

You'uns: Toward Appalachian Rhetorical Sovereignty

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You'uns: Toward Appalachian Rhetorical Sovereignty

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## ABSTRACT

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You'uns: Toward Appalachian Rhetorical Sovereignty

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“You'uns: Toward Appalachian Rhetorical Sovereignty” began as a consideration of how Scott Richard Lyons's concept of rhetorical sovereignty (put forward in his essay “Rhetorical Sovereignty: What do American Indians Want from Writing?”) might be applied to Appalachia. While the field of rhetoric and composition has advanced a sense of academic and social value for non-standard dialects, my sense is that Appalachian dialects in particular continue to be evaluated as “wrong” rather than different. This evaluation of linguistic error is tied with perceptions of cultural deficit, making some teachers eager to correct both the language and the social values of Appalachian students. What is often unseen in this is the rhetorical writing and communication styles that are attached to that language and those values. Because Appalachian rhetoric as a shared cultural dynamic remains unseen and unconsidered in the classroom, many Appalachian students fail to see themselves as united with others in potentially empowering ways. Thus, where Lyons defines rhetorical sovereignty as the right of a people, united by shared language and cultural history, to create their own definition and have it respected, the people of Appalachia must first learn to perceive themselves, and be recognized by others, as a rhetorically-linked people. To this end, I use historical, cultural, and rhetorical analysis to investigate Appalachian rhetoric as a potentially uniting factor. Specifically, I put forward that elements of Celtic rhetoric and ideology have been

inherited by Appalachian peoples throughout the region. These elements are discernible in the ways Appalachians speak and write, although because these elements are unrecognized as rhetorical practices within the academy, many students are simply given the sense that they “don't know how to write.” I advocate bringing Appalachian rhetoric as a concept into regional classrooms, asking students to investigate and record their sense of Appalachian definition and discourse, as a stepping stone toward achieving a critical sense of ourselves as both individual and linked. I also demonstrate my sense of Appalachian rhetorical writing, through the inclusion of personal and family stories and considerations of my process of thinking as illustrative of individualized, non-adversarial argument.

## DEDICATION

*For family, place, and all the ways they intertwine.*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

If this work is anything worthwhile, it ain't cuz a me. It's because of the many people who make my world and make me care about doing something good in it.

Thanks to my parents, grandparents, brother, aunts, uncles, cousins of all degrees, friends and neighbors . . . naming them all would take up more space than the dissertation itself. And to those family members who've come before me, and them as yet to come.

Special thanks to my teachers, not least of all the ones on my committee: my director, Mara Holt, Sherrie Gradin, Jennie Nelson, and Jaylynn Hutchinson.

And thanks to the spirit of Manasseh Cutler, for his dream of a pioneer school that became Ohio University, a research institution in the Appalachian foothills, where my worlds could combine.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO APPALACHIAN RHETORICAL SOVEREIGNTY (OR, PIECIN' A QUILT)

Great-grandma Carpenter was a master quilter. She didn't need a sewing machine; she pieced every one of her quilts by hand. Some of them was made for me, which even when little I thought was incredible, as she had so many grandkids and great-grandkids who would have loved to've had one of her quilts. I remember watching her quilt; I was pretty young at the time, but I knew quilting was something I wanted to do, too.

Unfortunately, I was too young to have much patience. The stitches had to be so small and so exact...I managed to knot up the thread a few stitches into my one and only solo effort, and gave up the entire enterprise. It's up in my grandparents' attic now, that little piece of batted cotton I was too impatient to quilt when I was five. It's in the cedar chest, just like Grandma Carpenter's quilts are. It's like somebody knew better than I did at the time how much I'd regret giving up. I did learn to crochet eventually, taught by the mother of one of my brother's friends. But it's not the same. Crochet, unlike quilting, ain't part of the family.

We don't need any other reason to love Grandma Carpenter's quilts but that they was made by her. Still, it wasn't until within the last few years that I learned to see those quilts in a new light, as something precious not just because of the messages of love and artistry that they'd always conveyed for me. In fact, I've only recently been learning to read them, to read quilting as a whole, as something even more deeply rhetorical than I'd ever realized.

The realization tracks directly to my discovery of Fawn Valentine's *West Virginia Quilts and Quiltmakers*, wherein she explores the cultural roots of the Appalachian quilting traditions. She demonstrates ways of reading the cultural traditions of quilts through their designs and constructions. Scotch-Irish-influenced quilts regularly consist of a traditional pattern, such as a starburst or rings, but within that pattern can lie a chaos of apparently non-related colors and cloth patterns. The whole is over-layered by a pattern of intersecting, wave-like stitching, giving the quilt an equal sense of order and chaos, of circular and interlaced connections. Materials ("piece-goods" Grandma Carpenter called them) are often chosen for sentimental or value-laden reasons; a scrap of a quilter's wedding dress may be entwined with a piece of the blankets that swaddled each of her babies. Thus, what might at first glance appear a disorganized mishmash of clashing colors is actually an ode to the passages of a person's life. It is, as I see it, a system that privileges styles of communication such as descriptive narrative (each piece of the quilt is an opening to an interconnected body of stories) and proposes as an end-goal the drawing of connections between both the similar and seemingly disparate components to create a whole text, a text that speaks of the quilter perhaps more than it speaks to the viewer. The resulting patterns require a sense of cultural literacy for best interpretation, as they require the willingness of the viewer/listener/interpreter to both see the quilt as more than an object, to look at it as a cultural insider might, and to consider meanings beyond the surface materials. A quilt tells a story, but on its own subjective terms.

It is this sort of cultural literacy, a literacy that is needed to accept and understand Appalachian rhetoric, which my project hopes to advance. I don't know the stories behind Grandma Carpenter's quilts exactly, in that I don't know, and can no longer ask, why she chose the fabrics that she did, or why she placed one particular piece next to another. But I imagine I've come to understand better now why she quilted at all, why she took the time and patience with those small and precise stitches, what she meant in doing it, and what it can mean for me and for others. If the quilt, and the quilting, are rhetorical products and acts, they are emblematic ones, grown from and created by a rhetorical tradition that I have perhaps performed myself without knowing. I want to know now. I want to quilt.

My experience of Appalachia is one of rhetorics made visible in multiple ways. Quilts become texts written by the history, place, and relationships that have written, so to speak, the quilter. One of my more recent discoveries has been Daniel Patterson's *The True Image: Gravestone Art and the Culture of Scotch Irish Settlers in the Pennsylvania and Carolina Backcountry*, which argues that our headstones are likewise rhetorical objects, in that they evince similar messages from similar influences. In fact, I sometimes wonder if writing has had less use as a rhetorical format in Appalachia than anything else.

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Let me tell you a story.

My pap's grandparents built the old house. I never knew them, of course, nor even Pap's mother, the last to live in it, but I knew their house intimately. There weren't no way a livin' in it by the time I was born, and when I think on the old house, it's the

sagging walls and rotted out floors that I remember. It stood there, 30 feet from the front porch of our trailer, till I was 14. As a child, I could sit on the porch in summertime to watch the once-white curtains blowing through a broken window on the old house and imagine I was ketchin a glimpse of a ghost. It wasn't a scary thing, the old house or the spirits of it. They was family.

And what a family to have. William Gallagher (the first) built the old house with his mother, wife, and kids after he came home from the war. We have a picture of him in his Union uniform, crossing his pistol and knife in front of his chest, defiant and strong. War may of tempered these traits a bit 'fore the end; having survived South Mountain and, barely, Antietam, he never had a good word to say about war when he told his kids about it. In fact, me and Mom had to rediscover the names of his battles, 'cause these weren't what got passed down to us. They were, in the family memory, forgotten. What we learned from him, like his children and his children's children learned, was that war was hell. "I run five miles to get into the army," he said. "And once I was in it, I'd a-run ten to git out, and been glad to go home." His father went into battle at his side, and he never did come back from it. Dying away from home: wudn't much worse you could say about war than that.

I know my ancestors' names and stories and words from what got told generation to generation. Writing didn't tell the stories, mouths did, but sometimes written words featured in the stories themselves. Inside the old house was the letter informing William's mother that her husband, Elza, was dead in some God forsaken war hospital in Tennessee, and for a price could be brought home for burial. (She couldn't pay. In

Tennessee he remains.) I know that my great-great grandmother, Sarah Narcissus, held together her family and families around her as a root doctor; the old house kept two well-worn volumes of herb lore and advice on home maintenance to scaffold the learning she likely got from her own momma, even though their pages had long since so crumbled and mildewed to be mostly unreadable. The old house held the albums of tin-type photos of relations whose names were documented, but about whom we've lost all else. It held the Bibles my great-grandmother Maud Lula's father had used when he was a preacher at the Baptist church on the next hill over. All of these were held on to, not because of what their writings could tell us, but as artifacts around which stories were told, remembrances kept.

Grandma, Pap, and Mom finally agreed that the house itself should come down, as it was getting dangerous for the kids to play around those sagging walls and broken windows. I don't believe any consideration other than our safety would a-made that decision possible. Pap called a neighbor, who had a backhoe, to see about doing the job. What we didn't realize was that this neighbor would take to the task with initiative; he showed up the next day while we were all gone at work and school and with his backhoe pushed the old house, including most all of its precious contents, over into the wooded holler below, and crushed the remnants onto pieces in his tracks. I came home from school to find that the walls, by which I'd measured my life till then, was gone completely.

But the place remains, and the stories with it, and that is what we hold to. Not long after that my parents, brother, and I moved out of the trailer and into a house we'd

had built a little further out the ridge, and my cousin moved into the trailer. Eventually, she would add to the family two babies, and when they'd outgrown the trailer, she had a double-wide moved in to the precise spot where the old house had been. It is a place that centers the extent of our farmland, bracketed by my parents' home on one end and my grandparents' on the other. All told, the blood of seven generations of Gallaghers has lived on this land; the houses come and go, but this land is the pole around which we seem to rotate.

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Is there something rhetorical in it, then, these generations, these stories, these artifacts, this place? This is the most recent incarnation of questions I've considered for years, since the day one of my middle-school English teachers told us we were Appalachian, and perhaps before then. I'd noticed since I first started to make sense of stories that ours weren't much like the ones I saw on TV. I noticed differences, even before I'd noticed the value judgments people like my English teacher (whose reference to the concept of Appalachia occurred during a scolding over our poor grammar test scores) could and did make about them. Questions about the sources of these differences, their causality and implications, have been with me, then, since childhood. In rhetorical studies, I've found what seems to be the most holistic way of gathering and considering them that has yet been shown to me. It was through the field's scholars, like Geneva Smitherman, Victor Villanueva, and Shirley Brice Heath, that concepts of culture and rhetoric became for me interwoven, and through which I learned to extrapolate the questions they asked about specific cultural groups' "ways with words" to my situation:

does my upbringing affect how I write and think? Do my family stories, and the places and things around which they revolve, connect us with something bigger than just us, something my English teacher perceived in her reference to us as “Appalachian?”

I would posit that there is something rhetorical in the large, messy conglomeration of places, peoples, stories, and more that fills my mind when I try to think and write my identity, but by a definition of the term I'm not sure I've encountered. While rhetoric as an academic field has a distinguished history of theorizing and exploring diverse conceptions of definitions, the version of rhetoric I received in college-prep English classes, in the form of “academic writing,” continued an unwavering allegiance to an idea of rhetoric that students from the classical era onward might have recognized: rhetoric, by this definition, was about writing arguments; specifically, arguments intended to change readers' minds. Often, this persuasion involved defining and defending a pre-approved thesis statement, on a pre-approved, academically acceptable topic. The story of the old house had no place in any academic writing assignment I ever received in high school, no matter how deeply it remained in my psyche. School writing was for making and defending arguments about great literature, regardless of how deeply uncertain I felt about the arguments I was making. Undoubtedly I experienced, as many scholars have noticed with many student populations, a fundamental difference in the values of home communication versus those of school. But I have since come to suspect that defining my discomfort as a values-clash overlooks something perhaps even more deeply fundamental. That perhaps it was the conception of writing, and even communication

itself, as rooted in the distinguishing of positions and the persuasion of others that presaged an even greater rift than choice of subject matter or grammar.

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The first time I met Sarah three years ago, we talked about West Virginia. She grew up there, and I had at least some family connections across the state border, so we canvassed surnames for any potential common relations or acquaintances. While we didn't talk about geography—the hills or rivers or coalmines—from my perspective our subject was *place*, in that the peoples themselves, and our instinct to discuss them, is part of the place by definition. However, the subject of place in any form didn't come up again until recently (both of us being in grad school, the topics of classes and comps exams formed by far the bulk of our conversations), when we discussed our writing weaknesses. I'd just gotten feedback on a paper to the effect that I didn't have a strong thesis, that the overall tone of my argument was too tentative. “That happens to me a lot,” I admitted to Sarah, feeling pretty ashamed of myself for routinely failing such a basic tenet of academic writing, even after all these years of practice. But Sarah shrugged it off. “They just don't get that it's because you're Appalachian,” she said. “You don't want to tell anyone what to think.”

Sarah described my conundrum perfectly: thesis statements and classical arguments have always felt wrong. And on greater reflection, I think it's only the start of how and why my sense of rhetoric, writing, and communication has never entirely meshed, at least not comfortably, with the most textbook definitions of rhetorical correctness.



When I started teaching a composition course entitled “Writing about Environmental Sustainability,” I decided to open the course with a writing project called the place-based biography. In order to get students to thinking about the environment as something immediate, as influential in their lives, I asked them to think and write about how places have shaped them in important ways. Many students chose as a thesis some particular aspect of their personality or a personal value that they hold (along the lines of a “This I Believe” statement). They then discussed an interaction they'd had with a specific location that helped them build or demonstrate these values. Others chose to focus more on a place itself, with a thesis stating the dominant impression they wanted their readers to get about the place (“Such and such is a great place to raise a family because...,” for example). However, one student went in a different direction. Mac, the only student in my class who, like me, hailed from Southeastern Ohio, lacked a thesis statement of any sort in his essay draft. Rather, his essay told a collection of stories about differing aspects of his homeplace. In our discussions, I pointed out that some readers might find his essay disorganized; they might not understand why a paragraph on a particular tree in his backyard was followed by the story of his community's response to a high school classmate's car accident. Mac had a question for me, then, one I think is important: why did the reader need to know anything beyond the fact that these ideas were connected for him, that these were things he thought about when describing his sense of place? For him, this essay didn't need a thesis. It was, rather, a way of demonstrating for a reader his own sense of what living in his community felt like, and why. But he also pointed out that living here could mean very different things to others;

he was wary of making a definitive statement about his particular place at the expense of other interpretations. This essay was, I've come to think, his quilt, a text that could very well mean more for him than for his readers.

On reflection, I feel like I recognize what Mac was doing, because I have done it myself frequently and unintentionally on writing projects, even those that were intended to be classical arguments. I would have no thesis, or a very weak one. What I would do instead was essentially write my way through my thought process on a particular subject. For a long time I didn't necessarily understand that I wasn't trying to make an argument, *per se*. If asked, I probably would have said that I was, because I knew that was what an academic essay was supposed to do. But what I was ultimately doing, rather than pushing for my reader to agree with a particular point, was showing them how I thought, how *I* reached the conclusion that I did about a subject. Likewise, Mac was uncomfortable with crafting a thesis, the “dominant idea,” about his experience, because making one thing about his community dominant would by necessity denigrate other things, aspects that might have more meaning for others than for him. A thesis would risk telling others what to think about his community; instead, he would tell what he thought, and why. *He* knew what he thought about his homeplace, and he could tell the stories that made him think that way. His reader could witness his experience, could perhaps understand him, could perhaps agree with him, and could view his process as an example from which to think about their own perspectives.

The problem, as I see it, is that a reader also might do none of these things, or even realize that doing these things is part of Mac's rhetorical purpose, let alone why this

purpose feels valid to him. An even greater problem might be that, according to Mac himself, this was his first experience of considering his rhetorical effects, let alone why he made these rhetorical moves. Mac defined himself as Appalachian for much the same reason I initially did: he was told in school that that was what he was. And he evinced in his essay many of the social concepts I think of as Appalachian, beyond even his style of writing and essay organization. But what he didn't do, at least initially, was connect his way of writing and rhetoric with Appalachia. He thought that he was simply fulfilling a writing assignment to the best of his ability, an ability he fully expected, on the basis of previous academic writing experiences, to be told he didn't have. In short, Mac didn't recognize his rhetorical approach as based upon cultural or place influence, which I strongly suspect it is; he had only a vague sense that his way of writing wasn't "right." And if he couldn't recognize the cultural reasoning behind his rhetoric, how could his writing teachers, many of whom come from entirely different place and cultural backgrounds, be expected to?

What I have been attempting here, then, and what I hope to continue throughout this project, is to do consciously what I and what Mac (and, I suspect, many Appalachian students) have done before without knowing: write an argument in an Appalachian style. Doing so will mean offering not an explicit thesis, a specific idea I want a reader to accept, but rather to demonstrate my own subjective process of thinking through my conceptions of Appalachia as culture, as rhetoric. Maybe it reads like one of Grandma Carpenter's quilts. Maybe it's unclear why I go from one idea to the next. I may not even be able to articulate these if asked. But they are ideas that fit, for me. Perhaps readers will

come away agreeing with me on some things. But what I hope most of all is to make visible an idea, an example of a way of thought and expression that comes from a people, a place, and a history. Because I think that this visibility can benefit these people, this place, and the academic realms with which we are making ever more contact.

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It is this melding of my encounters and experiences, some quite old, some quite recent, and some encountered by me only vicariously through stories and texts, that has prompted my interest in what I think of as Appalachian rhetoric. Or at least, as *my* Appalachian rhetoric. I make this distinction in recognition that Appalachia is vast, is complex, and means different things to different people. And the factors influencing these interpretations are multiple, not limited only to subsets of regional geography. My experience of Appalachia has been that of a farming culture and economy; not all residents of Appalachia are so fortunate. In 2011, Todd Snyder composed a dissertation, which has since been published as the book *The Rhetoric of Appalachian Identity*, on the possibilities offered by critical pedagogy for Appalachian classrooms. He explored his experiences growing up in a coal town, where mining was not only the primary economic activity, but within which even political thought and activity was dictated by the coal industry. His definition of Appalachia, and what it means to be Appalachian, is fundamentally different from mine; in his experience, Appalachian identity is something dictated to people by corporations, without disinterested intent.

I cannot possibly, then, provide a definition of Appalachian-ness that will satisfy everyone, if such a definition even exists (which I doubt). However, the act of making

this distinction—of attempting to validate my own experience and reading of rhetorical constructions without denigrating that of others—to my mind fits deeply with Appalachian rhetorical stylings. It is a rhetoric, I submit, that allows for both individual interpretation and humility in the face of alternatives, that can accept ambiguity and multiplicity. It is a rhetoric that seeks connection over argumentation, or at least, over what many would recognize as academic argumentation. But I'm perhaps getting ahead of the story. What I posit here is simply that there is an inner-life to Appalachian rhetoric that can engender in its people cultural and communicative differences that have traditionally been little explored. What I seek to explore further is the shape of Appalachian rhetoric, what influences it and how it influences identity, and perhaps most importantly, why these differences matter, within and without the geographic region.

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I'm gon tell you'uns a story that I think of, in broad terms, as my exigency. Like most stories that I think of as mine, this story starts before I was born. In fact, I could say it starts with the successive generations of my family that have been raised on our homeplace for the past 150 years. My mother and her sisters, daughters of William (the second) and Alberta Gallagher, have remained near the original Gallagher land, with me having been raised specifically on it. My cousin Stacy, upon reaching adulthood, has returned to this land permanently (her parents being settled approximately ten miles away, though she, like all my cousins, had spent a great deal of time here throughout childhood). The current geography of the homeplace is something like this: my grandparents' house, my cousin and her two children in a double-wide a little ways

further up the hill, and my parents' house a little further out the ridge from that. We are the only family on this hilltop, our houses connected by a dirt road, all within easy walking distance of each other. It is a situation not at all uncommon in our region.

When I was fourteen, we moved out of our trailer and into the aforementioned house my parents built, while Stacy moved into the trailer. By this point, Stacy had completed her engineering degree at Ohio University and was working with the state on a road construction project, which is how she met Rod. Rod was from the other Ohio, a flat-land Ohio, to the north, where he lived and most often worked, and where he was a member of the National Guard. Because of his own roots some hours away, Stacy made clear early in their courtship that she was happy living near her family and had no interest in moving; if the relationship was to continue, Rod would have to be willing to move to her home. This, again, is not at all unusual; my own father had moved to my mother's family home, albeit from much closer.

Rod's agreement was a relief to Stacy, and his acquiescence didn't seem to falter until after the wedding and the birth of their first child. Rod, having chosen not to sell his northern home, soon began insisting Stacy and the baby travel there to stay on weekends. However, even during the week, he'd start up arguments that ended with threats of divorce if Stacy didn't agree to make a more permanent change. Eventually, Rod began taking their son to his home without telling Stacy, refusing to return him unless Stacy agreed to move. He had also begun having an affair while Stacy was pregnant with their second child; this woman, who lived nearer to Rod and who served with him in the

National Guard, became Rod's second wife within weeks of finalizing his divorce from Stacy.

That all of this was known by the wider family was, again, not unusual in my experience, because Stacy's well-being was the charge of many—her parents, but also her grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. This state of affairs had caused conflict during the marriage; once, when Stacy cut her hand and needed stitches, she called her mother to drive her to the emergency room—I would have done the same. It's even a joke with us—if you're sick or hurt, you call your mom. If you can't find her, call your grandma. Rod was angry, however, that she hadn't called him at work, instead. (Stacy was, he said more than once, “too attached to her family.”) Likewise, her children are our children; as such, no less than three generations of relatives have been there to sooth in the wake of the parental strife defining these kids' early years. Given that the marriage caused such chaos for Stacy and the kids, a divorce was considered by all of us to be largely for the best. Stacy was granted primary custody, with Rod receiving standard weekend visitation privileges.

I wouldn't be telling this story if it ended here. Rod and his new wife have, over the past year, sought full custody of the children. We had previously suspected that what the kids heard on their visitation weekends up north was not exactly flattering toward their mother or her family. Rod was known to have told them at length how much more fun life at his home would be, because there would be “so much more to do” in town than there was back in the country. He chided his son for being a “mamma's boy,” and for having too many family members ready to “wipe his butt for him.” His new wife claimed

that the children lacked “essential” mannerisms, such as being unable to hold their eating utensils “properly,” which was ascribed to their being raised by “hillbillies.” And when Rod and his new wife bought clothes and toys for the children, they were told that none of these could be brought home, as “nice” things would not be appropriate in their mother's house. Ultimately, what's being made here is, for me, a very disturbing distinction: the difference between Rod's lifestyle and ours is, according to him, not one of culture, but one of a right way to live and think, versus a wrong one.

The point of this comes to a head in the charges Rod made to the courts as part of his custody case. Rod argued that the children currently live with a single mother who, technically, is below the poverty line. Specifically, he argued that he and his new wife could provide the children a “stable family environment,” where the primary family members (i.e., a father and a mother) live under one roof, and where presumably grandparents are seen only on holidays and cousins perhaps once a year at a family reunion, rather than daily. Likewise, their (urban) location was more conducive to the children's wellbeing and social development than their current (rural) environment. The environment of their mother's home lacked the mainstream American normality they would receive in Cleveland. In other words, the court in this case was being asked to remove the children from an impoverished, single, backwoods mother and grant them to a middle-class, urban, nuclear family unit.

The case did not ultimately go to trial; Rod withdrew his custody suit the day before trial was scheduled to begin, for reasons we will probably never know. But what continues to worry me is that on paper, and to a northern Ohio court, Rod's assertions



may well have had merit. However, what they left out, and they left out a lot, has everything to do with a convenient (and from my point of view, deeply unfortunate) failure to view Appalachia on its own terms. Patricia Williams puts forward as a tragic flaw in the rhetoric of the United States legal system, that a presumed objective neutrality in fact masks the subjectivities of those empowered to make legal decisions:

Law and legal writing aspire to formalized, color-blind, liberal ideals.

Neutrality is the standard for assuring these ideals; yet the adherence to it is often determined by reference to an aesthetic of uniformity, in which difference is simply omitted . . . Race-neutrality in law has become the presumed antidote for race bias in real life. (48)

Appalachia has no place in the courtroom because the law presumes itself above such distinctions; little consideration is given to the convenience with which “objective” legal values and the social values of mainstream, white American culture coincide.

Because Appalachian cultural values are rendered invisible in the American legal system, my voice in the case, as the children's mother's cousin, amounts to nothing. Whoever, outside of Appalachia, would understand that a parent's cousin could be a daily part of a child's life, and the children a part of hers? That losing them would create the kind of wound that would never heal, not only for their mother but also for multiple generations of extended family? Or even, come to that, that a woman would be more willing to risk divorce than to raise her children anywhere but a rural hillside farm? The answer to these questions would require an understanding of the web of our lives, a web built by peoples, by places, and by words that go unheard far too often by those outside

our region. In fact, Rod's arguments play very nicely on the “common sense” of mainstream America: he offers a nuclear, financially affluent family situation in a suburban environment, whereas their mother offers a double-wide in the woods, at least a half-hour's drive from an urban setting, and currently the salary of a substitute school teacher. How could the kids possibly be considered better off here?

I understand how. But it's not an understanding I've ever been called upon to put into words, particularly written words. How can all of this, these ways of living and dying, of thinking and speaking and simply being in the world, be adequately explained to those who haven't lived them since birth? How can we explain who we are when we haven't, by and large, conceptualized it for ourselves? And how can we make ourselves heard by those who don't want to listen?

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I find that rhetoric plays significantly into this case, though in ways that are not surfaced or discussed. Nowhere in the court documents was cultural difference raised as a factor in this case, although its effects (including the rhetorical construction of “family” and the comparative values for place, money, and history) certainly were. But why not? Rod's construction of my family as impoverished and backward, even unstable, is not necessarily viewed in the lens of a culturally-influenced bias; in the discourse of mainstream social values, it is simple truth. It is a discourse in which to have a low-income is to be poor, which is to be ignorant, which is to be wrong; to knowingly choose to live in a region of fewer economic opportunities exemplifies this ignorance and backwardness. To want this for your children is tantamount to abuse. And when this

discourse prevails in the realms of power, the realms which will decide on an Appalachian child's best interest, failing to hear alternate discourses becomes anything but fair and objective.

But what if alternate constructions were allowed? What if the truths constructed about us could be augmented by those we provide? What would they even sound like? Of course these questions themselves are based upon an assumption I'm making, that I feel justified in making, which says that Stacy and her kids are part of a distinct culture, one with its own values and means of communicating those values, which sets them apart in an important way. My assumption says that this separation perhaps puts us at greater distance from the values of both Rod and the legal system, yet does not make us less. My assumption rests, ultimately, on the concept of Appalachian-ness, and the idea that this is something real to both the people who live it and to those who do not, though perhaps in very different ways. And the questions that underpin this all—what is Appalachia? Why does it matter?—are perhaps the most intricate of any questions I raise in this dissertation.

There is, of course, a fairly simplified geographic answer to this question of what Appalachia is. The Appalachian Regional Commission, established by Congress in 1965, defines Appalachia thusly:

The Appalachian Region . . . is a 205,000-square-mile region that follows the spine of the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi. It includes all of West Virginia and parts of 12 other states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York,

North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. (“The Appalachian Region”)

It's a flat, technical definition, as it is no doubt intended to be. Objectivity, once again.

The only sense about life within this region comes later in the Commission's continuation of their definition:

The Region's economy, once highly dependent on mining, forestry, agriculture, chemical industries, and heavy industry, has become more diversified in recent times, and now includes a variety of manufacturing and service industries. In 1965, one in three Appalachians lived in poverty. Over the 2007–2011 period, the Region's poverty rate was 16.1 percent. The number of Appalachian counties considered economically distressed was 223 in 1965; in fiscal year 2014 that number is 93. (“The Appalachian Region”)

Again, we are defined (through an ostensibly objective standard) by poverty, albeit a poverty less severe than before, thanks to the efforts of the Appalachian Regional Commission, who define their own mission in four points:

- 1) Increase job opportunities and per capita income in Appalachia to reach parity with the nation.
- 2) Strengthen the capacity of the people of Appalachia to compete in the global economy.
- 3) Develop and improve Appalachia's infrastructure to make the Region economically competitive.

4) Build the Appalachian Development Highway System to reduce  
Appalachia's isolation. ("About ARC")

While I have no wish to denigrate the ARC, I do think it's worth noting that if one were to encounter Appalachia solely by the information provided through them, it would be easy to assume that Appalachia has no culture to explore or to celebrate, or even to denigrate; at least, none different than any other part of the United States. It is this silence on the idea of Appalachia as a cultural entity, as much as any denigration of that culture, which I find unsettling.

But why? Why does it matter how Appalachia is defined, or whether its rhetoric is perceived and appreciated? It matters, I think, because these perceptions can affect our sense of identity, and by extension, how we exist and how we allow ourselves to be defined.

I consider myself to be Appalachian. And when I say this, I mean more than that I live in the region of the Appalachian Mountains, a place with a higher poverty rate than many other regions in the United States. I mean that I perceive myself as having developed within a cultural system, one revolving around a distinctive rhetorical tradition, which is based in both region and history. This is not a realization I learned in school; it is one I have determined for myself via study, interaction and experiences with peoples whose own cultural backgrounds are not Appalachian. I learned to recognize the systems in which I grew and developed at home as being rooted in a non-mainstream rhetoric. And it is only through this study and experience that I have developed interest in the dynamics of Appalachian rhetoric and its treatment by outsiders.

I mention this because I find it troubling that my development of a conscious sense of cultural self-definition has had to feel so very individual. Not only were the values that I would come to see as cultural dynamics denigrated through much of my public educational experience, the very fact that they *were* cultural dynamics was completely ignored. If, for example, I or one of my classmates tried to compose an argumentative essay not via a thesis and topic sentences, but rather through a story we'd learned from one of our grandmothers, we weren't demonstrating a culturally based rhetorical approach; we were simply producing bad writing. ("You don't want to tell a story here," a teacher told me once. "You want data to support a thesis." I was powerless at the time to question whether my story couldn't do both.)

The misunderstanding of what can happen when Appalachian students put pen to paper concerns me. It isn't accidental that I think my way through ideas in terms of stories, my own and other peoples'. It isn't accidental that other peoples' stories, particularly peoples from these hills, feel like my own. What I'm starting to see, and what I want to share, is that there is a reason for this that extends beyond me as an individual and into my participation and upbringing in a particularly misconstrued region. When we fail to frame Appalachia as a culture, we fail to see how its rhetorical dynamics emerge or how they can benefit us both within and outside the region.

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While I think of quilting as a metaphor for how I'm writing, my wider conception of why I'm writing owes much Scott Richard Lyons' definition of rhetorical sovereignty. As the controlling idea for what I'm seeking and a trail guide for how to get there, I am

framing my project around this concept. In his article “Rhetorical Sovereignty: What do American Indians Want from Writing?,” Lyons defines rhetorical sovereignty as a people's control over their own meaning; in other words, it is “the inherent right and ability of peoples to determine their own communicative needs and desires...to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse” (449-450). By Lyons' definition, this state requires self-recognition and the recognition by others of cultural identity on the people's terms; therefore, Appalachian rhetorical sovereignty would require us to name ourselves and our experiences, and for others to respect that naming.

I recognize that my reliance on Lyons is complicated by the inherent differences in the situations and peoples under discussion. Native American peoples experience political domination, wherein once fully independent nations are now subject to the domination of an outside entity, which is not the case for Appalachia as a people/culture. We are implicated in that domination; it cannot, and should not, be denied that my ability to discuss Appalachia as a region and a people is predicated upon the attempted annihilation of the Native peoples from whom the mountains were taken. Additionally, Lyons' concept of rhetorical sovereignty is dependent upon a group's recognition of itself as a people, defined by him as “a group of human beings united together by history, language, culture, or some combination therein—a community joined in union for a common purpose: the survival and flourishing of the people itself” (454). Appalachians are difficult to describe as a “people,” not because we lack these connections, but because not enough of us have had the opportunities to make those identity connections; in other

words, too few Southeastern Ohioans understand the links of history, language, and culture that join them to North Carolinians, or Tennesseans to Western Pennsylvanians. Too few of us ever have the chance or a good reason to think about and explore these ties.

Therefore, what I am making here is a very soft connection, in that both the Native peoples Lyons considers and the Appalachian peoples upon whom I focus lack rhetorical sovereignty in fundamental ways, and that composition and rhetorical studies can play a role in bringing us closer to its attainment. I wish to further explore how the concept of rhetorical self-determination Lyons advocates for Native peoples could be brought to bear on our perceptions of Appalachia, and how Appalachia could potentially move closer to rhetorical sovereignty. How could deeper explorations of Appalachian rhetoric contribute to a greater sense of peoplehood, or self-definition? I want us to consider that Appalachia has been systematically robbed of voice in ways that might make the correlation with Lyons' concept worthwhile. Claiming rhetorical sovereignty, in Lyons' estimation, as a step for Native Americans is "the general strategy by which we aim to best recover [our] losses" (449), by allowing culturally unique and historically disempowered peoples to recognize and demand recognition for their identities and rhetorical/cultural traditions (457). Perhaps it can be so for Appalachia, as well.

I consider, too, that foregrounding the means by which Appalachia's rhetorical situation differs from that of America's Native peoples could help to illuminate what makes our cultural and rhetorical recognition so difficult. While Native peoples have consistently been perceived by the American mainstream as culturally and racially



distinct, and have thereby been marginalized within the realm of political power, the situation with Appalachia is somewhat less clear-cut. Appalachia, in some ways, has been forcefully defined not as culturally or ethnically unique but as same-but-worse, in order to provide a scapegoat for mainstream ideologies of American whiteness. In other words, by defining Appalachia's people as essentially the same as the American mainstream (white, Anglo-Saxon, protestant) but undeniably worse due to our own individual freakishness of character (choosing, in essence, to live in poverty, ignorance, and violence), Appalachia becomes a kind of cultural scapegoat. We become the other by which the mainstream defines and contents itself with its own superiority. We started the same, but we've chosen to be better, they seem to say. When we look at Appalachia, we can see how far we've come.

Victor Villanueva has argued that it is in this way that Appalachia in fact becomes racialized, only it is as “a color without a name” (xvi). Appalachia is framed as white but not white, American but not American, in ways that are meant to be readily visible but not overly critiqued. Because if critiqued, this social construction might well fall apart at the seams like a poorly stitched quilt in a worshin' machine.

The wider American disdain for Appalachia has been bred in this silence, this absence of alternate definition. If anything, it's a perception that has proven as useful for the mainstream discourse as it has destructive for us. Our invisibility has been useful for creating and maintaining the conditions under which the region can be exploited by outsiders. Corporations and extractive industries feel empowered to exploit us economically, while entertainment media find in us a ready-made villain for their horror

movies and joke for their comedies. And often education, the entity with which I am most concerned, works to “fix” the flaws in our characters and values that keep us in such deplorable mental and physical conditions, faithful in the power of standardized discourse to lead us from the darkness. Lyons, seeing the forms of educational work being done to assimilate Native peoples into mainstream American discourse, and thereby deny these cultures their own identities, argues that the focus instead should be on reworking the teaching of writing to allow peoples to determine their own discursive needs and shape their own discursive identities. My desire, then, is to reframe the discourse about Appalachia so that we too can be recognized, and recognize ourselves, as a people, a people with a unique history, culture, and rhetoric worthy of such sovereignty.

I consider my project to be something of a prolegomena, a step forward on a trail that requires a great deal of further consideration to be navigated. My project, in essence, considers Lyons' rhetorical sovereignty in an Appalachian context from multiple angles and, to a degree, for multiple audiences: cultural outsiders, cultural insiders, and the educators of any background who care about the cultural literacy of Appalachia. On one hand, I feel this is important because rhetorical sovereignty, as Lyons defines it, requires the participation of these multiple groups. However, I also feel that such a multi-pronged approach is fitting with Appalachian rhetorical traditions. Much of our rhetoric defies Greco-Roman tradition, as much of Appalachia's rhetorical and cultural history traces to Europe's Celtic fringes (Ireland, Scotland, and Wales), regions where classical influence was limited. We have inherited and continue to propagate a rhetoric well-suited for rural regions, one that seeks to create connections rather than distinctions. I am trying, then, to

make visible forms of Appalachian narrative rhetoric that are too rarely committed to writing. I want educators and outsiders to see how judging our rhetoric through the lens of the Greco-Roman tradition does us a disservice and contributes to our silencing. I want us to see how we can reclaim our own tradition, examine and understand it, more than we have been allowed to do in the past, and to see how writing can help us do this. In fact, Lyons' rhetorical sovereignty demands of us the willingness and ability to value the heritage of our rhetoric in the ways many of us value the heritages of our family. An Appalachian writing classroom, as I envision it, could become the realm in which this happens. This transformation will require the participation of both Appalachian peoples and the outside influences that determine how and why we are schooled as we are. Without the consensus among these groups that Appalachian rhetoric and culture are worthwhile areas of critical examination, they will continue to be misconstrued and undervalued, a status that simply does not bode well for the attainment of a culture-wide rhetorical sovereignty.

I do, however, have a deeply emotional stake in wishing this attainment to happen, as does Lyons. Though Lyons does not directly reference the Indian Child Welfare Act, I find his article to be inextricably haunted by it. Originally passed in 1978, this legislation reacted to a long history of assimilation being achieved by the removal of children from their cultures, to be raised instead by white American families. The locus of the act revolved around the premise that robbing these children of their cultural heritage did them, and their cultures, a great injustice. The act was intended to recognize that it is not enough to assume, as was long assumed, that becoming culturally American

was in these children's best interest, by providing them with a “better”, more civilized lifestyle than their original cultural backgrounds would provide. For centuries, these peoples struggled to argue in their own defense against a dominant discourse unwilling to critique its own cultural ideology. That the Indian Child Welfare Act exists, imperfect and at times unsuccessful as it is, indicates to me at least some degree of the critical understanding in this country that cultural identity matters. Why, then, is it so easy to ignore regarding Appalachia? Why is it so hard to understand that growing up Appalachian matters for our children?

Because culture matters to me, and because being Appalachian matters to me, I want us to build a society, an educational system, and a justice system that will not ignore or denigrate Appalachian cultural identity. Without rhetorical sovereignty, without being able to both name ourselves as Appalachian and define with authority what that means, what do we have? For one thing, we have a custody battle in which being Appalachian can work against us, but in a way that is not acknowledged and therefore, not assailable. And I fear this will continue to be the case until we can, as Lyons so powerfully argues, learn to write and claim our own rhetorical and cultural identities.

Could we, one day, have an Appalachian Child Protection Act, that demands our court systems consider the removal of Appalachian children as damaging to them and to their culture? Maybe. But for such a thing to even be conceivable would require recognition, inside and outside Appalachia, of the existence and validity of Appalachian culture that we are nowhere near achieving. I am putting forward here that making

Appalachian rhetoric more visible academically, particularly in composition studies, can be an important first step, with potential individual, legal, and economic repercussions.

Lyons acknowledges that, in regard to the kinds of cultural and linguistic extinctions that result when marginalized groups are denied respect and sovereignty, academic composition and rhetoric “can only do so much” (462). It is, however, worth doing; as Lyons quotes Hawaiian nationalist Haunani-Kay Trask: “Language, in particular, helps to decolonize the mind. Thinking in one's own cultural referents leads to conceptualizing in one's own world view which, in turn, leads to disagreement with and eventual opposition to the dominant ideology” (462). Can these ideals be applicable to Appalachia? Do we have cultural referents to think through, world views to conceptualize, non-dominant ideologies with which to challenge the mainstream? If the answers to these questions is yes, and I think it is, then we have as much to gain by doing (or lose by neglecting) this type of intellectual work as other marginalized groups.

I worry about children like Mac who are taught in school that they don't know how to write correctly, but I worry also about the ones who internalize these “corrections.” My concern is not because they have learned the dominant discourse (I am by no means arguing against learning the discourse of power), but because they have assimilated to it, without ever understanding what it is that has happened or what they have given up. What if my own teacher had never mentioned Appalachia, even in a negative light; who would I think I am today? If I had never been interested or curious enough to seek out alternate ideas about being this mysterious thing, Appalachian, how would I identify myself? Would I think of myself, of my background, as different from

the American mainstream, or would I think of it as less? Would I correct the people around me when they said ain't, cringe at my grandfather playing banjo, and despair at having not grown up nearer the action and excitement of a city? Would I have held my cousin's babies on the days they were born? Would I have thrown my great-grandmother's quilts away because their colors clash?

My wish in exploring the features of Appalachian rhetoric that are often overlooked or unrecognized, in positioning these as grown from roots of culture and history, is to more deeply consider the possible ways our rhetoric can sew us together, can bring us closer to asserting Appalachian identity and demanding a voice for that identity. I posit that the features of Appalachian rhetoric can allow for difference, which there certainly is, in our experiences and self-definition of Appalachia, while being strengthened by the commonalities we have largely heretofore failed to acknowledge. I wish, in short, to demonstrate my thinking through a deeper consideration of Appalachian rhetoric and its roots, while advocating similar work to take place in the writing classrooms in which our students find themselves. If we are ever to have the rhetorical sovereignty that Lyons advocates, and the rights that accompany it, such work is essential. If not, if Appalachia's distinctive rhetorical /cultural traditions are not brought to the forefront of consideration, and if the region continues to be uncritically defined from the outside predominantly by stereotypical traits such as poverty, if we continue to overlook or even deny our own identities, then the educational system will continue to revolve around assimilation, stereotypes will continue to take the place of critical

consideration, and “Appalachia” will continue to be excluded from discussions, like Rod and Stacy's custody battle, wherein cultural difference could shed valuable light.

It's time for us to learn how to quilt, or to re-learn if we have forgotten. And it's time to hang our quilts for the rest of you'uns to see.

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Books grow. This one is the outgrowth of my enchanted childhood in a unique area of the state of Ohio, an area that has long been called the Raven Rocks, since large flocks of ravens were known to have gathered here. (Harper)

Not too long back, I took a class on rhetorical theory. My final paper was largely concerned with issues of ecology and theory; like with most of the things I write I somehow meandered around to discussing things from a local perspective. At one point I wrote, “There is little hope that Appalachia will achieve environmental sustainability until the people and culture of the region are finally seen and respected.” I received feedback from both a peer reviewer and my instructor that, I'll admit, I found a little bit baffling: “What do you mean? How is one connected to the other?” And I'll admit I never did get around to addressing this feedback in the essay, because I simply didn't know how. “How could they not be connected?” was put-near the extent of the response I could think to give. Truth be told, I don't feel much better able to explain what I mean now. What I do know is that I think Harper sees the connection, too. And maybe there's more of us feels it than can explain it: the idea that the way we think and act and communicate and flat-out be in the world grows from place. And when that way of thinking and being

feels healthy and respected, it gives that health and respect back to the land from which it grows. Writing Appalachia is, for me, by its nature an act of environmental advocacy.

But as much as that, it's also a work of history. Because for me, these things cannot be separated: people, land, history, culture, and all developed and expressed through rhetoric. This is probably about the longest winded way I could've conceived of coming around to discussing the past and rhetorical history. Ecological writing theory posits that writing and rhetoric operate within a system, wherein "the participants create in part the environment that, in turn, creates the participants" (Fleckenstein, et al). In other words, texts are interconnected with the rhetorical "ecosystems" that create them and that are, through their influence, created by them. My question, for a long time, has been: how did our rhetorical ecosystem come about? What grew it, essentially? If my words and Harper's grow from a particular place, what can we say about the soil there?

Chapter two seeks to provide an answer to these questions. They are questions that I relate also to Lyons' conception of peoplehood, a concept inherent to rhetorical sovereignty. Specifically, I believe Appalachian identity can cross state borders, but no such sense of identity will flourish without a wider understanding of the shared history influencing the ways we perceive and make sense of our worlds and ways of communicating these. While not all Appalachians share a biological or ethnic heritage by which we could more easily define ourselves, many of us do share a rhetorical heritage stemming from the early and lasting influence of Scotch-Irish communicative styles and folkways. This chapter will examine in greater detail what this influence is in terms of



how it has shaped common Appalachian rhetorical forms and purposes, as well as considering why this particular influence has been so significant throughout the region.

While chapter two focuses on the historical dimensions of Appalachian rhetoric, chapter three seeks to examine its current state, specifically with regard to writing. As previously noted, my own experience with local rhetoric had very little to do with actual writing; this chapter considers why this might be the case, for myself as well as others. I also examine what I consider to be examples of written Appalachian rhetoric, demonstrating the unique possibilities and challenges of writing and reading Appalachia as a written rhetoric. My hope is that in examining these texts, I can both illustrate for non-Appalachian readers the logic behind what might seem unconventional or even incorrect writing choices, and make the case to other Appalachians that writing can be made to “fit” our rhetorical desires (as opposed to us being made to “fit” a more standardized written discourse).

The pressure Appalachian students feel to reshape their identities and rhetorics into more mainstream models is a significant force inhibiting the more widespread appearance of these in writing. My concern that Appalachia and academic writing are often posed in an adversarial relationship forms the impetus for chapter four. Lyons argues that rhetorical sovereignty is dependent on the ability of cultural insiders to define themselves and their communicative needs, and also on the ability of outsiders to hear and respect these definitions. Therefore, this chapter examines my sense of the educational and social conditions preventing us from being heard; in other words, I want to consider more fully the ways and reasons by which dominant discourses inhibit

Appalachian rhetorical sovereignty. I specifically focus on ways in which cultural and class bias unite to not only create a false definition of Appalachian identity, but which also allows the dominant discourse to feel justified in claiming the right to name Appalachian identity.

But what if this were not the case? What role could the academic writing classroom play in helping Appalachian students to critique, rather than conform to, the stereotypes and pressures that prevent our recognizing and claiming our Appalachian identities? The final chapter considers ways the classroom and teaching can help bring Appalachian writers closer to claiming rhetorical sovereignty, as well as to mitigate negative influences from outside discourses. My sense is that this will require from Appalachian students the willingness to embrace writing and to make demands of writing instruction, as well as the willingness of instructors to embrace a role for Appalachia as a non-dominant discourse in the classroom. I believe doing so will benefit our ability to perceive the connections, the threads, which bind us together in a way that allows us to feel individual while also bringing about the possibilities of collective power inherent in rhetorical sovereignty. This is an outcome, I posit, that would benefit not only the peoples of Appalachia but, by extension, our educational system, our country, and our world.

## CHAPTER 2: ROOTSYSTEMS OF APPALACHIAN RHETORIC

In my introduction, I considered my exigency and hopes for my project, specifically, reaching a point at which rhetorical sovereignty and its benefits can become attainable for Appalachia. In this chapter, I'm exploring what I consider to be an inextricable feature of that quest: a deeper understanding of Appalachian rhetorical history. In order to make the case that Appalachia has rhetoric that deserves sovereignty, I wish to first make the case that our discourse has roots connected to culture and geography, that we have not simply learned incorrect forms and backward ways and repeated them—an assertion that continues to dog Appalachian students to this day.

In her essay “Keepers of the Legends,” Sharyn McCrumb cites Dr. Kevin Dann's book *Traces on the Appalachians: A History of Serpentine in America*. What Dann finds is that a vein of serpentine “forms its own subterranean 'Appalachian Trail' along the mountains, stretching from north Georgia to the hills of Nova Scotia, where it seems to stop. The same vein of the mineral serpentine can be found in the mountains of western Ireland, where it again stretches north into Cornwall, Wales, Scotland, and the Orkneys, finally ending in the Arctic Circle” (13). Dann argues that this is evidence of a pre-continental drift unity; these respective mountain chains were, essentially, once one (13-14). McCrumb, in her later essay “A Novelist Looks at the Land,” describes the early Celtic migrants to Appalachia as:

People forced to leave a land they loved to come to America. Hating the flat, crowded eastern seaboard, they head westward on the Wilderness Road until they reach the wall of mountains. They follow the valleys

south-southwest down through Pennsylvania, and finally find a place where the ridges rise, where you can see vistas of mountains across the valley. The Scots, the Irish, the Welsh, the Cornishmen—all those who had lives at the other end of the serpentine chain—to them this place must have looked right. Must have felt right. Like home. *And they were right back in the same mountains they had left behind in Britain.* (McCrumb 20; italics in original)

If Celtic culture and rhetoric have survived here in Appalachia, as I think they have, I think it has a lot to do with the land. I'd imagine that a way of living and communicating that had for centuries formed to accommodate life in a rural and mountainous land—where difficult travel encouraged individualism but where the necessities of survival required also a degree of community—fit just as well in a twin landscape.

I live on the same land as my ancestors. But in some ways, I live in a more complicated world.

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I was probably around fifteen when the Ebonics debate hit the US news cycle in a big way. And I'll be honest: it confused the hell out of me. My limited understanding of the issue was that schools in California were proposing to teach students with accents in accents (“accent” being the only term I had for anything like a concept of dialect—neither accent nor dialect being directly discussed in my middle- or high-school classes). Meaning, I thought, that they were simply going to stop teaching students to talk right. I was deeply confused. Why wouldn't anyone want to learn how to talk right?

Because dialect, let alone culturally-based concepts of rhetoric, was absent from any part of my earliest academic experience, I had little idea how to frame concepts of language beyond “right”--standard English—and “wrong”--everything else. And that “wrong” most definitely included much of the way I talked at home, and how my parents and grandparents talked in unguarded moments. (I say “unguarded” because, like many mothers, mine felt compelled to correct my speech at times; “Say '*she* and *I*,' not '*me* and *her*.’”) These were concepts ripe for confusion. I felt shame toward myself when I spoke wrong; “‘ain’t’ is not a word,” and all that. Of course, plenty of my classmates couldn’t give a damn one way nor the other, which has probably helped our language survive. But I wanted to be a good student. Even now I can’t quite square how I was so easily shamed by my “wrong” English. I might’ve bitten like a badger if anyone had accused my grandparents, for example, of stupidity on the basis of their English, but I easily believed it of myself, and was willing, at least for a time, to believe it of other non-standard speakers. Corrections to my writing, as when I failed to produce and defend strong thesis statements, shamed me too, but I was even less able to see these as anything other than my own personal failings. Whereas my family and community taught me my “wrong” speech, and gave me thereby something of a reason to be ambivalently protective of it, school alone taught me to write. And when they said I did it badly, well, what alternative did I have but to believe that was true?

It wasn’t until college, and the discovery of scholars like Geneva Smitherman, that my worldview opened in a substantive way. Oddly enough, I can’t recall the specific context in which I first encountered Smitherman’s work. I do recall being startled into a

greater understanding of the possible meanings behind non-standard Englishes in her passionate and undeniably logical exploration of Ebonics: “Ebonics is emphatically not 'broken' English, nor 'sloppy' speech. Nor is it some bizarre form of language spoken by baggy-pants-wearing Black youth. Ebonics is a set of communication patterns and practices resulting from Africans' appropriation and transformation of a foreign tongue during the African Holocaust” (19). The idea that language, and even the patterns and ideas underpinning language use, could indicate not misunderstandings of correct English but rather of a cultural heritage was certainly not one I had encountered on any grammar worksheets. By connecting language not only to current culture but also to cultural history, Smitherman opened a door for me to consider my own language, and the languages of those around me, in a new way. But what are the chances that every Appalachian kid will eventually read Geneva Smitherman?

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I spent several years as an adjunct instructor and tutor at a community college in Appalachia. I'd earned my Master's degree and did what many of us hill kids want to do after college and can't: I went home. Of course, this was only possible for me because I had no children to support, could live at home rent-free, and could just about make do on any other expenses with an adjunct's salary. Thankfully, I was in a position to make a choice, and my choice was that being at home was more important than making more money than I needed. Having this choice made me, amongst my peers, quite privileged.

And my community college students by and large felt the same about wanting to stay home. They were going to school so they could get the jobs that would support their

families and would, specifically, support them here. Business majors wanted to open businesses here, nursing majors wanted to work with patients here, electricians wanted to wire homes here. On the other hand, I get the sense with my current university students that, for many of them, school is a means of escaping home. For my community college students, school and its attendant costs is the price one pays to afford staying at home. Staying home has become, in Appalachia, something of a pay-to-play enterprise.

I have reason to believe, though, that the community college itself was less enthusiastic about “home” than its students were. It was while I was tutoring that the school invited a representative from educational consultant Ruby Payne's Aha! Program to speak with faculty about the economic issues facing our students. I didn't make it to the speech, but I deeply regretted later that I hadn't. Because apparently, the focus of the session came around heavily to language—specifically, the role non-standard dialect usage played in maintaining the “generational poverty” mindset (Payne 10). Within a week after the session, the newly inspired English and Communications departments united to form the “Banned Terms Project.”

An email was sent to all faculty and instructors to let us know that the school would focus on one “banned term” per month. As we were told, “You might announce the banned term and then in conversations with students or perusal of their written work, you can concentrate on eradicating the phrase in any way you choose” (“Banned Terms”). The first term was “I seen,” while for the second month we would be focusing on “we/they was.”

The Banned Terms Project seemed to be doing something more than trying to teach students standard English, the language of power; in fact, it seemed poised to enthrone it as the only acceptable language. What it didn't do was give any indication of seeing the terms being banned as part of a dialect, part of a culture, which might mean something for us. Given my aforementioned encounters with scholars like Smitherman, I was deeply unsettled with this particular approach. Or, I could say, I seen it differently than my colleagues did. If Smitherman's Ebonics speakers were evincing through their language their heritage, their cultural diversity, then could the same not be said for Appalachian students? Could making it known that the college planned, overtly and proudly, to standardize students' dialects send the very oppressive messages that Smitherman cautions us against?

It was when I was working with a student from a developmental writing course that I had something of a crisis of conscience. One-on-one tutoring was still relatively new to me and I was learning how to work with students across a wide spectrum of needs, so I was still unsure of myself, even without the added pressure of the dubious morality of banning terms. I didn't quite know how to broach the subject when I noticed one of the banned term in her sentence.

“Umm...ok. See this part right here?” She looked at the words I'd circled: *I seen*. “Oh,” she said. “Is that one of them banned words?”

“Yeah,” I said, embarrassed to be saying so. After all, I used “I seen” myself.



“Okay.” She picked up her own pen and put a mark beside the term. I was about to ask her what she thought to replace it with, when she added, “It feels wrong, you know?”

I did. But I asked, “What do you mean?”

“Well, my teacher says that the right way of saying something like this will sound more right when we say it to ourselves. But it don't! This,” underlining her term, “is what sounds right. That's how my grandma says it. What's wrong with it?”

Now how in God's name was I supposed to answer that?

I sent an email that weekend to the full-time English faculty, four individuals who had been exceptionally kind to me in their assurances that, though an adjunct, I was part of the team and should come to them with any questions or concerns I ever encountered in the classroom. I asked if we could talk about this “Banned Terms Project,” specifically about how, in this form, it could have an un-intentioned effect on students self- and community-esteem. I told them about the student in my tutoring session. I referenced Geneva Smitherman and Keith Gilyard's work on dialect's cultural repercussions, and Peter Elbow's calls to “invite the mother tongue” into our classrooms along with the standard. (I thought Gilyard's point, cited in Elbow, that “[T]he eradication of one tongue is not prerequisite to the learning of a second” [359] was particularly relevant in this instance.) Given what I knew about both my audience—these were four deeply dedicated and caring teachers—and cognizant of my own inexperience by comparison, I didn't demand a cease and desist. I didn't say that I was personally upset about what was, in its

rawest form, a forthright argument that my own mother-tongue had no place in academia.

I was *diplomatic*.

I received one response. Pamela, like the other full-time instructors, hailed from outside the region. When we met in the hall the following week, she raised the subject of my email and said, “It basically comes down to this: would you rather our students stayed poor?” She held her hands open in front of her, like she was at a loss for alternative options.

I quit soon after that term. Maybe I should have stayed and kept trying. I ended up back in graduate school instead.

In trying, as I have many times since, to make sense of this episode to myself, I find that I'm troubled by several things. One, of course, is the idea that non-standard dialects can and should be “eradicated,” at least in the realms of academia. That the “right” way to say something will “sound right,” if one well and truly “thinks” about it. Another is the easy and uncritical correlation of dialect, and by extension culture, with economic status. Our students were not poor because of systemic social inequality that makes it difficult to access educational opportunities and jobs that pay fair wages without causing environmental harm or requiring outward migration. No, they were poor because they had never learned to talk right. And if one doesn't talk right, how can one think right? Who would hire such a person? And beyond even this, the dialect carries poverty within it, as a misguided social value that cannot be altered without changes to the dialect itself (Payne 79).

I'm not sure what is being seen in this debate—or, more specifically, this lack of a debate—about Appalachian dialect is that it *is* a dialect, with all that the term dialect entails. What I mean by this is that Appalachian language is not seen as reflecting a culture or a history in the same way that other regional or socially-based dialects are, at least somewhat. Appalachian speech, typified in terms like “I seen” and “we/they was,” is perceived as reflecting a lack of education, an ignorance of correct English and by extension correct social values, and is by extension limiting our economic and social possibilities. It is not seen as reflecting a cultural history or mindset that is worthy of consideration or respect.

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When I was a Master's student, I took a course on the history of the English language. One of our requirements was to conduct group research projects, the results of which we presented to the class. My partner and I chose as our focus the French and Latin influences on early English, a topic I still find fascinating. However, one of the other groups chose to research Appalachian English, and it is their project that had a greater impact on me than my own. What they found in their research was that many features of Appalachian dialect originated with Scotch-Irish settlers; they produced a list of Scotch-Irish terms, pronunciations, and grammatical features I recognized. For example, “You'uns,” “redd up,” and “piece (as distance)” were all familiar to me; I “in-joyed” things that others “enjoyed”; I'd never even realized that “the combination of need and the past participle of a verb” (ie, “needs finished”) was a regionalism (Montgomery).

The list went on. However, the presenters also found that the influence went beyond language. “Appalachian culture *is* Scotch-Irish culture,” one of the presenters noted.

Well, damned if that didn't wake me up.

I knew, of course, that my family heritage was at least in part Scotch-Irish . . . lots of us in the hills can say the same. And the idea that Appalachian culture, Appalachian difference, could have such a simple and (this being roughly the era of *Braveheart* and the *River Dance* craze) cool explanation was thrilling to me at the time.

I have, however, come to believe that this statement about Appalachian culture is both highly valid and somewhat too simplistic. Simplistic, first and foremost, in that it risks overlooking the high degree of diversity and the varied influences permeating aspects of Appalachian culture. As Stevan R. Jackson points out, “Of all the stereotypes that haunt Appalachia, perhaps the most deceptive is that Appalachians are a homogeneous people with a single cultural heritage” (27). Sociological work has demonstrated a wide variety of cultural influences on aspects of Appalachian culture such as traditional crafts, music, and dance. For example, methods of traditional basketry can be definitively traced to the Cherokee, and that proto-typical Appalachian musical instrument—the banjo—is African in origin, as are certain aspects of clog dancing (Thompson and Moser 147-150).

However, it is also frequently noted in discussions of Appalachia's cultural heritage that the Scotch-Irish influence “is undeniable and pervasive” (Jackson 30). I think the emphasis on influence is important here. I find it frightening to consider any ethnic marker becoming a sort of measurement of one's Appalachian-ness; in other

words, I don't think having Scotch-Irish genealogy makes or can make anyone somehow more Appalachian than those with differing family backgrounds. As I said earlier, Appalachia is ethnically diverse, more so than is often credited. Our cultural and rhetorical history may stem, at least in part, from an ethnic group, but I don't believe our modern dynamics are limited by whether or not one belongs to that ethnicity.

So I guess what I'm saying is that Appalachia may be in the blood of its people, but only in a metaphorical sense. Being part of Appalachian culture and dialect is not ultimately about linkages of blood, genealogy, ethnicity, or even about shared group history in an extensive way. If it were, how could my family, with our at least partially Scotch-Irish family origins, be "Appalachian" in the same way as our neighbors, whose family history is primarily Polish? This multiplicity of origins perhaps distances us from what Lyons was thinking in his work on rhetorical sovereignty, in that it differs us somewhat from his definition of peoplehood in the context of Native Americans. Lyons cites Deloria and Lytle, who note that for "most American Indian tribes [group history] begins somewhere in the primordial mists" (454). Ours don't go back that far. However, he also notes that other factors influence the definition of peoplehood, such as language and culture (454). In Appalachia, we are bound with linkages not of bloodline, genetics, or even, strictly speaking, ethnicity (although Victor Villanueva has raised the possible relevance of considering Appalachian people as an ethnic group [xv]). We are, I am positing, linked by threads of language, of ideology, of place, of mindset, into a culture that may or may not be that of our familial origins, but that influences us nonetheless. It is an influence expressed in rhetorical styles that go unrecognized and disrespected, and

the roots of which go unacknowledged. My interest, then, is more on the influences that create this culture, this rhetoric, and what affect recognizing these influences could have on us as a people.

Therefore, I wonder if the statement defining Appalachian culture as Scotch-Irish culture, though undeniably oversimplifying the culture as a whole (and its micro-regional variations), can still be valuable. Perhaps a greater recognition of Scotch-Irish culture, or in a wider sense Celtic culture, as one influence on our rhetoric and values can be, essentially, a thread that helps to unify, to define Appalachian-ness in a way that allows us to conceptualize our language and rhetoric and demand its respect. While all of Appalachian culture is not entirely an outgrowth of Celtic culture, perhaps we can consider it as influenced by it to varying (though decidedly greater than in Non-Appalachian America) degrees in differing parts. Or, to maintain my original metaphor, perhaps I could best think of Celtic culture as a layer of batting on an Appalachian rhetorical quilt, the thickness of which is dependent on the quilter's own design, their own micro-regional context. As Jackson states, "the cultural diversity of Appalachia is extensive. Yet through nothing but historical accident, the Ulster Scots delivered most of the settlers into the Appalachian region early in its settlement development and thus influenced that development heavily" (35). Ultimately, that the Scotch-Irish were influential in Appalachia is not news, at least not for us. Yet we (by which I mean both Appalachian peoples and scholars of Appalachia) haven't fully considered what this influence could mean to how we think and how we communicate...in other words, what it could mean for how we think about, value, and use our rhetoric.

For example, is it a matter of accident, as Jackson says, that the Scotch-Irish settled here, or that they've been culturally and linguistically influential? The answer to that question, I contend, involves a deeper consideration of what we mean by “Scotch-Irish” and the description of their dialectical and cultural influence as Celtic.

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My sense is that what I have come to see as Appalachian rhetoric has been deeply influenced by the Celtic rhetoric of the subordinated Scotch-Irish, a state of affairs that differentiates us from standardized rhetoric and language, which are more centrally influenced by the dominant ideologies of the Anglo-Saxon English and, before them, the Greco-Romans. However, I recognize that these terms require greater explanation, specifically in how I define Scotch-Irish, as well as what I imply with the term Celtic, because the connections between these concepts and modern day conceptions of Appalachia are not necessarily self-evident. The term Scotch-Irish, often used interchangeably with the terms Scots-Irish and Ulster Scots, depending on the speaker, refers specifically to a population of Scottish Protestants, who “migrated in the early 1600s to Northern Ireland, and then migrated onward to Colonial America during the years 1717 through 1775” (Brown, Hirschman, and Maclaran). The Scots of Scotland shared an ethnic and cultural background with the Irish, with “Scot” being an early blanket term for inhabitants of both Ireland and Scotland (O' Snodaigh 29), and a great deal of mutual migration occurred between the two island nations up through the medieval era. However, the reasoning behind the 1600s emigration of Scotland Scots to Northern Ireland is significant to the story of both nations. A pattern of invasions and

colonization of both lands by the English, since at least the 1200s, is well established. By the late 1600s Scotland, unlike Ireland, had (like England) become primarily Protestant. In a move calculated to “ensure the future pro-British attitude of Ireland,” an attitude based largely on religion, some 40,000 of the poorest Protestant Scots were transplanted to Northern Ireland, to lands previously seized from the native Irish by the British government (Brown, Hirschman, and Maclaran 3, 5). While the term “Britain” is often intended to reflect the participation of Scotland and Wales in a united society, I tend to use “England” to refer to the national and cultural power center that in varying degrees claimed colonial dominion over those nations. This movement of Scots is known to history as the “Plantation” of Ireland, and the people who took part became known as the Scotch (or Scots)-Irish, or Ulster Scots (Ulster being the region of Northern Ireland in which they settled). Many of the earliest immigrants to what we today dub Appalachia were drawn later from the Scotch-Irish population; upon arrival in Ulster, they had discovered similar dynamics to those they had left. Arable land access was as much the province of the Anglo elite in newly colonized Ulster as it had been in English-dominated Scotland (Hofstra 11). Also, they were caught in the cross-fire with the dispossessed native Irish, attempting to regain their homeland (Brown, Hirschman, and Maclaran 5). After a few generations, many Scotch-Irish continued on to the New World, where they became the people Sharyn McCrumb describes in her books and essays.

This is in general the population to which I refer when I discuss the Scotch-Irish influence in Appalachian rhetoric and culture, but I also refer to something larger than these few thousand individuals. The terms “Celtic” and “Gaelic” are, strictly speaking,



linguistic terms, to describe a particular linguistic subset of non-English-speaking people who, though dwindling in numbers, remain concentrated on Western Europe's "Celtic Fringe" of Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. Though many of the early immigrants in Appalachia hailed from this region, I have found no evidence for the survival of the Celtic/Gaelic language in Appalachia in any substantive form. (I do have one minor caveat to this. I learned as a child to say "Hi" in a way I've yet to hear pronounced outside of Appalachia; it sounds somewhat like "Hoyt." About a year ago I found my way onto the Irish Gaelic page of the Mango Languages website, which allowed me to listen to pronunciations of common Irish Gaelic phrases; I learned that there is a formal hello and an informal hello in that language. Imagine my delight when I clicked on the "Informal Greeting" icon and heard the speaker say, "Hoyt!" I cannot definitively say this is a linguistic hold-over, but I can't say that it hain't, either.)

Yet my evidence for rhetorical connections between current Appalachia and Celtic Europe is predicated upon the assumption that rhetorical and cultural linkages existed between these as Celtic nations, connections not severed by the imposition of national, religious, or even linguistic borders—that like differently patterned cloths bound in one quilt, the Celtic nations were linked by threads, by an underlying batting. It is an assumption I am not alone in making. Huw Pryce, the author of *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies*, argues that Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and Brittany can be seen as similar in literary and cultural outlooks. While not uniformly similar, these countries bear enough similarity to justify studying them together as "Celtic" (2-3). Helen Fulton also identifies the term Celtic to describe a group of linked yet marginalized cultures (11). My project,

exploring the influences of a culture and rhetorical style I am likewise calling “Celtic” on the development of Appalachia, relies on the concept of Celtic as a cultural descriptor, rather than strictly a term to denote speakers of the Gaelic language. I am also relying on the concept of Celtic as a descriptor that applies to the culture/rhetoric of the Scotch-Irish.

This reliance is based on the idea that the Scots shared rhetorical/cultural similarities with the native Irish, from whom many of the extant resources on Celtic rhetoric stem. However, perhaps the strongest argument *against* defining the Scotch-Irish in particular as culturally Celtic comes from the more recent violent disputes in Northern Ireland. To a degree, the originally Scottish Protestants brought to Ireland as part of the Plantation project have, in modern times, self-consciously defined themselves as culturally more Anglo/English than Celtic, due to their religious differences from the rest of Catholic Ireland. However, Padraig O'Snodaigh, in his book *Hidden Ulster: Protestants and the Irish Language*, defines these attempts by the Scotch-Irish to “anglicize” themselves as a more recent phenomenon, born of deliberate work by the English ruling class to disrupt harmony between the Catholic and Protestant peoples. O'Snodaigh notes that the initial Scottish settlers and Irish natives recognized their shared cultural heritage and language (29-31), a state that contributed to shared cooperation despite religious differences (33). As the original intent of the Plantation system was to subdue and convert the Catholic Irish to Anglicized culture, religion, and loyalty, this cooperation essentially undermined English authority, the response to which was deliberate (and successful) attempts through imposed laws and educational curricula to

create identity tensions between the two groups (O'Snodaigh 61, 78, 80). O'Snodaigh cites the year 1860 as the approximate point by which Scotch-Irish Protestants as a group began to disavow their Celtic identity (80), a point by which many of those who would become the early Appalachians had already emigrated. Therefore, the Appalachian Scotch-Irish would have had far less, if any, exposure to deliberate attempts to alter their cultural identities. It is worth noting also that, while many of the Scotch-Irish who remained in Northern Ireland would come to self-consciously disavow their Celtic roots, the actual success at altering their cultural structures has been far more questionable (Brown, Hirschman, and Maclaran).

The situation between the countries of Europe's Celtic Fringe is, in a way, a situation similar to what I perceive in the American states of Appalachia; despite lines demarcated on a map, and perhaps even in people's minds, connecting threads—connecting rhetorics—remain. Like Ireland and Scotland, which share distinct geographic similarities, Appalachia's hills in West Virginia are also the hills of Tennessee, of Pennsylvania, of Southeastern Ohio—we've a rhetoric that fits a certain landscape and lifestyle, no matter what the state or country that land is in.

I don't wish to indicate that these Scotch-Irish immigrants had some kind of inherent claim on the land; as I said, the only way they were able to settle here at all had to do with pushing Native peoples off. (When I had my mostly non-Appalachian students reading some editorials by local authors—something I'll discuss further later on—I overheard one student ask another, “Why do they all make such a big deal about how long their families have lived here? It's not like there wasn't someone there before them.”)

Hell of a point. Though I think the family-place inclusion has more to do with rhetorical tradition and what we consider ethos, not with some misunderstood belief that no one ever lived here before.) But what I do want to say is that no, I don't think it's an accident that the Scotch-Irish chose to settle here, or that they were influential. I think they recognized a good fit when they saw one. What we've forgotten, or else never learned to look for, was the reasons why the culture and rhetoric fit, and what it says about who we are and want to be.

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As I said, my first considerations of Appalachian rhetoric were specifically with matters of language. Therefore, I want to consider, firstly, matters of linguistic dialect, as these form an important part of rhetoric, how it is used, and how it is interpreted. Lyons states that a shared language is one of the central tenets around which a people can be defined (454), making the importance of language to culture and identity difficult to overestimate. Sharing language, on its surface, is an easy means by which to build shared identity; this conception has been both recognized and co-opted in recent years by groups wishing to use this power to exclude others (Horner and Trimbur). But what about when the shared language is not recognized as being shared? In other words, how can we build identity around a shared language when we don't know that we share it, or why, or where it comes from?

In seeking some of the possible roots for Appalachian dialect, I hope to mitigate some of these roadblocks. In other words, I believe that many Appalachian people across the region's expanse do share linguistic similarities, and that the reason why has much to

do with where that language comes from—it's origin and the rhetorical culture that origin promotes. Specifically, I'm seeking here to surface the ways Scotch-Irish dialectical features exist across wide expanses of the Appalachian region. In doing so, I hope to make the case for a linguistic dimension of Appalachian rhetoric that unites us and can serve as the focus of arguments in favor of greater regional consideration and respect. In other words, I'm making the case for the existence of an Appalachian dialect that is part of our cultural heritage and that, at least to a degree, crosses the boundaries imposed by maps.

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For the longest time, I had no way of thinking about our language other than as incorrect or as a weird and somewhat undesirable accent. When my dad would ask, "You'uns ready tuh git movin'?", or when my mom would decide the dishes "needs worshed," or when a friend would say, "By the time we got the car red up, we was all tuckered out"--for a long time I had no conceptions by which to think about this way of speech or its implications. It got marked off when it showed up in school writing, I knew that. I also knew that we were, by the public school American history concept of the term, northerners. The distinction between North and South remains a reified distinction in both our history and modern identity politics, but as a multi-generational Ohioan, it wasn't one I was personally in any way confused about. Ohio was a Northern state; we had ancestors in the Union Army to boot. (Though I've since learned that participation in the Union or Confederate armies was also nowhere near so clearly geographically cut.) So it was a bit of a shock when I stumbled upon a recording of Sheila Kay Adams, a

storyteller from North Carolina, who sounded like us. Perhaps her language was ours dialed up a notch, but I could still hear it. It sounded extremely similar to my family members who lived slightly deeper in Southeastern Ohio. (When Sheila Kay, telling the surprisingly funny story of a neighbor's funeral, cried out "Irvin! You got to come on down t'house an' help me git Amos up off'n the floor!" I could of swore I was hearin' my great-aunt Nova, born, raised, and livin' her whole life in Monroe County, Ohio.) It was an experience that gave me some pause. Sheila Kay was from North Carolina, so she was southern...did we somehow have southern accents?

My conclusion, drawn after a good deal of research and reflection, is no, we do not have southern accents. Because me, my family, and my neighbors may sound a bit like speakers from North Carolina, but honey, ain't a one of us southern. What we are, in Southeastern Ohio and in Western North Carolina, is Appalachian.

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While not much good has been said about Appalachian language even in those regions where it is somewhat more recognized *as* a language (as opposed to a mere series of linguistic mistakes), one early attempt was made to lend it some prestige. As Kim Donehower has noted, the early twentieth century witnessed the first wide-scale attempt by outsiders to romanticize mountain life, but on the dominant culture's terms. Essentially, Appalachian culture became defined, mostly by northeastern "culture professionals," as "representative of . . . 'pure' Anglo-Saxon culture," a belief bolstered by the idea that "Appalachian dialect is actually some form of Elizabethan English" (49). While I will be considering the implications of this misrepresentation later on, for now I

only want to mention a few of the ways I find it troubling. Perhaps the least relevant to my current topic is the conflation of “Anglo-Saxon” culture and “Elizabethan” English. (I’m picking a linguistic nit here. The English language, by the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, had little to do with the English of the Anglo-Saxons. Courtesy of the Norman Conquest.) But I am also disturbed by the easy ability of outside quantities to define our heritage, while ignoring the histories and experiences influencing that heritage. If the history of the Scotch-Irish and other Celtic groups demonstrates anything, it’s that their history with Anglo-Saxon power dynamics is not pretty or pleasant. To be defined, particularly to be mis-defined, in terms of that group is disconcerting, as a brilliant example of the power of the dominant group to influence identity and definition.

However, describing Appalachian English as somehow more deeply Anglo-Saxon than other variations of English is an assertion that is troubling in another important way: it is essentially wrong. Linguist Michael Montgomery has demonstrated that “the Scotch-Irish contribution [to Appalachian English]...is much more substantial (in terms of number of features), broader (in terms of diversity of features), and deeper (in terms of the level of structure) than the Southern British or English one is” (“How Scotch-Irish Is Your English?”). This last point, about the level of structural linkage, is significant here. Montgomery explains that grammar “is more stable across generations and therefore easier to track historically” than terminology is. In fact, a great deal of Appalachian vocabulary was “actually born in America” (Montgomery, “Language” 1003), though the reason for this is still a thread linking our language to the Scotch-Irish: the documentary film *Mountain Talk* includes interviews with Appalachian residents

regarding their language. Gary Carden, who is both an interviewee and the film's narrator, summarizes the state of Appalachian English:

The Scots-Irish brought an early form of English, and many older words and expressions remained in mountain speech long after they dropped out of mainstream English. . . but many new words and expressions were invented here. . . Older forms of English form the basis for mountain talk, but languages continue to develop, even in isolation. The seclusion of mountain life nourished the Scots-Irish talent for improvisation. Every community quickly developed distinctive dialect features, and new words and expressions.

Carden also notes that this creativity and uniqueness is “one of the delights of mountain life.”

When the cultural roots of Appalachian English are thus obscured, we lose access to important information that holds the potential for helping us shape and fight for our identities. How might my community college colleagues and my students have responded to the idea that the language they were earnestly working to “eradicate” was spoken in the grammar of William Wallace?<sup>1</sup>

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For the features of a language, particularly a language under siege by dominant forces, to expand so far throughout this region and remain used, is to me extraordinary. Yet while I think language is an important factor in discussing Appalachian rhetoric,

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<sup>1</sup> William Wallace is the historical Scottish warrior portrayed to great acclaim in the film *Braveheart*.



being maintained by and helping to maintain the rhetorical system, forms of spoken language alone are not the whole story I want to tell here. To explain this survival brings me to a consideration of more extensive features of its rhetorical origin with the Scotch-Irish and their Celtic cultural background.

It's a tricky undertaking, certainly, to boil anything as complicated as a rhetorical system down into distinct statements. I'm going to list what seems to me to be prominent features of Celtic rhetoric, features that I've gleaned by reading both original Celtic texts (in translation) and the few works I've found on these texts by modern scholars. They are features that also figure in Appalachian rhetoric, as I will explore further in chapter three. I'd like to emphasize that some of these interpretations are mine, and therefore subject to my subjectivities. But something I think we've inherited from Celtic rhetoric is a comfort, even encouragement, to show our individual subjectivities.

Let me just show you what I'm thinking.

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#### Prominent Features of Celtic Rhetoric:

- Ethos is built through humility; the rhetor must identify with audience, not set oneself apart (Lynch).

- Conceptual boundaries are blurred: for example, the differences between the rhetor and the audience, between modes of communication, and between past and present are less distinct than in modern, mainstream conceptions (O'Riordan; Marshall; Scherman).

-Narratives (often non-linear) demonstrate the rhetor's process of thinking about a subject; in other words, demonstrating how one has come to knowledge or belief, without overtly insisting on similar beliefs from the audience (O'Riordan; Stacy; N. Patterson).

-The process of thinking/coming to knowledge is often built by family and place-based experiences, with the assumption that the audience will also value these as sources of knowledge (Lynch; Connell).

-Rhetoric is less about arguing in favor of specific ideas as it is the preservation of mindsets and ideals, connections, and consensus about general values (Lynch; O'Riordan; Connell; Johnson-Sheehan and Lynch).

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Loyal Jones describes in his book *Appalachian Values* a set of social values prevalent in Appalachian culture, including, amongst other things, humility. It is a humility that means not groveling nor necessarily lack of pride, but rather an unwillingness to conceive of oneself as separate or, most certainly, as better than other. It's bad manners, in other words, to hierarchize ourselves. Humility is a social value that seems to set us apart from much of mainstream American pop culture, which, from what I can tell, seems to equate success to fame, to notoriety, to being the wealthiest, the most talked about. The most separate.

In teaching one of my recent rhetoric/composition courses, I asked my students to read editorials written by local citizens regarding the fracking debate. My students, none of whom identified as Appalachian and nearly all of whom hailed from northern Ohio, seemed confused by what they were reading. As I noted before, the editorials all “made a

big deal” about how long the writers' families had lived here; this kind of connection with place was demonstrating credibility, rather than its lack. However, these editorials also included a plethora of phrases seeming to indicate the writer's uncertainty or tentativeness; the writers were frequently emphasizing that their arguments were “only” their own opinions, while also seeming quick to emphasize their own rural backgrounds, sometimes even their own lack of formal education. “They really don't have much ethos,” one of my students said, and although I was thrilled that he was attempting to analyze ethos, I think there was something fundamental he missed as a cultural outsider. There was a reason these editorials were written the way they were, and it was not, I suspect, because the writers hoped *not* to be listened to.

I'm using humility -as-ethos as a means to begin considering what medieval Celtic rhetoric was like, and by extension modern Appalachian rhetoric, because I think it serves as a useful threshold by which to understand the purposes and appearances behind this complicated system. And it is complicated. There's a very real visual connection between the complex designs of Scotch-Irish style quilts and the complexly interlaced designs of Celtic art; perhaps this connection can also be extended to the complexities of Celtic rhetoric and mindset. It was a mindset in which conceptual borders were much less distinct than what tends to be the case in cultures influenced by Greco-Roman civilization. For example, it was a mindset in which matters spiritual, physical, and imaginative were intertwined (Marshall 90), where concepts of time and space were blurred (O'Riordan 3; Marshall 92). One of the most powerful social positions in medieval Celtic societies was that of the *filid*, the poets, but who were perhaps not poets

in a modern mainstream sense; rather, the *filid* were a learned rhetorical class, who played a “semi-sacred role in interpreting the world” (O’Riordan 1), serving as what we might consider simultaneously poets, historians, lawyers, educators, and jurists (Scherman 33). That these roles were considered compatible, indivisible, and equal in itself indicates a difference between Celtic societies and the hierarchical, categorized Greco-Roman ways of thinking; Celtic thought was perhaps more a collection of interlaced threads, a blanket more than a ladder.

My sense is that humility as a means of creating ethos worked in this system because the general goals of Celtic rhetoric were different than those of Greco-Roman academic rhetoric. The classical rhetoric that has influenced modern mainstream conceptions held that “Rhetoric was, first and foremost, the art of persuasive speaking” (Bizzell and Herzberg 1-2). Persuasion and argumentation developed as the end-goals for rhetoric in the urban polis of Greece and the Mediterranean (Lynch 114). Because the social and geographic worlds of the Celtic Fringe were so vastly different than those of the Mediterranean, the rhetoric that developed here was also vastly different (O’Driscoll xiv). Here, life revolved around rurality rather than urbanity; rhetorical communication developed as a means of creating cultural unity among a “decentralized, rural” (Lynch 115) people. I imagine that to achieve a hearing amongst people who need not, if they chose, listen to you at all, humility would be quite a good approach. (Seriously, I don’t know who all would’ve listened to Plato’s Socrates where I’m from. His whole rhetorical success depended on people actually willing to stand around and play his game of “dialogue,” which only ended after he’d gleefully painted his opponents into a rhetorical

corner. Personally, I think if I were in one of those conversations like he had with Gorgias, the second he started lettin' on like he had all the answers and I was an idiot. . . I'd a-walked away and made sure to never see him again. This is the country; we got room to do that here.)

Significant, though, is what that humility was an approach *to*. And it is here that I see perhaps the greatest defining feature, and differentiation, of what I think of as Celtic rhetoric from that of the Greco-Romans: it was communication not intended to establish argumentative dominance or individual rightness on particular points or ideas (goals that might well create offense between speakers), but rather to create group cohesion, to preserve traditional lifeways and mindsets that could benefit life in a particular environment. As Michelle O'Riordan notes in her book *The Gaelic Mind and the Collapse of the Gaelic World*, “the poets arrived at a language and a mode of expression which articulated . . . the nature of their relationships” (4) with each other and with the world; it was a world of relationships, both current and historic, in which “everything is related to previous mythical or historical events” (4). Within this web, the power of words to shape reality was well understood by Celtic rhetoricians; language was used “for teaching and normalizing [through] stories and poetry” (Johnson-Sheehan and Lynch 242). The ethos of the rhetor assumed great importance in this system, but through identification rather than self-promotion. A successful rhetor in a Celtic context “had to identify . . . with the vocabulary, the values, and the symbols [of the audience] . . . to reaffirm as much as to transform” (Lynch 116). In other words, the role of the Celtic rhetorician required blending in more than standing out, as the ultimate goal was the

preservation of something far wider than the individual self: a worldview of vocabulary, values, and symbols.

Amongst the understood symbols was the power of story, of illustration, as the means by which people learned to think and act in particular ways. As forms of rhetoric and writing were not necessarily subject to separation and hierarchizing, narratives retained their centrality; they never became defined as a lesser form of communication, even for academic and legal purposes. However, the form stories took was not identical to the modern academic mode of narrative writing; specifically, these narratives were “in no way concerned with presenting a chronological account” (O’Riordan 7). This blurriness on the subject of chronology may be a cardinal sin in academic narration (I’m thinking of how many times I’ve lectured my own students on the importance of transitions as chronological guide-stones for readers.) However, these at times non-linear narratives worked particularly well in the Celtic system, as they allowed for an emphasis on individual thought-processes and experiences. This emphasis, in turn, allowed for the conveying of ideas and values without what might be called *pushiness*. Rhetors were able to use stories to educate, to preserve, in a way that maintained humility and did not force acceptance onto the audience. This is how I think, and this is why, the subtext of a story might say. You may choose as you will. The *Senchas Mor*, one of the surviving Irish legal texts of the medieval era, starts with an illustrative story (N. Patterson 8); in fact legal writing was considered to be tightly linked with literary and historical writing (those blurred boundaries, again) to the point that many such surviving legal documents contain fictional and mythological narratives within the law tracts (Stacey 65-69). The purpose of

these stories was not to establish rules to be followed in every case (avoiding ideological pushiness, again), but rather to establish precedents, to illustrate how the experiences of historical, fictional, or mythic jurists could illuminate the experiences of modern ones (Stacey 73-74). Significantly, the stories themselves weren't even focused on particular laws; instead, they “centre on the process of judgment itself” (Stacey 75). It was the experiences of others within a shared cultural and geographic context that taught how to think and act individually in order to maintain tradition and unity.

In considering Celtic rhetoric as an influence on current Appalachia, I think that there are viable linguistic, stylistic, and conceptual linkages, but I also think there is a direct link between the cultural values that Celtic rhetoric sought to maintain and those prevalent in Appalachian culture. Among the values that emerge most strongly for me include those that privilege history, family, and place—concepts that are presented as not necessarily distinct from each other. I take as a strong example of this emphasis the twelfth/thirteenth century Irish text *Acallam na Senorach*. The *Acallam*, a form of narrative depicting conversations between characters (Connell 6), does what many other Celtic texts have done in that it “navigates the spaces between fiction, identity, and history” (Connell 11) in a way that is, according to Joseph Nagy, “self-conscious” (qtd in Connell 11) of its techniques and purpose: the building of Irish identity through the use of Irish rhetorical traditions. But what is significant is the identity the text is building: it is an identity inextricable from the land and the people's history with that land. Sarah Connell identifies a wide oral and literary tradition of using language and narrative to construct an identity “built around claims that the people and the land of Ireland are not

separate or separable” (6), a tradition that “would prove influential for centuries to come” (6). In emphasizing continuity between peoples and places, the rhetoric itself did a great deal to ensure this preservation of influence. Time was not, in other words, a factor that separated or changed peoples and places, but rather one that wove them more tightly together. The narratives of the *Acallam* and the *Senchas Mor* encouraged their audiences to see themselves in terms of place and history, to essentially create the continuation of these identities by continued emphasis on these dynamics. I would argue that this sense of constructed continuity of the past and its values likewise pervades the works of modern Appalachian writers.

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I anticipate an argument against my interest in exploring linkages between Appalachian rhetoric and that of the medieval-era Celtic Fringe. Specifically, some might say it does Appalachia a disservice, by perpetuating the sense of Appalachia as somehow frozen in the past. Not long back, I was discussing *The Hunger Games* with a group of junior-level composition students; I was disappointed but not really surprised to find that few if any of them realized that Katniss Everdeen, the female hero who little girls around the nation were dressing as for Halloween and taking up archery in hopes of emulating, was meant to be an Appalachian woman, the latest in (for us, anyway) a storied history of strong Appalachian female heroines. My students simply didn't get it. But what was enlightening for me was the explanation I received from one for why Katniss's Appalachian identity wasn't self-evident: “*The Hunger Games* is set in the future,” one student said. “I don't really think of Appalachia in terms of the future.”



I can understand this viewpoint, but my concern is that it masks a perception that the “past,” that time frame in which Appalachia eternally exists, is both something distinct from the present and something shameful, senses that are not necessarily shared in Appalachian culture. Kim Donehower warns against approaches to Appalachian culture that advocate “preservation”: “Preservationist projects that seek to turn rural communities into museums essentially ensure that those communities cease to exist, as no one actually lives in a museum” (44). Good point. (Although let's be fair, I know plenty of people who'd live in museums if they were allowed to.) But what if we have, as I think we have, inherited from those Scotch-Irish settlers a way of life in which culture, and our means of communicating culture, is inextricable from preservation--where preservation, in essence, forms the root and purpose of our rhetoric? Where a tradition of narratives provides precedents by which to evaluate the world and our relationships? Where “the past,” as others think of it, as something dead and gone, doesn't exist, because it lives in us, while the dynamics that shaped our past continue to shape us today? The ideas and identities preserved by our rhetorics have arguably helped us to survive, to create connections between events (O'Riordan 5), to endure, to continue, in troubled times. It has kept alive with me good people, and a good land. And I'm at a loss to see the shame in that.

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One stereotype of Appalachia that seems to run across the board is that of the rugged individual, of people who hew a hard life for themselves, by themselves, and prefer it that way. When I say it runs across the board, I mean that it isn't an idea held

mainly by outsiders—it seems to be what many Appalachians believe of themselves. Loyal Jones includes self-reliance on his list of Appalachian cultural values (51). Todd Snyder has written a brilliant analysis of the means by which individualism, as a social value, has played into the agendas of extraction industries (primarily coal companies), to discourage Appalachian workers from seeking assistance to fight for better working conditions. In other words, I'm not disputing the existence of individualism as a social value. But I'm curious about what this emphasis on individuality means to the possibilities of building a wider Appalachian group identity, the peoplehood that Lyons perceives as necessary to the fight for rhetorical sovereignty.

What I am wondering is whether the surfacing of how individualism works in our rhetoric, where it comes from and why, can help create threads of recognition between widely spread Appalachian peoples. Because it is the rhetoric, specifically the form of rhetoric we have inherited from the Celts, which allows for individualism to thrive. Helen Fulton describes the field of early Celtic literature as “diverse yet coherent” (14). This concept of simultaneous diversity and coherence is made possible by the styles of rhetoric, in which individual perspective is emphasized yet humility builds ethos for the narratives that influence identities.

Warren Hofstra notes that while “understanding individualism is critical” to an understanding of the Scotch-Irish immigrants to the United States, it is “[n]ever absolute, the individualism of the Scots-Irish was alloyed with the ever-present authority of community and the need to live together not only among themselves but also among diverse peoples in various contexts,” (xvii) often within “dispersed rural settlements”

(Montgomery, qtd in Hofstra xvii). There is an opportunity to create cohesion, group identity, *peoplehood* and all the potential political and social benefits therein, including rhetorical sovereignty, through the simultaneous respect and allowance for individual identity. In other words, I think when we have the chance to see and hear each other's stories, we can choose to embrace those links, in ways we never will if they are either forced on us or, otherwise, never shown.

My overarching interest is in the ways a greater public understanding of this rhetorical existence and its heritage could move us closer to attaining rhetorical sovereignty, and the social privileges that sovereignty entails. If Appalachian dialect, as well as the wider system of traditional narrative rhetoric, were understood to be an outgrowth of Celtic rhetoric, perhaps this understanding could lead to an increased social respect and interest in what happens when Appalachian students open their mouths, or put pen to paper.

The idea that this could lead to wider social respect could perhaps be interpreted as a cynical attempt to latch on to a mainstream cultural fad—there's a reason the term “Celtomania” became popularized in the wake of *Braveheart*'s box office success, after all. But my interest in surfacing the heritage of Appalachian rhetoric has less to do with what that heritage is than the mere fact that a heritage exists. I remember how I felt reading Geneva Smitherman, the wonder I felt in thinking that an Ebonics speaker could, in a sense, be speaking something of an ancestral language hundreds of years removed from its land of origin. There was a reason for dialect, a reason that did not equate to ignorance, a reason that was, for me, innately respectable. To speak in the voice of my

ancestors, even just a little, means something to me. And, given that the discussion on dialect and world-Englishes has only grown in the academy, it means something to many educators, as well.

Katherine Kelleher Sohn, whose book *Whistlin' and Crowin' Women of Appalachia* was the first I had ever encountered to focus on Appalachian students' experiences with academic literacy, recalls witnessing professors at a CCCC in Nashville, Tennessee, mocking their Appalachian waiter's accent. These are teachers, she emphasizes, "who, if asked, would probably pride themselves on their multicultural awareness" (1). Yet they fail to even recognize Appalachia as part of the very multiculturalism they hope to advance. For this reason, if no other, I think a greater awareness of our cultural roots is important in mainstream and academic contexts. However, it's important, too, for us, as Appalachian peoples, to have the opportunity to explore the cultural heritages that not only influence our language and ideals, but could also link us together on a much wider scale than we've yet experienced. There is power in community, in identity, which I think our rhetorical styles recognize, even if we have not fully considered it ourselves.

The following chapter expands on these concepts through an exploration of Appalachian writing. Specifically, I will explore examples of writing by Appalachian peoples, to see how the dynamics of Celtic rhetoric emerge in these stories, and what these concepts can mean to our understanding of Appalachian identity.

### CHAPTER 3: WRITING AN APPALACHIAN RHETORIC

In chapter two, I explored the historical roots of Appalachian rhetoric, specifically with regard to the traditions of Celtic rhetoric and its differences from Greco-Roman forms. In this chapter, I want to look more specifically at the ways that Celtic influence is made visible in examples of Appalachian writing, both through writing styles and subject choices, which may set us as writers apart from what could be taken for granted as “good” rhetoric and writing in the classroom.

And Appalachia is no stranger to the classroom. I've discovered that there is more scholarship available on the subjects of Appalachia, writing, and rhetoric than one might think.

Let me give you a quick run-down of some of the major contributions: I mentioned Katherine Kelleher Sohn's *Whistlin' and Crowin' Women of Appalachia* in chapter two; while later developed into a book, this text began as a 2003 article in *CCC*. It was one of the first texts to really focus on Appalachia and issues of writing or literacy. Sohn's interest was in the ways Appalachian women utilized the academic literacy they gained in college in their social and professional lives afterward. This was followed by Jennifer Beech's 2004 *College English* essay, “Redneck and Hillbilly Discourse in the Writing Classroom: Classifying Critical Pedagogies of Whiteness,” in which Beech asked Appalachian students to closely examine the outsider discourses that dominate mainstream definitions of Appalachian identity in unfair ways. In 2007, Sara Webb-Sunderhaus's “A Family Affair: Competing Sponsors of Literacy in Appalachian Students' Lives” appeared in *Community Literacy Journal*, considering how family

served to aid or inhibit Appalachian students as they learned academic discourse. Also in 2007, the book *Rural Literacies* was published, in which Kim Donehower authored a chapter examining the ways mainstream and academic discourse has created Appalachian stereotypes. Even closer to home, Nathan Shepley's 2009 *Composition Studies* article "Places of Composition: Writing Contexts in Appalachian Ohio" compared the experiences of an Appalachian student and a non-Appalachian student in a composition course at Ohio University, demonstrating that the experience of the Appalachian student wrestling with academic discourse was significantly different in complex ways.

My purpose in this run-down is to demonstrate not just what I've seen in the scholarly literature, but also what I haven't: while all of the above consider the ways mainstream or academic discourse shapes Appalachia and/or the experience of Appalachian students encountering academic writing (certainly an important focus, and well-worthy of extended inquiry), none focuses to an extended degree on the discourse these students bring with them into those classrooms.

Let me dwell for a minute on one article in particular. Though I didn't mention it above, Erica Abrams Locklear's "Narrating Socialization: Linda Scott DeRosier's Memoirs" appeared in the same 2007 issue of *Community Literacy Journal* as Sara Webb-Sunderhaus's work. Like Webb-Sunderhaus, Locklear is focusing on issues of Appalachia and discourse; her views (and those of DeRosier, an Appalachian memoirist whose work she evaluates) tell me something important about the current gap in this area of scholarship.

Locklear's textual analysis of college professor and memoirist Linda Scott DeRosier's published memoirs highlights the ways that college education distanced DeRosier from her sense of Appalachian identity. DeRosier, upon entering college, “increasingly learns that her Appalachian way of being contrasts with accepted ways of being in the academic community” (Locklear 41), a contrast the DeRosier manages via “a constant obsession over passing for ‘normal [. . .] not hillbilly’” (Locklear 43). While DeRosier later became troubled by her own desire to assimilate, she continued to value her facility with mainstream discourse, as it allowed her to write the memoirs wherein she challenged negative Appalachian stereotypes.

This article echoes Webb-Sunderhaus's piece in significant ways. Locklear notes DeRosier felt compelled to disavow her Appalachian identity when she attended college, much like the students in Webb-Sunderhaus's study; like Webb-Sunderhaus, Locklear leads me to some wide questions: why is there such a perceived difference between classroom and Appalachian identity, and can this troubling trope be addressed productively by making those identities part of the writing classroom? I'm troubled that, in the absence of foregrounded consideration of these identities and rhetorics in the classroom, we're left with the assumption that DeRosier's memoirs were only possible via the standardized writing discourse she learned in college; there seems to be no sense that such work could possibly be written in any other way, other than utilizing the rhetorical conventions of the academic mainstream.

My ultimate sense, then, of the previous literature regarding rhetoric, composition, and Appalachian studies is not that the region or its culture are necessarily

approached as negatives, so much as that the bulk of scholarly focus has been on the “outside” dimension of Appalachian rhetoric. By focusing intently on how outside discourse interprets Appalachia (such as with Donehower) or on the ways by which Appalachian students adapt to academic or mainstream discourses (as with Sohn, Webb-Sunderhaus, and Locklear), what remains open for exploration is the inner-life of Appalachian rhetoric. (As a grad student, I've been taught to look for potentially productive gaps in the existing scholarship; it has allowed me to notice that this here is a big gap.) While these authors are doing unquestionably important work in bringing scholarly attention to the subject of Appalachia and considering how best to open mainstream and academic discourses to Appalachian students, I want us to think, too, about the rhetorical literacy these students bring with them to the classroom (perhaps even subconsciously), where this literacy comes from, and what it means. In other words, I want to consider in part how we might tentatively define an Appalachian rhetoric, as formed within the region and in response to regional exigencies. The uncritical connection of writing with mainstream (or otherwise non-Appalachian) rhetoric is something worth challenging, for academics and for Appalachians; by surfacing an Appalachian rhetoric that can and has been written, specifically in the service of memoir-writing, I hope to strengthen the concepts of Appalachian discursive identity, and a value for it, that are essential to any claims for rhetorical sovereignty.

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My first year of community college teaching, the year after I got my Master's degree, was very much a new experience for me. I'd started out as a student at a



community college, but, having achieved the required score on a standardized test, I was not required to take first-year writing. Really, I had no idea what first-year writing at my new place of employment would be like. I was required to teach a pre-determined syllabus (which, as a newbie and an adjunct, I had no role in composing), with a pre-determined textbook (which, for similar reasons, I had no role in choosing). I'm going to take a moment here and do something I'm rather uncomfortable with: advocate my own advantages. While I would never once claim I knew better than my new colleagues (Lord knows I didn't: I had a total of two years' experience as a teacher to their decades, and my experience was at a research university with a demographically different student body), there is a reason I think, in hindsight, I should have trusted my own instincts more than I did. What I had, and what they did not, was a specific interest and focus in rhetoric and composition. All of the full-time faculty, the people who made departmental decisions, had MA degrees in literature, with no specific interest in the field of rhet/comp or its ideas. Teaching composition in this school, as I would come to surmise, was largely done with the intent to instill a kind of disciplined, categorical thinking that would benefit students in their vocations. While I'm not faulting this idea, nor advocating that we overlook the importance of economic practicality in students' motivations for seeking college education, I will venture to say that I had experience in a field that the department decision-makers did not, experience that was enough to make me uneasy about the tasks I was asked to perform as an instructor. I now think it was a discomfort linked as well to my being (like my students, and unlike my colleagues) from an Appalachian background.

The textbook required for all Comp 101 courses was composed within the department, by the faculty, in order to better meet departmental learning outcomes. The textbook revolved around the old-school modes of writing. Description, Narration, Exposition, and Persuasion were each given their own chapters; students, in addition to writing in these modes, took Scan-tron exams to test the degree to which they'd memorized the facets of each. This, I came to understand after working at two other regional colleges, was not an isolated case. While I wasn't required to give my writing students multiple choice exams at the other schools, both also used composition textbooks centered on a mode-based model of writing.

The instructions for each mode were specific. Our first mode, descriptive writing, was “writing that presents physical details about a person, place, or object in order to paint a verbal picture of it” (Huth 19). While it was noted, that “you will rarely encounter a piece of writing that exclusively employs the descriptive mode” (Huth 19), nonetheless, students were asked to write an exclusively descriptive piece as their chapter assignment. When I assigned my students their descriptive piece, I thought I was making a fruitful nod to our shared cultural background: I gave them the option to describe any place they loved, thinking that I was giving them the freedom to describe the grandparents' houses and woodlands and cricks that they'd perhaps never before been encouraged to write about in school.

And they did. I got papers about those houses and woodlands and cricks, but not in a way I expected. For example, one of the first essays I read was by a student who wrote about the swing-set that had been in her parents' yard, that she'd played on as a

child, and that they had recently replaced with a new version for her own daughter. This writer told me about how her whole family had come out to offer help assembling the new set, and how they held their breath when her little girl took her first nervous trip down the slide, only to laugh when she reached the end and tried to climb back up for another go. She told me about how she remembered doing the same thing on her old childhood slide, and how this all made her realize that, though the swing-set was different, she was happy that her baby would have the same experiences of family and fun in this place that she'd had.

I don't remember the exact words I wrote on this student's paper, but it was something along the lines of, "You're mixing up description and narrative here." There I was, being the good student again. And telling her that she was a bad one.

Yes, I cringe to think of this. It's a reflex that started to set in the longer I taught, when I had student after student come to me during office hours to ask, "Could you help me with my story?", despite the fact that the assignment in question might be a persuasive piece or a research paper. They were all, to my students, stories. And the more I thought about it, the more I realized it made perfect sense to me, too. What are we doing when we write anything, if not telling our stories?

Not long ago, I went to a guest lecture and reading by Diane Gilliam Fisher. Fisher comes from an Appalachian family; her most recent work, *Kettlebottom*, is a book of poems from the perspectives of participants in the West Virginia Mine Wars of the 1920s. Describing her work, Fisher said, "Stories matter. Stories are how we get to be who we are." Does it matter that for her, "stories" and "poetry" are the same thing? Or

that the stories that created her are mostly not ones in which she is a direct participant? And, perhaps most significantly, in “getting us to be who we are,” are our “stories,” ultimately, rhetoric?

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There have been Appalachian people writing in (and being written about in) the academy and mainstream society for some time. And much of this writing is done, or at least attempted, in mainstream or academic dialect, both in terms of language and rhetorical choices. What I want is something different: I want to know what Appalachian people write like when they're writing for themselves and other Appalachians, when they're writing in ways that seems fittin' for these occasions. Can we, in essence, eavesdrop on Appalachian writing—on our stories—in a way that hasn't been done before? I'm going to try.

What I'm listening for is not limited to language choices. There is writing that “speaks” in an Appalachian tongue, certainly, but I'm not sure this can be a requirement by which to judge the Appalachian-ness of a text, for particular reasons. On one hand, some Appalachian writers have never written in their home dialects, particularly if their writing instruction comes primarily from post-WWII public schools. In these cases, the teaching of writing and the teaching of standard English have often overlapped, to the point that a more standardized English has become no less the default language of writing for us as for other students in this country. This is, more or less, my own case; I never really learned to write in anything but standard English, nor did I get much experience speaking my home dialect in academic contexts; even now, I find myself having to think,

when attempting to demonstrate for my students my home language, about what I would say or how I would say it. Sometimes, when I hear myself saying something in a way I think of as Appalachian, I force myself to remember it for future reference. (A while back, I was walking past the road construction being done outside my apartment. Because it's a construction site, it's put-near a mud hole when it rains, which it was doing then. One of the workers saw me, and politely apologized for the layer of mud I was getting on my shoes. "I grew up on a farm," I assured him, "'Is here ain't nothin'.") It don't come natural to me in a schoolroom, and not always on a blank page.

I've found that this nervousness about written language amongst Appalachian writers correlates also with a deeply running set of social judgments about Appalachian English, making its appearance a potential sore subject for some speakers and writers. Katherine Kelleher Sohn agonized over how to transcribe the language of her Kentucky interviewees in her ethnographic study, coming to the conclusion to standardize in order to protect them from these judgments:

Appalachian ethnographer D.E. Walls defends his choice to regularize language by stating that the 'attempt to use the vernacular misfires in one of two directions. Either it confuses and slows down the reader or it reduces the mountain characters to little more than ignorant, comic fools. I had no desire to do either' (xiii). Though all language systems are rule-governed and legitimate, I wanted my audience to hear these women as intelligent beings who had something to whistle and crow about; I did not want someone judging them as 'ignorant, comic fools.' (18)

What is problematic, of course, is that it is an attitude that places the burden upon the speaker, rather than holding the dominant-dialect audience accountable for their own ignorance and prejudices. However, it is an attitude shared by at least some of Sohn's Appalachian interviewees as well; upon showing her the edited transcription, one participant, Jean, “edited her transcript even further, saying that she did not want to sound like a 'hillbilly' to anyone else reading the transcript” (Sohn 36). Nathan Shepley encountered a similar attitude regarding dialect in his interviews with Matt, an Appalachian student in Shepley's composition course:

My accent's probably a lot worse than I let on. I do—it's not that I'm embarrassed of where I come from or who I am. It's just that people perceive you differently if you've got this, you know, southern drawl thing going on. So, it's trying to conceal that sometimes 'cause you don't get taken seriously, and I've experienced it before. People just don't, you know—they're not into what you're saying. (qtd. in Shepley 85)

Matt also lays the ultimate responsibility not on listeners (to confront their own linguistic prejudices) but on speakers to prevent such an awkward situation from arising.

This attitude, however, is not shared by all Appalachians or academics. In transcribing her interviews with an Appalachian Ohio woman, sociologist Rosemary Owsley Joyce chooses not to edit for standardization, deciding that “It seems to me a heightened form of snobbery not to use the vernacular, a subtle way of saying 'You talk funny, and rather than embarrass either of us, I will clean up your act and make it sound like it should—like me!' Pure ethnocentrism!” (Joyce 20). Also, in one of the most

famous examples of Appalachian autobiography, Loretta Lynn emphasizes that when she agreed to write a memoir, she insisted on control over her language, but not so that it could be standardized:

The first thing I insisted was that it sound like me. When all those city folks try to fix up my talking, all they do is mess me up. Like the way I pronounce the word 'holler.' That's our word for the low space between mountains. City people pronounce it 'hollow' but that ain't the way I pronounce it. This is my book. Instead of using Webster's Dictionary, we're using Webb's Dictionary—Webb was my maiden name. (xiv)

So while Appalachian language attitudes are a bit of a mixed bag, my suspicion is that, as Michael Montgomery argues regarding dialect, there is something deeper going on below the linguistic surface. In other words, Appalachian rhetoric can be more than just the shape and sound of the words we use.

Specifically, what I'm looking for are rhetorical conventions that the authors themselves may or may not be aware of using; they may simply be writing in a way that “makes sense” for them. But what is it that makes sense for Appalachian writers? It is, for me, both a very personal and a very social question. Are the ways in which I feel drawn to write, to express myself, and the ideas I feel compelled to express myself about, just some individual quirk? Are they just me being me, or are they something far wider; something that, in understanding, can help me understand myself, and perhaps help other Appalachian writers understand themselves, as part of a culture?

I'm thinking here, again, of Matt, the Appalachian student in Nathan Shepley's study. Listening in on Shepley's interviews with Matt, it's easy to grasp that Matt's conceptions of himself are complex; he is aware of himself, to the degree that he self-identifies, as Appalachian, which is itself an identity marker not all inhabitants of the region are aware of as an option—for many of us, there is no term for who and what we are, or at least no positive term. But Matt claims Appalachia, he knows it is there to be claimed. This, I would posit, is a positive step on the path to building the kind of people-identity Lyons sees as necessary to rhetorical sovereignty. However, Matt's conceptions of Appalachian identity, as seen through his views on language, are not entirely simple: he is embarrassed by the language bequeathed to him through this cultural identity, having been taught that it is a “worse” way to speak (Shepley 85). But something that is of particular interest to me is the rhetorical dynamics that Matt doesn't necessarily seem to recognize himself embodying, dynamics that he may not even label as particularly Appalachian, but that we can catch traces of in his classwork and interviews. For example, Matt notes that he could “more easily engage in class activities and writing if he could explore familiar subjects” (83); the subjects he specifies are family and place-specific. He describes at length his grandfather as both an intelligent man and one of his (Matt's) own best teachers, though he explains that his grandfather's “intelligence was in things that applied to him, you know, gardening or farming or something like that. That was where it applied to him. It wasn't, you know—he didn't know about Shakespeare or Virginia Woolf or things like that. It didn't appeal to him. It wasn't useful in his world” (83). Loyal Jones has specified family and place as being central values in Appalachian



culture; Matt demonstrates these through his discussions of both. But what is also, I posit, part of Appalachia's rhetorical inheritance, is the point about applicable intelligence, the desire to write and think about—and thereby preserve—the knowledge that is “useful in [our] world”—usefulness which is, in this cultural context, linked inextricably with that which allows us to build and maintain place and family links.

Shepley notes some of what seem to be (most likely culturally based) differences in social values that distance Matt from the writing assignments he is asked to do in class. For example, one assignment asked students to “pretend they were writing three letters to three different audiences in order to get money for spring break,” to which Matt responds, “I would never do that. I would never be able to do that” (Shepley 84). Shepley considers a cultural value for self-reliance to be at the root of Matt's discomfort, and that is likely so, but I imagine he is also repelled by the idea of taking money, perhaps dishonestly, from parents or family to waste on one's own pleasure. Matt had earlier mentioned his discomfort at his non-Appalachian classmates' cavalier attitude toward “their parents' credit cards” (84), a judgment he makes but also tempers with the olive branch of “I'm not saying that [all they do is party]” (84).

This attitude toward money, family, and personal responsibility may well be rooted in Appalachia. So too, I believe, is the qualification Matt makes on judging his classmates, in softening the statement, keeping the emphasis on his lack of perfect knowledge of his classmates' own values. What interests me is how deeply ingrained these concepts are, how rhetorically bound they are with not just how Matt speaks/writes but what he speaks/writes about, and why. Unlike his discussion of his language, Matt

doesn't describe this desire to write about family and place-based subjects as negative, or even necessarily positive, perhaps because it is simply something beyond those value judgments: it just *is*, it's how the project of writing makes sense.

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This desire to eavesdrop on Appalachian rhetorical conventions has a lot to do with how I chose which texts to eavesdrop on. My choices are, more or less, samples of autobiographical writing, as these are texts in which writers, in telling their own stories, are perhaps more likely to write in ways that seem natural to those stories, particularly for audiences with shared regional backgrounds. In other words, if I'm gon tell you'uns about my life, I'm gon tell it in the terms of my life and my values, particularly if I'm not conscious of how those terms conflict with those of the academy. I'm choosing for this analysis writers/speakers who are, to some degree at least, writing at home—who demonstrate that Appalachians can *be* at home with writing at all. They aren't necessarily trying to do things differently than feels right to them. And it's this “home” writing that I want to explore, not least to show that writing “home”--writing Appalachia—on its own terms is possible.

However, my choice of memoirs as rhetorical texts may require some explanation. Are they? My gut answer to that question might be, “They are, here.” But that is because of what I think of rhetoric as doing—specifically, I think of “rhetoric” as a means of creating, sharing, and understanding one's self and one's world through language. In analyzing memoir, I'm seeking to better understand what that world is for these writers, how they create it and how they communicate it. Isn't memoir, though, the

realm of creative non-fiction; in other words, does it by essence slip away from our definitions of rhetoric? At times, I'm sure it does, that some creative non-fiction writers would certainly define their works as artistic explorations, un-tethered by rhetorical purpose. Defining art versus rhetoric in and of itself would be an exhausting discussion, one I've no intention of having here. But I am intrigued by a point that came across again and again in my research of Celtic rhetoric: that of interlace, a desire to obscure boundaries or disconnections in favor of surfacing third spaces, unities. The religious life of Pagan Celts had this element ingrained: There was no Celtic deity of love or one of death in the Greco-Roman sense; rather, there was one Goddess of both love *and* death, another of war *and* fertility (O'Driscoll 289). Likewise, they drew few if any distinctions between concepts of narrative, poetry, or song—all being vehicles for the magic of language, a magic that allowed the world to be created and maintained (Johnson-Sheehan and Lynch 234-236). For us, cannot the creation of memoir be artistic and rhetorical, its product a work of both literature and rhetorical purpose?

I'm wondering now if perhaps there is something culturally-dependent in my thinking of rhetoric, and memoirs as rhetoric, in this way. Huw Pryce described early Celtic literacy as being used to foster native culture, specifically to preserve and transmit learning and lore (11). My sense has always been that this is what memoirs, as life narratives, do: they are told (or written) to create and share a sense of one's worldview, and to preserve that worldview. I think that memoir, therefore, is a particularly Appalachian form of rhetorical writing; recall Matt's desire to write about his own experiences in the classroom, as, in fact, the only way in which he would truly feel

engagement and comfort in his writing. I don't see this as either evidence of Matt's failure to distinguish rhetoric from creative non-fiction, nor of self-involvement on his part. Rather, I think he's responding to a cultural sense that personal stories are the best way to convey one's ideas and sensibilities; in other words, of writing rhetorically.

I would note, however, that what Matt and I may be thinking of as “personal experience” and memoir are perhaps not the same as what might appear in more mainstream contexts. It is something in which *I*, the person in question in the term personal writing, might not appear at all, or at least may at times seem to take a back row seat. Specifically, I think memoir, whether oral or written, fulfills a rhetorical purpose in Appalachia, as an at least partial descendent of Celtic culture: it draws connection, between people and with social values, and it puts us in our place, sometimes literally. It emphasizes that we, even as writers, are just one thread in a larger cloth that someone started a-sewin' before we was even born.

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A while back there was a wedding in the family. My great-aunt Nova's husband, Girdon, and his sisters Marcella and Cinderella got up to sing some of the old songs to the guests. The old style isn't so common anymore, certainly not outside the area. It's a throaty sound, where the goal is not so much for your voice to sound pretty but to sound strong. Cousin Terry had brought his new girlfriend down for the event. When Girdon, Marcella, and Cinderella started singing in the old style, in that wonderful, harsh harmony of voice . . . Terry's girlfriend laughed. She howled. She nearly fell off her chair, she thought they sounded so funny. Terry said nothing.

None of those three sang much after that. And Terry married that girl.

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Did I just write a memoir? In other words, is this part of *my* story? That's a bit of a complicated question, not least of all because it is, strictly speaking, a memory that is not my own. I am nowhere in the scene itself, which occurred before I was born. I had no influence on any part of it. I'm not even, by the definitions of mainstream nuclear family relationships, closely related to the participants (my great-aunt and great-uncle, my cousins-once-removed by blood and by marriage). But I would say that this is, for me, a memoir; it *is* personal experience. Because it's a story that I've been told through family channels, one that has had an effect on how I define the world and why. On what I value . . . and on behavior that I don't. Specifically, I learned (or perhaps better to say, had reinforced) the value of respect for elders, and the devastating cost of disrespecting cultural history. Terry's girlfriend, and later wife, Carolyn, had family connections in the region, but she had grown up "in town," a distinction she made much of; the story of Carolyn and Terry's behavior, and the result it created in Girdon, Marcella, and Cinderella's reluctance from then on to sing in the old ways, taught me the concept of internal colonization, long before I ever learned the term.

Perhaps the question I should ask that is more to the current point is, in writing (or in having been told) this story, am I engaging in rhetoric? This is a question that might, in fact, have a somewhat clearer answer, depending on one's point of view. Because, in fact, if I am to ask the question from a traditionally first-year composition definition of rhetoric, the answer might be no.

It's no real secret that much of what is considered rhetoric in academic contexts descends from specifically Greco-Roman rhetoric. Think, for instance, of the textbook *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* by Edward P.J. Corbett and Robert J. Connors. It's an excellent rhetorical text, but as the introduction makes clear, the origin of “classical” rhetoric is the urban *poli* of Greece and Rome. And Greco-Roman rhetoric is, quite often, “instances of formal, premeditated, sustained monologue in which a person seeks to exert an effect on an audience” (1). Already, this definition problematizes the often informality, abruptness, and spontaneity of Appalachian narratives. The telling of the wedding story to me was not planned, was not formal, was not packaged with a stated moral or thesis (although it was made pretty clear in the telling what exactly the teller—my mother—thought of that laughter, the loss she felt, from that thoughtless act of humiliation, in not hearing that singing like she once did.) Greco-Roman academic rhetoric is likewise, as Aristotle described, at root the art of persuasion. While Corbett and Connors note that this definition can be expanded to include both argumentation and exposition (1), it seems clear from any informal survey of composition textbooks that argumentation in particular reigns supreme as the purpose of academic rhetoric.

It is, significantly, an idea of argument that for many first-year composition textbooks has a fairly definitive form and definition. Written arguments revolve around a discernible, relevant issue, with an identifiable thesis making a clear claim on the issue (Bullock 97) that the audience is (hopefully) going to be convinced to agree with by the end of the essay. Some even go so far as to instruct that “argument is always grounded in reason” (DiYanni and Hoy 614), a concept with deep Greco-Roman philosophical roots.

I wonder, then, what this can mean for the reception of our stories as rhetoric. I don't think the wedding story would pass as an academic argument; as I said, I wasn't asked, overtly and formally, to accept a claim about an issue as the audience for this story. (I'm likewise often uncomfortable asking others to accept my claims.) I could guess pretty easily what my mother took from it, and what I'll even go so far as to say that she hoped I'd take from it, but I don't know that it was a hope that could even be articulated at the time: it would have been utterly strange for a teller to preface the story with, "Here's what I want *you* to think about this." What happened was something more subtle and understood. I could see what she thought and why, and take it from there. It didn't even need explained why something like this, revolving as it did around valuing heritage and respecting family elders, was an "issue" worth addressing. It just was.

So if what we have in Appalachia is a rhetoric, it ain't a Greco-Roman one.

Is it a rhetoric? The study of women's rhetorics in particular has done a great deal to expand accepted conceptions of what rhetoric is and what it does, beyond the narrow limits of the Greco-Roman tradition. As Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald note in the introduction of *Available Means: An Anthology of Women's Rhetoric(s)*, while "women have often written in unprivileged or devalued forms such as letters, journals, and speeches to other women," a renewed examination of these texts as rhetoric has created "an expanded definition of rhetorical form" (xx). Therefore, by asking us to fit these collections of Appalachian life-writing, what I am, for lack of a better term, calling memoir, into that definition, I am doing nothing new. I'm just stretching the already well-worn definition a little further; maybe, to maintain my metaphor, I'm quilting together

memoir and rhetoric into an interlacing pattern, for what I see as an Appalachia rhetorical purpose: by analyzing these texts rhetorically, seeing what it is I can learn from them to better explain my own sense of culture and its shaping influence on identity, I hope to present a picture of my own thinking, laid bare. Because while I find myself uncomfortable with the academically rhetorical concept of thesis-as-argument, I can make a purposeful demonstration of my process of thinking—in this case, about how Celtic rhetorical heritage has shaped Appalachian rhetoric.

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In order to explore more fully how what I'm calling Appalachian rhetoric works, I propose to listen in on memoirs by two authors: *An Enchanted Childhood in Raven Rocks* by Elsa Crooks Harper and *The Way It Was* by Della Grace Kindness. These texts are similar in context, making them beneficial and problematic to my proposed eavesdropping in similar ways. Both are, essentially, local texts, in that they were published by small, regional presses for small, regional audiences: Crooks Harper by Raven Rocks Press and Kindness as self-published by the author, with copies printed on request. However, despite the emphasis on localism in the content and condition of both texts, what neither author does is to identify that locale or herself *as* Appalachian; in fact, the term Appalachia does not appear in either text. While this is on the surface problematic (how can these voices be relevant to Appalachian rhetorical sovereignty if they don't identify as Appalachian?), my sense is that a usage and recognition of the term Appalachia as a descriptor of the lifestyle and regional culture these writers describe is a more recent phenomenon, in multiple parts of the region. Katherine Kelleher Sohn notes



that while “outsiders may use the term 'Appalachian,' [her] Appalachian neighbors . . . do not use it to describe themselves and would more likely explain their origins in terms of the holler, town, or country where they live” (3). These concepts of self-definition are important as a cultural linkage; in other words, while different memoirists may identify themselves with different hollers, the fact that they identify so strongly with those particular hollers at all is in fact a cultural similarity, one that plays an important rhetorical role in their writing.

Also, to a degree, my selection of these texts is due to availability. Both the authors are known to members of my extended family network, which is how I learned of their existence in the first place. This is not to say that memoir writing is frequent amongst Appalachian peoples; from what I've been able to see in my research, the style of rhetorical discourse I'm investigating remains largely an oral tradition. But not entirely. I know of other similar texts (at least one of which is a memoir that has been simply typed out on loose-leaf paper, with copies made at home and distributed to interested readers), all of which are similar in their composition and audience; few Appalachian memoirists, it seems, achieve or perhaps even aim for a national audience (Loretta Lynn's *Coal Miner's Daughter* being an exception, although it was written with a non-Appalachian co-author). Perhaps part of the reason why these memoirs remain a localized phenomenon has to do with the effects of writing Appalachia as a discourse; what does our Celtic rhetorical inheritance look like when you put it on a page? If you're not from around here, maybe nothin' like what you'd expect. Or be willing, even able, to

read as I think it's intended. We can write Appalachia, in other words; I'm less certain that many people know how to read it.

With this in mind, let me sift through some of the Celtic rhetorical threads I brought up in chapter two, and see if I can use them in my quilt.

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- Rhetoric is less about arguing in favor of specific ideas as it is the preservation of mindsets and ideals, connections, and consensus about general values (Lynch; O'Riordan; Connell; Johnson-Sheehan and Lynch); the process of thinking/coming to knowledge is often built by family and place-based experiences, with the assumption that the audience will also value these as sources of knowledge (Lynch; Connell)

In 2012, Stephen Fry filmed the BBC documentary series *In America*, in which he traveled the 50 states seeking the roots of both regional differences and similarities. In Kentucky, he stopped in on an informally organized, public bluegrass music session. One of the players, after a demonstration of his banjo pickin' (three-fingered style, he explains, like Earl Scruggs), discusses the Scotch-Irish origin of the musical style, and ponders the wider implication of what playing this music means for him: "I would say that it, it runs deep in your blood and it becomes a part of you . . . and you feel the land, you know, in your heart."

However, music is perhaps not the only way we tie ourselves to the land; or rather, it is part of a larger rhetorical system dedicated to that achievement. In her article "Writing On the Land of Ireland," Sarah Connell makes the case that Irish texts like the

*Acallam na Senorach* effectively linked identity with geographic space; in other words, that the text worked rhetorically to “merg[e] their bodies with the land” (5). This is achieved textually by the speakers in the text demonstrating their knowledge of place-based traditions: “the *Acallam*'s author is able to show how the people of Ireland have shaped the land in which they live—and how the land has also shaped them. . . . [through knowledge of] *Dinnshenchas* [place-name lore] and genealogies, knowledge of the land itself and of the people who inhabit that land” (8). The text becomes a “synthesis of narrative traditions, people, and physical geography” (8) that preserves the connections between the people and place of Ireland, connections that Connell argues were particularly important to articulate at the time of the *Acallam*'s composition, during the early waves of Anglo-Norman colonization (8).

My suspicion is that something similar is happening when Appalachian writers put pen to paper, in that these same ideas—a value for connection between peoples and places, and the preservation of those connections—play an important, if not always surfaced, role in our rhetorical choices. In other words, I wonder if we aren't writing ourselves into place, too.

For example: in Della Grace Kindness's memoir, there is a chapter titled “Blooming Grove Community.” Here Kindness details a “special section of Oxford Township” where “probably the first settlers had discovered a grove of trees, maybe in the springtime when they were in full bloom” (30). (I am always struck, in this passage, with Connell's point about the role *Dinnshenchas* [place-name lore] plays in the *Acallam* [8]). Kindness's chapter continues to provide a verbal map of the region, in rather

mundane detail. For example, we learn that “At the crossroads stood a one-room schoolhouse . . . Although the farms adjoined, the houses were not close together . . . Besides the school were two churches in the community: Saltfork Baptist Church which, from what I heard, was quite prosperous and well-attended, and Pisgah Church which was located toward Route 40 . . . everyone around gathered up apples from their own individual orchards and brought them to Doc's mill” (30-31). For her readers, the specifics of these details may hold little meaning; some of the places she describes, such as the one-room schoolhouse, no longer exist. What I also find significant is that, while explicating these details for her readers, Kindness prefaces her chapter with the statement “I only know these things I write about from what I have heard from my parents and brothers” (30): Kindness herself was raised in the nearby Antrim community; she describes Blooming Grove because it was part of her family's place-connection, rather than her own.

So why explicate these (perhaps ponderous) geographic details, when they are not even part of her own narrative, her own life story? Because, I would say, for her they are part of her life story, exactly because they were part of her wider familial connection with a place. They are also part of her rhetorical purpose in committing these accounts to writing. Kindness not only expounds on the minutia of a disappeared farming community, she emphasizes that this knowledge about places, even if that knowledge is at a remove from her individually, is important. By demonstrating her knowledge, Kindness demonstrates her place-based identity, an identity that, in writing her memoir, she encourages preserving.

While I do not know if Kindness made these rhetorical choices consciously in the writing of her memoir, I do think Elsa Crooks Harper indicates some self-awareness of her views on language, place, and identity. She begins her own memoir not with herself or her family's history, but with place: “[b]ooks grow,” she tells the reader, and “[t]his one is the outgrowth of my enchanted childhood in . . . an area that has long been called the Raven Rocks, since large flocks of ravens were known to have gathered here” (1) (notice again the emphasis on place-name lore). In other words, her book, her writing, are nourished not just from her life, but specifically from her life in a particular place. By making these her opening sentences, Crooks Harper is emphasizing an interconnection among self, writing, and place that is both sophisticated and, by Connell's measure, a rather traditionally Celtic way of looking at the project of rhetoric. While Connell notes that the *Acallam* demonstrates a process of textually tying together people and place, Crooks Harper explains a tradition of locals writing themselves quite literally into the landscape of the Raven Rocks; people “tied ropes onto the trees above, and swung over the edge, anchoring themselves while they managed, with difficulty, to carve or paint their names” (8). I would posit that what Crooks Harper is doing is, in a textual sense, writing her own name on the landscape that has, as she acknowledges, written on her. However, it is not her own name she wishes to inscribe; as an Appalachian author, Crooks Harper has many names to write.

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- Ethos is built through humility; the rhetor must identify with the audience, not set oneself apart (Lynch).

Both Elsa Crooks Harper and Della Grace Kindness take steps to emphasize a sense of humility in their writing that might seem counter-intuitive in the authors of autobiographies. It might be said that by committing one's life experiences to writing, and taking the added step of publishing that text for the view of others, is by nature an act of, if not pride, then at least the expectation of something exceptional about oneself, something others will find surprising or worth considering. Yet both these Appalachian authors seem to work intentionally to undercut any sense of self-exceptionalism, by redirecting their readers' attention to the wider context they ostensibly share: by emphasizing, that is, family, community, and place. Both are writing to audiences they conceive of as connected either by ties of place, of blood, or both; these ties are emphasized rather than severed in the creation of authorial voice. Kindness's memoir begins in fact with no mention of herself; rather she begins with a meditation on the importance of remembering one's fore-bearers with "love, honor, and respect" (1), followed with several pages on the history of her family's roots in the region of her upbringing. Crooks Harper is even more direct in offsetting her own authorial voice; she states on the first page that the content of her book, and by extension her identity, is not solely hers but rather the compilation of "experiences with my own family . . . early childhood friends, and [with] neighbors in that world of quiet, peace, love, and beauty" (1). She creates credibility and authorial identity not as exceptional amongst her audience but as solidly one of them, with, like most of her audience, family roots in the region (1-2) and a home that she emphasizes was not grand, but rather good (223). It is precisely because of this humility, this identification, that she can attest "I have never been

ashamed of my upbringing” (223). By avoiding pride, she by extension avoids shame. As Lynch explained with the rhetoric of St. Patrick, ethos in this way is built not by being special or distinct, but rather the reverse: by identifying with “the vocabulary, the values, and the symbols” (116) of the audience, which in this context, values both humility and individual judgment.

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- Narratives (often non-linear) demonstrate the rhetor's process of thinking about a subject; in other words, demonstrating how one has come to knowledge or belief, without overtly insisting on similar beliefs from the audience (O'Riordan; Stacy; Patterson).

However, I also perceive something of a paradox in these examples of Appalachian rhetoric, a paradox that offsets this decentralized authority with a highly individualized style of narrative. Let me explain what I mean by that. Appalachian peoples have something of a reputation as storytellers. Not for nothin' is a recent book of critical essays on the works of Appalachian writer Sharyn McCrumb titled *From a Race of Storytellers*, the “race of storytellers” in question being the Appalachian peoples from whom McCrumb draws much of her inspiration. Yet many of the stories I see from Appalachian writers like McCrumb, and even memoirists like Crooks Harper and Kindness, don't overtly try to enforce interpretation, to tell the audience what the “point” of the story is that they should take away. In fact, Crooks Harper looks at it like this: “Not all of us see beauty in the same paintings, the same poems, or the same music. We each tend to bring to any form of the fine arts our own feelings, past experiences, or

appreciation. However . . . I hope the reader will find something [in this book] which will captivate” (2). Despite her later assertion that her homeland and its stories have much to teach (14), Crooks Harper is pretty well satisfied to leave it up to the readers to take what they will from her stories. Instead, what we see in both Crooks Harper and Kindness are a collection of stories designed to illuminate their own sense of life in particular places, with the tacit understanding that the reader may take from this process and the author's conclusions what they will; the effect, I would posit, is not unlike that of the *Acallam* (Connell 11) and other early Celtic texts, in which the rhetorical emphasis was placed not on a distinct thesis but rather on demonstrating an individual's process of judgment or coming to knowledge (Stacy 75).

It is a difficult balance these writers achieve, in emphasizing that their words are “just their own opinions/ideas/experiences” while also recognizing and giving credit to the families, communities, and places that have shaped these opinions/ideas/experiences. Something that I suspect helps them achieve it is the specific form of storytelling/narrative structure the writers utilize. My experience with academic writing textbooks, specifically those geared toward community college writers (a topic I will expand upon in chapter four) is that they are usually pretty clear on how one should write a narrative; academic narratives, or at least good ones, are organized chronologically. Description can be utilized (unless “description” is, as with that previous textbook I encountered, treated as a distinct form of writing, to be assigned separately), but it plays a secondary role to the chronological flow of events; in fact, to a large degree, it seems to me that academic narrative writing is inextricable from “event;” in other words, narrative



itself, even when somewhat grudgingly accepted as a possible form of rhetorical composition, is intended to tell a specific story about a specific happening, in order to more fully persuade the audience of the correctness of the writer's specifically stated thesis. And while I'm sure that there are Appalachian writers who have written these—we are not without exposure to academic and mainstream literacies—I'm more interested in another style I'm seeing in these Appalachian autobiographies, one I think can be historicized culturally. In that light, what is particularly interesting about the collections of stories in both *Crooks Harper* and *Kindness* is that they aren't necessarily chronological, not focused on particular events, and are at times taken over by description. *Crooks Harper*, for example, follows her own discussion of community quilting parties with a sudden description of the appearances and joys of farmhouse porches (a discussion that she likewise interrupts with a sudden and detailed description of her family farmhouse's rain barrels). *Kindness* quite often follows family stories and experiences with detailed descriptions of the layout and geography of her childhood community; in fact, she sandwiches her description of the layout of the Blooming Grove farming community between her brothers' stories of first drinking pop in 1917 (29) and her recollections of the family horses Doc and Dan (35). Distinctions between modes of writing seem simply not to apply in these texts.

In fact, these memoirs defy chronological organization from the first pages. Both authors begin their memoirs not with their births or anything else so easily described as “event,” but rather with de-personalized discussions of places. *Crooks Harper* begins with descriptive prose and poetry about the Raven Rocks, including not just a description of

the geographic details but also historical details of the region's development ("Little Piney Creek, through the ages, had slowly but surely worn down the soft rock, leaving a harder rock which has formed caves and overhanging roofs" [5]). She then describes phases of human interaction with the land, from Native peoples through miners and farmers who live in dependence upon the land itself. Her notations about the place are, as she specifies, not only her own; she intersperses her own knowledge with that of others ("My mother could remember when the overhanging roof extended from each side so near that one could step from one side to the other" [8]; "[m]y father and a neighbor decided they would explore the Bear's Den" [9]). It is within this context that she describes her own family's roots in the region. Kindness likewise begins her memoir with place, but in the context of a more distinct description of her family's genealogy. Her introduction begins with the statement "[a] George family was living somewhere in Massachusetts in the 1700s" [2]; she then skips forward to a description of the first ancestors to settle in southeastern Ohio in the early 1800s, a family line that has remained in the region ever since. She concludes this combined family-place genealogy by describing her memoir as "a true story about a family, a town, and the people who lived in and around this small community in Ohio known as Antrim" (2). What she describes as "a story" is in fact what many might call a random collection of anecdotes, descriptions, documents, poems, and photos, rather than a linear narrative.

What to make of this, then? Are Crooks Harper and Kindness simply bad writers? I would argue not; rather, what we can see in these texts is an effect of the individual/communal balance at play in the culture, a balance (and method of achieving

it) inherited from the similar geographic and social situations of our Celtic cultural antecedents. As O'Riordan (7) has noted, the concepts of storytelling and linearity are not necessarily fused in Celtic writing. Perhaps the reason for this development, in both contexts, has something to do with what those stories are meant to do, or what they're meant to not do. In other words, what I see in Crooks Harper and Kindness, and what I see in other Appalachian writers, is a somewhat stream-of-consciousness style of storytelling that emphasizes the individual nature of the writer's process of judgment and evaluation of their life experiences (and the sometimes impersonal influences shaping these experiences); judgments that are perhaps encouraged, but not necessarily intended to be forced, upon others. They write what they're thinking as they think about it, rather than sacrificing thoughts and descriptions they find important to maintain a smoothly chronological narrative that the reader may find more appealing, but altogether less representative of the writer's own experience. I imagine one of the old-fashioned community quilting bees Crooks Harper describes, wherein the materials and work of constructing a quilt were shared. A quilt might be simpler, even more aesthetically pleasing, with fewer and more matching colors; but if I'm not allowed to contribute my length of orange cloth alongside my neighbor's blue, how could it be said that the resulting quilt was really either of ours?

Having and demonstrating our individual judgments seems important for us both rhetorically and culturally, but this doesn't mean that Appalachian authors have no stake in an audience's reception of their texts. This point allows me to revisit, also, how I am defining these texts as rhetoric, despite their non-conforming with traditional

academically rhetorical forms (and, in fact, their correlation with literary forms).

“Stream-of-consciousness” has a storied history in literary fiction and creative non-fiction (having been popularized as a mode of fiction in large part by James Joyce, an Irish writer). In what way can I describe these particular narratives, then, as rhetoric? I think this a position wherein Peter Elbow's conception of nonadversarial argument has relevance. As Elbow notes:

Traditional argument implies a zero-sum game: if I'm right, you must be wrong. Thus, arguments (and essays and dissertations) traditionally start with criticism of the views of opponents. Only in this way—the assumption goes—can I clear any space for my ideas. But this is usually rhetorical suicide with any readers who aren't already on my side. I'm telling them that they can't agree with my ideas unless they first agree that they are wrong or stupid—before they've even heard my allegedly better ideas. (398)

Nonadversarial arguments, in Elbow's view, are rhetorical explorations of concepts seeking assent; in other words, “argu[ing] *for*, not *against*” (397; italics in original). My position on the narratives that I'm exploring is that they are representative of a historied tradition, but also that they are fundamentally rhetorical rather than creative in purpose, for reasons not at all unlike Elbow's nonadversarial rhetoric. These writers seem, and I would posit are, at times writing for themselves, but they also want their readers to take something from their example.

That both Crooks Harper and Kindness expect that the reader will gain something from their texts is more than implied. On the back cover of her memoir, Kindness offers her expectation that the stories therein will lead her descendants to “know and be proud of their heritage.” For Crooks Harper, the act of writing these stories, an act she refers to as “my time of gathering things together,” is so important that it is both “a relief and a pleasure to pass them on to others” (224). These acts of gathering and distributing, the act of writing, is not done without purpose. The writing itself is (perhaps) performed by an individual, and demonstrative of “just” that individual's thoughts; however, the role of familial and communal influence on shaping those thoughts is not forgotten. And often, the acknowledgment and binding of those families and communities is part of the purpose. While Appalachian autobiography may perhaps be described as a communal effort, in that, as Crooks Harper noted, the stories themselves are the equal work of her, her family, and her place-based community, there is a hesitance to dictate what value the reader should take from that effort, beyond a rather vague something of knowledge and pride in what is preserved. In other words, the ideals/values implicit in these discussions, such the preservation of and value for family stories, is understood to be a communal belief; however, the particular interpretations of these stories are also understood to be “only” the writer's own. It is the preservation of the communal value, rather than the fleeting individual perspective, that ultimately matters most.

This is a consideration that has much to do with the purposes, if such can be generalized, of Appalachian rhetoric. It's a consideration also that again ties in ethos. I've gotten the sense that many Appalachian writers (in which group I include myself) are not

necessarily comfortable with the ways academic argumentation asks them to position themselves, as one persuading others of a specific idea or interpretation. However, if persuasion were entirely absent from Appalachian rhetoric as a purpose, what, then, would be our authorial intentions? Let me clarify, then, that I don't think persuasion is absent; rather, it is nonadversarial. These life narratives are told with a purpose based around preservation and assent, rather than creating change and disconnection. Crooks Harper and Kindness are sharing their process of thinking about place, family, and the social values they attach to these, because thinking about these things matters. It is because these things have been thought about, and that process of thinking shared, for generations that we as a culture continue to think about them, and value them, today. What we don't do, necessarily, is think about them in the same ways. Neither Kindness nor Crooks Harper seems to insist on any one interpretation of their texts, nor to much care whether their readers find their points entertaining or aesthetically pleasing (as I noted, the level of detail can become quite dull to read—although it is significant to recall that, as she is a significant part of her own audience, in constructing her own “quilt”, her own process of thinking and values, I doubt she finds these details to be at all dull). But as examples of situated experience, as encouragements to value situated experiences, these narratives fulfill a rhetorical purpose in creating, for both the writer and the reader, a world and an ideology to be passed on.

To look at this more specifically: Crooks Harper, in explaining her purpose, again deflects attention from herself *per se*; she notes that, in the face of “modern hurried living” (13), it is not her but rather “[t]his location of my birth [that has] many things to

offer” (14). But what is interesting is what those offerings are. Crooks Harper is not advocating that we somehow return to outdated methods of living (although she does, like many people, miss the days when doctors made house-calls [113]). As she notes, many of the day-to-day experiences of her own upbringing were based in past contexts that cannot be relived in the present (223); it makes no sense, for example, to return to horse-drawn wagons as a primary mode of transportation, although she does describe in detail what role horses played in the maintenance of her family and farm. Instead, what her narratives, her composed life experiences, can demonstrate is a way of maintaining essential values in times of change, “even though it is not always by choice that we must face [these changes]” (224). In other words, while the details of life may change, the values need not. While most of us no longer rely on rain barrels for our water (though, given the influence climate change is having on rain patterns, this is perhaps an old-fashioned device that more of us ought to revisit), Crooks Harper nonetheless explains the importance of the rain barrel for supplying water in her childhood. She “mourns the passing of the rain barrel” (45) not because she dislikes having running water today, but because she sees importance in what the rain barrel represented for her: sustenance, self-sufficiency, and curiosity about the world around her. (As she explains, as a child the rain barrel “raised questions in my young mind. How did that frog get into the barrel? How could it breathe in that deep, dark chasm? What would he do when the barrel got empty?” [45]) The point, as I read it, is that Crooks Harper is writing to create and preserve ideas and knowledges that have potential social value; not just how to use a rain barrel, but what having a rain barrel says about her upbringing and the values of the place that

fostered that upbringing: that it is important to be self-sufficient, to understand the environment, to find ways to sustain. What she does not say is that her upbringing is better than others, or that the lifeways of herself, her family, and her neighbors ought to be adopted by all. Rather, Crooks Harper says to us, as I interpret her: I've created my quilt, a vision of my world built by my words. It is a vision I value, and I invite you to share. It is something both individual, in that the vision itself is very much reflective of her own thoughts and interpretations, but also communal; this invitation to her audience to both assent and to build their own visions is one that Crooks Harper expects at least some of her readers to take up.

My sense, then, is that both Crooks Harper and Kindness are deflecting attention from themselves as authors (not a move that I perceive as conventional in more mainstream memoir), in service of a rhetorical purpose: they are working to preserve, through language and communal assent, something much larger than themselves, a lifestyle based upon recognized (for their audience) ideals of community social values revolving around place and family. Specifically, what I'm seeing in the rhetoric is a reliance on place and family not only as socially important concepts (which they are), but also an implicit understanding that these are sources of knowledge upon which to build one's process of thinking and identity-building. In other words, the concepts of "place" and "family" can be defined much more widely in Appalachian rhetoric, a width that pushes these concepts beyond the bounds of abstraction and into something tangled up with threads of self-definition. Place, as I read it in these texts, can be family, and family can be place. And the stories of each that we tell are no less part of us because they were



sometimes first told to us by our mothers and grandmothers; they shape us as much as the stories we create ourselves.

To provide a perhaps useful overview of my thinking at this point: what I'm seeing in the texts, as examples of written Appalachian rhetoric, is a focus on individual perspective, in that the writers are essentially creating and demonstrating their construction of social values for place and family/community. They emphasize humility in this individualism (in that these are, as they carefully note, only their perspectives, which they do not insist be shared by all), a humility that encourages connection and assent over dissension. Likewise, they take steps to emphasize that "individual" in their conceptualization can and does include other peoples, even places; in other words, while these texts are individual perspectives, they give credit to other forces in shaping their perspectives. The narratives are complicated, in that they defy strict chronological organization or focus on specific events, yet by doing so demonstrate a fuller picture of each author's thought process while composing, a thought process that occasionally slips the reins of clear organization and transitioning. (I can't help thinking again, here, of my great-grandmother's quilts. Why exactly did she place a red and orange paisley within an almost neon green? I have no idea....but I trust that it made sense to her.) Where I see these texts as being particularly rhetorical, and where I see the Celtic rhetorical tradition coming into distinct focus, is in what I read as the purpose of these texts: the demonstration of a process of judgment, about the means by which the things we value shape our lives, and how we'd like to see them shape lives in the future. Like the *Acallam*, these texts are linguistically tying the authors, and perhaps their readers, to

places and communities. While I see these as rhetorical persuasions to accept social values, they are not forthright or forceful in that persuasion; rather they hedge, they hint, they encourage and invite without attempting to overtly insist.

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Of course, this is just the evidence of two texts; the readings of them are just my own interpretations. But I don't think that makes them invalid; the ways Crooks Harper and Kindness are writing their stories are the ways I'd write (am writing) mine, too. With the ever-present understanding that readers may take what they will from anything I do write (and that those interpretations may differ from my own), I will hazard to say what I take from my process of thinking: that Appalachian rhetoric can be and has been written, and at least some aspects of it have a history that influences both what gets written and how. But I'll hazard even further to say that I think understanding this history and its influences can play an important role in how others think of us, and how we think of ourselves.

Todd Snyder said something at a recent guest lecture that sticks with me. He said that he likes stories that don't always end up where you think they will, but that this was an impulse he had to curb when composing a text for mainstream academic publishers. Like Todd, I don't think we always know, in starting our stories, where exactly we'll end up; and if you're an Appalachian writer, that's just fine. That is part of the telling, the journey, the process of building for ourselves the world through our thinking, our judgment, and letting others listen in. I've taken some turns I didn't foresee at the start, or maybe I've quilted in some cloths that didn't quite match but that, for me, fit the pattern

I'm following. It's a pattern of loops and webs perhaps, but it's a web that keep bringing me back around in my head to those Scotch-Irish, planting homesteads up and down Appalachia 300 years ago.

I'm not trying to say that all Appalachian texts are identical to some historical precedent, or even that Scotch-Irish rhetorical influence is the only force shaping how we think, act, speak, and write. There are, as has been noted, many more cultural influences on Appalachia than are often credited or acknowledged; nor can we simply say that Appalachian rhetoric merely replicates past forms in unchanged ways, without reference to modern life and modern exigencies. Any form of culture that didn't adapt with changing needs and situations would surely die out. Add to this that Scotch-Irish language attitudes to some degree encouraged adaptation: recall that Michael Montgomery argues that while the underlying grammar of Appalachian dialect remains that of the Scotch-Irish, the vocabulary is a different story. Gary Carden, in the documentary *Mountain Talk*, attributes the formation of newer vocabulary to “the Scots-Irish talent for improvisation.” Maybe what I'm seeing in these texts is to our rhetoric what the Scotch-Irish grammar is to our language: the deep structure, that part that holds on while we improvise the details of life.

I also don't wish to indicate that all Appalachian people will write or communicate in ways identical to each other, or to create a measurement by which to define Appalachian-ness in a text or a person. Not all Appalachian peoples have identical experiences, for a variety of reasons. For example, as I've noted before, many Appalachian people grow up in coal towns; I did not, nor did these authors. It's also

worth noting that not all Appalachians today live in Appalachia, a state that promises fruitful future questions: how does one account for the role place plays in personal or family identity, when the place upon which one lives has changed?

So what am I trying to say with this? What does it matter if Appalachian rhetoric and culture are influenced by a Celtic tradition? For one thing, it could provide us some sheer explanation for why we feel influenced to communicate in particular ways; when Geneva Smitherman taught me that Black Vernacular English grew from roots in African languages and ways of speaking, my worldview opened up wider than it had been before. And as someone who does value heritage, for either individual or cultural reasons, I wholeheartedly admit to wanting Appalachia to have a rhetorical heritage, something we can hold up like a shield when told that we simply talk or write wrong. I'm trying, ultimately, to raise possibilities that have gone unseen: that there may be different influences prompting Appalachian writers in the classroom, influences related to a cultural heritage that goes too greatly unrecognized, and which are not simply attributable to having never learned academically correct (or, having learned and repeated incorrect) ways of writing. If our rhetoric is a link with an alternative rhetorical tradition (that of the Celts), and if that rhetoric continues to serve us as a people, then that fact says something about us as a people, about what we value and how we live with each other and with the land. As Lynch (115) noted, the typically rural, decentralized lifestyle of Celtic people required an alternate rhetoric to that proposed by the urban Greeks and Romans. It's a point I can't help but recall in the section of her memoir when *Kindness*, here at the other end of the serpentine chain, describes a spread-out Appalachian community in which

farms touch, but houses don't. What can rhetorical study tell us about why Appalachia has formed comparatively fewer cities than other parts of the country, while maintaining aspects of rhetorical tradition? How do these correlate?

However, this previous point—about us as a people—is perhaps premature. It is, in fact, getting to a point where we are seen and see ourselves as a people that I feel is worth greater consideration. Because of this, I do wish that our rhetorical genealogy were better known, both inside the region and without. Perhaps it is indicative of cultural influences upon me that I believe knowing one's history, one's heritage, can be important to knowing what one wishes to stand for, and who one wishes to stand with, and why. My sense is that the Scotch-Irish as an early immigrant group is fairly well known within Appalachia (as with the young Kentucky man in *In America*, who knew his musical tradition had Scotch-Irish links). But what I'm not sure is that we widely understand what this origin means as a source of influence, culturally and rhetorically, nor that it is a shared influence that can connect across state borders. Recall Lyons' articulation of peoplehood as a requirement for rhetorical sovereignty:

A people is a group of human beings united together by history, language, culture, or some combination therein—a community joined in union for a common purpose: the survival and flourishing of the people itself. It has always been from an understanding of themselves as a people that Indian groups have constructed themselves as a nation. (454)

I want us to recognize our connections, of which I feel rhetorical history and influence must be counted, because it is this recognition—of history, of language, of culture—that

can lead to critique and resistance, to better champion our right to both make our own rhetorical choices and have those choices respected. To make the classroom a place where we can more critically reflect on our literacies as well as learning the literacies of others.

Of course, demonstrating that Appalachian rhetoric has a cultural history does not matter to everyone's view. After we read those letters to the editor about fracking in my class, I tried explaining my sense of Appalachian rhetoric to my students. I told them about the Celtic rhetoric inherited by the Scotch-Irish, and how I feel that heritage has influenced both how we communicate and what we value. One of my non-Appalachian students snorted. "If you can see how your culture hasn't changed since the Dark Ages, well, that's not exactly something to be proud of, is it?"

Appalachia just can't win with people like you, can it? When mainstream rhetoric demonstrates its precedents in Greco-Roman rhetoric, it comes across as "classical;" when we reach through time for our own intellectual precedents, we're accused of living in the Dark Ages. I thought this, but didn't say it. To paraphrase Marilou Awiakta, generations of Appalachian ancestors kept me from being that confrontational—angers between people, once kindled, are difficult to put out—or at least to be that confrontational with someone who was, essentially, a stranger. Instead, I said, speaking only for myself, "Well, I'm proud of it."

There's a lot going on in this student's response. It's an indication of how little we know Celtic history in this country: the "Dark Ages" for most of Europe was actually a time in which the Celtic Fringe enjoyed the best educational system and most humane

social policies on the continent. But also, he pretty well articulated the risks inherent in any connection of modern Appalachia with the past; the result can be an easy assumption not only of our backwardness, but that it is a backwardness we have chosen, and thus must be held liable to the repercussions, which can be anything from poor schools, poverty, pollution, and lack of decent healthcare. (When one chooses to live in the Dark Ages, what does one expect?) Of course, too much interest in the past clashes with mainstream America's fetishization of newness; it's a divergence I will be exploring further in the next chapter, about how the ideologies of mainstream America clash with those I identify as Appalachian, and what that might mean for our chances at gaining rhetorical sovereignty. In a society that seems often to privilege change, even for the worse, over sustainability and preservation, Appalachian rhetoric is out of the gate deemed unsuitable, ignorant . . . nothing to be proud of.

Except, as I said, I am proud of it. Sometimes it takes more strength and creativity to knit things together than to rip them apart, and like the man in Stephen Fry's documentary, who cannot play his music without feeling the threads connecting him to history and the land itself, I cannot look at my rhetoric without seeing the same. I want Shepley's student Matt, and his other teachers, to know that there is perhaps a reason why writing in certain ways and about certain things feels right. And while I'm hesitant to tell Matt how he should feel about this reason, this heritage, I know how I feel about it. And Matt, if you're reading this, you're welcome to feel the same way, too.

In the following chapter, I want to look at some of the ways education can influence whether or not Matt does feel pride in his Appalachian identity, or whether he gets to consider that identity at all.



#### CHAPTER 4: REMOVING APPALACHIA FROM THE CLASSROOM

In chapter three, I considered what Appalachian rhetoric can look like through examples of writing composed by regional authors, for (perceived) regional audiences. In this chapter, I will consider more fully why this form of writing is not being embraced, or perhaps even recognized, in academic writing classrooms. My sense is that this explanation involves not just perceptions of Appalachian rhetoric but a more wide-scale sense of what “Appalachia” itself means, and what education is intended to do for Appalachian students.

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One of the nearest towns to where my family lives (“town” being a term I’m sure many would not bother to apply, it being that small) has a festival every summer that we used to call “the Homecoming.” While I’m not certain about the origin of this name, it seems likely to me that it meant exactly what it implied: this was to be a time of homecoming for those perhaps far-flung former residents, many who likely left when the railroad stopped running and took the town’s prosperity with it. So each year several hundred people descend on this little place to chat, eat fried pies and steak sandwiches, watch their kids march or ride their horses in a parade, and view the fireworks display that is put on now rather than on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, in the festival’s honor.

When I was about five or six years old, the festival’s name officially changed to “The Folk Festival.” Like most kids at that age, I found change annoying. “Why’d they change it?” I asked Pap; “wudn’t anything wrong with the name ‘Homecoming.’”

Pap replied, “This’n works too. It’s a folk festival, and we’re hill folk.”

This exchange stuck with me, because it was the first time I ever heard that there was a name for what we were. And in retrospect, I think it's important to note that the name my grandfather applied to us was based on place, on the geographic location of “the hills,” and arguably culture, with “folk” being a term less utilized in mainstream discourse, or at the least, having associations with ruralness. But no part of that self-descriptive term had anything to do with poverty.

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I'd like to dwell for a while in this chapter on a question that haunts the concept of Appalachian rhetorical sovereignty, or at least half of it. As Lyons noted in his definition of rhetorical sovereignty, it requires both self-recognition and the recognition by others of cultural identity on the people's terms (449-450); in other words, rhetorical sovereignty would allow us to name ourselves and our experiences, and demand that others respect that naming. My sense is that in part the reason why we don't see more of Appalachian peoples “naming ourselves,” at least in any wide-scale way, is that the opportunity for us to consider our shared connections and social needs across state and local borders has been largely absent; we aren't, in other words, encouraged by the educational system to think of ourselves as a people, or explore our linkages.

Which brings me to the question guiding this chapter: why aren't we? It's a worthwhile question. Social denigration and disempowerment traps us in reliance upon the dominant culture in decisions that can affect our sense of identity, thus making the “respect from outsiders” half of Lyons' rhetorical sovereignty formula particularly important. What I mean by this, is that we as localized Appalachian peoples have very

little say in how our educational system is run—curricular decisions are made at larger state and national levels. There has up till now been little place in many curricula, at either the public school or college levels, for Appalachian identity considerations; when it does appear, it is too often the work of individual teachers or school districts attempting to resist mainstream domination. Being Appalachian, in other words, is not generally deemed essential to our educational experience.

Why not?

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Something I've heard more than once, from people inside and outside of Appalachia: "When I was a kid, I never knew we were poor." For example, Katherine Kelleher Sohn cites an Appalachian informant in Virginia Seitz's study, who recalls, "I didn't know I was poor white trash until I went to school and somebody told me. If I had never gone to school, I never would have known I was poor" (71). This was somewhat true for me, too; in retrospect it's clearer than it felt at the time. We lived in a trailer. For a long time, we all slept in one room; the living room, with its wood-burning stove, was the only room with real heat in the winter. My mom told me once that for a phase of about eight years during my childhood, she hardly ever had new clothes; any money she got went toward providing for her kids. When I was little, my father worked as a day laborer for a road construction company. He had started this work soon out of high school; he was laid off most winters, when there was no work. But he was good at his job. Mom told me once, too, that Dad could look at a job site and just know what needed done. He worked his way up to steadier and more lucrative administrative jobs. His skills made

him sought after by several companies; his last employer was based out of London, England. (There were some highly comic exchanges between my cursing-addicted father and these very proper English businessmen that are told like legends in the family even today.) By the time he retired, my father was a well-paid construction company supervisor; we had built and moved into a new house where everyone had a separate bedroom, something that took me years to get used to.

But here's the thing. Once, before he retired, the company my father worked for set out to hire for the position directly below his, one he had moved up from several years earlier. Come to find out that now, among the absolutely mandatory job requirements, was a college degree. My father, were he to start out today and attempt to recreate his career path, with the exact same work ethic, experience, knowledge, and skill he applied before, would simply be unable to rise above that day laborer position. The system, not my father, has changed too much for that.

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My ancestors worked. There has always been, of course, that full-time, unpaid domestic work that is required to keep body and soul together for oneself and one's children. But what I mean, too, is that they did economic work as well. My great-great grandparents farmed. My grandmother's father worked in a stone quarry; Great-grandma Carpenter always remembered the pain she felt at seeing him off to work, in January, to hew rock with no gloves. My grandfather's family farmed and mined coal; they didn't work for a coal company, something of which I am inordinately proud, but rather dug from the hillsides and sold by the bucket to their neighbors. (As it's been told to me:

“Father dug, Mother hauled, Kids sorted.”) When Pap came back from WWII, minus an arm and an eye, he learned television repair and opened a shop in an old coal shack he had hauled back to the house. Much of his work saw him traveling the countryside to repair TVs, back in the day when electronics were actually repaired rather than replaced.

There are inequalities implicit in this list, not least of which is the fact that nearly all economically remunerative jobs were, in those times, the provinces of men; I don't wish to imply that the women didn't work perhaps much harder than their male partners, only without direct pay. But also that many of the jobs in my direct heritage—quarryman, miner, construction laborer—are ultimately physical forms of work. We weren't people who were expected to make a living by what we thought.

Todd Snyder's recently published book *The Rhetoric of Appalachian Identity* explores the complicated dynamics of Appalachian “work.” Using a Marxist lens, Snyder explains that ideologies of manual labor, often underpaid and unsafe, become entwined with ideologies of masculinity (71) that result in defensiveness of the very processes that keep such workers dis-empowered. So, Appalachia becomes part of a cyclical system of multi-generational (often male) manual laborers with little access to material or educational advantages (66), influenced both without and within to see the system as normal, even laudable. Real men do real (physical) work.

Having been ingrained in the system Snyder describes, my immediate reaction to my ancestral stories of work is pride. I'm proud of “Grandpa Jake,” working a pick-ax bare-handed in the winter cold to buy warm boots for his kids. But it is a pride, as Snyder has shown, that is problematic: I wonder now, did Grandpa Jake feel like this was his lot

in life, his “man's work,” something to take pride in despite its small rewards? Why did Grandpa Jake have to work so hard, for so little? And more than that, why couldn't he have been a schoolteacher, a doctor, a college professor (as I hope to be)--in other words, a job where his thoughts mattered as much as his muscles? Why didn't the world care what he thought? Why do they still not?

I don't intend to dwell here on the gender politics or social implications of work, necessarily (Snyder has done valuable research on this subject), but I do want to consider the possible implications these dynamics can have regarding voice. Because if nothing else, I hope my above stated “work genealogy” shows one thing: we are not a lazy people. But we are, broadly speaking, also not a rich people. And that seems, from my perspective, to be the sticking point in so much of how we are viewed and defined.

What is that American dream, again? Oh yes: work hard, and you'll succeed (“success,” of course, bringing certain monetary rewards). If we work, yet do not “succeed” in gaining the economic outcome the narrative says we should—if we work and yet stay poor—there must be something wrong with us. Right?

The answer, according to historian Ron Eller and social justice advocate Helen Lewis, is no. Both place the blame for Appalachian economic inequality largely on corporations in the extraction industry that mask exploitation under the label of “progress” (Lewis 2). But why do so many seem so willing to believe that economic and social inequality is our fault? I worry that we, inside and outside the region, are at least tacitly educated to believe that it is.

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I want to return here to the Banned Terms project I discussed in chapter three. The project, entailing a joint effort by the college's English and communications departments to eradicate regional features of students' language, was the result of a deeply influential faculty meeting. This meeting featured a guest speaker, representing Ruby Payne's educational consultation organization, aha! Process, Inc. Payne's influence stems from her 1996 book *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, a text that outlines the concepts about which she has continued to write and speak, to tremendous popularity. Payne advocates educating teachers and others (including law enforcement and political officials<sup>2</sup>) about the “culture” of poverty; in other words, Payne argues that each social class, poverty, middle-class, and upper-class, operates on its own distinguishable rules. Impoverished people remain impoverished because they don't know the “rules” of the middle-class, rules that dictate language, behavior, and social values. For example, Payne explains that among the rules of poverty is that “any extra money is shared . . . people are possessions . . . the mother is the most powerful figure . . . food is equated with love . . . [and] separation is not an option” (37). The poverty mindset is one that is both criminal and violent; “the line between what is legal and illegal is thin and often crossed . . . The poor simply see jail as a part of life and not necessarily always bad” (36). This is just a selection of the “hidden rules,” all of which are perceived as negative, and adherence to which keeps people trapped in cycles of generational poverty. Payne argues that teachers

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2 Monique Redeaux notes the dangers that can result from law officers imbibing Payne's argument that the poor are “inherently violent” and unable to consider long-term consequences. When one of her own students is killed by a police officer, Redeaux wonders if it was because the officer “looked at Ellis and saw the person Payne describes” (180). Given current events in Ferguson and New York, a reconsideration of Payne's ideology seems timely.

can be, for poor students, their perhaps only “appropriate role model[s]” (39) who educate them in the rules of middle-class thought and behavior. Payne's characterizations of “poverty culture” cross other cultural or racial boundaries; throughout her book, Payne creates hypothetical situations to illustrate her points, “scenarios” based around white, African-American, and Hispanic characters who demonstrate the values and mindsets Payne ascribes to poverty culture. Schools bear the responsibility, she argues, for fixing “students who bring poverty culture with them in increasing numbers” (79) by essentially teaching middle-class culture.

The rules of middle-class thought and behavior that Payne wants to see taught are deeply entwined with conceptions of rhetoric. Payne separates discourse into “formal” (middle-class) and “informal” (poverty-class) register; however, she overtly defines formal register as definable by the characteristics of “sequence, order, cause and effect, and a conclusion: all skills necessary for problem-solving [and] inference” (49). Informal register, on the other hand, is merely more entertaining (48). In essence, Payne argues that standardized academic modes of communication, modes she describes as the realm of the middle-class, are alone capable of producing the cognitive effects of problem-solving. Meanwhile the informal dialects of the poverty class (which by their nature lack “sequence, order, cause and effect, and a conclusion”) very literally produce ignorance in the minds of their users.

Julie Keown-Bomar and Deborah Pattee have noted the effect these ideologies have had on educators:



Many participants fresh out of a Payne workshop are impressed, leaving motivated with the belief that they can help students learn skills they need in order to assimilate to a middle class culture and, therefore, move out of poverty. Some feel they had more cross-cultural compassion, an enlightened understanding of people different from themselves, and an increased desire to help. (215)

Is it any surprise that the faculty of that Appalachian community college came away from this meeting with a renewed desire to get rid of dialect? It turned out that what was “wrong” with us, what kept us in poverty, was something very simple, with a very simple solution: standardize the language, and you will standardize the people.

Of course the problem is that it's not so simple at all.

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Roberta Ahlquist, Paul C. Gorski, and Theresa Montano have problematized Payne's ideology; as they argue, “Payne has made her millions and grown her empire by selling a theoretical framework, the 'culture of poverty,' which, for all intents and purposes, was dispelled, empirically and philosophically, as mythology in the 1970s” (1). It is a theory based fundamentally upon deficit ideology, “which locates societal problems as existing *within* rather than as pressing *upon* disenfranchised communities” (Ahlquist, Gorski, and Montano 1; emphasis in original). Yet as a theory, and as a set of thereby prompted practices, Payne's culture of poverty ideology continues to thrive. (As Ahlquist, Gorski, and Montano note, “district after district pay her tens of thousands of dollars or more to misinform them” [2].) Gorski in particular raises the concern that what

this ideology does is to mistake difference for deficit (152), in a way that prevents us from recognizing and resisting supremacist ideologies (153). Rather, poverty is reified as a state created by individual choice, as a reflection of the moral weakness ingrained by poverty culture (Redeaux 194), while teachers are encouraged to focus on “fixing” disenfranchised communities rather than the policies and practices that disenfranchise them” (Ahlquist, Gorski, and Montano 4).

I don't mean to single Payne out as the “problem” that prevents the kind of productive role I'd like to see for Appalachia in classrooms and wider society. What Payne advocates is hardly new or limited to only her; E.D. Hirsch, for example, has also long been a vocal and respected educational voice urging greater curricular standardization as a means of achieving social equality. And, in fact, Payne does not specify Appalachia by name in any of her poverty culture “scenarios;” part of her project is to unite all poverty into one culture, regardless of racial or geographic factors (Montano and Quintanar-Sarellana 199). Rather, she is a highly visible example of the kinds of thinking—specifically, the deficit ideology and economic perceptions fueling it—that influence how Appalachian peoples can be problematically perceived, defined, and treated in educational arenas. So what does deficit ideology mean for Appalachia, and why?

My sense is that, despite the absence of the term Appalachia in her work, Payne's arguments have very real effects for Appalachia. I've witnessed it. As I said, it was a guest lecture by one of Ruby Payne's aha! Process, Inc associates that resulted in my former college's Banned Terms project. The case was made exceptionally clear: the

problems “keeping our students poor” were not effects of exploitative industrial practices and prejudicial policies; they were the words our students chose to use, and the mindset that prompted those choices. By very specifically connecting language and dialect with violence and shallow thinking, Payne articulates a time-honored association between language and morality/intelligence. Our students' poverty mindset creates and is reflected by their incorrect English. In this ideology, language is a problem that can and should be changed by dedicated teachers; in fact, doing so does what so many teachers long to do: it makes students' lives better. Who, after all, wants to be poor, to feel trapped and helpless to better provide for themselves and their families? What isn't asked, however, is not “who wants to be poor?” but rather “who wants to be Appalachian?” By arguing that all impoverished peoples share ingrained traits, including social values, language values, and rhetorical practices, Payne effectively erases Appalachian cultural distinctiveness; what we have to offer academic ideals of multiculturalism becomes even less visible. And I would argue that some of us do want to be Appalachian, or would, if “Appalachian” and “poor” weren't defined as one and the same. Especially since both designations have come to represent the same thing in the Payne-style ideology: violence, stupidity, and lack of self-respect.

Poverty culture is not a new concept, having been popularized in the 1960s by anthropologist Oscar Lewis (Ahlquist, Gorski, and Montano 1). What I see Payne bringing to the debate, in a problematic way, is an increasingly intentional erasure of cultural difference within this model. Payne's lumped definition of poverty culture not only allows for an easier correlation of “Appalachia” with, at root, “poverty;” it also

allows for a leveling effect that other scholars have noticed, in which conceptions or artifacts of Appalachian culture, including stereotypes, are being applied to all impoverished or even simply rural areas. For example, Kim Donehower notes that all rurality is increasingly painted as essentially Appalachian. She describes the 2002 annual meeting of the Rural Sites Network of the National Writing Project, where participants were asked to wear bandanas, listen to bluegrass music, and participate in an opening cheer of “yee-hah” (46), even though most of the participants were from non-Appalachian rural areas in the American West<sup>3</sup>. Likewise, Todd Snyder was surprised at the response his discussions of Appalachian identity had with students in New York: “they seemed somewhat unwilling to grant Appalachian culture status as a recognizable and authentic culture” (16), preferring instead to argue that what Snyder identified as issues directly related to Appalachian experience were not culturally-related. According to one student, “The obstacles [Snyder] faced aren't that different from the problems of a first-generation college student from small-town Maine or Vermont” (17). It's interesting to me that this student chose Maine and Vermont as comparatives, as the Appalachian Mountain chain does extend through New England in addition to the more recognized mountain south, but I doubt that's what this student was thinking. Instead, he seems to have been thinking that all poverty produces the same effects; as, according to popular definitions, primarily a culture of poverty, Appalachia is no different than small-town Vermont.

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3 On a related note, it's not uncommon to notice in the sitcom *Big Bang Theory*, the character Penny being described as a “hillbilly” or one of “the hillfolk.” Her character, it has been well-established, is from the Great Plains state of Nebraska.

These definitions concern me deeply. Appalachia has long been defined in wider American society not by culture but by economic class (or the effects of poverty). As previously noted in chapter one, the Appalachian Regional Commission considers poverty as inextricable from their existential purpose and the very definition of what Appalachia is. Even Ohio University, which published the collected reports “Appalachian Perspectives at Ohio University: Findings of Spring 2004 Survey,” introduces its topic, the university's Appalachian regional surroundings, with a definition. However, the definition in question focuses on poverty: “Almost 40 years since the Johnson administration created the ARC to fight the war on poverty in Appalachia; many people continue to struggle for basic food and shelter” (2). The second part of this report, on the other hand, offers an interesting counterpoint: when participants in the surveys identified themselves as Appalachian, they did so “largely based upon (a) ties to family and place, (b) heritage and traditions, and (c) personal values” (1)...not based upon poverty.

What specifically troubles me is that defining Appalachia primarily, at times it seems even solely, in terms of economic poverty, risks denying the very differences in cultural origins and influences that make our rhetoric unique. I noted, in chapter two, Kim Donehower's descriptions of mainstream conceptions of Appalachia and Anglo-Saxon culture and language, a conflation that mistakes and overlooks differences in origins and influences on Appalachian dialect. It is a conflation in which Celtic influence is either ignored or lumped together with a sort of vague European whiteness. And it is this last point that may be the most significant factor in the conflation. In painting Appalachia as “representative of whiteness, of 'pure' Anglo-Saxon culture, protected from

racial or ethnic contamination by being shut away in the mountains” (49), Appalachian culture becomes defined not as different but rather the same; we become, essentially, “the 'contemporary ancestors' of modern [American] civilization” (39), who through our own perverseness have simply failed to advance. Donehower considers the reasoning behind this conflation as one of regional scapegoating—it emphasizes the superiority of non-Appalachian, mainstream white America, who, through nothing but choice and action have become “intellectually, culturally, economically, and morally” better than us. By extension, we, having (according to the myth) started identically, bear the culpability of choices that result in negative repercussions, socially, educationally, and economically.

As Donehower notes, this makes, for compassionate people, as educators often are, Appalachia a “problem to be solved” (41). We can, in other words, be “caught up,” a process that entails, in ideologies such as Ruby Payne's, teaching us to want the values of our middle-class white, mainstream kinfolk.

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Last summer an oil man came to see my father. His company was proposing a pipeline project, and he wanted permission for it to cross our farm. At one point, my brother asked him what risks this project had for the underlying water table.

The oil man, who'd been basically polite up till this point, shook his head. “What is it with you people?” he asked. “We're offering to make you rich, and all you want to know about is the water. Just move away.”

Believe it or not, this exchange made me put-near giddy. It was a thrill to see an honest opinion from an industry rep, for one thing. But he also clarified a few things for

me that I appreciated: more than just my family are worried about our water, and more than just us are refusing to abandon ancestral lands to Big Oil. So many so, apparently, that an exasperated oil rep referred to us as “you people.” If we were culturally the same, wouldn't most all of us have done what he expected: thanked him for his “offer,” grabbed our cash and run? What I've seen happening in reality is something far more complicated: plenty have taken the cash for oil and pipeline leases, it's true. But I don't know a one of them that's moved away.

We could talk about this as something problematic, as it certainly can be. Todd Snyder deconstructs the concept of “holme” (74) in Appalachian culture; as he pointed out in a recent guest lecture, “I'll be Appalachian, no matter where I live,” a statement that in itself indicates there is something ideological to Appalachian identity, a presence rather than a deficit of culture. But what is most important for me, at this point, is simply considering the possibility of seeing these dynamics as cultural at all, and not simply formed through poverty, through shared neediness. That we share cultural influences, inherited and promulgated through the rhetorics of our words, bodies, and ideals. Maybe we take the money, but we want the water, the land, too. Surely if all we were was a united collective of poverty, the money would be enough.

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I tried teaching a junior-level writing and rhetoric class here at Ohio University that focused in part on rhetorical constructions of Appalachia. The texts I used involved writings and films about Appalachia, some produced by and some not produced by Appalachians. I based the overall approach for the course on the tenets of place-based

pedagogy, as Paula Mathieu explains, “We believe that mindfulness about places—critical thinking, close observation, and personal reflection—can help us better understand ourselves and our environment while we also hone the very skills necessary for academic success” (xv). The students in my class (all but one of whom were not from the Appalachian region and did not identify themselves as Appalachian), no matter their origins, now lived here; wherever they landed in the future, they would live not only with people but also in places, and I hoped they could begin to learn to live in those places well, thoughtfully, and sustainably.

However, no matter how I described the exigency or value of this approach, the course ended up being a hard, and largely unsuccessful, sell. I remember one student's class response that the study of Appalachian rhetoric was ultimately pointless. As he or she put it, “a lot of this class was about Appalachia. Who cares?” Appalachia is something removed, something un-important, even for the outsiders who choose to live there. (If it is, after all, fundamentally a deficit culture, who in their right mind would want to ponder Appalachia?) It's an attitude I've since come to feel more and more strongly ties to the “official” story of Appalachian definition, one that a 10-week term simply could not shake.

However, not all students shared this opinion; seeing us as a “deficit” culture for some awakens an alternate attitude, one identifiable in those dedicated teachers who banned our language in the classroom, an attitude shaped by compassion rather than contempt: specifically, that mainstream America must “help” Appalachian peoples be better. The way this attitude came into play in my class was articulated by one student,



Lisa, who earnestly explained that Ohio University students could do much more to help the Appalachian people in Athens County. She was speaking, specifically, along the lines of charity work, encouraging her classmates to donate their old clothes to organizations such as Goodwill. “We need to help these people!” she said. I don't want to criticize this attitude; I'm delighted that she recognized and disliked the level of disconnection between local town-and-gown dynamics. But I couldn't help feeling uncomfortable, too—it seems like a different shade of the same story: we hillfolk are either pointless or we need help, but either way, both attitudes position us as having nothing to offer. While Lisa was speaking, I wondered what Ella, my one student who was an Athens County native, who did define herself as Appalachian, was thinking, and was pondering the ethical implications of asking her directly. Turns out, I didn't have to; she volunteered her thoughts. Ella raised her hand and, turning to Lisa, said, “I appreciate what you're saying, and I don't mean to sound rude, but . . . I can't think of anybody who'd say they want your help.”

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Sharyn McCrumb recounts an incident in North Carolina during a particularly bad winter in 1960 that she says illustrates a central factor of the Celtic Appalachian character:

Two Red Cross workers had heard about an old woman in her eighties who lived in a cabin way back in the hills, and they volunteered to take a jeep to bring help to her. The two volunteers drove up the ice-bound road as far as they could, abandoned the jeep when the road became

impassable, got out snow shoes, wrestled them on, and helped each other tramp through the waist-deep snow until, finally, they saw the little curl of chimney smoke up on the ridge that told them they'd found her. They managed to hike to the cabin on the top of the hill, stomped up on the porch, and rapped on the door. Finally the old lady opened it. The rescuers announced proudly, "We're from the Red Cross." "Oh honey," she replied. "It has been such a hard winter, I don't think I can help you this year."...(NB: *I think that old lady knew exactly why those Red Cross workers had come, but she was employing the culture's deadpan sense of humor, and also gently inferring that she had no intention of accepting charity.*) ("The Celts and the Appalachians" 23-24; italics in original)

I see potential rhetorical repercussion in the image this story gives of Appalachian character—meaning, I don't want it ever to come across along the lines of "Why should we bother trying to provide decent medical care, working conditions, and educational opportunities in Appalachia? They obviously don't want 'help.'" But what I do want to show with this story, is that nothing about this woman indicates that she *needs*, certainly not in the way that we have been rhetorically defined from the outside as being nothing but need . . . as a problem to be either solved or ignored.

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I occasionally watch cartoons. Honestly, they're sometimes the best storylines available on television. And one of the cartoons I watch is *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. There was one episode in which the character Iro (the wise and patient uncle of troubled

xenophobic youth Zuko) tries to explain to his nephew the benefits of a multicultural outlook, using the four “nations” existing in the show's mythology:

Fire is the element of power. The people of the Fire Nation have desire and will, and the energy and drive to achieve what they want. Earth is the element of substance. The people of the Earth Kingdom are diverse and strong; they are persistent and enduring. Air is the element of freedom. The Air Nomads detached themselves from worldly concerns, and found peace and freedom. (Also, they apparently had pretty good senses of humor!) Water is the element of change. The people of the Water Tribe are capable of adapting to many things. They have a deep sense of community and love that holds them together through anything. . . .It is important to draw wisdom from many different places. If you take it from only one place, it becomes rigid and stale.

I know, intellectually, that boiling anything like a real, living culture into any one sentence is nearly impossible to do with accuracy or fairness. And I also know that looking at multiculturalism solely from the perspective of what one can gain from it is somewhat selfish. Yet still, when I watched this episode, I had to rewind and listen again: “It is important to draw wisdom from many different places. If you take it from only one place, it becomes rigid and stale.” I don't remember any of the cartoons from my childhood articulating so clearly the ideal of multiculturalism, let alone the way cultural diversity can keep knowledge itself vital, alive. Wouldn't it be nice if the kids who grow up having heard this message, also grow up thinking of Appalachia as part of that

multicultural fabric? That we are part of the wisdom from which they can draw, one of the places that can nourish our nation's, our world's, intellect? And wouldn't it be nice if we could recognize that wisdom in ourselves?

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It is with regard to this last point that I wish to focus, again, on concepts of Appalachian education. I find myself returning again and again to the opening pages of Katherine Kelleher Sohn's groundbreaking text, *Whistlin' and Crowin' Women of Appalachia: Literacy Practices since College*, wherein Sohn recalls witnessing professors at a CCCC in Nashville, Tennessee, mocking their Appalachian waiter's accent. These are teachers “who, if asked, would probably pride themselves on their multicultural awareness” (1); for them, Appalachia simply does not qualify.

I am concerned by what Appalachian cultural erasure can mean for us and our ideas about self-identity and educational attainment. I certainly don't wish to indicate that all educators somehow work to inhibit Appalachian rhetorical sovereignty; that is certainly not true. What does concern me, is the prevalence of an attitude, an ideology, so widespread and powerful that it can influence how decision-making powers outside the region institute educational policies that can, themselves, affect attitudes within the region. In other words, how they see us (or don't see us) and define our needs affects how we are taught to see ourselves and to define our own needs. For better or for worse.

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Kim Donehower describes a scene that seems quite familiar to me, as I would imagine it is to many kids here in the hills. A teacher, herself a “local” to the region, describes her daily linguistic battles with students:

But when they hear [dialect] at home, day in and day out, they come to school and they're wearing that there, and it's hard, you have to go over and go over, repetition, repetition, repetition, to get that—out, and then, I had a child tell me once, I had been hammering on something that I was trying to get into them, one of the students came back and said, “Ms. Sykes,” said, “They made fun of me at home, because I did so and so.” You know? And I said, “Well you just stick to it because you are right.”  
(Donehower 60)

And so, by extension, is she.

If, as I fear, the culture of poverty/deficiency model is a prominent factor in the educational realities many Appalachian students face, it's worth considering what these realities might look like, and what drives them. Historian Ron Eller describes a feature of the culture of poverty ideology, which states that under-education is essentially the fault of the poor, who fail to value and take advantage of educational opportunities. It is a feature problematized by his own research and experiences; as he states, in studying Appalachian poverty, “It did not take us long to realize that there was nothing particularly wrong about the attitudes and values of these families struggling with poverty. They did not value education because they themselves were not valued by their schools” (qtd in DeWitt). Victoria Purcell-Gates agrees; in a two-year long ethnography of an

Appalachian family, she discovered a distressing trend amongst educators to particularly associate “hillbilly language with intractable ignorance” (122). The “good” students will be receptive to attempts at assimilation; the “bad,” either unwilling or incapable of such change.

Beverly Olson Flanigan's exploration of dialect in Appalachian Ohio notes a gendered dimension to the way this standard-English only education affects self-perception:

Grammar school (as it was appropriately called) taught the niceties of language to all students, of course, but women and girls were expected to “follow the rules” more than men and boys were, and women in turn passed these rules (in other words, the prestige norms of the larger society) on to their children, and especially to their daughters. As a consequence, women tend to use “standard” agreement rules (“I/he was” vs. “we/you/they were”), avoid *ain't* and double negatives, say *going* instead of *goin'*, and use standard past tense forms . . . . *poke*, *polecat*, and even *mango* might be self-consciously dropped in favor of *sack*, *skunk*, and *green pepper*. (188; italics in original)

The attitude thus instilled, that standard speech is a matter of good manners and will translate into better jobs and social opportunities (a result that Flanagan notes is not at all proven through experience [181]) results in ambivalent feelings toward one's home language. This can be even more complicated given that a fuller picture of Appalachian rhetorical styles is rarely ever recognized enough to be either denigrated or defended; it

seems to me like many of us end up simply thinking we don't know how to write, rather than that our styles of writing and rhetoric run counter to expected academic forms.

Internalized oppression is a complex dynamic, but one that seems appropriate to consider in terms of Appalachian education. As I noted previously, I was the only Appalachian on the English teaching faculty at my previous community college; this is true for most of the community colleges I've taught in. However, it is distinctly not true for my Kindergarten through twelfth-grade experience. Those teaching staffs were mostly made up of locals; yet their approaches to teaching composition and grammar closely mirrored the teacher in Donehower's description. It is, in my opinion, too easy to simply indicate anything along the lines of "outsiders don't get us, insiders do." (In fact, E.D. Hirsch, one of the first and most vocal proponents of educational standardization and deficit ideology, whose 1987 book *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* provided a philosophical grounding for the educational common-core approach, is from Tennessee.) When I was teaching writing in those Appalachian community colleges, I would survey my students on the first day to ask what they hoped to gain from the class; "to learn better English" was a common response. What I want to be sure of is that they've had the chance to critique why they think standard English is "better," and to fully consider what it is they're being asked to believe when they are told their home language is sub-par. In fact, the idea of what "insider" status even entails is hugely complicated. We may have, at root, certain linguistic and rhetorical similarities (as Lyons indicates a "people," by definition, should), whether or not some would acknowledge them. But what complicates this is the wide range of attitudes toward those erstwhile

commonalities, particularly in terms of language. Nobody wants to be poor, but some of us want to be Appalachian. Then again, some of us don't. My concern is with how much schooling, and the mainstream social attitudes that influence schooling, may have to do with why they don't.

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I have great admiration for public school teachers. Many of them leave home while it's still dark outside, and don't get back home until it has fallen dark again, for far less pay than those hours and the tasks they involve ought to warrant. And I think it's important to bear in mind also that many of those teachers aren't allowed to make the choices about what happens in their classrooms. Curriculum is ever more rarely something teachers themselves get to determine; these decisions happen, depending on the location of the schools, very far away, in state or nation capitals. I would like to note, again, Shirley Brice Heath, whose groundbreaking 1983 book *Ways with Words* did much to encourage the conversation about non-standard dialects and their roles in students' home and school lives. The book described Heath's ethnographic work in the Carolina Piedmont region, work that influenced the local school to undergo curricular changes suited to the exigencies of their multicultural and multi-dialectical student population. The approach to learning was based around teaching students to analyze and communicate within the multiple discourse communities surrounding them. In Heath's ideology, teachers became "learning researchers," using "ethnographies of communication to build a two-way channel between communities and their classrooms" (354). Students learned "to understand how to make choices among uses of language and



to link these choices to life chances” (343), and the participating teachers gained new knowledge of their students, school communities, and potentials for fostering community health via the educational system. However, these changes were not lasting; an increasing movement to nationalize education, with resulting emphasis on testing for baseline educational “achievements,” made the classroom necessarily more focused on teaching standardized criteria. This push increased the emphasis on the skill-and-drill approach to inculcating standard English grammar, leaving little room for linguistic and cultural exploration. In the epilogue of her book, Heath noted that, as of 1981, the ethnographic methods and place/culture based work taking place in those rural Carolina classrooms had “all but disappeared” (356). Her interviews with the teachers involved showed that they were increasingly told by outside regulation what to teach, how to teach it, and specifically, how to test it, with required criterion-based, computerized exams (356-357). One teacher lamented the attempts to standardize both educational outcomes and, indeed, students themselves: “They run every kid through the same hierarchy of learning; it's as though everyone developed along the same pattern, and school's gonna make 'em all fit that pattern, like it or not” (qtd. in Heath 357). Teachers who had been excited by the possibilities of ethnographic, place-based education were left to conclude, “There's no joy left in teaching now” (qtd. in Heath 359) and simply fall in line with the classroom formats being forced on them.

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My cousin's boy, Dale, takes Ohio history. I did, too, once upon a time in middle school. We didn't talk about Appalachia in our Ohio history class. Neither does his. I've looked at Ohio's Common Core standards in social studies, which for his grade:

. . . focuses on the early development of Ohio and the United States.

Students learn about the history, geography, government and economy of their state and nation. Foundations of U.S. history are laid as students study prehistoric Ohio cultures, early American life, the U.S. Constitution, and the development and growth of Ohio and the United States. Students begin to understand how ideas and events from the past have shaped Ohio and the United States today.

Appalachian Ohio, apparently, has done none of this shaping.

In Language Arts, they study Greco-Roman mythology. They don't study, or even hear about, the *Tain Bo Cuailnge*, the *Acallam na Senórach*, nor of the Celtic fascination with liminalities of thought and expression. They learn duality, category.

That is, according to the experts, what they need to know.

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If all Appalachia is fundamentally no different than mainstream America, or if any differences can be explained primarily by poverty (which, in Payne's ideology, produces the same alterations on all peoples and cultures), then the sorts of instructions I've seen textbooks giving Appalachian community college students are less problematic. In other words, it is more understandable that the texts students encounter do not acknowledge differences in culture or rhetoric, because these differences are either non-

existent or, if they do exist, exist as poverty-induced detriments to students' abilities to achieve gainful employment and, by extension, to access the resources they need to live well, such as educational opportunities and medical care. (Isn't it interesting that standardization, employment, and access to medical care can be conceptually linked? Do only the middle-class need doctors? You'd certainly think that was the case the way the medical establishment treats us in my county—I could easily go off on a tangent here, which would be, I think, a very Appalachian rhetorical move, but I will fight the impulse for the purpose of brevity.)

I am simplifying, of course, but it's mostly for myself—I want to see better what the stakes are in what it is I'm interpreting, and invite others to help me if I'm seeing things wrongly. But if I'm not, if these are perceptions that, at least in part, are influencing educational decisions that affect Appalachia, I worry that the stakes can have repercussions for our chances of ever attaining rhetorical sovereignty.

I would like to consider, for a moment, the textbooks I encountered during my years as an adjunct community college instructor. I can't make any grander claims than my own experience—though I would like to undertake wider research in the future on the state of rhetorical instruction at Appalachian colleges. But what I saw illuminates for me something about what these students are being seen as needing, and why.

There are two things, specifically, that I would like to surface as being essentially problematic: concepts of writing as categorized and the specifics of how these categories are being defined. While I don't wish to be critical of either the authors of these texts or the teachers who assign them, I do think there may exist a gap between the assumptions

of these texts and the population of students expected to benefit from them. The first assumption I would like to consider is that of a categorization of knowledge/writing. Each of the textbooks I encountered—*How to Write Well (Without Going through Hell)*, *Patterns*, *A Pocketful of Essays*, *Grassroots*, and *At a Glance: Essays*—approached writing as a matter of separating modes: Narration, Description, Comparison/Contrast, Process Analysis, Classification/Division, Definition, Exemplification, Cause/Effect, and Argument. I don't wish to make a case against modes, per se. I do wish to consider that, if we accept that there may be cultural and/or rhetorical differences between Appalachia and what I'm calling, for lack of a better term, mainstream America, then the modal-based approach to writing here might be more problematic, at least if not critiqued and surfaced. In other words: the inference that can be drawn from a modal-based form of writing is that of distinctiveness. This approach risks students coming to think of writing as boxed up, with each box having a distinct set of instructions. Again, this, in itself, is perhaps not inherently bad. But what concerns me is that it emphasizes categorical thinking (or what Appalachian writer Wendell Berry calls “specialization” thinking [19]). This is a form of thinking that has admittedly given the world incredible technological and medical advances; as one of my students, who had been born extremely premature, told me, were it not for specialization thinking, he wouldn't be alive. However, as Berry notes, it has also given us a world of environmental degradation and social intolerance, in which many people don't know even the basics of food production or sustainable living. Yet Payne's culture of poverty model insists that categorical thinking is exclusively the domain of the mainstream middle-class and the only means of cognition and problem-

solving. To think in other ways, particularly in the connective, narrative-based way I think of as common in Appalachia, is to not think at all, at least not seriously or academically. The prevalence of mode-based categorization in introductory college composition textbooks seems, even if tacitly, to endorse this ideology.

But, according to the culture of poverty model, it's the kind of thinking we need to learn. It is, therefore, acceptable not to raise counter-discourses in the composition classroom, because such counter-models of language or rhetoric would detract from what we need most: the values of the middle-class, the mainstream, the keys to assimilation. In the writing classroom, this means that what we learn, if we can manage to, is a categorized discourse of "sequence, order, cause and effect, and a conclusion: all skills necessary for problem-solving [and] inference" (Payne 49).

However, what seems to happen in the classroom is rarely ever so clear-cut as this. My sense is that few teachers, whether "insiders" or "outsiders," and perhaps few students, see what happens as the work of cultural assimilation and silencing. Like I said, I would never have started looking if not for Geneva Smitherman. I would never have known to try. If I'm right about what I see as cultural dynamics in Appalachia, then here categorical thinking often takes a rhetorical backseat to an emphasis on an overlapping, a blurring, of concepts. And if I'm right, and this is an ingrained cultural dynamic, it most often happens subconsciously. So what we as Appalachian writers encounter in the mode-based writing classroom is disorienting for reasons we perhaps cannot explain...we only feel, like Nathan Shepley's student Matt, oddly distanced from what we are expected to learn and perform.

I would also like to look at some specific assumptions regarding the categories these texts have that seem to me at odds with Appalachian rhetoric in particular ways. *Pocketful of Essays* and *At a Glance: Essays*, for example, both take the common approach of splitting writing and rhetoric into separate modes. What is similarly problematic to me is how each of these texts describes these modes. As David Madden's *Pocketful of Essays* describes, "All good narratives center on a conflict (or paradox)" (7). Likewise, Lee Brandon, in *At a Glance: Essays*, specifies that "A narrative is an account of an incident or a series of incidents that make up a complete and significant action" (55); narratives in their entirety are composed of situation, conflict, struggle, outcome, and meaning, which is stated in a thesis (55-56). By this definition, a narrative, a story, is by its nature a function of conflict rather than continuation. But what, I wonder, if the situation *is* the story? I'm thinking, here, of the narratives I've seen from Crooks Harper, Kindness, and some of my students; in other words, what about when our stories focus on the rhythm of days rather than their discordance? Is it not possible to tell a story that has no conflict? Maybe, but not a good one. I think, too, of Brandon's clear description of the narrative arc in relation to some of those Celtic narratives, such as the *Tain Bo Cuailnge*, which has plenty of conflict, but also has long lists of names and places, digressions of characters' thoughts and experiences, even interrupting battle scenes. A race of storytellers we may be, but I'm not so sure that our way of telling those stories is so easy to pin down and define.

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Pap told me once, “I used to know of a woman they said could take the fire out of burns.” I imagine this was important, in a time when people's daily lives revolved around open flame in a way they simply do not today—heating, cooking, washing, light: fire was the key to all these things. That burns were common is not surprising. Nor was this style of healing uncommon; many places had a specific fire healer, one who may or may not have healed in any other way. Because taking the fire out of burns was concentrated work. It took time, energy, and words. The fire healer's art was not possible without words: a Bible verse, specifically, was spoken over the burn. Not everyone had the gift, of course, even with the words. But the healing was not possible without them.

“Did it really work though?” I asked him.

Pap looked thoughtful. “Well, so far as I know, she never got no complaints.”

Words can do many things. Bind and separate, preserve and destroy, heal and harm. Maybe that's why some people try so hard to put them in labeled boxes. How could anything so powerful not have at least a little mystery?

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However, I'm not sure that narrative is the only form of writing in which I see ideological discordance from the books I encountered in my community college experiences. It's easy to get the sense from many such textbooks that argument is perceived as the highest form of academic writing. I've already discussed some of the ways in which academic argument, as the forthright attempt to convince readers of a specific point, stated clearly in a thesis (Madden 115), has the potential to jar students who share the sense of Appalachian rhetoric I've been describing. As Brandon explains,

argument is essentially persuasion over a fundamental issue; a well-structured argument is composed of background, a proposition, refutation, and support (167), which in itself consists of “sound reasoning . . . appropriate facts, examples, statistics, and opinions of authorities” (168). Of course, when we apply these to Appalachia, ain't a one of 'em as simple as it sounds.

Kim Donehower writes an excellent analysis of James Moffett's *Storm in the Mountains: A Case Study of Censorship, Conflict, and Consciousness* that I think has relevance here. Donehower describes Moffett's book as a work that “pits the academic literacy professional against the supposedly 'anti-intellectual' non-professional” (51), exploring a situation from the 1970s in which Kanawha County, West Virginia, “banned a set of textbook materials for high school English classes that (Moffett) had edited” (51). I have a familial interest in Kanawha County. When my three-times great-grandfather enlisted in the Union Army, his unit mustered in Kanawha; they were thereafter known as the Kanawha Brigade. Moffett also seems to enter the region with battle on his mind; he “repeatedly tries to convince his informants of the wrongness of their stance. Using the didactic rhetoric of Socratic education, Moffett asks the kind of leading questions a teacher asks a student (when the teacher already has the 'right' answer to the question firmly in mind)” (52). To his astonishment, these “anti-intellectuals” just won't play ball. He is baffled by their responses to his leading questions, responses which, as Donehower notes, rely heavily on “scriptural quotations, parables, and local anecdotes and analogies” (54), and at times seem to Moffett entirely irrelevant to the issue at hand. Sometimes, Moffett's informants are “able to end up exactly opposite of where Moffett has been



trying to lead [them]” (53). In other words, Moffett simply isn't able, through traditional academic rhetoric, to “convince” his Appalachian audience of anything. The result is that Moffett decrees the entire populace to be suffering from “‘agnosis’--a term he coins to mean, essentially, the desire to be ignorant” (51). This, it seems, is their punishment for not agreeing with Moffett's rhetoric, or for having a different one.

While I, personally, am vociferously anti-censorship—not all of us think the same, after all—I agree with Donehower that

Far from demonstrating some kind of backward mental state, I believe the Kanawha County residents displayed canny rhetorical skills that they used to try to protect themselves, their culture, and their worldview from Moffett, who would label them ignorant unless they agreed to critique their sacred texts, relinquish their way of looking at the world, and generally come around to his way of thinking. (51)

And I tell you, as anti-censorship as I am, were I one of his informants, I might have disagreed with Moffett on principle. Though I might not have put it that way; I might have smiled, and told him a story about my grandparents.

Essentially, I want to consider the possibility that the academic argument described in these textbooks, specifically what it presents as “fact,” “support,” and “logic,” can mean different, more complex things than what is often assumed. It can, in some circumstances, feel like an attack, even if the attackers don't always see that as their purpose, and the attackees don't always have practice in describing what it being attacked.

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So, I could simply say that I advocate surfacing cultural dynamics like these, to help students better understand why they may feel this way and to help them work past it in order to better succeed in their composition classes. This is the kind of approach undertaken by Helen Fox in her book *Listening to the World*, and is an approach I will expand upon further in the final chapter, which considers pedagogical possibilities toward building Appalachian rhetorical sovereignty. But I want to consider, also, that the presence or absence of discussion about Appalachian rhetoric and culture might be worthwhile for more reasons than just to help these students understand and master standardized forms.

In chapter one, I described getting peer feedback on a paper, from a reviewer who couldn't see how sustainability and Appalachian culture were conceptually linkable. It was back when I was a Master's student, in a paper where I first articulated an idea that would play over in my head steadily in the years to come: that if we want sustainability in Appalachia, we need to bring Appalachian culture into our classrooms. My reviewer also asked, in his final reading reflection, another important question: "Why do we need Appalachia? Especially since OU's focus is on providing an up-to-date, urbane education?"

I've certainly gotten similar questions, and I'm still working on ways to articulate a reply for something that seems so ingrained to me. (You've probably noticed. I've been trying for about 120 pages at this point.) What is Appalachia's value? It's worth?

Particularly in college, where the educational focus on the global, the fresh and modern, seems so at odds with how Appalachia is defined?

Appalachia does appear in classrooms here at Ohio University. My own teachers here were the first I encountered who encouraged me to study my cultural background. However, these teachers are the individuals, not the system. I looked through *The Post* last Wednesday, to find a feature length article entitled, “OU Courses Examine Culture and Setbacks of Life in Appalachia.” Setbacks. Of course. That's what life, what culture, in Appalachia is, apparently: one long, long setback.

As a whole, as an institution, OU seems to accept Appalachia as deficit: solve or ignore, but don't celebrate. For example: the report entitled “Voices at Ohio University Speak about Appalachia” points out that in 2006, Ohio University had the opportunity to host the Appalachian Studies Association's annual conference. They declined. Despite being the only major research institution in Appalachian Ohio, OU still does not offer an Appalachian Studies program. And the university continually raises tuition, beyond what many within the region can afford; when questioned about the financial repercussions for students, one administrator said that students who dislike the costs could “vote with their feet” and leave. As Todd Snyder could've told him, it's not that simple, when the culture teaches us to value home and family, and OU is, in some cases, the only educational resource in proximity to those. I doubt the administrator who made that statement much cared about Appalachian cultural influences, but I doubt, above all, that he was even aware of them. Why should he be? It's not like learning our culture has anything to do with running a university in Appalachia. I'm betting that in his discourse, “university”

and “Appalachia” can, perhaps even should, be conceptually distinct. Different modes, so to speak.

I wondered, at one point, what the runaway success of *The Hunger Games* would mean for a widespread conversation about Appalachia. My interpretation of the book was that it was a stark appraisal of cultural values and ideologies, taking the harshest elements of modern American consumer culture and ramping them up to their most destructive conclusion: where sparkle, appearance, and fame are valued above all, and where entitlement has led the wealthy elite to interpret the Survivor-style, reality-TV death and despair of the dominated as entertainment. In the story, this system is disrupted by the efforts of a girl from District 12—a futuristic Appalachia—whose actions and values embody Appalachian ideals of self-sufficiency, bravery, and family loyalty (Whited 327-328). I was startled, after reading the book, to see the differences presented so starkly. Here is this way of being, the story seemed to say, and here is an alternative. What side are you on? I wondered, “What will people think of that?”

I needn't have. Consumer culture, apparently, can afford to ignore its critiques. For example, Cover Girl cosmetics followed up the success of the film adaptations (and what has become a *Hunger Games* franchise) with a line of Capital and District-inspired cosmetics, so that the consumer can better emulate the extreme futuristic fashions displayed by the film's ruling elite. (Despite the fact that, as the story makes clear, these are the people we are NOT supposed to want to emulate.) And, I've come to understand, relatively few seem to interpret District 12, and by extension the heroic Katniss Everdeen, as Appalachian at all. One of my classes, startled to learn that author Suzanne

Collins ever intended such a correlation, tried to argue against any similarities. “District 12 can't be Appalachia,” one of them told me. “*The Hunger Games* is set in the future.” Yes. And Appalachia, if it exists, is eternally the past.

Why, then, does it matter that Appalachia has no place in most classrooms? In our sense of multicultural education? What does Appalachia have to offer? This is a tricky question, and one that I probably wouldn't try to answer if it wasn't for the fact that I am asked it directly in questions like that of my students and my peer reviewer. In attempting an answer, I open myself up to criticisms of over-simplification, or of treating the culture itself too positively (although honestly, haven't we already received more than our share of negative description?) Ultimately, I don't like the thought that I'm answering for others, so I will answer, instead, for myself: here is what I think Appalachia has to offer. You can, of course, disagree.

I do, however, have a source: Loyal Jones, whose book *Appalachian Values* was the first attempt I ever encountered to put in writing cultural values that were, at least in some views, positive rather than negative. According to Jones, the elements Appalachian culture excels at valuing include: independence (51), yet also neighborliness (69); humility (89), yet also pride (51); and a sense of humor interspersed with tragedy (123). Just looking at this list, I'm dumbfounded at how often Appalachian culture is coded as “simplicity”--seem to me like you can't get no more complicated than a culture that combines all of these. But perhaps what we do best, and what, I think, makes Appalachia so important to our nation's discussions on sustainability, discussions that have infiltrated so many conversations about the goals and nature of education, is our sense of place

(Jones 99), our ability to rhetorically conceive of spaces and the peoples who live in them as intertwined, even interdependent. It's not a simple concept, and it doesn't mean we don't have environmental problems; we certainly do. Ron Eller, in an interview with journalist David DeWitt, makes a compelling case for rooting the concept of economic growth as incompatible with environmental health with both the extractive industries and, ironically, with the government War on Poverty programs that were designed to bring jobs but not, at the same time, protect the land. What, I wonder, would those programs have looked like if we could have designed them ourselves? That we didn't, of course, is itself probably the point.

It is these values, at least in part, that I would posit our rhetoric preserves and promulgates; these values that enrich us as people and which can enrich our multicultural world. But it is also these that, without forthright considerations of rhetorical sovereignty, we could all lose.

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Strangely enough, I sometimes find it easier to explain what I'm not trying to say than what I am. And I want to say that I do not wish, with this exploration, to argue that all Appalachians value the same things, or that our students should not be exposed to ideologies or concepts that run counter to those they bring with them to the classroom. It is, after all, a central tenet of education to expose students to different ideas, experiences, and histories. (My non-Appalachian historical education has, for example, provided me with a deep fascination about the Tudors, specifically with the assorted wives and children of Henry VIII. I don't consider this topic as connected to my own cultural sense

of history or identity—in fact, they're about as far from it as can be.) Nor do I wish to implicate all textbooks, or all teachers, in some sort of a conspiracy to undermine Appalachian culture or rhetoric. My concern is for something much more subtle: that we don't see exactly what it is that is being undermined, or that undermining is happening at all. That when we learn in school not that we have a dialect but that we simply speak incorrectly, or fail to learn that there might be a reason why we want to tell particular stories in particular ways, undermining happens, the result being loss, for us and for the world.

In the final chapter, I will consider what could do to push back against this undermining. Even more than that, I want to ponder how Appalachia could be invited into the academic writing classroom, and how rhetorical sovereignty could be not only considered, but actively sought.

## CHAPTER 5: RHETORICAL SOVEREIGNTY FOR APPALACHIA



*Figure 1. Quilt by Alta Carpenter*

This is one of my Great-grandma Carpenter's quilts. This quilt is, in various ways, both how I've been writing and what I've been writing about. It's a quilt that fits Fawn Valentine's descriptions of Scotch-Irish Appalachian quilting; she notes that "Scotch-Irish quiltmakers appear more absorbed in process, cutting and sewing, than in visual arrangement" (92). I think about this when I think about Robin Chapman Stacey's description of Celtic law texts, which, rather than explicating specific laws, explored the process through which individual jurists thought through cases (75). This dissertation is my process of thinking about a basic question: how could Appalachia achieve rhetorical sovereignty? In quilting my answer, I've chosen a theme, a pattern, a basic structural outline to follow, but even I wonder if what falls within those lines might come across a



bit chaotic. That certainly seems to be the case with my great-grandmother's quilt: the choices of cloth and color blur the distinctions between pattern and chaos. (Notice, if you can, that she has sewed webs onto the quilt, rather than the more traditional waves; it might be a break with strict notions of tradition, but her choice of webs makes this quilt an even more apt metaphor for the regional rhetoric.) This quilt, in my eyes, is a both/and; after years of immersion in both Appalachian and non-Appalachian discourses, my writing is probably a bit of the same.

Yet at least some dimension of Appalachian rhetoric, as I have historicized and described it, is itself a study in both/and. Boundaries between self and community, land and people, history and future, are routinely nudged or outright collapsed. The form of the writing can defy organizational description; stories, poetry, recipes, images, document scans, all blend together in the service of explaining the workings of the writer's mind and the places and peoples who shaped it. Reading it feels a bit like looking at Great-grandma Carpenter's quilt. There is a theme here in Alta Carpenter's quilt, but within that pattern there is a little bit of everything that she thinks fits. Whether or not we would choose the same—if not, we can go make our own.

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My great-grandma Carpenter's given name was Alta, but around here that got pronounced Alty. So did most names ending in -a; when I was little, Pap's pet name for me was Matilda . . . or rather, Matildy. I never did know why he picked that name, and now, I never will.

Alty used to tell stories about her childhood. We think. See, Alty was bit of a talker, not so much as her sister was, but still perfectly willing to share what was on her mind. Problem was, at least toward the end of her life, that hardly anyone could understand her when she talked. She'd been pretty well a life-long snuff dipper, and even in old age retained the habit of talking like she was workin' round a mouthful of snuff. The result was a sort of throaty “Murblemurblemurble” that wudn't exactly easy to understand. Oddly enough, I can't remember anyone ever askin' Alty to repeat herself. I imagine she would've taken that as a sign you weren't listening, and I don't think anyone was eager to take that risk. It was best to keep on Alty's good side.

There's a story Mom likes to tell, about herself listening to Alty tell a story. Mom had long ago learned that you sometimes have to sacrifice comprehension for peace, and was just nodding along when Alty said something that sounded like:

“MurblemurblemurbleSHIT IN THE CROCK A-BUTTERmurblemurblemurble.”

Alty could certainly be clear when it counted. Although Mom never did find out what the rest of that story was about.

I don't suppose it matters, though. By this point, Alty herself has become the story, the legend.

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This here quilt is also what I've been writing about, in the sense that I look at it and see our potential for rhetorical sovereignty. Alta, as a quilter, made her own choices, for her own reasons, and expected them to be respected. (Which, in our family and our quilt-loving region, they are.) When I go to the Folk Festival's annual quilt display, with

its combination of historical and modern quilts, and when I read Fawn Valentine's book on Appalachian quilting traditions, I see a thread that connects us across the arbitrary boundaries of map lines, but within the geographic cradle of hills and mountains. What I learn, from that book, is that my great-grandmother's quilts connected her to a history of hills and mountains and people across an ocean, something I'm not sure even she fully realized. What I wonder, is how many of us see those connecting threads, and what could happen if more of us did.

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In that class I taught on Appalachian rhetoric, a class that happened to coincide with an election cycle, I asked my students to consider why Appalachia isn't seen as a regional power-block. In other words, why don't we hear about politicians courting the Appalachian vote? Responses were varied: maybe not enough people in Appalachia vote, maybe they don't donate enough campaign funds to be seen as important, maybe the regional emphasis on individualism keeps us from being seen as a people. It was the last point that captured me. "Imagine if we were," I said, somewhat thinking aloud. "Imagine if we saw ourselves as a united front for social action; like, if Appalachia decided collectively to do something about unequal school funding. I don't think such a thing has ever really been considered." Another student raised his hand. "So why is it that Appalachia can unite for bad reasons, but not good ones?" he asked.

I wasn't sure what to make of this. "Explain that question a bit more."

He shrugged. "You know, like forming the KKK and neo-nazi groups."

Startled, I assured him that Appalachia was not united behind the KKK or neo-nazi groups; in fact, I've since learned that none of the states with the most hate-group activity in the country are actually in Appalachia ("Southern Poverty Law Center: Hate Map"). Nonetheless, the discussion was firmly moved in a different direction, and I never did get us back to my original question.

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The question of building group identity in Appalachia is a complex one. I'm certain I haven't scratched the surface of these complexities. There's a reason I went into this project thinking of it as a prolegomena.

But something I find interesting about Appalachian culture, as I experience it, is the potential it has for embracing both individual and group identity; our rhetoric, I would posit, particularly allows it. We can make room for both group and individual identity by offering "argument" from an ethos that is presented as individual yet composed by interactions with family and community, that encourages connection and acceptance but doesn't insist upon them. In other words, I can explain what Appalachia means to me; what I can't promise is what it means to others. Rather, I can invite others to see themselves in my definition, or, whether they do or not, to make use of my thinking as a model upon which to undertake their own. We stay our individual selves, with our individual right to either claim or disclaim the influences that affect our identities. What I'm not sure we've explored, however, is the breadth of the potential we have for group identity as Appalachians; we haven't considered or foregrounded it, nor insisted upon its recognition by others.

There are, of course, dangers implicit in seeking cultural group identity. On one hand, identity politics can create “Groups [that] tend to remain separate, focused on their own issues and concerns, sometimes competing with each other for recognition and resources” (Kirk and Okazawa-Rey 565). Feminist theorists Gwyn Kirk and Margo Okazawa-Rey argue in favor of, rather, an identity-based politics, which “has a strong identity component and also a broader view that enables people to make connections to other groups and issues” (566). In seeking rhetorical sovereignty for Appalachia, I am seeking such a possibility, in which group identity is possible for the purposes of coalition and empowerment, without the concretizing of definition that creates disconnection or divisiveness. Good thing, in this sense, that our rhetoric has possibilities for boundary-crossing, rather than categorization, sewn right in. As Todd Snyder has noted, Appalachian identity can be very much a matter of individual self-identification and definition (16). This, rather than a weakness, can be a strength in allowing us to achieve identity-based politics without exclusion . . . if, of course, we can reach a point at which Appalachian identity is presented as a possible and beneficial identity to claim.

Ultimately, I'm positing that a group identity for Appalachia can offer more benefits than drawbacks, for reasons of both self-esteem and power. To return to Lyons' definition of rhetorical sovereignty: “the inherent right of *peoples* to determine their own communicative needs and desires . . . to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse . . . rhetorical sovereignty requires of writing teachers more than a renewed commitment to listening and learning; it also requires a radical rethinking of how and what we teach as the written word at all levels of schooling” (449-

450; italics in original). In other words, the latter (a renewed thinking about how we teach writing) can help us achieve the former (our right to determine our own discursive identities). In Appalachia, I consider the latter to be particularly essential in allowing us to see ourselves as a people, to explore and surface our linguistic, rhetorical, cultural, and historical connections in ways we rarely have the opportunity to do.

But why does it matter if we do? What exactly is it that this rhetorical sovereignty has to offer us here in these hills?

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I learned at a fairly young age that my grandmother hadn't finished school. This was never a secret. She had grown up as part of a family of sharecroppers over around Calais, in Monroe County, with most of her family members born, raised, and buried within walking distance. But Grandma dropped out of school to go north, and found work in a grocery store up near Ravenna. She told me how the stores worked back then, how kids would bring their mothers' shopping lists, and she would go find all the things on them while the children waited up front. Grandma didn't stay away from home long; the cousin she had originally gone with had come back even sooner, out of homesickness.

Grandma and I used to take long walks when I was little, and it was during one of our walks that I first learned about her educational and work history. It took a while before I understood how to reconcile the grandma I knew, who seemed to me to know so much, who it seemed could just about name every flower we passed on our evening walks, who read much, and who told good stories, with the high school drop-out. My

formal schooling told me, of course, that to drop out was to be a loser, to be less than those who finished.

“Your parents just let you quit school?” I asked.

“It wasn't such a big thing. Going to work made more sense,” she explained.

I learned, eventually, to question the schools, the things they told us and how they treated us. I learned to understand that education and school were not synonymous. I learned that sometimes the immediate needs of your family mattered much more than schooling did, or, at least, that the school system could matter far less.

But what if it didn't have to?

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In her highly influential article, “The Politics of Teaching Literate Discourse,” Lisa Delpit argues for the possibility and necessity of teaching the dominant discourse to students from non-dominant backgrounds. As with Ruby Payne, Delpit's vision of dominant discourse teaching is framed as a moral imperative, as it is through the standard discourse that students can access power. In other words, it is through learning dominant discourse that students can find pathways to success. However, unlike Payne, Delpit specifies that this is not the same thing as eliminating their home dialects; the goal should be, rather, “to add other voices and Discourses to [students'] repertoires” (293). From my experience, and from what I've learned in my research, Delpit's latter point is being too underplayed in Appalachia. My sense of why, as I've noted, is because our home dialects aren't conceptualized as *being* home dialects, rather than ignorance or incorrectness. So we experience the privileging of standardized discourse—as language, rhetoric, and

identity—without the respect for our home discourse. Re-conceiving the goal of rhetorical and writing education away from standardization and to rhetorical sovereignty can allow for equal consideration of the affordances of multiple discourses (including dominant) in the classroom, and can bring our schooling experience closer to one of liberation rather than subordination.

Of course, this move would require a concurrent reassessment of societal definitions of success. Right now, success is deeply entwined with economic gain and middle-class identity. But Appalachian scholars like Todd Snyder are asking us to rethink what the “success” that education provides can mean. As he states, “When Appalachian students begin to question the lessons they learn about themselves both inside and outside the walls of academia, amazing transformations can take place” (14). Those “transformations” don't just mean achieving a low-level technical job.

This dissertation has been in some ways my process of asking those questions, and what I gained from doing so. What I want is to demonstrate something I'd like to see more of us given the opportunity and encouragement to do. I want us to have the chance to think about how we write, and why.

Joel Spring describes what he calls the Pan-Indian movement in the United States; he defines it as “a movement [that] was based on the assumption that Native American tribes shared a common set of values and interests” (396), and that encouraged strategic consolidations to address social and educational grievances. The movement has succeeded in attaining improved recognition and legislation in service of greater Native American self-determination, educationally and culturally. (Though one need only read



Scott Richard Lyons' "Rhetorical Sovereignty: What Do American Indians Want from Writing?" to see that any gains still have a far piece to go in attaining full sovereignty and social respect.) I think it worth considering how this indicates a new potential definition for "success"--that success can mean something different than the attainment of middle-class identity. What could Appalachian rhetorical sovereignty offer us that standardization does not? Perhaps a better chance at determining our own voices and identities, and claiming a role in the curriculum creation and even laws that affect our lives.

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If we look at a map of the Appalachian region, we can see immediately that it is vast. Are all people within this region culturally identical? No. (Though I advocate looking for the cultural/rhetorical commonalities that can exist, if not in daily experiences then at least in common causes that might best benefit from a "Pan-Appalachian movement.") Will all of these people self-identify as "Appalachian"? No. (Though I also advocate making such questions of identity relevant in the classroom; if you don't identify as Appalachian, why not? What are the stakes involved in identity conceptualization?) But think, for a moment, just how many writing classrooms exist within this expanse. Think how many of us have taught or are teaching the students of Appalachia, perhaps without even recognizing it. In my experience as a teacher at three community colleges within the region, nearly all of my students were "locals." In other words, they were the very people for whom considerations of Appalachian identity and rhetoric are most relevant. Yet, even as a teacher at Ohio University, I have a small but consistent stream of regional undergrads—I, once upon a time, was one myself. Yet I also

think of my Columbus and Cleveland students, when they enter my class, as entering an Appalachian classroom: in fact, what I have most of here at OU are students from outside the region who, by living here now, live in Appalachia, often without thinking about it. Except I want them to think about it, as I want all people to think, and care, about where they plant their lives. What I'm saying, in other words, is that I'm defining an "Appalachian classroom" regionally, geographically, not necessarily by student background. Because, if Appalachian rhetorical sovereignty is going to happen, then we need to talk about what living in Appalachia means, whether or not we were born here.

There are many things happening in rhetoric and composition pedagogy, particularly at the college-level, that I heartily endorse for Appalachian classrooms and that I wish I had experienced myself as a student. I am certainly not, in advocating for specialized pedagogical practices, re-inventing the wheel; I think others have done that work long before me, for different exigencies. What I'd like to see are two things: 1) that rhetorical and identity-based pedagogical practices more routinely reach Appalachian classrooms, and 2) that "Appalachian" becomes a regular concept in these classrooms, one that students and teachers have the space and encouragement to explore as an aspect of identity and rhetoric.

I want to share, at this point, examples of pedagogical practices, some of which I've been able to work into my own teaching, and some of which I plan to, but all of which I've thought about deeply with regard to creating connections between concepts of "academic" and "Appalachian" rhetoric.

The first attempt I ever made in this direction was a brief unit I was able to work into my community college syllabus, which I entitled the “Language Analysis Essay.” I took as my exigency the fears I noticed amongst some students that their native dialects, mostly Appalachian in origin, made them “sound stupid.” The project started out quite informally; I asked students to study and keep journals about the ways their dialects altered (or didn't) in different surroundings or situations. It eventually morphed into a more formal report, in which students noted the location, subject, and audiences of these language-use situations. I wanted them to consider their language uses in terms of linguistic features such as phonology (including words that might be pronounced or spelled differently here than in other areas, such as crick for creek and worsh for wash), lexicon (such as words/usages that are acceptable in the local dialect, but not necessarily in standard English; for example, “you'uns”), and grammar. My ultimate goal was that they start to see language as situational, to see that their non-standard dialects did in fact “fit” better in certain situations. As my own experience as a teacher has broadened, I've seen that what we were considering was the concept of discourse communities, a far more fair way of looking at linguistic difference than the simple “right” and “wrong” many of us were used to.

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My students' language analysis work did not take place at the same school as the Banned Terms project, but that didn't mean attitudes were not the same. At one point, after we had done a couple sessions discussing language analysis and situation, two of my students came to class bursting to tell me about the experience they had just had in

the math course they were taking together. I learned that their teacher had publicly shamed a student for using a double-negative (“weren't none,” specifically). One of my students had raised her hand, and very politely informed the instructor that the student's usage was in fact not “wrong.” It was a common usage in local speech; it was only, perhaps, not the most fitting language choice for this particular situation. Her teacher was curious about where she got that idea. She told him, “It's what we're learning in our English class.”

My student said her math teacher looked at her for a moment, then said, “Your English teacher ought to be fired.”

I think I understand his opinion. If what English teachers are supposed to be doing is “correcting” students' discourse so that they can escape poverty, what I was doing instead, in his view, was keeping them incorrect, and thereby trapped in the mire. Despite his opinion, my students seemed quite proud of themselves. Hell, I was rather proud, too.

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However, while I hope that this project had a positive effect on my students' linguistic outlooks, I don't think it really addresses the issues that concern me regarding the possibilities for Appalachian rhetorical sovereignty. For one thing, I don't think I did enough to incorporate language-use into a more holistic sense of rhetoric; as I hope this dissertation has shown, I think there is more to Appalachian senses of cultural identity and communication than only the surface features of language. And, while the ability to self-consciously evaluate situations and code-switch in response is undoubtedly valuable, I don't think I pushed far enough in asking my students to resist the insistent pressures

that told them their language “sounded stupid,” or did enough to encourage them to critique these attempts at cultural alienation and claim ownership over the narrative of their cultural identities. Why is your language “stupid”? I should have asked. Who says so? Why do you believe them? Why do we speak and write the way we do? Where does it come from? What does it achieve? Who else speaks and writes this way? What do we want from writing, and why?

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I think we often hear stories about the books or writers who change lives because they make us look at the world differently. Just as important, I've found, are those who make me look at myself differently, who rearrange something I've thought I understood, or hadn't thought about at all, about who or why I am. One was Geneva Smitherman, who taught me to look for a cultural history in my casual usage of “we was” and double-negatives. Another was Helen Fox.

Fox's book *Listening to the World: Cultural Issues in Academic Writing* opens with the story of a visit to an American college class by a West African praise singer. Despite all parties conversing in standard English, the students were unable to understand the speaker, whose answers to their questions, it seemed to them, were “totally off the point” (ix). Fox draws from this, and continues throughout her book to explain, that *logic* is ultimately cultural, and that the ways we use rhetoric to make logical points can differ widely. It is from Fox that I began to wonder about the possibility that Appalachian students are writing in ways that are closer to those of what Fox calls “World Majority Students” (10) than of mainstream American students, who are raised in “a process of

both formal and informal socialization” to value “literal meanings and precise definitions and explicit statements of cause and effect. . .writing sparsely and directly, without embellishments or digressions, beginning each paragraph or section with a general analytical statement” (xviii). Fox describes the latter as an essentially Western European rhetorical style, which is problematic if we look at Appalachian rhetoric as descended from Celtic rhetoric, which itself was born in Western Europe but with few commonalities to the style she describes. Thus we are, again, linguistically erased. Nonetheless, were it not for Fox's book, this in itself is a consideration I might never have come to see.

Fox puts forward the notion that by surfacing cultural difference in classrooms, we as instructors both help students better master the forms of academic writing they encounter, to “help them cope with the system as it exists” (108), and also acknowledge “to students and to ourselves, that other reasonable, logical ways of seeing the world exist” (108). For academia to help, rather than inhibit, Appalachian rhetorical sovereignty, this is an acknowledgment that must occur, and for it to occur, an even more preliminary acknowledgment must take place: that Appalachia is cultural, that the difficulties our writers face are, at least potentially, rooted in differing cultural assumptions, values, and definitions. . .in other words, in rhetoric. And that how we use and are used by rhetoric can mean something for how we learn to be in the world.

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Another project I test drove in my community college teaching was not so much a separate project as it was a re-naming of an old one. One term, my last, in fact, before

returning to graduate studies, I titled my students' final portfolios their "heirloom collections." "Think of the papers you write this term as something your grandkids'll read one day," I told them. With this in mind, I waited to see what results I would get. They varied. Some students seemed no more invested in their work than they had been when I was calling it their "portfolios." But others, I found, made additions to the final project I hadn't requested. Some "heirloom collections" came to me with family photos stuffed between essays. Instead of addressing the collection's final reflective letter to me, several addressed it to their future grandchildren. Memorably, one student included in the pocket of her collection's folder a little plastic baggy filled with dust; "That's dirt from the homeplace," she explained to me. Dirt itself, in the stories of who we are, is rhetorical.

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But do we know what it is that makes our dirt rhetorical? My heirloom collection project was not pedagogically new. There have, in fact, been historical precedents for bringing Appalachian cultural history into the composition classroom. Perhaps the most famous of these is the *Foxfire* project begun in the 1960s. *Foxfire* was a magazine produced by English students in a rural Appalachian school district in Georgia; the content focused on interviews with local elders to describe for readers elements of folk culture. However, what *Foxfire* and my heirloom collection project did not do was bring Appalachia into the classroom in a wider, perhaps more metacognitive sense. My students, in composing their collections, did not investigate the rhetorical history/ecology that influenced their inclusions and organizational choices. The *Foxfire* students, from what I can tell, focused on the culture of their local community, without reaching beyond

to seek cultural commonalities in a wider Appalachia. (Perhaps they, like Sohn's students, were identifying themselves culturally and geographically in terms of their local communities and hollers, rather than with Appalachia in a fuller sense.) Likewise, I'm not sure those students devoted a great deal of consideration to rhetoric, in the sense of its influence on their and their interviewees forms of identity and communication (although some consideration of non-standard dialect did happen, as attempts were made to recreate in writing the speech forms of those they interviewed). Additionally, in composing and publishing the magazine, students don't seem to have explored the non-Appalachian, dominating discourses that shape the story of Appalachia in potentially destructive ways. To what degree, then, my heirloom collection project or the *Foxfire* initiative helped students to analyze and resist discourses, or to claim agency in creating discourses, is rather uncertain.<sup>4</sup>

However, I also take from these a hopeful note: there can be a place for Appalachia in the classroom, if we invite it in.

I want to make the case for a pedagogical approach to Appalachian rhetoric that, at least potentially, accomplishes multiple things. Firstly, I want to allow for the individualism and differences that can appear when one is composing their own thought process, a messy and choppy business if your mind is anything like mine. But I also want to help us, secondly, publicize our thinking. In 2005, Tim Lindgren published a piece in

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4 While *Foxfire* is still produced at Georgia's Rabun County High School, it is no longer produced in an English class; rather, it's part of a business elective ("The *Foxfire* Magazine"). Opportunities for Appalachian students to consider rhetorical/discursive influence and creation seem less likely to occur in a business course; even if they did, as an elective, there are limits to the number of students these opportunities could reach.



*Kairos* entitled “Place Blogging: Locating Pedagogy in the Whereness of Weblogs.”

Lindgren defines the concept of the “place blog” as a means of combining the affordances of writing to both construct identity and inhabit places, a concept, I recall, which was likewise central to the medieval Irish composers of the *Acallam*. Lindgren, however, conceives of online writing, specifically blogging, as a genre that fits the widely ranging needs of place-based writers and the ecologies they inhabit, allowing for invocations of personal essays, ethnography, journalism, and travel writing. Blogs additionally allow for multimodal approaches to composition, thereby offering writers methods beyond print text by which to construct and reflect the complexities of the places they blog.

I would like to offer a suggestion for the relevance place-blogging could play pedagogically in service of Appalachian rhetorical sovereignty. While the nature of place blogs, as described by Lindgren's descriptions of their genre-defying multimodality, fits the conceptual and organizational boundary crossing I see happening in Appalachian writing, I also perceive value coming from the use of blogs and blog styles to discuss these boundary crossings, where they come from and what they mean. If Appalachian students are experiencing academic writing as an alienating process of distinguishing and hierarchizing ideas and forms, then the blog could offer opportunities to explore and experience alternate concepts of composition.

Another potential benefit may be more a matter of surface features. Like the place bloggers Lindgren describes, and to a degree like their predecessors in the *Foxfire* project, students could use this as a means of exploring the interconnected webs of their

lives in Appalachia, including the reasonings behind their languages, rhetorics, cultural experiences, and situations with place. Lindgren quotes Anis Bawarshi's description of writing as a "form of inhabitation dependent on locating oneself in social and rhetorical place." What could be more academically relevant than exploring that location?

Jessie Blackburn, in her recent article "[E]ppalachia: Rural Ethos, Online Discourse, and Cyber-frontiers," examines the cultural narratives created by websites intended to promote Appalachian regional tourism. She discovers that many regional stereotypes have essentially gone digital, something she posits is related to the authors of these websites being non-Appalachian, professional web-developers, rather than locals. She advocates the importance of exploring "the gap in reality that is created when an elite few are charged with the construction of a community's website. . . .whole groups rendered invisible, marginalized, and unauthorized by their community's home page" (228-229). I take from this not only the problem she describes, in that Appalachia is being defined from the outside, but also the sheer scale by which the problem of rhetorical imperialism becomes amplified on the web. Internet, by its nature, allows for instantaneous, global informational access. How we are being written online could have higher stakes than ever before. This, to my way of thinking, makes facility with digital composition particularly relevant for Appalachian students. Creating this facility, by asking students not only to investigate Appalachian identity but to do it digitally, is complicated. Depending on the region, students may have limited home access to digital technology. Such an undertaking would require the dedicated use of class time and available means within schools, including computer classrooms or labs, to allow for

exploration of the affordances of new media, a combination of requirements that is still not available to every school or every teacher.

But despite its difficulties, the combined emphasis on place, people, and public writing implicit in place-blogging makes me see it as potentially relevant to Appalachian rhetorical sovereignty. While I wish to see Appalachian writing classrooms as spaces in which our situated rhetorical dynamics, their creation and value, are considered, I'm also interested in the potential for blogs to serve as public counter narratives to the dominant ideology about life in Appalachia. There are plenty of Appalachian students who dislike their cultural backgrounds; the definitions of Appalachia they are presented with are often far from positive. But what would they see if asked to look beyond those dominant ideologies of deficit and backwardness? To consider what and how and why they, and their communities, look and sound and act the way they do? What I would like to see is not just more of the exploratory work I've advocated here, but also greater efforts to publicize that work for a wider audience. Earlier on, I said that we as Appalachians needed to start creating our own discursive quilts from what we're given by our homes, by our schools, by ourselves, and start hanging those quilts for others to see. I'm ready to see what cloths and colors my Appalachian students will choose.

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I never want to imply that Appalachia is simple. That is one of the stereotypes that has done us the most harm: that we are a simple folk, living simple lives in a simple place. I tend to think the opposite is true, that due to its sheer expanse of territory, diversity of peoples, and multiplicity of social influences, Appalachia is more culturally

complex than many regions of the country. We are eternally what Gloria Anzaldua describes as a border region, where discourses meet, mix, and sometimes clash. What I have tried to do here is trace one thread, one tradition, one influence shaping the ways Appalachian peoples create and communicate identity. I don't claim that this is the only thread, the only tradition, or the only influence. I have foregrounded a form of non-adversarial argument common in the writings of Appalachian authors, which I perceive as rooted in a regional geography and cultural history. However, this is not the only way in which Appalachian people compose arguments. I have purposely, up until now, avoided the *very* adversarial argument tradition stereotyped with Appalachia, that of the feud. A recent resurgence of interest in the Hatfields and McCoys has ensured that new correlations will continue to be drawn between Appalachian culture and predilections for violence, correlations that might seem at odds with my descriptions of non-adversarial argument traditions. As I was describing my sense of Appalachian non-adversarial argument, and the hesitance Appalachian student writers seem to feel about composing strong thesis statements, to my office-mate Leah, she nodded thoughtfully. "It makes sense," she said. "There's probably a cultural hesitance to cause offense, because feuds can last for so long." She might be onto something there, a point I hadn't considered. When having deep family loyalty and a long memory is a cultural value, there are potential positives and negatives. It makes sense of some of the rip-roaring arguments I've seen take place in my family, without a lick of "non-adversarial" about them. But I think it's noteworthy that those arguments happened within the family. There's a sense of safety, a loosening of the rules of interaction, when we can be reasonably sure that the

people we're fighting with will forgive our offenses. Outside the family circle, the need to preserve lines of connection is a perhaps more tenuous proposition.

Ultimately, while my points about the nature and history of Appalachian rhetoric may not be as easily generalizable as they initially appear, what I hope they can be is a starting point. As I said, I want other Appalachian students and teachers, whether they were born here or not, to consider these issues for themselves, and to consider further how building and linking our Appalachian identities, whether or not those identities end up looking the same, can help us make demands for the educational, aesthetic, and legal well-being of ourselves, our families, and our lands. I want us to understand our own rhetoric, how we can use it, and how to see when it is being used against us.

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A few months back, *New Yorker* staff writer Jeffrey Toobin published a piece titled, "What's the Matter with West Virginia?" Judging by the title alone, I was afraid I would encounter yet another "what's wrong with these people" description of Appalachian backwardness. What I found was a meditation on a question that does seem to be quite perplexing. Toobin can't understand why West Virginians continue to offer tacit support to the industry leaders and right wing politicians that seem willing, if not eager, to do harm to the state's land and people. He specifies the case of Massey Energy executive Don Blankenship, who "engaged in a lengthy pattern of deception in dealings with federal mine regulators, in an effort to cut costs, and, consequently, exposed his employees to appalling risks" (including the 2010 disaster at Upper Big Branch, where 29 miners died). Yet the state continues to elect, by huge margins, the Republican politicians

supported by firms like Massey Energy, who campaign on promises to fight *against* EPA efforts to protect land, air, and water from harmful extractive industry practices. I, too, find this pattern troubling and deeply frustrating. Appalachian culture, as I have experienced it and according to every source I've read about it, is a culture that values place. (Recall that oil man's exasperation that people wouldn't just leave their land when it became polluted.) In fact, I have never talked to a person from this region who gave me the indication that they didn't care about their land. Why then, does West Virginia, and other parts of Appalachia, continue to support people who don't?

Toobin wonders if the disconnect is, in fact, one of rhetoric. As he notes, "It's a good bet that a majority of the Massey miners, whose lives Blankenship may have placed in jeopardy and whom the federal bureaucrats were trying to protect, voted Republican," largely on the basis of perception. He concludes that Democratic politicians in West Virginia are regarded as "an alien force," outsider elitists whose goal is to dominate rather than cooperate. What Toobin wants is for Democratic politicians to learn to talk to West Virginians. The inference, then, is that Republicans already do, that what industrialists like Blankenship and the politicians he supports have learned to do is convey themselves, to West Virginians, as "one of you," a status which, in a culture that values loyalty, can cover a vast amount of sins. Is it, in fact, the ethos rather than the ideas that are being elected, and do the electors realize why they find that ethos so trustworthy? Even when that trust, as in the case of Don Blankenship, is so grossly misplaced?

Toobin wants those losing Democratic politicians to, essentially, learn a new rhetoric. I wonder, though, what might happen if more of West Virginia's voters had

access to a comprehensive rhetorical education, as well. I don't mean, as I think Toobin does, that I simply want Appalachians to stop voting Republican and start voting Democrat. What I want is to be sure we, as a people, understood when we're being rhetorically played, and how, and what that means for what we in fact really care about and want to see in the world. It would help if, first, we had a chance to think about what our rhetoric *is*, and what it indicates, and how it can be used for, or against, our interests.

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In 2011, Marilyn M. Cooper published the article “Rhetorical Agency as Emergent and Enacted” in *CCC*. In her piece, Cooper came to the following conclusion:

What we need is not a pedagogy of empowerment, but a pedagogy of responsibility. We need to help students understand that writing and speaking (rhetoric) are always serious actions. The meanings they create in their rhetoric arise from and feed back into the construction of their own dispositions, their own ethos. What they write or argue, as with all other actions they perform, makes them who they are. (443)

When we compose, we compose ourselves, and not just for others. I think of those Appalachian memoirs, which seemed so self-consciously aware of that concept. They were composing themselves, specifically, were composing their lives in places, and were inviting others, readers, to witness that composition. Even before this dissertation had begun to take shape in my mind and through my hands, back when I first read Cooper's article for a course on rhetorical theory, I made a note in the margin. “This idea sounds

very Appalachian,” I had written. Wouldn't it be something if, for once, we could be seen as being on the intellectual cutting edge.

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One of Emily's Christmas presents was a video dance game for the Nintendo that we keep down home (“down home” being my grandparents' house; the trailer a little further up the hill where I grew up, and where Emily lived until the trailer was replaced by a double-wide, has long been known as “up home”). Not long ago, I was playing this game with Emily and her friend Payton. After a few random song selections, the two of them chose as their next dance song a tune that recently overtook popular radio, despite having lyrics that speak favorably of rape and violence against women.

“Not that 'un,” I immediately said, forgetting for the moment that such an approach is never successful with children, unless one has the parental authority to back it up. Both girls knew damn well I did not.

“Fine,” I said, after unsuccessful haggling, “you two go right ahead, but I ain't gon play while that song is on.”

“Why not?” Emily asked, clearly confused. I gave her a quick hug while I headed out of the room. “It's a song about hurting people, darlin,” I said, and left. She and Payton danced to the song, then called me back. And they didn't pick that song again. I'll take that as a win.

But what did I win? I've thought about this a good deal since. Emily is thoughtful; I think it likely she has considered it, too. But whether she has or not, I think about what it is she saw in that moment. I didn't refuse them a song that troubled me. But I did speak



my piece, and walked away from it. What I hope Emily saw, is that even the songs we listen to have influence; they shape us, but we can choose how we want to be shaped and why. Rhetoric is not only how we persuade other people. It's how we are persuaded, built, created by others. I refuse to allow that text to create me. I reject it for myself. I hope Emily will learn to pay attention to texts, to decide for herself what she wants to let in, to quilt into her own life.

When discussing her book of Appalachian story-poems, *Kettlebottom*, Diane Gilliam Fisher made the point that “Stories are how people get to be who they are.” They are certainly how I've gotten to be me. If this dissertation argues anything in a traditional academic sense, let it be that stories, rhetorics, are how Appalachia has come to be what it is, even if those stories don't end up where you'd expect them to, or maybe don't end at all. Like Todd Snyder said, we kinda like our stories that way. It is the process of coming to be that matters. It is the glorious array of colors that make the quilt what it is, and the choices of those colors that make it ours.

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When I began this project, I was raw with the fear that my family would be broken apart, that Emily and Dale would be taken from us by their non-Appalachian father, who thinks we are nothing. I felt silenced by a court system that couldn't understand my role in their lives or their role in mine. And in the last month, I've lost my grandfather, my Pap, the last grandparent I had. I find myself overwhelmed by the weight of stories I'll never hear, and terror that I'll forget the ones I have heard. What I find is that I feel more urgency now, more responsibility than I felt even when I began, to say

something that will give back to the culture that made him, and that made me. Far from being made less by our Appalachian-ness, as deficit ideology says we are, I feel I owe something to it, for giving me these people, these places, these stories.

This quilt, then, is what I have to give.

I began with the premise that there is something real to being Appalachian, in the sense that it can influence our ways of thinking, acting, and valuing. However, these differences can be, and too often are being, framed as deficits, or overlooked completely, in the academic arenas Appalachian students find themselves in. I raised the possibility of considering Appalachia in terms of rhetorical sovereignty, as defined by Scott Richard Lyons: “a people's control of its meaning” (447). Composition studies, Lyons argues, can help peoples achieve this control through helping students from non-dominant cultures critique rhetorical imperialism (452) and determine their own communicative needs (462). Rhetorical sovereignty, when it exists, can have social, legal, and educational repercussions; without it, Appalachia is that much easier to dismiss as culturally invalid or irrelevant. However, what perhaps makes rhetorical sovereignty difficult to apply to Appalachia, specifically, is the emphasis on rhetorical sovereignty as a state attainable by a “people,” which Lyons defines as “a group of human beings united together by history, language, culture, or some combination therein” (454). Appalachia can, and has, been defined as a wide geographical expanse, a range that crosses multiple state boundaries. Can the inhabitants of this expanse be considered a “people” in a way that would allow us to campaign for our own rhetorical sovereignty, the right to claim our own definitions, and have them respected?

My sense, and what I've attempted to work through in this dissertation, is yes, though in complicated ways, ways we likely cannot begin to conceptualize in isolation. It is an answer predicated upon the belief in a potentially uniting thread: Appalachian rhetoric, with its forms, history, and epistemology, can both link us together and set us apart from the academic mainstream. I've attempted, in chapter two, to root this rhetoric as unique and pervasive through the influence of early Scotch-Irish homesteaders, who brought with them a rhetorical system based not upon classical forms but upon the system of the Celts. As emigrants from Europe's Celtic Fringe, the influence of the Greco-Roman world would have been historically less prominent, whereas Celtic rhetoric had developed over centuries to fit the social and physical geographies of the Celtic countries. I sought ways of defining and analyzing Celtic rhetoric; the result, while likely simplistic, I posit to be nonetheless worthwhile as a means of analyzing the rhetoric of Appalachia, particularly as it appears in writing. Chapter three does this; I hoped to show, in other words, what a written Appalachian rhetoric looks like and why it takes the forms it does. These, for me, are essential concepts if Appalachian rhetoric is ever to have a hearing in rhetoric and composition classrooms. If the classroom is ever to become a space in which we as Appalachian students can start to see ourselves as a linked people, and beyond this, to critique rhetorical imperialism and determine our own communicative needs, there must be an acknowledgment that we have something to be respected for, and to contribute to, those classrooms.

Finding a space in the composition classroom for Appalachian rhetoric and rhetorical sovereignty may also rely upon the views of the non-Appalachian, mainstream

decision-makers who determine curriculum. Lyons's rhetorical sovereignty has two interlinked components: it is the right of a people to define their own meaning, but it is also the willingness of others to respect that definition. It is the latter consideration that determined my fourth chapter. What prevents us, in other words, from being seen from the outside as a culture, or as having a rhetoric, as opposed to simply being educationally under-prepared and in need of standardization? The answer might have something to do with a failure to see Appalachia as historically and culturally influenced in ways distinct from non-Appalachian regions of the country—with seeing Appalachia as fundamentally white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant in the same ways as the American elite. Steamrolling cultural or rhetorical difference, and establishing the defining feature of Appalachian identity as poverty, allows for simplistic notions of education and success for Appalachian students. What we “need,” in this view, is standardization, which allows us to gain quasi-lucrative jobs and middle-class social identities. In this system, skill-and-drill standardization becomes not only the central, or only, feature of the classroom, it becomes a moral imperative for teachers seeking to improve the quality of our lives. What goes unseen is what stands to be lost by such “improvement,” the potential stakes implicit in cultural denigration.

This final chapter is the most difficult for me to write or even to conceive. It is the chapter that makes me feel the most like I'm writing in the dark. It is in this chapter that I've tried to explain what I want to see happen in our classrooms, to provide guidance or ideas for alternatives that avoid cultural denigration, and that offer steps toward Appalachian rhetorical sovereignty. These are the most difficult for me because,

ultimately, I don't know what will work and what won't. That will require both time and concerted effort on the parts of many more than just me. My hope is not, then, that educators will attempt to follow my pedagogical suggestions verbatim, but rather that they will start to ask their Appalachian students to think about their identities and rhetorical desires, and how to make these known. Who knows what we will learn, about ourselves and about each other?

I remember writing in a paper once, when I was an undergrad, that I liked good questions, because there was always the chance that they'd have good answers. Maybe all I've done over these pages is raise questions, hopefully good ones. But the best one I find myself faced with now is one that Lyons would advocate: What do I, as an Appalachian, want from writing instruction? I want it to help me remember my stories, and to hear new ones; I want it to respect my stories; I want it to help me mine them for meaning and share them the best ways I can. I want it to help me see why family and place seem to stand for the same things in my mind, and why I look to these as a means by which to create knowledge. I want it to help me create that knowledge. And I want it to help me tell the world who I am, who we are, and to claim the world's respect.

Are these good answers? I don't know yet. I want to hear a lot more first, then maybe I can decide.

A few years ago, I crocheted a lap blanket for Pap. He always hated the cold, and would turn the heat up so high that the rest of us would actually step outside into the winter cold to get a few minutes' relief. If you've had much experience with crochet, you know that it can have a lace-like appearance; Pap took one look at my gift and frowned.

“How's 'at s'posed to keep you warm? It's got all them holes in it.” No doubt he would have preferred a quilt. I found out later, though, that he told my mother, “You know, that blanket Nan made is purty warm.” I put it in the casket when we buried him; I couldn't bear to see it a-layin' there on the bed by itself. If I was a quilter, maybe I could've found a way to sew part of it into a new blanket. But my quilting uses a keyboard rather than cloth, so I didn't need Pap's blanket. He'd given me a story instead.

The blanket I crocheted had holes. The colors of Alty's quilt clashed. Ain't none of us can satisfy everyone. It's hard enough to satisfy ourselves. The least we can have is the chance to try.

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