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Abstract
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Negative stereotypes about the Appalachian region and the Great Plains region abound, and while some truth may be garnished from these one-dimensional depictions, larger questions of culture, characteristics, and identity remain unanswered. One method of flushing out the realities of the Appalachian region and Great Plains region involves using literature as a window into the lifestyles and values of the areas' residents. Comparing the literature of Appalachia with that of the Great Plains reveals that both groups value independence, self-sufficiency, family, stories, songs, religion, the land, and work.

These characteristics appear in several Appalachian and Great Plains novels, such as Robert Morgan's *Gap Creek*, Wright Morris's *Plains Song for Female Voices*, Denise Giardina's *Storming Heaven*, Elmer Kelton's *The Day the Cowboys Quit*, Fred Chappell's *Farewell, I'm Bound to Leave You*, and Robert Day's *The Last Cattle Drive*. Evaluating the similarities between the regional characteristics present in the novels helps to establish the contributions of the two regions to American identity, thereby contextualizing the importance of Appalachian and Great Plains literature.

PECULIAR PEOPLE AND PLAIN FOLK:

COMPARING THE LITERATURES OF APPALACHIA AND THE GREAT PLAINS

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INTRODUCTION

People have pushed themselves to explore new frontiers throughout American history. Early settlers surveyed the backwoods of the Carolinas, Kentucky, and Tennessee. Later travelers crossed the Appalachian Mountains and moved into Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma. Pioneers propelled the expansion further west by searching for gold and land. They crossed the Rocky Mountains and reached Utah, Oregon, and California. Few people would argue that the idea of the frontier "has helped shape some distinctive aspects of American literature" ("Frontier"). Nonetheless, many people now view the Appalachian region and the Great Plains region, both once exciting frontiers, as places of economic depression and cultural emptiness.

Negative stereotypes of Appalachia abound. Many individuals imagine an unkempt, poverty-stricken, poorly educated, barefoot man dressed in overalls and a ragged felt hat when they think about Appalachia. Oftentimes, the imagined Appalachian person may be shouldering a shotgun, drinking moonshine, and surrounded by hounds. Caricatures of these individuals are found in comics such as *Snuffy Smith* or television shows such as *The Beverly Hillbillies*.

Similarly, perceptions of the Great Plains fall victim to stereotypes. When people think about the region's residents, they often recall the gun-slinging, horse-riding, Indian-fighting, cattle-herding, hard-drinking, gallant cowboy. Images of hard faced, gaunt, and work-worn farm families also define many people's perceptions of the area. Some people even call the area of the Great Plains a "flyover" region because they assume nothing there is worth stopping to see.

Both Appalachia and the Great Plains are steeped in myth and stereotype. Appalachian scholars, such as Jim Wayne Miller, Henry Shapiro, Loyal Jones, and Ron Eller, work to produce positive perceptions of Appalachia or emphasize the value of lifestyles that appear foreign to many. Walter Prescott Webb, Diane D. Quantic, Michael Johnson, and P. Jane Hafen toil to highlight and define the significant lifestyles of Great Plains residents. While these scholars provide valuable insight with their texts, they mainly concentrate on their respective regions. However, despite the differences in the two regions, these areas share many cultural commonalities. Establishing the cultural similarities of Appalachia and the Great Plains through literature provides an avenue for identifying and contextualizing the literature and the influence of the regions in the scope of the larger America.

Understanding the nature of culture proves foundational in any attempt to discuss cultural similarities, regional literature, and its influence. The term "culture" holds many denotations and connotations. For the purposes of this discussion, "culture can be loosely summarized as the complex of values, customs, beliefs, and practices which constitute the way of life of a specific group" (Eagleton 34). Focusing on the literature of Appalachia and the Great Plains provides windows into the cultures of these areas.

Regional literature has historically held a tenuous place in the spectrum of fictional works. Some individuals viewed this mode of writing as an "unfortunate" pastime of women who concentrated on their own small, local facilities (Inness and Royer 1). In contemporary studies, Herring proposes that people often equate regionalism with rural living; therefore, "regionalism – as a genre – becomes a discarded literary mode, the case study of an isolate, . . . Conflated with a quaint local color,

'regionalism' thus figures as an antiquated and effeminized (dainty, minute, skimpy) literary form" (Herring 3). These discouraging remarks reflect a notion that regional literature is poorly written.

In large part, early regional literature employed stereotypes or ideal pictures of the places the authors wrote about. Katie Algeo's work with locals on local color finds that

> During the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, local-color writers and academics held a similar view of Appalachia. Not only did certain words and phrases recur in descriptions of the region, but the writers shared a common understanding of what made Appalachia different. . . . The dogged persistence of Appalachian stereotypes grew out of repetition of imagery by popular and academic sources, with the academic voice lending authority to imaginative fictional renderings of place. (53)

Cratis D. Williams explored later negative characterizations in his seminal work *The Southern Mountaineer in Fact and Fiction* (Olson "Literature" 166). One specific example of a twentieth-century one-dimensional rendering of Appalachian residents is Jack Weller's *Yesterday's People*. Weller's 1965 publication calls mountaineers angry men who live "dull" lives (125, 123).

Works from the plains suffered a similar fate. The people of the Great Plains were once said to live in "The Great American Desert." Stereotypes equate the region's "open spaces with empty lives" (Quantic and Hafen xx). Kansas writer Denise Low laments that people discriminate against the Midwest because they believe Midwestern values are not worth investigating (69). Even the cowboy fiction that springs from the unique landscape of the plains suffers from a kind of second-class literary citizenship.

Western texts, first made popular by the adventures of famous cowboys in dime novels, have been sold as mere popular fiction well into the present. Authors incorrectly portray cowboys and rodeo riders as exaggerated caricatures of glamour in several works of popular fiction and movie depictions. Despite these poorly written and discouraging characterizations, regional literature has continued to flourish.

One reason for the genre's continued vitality involves the truth that "people really do like to read about themselves" (Low 69). This fact may seem trivial, but it carries great implications. Inness and Royer argue that the genre can provide intimate knowledge of an environment, encourage "investment in community," and answer questions about identity (7). In essence, "if self-knowledge is the goal of humanistic learning, literature should reflect some understanding of the self not only in the abstract but also on native or familiar ground" (Higgs, Manning, and Miller xi). These larger questions underscore the importance of regional literature; however, at its core, all literature reflects a region.

Truthful authors writing about specific places allow the entire landscape, mindset, and culture of the region to permeate their works. Such infiltration becomes evident in Fred Chappell's response to a question about regional writing. He replies, "All writing is regional. It takes place somewhere. . . . What was it that Archimedes said? 'Give me a lever, a place to stand, and I will move the earth.' Well, writing is my lever, the South is where I stand, and I will move the earth" ("Author Interview"). Denise Low articulates a similar outlook in her statements about regional writings. She concedes,

> New York City is a wonderful place, but it is a region. Many publishers happen to live in that region, and they want to read about their own region.

> I have a friend, a professional writer, . . . who wrote a novel set in Omaha. Literally, her agent read the first draft and said, "My dear, you must make this more upscale and move it to New York." That's where the agent's population center is, where her sense of the market is. (69-70)

All literature functions as a window into a place where people want to discover themselves and others. As C. S. Lewis argues, "Each of us by nature sees the whole world from one point of view with a perspective and selectiveness peculiar to himself. . . . We want to see with other eyes, to imagine with other imaginations, to feel with other hearts, as well as our own. . . . We demand windows." Although the windows of regional literature, specifically pieces dealing with Appalachia and the Great Plains, may be hidden in the farthest reaches of the literary canon, these windows provide valuable and breathtaking views.

Broadening the focus of regional literature to include questions of environment, community, and identity heightens the importance of the genre, but honestly examining culture using regional texts requires a workable, honest criteria. A truthful study of culture through fiction requires that culturally conscious fiction, a text that "consciously seeks to depict" life experiences, be studied (Sims 49). Rudine Sims explains that good regional literature tells the story from the perspective of the residents in the region, the narrative is set in the area, and the characters can be indentified as belonging to the region through "physical descriptions, language, cultural traditions, and so forth" (49). These criteria serve as a guideline for each work of Appalachian and Great Plains fiction analyzed in this thesis.

Choosing to focus on regional literature necessitates defining regions. While the Appalachian Mountains cover thirteen states, most scholars and literary authors focus their works in the central and southern states of Appalachia: Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, Kentucky, West Virginia and parts of Ohio. This thesis will limit its investigation to these areas by eliminating the northern states of Appalachia, New York, Pennsylvania, and Maryland, because industry played a greater role in the development of these areas. Therefore, their culture and lifestyle do not relate as closely to the targeted Appalachian states.

Similarly, the region of the Great Plains consists of Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota, eastern Montana, eastern Wyoming, eastern Colorado, eastern New Mexico, northwestern Texas, and western Oklahoma in the United States. The Great Plains also extends into the Canadian provinces of southwestern Manitoba, southern Saskatchewan, and southeastern Alberta. The settlement of Canada and the country's founding philosophy differ significantly from the American because Canadians remained under British rule. Consequently, this thesis focuses on the ten American states of the Great Plains and their relationship with the rest of the United States.

Although Native Americans lived as the first settlers in both Appalachia and the Great Plains, the following discussion of characteristics in these regions will not include the Native American culture. Native Americans made valuable contributions to both regions, yet the distinct lifestyles of numerous tribes, the forced migration of Native Americans, and their unique relationship with the American government place their experiences outside of the scope of this text.

Appalachian and Great Plains literatures comprise the focus of this work. Investigating the literature of these regions highlights specific characteristics of each place, yet both areas are part of a larger region. People often associate Appalachian literature with Southern literature and Great Plains literature with Western literature. Association with the South and West means that, respectively, Appalachia and the Great Plains may share some commonalities with these larger regions, but their literatures are largely distinct.

Contemporary Southern literature acknowledges conflict and often centers on tension. Belief in human imperfection, an awareness of God, and a propensity toward the tragic makes Southern literature distinct. Alienation from community and nature adds to the characteristics of Southern literature. Some aspects of Western literature that differentiate it from Great Plains literature include the fact that people settled the West many years prior to the Civil War, and the western land, with abundant natural resources and farmland, looked much more inviting to settlers. These differences led to some distinctive cultural characteristics.

In order to limit variables in the novels, each grouping revolves around a common theme. Additionally, I chose novels written between 1971 and 1999, during the postmodern era, in order to limit the outside influences experienced by the authors. Although no author will have the same experiences as another, choosing one specific time frame does ensure some degree of commonality between the ideas, actions, and activities they encountered. *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* applies the term "postmodern" to literature written from the 1960s to the present (Baldick). The definition

in Harmon and Holman's *A Handbook to Literature* closely coincides with the Oxford definition, placing the beginning of the postmodern period around 1965 (407-08).

Both of these sources characterize this period as a time of alienation, chaos, fragmentation, and unsatisfied nostalgia (Baldick; Harmon and Holman 407-08). While some Appalachian and Great Plains literature exhibits postmodern elements of alienation and chaos, few people would characterize these texts as overwhelmingly postmodern. In the following discussion of Appalachian and Great Plains literature, the term postmodern primarily serves to designate a common time frame. Additionally, while the use of Sims's criteria and the analysis of books within a distinct period work to keep conclusions unbiased, I should mention my Appalachian birthplace and later enrollment in a Midwestern university.

I aim to create cultural connections by highlighting similarities between Appalachian and Great Plains fictions and to broaden perceptions of regional literature by exploring how these regional literatures pertain to perceptions of the larger America. Chapter one establishes the characteristics and traits of both Appalachian and Great Plains residents through the work of scholars and primary texts. The chapter first defines the characteristics of exemplary regional literature as it pertains to each region. Using these criteria, the chapter provides foundational material for defining marked literary characteristics of both the Appalachian and the Great Plains regions through exploring the people's settlement choices, practices, attitudes, and beliefs.

Chapters two through four investigate novels about Appalachia and the Great Plains and draw a comparison between the two regions. Chapter two highlights novels examining the struggles regional residents encounter that are, in many ways, particular to

their locale. Specifically, *Gap Creek*, an Appalachian novel by Robert Morgan, and *Plains Song for Female Voices*, a Great Plains novel by Wright Morris, examine these hardships from the female point of view. Chapter three focuses on the beliefs and attitudes of the residents in the regions concerning individualism and large businesses. Denise Giardina's *Storming Heaven* recounts the strike of the Appalachian coal miners at Blair Mountain against their bosses. Elmer Kelton's *The Day the Cowboys Quit* examines a similar conflict between striking cowboys and large ranchers. Chapter four centers on losing distinct ways of life using the texts Fred Chappell's *Farewell, I'm Bound to Leave You* and Robert Day's *The Last Cattle Drive*.

The final chapter synthesizes the various works and places them in the larger context of the American nation. Many people consider these novels of lesser value because they are considered regional works dealing with a specific place and people. This chapter will broaden such perspectives by discussing the influences of both regions on each other and the nation.

CHAPTER 1

EXPLORING THE REGION: CHARACTERISTICS OF APPALACHIA AND THE GREAT PLAINS

While stereotypes may contain some grains of truth, they more often present one-dimensional representations of the regions they discuss. Examining realistic portrayals of regional literature helps debunk stereotypes. Rudine Sims provides a basis for evaluating the truthfulness of regional depictions in literature. She explains that quality regional literature tells the story from the perspective of the region's residents, the narrative is set in the region, and the characters can be indentified as belonging to the region by means of "physical descriptions, language, cultural traditions, and so forth" (Sims 49). Others have expanded her definition, maintaining that regional literature should "(1) deal with the land as it impinges on humans, (2) deal in-depth with individuals involved in universal conflicts or learning some universal truth, (3) reject stereotyping, and (4) provide a heightened sense of place" (Glasgow 64-65). Taking a cursory look at the cultural traditions, the conflicts, and the sense of place in both Appalachia and the Great Plains provides the basis for evaluating the regional worth of the literature examined in chapters two through four.

In his autobiography, Herbert Quick writes of pioneers, "They turned their faces to the west which for generations they had seen at sunset through traceries of the twigs and leafage of the primal forests. . . ." (18). Without question, Americans and immigrants have traveled west for much of the country's history. They traversed the country in search of land, wealth, and opportunity. When these pioneers and adventurers reached the Great Plains, they encountered a distinctly different landscape. The new

environment led to some new traditions and customs, yet these cultural characteristics, formed on the flat, largely treeless landscape of the plains, mirror many of the same cultural characteristics practiced by the mountain people of Appalachia. The distinctive way of life present in both Appalachia and the Great Plains stems from the influences of both the environments and the values of the people.

The rugged mountainous landscape of Appalachia stands in direct contrast to the largely flat grasslands of the Great Plains. The mountainous terrain of Appalachia quickly became a defining feature because travelers and settlers constantly wrestled with the environment. In one of the first catalogs of the region, Horace Kephart credits the hilly landscape with influencing the residents' economy. He reports that flat land was limited, forcing many newcomers "back along the creek branches and up along the steep hillsides to 'scrabble' for a living" (Kephart 444). According to Kephart, the mountains also facilitated the isolation and fatalism of Appalachian people. In many ways, Kephart's portrayal of the region stems from idyllic notions about the region. He falsely depicts the area residents as "homogenous so far as speech and manners and experiences and ideals can make them" (Kephart 428). Present day scholars, such as Phillip Obermiller and Micheal Maloney, emphasize the diversity of the people and the numerous dimensions of their culture. Nonetheless, native Appalachians continue to consider the land influential in their lives.

West Virginian Bill Richardson describes the landscape of Central Appalachia as a "formidable, almost impassible area" while he considers Southern Appalachia a place of gentle, rolling hills (6). Some Appalachian mountains may be steep. Others may roll gently into valleys. Whatever their geography, Richardson explains,

> The geography of Appalachia has impacted nearly every aspect of life there. The early isolation caused by the mountains led to the development of distinctive cultures and types of speech. The terrain influenced settlement patterns and heredity. The land provided the means for survival – farmland, game, and later trees and minerals that would become the basis for the area's economy. So throughout history, the mountains of Appalachia have shaped the lives of the people who live there – and such is still the case today. (7)

Clearly, the obstacles and opportunities presented by the physical composition of the mountains make them a significant feature of Appalachian culture.

Just as encounters with Appalachia often revolve around the landscape, experiences in the Great Plains also center on the topography of the land. Here, too, newcomers battle environmental elements. Walter Prescott Webb, in his seminal work, *The Great Plains*, characterizes the region as flat, treeless, and dry (3). Webb claims that because of the environment, settlers had to devise new methods of living (9). In fact, Webb maintains,

> If the Great Plains forced man to make radical changes, sweeping innovations in his ways of living, the cause lies almost wholly on the physical aspects of the land. A study of these physical aspects – land formation, rainfall, vegetation, and animal life – not only illuminates the later historical development, but in a large measure serves to explain it. (10)

The physical aspects of the environment that Webb mention range from extreme hot and cold temperatures to "sudden torrential rains [that] can break a drought and hailstones [that] can pulverize a wheat field in minutes" (Quantic and Hafen xx). Quantic and Hafen also affirm that blizzards and tornadoes can strike swiftly with little warning on the plains (xx).

Jon Ise's lightly fictionalized work *Sod and Stubble* about his parents' settlement in western Kansas confirms these extremes. In August of 1893, heat scorched the family's corn crop (Ise 258). While such occurrences may seem to be only a small economic hardship, Quantic points out that "Farmers can raise only those crops that weather and soil will tolerate" (xvii). In February of 1895, the Ise family experienced a raging blizzard and devastating dust storm (Ise 259-60). Ise captures the unexpectedness and seriousness of the event by mentioning that the children left for school with no cold weather gear. Soon after the children's departure, "the clear sky began to turn a murky brown, out of which the sun shone dimly like a full moon through a yellow fog" (Ise 260). Ise continues: "The wind shifted quickly to the north, and in a few minutes a hurricane was roaring through the cottonwood grove, carrying dense clouds of dust and dirty, dry snow that hid the barn and granary and other outbuildings completely from view" (260). Such weather made it too dangerous to light lamps and the animals had to be cared for quickly.

Ise's narrative serves as a single example of Great Plains weather and environment, but previous blizzards, such as the one in 1886, virtually altered the entire economy of the Plains. During this time, ranchers lost millions of dollars because so many cattle succumbed to death in winter storms or were sold off prematurely for want of

hay (Frazier 61, 64). The Dust Bowl of the 1930s also led to lean times. As recently as September, 2011, prolonged drought over the Great Plains created economic hardship for many ranchers. A *USA Today* article reports, "Texans have lost $5.2 billion in crops and livestock to the drought, surpassing the previous record of $4.1 billion in 2006" (Jervis). Ranchers must decide whether to invest a substantial amount of money into hay or sell cattle early to minimize losses (Jervis). Whether experiencing drought, blizzards, tornadoes, or high winds, Great Plains residents share a relationship with the land that influences their very culture.

The substantial effect of the environment on the cultures of Appalachia and the Great Plains quickly becomes apparent in "Kentucky Is My Land," a poem by Appalachian author Jesse Stuart. The Kentucky author visits other parts of the country and surveys Eastern "smokestacks of industry" and "cities that were a pillar of fire by night" (lines 4, 6). He tours the North, "where industry / is balanced with agriculture," but past these fields, "smokestacks of industry [are] / belching fire and smoke toward the sky" (1-2, 6-7). Only in the mountains of Appalachia and on the plains of the prairie does Stuart recognize the role of the land. As he speaks of his Appalachian home, he remembers the soil, the seasons, the trees, the crops, and the livestock. Stuart characterizes the West as a place with an ever-extending "field of growing wheat," "clouds always in the distance," and a blowing western wind (5, 6, 11). While Stuart's descriptions of the East and North center on machinery and manufactured goods, landscape characteristics serve as key descriptors of both Appalachia and the Great Plains. Both of these descriptions highlight the magnitude the land plays in people's

perception of the regions even though the actual landscapes of the two regions drastically differ.

Stuart's poem "Kentucky Is My Home" also alludes to some values of Appalachia, such as family, independence, self-reliance, story, and song. These values of family, independence, self-reliance, story, and song contribute to Appalachian culture, but they play a part in the culture of the Great Plains as well. When settlers first came to Appalachia, they met a wild, virgin country largely unexplored by white men. Early residents learned to live from the land, dressing in the serviceable "vestments domestic industry provided – deer-skin moccasins and products of the wheels and looms of their wives and daughters" (Howe 15). Food had to be hunted, gathered, and grown. Few items were imported from the coast, and rugged terrain made travel difficult. Consequently, Appalachians "had to be self-reliant or else they perished. Thus individualism and self-reliance became traits to be admired on the frontier" (Jones 126). Frontier ingenuity truly enabled survival, but it also magnified isolation.

While Kephart may overstate or oversimplify the cause of Appalachian isolation, isolation did exist in the early Appalachian settlements. Robert Santelli considers isolation a major aspect of Appalachian culture. He asserts, "In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Appalachia's mountainous terrain caused deeply rural settlements to sit isolated from other small communities and, certainly, the rest of America" (Santelli xxi). Simpkins extends Santelli's reasoning past the region's landscape to allow for personal settlement choices as well. Simpkins explains that early Scots-Irish settlers to the region mirrored their homeland practice of living where they farmed. This choice created families who were alienated from other people. At the same time, these family

units had to be proficient at a number of tasks: farming, cooking, building, shepherding, sewing, manufacturing, etc. (Simpkins 38). Isolation, in turn, fostered many aspects of the Appalachian belief in independence.

The Appalachian region of the twenty-first century contains many modern conveniences that create a connectedness the area may not have enjoyed in the past. Many residents have satellite television, internet connections, and access to major highways. In fact, native Appalachian and North Carolinian Fred Chappell acknowledges that highways and "tornadoes of development" have drastically changed the situation in Appalachia ("Hail Farewell" 82). These changes have improved the economic situation; however, "the belief in independence and self-reliance is still there, whether or not the mountaineer is truly independent and self-reliant" (Jones 126). Jones credits the lifestyle of some mountaineers to this persistent belief in self-sufficiency:

> That is why so many mountaineers are tragic figures now, bypassed by the economy, often wards of the welfare system, but still believing in independence. We value solidarity, whether or not we can always find a place to be alone. We want to do things for ourselves, whether or not it is practical. . . . . There is a satisfaction in that, in this age when most people hire other people to do most of their work and a great deal of their living. (126)

The Appalachian belief in individualism and self-reliance fails to diminish. The outcome of such an attitude may not be as practical or as glamorous as it once was; nonetheless, it remains.

The traits of independence and self-reliance are not confined to the Appalachian hills. Those who journeyed to the Great Plains brought a healthy dose of the same independent spirit with. Much like Appalachians, the residents of the Great Plains came to value independence and self-sufficiency out of necessity. Johnson contends that Americans, in general, consider "freedom and independence" their special and "peculiar hallmark" (114). At the same time, he provides a convincing example of westward-traveling women who practiced greater independence and self-sufficiency than their peers back east. Johnson vividly describes these women: "On the weary miles of trails, . . . they birthed and lugged children, packed and unpacked wagons, tended to the cooking, endured bad weather and broken axles, stared out across desiccated flats, ate their oxen, [and] climbed mountains barefoot" before arriving at their destination (114). Once their journey ended, however, these women and their families continued to practice self-sufficiency and independence.

Women and families worked hard to eke a living out of a land covered with tall, tangled grasses and thick sod. They were responsible for feeding their livestock, feeding their families, clothing their families, and maintaining an income through farming, ranching, or other employment. These activities may not completely overshadow those practiced by most of the United States population in the early settlement years of the Great Plains, but the isolation of the region demanded greater self-reliance and independence.

The first settlers of the plains found that "they were separated from their neighbors by distances that often made it difficult to sustain the close-knit clusters of farm homes like those in Europe or the networks of small fames and villages in the states

along the eastern seaboard" (Quantic and Hafen xix). For Great Plains residents of the twenty-first century, "communication by phone, fax, and e-mail provides links to the rest of the world, and satellite television brings the world to their living rooms – but physical distance still isolates the farms and small towns" (Quantic and Hafen xxi). Even in 2001, "over a third of Great Plains counties had fewer than six people per square mile, and in half of those there are fewer than two people per square mile" (Quantic and Hafen 703). Even with the advent of technology, isolation continues to play a role in the lifestyles of Great Plains residents.

Conservationist John Madison writes of "fierce and free" grassland residents who "had no choice but to breast the fuller world – and often came to do so with pride and even arrogance" (51). He notes that the Plains people gained their fierce independence from need, yet they continue to display this quality as they tackle new endeavors.

The concept of family relates closely to ideas about independence, self-sufficiency, and isolation. In both Appalachian and the Great Plains environments, relying on family constitutes an important method of physical and emotional survival when people are far away from other sources of community. In Appalachia, "people are family centered. . . . Loyalty runs deep between family members, and a sense of responsibility for one another may extend to cousins, nephews, nieces, uncles, and aunts, and to in-laws" (Jones 126). A teacher collaborates with Jones's assertion when she explains her reasoning for remaining in the state of West Virginia:

> I stay in West Virginia because I choose to. I like West Virginia; I like being near my family. That is very important to me. I have a friend that lives in Florida and is all-the-time saying "Come down, move down here

> with me. I have a job for you in the room next door. You can make twice your salary." But I told her it was too far away from my mom. That's very important to me. I want my daughters to grow up around their grandparents. I don't want to be 18 hours away, where they get to see their grandparents only twice a year. Family is very important to me. (qtd. in DeYoung 170)

Even with the promise of warm weather, a place to stay, and an increased salary, this teacher values the connections her daughters and she share with their family.

Some people may consider the woman foolish for passing up such an opportunity, but valuing and respecting one's family is interwoven into the fabric of Appalachia. The family, both its positive and negative traits, "provides the framework, sure or shaky, upon which community is built" (Higgs, Manning, Miller 349). Further, the above narrative recognizes three generations, emphasizing one's "sense of family and community is the succession of generations thus provid[ing] strong link in the continuity of Appalachian life, uniting the living and the dead" (Higgs, Manning, Miller 349). In Appalachia, family relationships form the basis for community because families influence many people's choices to remain settled, move, or make other life decisions.

The family also played a significant, though slightly different, role in the Great Plains. Jon Gjerde argues, "The family was critically significant for many reasons, not least because its members were the principal source of workers on independent farms in the Middle West" (20). Additionally, the idea that pioneering families left all of their family back East remains exaggerated (West 95). In fact, "on the farming and stockraising frontiers, families often tried to transplant or quickly reweave those webs of

relations so important to rural life" (West 95). Nonetheless, some family members were left back East, as countless letters from pioneering women attest. Other family members returned East or continued West.

More recently, hardship has led to the separation of families. In an article about dying communities on the plains, Brian Hansen explains that "plummeting birth rates have accompanied the exodus of young people, leaving behind communities filled with elderly residents" and separating families (421). Family holds an important place in the lives of Great Plains residents, but individuals more often move and separate from their families more than their Appalachian counterparts do.

Whether individuals are in Appalachia or the Great Plains, many commemorate their familial heritage, their accomplishments, and their work by engaging in story and song. In the Appalachian region, where "storytelling maintains a presence far beyond that in other parts of the country," oral narratives serve to solidify people's roles within a family, culture, and society (Byers 38). Carl Lindahl writes, "Through recounting the heroic and humorous acts of relatives, family raconteurs articulate their personal and their family's history, values, and sense of place" (889). Great Plains individuals also engage in storytelling, and these narratives function to "help shape family, local, and regional histories" (Hathaway 308). These tales "capture the sense of newness and inspiration" the plains fuel while also forming "a critical part of our understanding of Great Plains history and heritage" (Hathaway 308). In both regions, recounting stories remains an integral piece of maintaining identity, heritage, and understanding.

Another means of celebrating the past and present involves music. People often associate music with Appalachia with good reason. In his work, *Appalachian Folkways*,

John Rehder states, "From the time of the first effective settlement, Appalachian folk entertained themselves with music: a long tradition of oral history in ballads and other folk songs was widespread and common to much of the region" (244). The advent of Appalachian music expanded with the introduction of radio and the famous Bristol sessions where artists such as the Carters recorded (Olson "Music"). Even though radio producers sometimes encouraged the style of the song to change, the songs' content continued to reflect the lifestyle of Appalachian people. Whether they live in mountain hollows or travel to the mills of the piedmont, Appalachian natives continue to make music "a mainstay of country gatherings" (Hall, et al.).

Similarly, music plays a prominent role on the Great Plains. "The music and dance of the Great Plains run the gamut from classical to polka to popular, in addition to the music and dance of the Native peoples of this area" ("Music"). Although country music has roots in Appalachia, the music "in the hands of Great Plains musicians took on a very distinctive flavor that was often based around the lifestyle of Plains ranching" ("Music"). The cowboys who worked on the ranches and assisted in cattle drives wrote and sang songs about their lifestyle, their horses, the cattle, and the landscape (Cochran).

Even those who were not cowboys valued music. Limited space in wagons prevented many pioneers from bringing their instruments, but they soon found ways to acquire new instruments, although it meant parting with precious cash (Dyer 145). In his work *Sod and Stubble*, Ise highlights the prevalence of music as a way to socialize and rest from labor on the plains (91). The stories and music of Appalachia and the Great Plains allow people to gain glimpses into the values, lifestyles, and histories of the people who inhabit the regions.

Many of the stories and songs from these regions emphasize values of independence and self-reliance. While the residents' individualism stems partly from isolation, these people find community within their family structures, although each group relates to this institution differently. Further, family circumstances or regional histories often find voice through story and song in both Appalachia and the Great Plains. In addition to valuing independence, self-reliance, kinship, story, and song, these two regions also consider religion and connections to the land important aspects of the culture.

Many people consider America a religious nation or at least a country that has roots in religion. While this belief may be true, residents of Appalachia and the Great Plains typically allow religion to influence them more than individuals from other regions might permit. In Appalachia, religious culture carries significant weight. The editors of *Appalachia Inside Out* consider it the "single feature that distinguishes the literature of Southern Appalachia from that of other regions" (Higgs, Manning, and Miller 398). Jones explains that Appalachian religion is tightly interwoven with the fabric of life although individuals may not attend religious services (125). Rather, "they are religious in the sense that their values, mostly, and the meaning they see in lives spring from religious sources" (Jones 125). Many Appalachians base their lives on "belief in Original Sin, that man is fallible, that he will fail, does fail" (Jones 125). Jones continues by pointing out that man's failure can be rectified through salvation in Jesus Christ, yet salvation does not guarantee earthly rewards. Instead, Appalachian religion "became *fatalistic* and stressed rewards in another life" (Jones 125, emphasis original). Therefore, Appalachian people continue to work hard and endure in hopes of a brighter future.

Countless Great Plains residents also endure with the help of religion. "The Great Plains stands apart from the rest of the country in terms of religiosity. Outside of the intermountain West, Texas, and portions of the Upper Midwest, the Great Plains is the most 'churched' portion of the United States" ("Religion"). The trappers, traders, and adventures who first traversed the plains may not have been ardent church attendees, but the families that followed found peace in faith. Lilla Day Monroe, an early Kansas lawyer and suffragist, recalls that pioneers had little to be cheerful about because they left behind so much, yet "there seems to be only one source of their cheerfulness, of the sublime courage, of their indomitable determination to conquer and to surmount all difficulties – and that was their simple faith in God. . . . They took solace of [sic] religion" (qtd. in Swierenga 418, ellipsis original). The kind of religion Monroe describes assuredly influences residents' worldviews.

Not surprisingly, religion on the plains extends past the physical church building because many people view religion as a tie to their past, a means of social interaction, and a place of steadfastness in dwindling communities ("Religion"). Religion, therefore, holds implications beyond those of a spiritual nature for individuals and communities. "More than a set of symbols and practices expressing adoration for the divine, religion forms a large part of the basis for a sense of place" ("Religion"). Like the religious leanings of Appalachia, the religion of the Great Plains often tackles practical issues, such as identity and relationship building.

Religion is not the only shaper of identity and relationships, however. The landscape provides a common reference point for both regions, yet it also functions as a character in the lives of the regions' residents. Just as the landscape differs in Appalachia

from that of the Great Plains, the people's relationship with the land is also distinctive. The people of Appalachia value land for the sense of place and home it provides. They consistently struggle against a desire for maintaining the land's beauty and using the land to advance progress.

Jones asserts, "We mountaineers never forget our native place" (127). Appalachia infuses her people with a sense of place inherently connected to the land that influences their sense of identity. Evans, George Warren, and Santelli acknowledge that this connection began with the first pioneers of Appalachia when "what these settlers brought with them blended with what nature had provided, and what was created was a seamless bond between land and people" (5). Native Julia Bonds elaborates: "We are part of these mountains and they are part of us: We are one. We are connected to this ancient, reverent land . . . (183). Such an ingrained link to the land and the home place make the destruction of Appalachia even more dramatic for residents.

Unfortunately, the desire for beauty and preservation in Appalachia wars with the people's need for economic security. Higgs, Manning, and Miller write, "Appalachian people must weigh their love of natural beauty against the need to make a living. This dilemma cuts to the heart of the Appalachian crisis . . . " (183). Mountaintop removal, the practice of cutting off the tops of mountains to reach the underlying coal, provides one example of this conflict. This practice exposes more coal, so owners and workers gain additional profits. However, the surrounding landscape and the mountain itself pays a steep price. David Whisnant explains this tension by acknowledging that Appalachia "is an arena in which the dynamics of conflict are set at the deepest spiritual, physical, and cultural levels. Conflicts over technical details of development theory and practice

are at most secondary; they are the shadows on the walls of Plato's cave" (193). Tension between preserving land and heritage in the face of progress contrasts sharply with Great Plains residents' propensity for movement as they conquer an unwilling land.

Few constants exist on the plains. The weather fluctuates between extremes. People travel almost constantly. Recognizing the nomadic lifestyle of Plains Indians and the current propensity residents of the plains have for traveling, Quantic and Hafen consider movement the "one constant in the region" (xviii). This lifestyle can be seen through the research of Rita Parks who found that "among those who migrated into the West 'almost everyone pulled up roots at least once and moved still farther west' and the nineteenth-century Westerners were so restless that Easterners tended to regard them as Mavericks. . . (qtd. in Johnson 118). Even today, plains residents travel regularly, whether it is to the nearest larger town or out of the region altogether.

One reason for the great movement on the plains involves the people's desire to conquer the land. E. Cotton Mather considers the large cattle lots and the unprecedented farm mechanization on the plains indicative of the people's "cultural predilection for innovation and large scale operations" (254). Ian Frazier's work *Great Plains* catalogs some of the innovation and progress that takes place on the plains. He mentions rancher Charlie Scott, who invented his own computer program to determine which cows produce the best calves (Frazier 130). Another example involves Dodge City. First a railroad boomtown, then a prosperous town because of cattle drives, the city reinvented itself a third time to capitalize on the popular television show *Gunsmoke* (Frazier 130, 151). Although these examples provide a limited picture, the desire to tame the land continues to characterize the relationship between the people of the plains and their environment.

Both Appalachia and the Great Plains share a sense of place that depends on their relationship with the land. Other common cultural characteristics the two regions share include self-sufficiency and independence stemming from isolation. Families help balance the isolation and create community in these regions. Story and song provide sketches of culture, history, and lifestyles. In many instances, the culture, history, and lifestyles of Appalachia and the Great Plains are intertwined with religion and with connectedness to the land. All of these cultural characteristics undergird the myths and stereotypes that so often represent Appalachia or the Great Plains. Delving into these characteristics through literature provides a reliable means of investigating the commonalities of the two regions.

CHAPTER 2

LIVING IN THE REGION: MORGAN'S *GAP CREEK* AND MORRIS'S *PLAINS SONG FOR FEMALE VOICES*

One major component of life is the actual living of it. People go to school, pursue marriage, give birth to children, work, and die. Appalachian people and people of the Great Plains engage in these same activities, and this business of life reveals several cultural characteristics that the regions share. The novels *Gap Creek*, by Robert Morgan, and *Plains Song for Female Voices*, by Wright Morris, focus on the importance of family, individualism, land, religion, music, and work in the lives of Appalachian and Great Plains residents, respectively.

In both of these novels, the characters work to make a living in rural communities. Robert Morgan writes about Julie and Hank, a young couple beginning their married life in the last years of the nineteenth century. After a brief courtship, they marry and move from their native North Carolina mountains to a small South Carolina valley right over the state line. In this new environment, Hank and Julie struggle to survive the antics of their landlord, the scarcity of jobs, the uncertainty of nature, and their relationship with each other.

Wright Morris traces the lives of his characters from the early years of the twentieth century to the 1970s as they make their lives on the Great Plains. Morris begins with Cora, a homely young woman who marries Emerson Atkins and travels with him to the Nebraska prairie. He records the lives of the Atkins family as Emerson's brother Orion marries, the couples have children, and individuals develop an awareness of their environment, themselves, and others.

The family relationships depicted in both novels emphasize the importance of this social structure in the cultures of Appalachia and the Great Plains. In *Gap Creek*, Morgan highlights the necessity of family by showing its members working together to survive. Julie and her father carry the family's youngest child Masenier four miles from their mountain home to receive medical attention. When Julie's father dies, Julie and Rosie, Lou, and Carolyn, Julie's sisters, band together to complete the necessary domestic duties and farm chores. Once Julie and Hank marry, they move away from their families, yet Hank's mother, Ma Richards, comes to assist Julie in birthing and taking care of her first child. Any of these undertakings would have proven almost impossible alone, and the family structure provides the support necessary for completing the tasks.

Not only do these Appalachian family members finish jobs together, but they also genuinely care for one another. Julie's sister Lou accepts Garland's marriage proposal only on the condition that he take her to Greenville, South Carolina, on her honeymoon, so she can visit Julie on the way to the city. Julie's entire family sends her presents of baked goods and other needful items. Carolyn, Julie's youngest sister, accompanies Lou and Garland. She remains with Hank and Julie as Lou and Garland finish their honeymoon. Julie values this time because it provides an opportunity for the sisters to become closer. She muses,

> [Carolyn] was growing up, and it was time to treat her like she was growing up. Because I had usually worked outside at home, and because I had always thought she was spoiled, I'd never made friends with Carolyn the way I was friends with Lou and Rosie. It was time to become friends

> with her, if I was ever going to, while she was visiting us, and while she was still young. (Morgan 188)

Julie values friendship with her other sisters and desires a similar relationship with Carolyn. She chooses to cultivate the relationship despite their different interests, ages, and attitudes because Julie believes in the importance of such a relationship. After a successful, though sometimes stressful visit, Carolyn admits to Julie, "You have been good to me" (Morgan 201). Julie replies, "You are my little sister" and drapes her arm around Carolyn (Morgan 201). Julie does not question her responsibility to Carolyn. Julie needs no other reason for acting as she does toward Carolyn other than kinship.

Toward the end of the novel, Hank and Julie lose their home and possessions. Circumstances force them to move, taking only what they can carry. On the morning of their departure, Hank finds out that Julie is pregnant. Despite the hardship of starting over, they remain hopeful. Hank and Julie draw strength from togetherness and the promise of a larger family. Like Hank and Julie, many Appalachian families value family members for the assistance and the relationships they provide.

Wright Morris demonstrates the importance of family on the Great Plains in his novel *Plains Song for Female Voices*. In the beginning, family members help Cora find a husband. She receives advice from her father. Another relative allows her to stay at his inn, so she can meet a suitable companion among the travelers who visit. Brothers Emerson and Orion Atkins live together as they homestead and then live within walking distance once both men take wives. The brothers have vastly different attitudes and personalities, yet they continue to live close to each other their entire lives. Orion's wife dies, and Cora steps in to help care for the motherless children. Most of Cora's children

and nieces stay close to their initial homes. Some occasionally travel, but they eventually return. On the plains, family members offer aid through advice, work, and support.

The family also provides a path to identity. Fayrene, Orion's youngest daughter, marries Avery Dickel because she becomes pregnant with his child. Family members initially look at Avery skeptically because they consider him a wild simpleton from the Ozarks. Despite the family's initial complaints about Avery and the situation, Avery becomes an accepted member of the family. Morris writes, "Avery was no longer an Ozark hick and a Hillbilly Dickel; he was Fayrene's beau and that made him all right" (133). Avery gains a new, acceptable identity when he joins the Atkins family.

Sharon also finds identity through the way she relates to family. Cora, Sharon's aunt, holds a prominent place in Sharon's view of herself. Cora's refusal to care for herself disgusts Sharon, but Sharon finds that she has adopted Cora's method of withdrawing from sexual encounters and other relationships in order to cope with unpleasant situations. She acknowledges, "As much as or more than the child she had borne, Sharon had been Cora's girl" (Morris 216). This realization allows Sharon to embrace her past while also moving toward a liberated future.

The examples of Avery and Sharon offer brief examples of family's importance in shaping identity, but each family member also shares a relationship with the other members based on shared experiences and relationships. The entire Atkins family comes together for Cora's funeral although a number of years have passed since they last met. Even separated by distance and time for many years, the family members still share "a common, agreeable emotion" seated around the dining table (Morris 211). In spite of the passing of time, family remains a significant staple in the lives of these individuals.

In both Appalachian and Great Plains literature, the family structure provides aid, support, relationships, and identity, but individuals move within and outside of this structure to assert their own self-sufficiency and independence. The women of *Gap Creek* frequently display independence. When Julie's father becomes ill, she takes over his tasks. She fells trees and cuts the logs into firewood. She reasons, "The job fell to me, without anybody explaining why. And since it had to be done, I done it, and kept on" (Morgan 18). This same attitude spurs her to plant crops because someone must "take over and get out and do the work" (Morgan 32). Julie's self-sufficiency continues into her marriage.

When Hank's work at Lyman Mill prevents him from butchering the hog, Julie completes the task although the work is messy and unladylike. A flood destroys many of Hank and Julie's possessions and winter provisions, but Julie insists that they try to salvage the soaked, rotting corn. As Hank and Julie struggle through a bitterly cold winter with little to eat and no income, Julie maintains,

> I knowed that if I asked Elizabeth or Joanne or Preacher Gibbs or half a dozen other people they would help us out. But they had already helped us out, and besides, everybody had had a hard time that winter. It was up to us to look after ourselves. If we was going to be grown up married folks who was about to raise a family, we would have to learn to take care of ourselves. It would be a disgrace to depend on other people to bring us things to eat. (Morgan 264-65)

Julie's expectancy of self-sufficiency fails to waver when the situation worsens. Necessity promotes many of Julie's independent acts, but other characters display the same attitude even when they have no vital need for independence.

Mr. Pendergast, Hank and Julie's landlord, shares the house with the couple. Neighbors describe the old widower as fiercely independent. They admit, "He done anything he could do on his own. He never liked to go off on public works. In the last year or two he was too feeble to go out in the woods much. But he would buy ginseng from other diggers" (Morgan 114). Despite failing health, Mr. Pendergast likes to maintain the allusion of self-sufficiency by bossing Julie around. He is too stubborn to give his independence up fully. The self-sufficient and independent attitudes of Hank, Julie, and Mr. Pendergast enable them to survive difficult times and maintain pride in their accomplishments.

Like Morgan in *Gap Creek*, Morris also presents independent women in *Plains Song for Female Voices*. Cora serves as the epitome of independence. Cora's uncle refuses to press the issue of Cora's marriage because he believes "her to be of an independent cast of mind, a young woman who could act and think for herself" (Morris 9). Morris affirms the magnitude of Cora's independence with his words: "Cora was so long accustomed to doing things by herself she found it irksome if someone tried to help her" (71). By herself, Cora takes care of her chickens, her yard, and numerous children. She also passes her independent spirit to her daughter Madge and her niece Sharon.

Morris describes Madge as someone whose nature demands that she "get up and do it herself rather than ask somebody else to do it" (116). Madge certainly embodies this characteristic as she cares for her children. Morris continues by characterizing

Sharon as someone who has a habit of independence. Sharon refuses to accept a friend's offer of a trip because doing so would make her beholden. She asserts her independence by traveling away from her family and going to college. She secures economic independence by taking a job in Chicago. Sharon refuses to marry any man and joins the Women's Movement, gaining further independence. The women of *Plains Song for Female Voices* may emphasize their independence through different means, but each one values the trait.

The independence of the women in *Plains Song for Female Voices* manifests itself, in part, because of emotional necessity, whereas the independence of Morgan's characters largely originates from physical necessity. Despite this difference, the qualities of independence and self-sufficiency play a crucial role in the lives of individuals because these characteristics allow them to endure in harsh emotional and physical environments.

In spite of the unforgiving climates of Appalachia and the Great Plains, Morgan's and Morris's characters enjoy a connectedness to the land. Julie and Hank, in *Gap Creek*, suffer through a bone-chilling winter and a flood, yet they find comfort in their relationship with the land. Hank climbs to the top of a nearby mountain in search of a turkey after losing his job at Lyman Mill. His actions indicate a desire to provide for his family and to reassert his pride. He believes he can achieve both goals by conquering the mountain and the game residing there; therefore, Hank's relationship with the land plays a significant role in his perception of himself.

Meanwhile, Julie worriedly assesses her meager store, but she soon finds herself deep in the woods adjoining her property. The wooded environment calms her. She

says, “I had not been out in the woods since I got married and come down to South Carolina. It felt good to be in the open, and to smell the old leaves in ditches and in the branch” (Morgan 148). Inhaling the scent of the musty leaves, drinking in the depth of the sky above the trees, and watching the animals of the woods cause Julie to feel as if she can fly. The land provides freedom and comfort for Julie.

Julie again receives comfort from the images of land when she is deathly ill. Weak and hallucinating, Julie sees a doorway in her bedroom. Going through the door leads to “a wonderful world” full of lush grass, mellow breezes, and dancing sunlight (Morgan 292). While imagining herself in this beautiful place, Julie encounters a younger version of her father who has passed away. His words, coupled with the refreshing landscape, provide the encouragement Julie needs to overcome her sickness.

Julie provides further evidence of the connectedness many Appalachians share with the land through her metaphor equating pleasurable sex with the enjoyment of pleasing landscapes. She describes her sexual encounter thus:

> Hank touched me on the breast, and he touched me on the belly. He touched me between the legs. . . . When Hank climbed on top of me I cried out. It was like we was going for a long walk over the hills and under the pine trees. . . . We said things we had never said before. And we walked further and rushed up on cliffs we had never seen before. . . . I had never felt such love before. . . . I felt myself soar out over a sparkling river, and I felt myself finally settle down into the warm nest of the bed and Hank’s arms. (Morgan 320-21)

Julie's description of the intimacy Hank and she share provides a clear example of a definite relationship with the earth. In some instances, the land acts as something to conquer while other encounters with the terrain bring comfort and joy. Nevertheless, all of these meetings strengthen Hank and Julie's distinct relationship with the land.

Morgan's work emphasizes the bond many Appalachians share with their native soil. Morris's description of his characters' interactions with Great Plains land mirrors this same link. In *Plains Song for Female Voices*, Emerson is enamored of the land. Morris states, "The dark furrows [Emerson] had just plowed seemed to please both him and the birds" (22). Nothing pleases Emerson more than holding "a handful of the moist loam, letting it sift between his fingers" (Morris 22) In many ways, Emerson enjoys a closer relationship with the land than he does with his wife because he avoids the house and domestic duties.

Although Cora and Emerson do not share the task of plowing the fields, Cora also enjoys a distinct relationship to the land. When she travels to the World's Fair in Chicago, her attachment to the soil becomes clear. Cora refuses to enter a gas station restroom because of the filth. Morris explains, "There was a difference in farm dirt, dirty as it was, and city filth. The farm dirt was her own" (139-40). Emerson and Cora spend their entire lives managing the land and cultivating a relationship with nature. As they grow older, however, this way of life passes. The family allows Cora's farmstead to fall into decay and ruin because no one desires to maintain the property.

Even so, Sharon, who moves farthest from working the earth, continues to sustain a relationship with nature. Morris acknowledges,

> The heat drone of the insects, the stupor of the food, and the jostle of the car seemed to blur the distinction between herself and the swarming life around her [Sharon]. Voices, bird calls, a movement of the leaves, the first hint of coolness in the air were not separately observed sensations but comingled parts of her own nature. . . . What she admired in Cora, yet disliked in Emerson and Avery Dickel, was that they were less persons than pieces of nature, closely related to cows and chickens, and Sharon Rose, for all her awareness, blew on the wind with the dust and pollen that made her sneeze. (Morris 135)

Sharon's connection to nature remains intact even after Cora's death and Sharon's return to the city. While she is staying at a crowded city hotel, a rooster's crowing instantly floods Sharon with memories of "the hush of summer dawn, the faint stain of light between the sill and the blind at her window," and the noises of morning activity at Cora's farmhouse (Morris 227-28). Although Cora's lifestyle has passed from existence, Sharon marvels that it can be "restored to the glow of life in a cock's crow" (Morris 228). Despite not earning a living from the soil, Sharon enjoys a close connection to the land where she spent her childhood as evidenced through Morris's recognition of this bond and Sharon's own vivid reminisces. Clearly, Emerson, Cora, and Sharon find comfort and purpose through their relationship with the land, as do Julie and Hank.

These characters also find comfort and purpose through religious community and events. Morgan indicates that religion, and especially church, holds a significant place in the lives of his characters. Masenier, Julie's young brother, indicates his and the family's familiarity with religion by playing at building churches and graveyards in his sandbox.

Julie and Hank get to know each other better through a church singing. Many of the characters spend time in prayer. Julie prays by her father's deathbed. Hank blesses the meal. Hank prays for Julie and his mother when they experience tension in their relationship. Hank encourages a drunk Timmy Gosnell to vacate the property by threatening him with prayer.

Acknowledgment of sin and salvation also appears in Morgan's novel. Ma Richards asks the Lord to "forgive our sinfulness, for we are all black sinners inside" (Morgan 87). Mr. Pendergast worries that he has committed the unpardonable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. Hank compares himself and his family to sin eaters, people who take on the sins of a dead person by eating a supper on the corpse's body. Preacher Gibbs invites his flock to experience the Lord's offer of salvation from sin. Both Julie and Hank accept the Lord's salvation and find peace in the knowledge that the Lord joins them in their work, joys, triumphs, hardships, and heartaches. Hank even credits God with keeping him from finding a twenty-dollar gold piece until he desperately needs the money.

Besides prayer, sin, and salvation, religion offers Hank and Julie a form of community with the church members. Julie states, "After I joined the church I felt better about living on Gap Creek. We didn't have no money, and we didn't have a cow, and Hank didn't have a job. But there was a fellowship at Preacher Gibbs's church that made you feel connected. In the worst of times there is, you can get through with the support of other people" (Morgan 250). Once Hank joins the church, he feels the same sense of community. The Gap Creek church congregation provides Hank and Julie with needed companionship, supplies, and encouragement.

Religion also provides a community environment for Morris's characters as they reside on the plains of Nebraska. Attending church offers Cora an opportunity to meet other people. She uses church services to compare her child's physical and mental growth to the other children's growth. The gathering provides her with vital human contact and information from outside of her close-knit family.

Religious principles often direct the lives of Morris's characters. Cora believes God sanctioned the union between herself and Emerson, so she remains with him throughout her life. The family consistently prays over each meal. The only days that Cora allows herself pauses from household duties are Sundays. Cora measures the success of her life by its adherence to a biblical passage found in Ecclesiastes 3.1-8 stating,

> To every *thing* there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:
>
> A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up *that which is planted*;
>
> A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;
>
> A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
>
> A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
>
> A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
>
> A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of

peace. (*The Bible: Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha: Oxford World's Classics*)

Based on this scripture, Cora reckons "that the rightness of their lives was His rightness" (Morris 69). She reasons that "chickens, people, and eggs [have] their appointed places, chores their appointed time, changes their appointed seasons, the night its appointed sleep," and such a life enjoys God's blessings (Morris 69).

As the matriarch of her family and as someone from an older generation, Cora's religious leanings may be expected; however, religion appears in Sharon's life as well. Amidst the anti-war demonstrations, racial integration, and sexual liberation of the 1970s, Sharon cannot escape the religious underpinnings of her childhood. She alludes to biblical ideas with her words "blood of my blood, flesh of my flesh" (Morris 210). Additionally, Sharon finds herself comforted when her friend Alexandra paraphrases the catechism. Despite Alexandra's attempt to use the recitation as a way of emphasizing male dominance, Sharon finds peace. A man and woman ask Sharon what they must do to be saved. Sharon provides them with no answer, but recounting the story to Alexandria brings "a smile of recognition to Sharon's lips" (Morris 227). While Sharon may not live her life by the strict religious dictates of Cora, wisps of religious thought and ideology remain in her life. Religion and the community religion provides acts as a foundational pillar in the lives of Atkins family members through subsequent generations.

Religion supplies life guidelines and community, but it also grants Morgan's and Morris's characters opportunities to sing. Music permeates the lives of the characters. In Morgan's *Gap Creek*, singing brings people together. Julie considers it a special time when her father plays his banjo accompanied by the voices of the entire family. Hank

and Julie use their common interest in music to get to know each another. They discuss the banjo, how the instrument is made, and Julie's singing voice. Both Hank and Julie cherish joining the songs at church. Julie says, "All together the voices seemed to raise the air. They made the church-house feel like it was lifting off the ground" (Morgan 243). Singing together and discussing music bring people closer to one another.

Not only does music promote connectedness among people, but Morgan's characters also use it to endure. Hank sings "By Jordan's Stormy Banks" as he works to care for Julie when she is sick. Hank considers the sounds of a dove, his crying daughter, and his axe chopping wood music that helps him get through each day of Julie's illness. Lying on her sickbed, Julie imagines that she hears music. She says, "Now it was like there was music coming out of everything I looked at. The glowing grass under my feet had its own music, and the shadows blowed out deep organ music" (Morgan 298). The music, a part of Julie, points her toward comfort.

Morgan emphasizes the importance of music in the lives of his characters by equating melodies with physical events. Julie describes her first sexual encounter with Hank in terms of colors and songs. She confesses,

> All the colors started running through my head in the dark. Purples and greens and yellows and blacks. They blended into each other and poured over each other. And the colors was like milk, so soft and warm and pouring over and into each other. And the colors was swelled, bigger than I ever thought they could be. The colors was melodies, like shaped note singing. (Morgan 53)

Music underscores the importance and intimacy of this event. Singing in church brings the same colors to Julie's mind. She says, "There was such color in the notes. I seen purples and blues and greens in the air. The organ music was living breath" (Morgan 242). Even in Julie's sickness, she imagines hearing music from a harp. She envisions "notes carved [in] the air in shapes of blue and purple and red, like pulsing stained glass windows all around" (Morgan 291). Having sex, joining the church, and battling sickness significantly shape Julie's life, and music plays a role in every instance. Morgan uses music to bring characters together, to help them weather life, and to mark significant events.

The title of Morris's novel *Plains Song for Female Voices* clearly indicates music's importance in the lives of the Atkins family. Morris depicts music as an instrument for enlarging life. He describes Sharon's emotions as she plays the piano: "Sharon Rose would be flooded with such emotion her eyes dimmed and her heart pounded. It did not improve her playing, but surely it enlarged her capacity for feeling" (Morris 84). Music enlarges Cora's life by drawing her to church. Morris writes, "Cora had been raised Unitarian, but she was not a stickler for denominations. She would go to the service closest by, if hymns were sung" (24). Cora purchases a piano and playing the instrument helps her and her family cope with hardship. When Cora becomes overwhelmed with the humanity and the pace of the Chicago World's Fair, music calms her. Morris states, "Weary and dazzled, [Cora] sat with Rosalene on a bench near where music was playing. The players were on a stage, the sun glinting on their instruments. It differed from anything she had heard in the way it soothed and calmed her" (142). Music consoles Cora in many situations. Emerson enjoys a similar reassurance from music. He

sings as he works. When he faces situations that bring uncertainty, he pauses to listen to the songs of birds. Undoubtedly, music functions as a method for broadening life and as a calming agent.

Morris describes the "pervasive tone" of Sharon's life as one of "sweet sadness, a pleasurable longing, suffused with drug-like strains of music" (221). The experiences Julie relates to music, combined with the swirling colors she imagines, contribute to the ethereal quality of the events. In both Morgan's and Morris's novels, music leads to an otherworldly encounter.

Music presents a pathway to a place akin to heaven, but all of the characters find that work provides a coping mechanism and brings satisfaction while in the physical world. The characters' reliance on work encourages acknowledgement of this characteristic although little scholarship has recognized this trait in either Appalachian or Great Plains literature.

In Robert Morgan's *Gap Creek*, Julie highly values work. After enduring an especially trying day early in her marriage, Julie uses work to organize her thoughts. She says, "It was the thought of the work that cleared my head a little. If I was going to have to work so hard anyway, I might as well be working for Hank and myself" (Morgan 57). Work provides a way for Julie to deal with difficult situations. When Julie gives birth to her first child alone, she makes it through the ordeal by viewing the labor as her special work. She maintains, "This is *my work* . . . This is the work only I can do. This is work meant for me from the beginning of time. And this is work leading through me in an endless chain of people all the way to the end of time. Other women have done their work down the course of the years, and now it's my turn" (Morgan 284, emphasis

original). Julie successfully gives birth to a daughter, Delia, because she determines to complete her work. Delia lives for only a few weeks. After the baby's death, Julie again turns to work to get through her grief. She explains, "Time kept spilling down on me, and the only way I could take hold of the minutes and make sense of them was to work" (Morgan 311). Work provides Julie with viable outlets for stress, pain, hardship, and grief.

Morris emphasizes Cora's necessity to work in order to endure successfully life on the plains. Unsure of herself in her wifely role, Cora turns toward work to gain perspective. Morris describes Cora's view concerning exertion: "That work was never done reassured Cora. She knew how to work, and asked only that she work to an end" (19). Cora also finds satisfaction in considering her pregnancy a "work soon to be completed, a harvest to which she could look forward" (Morris 24). At the end of Cora's life, people describe her existence as "works and days" (Morris 215), yet everyone agrees that this work "kept her going as long as she did" (Morris 174). Toiling at chores and birth invigorates Cora's life and allows her to survive. Morgan and Morris highlight the importance of work in the Appalachian and Great Plains cultures through the trials and triumphs of their characters.

Morgan's *Gap Creek* and Morris's *Plains Song for Female Voices* present examples of Appalachian culture and Great Plains culture, respectively. In both books, the characters rely on family to provide support, relationships, and identity. The family structure offers many benefits, but characters also value their self-sufficiency and independence because it enables them to survive in harsh environments. Despite the unforgiving locations of the characters' homes, they find purpose and comfort in their

relationships with the land. Religion offers further purpose and comfort while music transports the characters to a heavenly state. Finally, work allows the characters to succeed in the midst of troubles and confusion. All of these cultural characteristics permeate the lives of Appalachian and Great Plains people.

CHAPTER 3

WORKING IN THE REGION: DENISE GIARDINA'S *STORMING HEAVEN* AND ELMER KELTON'S *THE DAY THE COWBOYS QUIT*

Robert Morgan's *Gap Creek* and Wright Morris's *Plains Song for Female Voices* present characters who struggle to make a living through farming and working the land. Although they face many hardships, they work for themselves. They make their own schedules and act as their own bosses. Conversely, Denise Giardina and Elmer Kelton explore the lives of characters who work for others in *Storming Heaven* and *The Day the Cowboys Quit*, respectively. In both of these novels, the tension between bosses and laborers serves as a framework to highlight the characters' independent natures, religious affinities, and family values.

Based on the true events at the Battle of Blair Mountain, the fictional *Storming Heaven*, by Denise Giardina, tells of a mining strike during the 1920s in Justice County, West Virginia. Four characters recount the narrative as events unfold: C. J. Marcum, a drug store owner; Rondal Lloyd, a miner; Carrie Bishop, a nurse from Kentucky; and Rosa Angellelli, an Italian immigrant, housekeeper, and miner's wife. Giardina uses these four individuals to explore the mining company's initial purchase of the land, the residents' feelings concerning the company, and the subsequent strike, killing, and tragedy.

Elmer Kelton's work of fiction *The Day the Cowboys Quit*, loosely based on the 1883 Texas Panhandle Strike, tells about Hugh "Hitch" Hitchcock and his efforts to foster cooperation between wealthy ranch owners and the cowboys that work for them. Hitch joins the strike because of a promise he made, but, realizing the gravity of the

situation, Hitch works tirelessly to help the cowboys articulate their rights, keep what small herds they have, and gain fair treatment in the eyes of the law.

Tensions between the wealthy bosses of the mining and cattle companies propel both of these novels. Residents of Appalachia and the Great Plains view this tension as a recurring theme because the conflict often centers on the use of land or livestock and its relationship with money. In Giardina's novel, several of the characters express disdain for the way the mining company treats the land. Ermel Justice, a relative of Rondal Lloyd, acknowledges, "Damnable thing is, business at my store has never been better. I make more in a week than I used to all year. No sense in farmin much this year. I'll be makin money outen this mess anyhow. They're a blastin and a tamin the mountain, and I'm a gittin rich" (Giardina 9). Despite making a healthy profit, however, Ermel shakes his head at the situation and comments, "I'm glad my daddy has passed on so he cant [*sic*] see it" (Giardina 9). Clearly, Ermel comprehends that living comfortably comes at a price.

Other characters experience this same tension. Carrie Bishop's father, Orlando, sells his timber to a mining company to help run the coal operations. His family members understand the need to make money, but they are uneasy with the large expanse of barrenness on the mountain. Orlando also undertakes the dangerous job of transporting the cut timbers by floating them down the river. In the process, he is killed. Orlando's sister comments, "Orlando's gone. Oh, Jesus, he's gone, my poor little brother that I carried in my arms oncet. And all for a handful of silver" (Giardina 65). She realizes that Orlando faced dangerous elements for the sake of progress and wealth. The

tension between preserving the land and making money further compounds because of the way the mining company treats the landowners.

Legally, the mining companies possess rights to much of the land in Justice and McDowell counties, and they base their acquisition on these rights alone. They fail to consider the rights of the families who have lived on the land for generations. C. J. Marcum explains that railroad entrepreneurs came to homesteads and claimed "they owned all the land, had bought if off somebody in Philadelphia whose Pawpaw had fought in the Revolutionary War and been give it as a gift" (Giardina 5). The railroad company favors the letter of the law rather than its spirit. They unabashedly and laughingly point out that county deeds hold no claim when they own a senior patent that legally takes precedence. Furthermore, "fat, smooth-faced men in black suits [came], and vowed they'd leave" the land and the region if the families merely signed over the mineral rights (Giardina 5). These railroad men did speak a perverted truth. "Instead they give the minerals over to the coal companies and the coal companies took [the] land two year later" (Giardina 5). This act displaces many families who had farmed the same plots of land for generations and fuels negative relations between company managers and community members.

For those who refuse to sign over their property, such as C. J.'s father Henry Marcum, the mining company finds more sinister means of taking the land. Someone shoots the elder Marcum. Shortly thereafter, the sheriff claims that before Henry Marcum died, he signed a paper using his mark that deeded his land to the coal company. This signature reeks of suspicion because Henry Marcum *could* read and write. Yet, the document's contents still forces the fatherless family to move. No matter what methods

the coal company uses, the frightened people struggle to find new homes with relatives in bordering states or in the newly built coal camps.

Additionally, ideological differences fuel the tension between the company bosses and the mountain residents. Most of the mine owners and other professionals come from outside of the Appalachian region. Instead of trying to understand the culture, these people demean the residents. Rondal Lloyd remembers one teacher who admonished him and other students to "raise ourselves above our parents and save our mountain people from ignorance" (Giardina 15). While the teacher's sentiment may be heartfelt, she automatically assumes the superiority of formal education while scorning other types of education. The mine owners and others in larger cities agree with the teacher's assessment of the Appalachian people's lack of knowledge. Rondal Lloyd distinctly sees this attitude when he visits Chicago where people consider Appalachian natives "a passel of ignorant hillbillies" (Giardina 177). The professionals' unwillingness to try to comprehend Appalachian viewpoints contributes to the conflicts between the two factions because many Appalachians feel disrespected. Disagreements over land, fairness, and respect eventually lead to a bloody battle at Blair Mountain and the deaths of C. J. Marcum, Rosa Angellelli, and many others.

The same kind of tension presents itself in Elmer Kelton's *The Day the Cowboys Quit*. The cowboys strike because they believe those who own large ranches deal dishonorably with the cowboys and neglect longstanding traditions tied to respect. The owners treat the cowboys unfairly by posting rules stipulating that no cowboy working for wages can have his own herd. Many cowboys, such as Hitch, Rascal, and Law, view this as an unjust measure because they worked hard, and more or less honestly, to build a

sizable herd. When Charlie Waide, the owner of the W ranch, presents this decree, Hitch comments, "Charlie, most of us took them cattle as a hedge against the future. How can a man put a price on his future?" (Kelton 86). The cowboys view this measure as unreasonable because it limits their investment ability. Other policies under the new rules render the cowboys completely dependent on their ranches' livestock and leave them afoot when they are not working. Ranchers also seek to usurp the longstanding practice of allowing wandering men to enjoy the hospitality of a cowboy camp for a few nights as they travel. These rules mark a steep departure from traditional rules, and the unwillingness of the ranchers to acknowledge these traditions highly provokes the cowboys.

Much of the cowboys' provocation stems from a sense of disrespect on the part of the ranchers. Asher Cottingham vents several grievances against the ranch owners. He claims, "A workin' man ought to be able to stand up face to face with the man he works for, like in the old days. Tryin to talk to the company is like fightin' your way through a tangle of spider webs; you never can get to the heart of things, if it's even got a heart" (Kelton 47). Cottingham, although he stirs up trouble at times, shares the sentiments of many others who believe in the respectful treatment of cowboys as equals. As Hitch muses over the rights of cowboys, he explains "that the cowboy considers himself something unique, a breed apart and perhaps a little above the common man" (Kelton 105). According to Hitch, the cowboy "considered himself the instrument which had brought this country up from the buffalo range and made it flourish" so Hitch laments that the

> [strike] document said nothing about dignity, about pride, about respect. It said nothing about unwritten traditions and the unspoken trust which seemed violated when ranch owners felt it necessary to start writing down guidelines for a cowboy's conduct and slapping him in the face by posting them on a wall, making him seem irresponsible and less than a man, making him appear somehow unworthy of trust. (Kelton 105-06)

Despite the old traditions, most of the ranch owners only understand "cows as figures on a ledger rather than flesh and blood creatures or leg and long horn" and consider cowboys mere workmen (Kelton 10). In fact, many of the ranch owners "did not have to be cowboys; they could hire plenty of men to do the horseback work. Their own task was planning and high-level decisions. . . . That they might not know or at least might not particularly appreciate the traditions which had grown up among cowboys and old shortgrass ranchers was to be expected" (Kelton 58). The owners' ignorance of cowboy customs could possibly be overcome, yet neither side willingly discusses the issues respectfully. Instead, the attitudes of all the men further intensify the conflict because, generally, "cowboys – like the ranchers they [work] for – [have] a tendency to be intolerant of men whose ways and values [are] different from their own" (Kelton 53). This attitude of disrespect, coupled with unfair laws, fuels the tension between ranchers and cowboys.

An underlying cause of the tension between companies and their employees relates to individualism in both Appalachia and the Great Plains. The independence and pride of both Giardina and Kelton's characters become evident as these characters struggle to overcome various hardships. In *Storming Heaven*, Rondal Lloyd, a miner,

admits to one of his bosses, "We're a pretty cantankerous bunch, independent like. Don't take kindly to hard bossing. . . . They [mine owners] have to respect the independent turn of mind of the Appalachian miner" (Giardina 102). This attitude appears several times throughout the strike. Some miners propose bringing in government officials or union organizers to help them overpower the coal companies. However, people quickly oppose these suggestions because talking "dont mean a diddly-squat in Justice County" (Giardina 122). Isom Justice concludes, "Aint nobody pay us no mind. We got to do for ourselves" (Giardina 122). Later, Rondal Lloyd echoes these same words about union organizers who consider the miners ignorant. He says, "Anything we do will be done our own selves" (Giardina 177). Lloyd again reminds the miners of their independence as they prepare to storm Blair Mountain. He proclaims, "Hit's a rich man's government and hit's a coal operators' government. We don't have to take nothing offn it. Aint yall never heard of the Declaration of Independence? It's our god-given right [to overthrow an unjust government]" (Giardina 260). Even the preacher wholeheartedly supports miners' independence, for he says, "Hit's a sin to have them [guns]. Hit was a sin to shoot down them gun thugs . . . But I'll not condemn you for carrying those guns. You carry those guns in God's freedom. You make mistakes because you are alive and free. You cant escape your sin, so sin boldly and know God loves you" (Giardina 193). The independent mindset of many miners and others fuels their grievances and allow them to oppose the powerful mine owners, yet other characters display fierce independence as well.

Carrie Bishop, a Caucasian woman, provides another example of individualism and self-sufficiency. She lives on a farm in Kentucky, just over the West Virginia state

line. After receiving her nursing training, she enters the mining camps to provide healthcare to miners. At first, she lives with her brother Miles, one of the mine bosses. However, she finds his rules too restricting and moves into a company clubhouse alone. Further, she begins working with Doctor Booker to provide healthcare to other African American miners and immigrants. Given the setting of the story, Carrie's bold decisions to live by herself as a young, unmarried female and work with an African American male display great independence. Carrie brags "I can take care of myself" (Giardina 106). She demonstrates this by living among the tent camps of the striking miners in the middle of winter to treat those who are sick. Additionally, she drives a team of mules, unassisted and against much advice, through enemy lines to transport a miner wounded in the Battle of Blair Mountain to safety.

Carrie accuses her brother of taking miners' independence from them because he fails to realize that "they are their own people" (Giardina 213). Accusingly she points out, "Hit's all up to you whether that [miner] freezes or keeps warm. Hit's up to you whether his family eats or starves. He's at your mercy" (Giardina 213). While Carrie's statement proves true in some respects, both the miners and Carrie retain large measures of independence as they fight for their freedoms and individuality.

Likewise, the cowboys in *The Day the Cowboys Quit* exhibit great independence as they oppose the wealthy ranch owners. Early in the novel, Kelton asserts, "Next to his way with a horse, a cowboy was proudest of his independence. He worked for other men, but they owned nothing of him except his time. He was a free soul" (2). Several characters aptly fit this description.

Hitch, a leader of the strike, acknowledges that "he [has] been self-sufficient since he was fourteen or fifteen" (Kelton 209). He tries to carry this independence throughout the strike by reminding other cowboys and ranch owners that no one person has charge of the strike because all the men are free (Kelton 112). Rascal, another cowboy who works with Hitch, brings grievances against the ranch owners because "they [ranch owners] don't want no workin' cowboy to accumulate anything that would make him independent. . . . [They] want to keep the rest of us down to where we'll always have to work for them" (Kelton 102). Rascal asserts, "I'd go on workin' for the wages I been gettin' if I knowed they'd let me keep ownin' cattle" (Kelton 102). The money matters little to Rascal. Instead, he desires the ability to move around and make his own rules.

Cowboys, such as Hitch and Rascal, are not the only plains residents that value independence. Some of the older ranch owners have this quality as well. Charlie Waide, a ranch owner that Hitch works for and respects, finds his pride wounded when he travels to city banks to ask for a loan. Unsure of himself in the financial world and unable to influence the outcome of the discussion about his finances himself, he admits, "I felt like a crippled horse penned up amongst a pack of gray lobo wolves" (Kelton 11). Despite the setback at the bank, Charlie continues to retain his fierce independence. On a long horseback journey, Hitch notices that time in the saddle begins to wear on Charlie; however, he avoids suggesting they rest because "Charlie would ride all the way to the wagon out of pure stubbornness" (Kelton 66). For a long time, Charlie goes against the other ranch owners by not applying their rules to his cowboys, yet a breach of trust and financial pressure finally cause him to agree to the ranchers' terms. Charlie's individualism sometimes puts him at odds with ranch owners when he tries to make

policies independently of the other owners, but even some of the other bosses highly regard independence.

John Torrington, owner of a large cattle operation, believes taking care of rogue cowboys himself would be more self-sufficient and effective than allowing the law or government to handle the situation. He acts in this manner when he lynches a cowboy who stole some of his cattle. He faces murder charges, but his lawyer does a good job of calling the prosecution's evidence into question. By all appearances, it looks as if the case will be dismissed, yet Torrington must assert his independence. He incriminates himself by proclaiming,

> It was *us* that hung Law McGinty. . . . We done it because a man ought to stand up for himself, not wait for some slow-footed court to do it for him at public expense. You think this country was built by tiptoein' lawyers and a shelf full of lawbooks? No sir, it was built by men with guts, men who done whatever had to be done and didn't fool around about it. (Kelton 268, emphasis original)

Despite the detestability of Torrington's actions, his commitment to self-sufficiency and independence remains obvious.

Besides cowboys and ranchers, the homesteaders of the Great Plains also demonstrate independence. Elijah Neihardt, a farmer, dismisses banker Edson Biggs's offer of a loan because he claims, "I always been able to take care of myself" (Kelton 207). Kate McGinty, cowboy Law's wife, displays great independence as she manages the homestead while Law herds cattle. Kate refuses to send for her mother or to go into town, so other women can assist her when she gives birth. As Hitch discusses the

situation with Kate, he can see that the idea of giving birth alone does not worry her. Kate's calmness seems to stem from the fact that "her mother had borne many a child, one or two of them alone" (Kelton 34). She continues maintaining the family's small dugout dwelling while her husband works on the range. Whether a cowboy, ranch owner, farmer, or wife, the majority of Kelton's characters display an independence befitting their statuses as Great Plains residents.

For all the independence of the Appalachian and Great Plains people, they also look to religion as a means of dealing with situations beyond their control. Their relationship with religion relates to practical matters such as coping with hardship and death. Denise Giardina's characters in *Storming Heaven* consider God a force that interacts with humanity's affairs in instances of marriage, injustice, and hardship.

While Giardina's characters do not always attend church, they believe that God acts in their lives. In the matter of relationships, Carrie Bishop, a nurse to miners, maintains that although Rondal Lloyd has sex with her and then leaves without the promise of anything further, God has brought them together. She reasons, "I believed in God and what Aunt Jane called His purposes. God had brought Lloyd to me, as surely as He placed us both in the mountains" (Giardina 111). Flora, Carrie's sister, echoes this same sentiment. She tells Carrie, "God has picked out a man for you somewhere" (Giardina 129). These women fully consider God capable of arranging their affairs.

Albion Freeman, another man that likes Carrie, encourages her to bring to God the matters of her heart. As Carrie contemplates what kind of relationships she wants with the men in her life, Albion advises, "Talk to God about it" (Giardina 148). Albion, a preacher, also sees God directly working in his own life. Albion desires to go into the

mines so that he can minister more effectively to the miners. As he enters the dangerous mine, he sees mushrooms growing inside. Viewing this as a sign from God, Albion declares, "He [God] was saying, 'See here how the least of these creatures can prosper in this place. And wont I take care of you?'" (Giardina 164). These people credit God with acting in their lives whether they worship him in a traditional church, while they work, or as they wonder at creation.

While Giardina's characters do not always attend traditional church services, they often look to God to rectify the injustices they experience. Many of the miners place their hope in God's ability to remedy their suffering. As Rondal Lloyd works to right the injustices the miners suffer, he comments, "Everything had always been the way it was, we were all pilgrims of sorrow, and only Jesus or the Virgin Mary could make it right" (Giardina 178). Other characters contend that not all the miners believe in God. While this may be true, other miners find themselves undeservedly in jail but are content to let God protect them (Giardina 209).

Most every character finds comfort in religious words and biblical passages as they endure being thrown out of their homes, living in tent camps, and fighting the mine bosses. The miners and their families struggle to survive the cold, wet winter in the miserable conditions of the tent camp. Nonetheless, the prayers the preacher speaks over sick patients and others provide a small measure of comfort. He offers reassurance as the miners prepare to storm the mountain by reminding them that the children of Israel suffered as slaves and under the weather conditions of the desert just as the miners have suffered under the harsh rule of mine owners and the weather conditions of a cruel West Virginia winter. He concedes that even if the miners do not win this battle, their children

have every chance to change the situation because the miners have seen the Promised Land. These words conceivably bring comfort to the many families gathered.

The Appalachian people of Giardina's *Storming Heaven* rely on religion to order their lives, cope with injustice, and provide comfort in troubled times. The characters in Elmer Kelton's *The Day the Cowboys Quit* consider God out of practicality. Like Giardina's characters, Kelton's characters believe that God can play a role in their marriages, but they approach the union practically. For instance, Kate nettles Hitch to settle down and get married. Hitch responds, "A cowpuncher like me is always too busy, seems like. I'm in no hurry. The Lord always provides" (Kelton 68). Kate reasonably answers, "He provides for them that helps theirselves" (Kelton 68). Later in the novel, a lynch mob murders Kate's husband Law. Law's brother Rascal searches the scriptures for advice about his next step as he contemplates marriage with his widowed sister-in-law. He mentions to Hitch, "I remember readin' somethin' in the Book one time, somethin' that if your brother dies, you should take his widow to wife. . . . I done a lot of thinkin' on it here lately, since Kate and that baby been alone" (Kelton 228). Rascal finally decides that he cannot love Kate except as a brother loves a sister, but the fact remains that he looks to religion as one means of guiding his decision.

When Rascal discusses marrying Kate with Hitch, Hitch admits that he does not read the Bible often. In fact, Hitch is not familiar with many hymns and has never been an ardent church attendee. However, after agreeing to enter a potentially dangerous position as a candidate for sheriff against the powerful ranch owners and their own candidate, Hitch welcomes the minister's offer of prayer. The minister says, "Mister Hitchcock, I'll pray for you" (Kelton 195). Hitch promptly answers, "You damn well

better" (Kelton 195). When prayer and religious ceremony appear advantageous, Hitch and others willingly engage in these activities. Edson Biggs follows this same pattern when he makes the transition from a cowboy to a banker. He confesses, "First thing a banker does in a new town is join the church" (Kelton 187). This act provides Edson with respectability and contacts, both essential elements of prospering in the banking business.

Finally, religious ceremony serves as a means of comfort and a call to action when the preacher performs Law McGinty's funeral service. The minister recognizes the people's need to mourn the loss of Law McGinty's life, but he also encourages them to mourn the senseless violence that took the cowboy's life. The clergyman calls on the people to "rise up in righteous anger and declare to them [the ranch owners] that this shall not happen again, that we shall not be silent nor stand fearful in the presence of their power" (Kelton 191). In this novel of the Great Plains, religion serves as a practical guide for life decisions, comfort, and action.

While religion provides one means of comfort, the family structure seems to provide a greater measure of comfort for the people of Appalachia and the Great Plains in many instances. Within both regions, people highly value family, and familial loyalty runs deep. Giardina depicts kin working together in *Storming Heaven*. Brothers Clabe and Dillon Lloyd farm together until the mining company takes their land. When the mining company does seize the land, Clabe Lloyd's family moves to be near his wife's parents. When the mining company takes the Marcum land, this family moves in with a cousin. In Kentucky, Carrie Bishop lives with her parents and in close proximity to spinster or widowed aunts. Miles, Carrie's brother, offers to help Carrie pay for nursing

school. He reasons that he has no responsibilities toward a wife or child, so helping his sister makes sense. After all, he proclaims, "That's what family is for" (Giardina 63). Giardina highlights the willingness of many Appalachian families to provide assistance for their relations through their unselfish giving of accommodations and money.

Giardina's characters also exhibit deep loyalty toward members of their family. For a time, Orlando's sister blames her nephew Miles for Orlando's death. Miles worries that his aunt hates him, yet Carrie, Miles sister, confidently proclaims, "Course she don't [hate you]. Aint you her kin? Aint we all kin?" (Giardina 65). True to Carrie's prediction, the ill feelings toward Miles do not last forever. Miles, himself, even demonstrates the depth of family ties when he risks his job and, possibly, his life for Carrie.

After gaining an education, Miles joins the mine owners as an operator; however, when Carrie approaches him in a time of need, he assents to her request. She asks him to use his position within the company to safely transport injured Rondal Lloyd, a blacklisted union organizer, to safety after he is wounded. Miles agrees. When high-ranking mine officials discover Lloyd's identity and order him off the train, Miles continues to stand with his sister. He rejects his boss's orders and declares, "I can't put my people off this train. . . . That man is gravely wounded. If you put him out and he dies, I'll swear out a warrant on you" (Giardina 286). Miles chooses to help his sister rather than follow his boss's orders. The deep loyalty this family displays for its members also influences the connection they feel with their home.

Carrie regularly returns home after she faces hardships such as the death of her first husband or the wounding of her lover Rondal Lloyd. She finds the familiarity of the

people and the place both comforting and revitalizing. Facing a long jail sentence or death, Carrie's husband says, "I want you to promise me you'll go back home. I know how much you love that place. Hit was such a joy to see you git offn that train today, to see the color in your cheeks, and your eyes bright. I know what put the life back in your face. . . . It was the Homeplace" (Giardina 227). Carrie's family members are not the only characters that treasure the place they live. When Rondal begins traveling heavily, C. J. Marcum comments "These mountains got a powerful pull. They let a man wander so far and then they yank him back like a fish on a line. I knew Rondal would sleep uneasy as long as he was away, and the hills would bring him home" (Giardina 121). C. J.'s prediction proves true, and Rondal returns to the mountains and his family. Clearly, the Appalachian families depicted in *Storming Heaven* rely on one another, honor blood ties, and consider the family structure and home a place of comfort.

Similarly, the characters in Kelton's *The Day the Cowboys Quit* value family members because of the support and stability they provide. Rascal and Law McGinty work together to create a profitable cattle herd. Mrs. Fallon, Kate McGinty's mother, arrives from town to help Kate with her new baby. When times get hard, Kate reminds herself, "Things always work out for people who have faith," and she confidently places her faith in her family (Kelton 130). Rascal McGinty works to provide a living for his brother, sister-in-law, nephew, and himself. When Kate's husband dies and a mob destroys Kate's house, Mrs. Fallon provides shelter for her daughter and grandson. The Matthews brothers gain support from their many children as every family member contributes to the cattle business. Rascal McGinty sets out to avenge his brother's

unlawful death. No matter the circumstance, these families provide support for one another in various ways.

In addition to these instances of support, family also supplies individuals with stability and direction. Even Hitch, a committed cowboy, consistently encourages Law to take advantage of the stable, calm, loving lifestyle Kate offers. In turn, Charlie, Hitch's boss, urges Hitch to marry a woman similar to Kate. Rascal, observing the pleasantness of family life, says, "Kind of nice havin' a married brother. . . . A woman sure does pretty up a place" (Kelton 158). This thought and others later prompt Rascal to consider seriously Kate's fate after the death of her husband. He becomes enamored of his baby nephew and begins to mellow somewhat.

Kelton shows another instance of family providing direction when Hitch campaigns for election as sheriff. He visits the home of Doug Free. Free refuses to support Hitch because doing so puts his family at risk. He explains, "I've already took enough risks in this life Mister Hitchcock. I got a wife and five kids that can't afford me to take anymore" (Kelton 204). Mr. Free believes he has "a lot more responsibility to his own family" that to his community (Kelton 205). Based on his concern and fear for his family, Mr. Free declines to support Hitch.

Families on the Great Plains provide individuals with encouragement, help, and guidance. These aspects of the family unit prove tremendously important as individuals without family often find themselves isolated. Once Hitch loses his job with Charlie Waide, he realizes "the life of a cowboy [has] its freedoms; it [has] its many compensations to offset the grinding hardships; but always there [is] this dark and lonely side, this troubling deprivation" (Kelton 152). Hitch goes "a week or ten days" without

seeing another person, and this situation heightens his loneliness (Kelton 166). Campaigning for sheriff alleviates some of Hitch's isolation, and as he travels, finding new settlers he had never known about pleases him. Hitch's visits also please Mrs. Clay. Kelton describes her as "gray-haired women of sixty" who "was lonely to talk to someone new" (210). For people such as Hitch and Mrs. Clay, family helps offset the loneliness and isolation of the plains environment. On the prairie, the family structure establishes support and purpose for individuals. Both Giardina and Kelton underscore the importance of family as an avenue of support, loyalty, guidance, familiarity, and community.

Conversely, few employees in either Giardina's *Storming Heaven* or Kelton's *The Day the Cowboys Quit* display any sense of loyalty to their employers. This fact that the miners and cowboys become social pawns for the interests of company owners underscores a major cause of the unrest in these situations. The employers consistently urge their workers to increase productivity, yet these businessmen rarely consider the common dignities, such as wages, housing, and respect, that allow workers to increase their yield more easily and willingly. Consequently, work, and its associated tensions, becomes a driving theme in these two novels.

The employers and those in authority promote superficial platitudes instead of actually listening to the needs of their workforce. In fact, a great irony of these novels involves the names of the places and characters. Giardina sets her novel in Justice County, West Virginia; however, the miners receive little justice. Moreover, the United States government plans to bomb the strikers' encampment rather than peacefully hear their grievances and move toward a solution. Elmer Kelton uses the character of Law

McGinty to highlight the binary opposition between the owners' words and actions. The owners clamor for their cowboys to obey the posted rules and laws of the ranches. Nonetheless, the ranch owners fail to respect the procedures of law when they unmercifully lynch Law McGinty. In both novels, authority figures promote the words of fairness and civil rule, yet they demand to follow their own dictates even if these run contrary to rule of law.

Many of the conflicts experienced in *Storming Heaven* and *The Day the Cowboys Quit* stem from different view of progress, money, and cultural traditions. The residents of Appalachia and the Great Plains assert their independence throughout trying situations, but they also look to religion for practical support and comfort. In addition to religion, the residents consider family another resource for support. In Appalachia, family ties become a contributing factor to characters' sense of place while characters on the Great Plains use family to overcome isolation. While the theme of work achieves prominence in Giardina's and Kelton's novels, investigating the cultural significance of tension, independence, religion, and family provides additional insight into the Appalachian and Great Plains regions.

CHAPTER 4

REMEMBERING IN THE REGION: FRED CHAPPELL'S *FAREWELL, I'M BOUND TO LEAVE YOU* AND ROBERT DAY'S *THE LAST CATTLE DRIVE*

Robert Morgan's *Gap Creek* and Wright Morris's *Plains Song for Female Voices* tell the stories, respectively, of Appalachian people and Great Plains people carving out lives in harsh regions. In *Storming Heaven*, Denise Giardina writes about a coal mining strike while Elmer Kelton recounts the story of a cowboy strike in his novel *The Day the Cowboys Quit*. All four of these novels highlight characteristics and traditions of their respective regions. However, in some ways the passage of time has caused some of these characteristics and traditions to change or fade.

The novels *Farewell, I'm Bound to Leave You,* by Fred Chappell, and *The Last Cattle Drive*, by Robert Day, investigate how Appalachian and Great Plains people weather change even as they cling to their independence, love of the land, enjoyment of storytelling, reliance on family, and methods of navigating tensions.

In Chappell's *Farewell, I'm Bound to Leave You*, the Kirkman family members of North Carolina ready themselves to face the death of the family's matriarch, Annie Barbara Sorrells. As they wait, Sorrells's grandson Jess Kirkman recounts various vignettes told to him by his grandmother, mother Cora Sorrells Kirkman, and other women. These stories help Jess learn about himself, develop traits that help him formulate his identity, and reach maturation so that at the end of the novel, Jess can comfort his mother as a man instead of coming to her as a boy who needs comforting even as he faces society's changes.

In Day's *The Last Cattle Drive*, Leo Murdock, a young teacher originally from Kansas City, Missouri, helps the Tukles and ranch hand Jed Adams drive their cattle two hundred fifty miles in the 1970s from Hays, Kansas to Kansas City. They face the same hardships that past cowboys faced, such as stormy weather and farmers who are angry with cattle destroying their crops. They also face modern inconveniences such as automobiles and gawking onlookers. The characters reach the stockyard in Kansas City, but they realize that the cowboy tradition is fading. Despite the changes both Chappell's and Day's characters face, they continue to uphold their respective regional values concerning independence, land, narratives, family, and outside tension

In *Farewell, I'm Bound to Leave You*, Chappell emphasizes independence. Annie Barbara Sorrells describes her son-in-law as independent. She tells her grandson Jess that his father does not "travel in any fashion except against the current, and the stronger it pushes him back, the better he likes it" (Chappell 29). Joe Robert demonstrates this quality by ignoring smoking rules and refusing to engage in schoolroom politics, even though doing so could bring a job promotion.

The women in Joe Robert's household, his mother-in-law Annie Barbara Sorrells and Cora Sorrells Kirkman, demonstrate the same individualism as Joe Robert does. Annie Barbara Sorrells admits to her grandson Jess that she raised Jess's mother "to be an independent woman, as independent as any man" (Chappell 30). Jess's mother lives up to her own mother's teachings because she gains financial autonomy and learns to shoot a gun. Annie Barbara expects her grandson to continue the family's tradition of independence. She tells him, "Our family has never harbored crybabies, male or female. I expect you to remember that, Jess" (Chappell 30). Annie Barbara Sorrells and Jess's

mother Cora Sorrells Kirkman continue to remind Jess of the value of being self-reliant through stories about other women in the family and community.

In the story of "The Fisherwoman," Cora's cousin, Earlene Lewis, regularly acts independently. At the age of twelve, she learns to trout fish because she craves adventure and "want[s] to be the first girl to do anything" (Chappell 84). Three years later, at age fifteen, Earlene continues to demonstrate the same independence. She has become a fishing partner with the elderly Mr. Worley. They often trek into deserted locations to catch fish. One day, Mr. Worley gets hurt. Getting help necessitates that young Earlene drive Mr. Worley's rickety truck down narrow, winding mountain roads. Although the task frightens Earlene, she persists because it needs to be done.

Other women in the family also act independently. In "The Madwoman," people describe Aunt Chancy Gudger as someone with strong willpower, made stronger and more stubborn as years passed. In a vignette titled "The Feistiest Woman," Jess's mother aptly considers Ginger Summerell "the feistiest woman" (Chappell 157). Summerell defies almost any man who tries to woo her because she values being "proud and free and a woman on her own terms" (Chappell 164). Like many Appalachian people, independence characterizes these women's lives because, as Cora explains, "Well, we had to do everything for ourselves, just about" (Chappell 128). Whether Chappell's characters deviate from the larger society, take care of themselves, or catch fish, they do so on their own terms.

The characters of Robert Day's *The Last Cattle Drive* also assert their independence. As a rancher, Spangler Tukle demonstrates overwhelming independence, often in the form of stubbornness. Leo Murdock recognizes that Spangler does "pretty

much everything he want[s] to do in the first place" (Day 79). He refuses to bow to the wishes of the local police and transport his cattle by trucks on the last twenty miles of the journey. He explains his actions by elaborating on his life philosophy: "It's not luck that makes things work out. It's pushing them around until they go your way" (Day 140). Spangler demonstrates this idea by continuing to drive his herd against Jed's advice and taking matters into his own hands when the stockyard attendants devalue his steers. Although Spangler sometimes ignores Jed Adams's advice, Jed himself values his own independence. He refuses to accept offers of rest or help even though his legs are stiff and sore. He would rather ignore his old age and continue living and working as he always has.

Many people readily acknowledge the independence of cowboys and ranchers, but many of Day's characters, such as Opal, Leo, and others, also exhibit independence. As Spangler's wife, Opal Tukle's independence matches, and perhaps exceeds, Spangler's own. Opal expresses her individualism by coming to marriage on her own terms. She provides Spangler with an ultimatum. She demands that Spangler marry her within one year. When Spangler tries to negotiate his own terms, she shortens the time period to six months. Although Spangler himself acts stubbornly, he also describes his wife as stubborn (Day 67).

Opal aptly displays her stubborn will in her dealings with the meat processing plant. The plant only offers to buy Spangler's herd as cutters, meat to be ground into dog food. Selling the cattle at this grade instead of as choice beef would cause Spangler to lose much of his anticipated profit. However, Opal, relying on her stubbornness and self-sufficiency, crafts a workable plan. She decides to auction off the cattle. This works

well because the cattle drive made the steers famous and numerous people want to share in the glory and adventure. Opal's stubbornness allows Spangler, Jed, and Leo to complete the cattle drive in a manner that dignifies the hardships they and the cattle endure.

Leo Murdock constitutes another integral member of the team who helps the cattle reach their destination. Although he grew up in the city, he shares the Tukles' propensity toward independence. Leo works for the Tukles over the summer, but during the school year, Leo works as a teacher and principal. Even in this job, he displays independence. When a letter comes from the state education department instructing him to issue his teachers temporary licenses, these are "filed in the trash can" (Day 6). The teachers demonstrate great efficiency, so Leo decides to make his own decision about their teaching abilities rather than allowing the state education department to dictate his choices. During the drive, Leo demonstrates self-sufficiency by continuing to work with the herd despite his broken arm.

Not only do the characters associated with cattle exhibit independence, but many people in the community also value this trait as well. As Spangler Tukle and his herd come down the city streets, people line the pavement and cheer. They wave signs reading, "WELCOME TUKLE HERD," "SHOOT ANOTHER COPTER," "STICK IT TO 'EM, TUKLE" "THE GOVERNMENT" (Day 207). These people appreciate the Tukles' and the ranch hands' actions because these represent "what they [the people] had always threatened to be in the grumble-gripe-talk of coffee breaks and back-of-the-store gossip sessions" (Day 208). While these city dwellers may not herd cattle, they do value the independence Tukle and his crew demonstrate as they move their herd and defy the

government. In both novels, the characters assert independence because doing so allows them to complete necessary jobs and tasks, such as marriage, dangerous driving, and moving cattle.

The characters from Chappell's and Day's novels value independence, and, in some ways, their independence intertwines with their relationship to the land. As the women in Chappell's novel recount stories, they often use images of nature as a method of description. Cora describes the elderly fisherman Mr. Worley as a man whose "temperament was as barbed as blackberry vines and gnarly as willow roots" (Chappell 85). Later, Jess describes the eyes of the Happiest Woman as "warm with a melting light as calm as a starry June sky" (Chappell 108). Cora compares a maddened mind with stream that has been dammed up: "The water will flow right along in its channel, but when you choke it up with rocks and mud and sticks . . . it spills over the banks and takes a lot of different little courses, running every which way. That was what it was like with Aunt Chancy. Something had blocked the natural channel of her mind and now it wandered in runlets to no purpose" (Chappell 120). These descriptions and others throughout the book demonstrate the author's and the characters' familiarity with the land. They easily recognize the land as part of their lifestyles as they include various aspects of nature in everyday speech and storytelling.

Another indicator of these characters' knowledge of the land involves Jess's visit to the home of the Wind Woman. As Jess sits in the house of the Wind Woman, he hears "a great music of speaking voices and voices singing and instruments playing and the sounds that the horses and cows and dogs in the fields make and the trees and birds and stones in the woods" (Chappell 114). He hears "square-dance music joyous and copper-

bright and music of bagpipes and drums and harps from over all the seas. A man's voice [sings] a river song slow and deep while another [is] singing a high-tenor mocking song" (Chappell 114). Understanding these sounds, including those of the land, allows Jess to write adequately about his lifestyle. His mother explains, "I don't know what you're writing about, but if you ever take a notion to write about our part of the earth, about the trees and hills and streams, about the animals and our friends and neighbors who live in the mountains, then you must meet the Wind Woman, for you'll never write a purposeful word till you do" (Chappell 104). Writing about the Appalachian Mountains and the people in the region involves recognizing the influence the land plays in the everyday lives of individuals.

Just as the land plays a role in the lives of Appalachian people, it also shapes the lives of Great Plains people. In *The Last Cattle Drive*, Leo comments on nature's tendency to affect the activities of the residents. He acknowledges,

> I had never been in a place where the weather had so much to do with the lives of the people who worked. If it was a cool autumn day in October and the sky was a deep blue and there was no wind, they would think that whatever they did would go well. They could plant wheat this year and the green bugs would stay the hell out of it; they could run cattle and the winter would be mild enough to bring them through; they could put in milo and not have it buried by an early snow or beat to death by a hail storm. But in January when the wind was over fifty and snow had been on the ground for thirty days, they'd wonder how anything ever made it through the winter and if it did why it didn't go mad. (Day 8)

While Day does not directly attribute his characters' dispositions to the weather, the schoolteacher Leo Murdock does experience loneliness during the winter. This feeling directly opposes the sense of contentment he feels during the summer as he works on the Tukle ranch.

According to Day, Kansans enjoy a distinct relationship with nature's weather. He writes, "The ranchers were proud of the weather, as if it were a home-grown affair. They said it didn't take much to be a rancher in Texas or Oklahoma, where it was nice most of the time. They had greater respect for the ranchers to the north of them . . . but then the cold weather there was pretty predictable" (Day 43). Conversely, the ranchers consider Kansas weather subject to change at a moment's notice. This characteristic of the weather leads the characters to battle rains and a tornado with little warning. However, acknowledging the intensity of Kansas weather allows the residents to somewhat prepare for the changes and take pride in their own resourcefulness and grit.

As someone who grew up in the city, Leo ends up connecting to the plains landscape in a distinct way as he works for the Tukles. At the beginning of the cattle drive, Leo expresses excitement about taking the herd through Kansas City because he can show off to all his friends. However, when Leo reaches the city with the livestock, he finds he does not consider the place home any longer. Instead, he longs for the company and places of Gorham, the small country town he left. He admits, "I'd said to Spangler that when we got to Kansas City, I'd show him my bar, Kelly's, on Westport Road. I'd thought then that to get to Kelly's would be to get home. Halfway down the road I didn't know" (Day 168). The distinction between the city and the country comes into sharper focus as Leo drives the herd farther into the city.

As Leo crosses a large city bridge with the herd, he mentions that the river appears much bigger than he remembers while the bridge seems less impressive. He comments, "The bridge looked more temporary, more a man-made thing than it does from a car, where it seems as natural as the car itself. From horseback, behind a herd of steers, the whole thing looked oddly like a toy, and shaky, like something too big for itself. It made strange noises when we took the herd onto it" (Day 193). Leo's time with the herd brings causes him to develop a bond with the land and animals so that he treasures his place in the country. The city he grew up in remains a sort of home, but he prefers the country and being close to the land.

In both *Farewell, I'm Bound to Leave You* and *The Last Cattle Drive* Chappell and Day separately emphasize the influence of land and nature in the lives of their characters. For the Appalachian people, having a relationship with the land helps them express themselves fully as they describe their lives. For Great Plains people, the land serves as a source of pride while also helping them define themselves and those around them.

Another means of defining the lives of Appalachian and Great Plains residents involves storytelling. As family members in *Farewell, I'm Bound to Leave You* prepare themselves for the death of the family's matriarch, Joe Robert suggests to his son that they listen again to "stories of women that your mother and grandmother needed for you to hear" (Chappell 5). Each story that Jess remembers teaches him something about life, those around him, and himself. Hearing stories of his parents' courtship and of his family's history helps him to understand his identity.

Jess's mother emphasizes narrative's ability to help define one's self when she takes Jess to the home of the Wind Woman and encourages him to listen to the sounds of his life in order to write successfully about his roots. Jess begins to recognize the ability of a story to define others when he explains that the details of stories change depending on the teller of the story. Jess desires to hear every possible version so that he can discover truth about the tale. He continues using tales to shape himself and others when he recalls a story for his young sister Mitzi to read for herself and one day read for her children. However, Jess focuses the narrative by acknowledging four storytellers: his grandmother, his mother, himself, and a famous musicologist Holme Barcroft. Jess's mother agrees that stories such as those told by Barcroft enlighten other people about Appalachian residents, showing that they are more than "ignorant hillbillies" (Chappell 221). Through stories, Chappell's characters connect with their history, gain insight into their past and present lives, and share their lives with others.

Stories function in a similar manner in Robert Day's *The Last Cattle Drive*. They help Spangler Tukle and the rest of the characters define themselves and others. Many of the men fuel their own exploits and a wary trust of the government through exchanging stories. Leo comments that farmers, ranchers, and oilmen met at the co-op where they "swapped lies about hunting and made up stories about how the government was doing this or that, and then cursed the government for doing this or that" (Day 8). These men employ narrative to define themselves and the government, but Spangler Tukle's crew also use stories to define themselves.

Two weeks into the cattle drive, Spangler, Opal, and Leo sit together in the mobile home that serves as their shelter for that particular night and begin to trade stories.

Leo explains, "Even then, our stories about what we had done began to grow away from fact, but we never corrected each other" (Day 189). The group chooses to ignore completely stories about some of the events they encounter, such as Spangler's fight with a movie producer and one of their friend's tales about a tragic death. By allowing stories to be told without corrections and by willfully skipping over other tales, the tellers shape their own identities because they have chosen the details of the narrative.

Perhaps more tellingly, however, is other people's ability to construct false perceptions based on often-told and often-skewed narratives. For instance, many tourists snap photos of the cattle drive, yet the pictures always focus on elderly ranch hand Jed Adams riding horseback and driving the herd. Leo asserts,

> I'll bet that there are living rooms in Newark and Hoboken where balding men are showing slides of their trip west to friends . . . and Opal's truck and horse trailer are left out, just as the Dodge and Winnebago campers that brought the cameraman west are left out. The west is pretty much the same, they are saying over Beefeater martinis to their buddies. (Day 116)

Leo's comment seems to capture many people's understanding of both the Midwest and the West. Regardless of the stories' complete truthfulness, they contribute to people's notions about themselves and about the Great Plains region.

The characters in Fred Chappell's *Farewell, I'm Bound to Leave You* encounter stories through oral transmission and reading text versions. The characters in Robert Day's *The Last Cattle Drive* exchange stories through verbal recounting, reading about their cattle drive in newspapers, and having media crews film the traveling herd. Despite these various mediums, every story plays a role in the culture and tradition of its

respective region because it serves to characterize the people of the region for themselves and others.

Often, Appalachian and Great Plains people tell stories about and to their family members because the family unit plays an integral role in their lifestyle. Chappell opens his novel *Farewell, I'm Bound to Leave You* with the family gathered around and comforting one another as Annie Barbara Sorrells's death approaches. Many of the characters unabashedly acknowledge the influence other members of the family had on them. Cora considers Annie Barbara Sorrells, her mother, a part of her own self. She worries, "I'll be a stranger inside my own life because Mama was a chief part of it" (Chappell 17). Moreover, almost every story that the women relate concern some family member. Through these stories of his family Jess Kirkman begins to form his own identity as a grandson, a son, a Kirkman, and an Appalachian person.

Joe Robert Kirkman also enjoys a close relationship with Annie Barbara Sorrells, his mother-in-law. The two regularly share practical jokes and merriment together. Furthermore, Annie Barbara Sorrells feels safe in the arms of her family. She muses, "I would not be struggling away [to death] if I could help it. I would rest in the bosom of my family . . . But I feel the darkness or the light, I don't know which, pulling at me with such an awful strength that I cannot go anywhere but toward the window with its light or darkness, whatever is there" (Chappell 21-22).

Despite the closeness of the family members, death finally separates them. However, those family members left behind mourn together, comfort one another, and support one another. When Joe Robert and Jess find out that Annie Barbara Sorrells has

died, they prepare to comfort her daughter Cora who also holds the position of wife and mother, respectively, to these men. Chappell writes,

> "Cora is trying to come down the hallway," my father said. "But it is dark and she can't find the switch and she is frightened. If you [Jess] and I don't go meet her halfway, she may not make it back to us. Are you ready to go with me into that dark hallway and bring your mother back her into the light?"
>
> "No. I am not ready," I said. "But I'll go with you anyhow."
>
> "Good," he said. "She's going to need us."
>
> "We're going to need her, too," I said. (Chappell 228)

The dialogue emphasizes how much every family member needs the others. In Appalachian literature such as Chappell's *Farewell, I'm Bound to Leave* You, the family members function as a place of identity, safety, and comfort.

Unlike the family members presented in Chappell's novel, the Tukle family displays a gruffer affection for one another. Much of their togetherness centers around work, but they continue to offer one another support. Opal Tukle acts as a major source of encouragement and help for her husband Spangler Tukle. After watching the pair for several months, Leo characterizes Opal as someone who "knew what needed to be done" and who considers herself the force that allows Spangler to successfully run the ranch (Day 123). While Spangler often acts ornery toward his wife, he frankly admits the value of her role on the ranch and in the cattle drive. She keeps the business books, organizes accommodations on the cattle drive, interacts with contacts on the cattle drive, and drives

the truck. Moreover, she often calms her husband's rash temper by acting as a mediator when he disagrees with someone.

Spangler scorns city slickers, truck drivers, movie producers, and many other kinds of people; however, he respects Opal. She may not be the prettiest woman Spangler encounters, but he loves her. Spangler tells Leo, who likes to have sex with women but does not like the women themselves, "You won't change your notion about women until you notice their face first" (Day 68). Spangler has noticed plenty about his own wife. He brags, "I'm out here with two hundred fifty steers, it's pouring down rain, I got some Green Gables in my gut, and I know I'm going to Brookville. All this is mine and Opal's. We put it together, . . ." (Day 145). Throughout the novel, Spangler and Opal work together to make their cattle drive a success. Without the contribution of each person, the drive would be doomed to fail.

Much of the novel's familial relationship focuses on Spangler and Opal Tukle, yet other aspects of family relationships appear as well. The Tukles' son Harold attends Kansas University and acts in direct contrast to his parents. Unlike his parents, who work close to the land, Harold majors in drama and Japanese. He ardently affirms veganism and experiments in drugs. In truth, few people like Harold, yet Opal tries to include him in their day-to-day lives. She invites him on the cattle drive. She leaves the house unlocked for him. When Harold gets into a scuffle with hired hand Leo Murdock, Harold's parents hold a slight grudge against Leo although Harold worked hard to start the fight. Despite Harold's differences and eccentricities, his family members continue to support him. They may not be his loudest supporters, but they remain loyal.

Opal, especially, values her family. She is often the first person to bring Harold into conversation. Moreover, in conjunction with driving the cattle and visiting interesting sites, Opal desires to see family members as she helps transport the cattle. She makes arrangements for lodgings with or plans to visit with a cousin, Spangler's brother, and Jed's relations. Overall, Day's characters rely on both the assistance and the dependency of their family members to gain financially and to feel that they are needed.

Family dynamics, and more specifically the dynamics of love between males and females, also appear to contain a necessary roughness. In Fred Chappell's *Farewell, I'm Bound to Leave You*, characters often prove their declarations of love when they obtain evidence of black and blue bruising. The stories of "The Shooting Woman," "The Figuring Woman," and "The Feistiest Woman" demonstrate these hallmarks of love. "The Shooting Woman" recounts the tale of the courtship of Cora and Joe Robert, her future husband. In this story, Cora attracts Joe Robert's attention by taking an interest in his hobbies. She helps him build a kite so that he can demonstrate electricity to his students. Once he builds the kite, however, he flies it incessantly past the classroom Cora teaches in. Taking the advice of her mother, Cora practices excessively until she can shoot the kite down. Her endeavor rewards her with the ability to shoot the kite and a large bruise on her shoulder from the gun's kickback. Jess's grandmother reveals that she encouraged her daughter to continue practicing marksmanship for the specific purpose of acquiring a bruise. She explains that the mark served "to win your [Jess's] father's heart for good and all. When he saw how bad her shoulder was bruised, he'd understand how much she loved him and was willing to endure to get him. That would make him feel proud of her and would be the beginning of a love as deep as she desired"

(Chappell 39). The plan appears to work because Jess's mother and father continue to display affection for each other throughout their marriage.

Another instance of a person enduring pain to win the heart of another appears in "The Figuring Woman." In this tale, two boys engage in a fist fight to determine who has the right to court Vonda Rathbone. Before the encounter, Vonda seems to like the more athletic Jimmy Keiller rather than scrawny Paul O'Dell. Afterwards, she settles on Paul, whose "head was swollen up like a candy roaster and lumpy as . . . mashed potatoes and was a rainbow of suffering: red, blue, purple, yellow and even a little green about the cheekbones" (Chappell 47). Although Paul was clearly bested, Vonda chose to marry him because he proved he loved her the most. Chappell explains, "He took the bloodiest drubbing he could stand, and it didn't daunt him. Nothing would stop him but killing. Not the marriage vows, not threat or refusal. And maybe even after his life was over he might come back to her" (57). Paul's willingness to suffer on Vonda's behalf binds her to him.

Further, this same motif appears in "The Feistiest Woman." In this story, Ginger Summerell vows to marry on her own terms. This position prevents her from marrying when most her peers do; however, when she encounters, Orlow Jackson, who had formerly terrorized her playhouse as a child, Ginger finds herself falling in love. The relationship progresses smoothly for a while, and the couple becomes engaged. A fierce argument, however, spurs Ginger to challenge Orlow to a duel to the death. Orlow refuses, yet Ginger will have none of it. Not wanting to hurt the woman he loves, Orlow clonks his own self in the head with a hammer several times. In turn,

> Ginger looked down at Orlow at her feet, and maybe he'd slain himself for love and maybe he hadn't, but there he lay motionless, with his face in the earth, and so her consciousness gave way, too, and she also keeled over facedown across the body of her beloved . . . It wasn't long before their eyes opened and they stood up and then fell once more, only into each other's arms this time. Now their vows were taken and sealed like bonds of iron and they rekindled their ardent courtship and were married in the harvest moon. (Chappell 175)

Based on this account and others in Chappell's text, bodily harming one's self for the purpose of love appears to be akin to creating solid declarations of affirmation. In fact, although Jess has not awakened fully into love, Chappell uses the black and blue colors of bruising to hint at his crush on Sarah Robinson. He describes the girl as someone with "dark blue eyes that turned violet when she brooded over some injury or slight" (Chappell 24). This lighter description parallels the heavier, more serious discussions of love older individuals encounter.

While the love in Chappell's novel manifests itself in brutal physicality, rough words mark the love in Robert Day's *The Last Cattle Drive*. Spangler and Opal rarely share a loving word. More often, their words concern chores or tasks that must be completed. As they get ready to do a movie shoot Opal once looked forward to doing, Spangler displays his rough tongue. He says, "Opal, goddamnit. Quit smoking. Here I get a movie deal for us and you turn nasty bitch. . . . Opal, you get on [t]his horse. They want a woman in the middle of all this. We haven't got time to beat up on each other" (Day 99). For all this coarse talk, Spangler and Opal really do care for each other.

Spangler admiringly admits that Opal is "a mercurial woman, . . . but she's a piss cutter," (Day 226). These affectionate words remain as bristly as the prairie grass their cattle graze, but the mode of expression seems fitting because Spangler and Opal's life and love centers largely around their work and what they provide for the other person.

Family units in both Appalachia and the Great Plains frequently provide stability for the members of the family while tensions between progress and past traditions unsettle the residents of the Appalachia and the Great Plains. Fred Chappell most strongly highlights this tension in a vignette titled "The Fisherwoman." In the tale, Mr. Worley, a native of Appalachia, habitually complains about the outsiders who invade the streams and woods he has fished in for numerous years. He detests the "fancy equipment," "big new cars," "blowhard talk," "tastes in fashion," and the unsightly manners of these "tourist anglers" and "plump-faced Floridians" (Chappell 86). His most fervent complaint concerns the outsiders' tendency to scare the fish away because they are ignorant of proper fishing methods and etiquette. However, when Mr. Worley is injured by a fall, his fishing partner receives assistance from a tourist and a park ranger though not before she endures their gawking stares.

The Kirkman family also recognizes that changes place tension on old traditions and lifestyles. Jess's father Joe Robert Kirkman comments, "If we lose your grandmother, if Annie Barbara Sorrells dies, a world dies with her, and you and I and your mother and little sister will have to begin all over. Our time will be new and hard to keep track of. The time your grandmother knew was a steady time that people could trust. But you can see for yourself that we are losing it" (Chappell 5). Near the beginning of the novel, a few accounts of his parents' courtship satisfy him. By the end

of the novel, Jess wholeheartedly acknowledges the four distinct tellers of "The Remembering Woman," and the changes each teller brings to the story. As the novel closes, Jess and his father come to terms with shifting traditions as they metaphorically watch time move chaotically. Whether the change stems from outside forces or natural occurrences, such experiences regularly bring apprehension to Chappell's' characters and other Appalachians.

The tensions Spangler Tukle and his cattle herd experience may be more direct, but they bring no less tension. One reason Spangler decides to drive the herd involves his belief that the traditions of the cowboys have been cheapened by popular media and entertainment value. He rants,

> It's them that's lost the tradition. Not me. . . . Out went the bars and the cowboys. All that's left is the fucking rodeo. What a bunch of turkeys. Everything that's work gets turned into a game. That's how you know when you've been fucked over. Se we got the rode and the Marlboro ads and a few piss-cutters like Jed. The whole place has become a T.V. museum. (Day 71)

Spangler considers the emerging West a thin, shabby veneer of what once was. He deplores the dentists and teachers who seek to earn extra funds by raising cattle in their backyards. He derides these individuals and demonstrates his scorn as he embellishes their practices of driving their livestock from one backyard to another and feeding the animals with grass clippings. Spangler believes these individuals' choices are indicative of falling cattle prices. He experiences tension concerning what he desires the West to be and what it actually is becoming. Ironically, while Spangler criticizes would-be farmers

and ranchers with backyard operations, he admits that he has never truly driven cattle over long distances.

The long cattle drive reveals even greater tensions between the lore of the West and the current reality that debunks the lore. When Spangler commences the drive, he desires to relive the excitement and thrill of the first cowboy drives, yet civilization stops his trek. Instead of traveling over the open range of earlier times, Spangler must take his herd down back roads and through small towns. In one town, the residents protest the cattle drive because they are fearful of the mess the animals may make. This attitude seems overwhelmingly infused with present day worries. Years ago most everyone had familiarity with livestock and their messes. Technology also diminishes the glory of the cattle drive. Cars and aircraft cause the herd to panic and the messy deaths of at least five steers. People act absurdly and dangerously as they try to participate in the excitement of the cattle drive. Perhaps the most devastating tension that the Tukles experience consists of finding out that their herd will only sell as dog food. During early cattle drives, the cattle gained weight as they moved across the land. During Spangler's drive, the cattle also gained weight, but machines now allow meat processors to estimate the large amount of unwanted gristle on the animals. Leo concludes that after the cattle drive and the passing of Jed Adams, "Things are as they were, save for Jed. Nothing is the same" (Day 227).

Leo speaks for all the characters when he says, "We know we can't do it again. His [Spangler's] truck pulls in at Betty's. There is nothing more to write" (Day 228). Although some activities, such as eating at Betty's, remains the same, other activities will

never return to their original glory. In much of the Great Plains, this fact creates tension as residents and others try to hold on to the past glories of the region.

Both Fred Chappell and Robert Day use the passing of stalwart individuals to signal the end of a mighty era. Those Appalachian and Great Plains residents who are left behind rely on their characteristic individualism to help them survive the changes. Working closely with the land helps steady them in unstable times while interacting with family members provides consolation and assistance. Finally, stories allow the residents to define their position both in the past and in the future.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATING THE REGION: THE SIGNIFIGANCE OF APPALACHIAN AND GREAT PLAINS LITERATURE

Comparing the Appalachian novels *Gap Creek*, *Storming Heaven*, and *Farewell, I'm Bound to Leave You* with the Great Plains novels *Plains Song for Female Voices*, *The Day the Cowboys Quit*, and *The Last Cattle Drive* reveals similarities in the way the authors depict independence, self-sufficiency, family, tension, religion, isolation, music, narrative, land, and work. The similarities between cultural characteristics play a role in highlighting additional characteristics of both Appalachia and the Great Plains and broadening people's perspectives of the regions.

These cultural characteristics often are highlighted independently in scholarly texts about either Appalachia or the Great Plains. However, the characteristic of work seems to appear infrequently, if at all, in scholarly literature while themes and ideas about work frequently emerge in the fictional texts. In both Robert Morgan's Appalachian novel *Gap Creek* and Wright Morris's Midwestern *Plains Song for Female Voices*, the authors' female characters view work as a means of coping and overcoming hardship. Work and people's relationship to their working roles becomes a theme in *Storming Heaven* by Denise Giardina and *The Day the Cowboys Quit* by Elmer Kelton. In many ways, Fred Chappell and Robert Day's rough depiction of love characterizes a type of work in their respective novels, *Farewell, I'm Bound to Leave You* and *The Last Cattle Drive*. In his article "Appalachia," Robert Morgan contemplates the place of work: "As I wrote more and more about work on the small mountain farm, I came to see that our work defines us. It is our work that gets us through our days and our lives, and perhaps

gives us our greatest satisfaction. In so far as we have any wisdom it is in our work, in the rituals of work and the job well done." In rituals of work, characters engage in taming or shaping their own spaces, much as Americans have done since the settlement of Jamestown. Not only does work seem to define the characters in Morgan's work, but work also plays a role in the other novels as well, whether it is rounding up cattle, building a dwelling, or traveling over the landscape.

Recognizing the roles of work, independence, family, isolation, music, stories, religion, and land in the novels of Appalachia and the Great Plains helps to provide a larger picture of the two regions. In *Farewell, I'm Bound to Leave You*, Fred Chappell explains that his characters respect Dr. Barcroft because he tells their stories in a way they "would like for others to know [them]" as a people (197). Dr. Barcroft does not focus only on Appalachia; however, he also speaks of his travels with cowboys "from the plains of West Texas to the railroad of central Kansas" (Chappell 208). Just as Dr. Barcroft joins these two regions together in his own stories, comparing the cultural characteristics of Appalachian and Great Plains literature emphasizes some distinct American qualities in literature.

Frank Norris argues that to some degree figures such as "'the Cowboy and Hoosier and Greaser and Buckeye and Jay Hawker' are "mere variations of an American type" (qtd. in Hsu 45). Nonetheless, Norris refrains from further expanding similarities because "'[I]f an American novelist should go so deep into the lives of the people of any one community that he would find the thing that is common to another class of people a thousand miles away, he would have gone *too* deep to be exclusively American. . . . He would have sounded the world note; . . . his countryman would be all humanity'" (qtd. in

Hsu 45, emphasis original). Instead of acting as a mere depiction of a single place, regional literature provides a pathway for American consciousness as Shapiro and Quantic, respectively, assert that Appalachia and the Great Plains are not tangible places but rather perceptions of the mind. These perceptions, moreover, function "as manifestations, variations, divergences, and extremes of a broader national culture" (Dorman 181).

Examples of larger national culture manifest themselves even in literature that focuses on specific regions. In his novel *Plains Song for Female Voices*, Wright Morris presents his perception of hillbillies. He writes, "Belle Rooney . . . cast her eyes about nervously as she talked; the front of her soiled blouse lacked buttons. Cora thought her wild and unkempt in appearance, her black hair disheveled as an unruly child's. She did not wear bloomers. Most of what little Cora had heard of hill people seemed confirmed" (Morris 39-40). This view perpetuates a stereotype, but Morris enlarges his view by adding, "Belle was not afraid of work, however, and couldn't seem to get enough of child caring and tending" (40), and Cora comes to value Belle and her mountain manners (Morris 60-61). Morris acknowledges stereotypes while also pointing out the valuable qualities of the hill people of the Ozarks. By emphasizing both Belle and Cora's inclination toward work, Morris expands people's view of two regions and points toward a national precept.

The propensity of American society to advocate individualism and to receive fair rewards for hard work appears in Morgan's *Gap Creek*, Giardina's *Storming Heaven*, Kelton's *The Day the Cowboys Quit*, and Day's *The Last Cattle Drive.* *Storming Heaven* provides an example of this idea that extends past its West Virginia setting. In the book,

C.J. Marcum and Doc Booker, an African American, discuss the bleak situation the miners face:

> He [Doc Booker] leaned across to me and lowered his voice.
>
> "I belong to the Socialist Party. You heard tell of it?"
>
> I nodded my head.
>
> "I git a newspaper from them, the *Appeal to Reason*. It come out of Kansas. They's a lot of sense in it."
>
> "I dont know," I said. "I always thought a man should own his land. I'd have to think about that there socialism."
>
> "Hell, let him own a little bit of land. Long as everybody got some that want it. But the man that does the work should own the coal mine. He should receive the fruit of his labor, like the Good Book say." (Giardina 57)

By alluding to a Kansas paper, Giardina expands the miner's plight. Their grievances no longer concern only Justice County residents or even West Virginia residents. Instead, the battle for independence extends to the Midwest.

Giardina further emphasizes American society's longing for independence by mentioning the Colorado coal strikes. She likens these western strikes to the West Virginia strike at Paint Creek because in both "the strikers [were] throwed out of their houses," lived in tents, and feared both gun thugs and martial law (Giardina 120). Additionally, Giardina recalls that Mother Jones was present at the Colorado strike. This fact serves to join the two strikes because while most of Jones's activities focused on the Appalachian coal fields, she also joined other strikes, such as railroad strikes. In fact, by

1930, people considered Jones "the most dangerous woman in America" (Higgs, Manning, and Miller 66). Kelton's novel *The Day the Cowboys Quit* further affirms American society's longing for independence in his catalog of the cowboys' grievances.

The idea of independence offers one example of applying regional themes to the whole of American literature. Broadening regional perspectives allows readers to understand both their national culture and regional culture. Hsuan Hsu asserts,

> By incorporating regionalist aesthetics into larger contexts, these texts demonstrate that affect originates not only in isolated, local communities but also in the broader spaces of transnational capitalism. Furthermore, the emotional responses evoked by global scenarios . . . contribute to the formation of regional identification on the part of narrators, characters, and presumed readers. (37)

Acknowledging ties to broader cultural manifestations debunks stereotypes as people realize that while some aspects of a region may be unique, the region is often not so peculiar as to be completely separate from the rest of American culture. Stephanie Foote maintains that "regional writing helped to create a way to understand and value social differences, and helped to establish a way of imagining communities that interrupted even as they sustained a national culture" (40). In fact, the broader American culture interconnects with the ideas of a place to create a specific regionalism.

Finding that ideas about independence, family, isolation, music, narrative, tensions, religion, and land permeate both Appalachian and Great Plains literature "helps to tell the story of literature's relationship to culture because it indexes the constantly changing interactions between literary forms and a broader discussion over what

constitutes ‘America’ in an American literary tradition” (Foote 38). Fred Chappell elaborates on this idea in *Farewell, I’m Bound to Leave You* by noting that individual personalities and stories form a “small current being but a streamlet of the larger current that pour[s] through the world and everything that [is] in the world and beyond it” (215). Just as water passes through streams, rivers, and lakes from mountains, plains, and grasslands to later join larger oceans, the stories of Appalachia and the Great Plains share similarities that allow them to constitute a significant portion of America’s larger literary river.

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