face today is tight with purpose
as speeded by taunts, slowed by lure of glinting glass,
he makes his round of business with spastic gait. (1-5)

Sinclair recognizes through “Sidney” an individual working an unorthodox occupation of gathering items that have been discarded as garbage on the roadways. Sidney’s work is a byproduct of mainstream society, and he has made what is regarded as unimportant to others the very essence of his own identity. Sidney’s self-proclaimed job of tidying up the countryside is a very serious business to him as Sinclair shows with her depiction: “His vague face today is tight with purpose” (3). The description of Sidney’s face as “vague,” along with the information shared in the first line that Sidney tows “his red wagonload,” both hint to the probability that Sidney is mentally handicapped. Sinclair also suggests that Sidney is physically handicapped with the following line: “he makes his round of business with spastic gait” (5). As Sidney walks the road, he speeds up and slows down from “taunts” (4) and distractions but is not deterred from his purpose. He is so intent upon his “business”

(5) that “Forgetting to eat, or relieve himself in the proper manner / he comes to a field / before the solstice sun can send him home” (6-8).

Sidney is rushing to complete his task to the point that he is “forgetting to eat” and “relieve himself” (6). Sinclair answers the question as to why Sidney is in such a big rush with “before the solstice sun can send him home” (8): it appears that it is the time of the winter solstice as Sidney’s day would be shorter and his night longer (Jackson). Also, most cultures recognize the winter solstice as a time of rebirth as Sinclair suggests in the last six lines of her poem:

Intoning heaven, as he has seen the reverend do,
 he digs a hole, deposits, covers;
 adds another stone to the small scattering
 that mounds this secret graveyard:
 dogs, cats, rabbits, possums, and a fox
 unable to manage the walking of these roads. (9-14)

Bennie Lee Sinclair packs a large amount of information into the text of her poem “Sidney” along with touching images of Sidney dedicated to his work: burying small animals struck by passing cars. Yet, what the reader feels toward Sidney is not necessarily pity, but admiration for his commitment to his “work” and awe for his personal respect for life and for his determination that all creatures deserve a ritual at their death.

Sinclair points to the deeper connection of humans and animals by beginning her poem with “Sidney walks these roads” (1) and ending the poem with “dogs, cats, rabbits, possums, and a fox / unable to manage the walking of these roads” (13-14). Sidney, with mental and physical handicaps, has managed to figure out a system of walking down the

highway without getting injured and also taking care of small animals who cannot safely navigate the road. Sidney cares for the things that others have viewed as irrelevant, similar to the way that he himself has been perceived as irrelevant and one of society's discards.

Sinclair's last word of many of her lines focuses on the tools, processes, and places of Sidney's work: "red wagonload" (1), "car-flattened cat" (2), "glinting glass" (4), "spastic gait" (5), "proper manner" (6), "certain field" (7), "small scattering" (11), "secret graveyard" (12), and "these roads" (12). Such diction places an emphasis on Sidney's work because the words relate to his "job."

"David, The Grit Salesman" in *Little Chicago Suite* (1971) is another Bennie Lee Sinclair poem focused on a working individual similar in some ways to "Sidney." "David, the Grit salesman" also has a physical handicap as "his step / is uniquely dystrophic" (4-5), although there is no evidence he is mentally handicapped.

Sinclair's poem starts with a reference to "Nestus Gurley," the character in a poem of the same name written by Randall Jarrell, United States Poet Laureate 1956-1958, who taught poetry at The Women's College at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (Baym). Jarrell's "Nestus Gurley" is a newspaper boy whose footsteps sound to the poet like an incomplete musical arrangement. The character is an image for multiple metaphors as the sound of the boy's footsteps could be heard as representations of life's "even keel," or perhaps that the newspaper boy is a mythical presence or his steps symbolize an incomplete musical motif to answer the question of what comes after death when the motif is complete (Coulehan). However, Sinclair suggests that her newspaper boy is a character who evokes less speculation, less complexity: "David, / the Grit salesman, can merely be likened / to David, the Grit salesman" (2-4):

Nestus Gurley with his soft, quick step
 has earned more noble metaphors; David,
 the Grit salesman, can merely be likened
 to David, the Grit salesman: his step
 is uniquely dystrophic, his voice
 a whinny, his smile a frantic twitch. Only
 his eyes, a clear, undamaged blue, reflect
 a soul secure as yours and mine
 within its blemished shell. (1-9)

The Grit was a small, weekly, rural newspaper sold on Saturday. The paper dates back to 1881 and is known for its practice of using newsboys to sell the paper directly to the public, with its heyday occurring during the 1950's and 60's (www.grit.com/). Sinclair's *Grit* salesman does not walk with a musical lilt like Randall Jarrell's newsboy, but walks with difficulty. *Grit* newsboys would stand in front of stores and shout out "*Grit* for sale," but David has a voice that does not sound pleasant as he tries to make a sale: his voice sounds like a "whinny." His face has "a frantic twitch," and Sinclair describes David as having a "blemished shell." Normally, these descriptions would not be positive attributes for someone in the public eye, trying to make a living as salesman, but Sinclair is drawn to "David, the Grit salesman":

Each Friday, Saturday David
 sells the Grit, lurching back and forth
 before the grocery store; neighing, waving,

pleading, perhaps, behind the convulsive

workings of his face, clear eyes

aflame as he tries to sell old news:

the Grit, the Grit, he offers me the Grit:

for fifteen cents the bargain of stale news:

for this small price the wonder of his eyes. (10-18)

It is in stanza two that we learn the intensity with which the poet relates to “Saturday David” (9), for *The Grit*’s newsboys would sell the papers on Friday to try get rid of “old news” (15) before the new papers were received on Saturday. Stanza three describes the excitement with which David sells the paper to the narrator: “When David / sees me drive up he comes running” (19-20), and “Eagerly / he conducts the ritual” (21-21). Stanza four begins:

Sometimes, I catch a glimpse of David

in repose, dozing against the front wall

of the store. He has a strong neck, ripe shoulders,

fine line to the chin—but for whatever

Fate it is decides our lot,

David would be rolling in some field, perhaps,

with a girl’s fresh hands at his spine; David

would be moving as a boy is meant to move,

delivering stars from lawn to lawn. (28-36)

This is yet another reference to the newspaper boy in Randall Jarrell’s “Nestus Gurley” as “He delivers to me the Morning Star, the Evening Star” (Jarrell). However, Sinclair’s David is not able to distribute newspapers from “lawn to lawn” (28) due to his physical handicap.

David cannot deliver the “the Morning Star, the Evening Star” literally because he cannot walk great distances. He cannot deliver “the Morning Star, the Evening Star” metaphorically, like the newspaper boy Nestus Gurley, because the sound of David’s footsteps do not create musical motifs. Yet, Sinclair does have her own images of David, and she wonders:

When I drift into that state this side
of nightmare, where life is almost as it is
at waking, but not quite; where one or two
details somewhat askew illuminate
the irony of both worlds, I dream of him.
In these dreams, he walks another poet’s
land, crossing silent lawns at midnight
or high noon, beating rhythms against his thigh

with cymbal hand, pressing his lips
into sweet flute sounds or humming a drone
accompaniment for moon-infatuate crickets,
sometimes singing those scattered notes that...
with a note or two...would be...
and only then do I awake to my David,
who does not sing, or dance, or whistle;
who shares my world, where nothing
is quite as other poets led me to expect. (47-63)

The boy in “Nestus Gurley” delivers newspapers with whistles and steps, which inspire Randall Jarrell to wonder: if Nestus Gurley were ever to finish his song and dance, would the meaning of life and death be answered? Sinclair’s newsboy David is working a job: he is a real person trying to make a living. David, working with physical handicaps, is a better image of the real meaning of life than the illusions implied in “Nestus Gurley”:

neither as good nor bad, and yet more real
 for its illusiveness. When I see David
 moving crablike across the parking lot, close
 to loveliness, and yet so far removed:
 as I offer him the irony
 of my coins, I think again of stars:
 of the binary brightness that unites us,
 of the eclipses we must make one upon the other
 for our differences – (64-72)

Sinclair’s lines “close / to loveliness, and yet so far removed” (66-67) and “where one or two / details somewhat askew illuminate” (49-50) refer to the delicate nature of genetics. Sinclair accepts human difference, unlike many who reject it. She recognizes that simply “one or two / details somewhat askew” can be viewed as “eclipses” (71) from the norm that connects all humankind.

Bennie Lee Sinclair sums up everything she has received from David in her last stanza:

until I touch his hand, marred
 as our flesh is always marred in some way

seen or unseen, and am reminded
 that stars are forever stars, and we
 locked from them in the shells of what
 we are. All this and mellowed news; all this,
 and the peculiar wisdom of vintage news, I
 take from David. I do not know
 what David takes from me. (73-81)

Sinclair uses nine-line stanzas in “David, The Grit Salesman” but without the rhyme scheme that is sometimes identified with the nine-line stanza unit first used by Edward Spencer in his epic poem *The Fairie Queene* (Packard 189). Sinclair takes the nine-line stanzas one step further by writing nine stanzas, resulting in an eighty-one line poem. Sinclair’s use of the Spenserian stanza and her nine verses in “David, The Grit Salesman” adds to her theme of pointing to a lack of symmetry apparent in all human forms.

“David, the Grit salesman” was a man who was trying to support himself by working at selling *The Grit*. Bennie Lee Sinclair noticed this man working who had physical handicaps but she did not see him as a handicapped person working. She saw him as an individual whose existence was an intricate part of life, the life that is real and lived everyday by working people. Sinclair uses David as a metaphor for people who can inspire us with their realistic lives if they are only seen and not ignored; in contrast to Randall Jarrell’s musical use of “Nestus Gurley” as a metaphor for what might be waiting when life ends.

“Sidney” and “David, The Grit Salesman” are just two examples of Bennie Lee Sinclair’s poetry dealing with the way work defines a character. Some other examples with this same theme are “On The Death Of Fireball Roberts,” “A Short Epic In The Defense Of

The Goat Man,” and “A Spinner In Her Hundredth Year” from a photograph by Doris Ulmann. Bennie Lee Sinclair wrote poems about people she noticed in her native region of Upstate South Carolina who worked at unconventional jobs and whose very identities were formed by society’s perception of them within the context of those jobs.

Patricia L Beaver, in *Rural Community in the Appalachian South* (1978), notes that “work” and “public work” have different meanings in the rural areas of Appalachia. Public work is a job that requires working for another person and receiving a salary, but “work includes any economic activity that contributes to subsistence or maintenance, with the specific exclusion of ‘public work’” (Beaver 158). A person’s worth is not determined by participation in a job for monetary means, but by “making at least some effort at coping with basic subsistence problems” (Beaver 158). Sinclair’s poems are important because they exemplify how work, whether it is the actual task or the fulfillment derived from that task, results in more than monetary value.

Bennie Lee Sinclair was born in Greenville, South Carolina, but her father’s paternal family was from the Bearwallow/Fruitland section of Henderson County, an area known for its numerous apple farms and other crops. This section of Henderson County is well known to me because when I was a child my father was the rural route mail carrier for this mountainous region. Bearwallow Mountain is one of the highest peaks in the county with an elevation of 4,203 feet, and my sister and I would worry about Daddy when the snow was deep and the roads were icy: we were concerned that the car would slide off the side of the mountain while he was working. It was not until researching Bennie Lee Sinclair that I learned “her” Sinclairs were from Henderson County, and the compassion shown in her

poetry for others became all the more clear; for the Sinclairs were known for their kindness and compassion, and they have been friends of my family for generations.

Bennie Lee Sinclair had a deep connection to her family hailing from the different points of Upstate South Carolina and Henderson County, North Carolina, stating in *One Hundred Years of Appalachian Vision* (1997): “I have devoted part of my life to preserving and passing on and interpreting the wonders of the Appalachia I inherited from all the mountain folk who have gone on before me. I want to pass on that inheritance” (64). Sinclair relied on memories and experiences for her poetry. She discusses in her essay “Appalachian Loaves and Fishes” that it is the good memories which shape our work and the bad memories that shape us: “In a strange way the sad experiences, the tragic ones, are loaves and fishes, also, for they truly do build character as well as wisdom for writing” (Dyer 270).

Bennie Lee Sinclair recognized people in her surroundings for their work, and she recognized the working experiences of her ancestors. Both of her parents were working-class individuals in a time when it was not common for women to work outside of the home. After Sinclair married potter Don Lewis, she admitted that their early years were a struggle financially as “we were penniless, as were our families.” The couple supported themselves through work scholarships and outside jobs picking fruit in the area and “earned our living through Don’s pottery” (Dyer 265-67). They lived in the Little Chicago area of Upstate South Carolina, a part of the Dark Corner section of Sinclair’s father’s mother’s ancestors. When Bennie Lee Sinclair began gathering poems for her first collection, she “realized they would not have been written if Don and I had not lived at Little Chicago. My life and my work were, and are inseparable—not necessarily autobiographical, but inseparable” (268).

Bennie Lee Sinclair noticed the people of Little Chicago, like Sidney and David, the Grit salesman, because of her awareness of surroundings and her compassion for others. She credits her maternal grandmother for this compassion: “My grandmother Necy taught me a lady is a lady to everyone—an early instruction in egalitarianism” (270). Sinclair’s poetry displays both the hard work of her subjects and her own labor, and “Because of these loaves and fishes. I am never looking for subject matter. My ghosts implore me to tell their stories, write their elegies: a lifetime’s work” (271).

Acknowledging Connections

The poetry of Kathryn Stripling Byer, Robert Morgan, Ron Rash, and Bennie Lee Sinclair has been a constant inspiration to me through my studies and writing concerning Appalachian culture and the effort that goes into the form of a poem. Ron Rash and Robert Morgan have both discussed the importance of reading the works of other poets as an aid to one's own poetry composition. The poetry books by the four poets included in this thesis have been my "bible" while trying to write my own poems. I am very grateful for having the opportunity to learn from them.

The importance and recognition of culture is apparent within the poems of Byer, Morgan, Rash, and Sinclair. The sharing of this culture in regards to location, ancestors, history, and age, along with respect and love for the Southern Appalachian people and region, almost forms a kinship within the poetry. While working on my own poems and completing my studies at Appalachian State University, I have continued to be employed at a number of jobs. These jobs, coupled with coming from a working class family, soon led me to notice that quite a few of my poems were written in the voice of someone at work, or were written to acknowledge the work of others. This experience led me to a different type of reading in the poetry of Southern Appalachian poets and one which could be beneficial to the region as a whole. (Following this section is a group of my original poems. See page 58.) In a graduate colloquium class at ASU, my classmates said of Appalachian writers that they can sometimes be guilty of "apple butter writing," or the tendency to sugarcoat actual events in Appalachia and write from a voice of romantic nostalgia. However, what is sometimes

perceived as sentimentality on the surface can actually be coming from a foundation of work and work experiences.

Kathryn Stripling Byer's poetry offers great examples of working class issues due to her recognition of "women's work" within her poems. Byer is not afraid to express that these women are not just "workers," but her personas often have a sexual or feminine identity, as demonstrated in "Wildwood Flower":

...Each month
 I brew squaw tea for pain.
 In the stream where I scrub my own blood
 from rags, I see all things flow
 down from me into the valley (15-19).

When I began my own poem "Hail" (see p. 63), it was to pay respect to the hardship faced by my maternal grandparents who put all of their effort into producing an apple crop to support their family for the coming year, only to have it destroyed in seconds with the coming of a hail storm. As the poem progressed, I began to think of the different ways in which men and women express their frustrations and worries, and I envisioned my grandmother's worrying about her children and her daydreams for items such as books and a guitar, as she hears "hail hit / the tin roof like pellets pinging / from a shotgun" (3-5). The sound of the hail, along with visions of the "budding blossoms" (9) began to merge with what my grandfather might be experiencing at the time, as his hard physical labor day after day was ruined in a matter of seconds. I pictured him reaching out to my grandmother as they lay together in bed, but she is unable to get the picture of the hail destroying all of her dreams out of her mind. So, in this way I connected the work experiences of my grandparents, along with the recognition of

them as having sexual needs, in the same respect as Byer described her character's hard work and sexual identity.

Robert Morgan grew up in Henderson County on a farm only a few miles from my current home. Although I did not grow up in this same section of the county, but moved here after marriage, I am familiar with many of the people and places used in his writing. There is also the kinship of being descendents of Welsh ancestors who have been native to this area since the 1700's and experiencing the same strong current of religion, fundamentalism, and fatalism as described in Morgan's writing. This is the theme of my poem "My Father Let Me" (see pp. 68-69), with Father playing a dual role of "Our Father who art in heaven" and my own earthly father, and the confusing messages sent to a small child who "skips hand in hand with Jesus" only to feel sinful due to not being baptized.

However, it is the poem "Papa Jones" (see p. 71) in which I found a connection to Morgan's poem "Canning" and "When He Spoke Out of the Dark." The setting of "Papa Jones" is my grandmother's kitchen, and similar to the kitchen in "Canning," this was the place where the women became responsible for providing nourishment for the family. The women in "Canning" are working hard at putting up peaches for the winter, and while my grandmother also performed this chore, the kitchen in "Papa Jones" becomes a place of constant stability and safe haven for a teenage girl. The peaches in Morgan's poem are "a first foundation of shells to be / fired at the winter's muddy back" (36-37), but in "Papa Jones" the "cornbread, broken apart, mashed up, / eaten with a fork" (13-14) is a representation of the foundation of family needed to help a young girl cope with the issues of emerging adolescence. Similar to "When He Spoke Out of the Dark" the man in the poem "Papa Jones" is also quiet, but Morgan's father in the poem is "looming to my dark-adjusting

eyes / white and smokelike out of the depths/ of night and spoke as close as anyone” (17-19), and “Papa Jones” says not a word. There is the same reference to eyes and smoke, but instead of actually talking, “Papa Jones” is “Speaking instead with blue-eyed glances / pipe puffs, cross of the knees” (6-7). The comfort and strength of the father figure is apparent in Morgan’s poem with the repetitive line “I had not seen him” (2 & 15) and the actual fact “there he sat” (15). Comfort and strength is also apparent in the poem “Papa Jones” with “sitting across / from a man who understood / the importance of buttered cornbread / to a thirteen-year old girl” (14-17). “Papa Jones” started out initially as a poem about a fondness for my grandmother’s cornbread, old or fresh, but turned into the realization that what was craved at my paternal grandparent’s home was the seeming lack of change in their lives, providing a constant in my growing up years.

Ron Rash’s family moved from the North Carolina mountains to the mill town of Chester, South Carolina, and his family worked there through the years of union organization, mill villages, and company stores. Rash’s poems are realistic in their issues with feelings of despair and entrapment due to the work necessary for providing food and shelter, and at times the poems are almost macabre, with unobtrusive auras dealing with death. Metaphorically, Rash holds up a mirror and sees his ancestors’ stories. In the poem “Jacob and Ellen” (see pp. 66-67), I employ the form of mirror poetry to convey a similar feeling of loss. While Rash knows first-hand the hardship of the textile working class, when I decided to write “Jacob and Ellen” I only knew what I had read about coal mining and coal mining disasters.

It was while riding back home to North Carolina from a trip to Illinois through coal mining country, that I decided to try to write a poem about an area I was not familiar with.

The poem was not titled at the time, and the exact location was not even known, but what was known (and similar to Rash's *Eureka Mill*) was the personal loss of a family member. What better way to convey that feeling of loss than by using the same form of simply stating the facts and letting the poem speak for itself?

A great deal of research went into my poem "Jacob and Ellen" as the character's personal setting was developed before knowing the broader locality. Similar to Kathryn Stripling Byer's muse of *Alma* (1983), someone was speaking through me to tell a story, and it was only through telling the story that the location came to light. By using the detail of "wild berries / the children picked" (12-13), I knew the mining disaster occurred in the spring of the year. Research then led to the personal discovery of the historic 1902 Fraterville coal mining disaster, the worst mine disaster in the state of Tennessee, claiming 184 lives (Coggins). Further investigation revealed a letter written from one of the miners, Jacob, to his wife, Ellen, and my poem became "Jacob and Ellen." As I continued my education in the field of Appalachian Studies, the letter from Jacob to Ellen resurfaced in Loyal Jones' *Faith and Meaning in the Southern Uplands* (1999), but on that ride home from Illinois to the Southern Appalachians, through Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee, it was the persistence of including a detail as trivial as berries that led to the poem "Jacob and Ellen."

So much of Bennie Lee Sinclair's poems are set in the upstate country of South Carolina, and it was this same area used in my poem "The State Line" (see pp. 78-79). Sinclair wrote about people of this region, locals and legends perhaps overlooked by others, such as "Sidney," "David, The Grit Salesman," and "A Short Epic in Defense of the Goat Man." These characters used to be common to this rural area of South Carolina, as Sinclair notes: "A lot of old coots and codgers hung around at the crossroads. They had a sense of

humor I could appreciate. At the same time, they always cared if someone was in trouble (www.knowitall.org/periscope/). The crossroads that Sinclair mentions are only a few miles from my home and in an area that has seen a surge in construction. While people such as the late Bennie Lee Sinclair and her husband Don Lewis have done much to preserve and safe-keep the wilderness of Upstate South Carolina, the mountainous region known as Dark Corner is now dotted with homes enclosed in gated scenic communities.

Bennie Lee Sinclair kept an eye out for working people who had become characters due to society's definition. Similar to her "Sidney" who "walks these roads, towing his red wagonload / of drink bottles, hub-caps, and a car-flattened cat "(1-2), there is a man who lives at a crossroads near my home who is known to all as "Cat Man" (see p. 62). Cat Man also has a fondness for cats as they go "slinking / about, licking paws, scrounging scraps / sunning lean bodies on piled up garbage" (7-9). Sinclair takes note of the importance of Sidney's "job," and just as important to Cat Man is his "job": waving to every person that passes by in front of his home.

Scattered across the country there are numerous people working like "Sidney" and "Cat Man," individuals walking the countryside, residing on city corners, working in roles that are meaningful to them. This is the link that Sinclair wanted to share in her poetry.

Southern Appalachian poets have been identified with many topics in relation to region, religion, history, and culture. In Jim Wayne Miller's essay "A People Waking Up: Appalachian Literature Since 1960," Miller notes that "Cratis Williams did not deal with poets in his 1961 study. But certainly he was aware of the poetry of Jesse Stuart, James Still, Don West, Louise McNeill, and the somewhat younger Bryon Herbert Reece" (Miller 50). James Still, Don West, and Bryon Herbert Reece all hail from the Southern Appalachian

region. These poets, along with contemporary poets such as Parks Lanier, Rita Sims Quillen, Jim Wayne Miller, Jeff Daniel Marion, Linda Marion, Fred Chappell, Nikki Giovanni, Joseph Bathanti, Marilou Awaikta, Doris Davenport, Dorothy Allison, Lisa Coffman, Amy Tipton Cortner, Bettie Sellers, Michael McFee, David Huddle, Bill Brown, R.T. Smith, Heather Ross Miller, Jo Carson, and Charles Wright all have connections to Southern Appalachia, and all deserve the right to have their poems read with recognition of working class issues.

This thesis, exploring the “Representation of Work Experiences Within the Poetry of Four Contemporary Appalachian Poets,” focusing on the poetry of Kathryn Stripling Byer, Robert Morgan, Ron Rash, and Bennie Lee Sinclair, has aided me in my own poetry to recognize the people and culture of Southern Appalachia as leading more than romantic agrarian lifestyles. This study is designed to bring attention to working-class issues in regional poetry, proving that Southern Appalachian poets are not “apple butter poets” but are acutely aware of the working-class people of the region.

Poetry by Connie Jones Aiken

Appalachian Semaphore

Letters whirl around Daddy's
erect figure as diagonally divided
red and yellow squares transform
motion into words breezing past
my uplifted face.

Speaking to me in a secret language
he learned in Scouting, used in Saipan,
my eyes quickly follow extended
arms move up and down like a clock,
free to communicate on its own.

Unfurling sounds hidden in movement,
spelling out mysterious codes,
initiating me to the voices of
Dutch Marines, Navajo Windtalkers.

Is this the reason I continue
to sit at open windows?
Waiting for the wind to touch
my cheeks with A's, B's, and C's?

Searching the fields for the
silent storyteller, whipping
the air with colorful expressions,
concealing messages within
symbols and signs.

Barefoot

Stepping on a pop-top
is not confined
to *Margaritaville*,
for my bare foot
landed smack dab
on the sharp edged tab,
carelessly tossed out
the car window,
slicing straight into skin
boldly revealed
for summer dancing
at the Teenage Canteen,
despite Papa's protests
he could afford
shoes for his granddaughter,
bleeding from the wound
of walking downtown barefoot.

Cat Man

Wave – “a disturbance traveling through a medium by which energy is transferred from one particle of the medium to another without causing any permanent displacement of the medium itself.”

Sitting on his stoop wearing blue jeans,
flannel shirt, long layers of red hair,
he waves to everyone who passes,
encircled by cats. I wonder about
this man who lives with cats.

White cats soot sprinkled,
orange cats minus tails, slinking
about, licking paws, scrounging scraps,
sunning lean bodies on piled up garbage.

Surely his hand must tire from the constant
uplifted motion of greeting children
crammed on school buses, bicycling athletes,
tourists taking a wrong turn, locals headed home,
farmers on tractors, campers on horseback,
Mexican migrants, rich people, poor people,
republicans, democrats, born again Christians,
atheists, Islamists, and Jews, yet never
moving from his stoop, surrounded by cats.

Hail

*I asked her once, "What did you do Granny? When you heard the hail?"
She answered there was nothing she could do, she accepted it.*

Lying in bed while hard calloused
hands slowly roam over her still
body, she listens to hail hit
the tin roof like pellets pinging
from a shotgun, remembering
dreams of new clothes, books, tools,
or perhaps a guitar to strum soothing
chords that might conceal ice tapping
rapidly on bits of budding blossoms,
like a pianist forcing crescendo
from black and white keys,
slicing sound as a knife cuts
through the core of an apple.

His Mark

Unaware of my mother's presence
returning from her Saturday night date,
story has it that Papa Hill pushed
open the screen door wearing only
wool long johns, and faced a full moon
illuminating thirty-seven acres
of apple trees.

Twelve years old when his mother died
giving birth to her eleventh child,
Papa's father became a sharecropper,
dragging them from farm to farm,
sleeping under wagons, tending other
peoples crops, working someone else's land.

But, Papa owned his own home now,
complete with indoor plumbing,
orthopedic mattress, wife, five
children, and hydroelectricity.

He could generate his own stream,
channel out his own row,
write his name, if he so pleased,
in the softly falling December snow.

That's when he heard the gasp of Vivian,
embraced within a goodnight kiss.
Unfortunately, it was much too late
for him to try and tuck it in.

Jacob and Ellen

May 19, 1902

At 5am the dark, skinny
man places his feet on the cold
slab floor. Gazing at dirty hands,
remembering a time when he tried
to scrub the blackness off,
but coal is a part of him now.
Pulling overalls over flannel shirt,
sliding socked feet inside scuffed boots,
he shuffles to the stove, where she waits,
with a flask full of hot chicory,
biscuits filled with fried fatback,
some hoop cheese, and wild berries
the children picked. All placed within
a gallon tin bucket. He steps outside
and feels her eyes upon his back.

May 19, 2003

At 5am the pale, slender woman
places her feet on the cold

slab floor. Gazing at rough hands,
remembering a time when she tried
to keep them soft and pretty.

Pulling faded dress over threadbare slip,
sliding bare feet inside worn shoes,
she shuffles to the stove, where she fills
a flask full of hot chicory, stuffs
biscuits with fried fat back, hoop cheese,
and wraps wild berries the children picked.

Stepping outside she looks up toward
the Fraterville Coal Mine,
covers her eyes with trembling hands,
and wonders if he had time to eat the berries.

My Father Let Me

Time for the Lord's Supper at the Baptist Church,
tiny juice glasses, bites of bread.

I usually sit with Daddy.

He helps me to drink – the blood of Christ,

He helps me to eat – the body of Christ.

Familiar faces surround me.

Broadman Hymnals beckon me.

Oak pews cradle me.

Angels smile down on me.

Stained glass windows hold my daydreams.

Sunday mornings are Sunday School
and preaching.

Sunday nights are Baptist Training Union
and preaching.

Wednesday nights are Girls Auxiliary, choir,
and preaching.

Today, I sit with Granny as the men
in white shirts and dark suits pass
around the heavy wooden holders.

I reach for the small cup,

“No child, you’re not baptized!”

I go from skipping hand in hand with Jesus

into a fire breathing hell.

I’m sitting on a cold hard bench.

Strangers surround me.

Angels in stained glass windows

glare down at me.

Nickels

Snickers from sister
did not deter me
from always choosing
nickel over dime
laid out in Papa Hill's
large palmed hand
for chores performed
around the orchard
on warm September days,
ripe fruit and pesticide
filling the air, yellow jackets
hidden in fallen rotten apples,
wooden ladders leaned
against trees, pickers
swinging canvas sacks
from broad shoulders,
cascades of sweat spilling
down darkened skin,
both from sun and from birth,
who saw the need to hold
something strong and sturdy
between my small fingers.

Papa Jones

He did not use words much,
“milk” when asked daily what
he wished to drink during dinner,
as if after eighty-three years he might
suddenly switch to coffee or tea.
Speaking instead with blue eyed glances,
pipe puffs, cross of the knees,
or once an Indian Head nickel
pulled out of his trousers pocket
for my good deed of bringing in
the newspaper before searching my
grandmother’s kitchen for last night’s
cornbread, broken apart, mashed up,
eaten with a fork, sitting across
from a man who understood
the importance of buttered cornbread
to a thirteen-year old girl.

Renaissance

Signs point up Mt. Olivet Road
to a Renaissance Community,
leaving me a bit concerned as
one wrong turn and folks searching
for cultural rebirth might mistake
the washout at the end of my drive
for a moat, and cruise right on up here,
what with all the hanging limbs from
last fall's hurricane resembling one
of those wild rhododendron canopies
advertised in their brochure,
and confuse our barbed wire fence
holding the cows in, with a locked
gate, keeping the people out.

Saluda Grade

Riding down the mountain with Daddy
allows for louder singing of those old
hymns. Sharp curves give lasting emphasis
to the Lord's name, as we herald
All Hail the Power through the hollers.

Shape notes bounce off kudzu coated
rocks, trailing into caves hidden
behind thin veils of water, holding
harmonic whispers of Quaker ancestors
who could not *Keep from Singing*.

Slowing down for dawdling drivers
our voices lower, whispering reverence
to *The Old Rugged Cross* then rise
in exuberance for *Love Lifted Me*
as we travel over the high bridge.

Breathe On Me merges with
rhododendron's earthy odor
floating in the open windows,
cool air collides with heated chord,

grace notes give way to melody,
and the Holy Spirit shares with us
a winding mountain road.

Steam

rises from water boiling
knife, fork, plate and spoon,
floats out the screen window,
settles in the creek flowing
to the French Broad River,
tumbles with the Tennessee,
dumps in the Mississippi,
plunges into the Gulf of Mexico,
unites with the Gulf Stream
making its way back to bodies
bathing in the Niger River
dripping sweat from picking
cassava instead of cotton,
eating *eguma bread* wrapped in leaves
instead of black eyed peas out of spoons
boiled by white women.

The Pilgrimage

White lace peaks out the yellow robe
with two buttons missing, pink rollers
top her head as she fries chicken in a hot
iron skillet we worry which ankle socks
to wear with matching Sunday school
dresses she sewed on her Singer.

She cuts out perfectly rounded biscuits,
while he shaves, splashes on Old Spice,
dons his suit, she carefully pulls a German
Chocolate Pound cake out of the oven,
stirs green beans put up last summer
as we sit in the station wagon, waiting.

She removes the yellow robe, pulling
on a black dress with matching pumps
and earrings as he blows the car horn
she wraps up chicken, biscuits, and cake
then slides into the front seat as he glances
at his watch, mumbling:

*Great-Grandma could cook for twenty
and still get there on time, and we begin
the weekly drive of harsh edges, sharp turns,
rocky cliffs. She holds a pot of green beans
between her feet, pound cake in her lap,
fried chicken under her elbow.*

He smokes his cigar, whistles, takes
in the view Debbie Loves Jimmy written
on a large rock, turning into the long
dirt drive, where the old man lies on a bed
in the parlor, waiting.

The State Line

Turn to the right off I-25
past the busted out windows
in the vacant store that sold sang
before the four lane highway was
built lined with billboards advertising
the French Chateau overlooking
land once owned by Papaw before
Mamaw got so sick he couldn't
take care of her anymore. Now
there's weddings on the lawn where
Mamaw's prized peonies used to grow.

You know the place I'm talking about
with imported grapes vines for serving
wine out of crystal glasses toasting
newlyweds whose daddies paid for
the view I look at everyday driving
home from flipping burgers at the grill
wearing grease spots on the jeans Billy
bought me right before he took off
with a woman he picked up at the fair
in Pickens, the same month Papaw

put Mamaw in that home smelling
like some sort of sweetness I can't quite
decipher, but makes Papaw cry every
time he visits her, and then goes back
to the brown trimmed trailer set on rocky
red South Carolina soil nobody wants
just yet because you have to turn left
instead of right off I-25.

The Tomato Sandwich

She wanted a tomato sandwich with the right amount of mayonnaise which I understood fine because I don't like mayonnaise and knew it would have to be applied just so to be edible. She did not want salad dressing but real mayonnaise smeared even on both sides, slightly thick, not dripping off edges, soggy. She wanted just the right kind of bread. Not brown or none of that speckled stuff, but plain old white bread that feels mushy like the Sunbeam Man unloads from his truck on a hot summer day while you watch with melting Popsicle dribbling down a Mickey Mouse tee shirt, icing toes tucked into pink rubber flip flops, painted nails catching cherry flavor. She desired the right tomato. Juicy, like it had been picked from an August garden right at dusk, as gnats begin to fly near your eyes, charcoal smoke mingling with hamburger. She wanted those tomatoes sliced straight through, about a half an inch thick, four laid out like a checkerboard square, sides overlapping, skin not peeled. She would've liked to fix it herself but was not allowed in the kitchen, so would beat hard on the door with cane in hand, waiting for someone to stop washing dishes long enough to make her sandwich, which she would then place in a top dresser drawer beside assorted cards and pictures of freckled grandchildren, until the day the nurse tossed the tomato sandwich into the trash along with puddings, Coca-Colas, and toasted cheese sandwiches covered in melted butter like the milk man brings on a cold winter day while you're wrapped up in a warm wool blanket, watching Captain Kangaroo.....

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 7th ed. Fort Worth: Harcourt, 1999.
- Abramson, Rudy and Jean Haskell, eds. *Encyclopedia of Appalachia*. Knoxville: U of Tennessee Press, 1996.
- Ballard, Sandra L. and Patricia L. Hudson, eds. *Listen Here: Women Writing in Appalachia*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 2003.
- Baber, Bob Henry, George Ella Lyon, and Gurney Norman, eds. *Old Wounds, New Words: Poems from the Appalachian Poetry Project*. Ashland: Jesse Stuart Foundation, 1994.
- Batteau, Allen. *The Invention of Appalachia*. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 1990.
- Baym, Nina, "Randall Jarrell." *Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Ed. Nina Baym. 5th ed. New York: Norton, 1999.
- Beaver, Patricia. *Rural Community in the Appalachian South*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1986.
- Bishop, Wendy. *Thirteen Ways of Looking for a Poem*. New York: Longman, 2000.
- Blethen, H. Tyler and Richard A. Straw, eds. *High Mountains Rising: Appalachia in Time and Place*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2004.
- Byer, James. "The Woman's Place Is in the House." *The Poetics of Appalachian Space*. Ed. Parks Lanier. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1991.
- Byer, Kathryn Stripling. *Alma*. Phoenix: Phoenix P, 1983.
- . *Black Shawl*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1998.
- . *Catching Light*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2002.
- . *Coming to Rest*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2006.

---. *Girl in the Midst of the Harvest*. Lubbock: Texas Tech P, 1986.

---. *Search Party*. Cullowhee: Amicae Press, 1979.

---. *Wildwood Flower*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1992.

Byer, Kathryn Stripling. "Kathryn Stripling Byer Biography." n.d. Web. 15 July 2009.

<<http://www.redroom.com/author/kathryn-stripling-byer-/bio>>

Byer, Kathryn Stripling. Personal Communication. 10 November 2008.

Byerly, Victoria. *Hard Times Cotton Mill Girls*. Ithaca: Cornell U, 1986.

Campbell, John C. *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1921.

Caskey, Jefferson D. "The Writings of Jim Wayne Miller: A Selective Bibliography."

The Iron Mountain Review 4.2 (Spring 1988): 37-40.

Chappell, Fred. *Spring Garden: New and Selected Poems*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1994.

"Chemical Element." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. 2009. Encyclopedia Britannica Online.

n.d. Web. 20 April 2009.

<<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/108636/chemical>>

Coggins, Allen P. "Fraterville Mine Disaster." *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*. Ed. Carroll Van West. Nashville: Rutledge Hill P, 1998.

Conway, Cecelia. "Robert Morgan's Voice and Lucid Prose." *An American Vein*. Eds.

Sharon Hatfield, Danny L. Miller, and Gurney Norman. Athens: Ohio UP, 2005.

Coulehan, Jack. "Jarrell, Randall: Nestus Gurley." *Literature, Arts, and Medicine Database*.

New York University. 07 February 2001. Web. 13 June 2009.

<<http://litmed.med.nyu.edu/>>.

Denison, Nicole. "An Interview with Kathryn Stripling Byer." *Blue Fifth Review*. Spring 2008. Web. 15 October 2008.

<www.angelfire.com/zine/bluefifth/Spring_2008/Byer.html. Spring 2008>.

Dixon, Dorsey. "Weave Room Blues." *History in Song*. n.d. Web. 10 May 2009.

<www.folkarchive.de/history/>.

"Drag." *American Heritage College Dictionary*. 3rd ed. 1997.

Dyer, Joyce, ed. *Bloodroot: Reflections on Place by Appalachian Women Writers*.

Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1998.

Dykeman, Wilma. *The French Broad*. New York: Rinehart, 1955.

Edwards, Alba M. and William Chamberlin Hunt. "Textile Industries." *Classified Index to Occupations, United States Bureau of the Census*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1921.

Eller, Ronald. *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*. 5th ed. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1995.

Fisher, Diane Gilliam. *Kettle Bottom*. Florence: Perugia P, 2004.

---. *One of Everything*. Cleveland: Cleveland State U Poetry Center, 2003.

---. *Recipe for Blackberry Cake*. Kent: Kent State UP, 1999.

"Gee and Haw." *American Heritage College Dictionary*. 3rd ed. 1997.

Grundy, Pamela. "WBT." *Encyclopedia of Appalachia*. Eds. Rudy Abramson and Jean Haskell. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 2006.

Hague, Richard. *A Red Shadow of Steel Mills*. Huron: Bottom Dog P, 1991.

---. *Possible Debris*. Cleveland: Cleveland State U Poetry Center, 1988.

---. *Ripening*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1984.

- Hall, Jacquelyn Dowd, James Leloudis, Robert Korstad, Mary Murphy, Lu Ann Jones, and Christopher B. Daly. *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1987.
- Hatfield, Sharon, Danny L. Miller, and Gurney Norman, eds. *An American Vein*. Athens: Ohio UP, 2005.
- Hicks, George. *Appalachian Valley*. Prospect Heights: Waveland, 1976.
- Higgs, Robert J. and Ambrose N. Manning, eds. *Voices from the Hill: Selected Readings of Southern Appalachia*, 2nd ed. Dubuque: Kendall, 1996.
- Higgs, Robert J., Ambrose N. Manning, and Jim Wayne Miller, eds. *Appalachia Inside Out*. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1995.
- Hunter, J. Paul. *The Norton Introduction to Poetry*. New York: Norton, 1999.
- Jackson, Ellen B. *The Winter Solstice*. Brookfield: Millbrook, 1994.
- Jarrell, Randall. "Nestus Gurley." *The Woman at the Washington Zoo: Poems and Translations*. New York: Athenaeum, 1960.
- Jones, Loyal. "Appalachian Values." *Voices from the Hills: Selected Readings of Southern Appalachia*, 2nd ed. Eds. Robert J. Higgs and Ambrose N. Manning. Dubuque: Iowa, 1996.
- Jones, Loyal. *Faith and Meaning in the Southern Uplands*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1999.
- Kohler, Dayton. "Jesse Stuart and James Still." *An American Vein*. Eds. Sharon Hatfield, Danny L. Miller, and Gurney Norman. Athens: Ohio UP, 2005.
- Lang, John. "Coming Out from Under Calvinism: Religious Motifs in Robert Morgan's Poetry." *An American Vein*. Eds. Sharon Hatfield, Danny L. Miller, and Gurney Norman. Athens: Ohio UP, 2005.

- Lang, John, ed. "A Kathryn Stripling Byer Bibliography." *Iron Mountain Review* 18 (Spring 2002): 39.
- . "A Robert Morgan Bibliography." *Iron Mountain Review* 6.1 (Spring 1990): 31-32.
- Lanier, Parks, ed. *The Poetics of Appalachian Space*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee P, 1991.
- Lee, Ernest, ed. *Being of These Hills: Readings from Appalachian Writers*. Boston: Pearson, 2002.
- Lewis, Helen. *Picking Up the Pieces: Women In and Out of Work in the Rural South*. New Market: Highlander Research and Education Center, 1986.
- Lloyd, Theresa. "Women Authors." *Encyclopedia of Appalachia*. Eds. Rudy Abramson and Jean Haskell. Knoxville: U of Tennessee Press, 2006.
- Marion, Jeff Daniel. "James Still's Poetry: 'The Journey a Worldly Wonder.'" *An American Vein*. Eds. Sharon Hatfield, Danny L. Miller, and Gurney Norman. Athens: Ohio UP, 2005.
- . *Lost & Found*. Abingdon: Sows Ear P, 1994.
- . *Miracles of Air*. New Market: Mill Springs P, 1987.
- . *Vigils: Selected Poems*. Boone: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1990.
- MacDonald, Lois. *Southern Mill Hills: A Study of Social and Economic Forces in Certain Textile Mill Villages*. New York: Alex H. Hillman, 1928.
- McCarn, Dave. "Cotton Mill Colic No. 2." *History in Song*. n.d. Web. 10 May 2009.
< www.folkarchive.de/history/ >.
- McCauley, Deborah. *Appalachian Mountain Religion: A History*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1995.

- McKinney, B.B., ed. *The Broadman Hymnal*. Nashville: Broadman, 1940.
- McNeill, Louise. *Hill Daughter: New & Selected Poems*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1991.
- Mitchell, Felicia, ed. *Her Words: Diverse Voices in Contemporary Appalachian Poetry*. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 2002.
- Miller, Jim Wayne. "Appalachian Literature." *Appalachian Journal* 5.1 (Autumn 1977): 82-91.
- . "Appalachian Literature at Home in This World." *An American Vein*. Eds. Sharon Hatfield, Danny L. Miller, and Gurney Norman. Athens: Ohio UP, 2005.
- . *Brier, His Book*. Frankfort: Gnomon P, 1987.
- . *Brier Traveling*. Louisville: White Fields P, 1993.
- . *Nostalgia for 70*. Big Timber: Seven Buffaloes P, 1986.
- . "A People Waking Up: Appalachian Literature Since 1960." *The Cratis Williams Symposium Proceedings: A Memorial and Examination of the State of Regional Studies in Appalachia*. Boone: Appalachian Consortium, 1989.
- . "Regions, Folk Life, and Literary Criticism." *Appalachian Journal* Spring (1980): 180-187.
- "Moldboard." *American Heritage College Dictionary*. 3rd ed. 1997.
- Morgan, Robert. *At the Edge of the Orchard County*. Middletown: Wesleyan P, 1987.
- . *Balm of Gilead Tree*. Frankfort: Gnomon P, 1989.
- . *Good Measure*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State U, 1993.
- . *Green River: New and Selected Poems*. Hanover: UP of New England, 1991.
- . *Groundwork*. Frankfort: Gnomon P, 1979.

---. *Land Diving*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1976.

---. *Red Owl*. New York: Norton, 1972.

---. *Sigodlin*. Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 1990.

---. *Strange Attractor*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2004.

---. *Topsoil Road*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2000.

Morgan, Robert. Personal Communication. 31 October 2008.

Morgan, Robert. "Robert Morgan." n.d. Web. 10 May 2000.

<<http://www.robert-morgan.com/about>>.

North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. "Agriculture Statistics."

n.d. Web. 8 March 2009. <<http://www.ncagr.gov/>>.

Packard, William. *The Poet's Dictionary*. New York: Harper, 1989.

Paris, Mike. "The Dixons of South Carolina." *Old Time Music* 10 (Autumn 1973), London,

GB, p. 13. Web. 10 May 2009. <<http://www.folkarchives.de/history>>.

Peeler, Tim. "Resting in the Gift of Their Labors: The Poetry of Ron Rash." *Iron Mountain*

Review 20 (Spring 2004): 3-7.

Periscope. "Poets Laureate: Bennie Lee Sinclair." n.d. Web. 15 June 2009.

<<http://www.knowitall.org/periscope/>>.

Pierce, Daniel S. "Great Smoky Mountains National Park." *Encyclopedia of Appalachia*.

Eds. Rudy Abramson and Jean Haskell. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 2006.

Pillai, S.K. *A First Course on Electrical Drives*. India: Wiley, 1982.

Prestridge, Sam. "Kathryn Stripling Byer." *The New Georgia Encyclopedia Companion to*

Georgia Literature. Eds. Hugh Rupperburg and John Inscoc. Athens: U of Georgia P, 2007.

- Quillen, Rita Sims. *Looking for Native Ground: Contemporary Appalachian Poetry*. Boone: Appalachian Consortium P, 1989.
- Rash, Ron. *Among the Believers*. Oak Ridge: Iris P, 2000.
- . *Eureka Mill*. Spartanburg: Hub City Writers, 1998.
- . *Raising the Dead*. Oak Ridge: Iris P, 2002.
- Rash, Ron. Personal Communication. 27 October 2008.
- Rash, Ron. "Ron Rash." n.d. Web. 15 November 2008.
- <<http://www.southernledge.com/southernlife/southernwriters/ron-rash/biography>>.
- Richman, Ann. "Singing Our Hearts Away: The Poetry of Kathryn Stripling Byer." *Her Words: Diverse Voices in Contemporary Appalachian Women*. Ed. Felicia Mitchell. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 2000.
- Rohr, Karl. "Peaches." *Encyclopedia of Appalachia*. Eds. Rudy Abramson and Jean Haskell. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 2006.
- Sellers, Bettie. *Liza's Monday and Other Poems*. Boone: Appalachian Consortium P, 1986.
- Simon, Bryant. *A Fabric of Defeat: the Politics of South Carolina Millhands, 1910-1948*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1998.
- Sinclair, Bennie Lee. "Appalachian Loaves and Fishes." *Bloodroot: Reflections on Space by Appalachian Women Writers*. Ed. Joyce Dyer. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1998.
- Sinclair, Bennie Lee. *Arrowhead Scholar*. Cleveland: Wilderness P, 1978.
- . *Endangered: New and Selected Poems*. Greenville: Ninety-Six P, 1992.
- . *Little Chicago Suite*. Cleveland: Wildernesse P, 1971.
- . *Lord of Springs*. Blacksburg: Rowan Mountain P, 1990.

- Sinclair, Bennie Lee. "Inheriting Appalachia." *One Hundred Years of Appalachian Visions*. Ed. Bill Best. Berea: Imprints, 1997.
- "Singletrace." *American Heritage College Dictionary*. 3rd ed. 1997.
- Smith, Barbara Ellen, ed. *Neither Separate nor Equal: Women, Race, and Class*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1999.
- Smith, Newton. "Ron Rash." *Encyclopedia of Appalachia*. Eds. Rudy Abramson and Jean Haskell. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 2006.
- Smith, R.T. "The Appellations Yet Rising: A Birdseye View of Poetry from the Appalachians." *Poetry Daily Prose Feature*, 2004. Web. 8 August 2008. <<http://www.poems.com/essartsm.htm>>.
- Starnes, Richard D. "Agricultural Tourism." *Encyclopedia of Appalachia*. Eds. Rudy Abramson and Jean Haskell. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 2006.
- Stephenson, John. *Shiloh: A Mountain Community*. Lexington: U of Kentucky P, 1968.
- Still, James. *From the Mountain, from the Valley: New and Collected Poems*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 2001.
- . *Hounds on the Mountain*. New York: Viking, 1937.
- . *River of Earth: The Poem and Other Poems*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1991.
- . *The Wolfpen Poems*. Berea: Berea College P, 1986.
- Stuart, Jesse. *The World of Jesse Stuart: Selected Poems*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1975.
- Tedesco, Marie. "Textile Workers." *Encyclopedia of Appalachia*. Eds. Rudy Abramson and Jean Haskell. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 2006.
- The Grit. "History of The Grit." n.d. Web. 10 June 2009. <<http://www.grit.com/>>.
- "Traces." *American Heritage College Dictionary*. 3rd ed. 1997.

- Vendler, Helen. *Poems, Poets, Poetry*. Boston: Bedford, 1997.
- Waldrep, G.C. III. *Southern Workers and the Search for Community*. Chicago: U of Illinois P, 2000.
- Walker, Melissa. "Part-Time Farming." *Encyclopedia of Appalachia*. Eds. Rudy Abramson and Jean Haskell. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 2006.
- West, Don. *In a Land of Plenty: A Don West Reader*. Albuquerque: West End, 1982.
- West, Robert. "'That Has a Ring to It': Song in the Poetry of Kathryn Stripling Byer." *Iron Mountain Review* 18 (Spring 2000): 16-23.
- Whisnant, David. "Folklore and Social Protest." *Encyclopedia of Appalachia*. Eds. Rudy Abramson and Jean Haskell. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 2006.
- Williams, Cratis D. *The Southern Mountaineer in Fact and Fiction*. Diss. New York: New York U, 1961.
- Williams, Mary. "Inside-Outside in Robert Morgan's Poetry." *The Poetics of Appalachian Space*. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1991.
- Williams, John Alexander. *Appalachia: A History*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2002.

Vita

Connie Jones Aiken was born in Hendersonville, North Carolina, on October 10, 1953. She attended elementary and secondary school in East Flat Rock, North Carolina, and graduated from East Henderson High School in 1971. She attended Mitchell Junior College in Statesville, North Carolina, for a short time in 1971 and returned to pursue her education at Blue Ridge Community College in 1999. Ms. Aiken transferred to the University of North Carolina at Asheville in 2000 and received her Bachelor of Arts in Literature and Language from UNC-A in 2002. In the fall of 2002 she enrolled at Appalachian State University and began study toward a Master of Arts in Appalachian Studies. The M.A. was awarded December 2009.

Ms. Aiken currently lives in Zirconia, North Carolina, is the wife of the late Jeffrey J. Aiken, the mother of three children, and grandmother of two. Her mother is Ora Vivian Hill of East Flat Rock, North Carolina, and her father was the late Julius C. Jones of Fruitland, North Carolina. Ms. Aiken's family has lived in the mountains of Western North Carolina since the late 1700's.