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Tracing Appalachian Musical History through Fiction: Representations of Appalachian Music in  
Selected Works by Mildred Haun and Lee Smith

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A thesis  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of Appalachian Studies  
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Arts in Appalachian Studies

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by  
John Curtis Goad  
August 2015

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Keywords: Traditional Appalachian music, Mildred Haun, Lee Smith, Appalachian history

## ABSTRACT

Tracing Appalachian Musical History through Fiction: Representations of Appalachian Music in

Selected Works by Mildred Haun and Lee Smith

by

John Curtis Goad

This research seeks to compare and contrast fictional Appalachian writings by Lee Smith and Mildred Haun to contemporary historical sources in an attempt to trace the development of Appalachian music between the mid-nineteenth century and the late twentieth century. The thesis examines two novels by Lee Smith (*The Devil's Dream* and *Oral History*) and the collection *The Hawk's Done Gone* by Mildred Haun, which includes a short novel and several short stories. Contemporary primary sources and scholarly secondary sources were used to compare the fictional works' depictions of Appalachian music to their historical counterparts. Also included within the thesis is a discussion of Smith and Haun's personal and research backgrounds and their connections to Appalachian music. Overall, the study found Smith and Haun's works accurate and based in historical fact, in part due to both writers' use of historical research and interviews to inform their fiction.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In his essay “Music,” included in *High Mountains Rising: Appalachia in Time and Place*, music scholar Bill C. Malone writes that “No concept in American life has had a more magic appeal than Appalachian music. For almost one hundred years, Americans have exhibited a romantic fascination with [it].”<sup>1</sup> The key term in Malone’s description is “romantic,” pointing to a somewhat fictionalized and idealized version of real life. Later in his essay, Malone states that many mountain-based musicians “were aware of the allure of Appalachian imagery, whether positive or negative.”<sup>2</sup> The constantly romanticized image of Appalachian culture, including its music, sometimes has been a sore point with natives of the region over the years, especially when authors, scholars, and members of the media choose to play on the stereotypical versions of the image rather than seek accurate depictions.

As both a bluegrass musician and a native of Appalachia, I have frequently encountered the “allure” of which Malone writes. Bluegrass music spans thousands of songs and numerous sub-genres and is widely acknowledged as requiring instrumental virtuosity.<sup>3</sup> However, due to the music’s roots in traditional Appalachian mountain music and its prominence in rural-themed television shows and films like *The Beverly Hillbillies* and *Deliverance*, many members of the general public automatically associate bluegrass performers with Appalachian stereotypes. These stereotypes include a lack of intelligence and the constant confrontation between city and

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<sup>1</sup> Bill C. Malone, “Music,” in *High Mountains Rising: Appalachia in Time and Place*, ed. Richard A. Straw and H. Tyler Blethen (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 114.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>3</sup> Neil V. Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 3.

country life and values (used throughout the series in *The Beverly Hillbillies* and in the “Dueling Banjos” scene in *Deliverance*).<sup>4</sup>

Ted Olson and Ajay Kalra also point to inaccurate assumptions about Appalachian music in their essay “Appalachian Music: Examining Popular Assumptions.” They specifically refer to the public and media perception of the 2000 film *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* noting that although the film is often praised for its support of Appalachian music, its setting is not in Appalachia. In addition, the majority of the music included in the film and on its soundtrack hails from other parts of the American South, such as Mississippi.<sup>5</sup> Olson and Kalra concur with Malone’s appraisal of Appalachian music, writing that “For over a century, non-natives have been fascinated by the relative distinctiveness of Appalachian music, and producers and musicians have sought to amplify this difference to make their music seem more fascinating...”<sup>6</sup> Overalls and gingham have been worn. Ancient connections between Appalachia and Britain have been over-emphasized. Banjos have been strummed, plucked, picked, and clawed.

I often experience frustration when I encounter casual music fans (and even some musicians themselves) who believe in the accuracy of stereotypical depictions of Appalachian music. As an undergraduate student majoring in History and Bluegrass, Old Time, and Country Music Studies, much of the research I conducted was focused on the historical background of bluegrass and other Appalachian-based music. As a graduate student in the Department of Appalachian Studies with an interest in history, I have written several papers about music’s role in Appalachian history and culture, including a syllabus proposal for a “History of Southern

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<sup>4</sup> Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History*, 262, 268.

<sup>5</sup> Ted Olson and Ajay Kalra, “Appalachian Music: Examining Popular Assumptions,” in *A Handbook to Appalachia: An Introduction to the Region*, ed. Grace Toney Edwards, et. al. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 164-65.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.



Appalachian Music” course. Throughout all of this research, I have enjoyed tracing the history and development of traditional Appalachian music and utilizing what I have learned both in my career as a student and in my work as a musician to combat inaccuracies and build upon the work of previous Appalachian scholars and musicians.

In the midst of a multitude of inaccuracies about Appalachian music, I was excited to encounter Appalachian author Lee Smith’s *Oral History* and *The Devil’s Dream*, two novels that offer a more accurate portrayal of Appalachian music and its role in the region’s culture. Upon the advice of a professor, I also read Mildred Haun’s novel and collection of short stories *The Hawk’s Done Gone and Other Stories*, which also features traditional Appalachian music. As a group, these three literary works cover a time period from the mid-nineteenth century through the late twentieth century, and each includes numerous references to music and characters who are musicians. In these literary works, I identified many features of historical Appalachian music that I had studied previously, and I wondered why these authors had taken care to create such an accurate depiction of a frequently stereotyped culture.

Due to the realistic portrayal of Appalachian music within these literary works, this thesis will seek to compare and contrast musical practices and the role of music in daily life in the fiction of Haun and Smith with historical primary and secondary source accounts. My prior experience with historical research inspired and has informed this aspect of the thesis. Furthermore, this thesis attempts to determine both how and why Haun and Smith present historically-based accounts of Appalachian music in their fictional literary works. What sources (if any) did each author use when writing her works? What were each author’s motivations to write historically accurate fiction? What historical inaccuracies (if any) exist in each authors’ fictional depictions of the music? The works of Lee Smith and Mildred Haun were chosen as the

basis of this thesis in part due to both authors' personal and scholarly backgrounds. Both women are natives of Appalachia, and both conducted in-depth research of the region's history, culture, and folklore as part of their writing process. In this thesis, I assume that these qualities provide the foundation for the writers' choice to create historically accurate depictions of Appalachian music.

Lee Smith is one of the most widely-read and popular modern-day Appalachian authors. She has received numerous awards for her works, including the Lifetime Literary Achievement Award from her home state of Virginia in 2010, the Sir Walter Raleigh Award in both 1983 and 1989, the Robert Penn Warren Prize for Fiction in 1991, and the Weatherford Award for Appalachian Literature in 1988, among others.<sup>7</sup> Her books are often set in Appalachian areas and utilize Appalachian sayings and folklore while also examining issues of women's rights, spirituality and religion, and mental health in the region. Many previous articles and dissertations written about Smith and her works focus on her treatment of such issues. However, the frequent inclusion of Appalachian music in her works has inspired several scholarly works. Perhaps the most relevant to the purpose of this thesis is Carmen Rueda Ramos' "On Music in Her Mountains: An Interview with Lee Smith," published in December 2013 in the *Journal of the Spanish Association of Anglo-American Studies*. In this interview, Rueda Ramos asks Smith to explain why Appalachian music has been an integral part of so many of her novels. Smith states that Appalachian music was "the sound of [her] childhood... There was always music out there, and there was always somebody playing music."<sup>8</sup> Smith not only grew up surrounded by music, but spent a considerable time researching music and folklore for her novels, particularly *The*

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<sup>7</sup> "Awards," LeeSmith.com, accessed April 23, 2015, last modified 2014, <http://www.leesmith.com/awards/>.

<sup>8</sup> Carmen Rueda Ramos, "On Music in Her Mountain Novels: An Interview with Lee Smith," *Journal of the Spanish Association of Anglo-American Studies* 35, no. 2 (December 2013): 157.

*Devil's Dream*, which resulted from “seven years of research in country music history and resources.”<sup>9</sup>

Danielle Johnson offers another analysis of Smith’s works in her 2013 dissertation “I’m Glad I Gave All My Heart: The Fiction of Lee Smith.” Johnson argues “that Smith accomplishes feminist cultural work in her writing by telling the untold unrecognized stories of female artists and questioning dominant historical narratives.”<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, Johnson’s understanding of Smith is that she has provided a voice for characters whose real-life counterparts seldom had a role in the “official” histories of Appalachia, including women and the poor. Johnson’s argument prompted me to pay special attention to primary source accounts of historical Appalachia in order to identify groups who were and were not represented in Smith and Haun’s fiction. Further analysis and comparisons can be found throughout the rest of this thesis.

During her lifetime, Mildred Haun did not enjoy the widespread popularity of Smith, but she still made several important contributions to Appalachian literature. While Smith still actively publishes and appears at conferences and other speaking engagements today, Haun passed away in 1966 after publishing only a handful of short stories and one longer work (*The Hawk's Done Gone*). Haun spent her later years working as a technical writer, writing manuals for the Department of Agriculture.<sup>11</sup> Parks Lanier, Jr., in *The History of Southern Women's Literature*, remarks that although Haun’s work received notice in regional literary circles at the time of its publication and at the time of Herschel Gower’s release of an edited collection of her work in 1968, her writings were soon “eclipsed by Jesse Stuart, the voice of W-Hollow, and

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<sup>9</sup> Curtis W. Ellison, *Country Music Culture: From Hard Times to Heaven* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995), 60.

<sup>10</sup> Danielle N. Johnson, “I’m Glad I Gave All My Heart: The Fiction of Lee Smith” (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2013), iii.

<sup>11</sup> M. Thomas Inge, “Mildred Eunice Haun (1911-1966),” in *Southern Writers: A New Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Joseph M. Flora and Amber Vogel (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 190.

James Agee of Knoxville.”<sup>12</sup> A cursory search of dissertations and scholarly articles reveals a lack of scholarly analysis of Haun’s works. One of the few publications to provide reflections of Haun’s literary contributions is Berea College’s literary journal *Appalachian Heritage*. In particular, Haun was the journal’s featured author for its spring 2008 issue. This issue includes several of Haun’s short stories and a few articles about her life.

In “Mildred Haun: A Haunting Life Story,” Viki Dasher Rouse offers an interesting biography of Haun, providing her literary and cultural pedigrees and commenting on Haun’s role as a “truth-teller.”<sup>13</sup> Rouse even compares Haun to Smith, stating that “She sets the standard for later writers such as Lee Smith who would concern themselves with ideas of Appalachian authenticity, authenticity that is at home in the midst of folklore and magic.”<sup>14</sup> In the same issue of *Appalachian Heritage*, Kingsport, Tennessee, native and author Lisa Alther reflects on the reasons she has always felt drawn to Haun’s writing. Chief among them is that “Haun not only preserves the distinctive speech patterns and folkways of a fading culture... she also summarizes the economic and social evolution of that culture from the Civil War up to World War II.”<sup>15</sup> Both Rouse and Alther draw attention to Haun’s fiction’s basis in historical fact and her attention to preserving details of the region’s culture. Haun also was a skilled folklorist, eventually compiling a lengthy thesis entitled “Cocke County Ballads and Songs” in pursuit of a master’s degree.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Parks Lanier, Jr., “Appalachian Writers,” in *The History of Southern Women’s Literature*, ed. Carolyn Perry and Mary Louise Weaks (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002). 313-14.

<sup>13</sup> Viki Dasher Rouse, “Mildred Haun: A Haunting Life Story,” *Appalachian Heritage* 36, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 22.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*,” 22-23.

<sup>15</sup> Lisa Alther, “The Shadow Side of Appalachia: Mildred Haun’s Haunting Fiction,” *Appalachian Heritage* 26, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 30.

The fictional works I analyze in this thesis are all set in Appalachia and all include descriptions of music and music-making. However, the works do not focus specifically on music but instead reference it as part of characters' larger lives. Of all of the works, Smith's *The Devil's Dream* includes the most references to music. This novel traces the musical Bailey family of southwest Virginia from the mid-nineteenth century through the late twentieth century. Although the book discusses characters' romances, mental issues, family problems, and other topics, music is a constant thread throughout the story, often prompting or influencing family events. The novel features multiple narrators, both inside and outside of the family, often allowing readers to see important events from varying perspectives. Events develop in a mostly chronological order, and include references to both traditional and commercial forms of Appalachian music. The novel is framed by two scenes from the work's present-day, as an unknown, omniscient narrator describing a gathering of surviving members of the extended Bailey family to record an album that represents the family's musical legacy. Smith's *Oral History* offers a similar narrative framework, using a college oral history project by a young, estranged member of another southwestern Virginia family to set the scene for the century-long story of the Cantrells. This novel includes multiple narrators, as well. Smith depicts numerous examples of Appalachian history, folklore, and folk culture throughout the novel, including ghost stories, witchcraft, moonshining, and traditional forms of music. In a similar manner, Haun's short stories referenced here also rely on fictionalized depictions of Appalachian history and culture. Music is often mentioned in passing as a character describes his or her everyday life or an event that happened within his or her community.

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<sup>16</sup> Sandra L. Ballard and Patricia J. Hudson, eds., *Listen Here: Women Writing in Appalachia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 277.

In the rest of Chapter One, I describe the methodology used in this study and define several terms included in this thesis. In Chapters Two and Three, I compare and contrast historical accounts of Appalachian music with fictionalized versions in the works of Smith and Haun. Chapter Two covers the nineteenth century through 1927. I trace the development of Appalachian music from the beginnings of available literature on Appalachia post-Civil War (and the beginnings of Smith's and Haun's fictional versions) until just before the dawn of modern country music with the "big bang" at the Bristol Sessions. Chapter Three picks up with the 1920s modern era of recorded music and concludes with the "present day" of Smith's novels, which is circa the 1980s. In Chapter Four, I discuss Smith's and Haun's motivations for writing historically accurate depictions of Appalachian music. This chapter utilizes as sources interviews with the authors and available biographical information. I conclude the thesis with Chapter Five, offering final thoughts and implications for further study.

### Methodology

For this thesis, I utilized three literary works and numerous primary and secondary source accounts covering a historical period of about one hundred years, from the late nineteenth century through the late twentieth century. Each of these documents will be treated as a historical source, following Martha Howell and Walter Prevenier's description of types of sources in *From Reliable Sources*. Howell and Prevenier offer three categories of sources: "narrative or 'literary' ... diplomatic/juridical, or ... social documents."<sup>17</sup> In general, all of the sources I used for this study can be classified as "narrative" sources, what Howell and Prevenier define as "chronicles or tracts presented in narrative form, written in order to impart a particular

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<sup>17</sup> Martha C. Howell and Walter Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 20.

message.”<sup>18</sup> Examples include periodical articles, scholarly articles, memoirs, diaries, and novels.<sup>19</sup>

I began by taking note of all descriptions of music, music-making, and/or musicians in each of the three literary works. In addition to reading physical copies of the books, keyword searches of electronic versions of the books aided in identifying references to music. Keywords used in searches were “song,” “singing,” “music,” “banjo,” “guitar,” and “fiddle.” Since Smith’s *The Devil’s Dream* is almost entirely about Appalachian music, I utilized descriptions of which I was able to locate similar primary and/or secondary source accounts (for example, Smith’s fictionalized version of the Bristol Sessions and historical Carter Family remembrances of the actual events). I then repeated the process using well-known historical accounts of Appalachian culture. Sources used included Horace Kephart’s *Our Southern Highlanders*, John C. Campbell’s *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland*, a variety of scholarly articles and periodicals compiled by W. K. McNeil in his collection *Appalachian Images in Folk and Popular Culture*, and Cecil Sharp’s *English Folk Songs from the Southern Mountains*. Several additional specific primary sources, including recordings of oral history interviews and recordings of historic radio programs, were also used in order to compare fictional and historical accounts of events such as the Bristol Sessions and topics such as ballad collecting. For Chapter Three, I used memoirs and autobiographies written by mid-twentieth century country music singers to help inform my understanding of Appalachian music’s transformation into commercial country music. Physical copies of these sources were used when available. Electronic versions of textual sources were reviewed using the same keyword searches as the literary works.

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<sup>18</sup> Howell and Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources*, 20.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21.

Historical sources were chosen based on several factors. First of all, the source had to provide a description of music, musicians, and/or music-making. The source needed to be contemporary with the literary works. As previously mentioned, some sources were specifically chosen because their contents correlated with events and/or characters in the literary works. Most importantly, the sources needed to be reliable. Howell and Prevenier remark that “the historian’s basic task is to choose reliable sources... and to put them together in ways that provide reliable narratives about the past.”<sup>20</sup> I also used reliable, scholarly secondary sources to inform my research and my arguments, including Henry Shapiro’s *Appalachia on Our Mind*, Barry Mazor’s *Ralph Peer and the Making of Popular Roots Music*, and *The Bristol Sessions: Writings about the Big Bang of Country Music*, edited by Ted Olson and Charles Wolfe.

In Chapter Four, I analyze Mildred Haun’s and Lee Smith’s personal and research backgrounds. To inform this chapter, I relied upon previous interviews with and articles about Smith and biographical articles about Haun. The introduction to *The Hawk’s Done Gone and Other Stories*, written by the book’s editor Herschel Gower, also provided background information about Haun. Most interviews and articles were published in literary journals and magazines, specifically regionally-focused publications like *Appalachian Journal* and *Appalachian Heritage*. I also conducted a brief interview via e-mail with scholar Carmen Rueda, whose research has focused on several of Smith’s works, including *The Devil’s Dream*. In this interview, Rueda discussed Smith’s use of music in her novels and the accuracy of her portrayal of traditional and commercial Appalachian music.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Howell and Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources*, 2.

<sup>21</sup> The East Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board determined that this interview did not meet the definition of research involving human subjects and as such, declared this research exempt from IRB approval.



The main limitation of this study is the lack of early primary source material (pre-WWII in particular) written by residents of Appalachia. Until this time, and even later in many instances, most nonfiction accounts of Appalachia were written by visitors to the area such as sociologists, anthropologists, missionaries, and educators. These outsider accounts may lend a certain bias to the historical accounts of Appalachia thanks to prominent stereotypes at the time. In an essay on teaching Appalachian literature included in *Appalachia Inside Out: Culture and Custom*, Fred Waage affirms this statement. He writes of the importance of considering an author's "outsider" or "insider" status to the region, even noting that insiders to the region may automatically assume another insider's writings are more trustworthy.<sup>22</sup> Howell and Prevenier also caution researchers to determine the intentions of the writer when using primary documents such as diaries or memoirs. Although they can offer insights into a certain culture and time period, researchers must remember that personal writings might only reflect the perceptions of those who wrote them.<sup>23</sup> In order to offset bias, I reviewed a wide range of primary and secondary sources and included both primary sources written by both outsiders and residents of the region. I also used recent secondary sources that provide a more balanced and critical view of Appalachian history and culture.

### Definitions

In this section, I will seek to define the terms "Appalachian," "traditional music," "commercial music," and "Appalachian music," each of which are used numerous times throughout this thesis. Since the thesis is concerned with the music of a certain region, I will define the region first. The Appalachian Regional Commission has a very specific definition of

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<sup>22</sup> Fred Waage, "Teaching Environmental Literature in Southern Appalachia," in *Appalachia Inside Out: Culture and Custom*, eds. Robert J. Higgs, et. al. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 676.

<sup>23</sup> Howell and Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources*, 21.

Appalachia that includes over 400 counties in thirteen states stretching from New York to Mississippi.<sup>24</sup> However, for the purposes of this thesis, I will instead refer to what John C. Campbell termed the “Southern Highlands” in his *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland*. Campbell’s definition covers a smaller area and includes the mountainous parts of Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama, and the entirety of West Virginia.<sup>25</sup> Most specifically, my study will almost always refer to the mountainous areas of Tennessee, Virginia, and North Carolina since those are the areas most often included in the works of Haun and Smith.

The music I refer will this be the music created in and associated with this region. I will refer to two separate types of music: traditional and commercial. Ronald D. Cohen provides five characteristics of traditional music, stating that

(1) its origins can perhaps be located in a particular culture or region; (2) authorship has historically been unknown, although authors did emerge over the past two centuries; (3) it has traditionally been performed by nonprofessionals, perhaps playing acoustic instruments; (4) its composition has been fairly simple, with perhaps little complexity so that it can be performed and shared communally; and (5) the songs have historically been passed down through oral transmission.<sup>26</sup>

Ethnomusicologist Kip Lornell provided a similar definition in his book *Exploring American Folk Music: Ethnic, Grassroots, and Regional Traditions in the United States*. Lornell used the terms “folk music” and “traditional music” interchangeably. He wrote that folk music had six characteristics:

Folk music varies greatly over space but relatively little over time. Folk music emanates from a specific, identifiable community, such as coal miners, Louisiana Cajuns, or Native Americans. The authorship or origins of folk songs and tunes are generally unknown.

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<sup>24</sup> Grace Toney Edwards, et. al., eds., *A Handbook to Appalachia: An Introduction to the Region* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), xiv.

<sup>25</sup> John C. Campbell, *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1921), 10-11.

<sup>26</sup> Ronald D. Cohen, *Folk Music: The Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1-2.

Folk songs are usually disseminated by word-of-mouth, aurally, or through informal apprenticeships within a community. Folk music is most often performed by nonprofessionals. Short forms and predictable patterns are fundamental for folk music.<sup>27</sup>

When referring to traditional music, this thesis will rely on these two definitions of the term. The term “traditional music” will be used most often when discussing the time period prior to the mid-1920s, although some music created and performed after that date was of a traditional nature. In contrast, the term “commercial music” will be used to refer to music made specifically for release to the public, particularly when recorded and sold. Although many of the same songs and playing styles can be found in both traditional and commercial music, the intent behind the music’s creation differs. Bill Malone supports this distinction between the two types of music, writing that the distance between them was especially evident in the late 1920s.<sup>28</sup>

The term “Appalachian music” is somewhat tricky to define, because though the region is defined by many similar geographic and cultural traits, it is not homogeneous. As shown through the use of the terms “traditional” and “commercial,” the region’s music has also changed over the years. In his essay “Music,” Bill Malone offers a definition of the “Appalachian music” that reflects the reality of the culture. He writes that “there is no such thing as ‘Appalachian music.’ There are instead a wide variety of instrumental and vocal styles made by Appalachian musicians... all of which have exhibited the eclectic and steadily evolving nature of life in the mountains.”<sup>29</sup> Malone notes that Appalachian music includes, but is not limited to, Anglo-Saxon ballads and songs, the commercialized “hillbilly music” of the 1920s and 1930s, African American blues, religious music, and adaptations of popular music. Appalachian music is any

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<sup>27</sup> Kip Lornell, *Exploring American Folk Music: Ethnic, Grassroots, and Regional Traditions in the United States* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 13-15.

<sup>28</sup> Malone, “Music,” 119.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

music made by those currently living within the region or who have lived there in the past.<sup>30</sup> This thesis will seek to explore several of these musical styles, including those represented by Smith and Haun and those not included in the fictional works.

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<sup>30</sup> Malone, "Music," 117-9, 131.

## CHAPTER 2

### HISTORICAL AND FICTIONAL REPRESENTATIONS OF APPALACHIAN MUSIC, NINETEENTH CENTURY THROUGH 1920s

Although exploration and settlement of Appalachia began several centuries prior to the publication of Will Wallace Harney's "A Strange Land and Peculiar People" in *Lippincott's Magazine* in 1873, Harney's article was one of the first publications to draw national attention to the region. Henry Shapiro asserts that Harney "discovered" Appalachia by becoming the first person to gain public attention for contrasting life within the region with life elsewhere in America.<sup>31</sup> Harney's article relies more on colorful descriptions of the residents of the areas in Kentucky and Tennessee he traveled through than it does on actual truth, describing the residents' "marked peculiarities of the anatomical frame," as well as their "quaint speech and patient poverty."<sup>32</sup> Harney also offers one of the earliest descriptions of music in Appalachia, relating a story he had heard about an act of revenge during the Civil War. Prior to an attack from Federal soldiers, a large group of Confederates "had gathered in [a] house at a country-side frolic, and the fiddle sang deep in the night."<sup>33</sup> Although this is only a passing mention of music-making, it still sets the stage for images that would become almost stereotypical in the years to come.

In general, most other primary sources dating from shortly after the Civil War until the late 1920s depict similar images of Appalachian music, albeit more thoroughly. Fiddle music figures prominently in descriptions offered by early Appalachian scholars John C. Campbell and

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<sup>31</sup> Henry Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 3-4.

<sup>32</sup> Will Wallace Harney, "A Strange Land and a Peculiar People," in *Appalachian Images in Folk and Popular Culture*, ed. W.K. McNeil (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1995), 431.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 436.

Horace Kephart. Campbell, in his *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland*, writes of evening get-togethers after events such as stir-offs or corn-huskings, where young people would meet to dance and socialize. A “real old-time fiddler” can often be found at these events, where “the cheerful scrape of his bow sets the feet involuntarily a-moving.”<sup>34</sup> Kephart concurs, writing in his *Our Southern Highlanders* that “the country dance is the chief amusement of young and old.”<sup>35</sup> As Kephart relates, fiddle and banjo music accompany the dancing, and tunes such as “Shady Grove,” “Gamblin’ Man,” and “Sourwood Mountain” are favorites.<sup>36</sup> Samuel Johnson, a resident of eastern Kentucky in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, states in his “Life in the Kentucky Mountains: By a Mountaineer” that his favorite pastime was playing the banjo at parties and dances. As a young man, he so perfected his skill on the instrument that he “was sent for far and near to make music for school exhibitions and all sorts of entertainments throughout the county.”<sup>37</sup> In these accounts, music made by fiddles and banjos seems to occur mainly during social events and reflect feelings of happiness and enjoyment.

The first mention of music in Lee Smith’s *Oral History*, the decades-long saga of the Cantrell family in southwest Virginia, takes place at a cabin-raising, or as the chapter’s narrator calls it, a “working.”<sup>38</sup> After the day’s work is done, “old Joe Johnson takes out his fiddle” to kick off a dance for the young people in attendance.<sup>39</sup> He plays tunes such as “Shady Grove” and “Cumberland Gap,” songs also mentioned by historical writers. In Kephart’s account of a

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<sup>34</sup> Campbell, *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland*, 143.

<sup>35</sup> Horace Kephart, *Our Southern Highlanders* (New York: Outing Publishing Company, 1916), 263.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 264

<sup>37</sup> Samuel Johnson, “Life in the Kentucky Mountains: By a Mountaineer,” in *Appalachian Images in Folk and Popular Culture*, ed. W.K. McNeil (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1995), 178-79.

<sup>38</sup> Lee Smith, *Oral History* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1983), 37.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-39.

mountain bear hunting trip, “Cumberland Gap” is sung by a hunter named John while the men are relaxing the night before the hunt.<sup>40</sup> In Smith’s book, as in the historical accounts mentioned above, the “working” is depicted as one of the few social events available for the people living in the rural mountainous areas and one of the most popular times for young men and women to begin courting. The chapter’s narrator, local midwife and granny woman Granny Younger, describes how she had encouraged Almarine Cantrell to begin courting after he returned home to Hoot Owl Holler. One of Almarine’s first courting experiences is at the working, where he meets Nancy Wiley. The two begin to get to know each other while dancing to Joe Johnson’s fiddling, and Granny Younger remembers watching as “Almarine and Nancy Wiley went around and around with their faces giving back the light of the fire and him so tall, and her so little and dark.”<sup>41</sup> The fiddling here helps bring Almarine and Nancy together, and although Almarine does not marry Nancy, his courting experiences at the working allow him to learn more about the process of finding a woman to marry.

Fiddle music also features prominently in Smith’s *The Devil’s Dream*, another southwest Virginia family saga that covers the better part of two centuries. At the beginning of the novel, readers learn the story of Kate Malone, a musically-inclined woman who has the misfortune to marry a strict, religious man in the mid-nineteenth century. Almost every member of Kate’s family plays the fiddle. They are known to play for dances, parties, and frolics and would “run a set at the drop of a hat.” However, her husband, Moses Bailey, forbids Kate’s father to play the fiddle at their wedding and later tells his son Jeremiah that “The fiddle is a instrument of the Devil, and iffen you ever take it up you will have to leave home.”<sup>42</sup> When he learns that his wife

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<sup>40</sup> Kephart, *Our Southern Highlanders*, 82.

<sup>41</sup> Smith, *Oral History*, 37-39.

has been playing the fiddle and teaching their children to play and sing during his absences from home, he becomes enraged and beats the entire family. The chapter's narrator, Ira Keen, who lived near the Bailey family at this time, remembers that Moses became obsessed with becoming a preacher in order to be more like his father, who was also a preacher. Moses's father, Sid Bailey, "was a hard man, and it was a hard doctrine that he preached."<sup>43</sup> Sid believes that Christians shouldn't drink liquor, work on Sundays, dance, or play the fiddle, among other things. Ira says that after Sid has died, Moses spends most of his time praying and attempting to connect with God, trying to get a "sign" that he could be a preacher like Sid. This obsession with religion, and his upbringing in his father's strict church, is perhaps the reason he believes "that fiddle music [is] the voice of the Devil laughing."<sup>44</sup>

Historical support for Kate Malone's troubles and Sid Bailey's teachings against the fiddle and dancing can be found in Emma Bell Miles' *The Spirit of the Mountains*, published in 1905. Miles was born in 1879 and spent much of her youth in Walden's Ridge, a mountainous community near Chattanooga, Tennessee.<sup>45</sup> In discussing the religion of Appalachia, Miles remarks on church policies that may sound strange to outsiders. Included in her list is the prohibition of instrumental music for church members. Miles rationalizes this ban by referring to preachers' love of simplicity and old-time ways.<sup>46</sup> Late nineteenth century educator William Goodell Frost, a president of Kentucky's Berea College, also indicates in his "Our Contemporary Ancestors in the Southern Mountains" that many mountain people believed that most non-

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<sup>42</sup> Lee Smith, *The Devil's Dream* (New York: Ballantine, 1992), 23, 27.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 18, 22-23.

<sup>45</sup> Ballard and Hudson, *Listen Here*, 445.

<sup>46</sup> Emma Bell Miles, *The Spirit of the Mountains* (New York: James Pott and Company, 1905), 145.



religious music was “wicked.”<sup>47</sup> A description of religious music found later in Miles’ work notes that appropriate music for the church included emotional songs with a serious theme. The focus was on the song’s lyrical content and the feelings it provided those who sang and listened to it, as opposed to a social or entertainment value.<sup>48</sup> This concept is reflected in Moses’ anger at Kate’s performance of fiddle tunes. The songs she sings and plays are cheerful and often humorous, meant for entertaining a crowd. In a discussion of North Carolina fiddler Samantha Biddix Bumgarner, Robert Hunt Ferguson notes that Bumgarner’s father did not want her to play the fiddle because its use as part of social gatherings and for entertainment meant that it often “was associated with drinking, carousing, and general amoral activity.” As such, it was referred to as “the devil’s box.”<sup>49</sup> Folklorist Alan Jabbour concurs with this assessment, writing that many legends throughout the American South connect the fiddle with the devil, “and its association with the devil has perhaps prevented its adoption for religious services.”<sup>50</sup> Characters in both *Oral History* and *The Devil’s Dream*, as well as historical Appalachian residents remembered by scholars like Kephart, saw the fiddle as something that could bring joy, not necessarily as an instrument of religious expression.

Religious music could also be encountered at funerals in Appalachia. In *Oral History*, Smith’s narrators depict a typical mountain funeral at the turn of the twentieth century. In this particular funeral, the circuit rider has finally made his way to Hoot Owl Holler to preach the

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<sup>47</sup> William Goodell Frost, “Our Contemporary Ancestors in the Southern Mountains,” in *Appalachian Images in Folk and Popular Culture*, ed. W.K. McNeil (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1995), 100.

<sup>48</sup> Miles, *The Spirit of the Mountains*, 149-153.

<sup>49</sup> Robert Hunt Ferguson, “Samantha Biddix Bumgarner: Country Music Pioneer,” in *North Carolina Women: Their Lives and Times*, ed. Michelle Gillespie and Sally G. McMillen (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2014), 386.

<sup>50</sup> Alan Jabbour, “Fiddle Music,” in *American Folklore: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Jan Harold Brunvand (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 256.

funerals of several Cantrell family members who have been dead for two or more years: Almarine's mother Nan, his wife Pricey Jane, and his son Eli, as well as Granny Younger, whom Almarine has allowed to be buried in his family's cemetery. James K. Crissman refers to this practice as "funeralizing" and notes that it "entailed burying the dead immediately and holding the funeral service at a more convenient time." Crissman remarks that poor roads, bad weather, and lack of convenience for farming families all contributed to holding funerals long after a person had died.<sup>51</sup> Interestingly, although the funeral service includes preaching, the gathering in Smith's novel serves as a social event for the attendees. Children play games, some of the men sneak off to play cards, and the women pass around babies and discuss their families. Smith's narrator states that "you have to come to a funeral but you don't have to listen too close, it ain't expected, it ain't like meeting. These folks have been dead a while."<sup>52</sup> According to Crissman, funeralizing allowed funerals to be leisurely events, rather than hurried and mournful.<sup>53</sup> As the preaching ends at the Cantrell funeral, attendees begin singing: "Bright morning stars are rising, bright morning stars are rising, bright morning stars are rising, day is breaking in my soul."<sup>54</sup> However, the music, like the rest of the service, serves as a background to the social activities conducted by most of the funeral attendees. Smith intersperses the repetitive verses of the song with observations of the funeral attendees leaving the service, children continuing their games, and men and women talking amongst themselves.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> James K. Crissman, *Death and Dying in Central Appalachia: Changing Attitudes and Practices* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 148.

<sup>52</sup> Smith, *Oral History*, 92.

<sup>53</sup> Crissman, *Death and Dying in Central Appalachia*, 148.

<sup>54</sup> Smith, *Oral History*, 92-93. For more on mountain funerals, see Campbell, p. 147-49. Smith's fictional funeral service in *Oral History* matches Campbell's description almost exactly.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-94.

This song, “Bright Morning Stars,” is used as an example of a typical Appalachian spiritual by Rich Kirby in a 1976 issue of *Southern Exposure*. Kirby particularly points to the repetition within its verses as characteristic of Appalachian religious music.<sup>56</sup> John C. Campbell made the same observation in the 1910s, remarking in his *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland* that the people of Appalachia particularly seemed to enjoy religious songs “having a chorus, or much repetition.”<sup>57</sup> Emma Bell Miles also points out the repetition in religious songs, although she has a somewhat negative view of this musical characteristic. Miles compares the mountaineers’ love of repetition, which she terms “wearisome,” to the use of drums by native populations to “incit[e] their savage minds to frenzy.”<sup>58</sup> Although Smith does not describe the funeral service in such frantic terms, she does mention that some attendees get caught up in the singing, leading to crying, shouting, and praying out loud.<sup>59</sup>

Smith’s description of the funeral singing in *Oral History* also highlights another characteristic of Appalachian music. In the novel, Luther Wade begins the song, and other characters slowly join in with him. However, although “Rose and Luella sing rings in and out of his voice,” the group has not practiced this song and certain singers are not assigned lead or harmony parts.<sup>60</sup> Several historical writers note the absence of part singing, a standard characteristic in almost all forms of popular and religious music, in the Appalachian music of the time. Kephart says that everyone “sing[s] in a jerky treble,” and ballad collector Howard Brockaway concurs, noting that it was sometimes difficult for him and song collecting

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<sup>56</sup> Rich Kirby, “And We’ll All Sing Together,” *Southern Exposure* 4, no. 3 (1976): 7.

<sup>57</sup> Campbell, *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland*, 183-84.

<sup>58</sup> Miles, *The Spirit of the Mountains*, 150.

<sup>59</sup> Smith, *Oral History*, 93-94.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

companion Lorraine Wyman to note melodies in their transcriptions.<sup>61</sup> However, other scholars state that part singing did exist in Appalachia, perhaps thanks to the use of shape-note singing in community singing schools beginning in the mid-eighteenth century in the northeast and spreading to many areas of Appalachia during the nineteenth century. Shaped notes were a type of musical notation in which certain shapes stood for musical notes. This style of singing targeted people who could not read music and previously did not know how to sing in parts. Shape-note singing focused on a four-part harmony.<sup>62</sup>

Mildred Haun actually references part singing in one of her short stories. In “Shin-Bone Rocks,” Shorty Fuller compliments Neppie Arwood on her singing. After attending the Rocky Point church for the first time, Shorty decides he likes Neppie and accompanies the preacher to her family’s home for dinner. After dinner, Shorty tells her, “I heard you singing alto plumb across the aisle this morning.”<sup>63</sup> Though there is not a specific mention of shape-note singing, the members of Haun’s Rocky Point church obviously embrace it or another more modern form of singing. In *The Sound of the Dove: Singing in Appalachian Primitive Baptist Churches*, Beverly Bush Patterson provides one explanation for the differences portrayed in Smith’s and Haun’s works and in historical scholarship. She remarks that religious singing styles in Appalachia historically have depended on the preferences of individual church congregations. For example, Patterson references one church where members do not sing parts because they view that style of

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<sup>61</sup> Howard Brockaway, “The Quest of the Lonesome Tunes,” *The Art World* 2, no. 3 (June 1917): 229.

<sup>62</sup> Deborah Thompson and Irene Moser, “Appalachian Folklife,” in *A Handbook to Appalachia: An Introduction to the Region*, ed. Grace Toney Edwards, et. al. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 152; Jeff Todd Titon, “‘Tuned Up with the Grace of God’: Music and Experience among Old Regular Baptists,” in *Music in American Religious Experience*, ed. Philip V. Bohlman, et. al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 321; Crissman, *Death and Dying in Appalachia*, 158.

<sup>63</sup> Mildred Haun, “Shin-Bone Rocks,” in *The Hawk’s Done Gone and Other Stories*, ed. Herschel Gower (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968), 210.

singing as worldly and as Christians, they try to be separate from the world. In another, however, members sing parts because it is easier for them.<sup>64</sup>

As in the case of Brockaway and Wyman, much of the interest in Appalachian music in the years around the turn of the twentieth century focused on the collection of songs thought to be remnants of the region's residents' British heritage, which is perhaps another reason the presence of part-singing is not mentioned in many historical texts. Ballad collectors, as they were known, were frequent visitors to the mountains, particularly in the first few decades of the twentieth century. These men and women, often from northern states or as far away as England, visited homes and community gathering places throughout Appalachia in order to trace the path of centuries-old English songs. They believed that, in part thanks to the perceived isolation of Appalachia's rural communities and lack of modernizing influences within the region, versions of traditional ballads had survived there even though they were for the most part long forgotten in their native country. One of the most well-known ballad collectors was Cecil Sharp, who along with his assistant Maud Karpeles and other partners like John C. Campbell's wife Olive Dame Campbell, collected hundreds of songs throughout Appalachia in the 1910s and 1920s. Sharp and Campbell published 325 of them in 1917 in a book entitled *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians*. In the book, Sharp notes that many of the songs are direct descendants of English ballads previously collected by Professor Francis Child, although others had never been recorded in a scholarly collection and thus were new songs created in the English folk song tradition.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Beverly Bush Patterson, *The Sound of the Dove: Singing in Appalachian Primitive Baptist Churches* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 50.

<sup>65</sup> Olive Dame Campbell and Cecil J. Sharp, *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1917), viii-xiv.

Ballads such as these are frequently mentioned in historical sources when authors refer to Appalachian music of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. John C. Campbell notes that English ballads have been preserved in the most remote areas of Appalachia, where many have been modified over time to suit life in the region. However, he does note that some have survived almost intact when compared to the English and Scottish ballads collected by Child.<sup>66</sup> He uses the ballad “Pretty Polly” as an example, in which the English version refers to the song’s villain as a “mansworn man” and the Appalachian version calls him “a rebel” in reference to the Civil War.<sup>67</sup> Emma Bell Miles also provides examples of ballads updated to reflect the song’s new Appalachian surroundings, such as “Chester town being substituted for London town, and the like.”<sup>68</sup> Howard Brockaway, in contrast, remarks upon the strangeness of hearing people thousands of miles removed from England sing songs that reference “lords and ladies ... castles and moats ... steeds and knights.”<sup>69</sup> Brockaway also notes the collection of the song “Pretty Polly,” although unlike Campbell, the version he heard shares the same lyrics with its English counterpart.<sup>70</sup>

Although the prevalence of ballad collecting and the singing of old English songs is present in almost every historical source I consulted from this time period, Smith and Haun make only passing mentions to ballads in their works. Ted Olson, in *Blue Ridge Folklife*, provides a possible explanation. According to Olson, Cecil Sharp and those who worked with him were preoccupied with proving that historical English culture had survived almost intact over

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<sup>66</sup> Campbell, *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland*, 146-47.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>68</sup> Miles, *The Spirit of the Mountains*, 163.

<sup>69</sup> Brockaway, “The Quest of the Lonesome Tunes,” 227.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

hundreds of years in Appalachia. In doing so, they neglected to include in their collection songs descended from other cultures, songs original to the region, and versions of popular songs they heard.<sup>71</sup> In his book *Appalachian Folkways*, John B. Rehder remarks that between 1916 and 1918, Sharp and Karpeles “listened to 281 singers and obtained 1,612 variations of tunes that represented 500 different songs.”<sup>72</sup> However, Sharp’s insistence on collecting only Anglo-Saxon songs meant that he neglected a huge swath of the region’s music traditions. In fact, Rehder writes that “had he sought all songs sung in the mountains, he could perhaps have added hundreds more to the collection.”<sup>73</sup>

With that being said, the two authors do include brief references to ballads, if not ballad collectors. Haun, who actually collected ballads herself around her eastern Tennessee home, refers to several ballads also collected by Sharp. In Haun’s short story “The Look,” the female narrator remembers how her cousin Howard used to ask her to play dulcimer and sing

Come rede us, fathers, come rede us, mothers  
Come riddle us two in one  
Say, shall I marry fair Eleandor,  
Or bring the brown girl home?<sup>74</sup>

These lyrics bear a close resemblance to a version of “Lord Thomas and Fair Ellinor” collected by Sharp in Rabun County, Georgia in 1909:

O mother, o mother, go roll a song  
Go roll a song as one,  
Which had you’d rather, I’d married fair Ellen,  
Or bring the brown girl home, home?<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Ted Olson, *Blue Ridge Folklife* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 85-86.

<sup>72</sup> John B. Rehder, *Appalachian Folkways* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 246.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Mildred Haun, “The Look,” in *The Hawk’s Done Gone and Other Stories*, ed. Herschel Gower (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968), 317.

<sup>75</sup> Campbell and Sharp, *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians*, 56.

Haun's character uses this song to draw a comparison between herself, a darker-skinned girl, and Howard's potential love interest, who has blond hair.<sup>76</sup> This song is also another example of ballad lyrics varying over geographical location. Although the general theme of the song in Haun's short story is the same as the song collected by Sharp, several differences do exist. For example, in Sharp's version, the girl is called "Ellen" in the lyrics and "Ellinor" in the title, while Haun's narrator refers to the girl as "Eleandor." John Rehder notes that the aural nature of folk and traditional music makes its transmission somewhat "like the party game 'gossip' in which a story... is whispered from person to person. By the time the story reaches the last person in line, it has changed so much that everyone laughs."<sup>77</sup> After aurally passing from person to person over generations, the existence of lyrical variations of a song is expected.

In Smith's *The Devil's Dream*, one of the few mentions of a ballad comes in the novel's introduction, when an outside observer hears country music star Katie Cocker describing the songs that will be on a new collection of music associated with her family, the Baileys. Katie says that one song, "White Linen," is "an old ballad that came into the family when [her] granddaddy Durwood Bailey married Tampa Rainette in 1910," while "The Cuckoo Song" is also a ballad her family has performed.<sup>78</sup> Throughout the novel, "White Linen" in particular is associated with the women singers in the family and is sang by several generations of Baileys. Shortly after Durwood marries Tampa in the early 1920s, she sings "White Linen" to the other members of the family in an effort to show off her vocal talents. Later on, once some of the younger women in the family, including Katie, begin to pursue careers in commercial country music, they sing some of the old ballads like "White Linen" in an effort to stay connected with

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<sup>76</sup> Haun, "The Look," 317.

<sup>77</sup> Rehder, *Appalachian Folkways*, 245.

<sup>78</sup> Smith, *The Devil's Dream*, 13.



their traditional roots. Near the end of the book, once Katie has almost completely moved away from her family's traditions by becoming a successful commercial country music singer, she is inspired to release a traditional album when she sees her aunt Virgie, Tampa's daughter, singing the song with folk revivalists on public television.<sup>79</sup> This connection of women with ballads can be found throughout historical sources, including Sharp, whose most frequent contributors were women.<sup>80</sup> Eastern Kentucky scholar Josiah Combs notes in his *The Kentucky Highlanders from a Native Mountaineer's Viewpoint*, that, in general, women both sang and composed ballads more often than men.<sup>81</sup> Geographer Ellen Churchill Semple made the same observation, remarking upon the outstanding memories possessed by these women.<sup>82</sup>

Although women were lauded by both native and outside scholars for their knowledge of ballads and other songs, women often did not fare well as the subjects of mountain music. In Haun's short story "The Picture Frame," the narrator's mother sings,

Now girls beware of my sad fate  
And do not be so rash.  
Just leave alone those gents who wear  
A little black mustache

as a subconscious slight to mustache-wearing houseguest Lep Callis, whom she dislikes.<sup>83</sup> Little Luther Wade, one of Smith's narrators in *Oral History*, writes a song about Dory, a girl he loves who has been slighted by another man. In the song, "Darlin' Dory stands by the cabin door, A-

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<sup>79</sup> Smith, *The Devil's Dream*, 111, 246, 299.

<sup>80</sup> Campbell and Sharp, *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians*, xi.

<sup>81</sup> Josiah Combs, *The Kentucky Highlanders from a Native Mountaineer's Viewpoint* (Lexington, KY: J.L. Richardson & Co., 1913), 32.

<sup>82</sup> Ellen Churchill Semple, "The Anglo-Saxons of the Kentucky Mountains: A Study in Anthropogeography," *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society* 42, no. 8 (1910): 594.

<sup>83</sup> Mildred Haun, "The Picture Frame," in *The Hawk's Done Gone and Other Stories*, ed. Herschel Gower (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968), 282.

pinin' for her city man.”<sup>84</sup> In each of these songs, women have fallen prey to men who treated them badly. John C. Campbell uses songs such as these (he uses “Come All You Young and Handsome Girls,” which warns against a false lover, as an example) to emphasize the differences in social expectations for men and women in early twentieth century Appalachia. At the time, he says, although there were few social activities available for either sex, men were allowed more freedom to pursue activities of which religious groups might disapprove, such as drinking, shooting, and courting numerous women. This double standard logically led to songs in which women would caution others about heartless men.<sup>85</sup>

Nonetheless, some happy and humorous songs did exist. Near the beginning of *Oral History*, Pricey Jane Cantrell, a narrator from the turn of the twentieth century, thinks about love songs she has heard while missing her husband Almarine. Though in some, the woman meets an awful fate, in others “love was described as a game, with dosey-do and curtsy and funny responses.”<sup>86</sup> William Haney describes a similar type of song in *The Mountain People of Kentucky*. In a section describing social customs, Haney writes of both dances and parties in which young couples would engage in games accompanied by cheerful fiddle tunes and songs about love.<sup>87</sup> Emma Bell Miles also writes of these musical games, which she refers to as “half dance, half romping child-play.”<sup>88</sup> According to Miles, these games, which were open to young men and women, were some of the few times Appalachian music mentions love.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Smith, *Oral History*, 172.

<sup>85</sup> Campbell, *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland*, 131.

<sup>86</sup> Smith, *Oral History*, 68.

<sup>87</sup> William Haney, *The Mountain People of Kentucky* (Cincinnati: The Robert Clarke Co., 1906), 52-53.

<sup>88</sup> Miles, *The Spirit of the Mountains*, 159.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

Miles also discusses Appalachian musicians' penchants for coming up with funny songs, often filled with jokes about their own living conditions, references to a love of drinking whiskey, and the singer's success with women.<sup>90</sup> Josiah Combs (referencing the work of Professor A. G. Shearin) writes that songs of this nature were often improvisational and were sung either to provide a break from daily monotony or to ponder through life's essential questions.<sup>91</sup> *Oral History's* Little Luther Wade is a fan of humorous, improvisational songs, leading a group of men at a hog killing in singing several sexually suggestive songs, including one about schoolteacher-turned-prostitute Lulu. In this case, the songs serve to pass the time while taking care of the rote, somewhat boring tasks involved in slaughtering a hog.<sup>92</sup>

Although traditional music was the most prominent form of music played and created in Appalachia during this time period, the outside modern world did make appearances in the region from time to time and with growing frequency as time passed. In her humorous short story "Dave Cocks' Motion," Haun relates the tale of a church congregation almost half a century after the Civil War that splits along Yankee/Rebel lines over the purchase of a piano to replace the organ, which dates from before the war. Abel Sneed, whose family members were Yankees during the Civil War, makes a motion to replace the decades-old organ with a piano, mostly because his daughter is learning how to play the piano. He dislikes the fact that Malissie Hayworth, whose family sided with the Confederates, plays the organ in church. After Dave Cocks, whose family members were also Confederates, makes a motion to keep the organ, the church splits along political lines.<sup>93</sup> Neither instrument is commonly associated with Appalachia,

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<sup>90</sup> Miles, *The Spirit of the Mountains*, 148-149.

<sup>91</sup> Combs, *The Kentucky Highlanders*, 33.

<sup>92</sup> Smith, *Oral History*, 195-97

even in regard to religious music. However, amongst the numerous descriptions of fiddles and ballads, a few historical sources do record the use of organs and pianos for religious music. One example can be found in William Haney's work, in his description of a "social," an activity open to "the most refined young people of the community."<sup>94</sup> Unlike the frolics and dances held after community work events that are detailed at the beginning of this chapter, socials were more sedate affairs at which young men and women could enjoy refreshments and sing religious songs accompanied by music played on an organ.<sup>95</sup> Another source that describes the use of pianos and organs in Appalachia is Rhoda Bailey Warren's memoir of growing up in Letcher County, Kentucky, in the 1930s. Warren remembers visiting a new neighbor in the coal camp in which she lived and seeing a parlor organ for the first time. Upon Warren's request, Becky, the neighbor, plays the organ while singing the popular ballad "Pretty Polly."<sup>96</sup> These events and Haun's description of the music played at her fictional Sarananny District church reflect the outside influence that was already reaching into Appalachia even as outsiders proclaimed that it was an isolated, backwards region with no connection to mainstream America. Warren's account in particular provides an interesting combination of the older musical traditions with more modern practices.

The music detailed in this chapter can be viewed as characteristic of Appalachia prior to the late 1920s and even afterward in some instances. In 1927, one of the most seminal recording sessions in history took place in Bristol, Tennessee, helping to launch the careers of early

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<sup>93</sup> Mildred Haun, "Dave Cockey's Motion," in *The Hawk's Done Gone and Other Stories*, ed. Herschel Gower (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968), 343-44.

<sup>94</sup> Haney, *The Mountain People of Kentucky*, 54.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> Rhoda Bailey Warren, *Appalachian Mountain Girl: Coming of Age in a Coal Camp in Kentucky* (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1998), 73-74.

country music artists such as The Carter Family. With those recordings, Appalachia was plunged even further into the modern era and commercial music became known to a much larger percentage of the region's residents. The Bristol Sessions are an important turning point in Smith's *The Devil's Dream*, as well, and as such, much of the discussion in Chapter Three will be centered around its events and corresponding historical sources.

## CHAPTER 3

### HISTORICAL AND FICTIONAL REPRESENTATIONS OF APPALACHIAN MUSIC, 1920s THROUGH C. 1980

Through the last several decades of the nineteenth century and the first three of the twentieth century, most forms of Appalachian music maintained a traditional status, played homes, at community gatherings, and sometimes for outside journalists and scholars. Music was usually passed down aurally and the main purpose of performing was often for entertainment of family or a local audience. However, in the 1920s, several new innovations helped bring traditional forms of Appalachian music to a wider audience and, in doing so, helped transform those forms into an extremely successful form of commercial music. Throughout the twentieth century, traditional Appalachian music, in the form of commercialized country and bluegrass music, continued transforming, spreading across the country, and eventually, returning to its roots.

One of the earliest methods to bring the sounds of traditional music to a wider audience was through the radio. In the 1920s, several radio stations (perhaps most famously Chicago's WLS and Nashville's WSM) began broadcasting weekly radio shows featuring traditional-style music such as fiddling and banjo playing, as well as country and rural-themed comedy. The signals from these radio stations could reach hundreds of miles from their home bases, so even though the stations were not located in Appalachia, listeners within the region could still easily hear music that sounded somewhat like home. Even before rural electrification took place, some families and businesses owned battery-powered radios. Perhaps the most popular program for listeners to gather around a radio and listen to was WSM's Grand Ole Opry, which was broadcast on Saturday nights beginning in 1925. Appalachia native Irene Flowers, in Jacob J.

Podber's oral history collection *The Electric Front Porch*, recalls her entire family's dedicating Saturday nights to the Opry. According to Flowers, "Saturday night was the only time we listened to radio. Daddy never went anywhere on Saturday. We had a Model-A Ford and he would take the battery out... and hook it up to the radio so he could hear the Grand Ole Opry."<sup>97</sup> In this way, radio shows such as the Grand Ole Opry became important cultural touchstones for Appalachian people living in the 1920s and 1930s.

Lee Smith describes a similar scene in her *The Devil's Dream*. In the novel's second section, which focuses on the Bailey family's musical transitions from traditional to commercial music, young Alice Bailey relates an evening spent at the top of the mountain with her extended family listening to a broadcast of the Grand Ole Opry. Alice's uncle R.C. Bailey "had the first radio in that part of the county," and like Irene Flowers' father, "he had it rigged up to run off a car battery."<sup>98</sup> In the passage from the novel, Alice recalls listening to early country musicians and comedians such as Sam and Kirk McGee and Uncle Dave Macon, and she remarks on how the music she has heard on the radio helped her feel like she is a part of her musical family. She says that "I felt like I was a part of my family too, and a part of that music they loved so. See, they always left us behind when they went off someplace to sing. I didn't hardly know Mamma at all."<sup>99</sup> Alice's mother, older sister, aunt, uncle, and occasionally her father perform as a musical group, traveling throughout southwest Virginia to perform at various events. Because Alice is a child, she is not allowed to accompany the adults, including her mother, Tampa Rainette, when they go to perform. By gathering together with them to listen to the music on the

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<sup>97</sup> Jacob J. Podber, *The Electronic Front Porch: An Oral History of the Arrival of Modern Media in Rural Appalachia and the Melungeon Community* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007), 75.

<sup>98</sup> Smith, *The Devil's Dream*, 113-114.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

radio – much of it very similar to the old ballads, fiddle tunes, and religious songs her family performs – she finally feels as if she is part of the music-making.

Just two years after the debut of the Grand Ole Opry, one of the most important events in the history of both Appalachian music and country music occurred. In late July and early August 1927, Ralph Peer, a representative of the Victor Talking Machine Company, visited Bristol, Tennessee to record musical talent from the region. Two other record companies had found success with “hillbilly” recordings and Victor hoped to follow them. Peer was familiar with the work of several hillbilly musicians who lived in the southwest Virginia area near Bristol, which helped him make his selection of a location.<sup>100</sup> The “Bristol Sessions,” as they came to be known, are an important turning point in the lives of Smith’s Bailey family. In *The Devil’s Dream*, R. C. Bailey takes his wife, sister-in-law, and niece (known as the Grassy Branch Girls) to the sessions from their rural southwest Virginia home. They had previously only performed in surrounding communities at such venues as churches and schoolhouses, and R. C. sees the opportunity to record as something that could prompt careers in music (and steady incomes, as well) for the family members. At the sessions, they meet Peer, record five songs (both original and traditional numbers), and launch a successful recording career. The experiences of R. C. and the Grassy Branch Girls somewhat mirror the experiences of the Carter Family, a group that was perhaps the most successful and influential band to emerge from the Bristol Sessions.

The Carter Family – husband and wife A. P. and Sara and sister-in-law Maybelle – hailed from Maces Springs, Virginia, about thirty miles from Bristol. All three had grown up hearing, singing, and playing the old ballads, folk songs, and instrumental tunes of traditional Appalachian music. Sara and Maybelle both played autoharp and guitar, among other

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<sup>100</sup> Ted Olson, “Introduction,” in *The Bristol Sessions: Writings about the Big Bang of Country Music*, ed. Charles K. Wolfe and Ted Olson (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2005), 2.



instruments, and A. P. could fiddle and often sang with the two women. Once A. P. heard about the recording sessions in Bristol (and the fact that Peer would pay fifty dollars for each song recorded), he was determined to attend. In their 2002 *Will You Miss Me When I'm Gone?: The Carter Family & Their Legacy in American Music*, Mark Zwonitzer and Charles Hirshberg set the scene for the recording session. The three musicians wore their best clothes, with A. P. wearing a dark blue suit and Sara and Maybelle in dresses and silk hose. They went upstairs in an old warehouse, where Peer, his wife, and two recording engineers waited. The Carters stood on a wooden platform and began singing and playing, recording four songs in all on the first day. Sara and Maybelle returned the second day to record two additional songs.<sup>101</sup>

Smith's fictional representation of the sessions matches closely with Zwonitzer and Hirshberg's description of the Carters' experiences. In *The Devil's Dream*, R. C. Bailey waits to enter the building, wearing "a dark blue suit, boiled white shirt, [and] somber tie," and he observes that the building was formerly "a hat factory, then a furniture store."<sup>102</sup> They enter the upstairs studio, meet Mr. Peer and two engineers, sit on a wooden platform, and begin to perform. The Grassy Branch Girls, with the help of R. C. on a few songs, record five songs for Peer, receiving a payment of fifty dollars per song.<sup>103</sup> Smith takes care to mention two aspects of the recording sessions that were particularly important for the Baileys' future. First of all, the fictional version of Peer is excited to learn that R. C. has written several of the songs they plan to record, and the other songs are his own arrangements of traditional songs and hymns. The

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<sup>101</sup> Katie Doman, "Something Old, Something New: The Carter Family's Bristol Sessions Recordings," in *The Bristol Sessions: Writings about the Big Bang of Country Music*, ed. Charles K. Wolfe and Ted Olson (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2005), 67-70; Mark Zwonitzer and Charles Hirshberg, *Will You Miss Me When I'm Gone?: The Carter Family & Their Legacy in American Music* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 78-79, 97-100.

<sup>102</sup> Smith, *The Devil's Dream*, 117.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 120-121.

originality of their music will allow the songs to be copyrighted, which, as Peer explains to R. C., is “the basis of the music business.”<sup>104</sup> Secondly, the engineers demonstrate the new, electric recording equipment to R. C. In contrast to older recording machines, which included a “heavy revolving turntable, covered by an inch of wax... run by a mechanism involving weights and pulleys,” the new Western Electric machine “ensures a far superior product.”<sup>105</sup>

These two features of the Baileys’ Bristol Sessions are taken directly from the real event and perhaps had the most influence on the Carter Family’s eventual success and the changing face of Appalachian music. According to Katie Doman, the Carters’ ability to rework traditional songs, making them fresh for new generations of listeners, helped ensure their success. These revamped songs also, as Smith states in her novel, gave Peer new material to copyright, which would then allow both him and his artists to earn money. Doman writes that the songs recorded by the Carters at the Bristol Sessions were “fresh and appealing” at the time, and are “relevant and even irresistible” for artists today.<sup>106</sup> Part of the enduring appeal comes from the clear sounds created by the new recording equipment. Electronic recording machines and microphones, such as the Western Electric equipment used by Peer in Bristol, were more sensitive than older models, which allowed both vocals and loud string band music to be recorded at a high quality.<sup>107</sup> The new machines were still not perfect. In a 1963 interview with folklorist Ed Kahn, Maybelle Carter remembered that Peer often overlooked mistakes the group made while recording so as not to waste the wax on which music was recorded. According to

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<sup>104</sup> Smith, *The Devil’s Dream*, 122.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>106</sup> Doman, “Something Old, Something New,” 66-67.

<sup>107</sup> Charles K. Wolfe, “The Legend that Peer Built: Reappraising the Bristol Sessions,” in *The Bristol Sessions: Writings about the Big Bang of Country Music*, ed. Charles K. Wolfe and Ted Olson (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2005), 28.

Maybelle, even if she wanted to redo a song on which she made a mistake, Peer would tell her, “Well, that makes them listen that much closer.”<sup>108</sup> Nonetheless, records made in the late 1920s were still of a much better quality than previous recordings, which set the stage for Appalachian music made by the Carters and others to spread across the country and even across the world.

One aspect of the Carters’ success that many scholars historically have overlooked, and that Smith either did not know about or chose not to include in her fictionalized version of the family, was A. P.’s reliance on African-American musician Lesley Riddle as a source of “original” songs. Although A. P. told Peer that most of the songs they recorded were his own compositions, or at least his own arrangements of older songs, he found many of them by working as a song collector in a similar manner to Cecil Sharp, Olive Dame Campbell, and others. He traveled through the southern Appalachian mountains, seeking anyone who could provide him with new material. A. P. was not as discerning as Sharp and similar ballad collectors. Instead, he sought songs about events within the region, mining songs, traditional tunes passed down through the generations, and even old piano tunes from the late nineteenth century.<sup>109</sup> According to music scholar Barry Mazor, Sara Carter revealed A. P.’s methods of finding songs during a 1964 interview with Ed Kahn. In his 2015 book *Ralph Peer and the Making of Popular Roots Music*, Mazor writes that A. P. met Riddle, a talented slide guitarist and blues musician from North Carolina, while traveling throughout the region searching for songs in late 1927. Riddle soon “became his traveling companion and human recorder of songs heard on their song searches together.”<sup>110</sup> Both Mazor and writer Nicholas Dawidoff also

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<sup>108</sup> Sara Carter Bayes and Maybelle Carter, interview by Ed Kahn and Mike Seeger, Angel’s Camp, CA, April 24, 1963.

<sup>109</sup> Nicholas Dawidoff, *In the Country of Country: A Journey to the Roots of American Music* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 59.

partially attribute Maybelle's increasingly complex guitar playing to Riddle's influence. Dawidoff notes that though Carter Family descendants acknowledge that Riddle's techniques may have influenced Maybelle (for instance, he says that June Carter Cash told him that Maybelle and Riddle helped each other learn more about guitar playing), one only has to listen to changes in her playing to see his impact. Dawidoff writes that Maybelle's blues stylings on songs like "Cannonball Blues" and "Motherless Children" likely came from Riddle, as did her use of "bottleneck guitar," a form of slide guitar playing.<sup>111</sup>

Even in recent scholarship on the Carters and early country music, Riddle's contributions have been reduced largely to a few sentences summarizing his role as an assistant for A. P. Carter. Jeff Biggers notes that while the Carters are remembered today for their recordings, no one sought out Riddle to record his music and as such, "his unrecorded legacy, of course, vanished with his death."<sup>112</sup> Jason Howard remarks that historical dismissal of African American contributions to Appalachian music was a common occurrence. Sharp specifically ignored songs that fell outside the narrow confines of Anglo-Saxon balladry. Emma Bell Miles, in a 1904 article for *Harper's Magazine* that was later integrated into her book *The Spirit of the Mountains*, also focused on the English roots of Appalachian music, despite her acknowledgement of banjos, Gospel music, and other non-English musical traditions.<sup>113</sup> The lack of inclusion of African

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<sup>110</sup> Barry Mazor, *Ralph Peer and the Making of Popular Roots Music* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2015), 146.

<sup>111</sup> Mazor, *Ralph Peer and the Making of Popular Roots Music*, 146; Dawidoff, *In the Country of Country*, 59-60.

<sup>112</sup> Jeff Biggers, *The United States of Appalachia: How Southern Mountaineers Brought Independence, Culture, and Enlightenment to America* (Emeryville, CA: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2006), 15.

<sup>113</sup> Jason Howard, *A Few Honest Words: The Kentucky Roots of Popular Music* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012), 7-8.

American music and musicians in Smith's work will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

Around the same time groups like the Carters used new innovations to spread their updated versions of traditional music, some groups worked hard to preserve the older versions. In a section of Smith's *Oral History* dated 1934, central Virginia resident Richard Burlage tells a contentious mountain resident that he works with the Works Progress Administration in order to avoid conflict. Previously employed in the Appalachian region of Virginia as a schoolteacher, Burlage has returned about a decade later to take photographs in hopes of seeing a woman with whom he had been in a relationship. With his nice automobile, "new English scarf," and camera, Burlage stands out amongst the coal camp poverty. A local man happens upon Burlage while he is taking photographs, and remarks that Burlage's clothes and car mark him as an outsider. The man becomes angry, telling Burlage that he cannot afford to provide for his family, and the government will not help him.<sup>114</sup> Burlage tries to escape the situation by asking where the family of Little Luther Wade lives, and the man says, "I reckon you come up here to hear him sing. You gonna write it down or what?" Burlage allows him to believe that is true, and the man replies, "They was some other fellers up here already, doing that."<sup>115</sup> Here, Smith's character refers to the Depression-era Federal Writer's Project, a part of the Works Progress Administration.

The government-funded Federal Writer's Project provided work for educators, artists, writers, and other culturally-minded people during the Great Depression. One of its overarching goals was to collect and preserve the history of America, with a particular focus on certain ethnic groups and regional cultures. Part of the Project's focus was in Appalachia, where workers collected folklore such as songs, remedies, and ghost stories from the region's residents. In an

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<sup>114</sup> Smith, *Oral History*, 216, 225-26.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

oral history interview recorded in 1976, Raymond Sloan, who began working for the Project in 1939, recalls how his supervisors assigned him certain topics and tasked him with locating informants to find information related to those topics. Sloan was based in southwest Virginia's Franklin County, where one of his major assignments was the collection of traditional music. In the interview, Sloan recalls visiting a Mrs. Wagoner, who sang old ballads like "Barbara Allen," "Gamblin' Billy," and "False William," as well as newer, regionally-based murder ballads like "Poor Ellen Smith." Sloan says that his main task in collecting folk songs was to find old ballads from the English and Irish traditions in order to see if they still existed. However, he was also allowed to record more modern songs if he found them. One particular similarity between Sloan and the men who had previously visited Little Luther Wade in *Oral History* is that both wrote the songs down as opposed to recording them. Smith does not provide an explanation for this method in her novel, but Sloan notes that the Federal Writer's Project did not provide its workers with a recording machine and he could not afford to purchase one, since they were expensive and difficult to purchase in that part of the country.<sup>116</sup>

This collection of old ballads is reflective of the work conducted by Cecil Sharp, Olive Dame Campbell, and other ballad collectors earlier in the twentieth century. Although the Federal Writer's Project workers were not always specifically interested in cultural value of the songs they collected, they still performed the same basic duties as the earlier ballad collectors by seeking out old traditional songs for the simple purpose of seeing if they existed. Both sought to preserve and promote the history and culture of a specific area of the United States. One difference between the two groups of song collectors is that those who worked for the Federal Writer's Project were, if not encouraged, at least allowed to collect modern-day songs from their

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<sup>116</sup> Richard Sloan, interview by Kip Lornell, Ferrum, VA, October 19, 1976.

informants. In contrast, the earlier ballad collectors neglected to record newer songs in an attempt to prove the strong connections between Appalachia and historical England.

As time passed, the fledging country music industry that the Carter Family (and Smith's fictional Bailey family) helped pioneer continued to grow, stretching traditional forms of Appalachian music into a firmly commercial genre by the late 1940s and early 1950s. By that time, the Grand Ole Opry was a famed institution, and country music radio shows could be heard on radio stations throughout the United States, particularly in the South. The commercialization that began with the recording and distribution of songs by the Carters and others was added to by the development of radio barn dance shows that brought acts into listeners' homes multiple times a day, each day of the week. The Carters themselves were featured on regular radio shows throughout the 1930s and early 1940s, including a stint on WBT in Charlotte, North Carolina, from 1938 until 1943.<sup>117</sup> Many of these acts utilized Appalachian imagery to develop certain (usually humorous) characters and personas that instantly identified them to regular listeners.

An example can be found in a recording of the March 22, 1941, Renfro Valley Barn Dance in central Kentucky, broadcast through Cincinnati's WLS radio station. The show's host, John Lair, is greeted by the character "A'nt Idy" (played by Margaret Lillie), who expresses sadness that her son, "Little Clifford" is ill and cannot make the show. Little Clifford has the "mis'ry in his back," an ailment that A'nt Idy also refers to as the "lumdegee." A'nt Idy speaks in an exaggerated country accent as she describes her recent adventures putting up a fence around her farm and tells Lair that she has to clean house because her "kinfolks" are coming to visit.<sup>118</sup> A'nt Idy is presented as an ignorant, though humorous, caricature of an elderly

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<sup>117</sup> Bayes and Carter, interview.

<sup>118</sup> "A'nt Idy and John Lair," *Renfro Valley Barn Dance*, aired March 22, 1942, on WLW.

Appalachian woman. Several of Smith's characters in *The Devil's Dream* find themselves portraying similar humorous country characters when they secure jobs on Richmond, Virginia's Old Dominion Barn Dance. After R. C. Bailey, his wife Lucie, and Tampa Rainette choose to end their recording career as the Grassy Branch Girls rather than pursue radio performance jobs far from home, the remaining member of the Grassy Branch Girls, Tampa's daughter Virgie Rainette, attempts to continue her career. She translates her prior success into a series of gigs on country-themed radio shows, including a spot on the Renfro Valley Barn Dance sharing the stage with A'nt Idy and Little Clifford. She then recruits her daughter Georgia and niece Katie Cocker to form a group with her known as Mamma Rainette and the Raindrops. Katie and Georgia's radio personas are Bitty and Elvira, silly country girls who tell "Little Moron" jokes and wear "straw hats and bloomers and big black clodhopper lace-up boots [and] red-checkered dresses buttoned up all wrong."<sup>119</sup> The girls become regular performers on the show, are featured in advertisements and even on billboards, and attract a significant amount of attention in and around Richmond, especially from young men. After about a year, they even begin recording songs and playing outside events like fairs.<sup>120</sup>

Lily Mae Ledford, a member of Renfro Valley Barn Dance regulars the Coon Creek Girls, offers support for Smith's fictional depiction of barn dances in the 1930s and 1940s. In an oral history interview from 1980, Ledford recalls how the other members of the Coon Creek Girls chose new "flower" names to sound more country. The girls wanted to name their group "The Wildwood Flowers" as a result, but Lair gave the name "Coon Creek Girls" in keeping with the country theme. Ledford says that Lair told them that was all part of radio publicity and

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<sup>119</sup> Smith, *The Devil's Dream*, 224-25.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 226, 233.



that a country name would help audiences associate them with the country music they played. Ledford also mentions the frequent letters and gifts (and even a few marriage proposals) she and the other members of the group received from young men at a local military base and describes how they began performing outside of the barn dance at theaters, schoolhouses, and other local venues once they had established themselves as a group on the radio show.<sup>121</sup> Much of the popularity the groups experienced came simply because of the wide exposure they got on the radio. Bluegrass music legend Don Reno, who performed on the Old Dominion Barn Dance and Charlotte, North Carolina's WBT (the station where, in 1953, Smith's Mamma Rainette and the Raindrops "busted up") explains in an oral history interview from 1977 that, as part of their contract with the radio station, barn dance performers also performed during the week.<sup>122</sup> Reno recalls that he was on air "every morning from 6:00 to 7:00, 9:15 to 9:30, 12:00 to 12:30" from Monday through Friday, "and then on Saturday [they] had a 4:00 to 5:00 radio show."<sup>123</sup> Radio saturated audiences with commercial, Appalachian-based music, serving to continually increase its popularity.

In *The Devil's Dream*, Katie Cocker eventually strikes out on her own to attempt a career as a country music star in Nashville. Her first stop is the Louisiana Hayride show in Shreveport, Louisiana, which she describes as "a surefire way to get to Nashville."<sup>124</sup> 1950s country music singer Maxine Brown, who was part of the trio The Browns with her younger brother Jim Ed and younger sister Bonnie, concurs with Katie. In her memoir *Looking Back to See*, Brown recalls the struggle to reach Nashville and land a recording contract. She remembers being overjoyed

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<sup>121</sup> Lily Mae Ledford, interview at Berea College, Berea, KY, January 24, 1980.

<sup>122</sup> Smith, *The Devil's Dream*, 237; Don Reno, interview by Kip Lornell, Ferrum, VA, June 1, 1977.

<sup>123</sup> Reno, interview.

<sup>124</sup> Smith, *The Devil's Dream*, 252.

when she and Jim Ed were asked to become regular cast members on the Louisiana Hayride, and like Katie, she calls it “a steppingstone to the Grand Ole Opry.”<sup>125</sup> In reflection of country music’s history, Katie expands upon the traditional Appalachian music she has grown up singing in southwest Virginia and on the barn dances, singing honky-tonk songs and crossover pop country throughout the 1950s and 1960s. She recognizes that she has traveled a long way from her roots, although Ralph Handy, a former bandmate, reminds her to “keep it country.”<sup>126</sup> This struggle between displaying one’s cultural background and adhering to what is commercially popular is also alluded to by country music star and eastern Kentucky native Loretta Lynn in her autobiography *Coal Miner’s Daughter*. Lynn writes that not long after she came to Nashville, the Wilburn Brothers (who helped manage her career) wanted to give her a slicker sound and look, in keeping with the current styles. Although she understood the reasoning behind the Wilburn Brothers’ suggestions, she also knew that she did not want to deny her Appalachian roots. She turned to producer Owen Bradley, who she says encouraged her to “stay more natural” and “just pronounce the words the way” she wanted to in her songs.<sup>127</sup>

In contrast to Katie Cocker, Lynn, and hundreds of other musicians with backgrounds in traditional Appalachian music, Nashville is not the ultimate goal for *Oral History*’s Little Luther Wade. His daughter Sally remarks that even though he has the talent to make it as a country music star, and many people tell him he should try, he decides to stay at home and stick with performing traditional music. According to Sally, “Pappy didn’t want any more than he had, I think – or I’ll say it this way – he already had everything he wanted.”<sup>128</sup> Little Luther’s main

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<sup>125</sup> Maxine Brown, *Looking Back to See: A Country Music Memoir* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2005), 53-54.

<sup>126</sup> Smith, *The Devil’s Dream*, 265.

<sup>127</sup> Loretta Lynn, *Coal Miners’ Daughter* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 97-98.

motivation to stay at home is his family and the memory of his late wife Dory. Interestingly, by the 1960s, an outgrowth of mainstream country music began to seek out the casual immersion in traditional music that musicians like Little Luther enjoyed. As mainstream country music moved further and further away from its traditional background, some more traditional-leaning artists were “discovered” by folk music enthusiasts as part of the folk music revival. According to music scholar Neil Rosenberg, those involved in the folk, or traditional, music revival were “motivated by a belief that folk music was meaningful and accessible in a way which other forms of music were not.”<sup>129</sup> They looked to a supposedly simpler time when music was innately connected to culture and its performance was part of everyday life. Folklorist Alan Lomax set a pattern for locating “new” talent to showcase at folk festivals by visiting locations such as fiddlers conventions throughout the South, hoping to find authentic traditional musicians. Artists such as Clarence “Tom” Ashley and Doc Watson were discovered in this manner, paving the way for a national showcase of their music.<sup>130</sup>

Near the end of *The Devil’s Dream*, Katie is astonished to see her aunt Virgie on a public television special singing traditional ballads and telling about her days with the Grassy Branch Girls. Although Katie cannot fathom why anyone would want to put the supposedly senile Virgie on television, her children’s nanny, Ramona Smoot, tells Katie that “she’s authentic.... That’s what they’re looking for now. She was there, after all. She’s the real thing.”<sup>131</sup> The idea that authenticity, in the form of traditional music, is now popular, inspires Katie to put together an album of songs associated with her family and incorporate the musicians in the family who are

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<sup>128</sup> Smith, *Oral History*, 238.

<sup>129</sup> Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History*, 170.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 171

<sup>131</sup> Smith, *The Devil’s Dream*, 299-301.

still living, including Tampa Rainette, Virgie, and R. C. Bailey, who bridge the gap between traditional and commercial music at the Bristol Sessions. According to Richard A. Peterson, the term “authentic” in this sense is “not inherent in the object or event that is designated authentic but is a socially agreed-upon construct in which the past is to a degree misremembered.”<sup>132</sup> In his book *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity*, Peterson uses the example of early country and hillbilly music consumers who bought records by Fiddlin’ John Carson, The Carter Family, and other because they viewed them as novelties, products of an earlier time. They called these records and performers authentic because they sounded old and traditional, not because the listeners had judged their historical accuracy.<sup>133</sup>

In *The Devil’s Dream*, the authenticity of both Virgie singing on public television and Katie recording an album of her family’s songs can be judged according to Peterson’s definition. Although both women technically are performing traditional songs in the same way their ancestors, such as Fiddlin’ Kate Malone Bailey, might have, their purpose in performing is more closely aligned with commercial music. Peterson notes that by recording traditional forms of music and marketing it to a commercial audience, authenticity is “commodified.”<sup>134</sup> Instead of historical truth, it becomes an advertising and marketing ploy. In his book *Singing Cowboys and Musical Mountaineers*, Bill Malone also points out that the term “authentic” was often somewhat contrived when used in reference to the folk music revival. Malone writes that many of the musicians lauded by folk revivalists, such as Dock Boggs and Clarence Ashley, had actually achieved radio and recording success in the 1920s and 1930s. The revivalists learned their music

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<sup>132</sup> Richard A. Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 5.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

from records and worked to create new performance and recording opportunities for these artists.<sup>135</sup> In reality, these “authentic” artists were part of the commercial music industry long before folk revivalists began searching for a respite from popular culture and the revivalists assisted them in joining it once again.

At one point after Ramona Smoot proposes recording an “authentic” album, Katie remarks that it’s “a completely crazy idea. It’s not commercial.”<sup>136</sup> Nonetheless, a similar idea did succeed in commercial country music in the 1970s, perhaps due in part to the concept of authenticity as described by Peterson. The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, a group that played a mixture of folk, rock, and country music, compiled a collection called *Will the Circle Be Unbroken?* that features guest performances from living legends of country and traditional music, touching on a number of modern country music eras. The album includes songs performed by Bristol Session participant Maybelle Carter, early Grand Ole Opry star Roy Acuff, talented Nashville session musicians, and folk revival hero Doc Watson, among others. In an interview from 2011, founding band member Jeff Hanna remembers that the album helped bridge generational gaps and cultural gaps by bringing commercial and traditional musicians together for a common purpose and once again raising awareness of traditional music.<sup>137</sup> Peterson elaborates on the application of the concept of authenticity to situations like this, stating that members of the public often use the word “authentic” in reference to people they believed have stayed true to a certain musical style or have accurately reproduced a form of traditional culture.<sup>138</sup> In this case,

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<sup>135</sup> Bill C. Malone, *Singing Cowboys and Musical Mountaineers: Southern Culture and the Roots of Country Music* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 106-07.

<sup>136</sup> Smith, *The Devil’s Dream*, 300-301.

<sup>137</sup> Paul Freeman, “The Unbroken Circle: The PCC Interview with Jeff Hanna of the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band,” *Pop Culture Classics*, August 2011, accessed March 15, 2015, [http://popcultureclassics.com/jeff\\_hanna.html](http://popcultureclassics.com/jeff_hanna.html).

although the musicians on the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band's project had experienced long, successful careers as commercial musicians, the public perceived their music as authentic because they reproduced the same traditionally-based styles of music with which they had gained popularity early in their careers.

Throughout the twentieth century, traditional music was expanded upon numerous times as new technologies such as radio and enhanced recording techniques allowed it to be shared with new audiences. It would be hard to find the seed of tradition in much of the slick, pop-influenced country music of the 1950s, 1960s, and beyond. However, as Lee Smith's characters and numerous historical primary and secondary sources show, country music has constantly returned to tradition by remembering its Appalachian background even while looking to a modern future. In doing so, musicians, fans, and scholars have grappled with the concept of authenticity, often using that term to refer to commercialized music with at least a hint of tradition.

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<sup>138</sup> Peterson, *Creating Country Music*, 208-09.

## CHAPTER 4

### AUTHORS' PERSONAL AND RESEARCH BACKGROUNDS

In the introduction to this thesis, I referenced several sources that indicate both Haun and Smith are regarded as historically accurate Appalachian writers, largely thanks to their status as natives to the region and their use of historical research to inform their fictional works. Their creation of accurate senses of place in their Appalachian fiction can make their works seem more truthful to readers, and the lack of stereotypical characters and dialogue lend a sense of freshness to their work. However, as mentioned in Chapter Three, Smith in particular seems to limit her work to the experiences of one group within the broader spectrum of Appalachian culture. This chapter seeks to further develop that introduction to the writers by using information gathered from interviews, biographies, and scholarly articles to determine each writer's personal background, experience with research, and historical accuracy.

The authors of the chapter "Appalachian Literature" in *A Handbook to Appalachia* remark that many historical writers whose work focuses on Appalachian themes fall prey to "unflattering stereotypes" of "the most exotic or romantic components of Appalachian history and culture."<sup>139</sup> Noted Appalachian Studies scholar Cratis Williams decries the stereotypical descriptions of Appalachian life in numerous novels published in the 1920s and 1930s, such as intermarriage and feuding in Fiswoode Tarleton's 1929 *Bloody Ground: A Cycle of the Southern Hills* and "lechery, fornication, incest, murder, and betrayal" in the 1930 novel *This Day and Time* by Anne W. Armstrong.<sup>140</sup> In contrast, the authors of "Appalachian Literature" praise Appalachian writers who choose to include examples of regional folklife in their work, noting

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<sup>139</sup> Danny Miller, et. al. "Appalachian Literature," in *A Handbook to Appalachia: An Introduction to the Region*, ed. Grace Toney Edwards, et. al. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 199.

<sup>140</sup> Cratis D. Williams, "New Directions: Folk or Hillbilly?," in *An American Vein: Critical Readings in Appalachian Literature*, ed. Danny Miller, et. al. (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2005), 1-2, 4.

that these writers, who are often Appalachian natives, “offe[r] insight into the distinguishing values of a particular place and time.”<sup>141</sup> Both Haun and Smith are natives of the region and works by both authors are strongly informed by regional folklife such as superstitions, religion, and music.

### Mildred Haun

Mildred Haun was born in 1911 near the Hamblen County and Cocke County border in northeast Tennessee. Haun spent much of her youth in Cocke County, which was filled with traditional Appalachian music. As such, she was surrounded by musicians and balladeers at a young age. In her unpublished master’s thesis, she wrote, “My foreparents have lived, farmed, and sung the old songs since the county was formed in 1779.”<sup>142</sup> According to Herschel Gower, the editor of *The Hawk’s Done Gone and Other Stories*, some of Haun’s earliest memories were of Saturday night community gatherings in which her family and their neighbors would come together to play music, sing songs, and tell stories. Interestingly, in contrast to many historical sources that list fiddles and banjos as some of the most common Appalachian instruments, Haun’s family members played the accordion, in addition to more traditional instruments like dulcimer and guitar.<sup>143</sup> This choice of instruments is actually reflected in a section of *The Hawk’s Done Gone* narrated by Mary Dorthula White. In this section, Mary Dorthula remembers visits from Charles, a man she had hoped to marry, including one night when he didn’t come as early as she thought he would. While waiting for him, she “played the accordion and sung.”<sup>144</sup> The accordion was not mentioned in any of the historical

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<sup>141</sup> Danny Miller, et. al. “Appalachian Literature,” 199.

<sup>142</sup> Herschel Gower, “Introduction: Mildred Haun, Storyteller,” in *The Hawk’s Done Gone and Other Stories*, ed. Herschel Gower (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968), x.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.



sources I consulted in the research for this paper, but several more recent scholarly works note that accordions and other instruments usually not linked with Appalachia were present in the region at least since the late nineteenth century. In “Peoples of Appalachia: Cultural Diversity Within the Mountain Region,” Stevan R. Jackson states that southern and eastern European immigrants who came to Appalachia to work in the coal mines in the late 1800s likely brought with them accordions.<sup>145</sup> Bob L. Cox records that northeast Tennessee native Jennie Bowman, the daughter of early hillbilly musician Fiddlin’ Charlie Bowman, was proficient on several instruments, including the accordion, by the late 1920s. Charlie Bowman often featured an accordion player in his musical groups throughout the 1920s and 1930s, and Jennie played accordion a band of her father’s known as the Buckle Busters for a short period of time in the late 1930s.<sup>146</sup>

Haun also had childhood experience with traditional Appalachian ballads from those same Saturday night gatherings. Gower notes that Haun’s mother and two brothers were ballad singers and often sang old mountain songs a capella for the family and neighbors. Haun eventually utilized that background in ballad singing to complete a 440-page Master of Arts in English thesis at Vanderbilt University that centered on her work as a folklorist collecting ballads in Cocke County.<sup>147</sup> According to Viki Dasher Rouse, writer Donald Davidson, who served as

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<sup>144</sup> Mildred Haun, *The Hawk’s Done Gone*, in *The Hawk’s Done Gone and Other Stories*, ed. Herschel Gower (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968), 173-74.

<sup>145</sup> Stevan R. Jackson, “Peoples of Appalachia: Cultural Diversity Within the Mountain Region,” in *A Handbook to Appalachia: An Introduction to the Region*, ed. Grace Toney Edwards, et. al. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 28-29.

<sup>146</sup> Bob L. Cox, *Fiddlin’ Charlie Bowman: An East Tennessee Old-Time Music Pioneer and His Musical Family* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 75, 83-84, 133.

<sup>147</sup> Herschel Gower, “Introduction: Mildred Haun, Storyteller,” xiv.

Haun's thesis advisor, called her work "the most significant and complete study of its type."<sup>148</sup>

Haun thus had a solid personal and educational background to reference for the inclusion of music and other Appalachian folklife in her work.

Haun's work has been praised by other Appalachian writers, particularly Lisa Alther, whose native Kingsport, Tennessee is separated from Haun's Cocke County by only a few counties. Alther searched for reflections of her own childhood memories in Haun's fiction, finding evidence in the Appalachian language and dialect within *The Hawk's Done Gone*. Alther praises Haun's careful attention to detail in the use of phrases such as "Sarah sent by Howard for me some shoes," "I wished there hadn't so many folks come," and "spread around over the county like a polecat."<sup>149</sup> Alther writes that "Haun not only preserves the distinctive speech patterns and folkways of a fading culture, as though in a time capsule for future generations, she also summarizes the economic and social evolution of that culture."<sup>150</sup> Haun obviously tried to ensure that her work accurately reflected the region's folklife and society; one could then assume her depictions of music are accurate, as well.

### Lee Smith

Smith is a native of Grundy, Virginia, which is located in the state's far southwestern corner. Smith was born in 1944 and began seriously writing as a student at Hollins College in the late 1960s. Interestingly, although she is now praised as one of the most accurate Appalachian authors, some of her first attempts at writing included no mention of her background. In an effort to sound more sophisticated, she ignored the common writing advice to "write what you know"

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<sup>148</sup> Rouse, "Mildred Haun: A Haunting Life Story," 22.

<sup>149</sup> Alther, "The Shadow Side of Appalachia," 31.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

but instead “wanted to write in order to get away from [her] own life.”<sup>151</sup> Her professor and classmates eventually praised an Appalachian-themed story she wrote, which seems to have influenced her career trajectory.<sup>152</sup>

Smith’s surroundings as a child directly influenced many of her adult writings, particularly in relation to her inclusion of music in many of her novels and short stories. In a 2011 interview with Carmen Rueda Ramos, she remembers seemingly being surrounded by music throughout her childhood. She says, “Music was very much part of every single thing we did. It was like the soundtrack of my childhood.”<sup>153</sup> This same immersion in music can be seen in *The Devil’s Dream*, in which important family moments are constantly underscored by music or the idea of music. Even Alice Bailey, a non-musician in the highly musical Bailey family, relates one of her favorite family memories to an experience listening to the Grand Ole Opry on the radio. Smith furthers the connection between her childhood experiences listening to Appalachian music and her decision to become a writer, stating that “I just grew up hearing a story and the stories were completely interwoven with the music, which is appropriate too because Appalachian music so often is telling a story.”<sup>154</sup> In Smith’s opinion, oral traditions such as music and storytelling accurately represent Appalachia, especially in a historical sense, because historical Appalachia was a largely illiterate culture. If residents of the region could not write their feelings down, they could at least talk or sing about them.<sup>155</sup> Smith’s early experiences with music and storytelling and her understanding of how they fit into Appalachia’s

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<sup>151</sup> Ballard and Hudson, *Listen Here*, 583.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ramos, “Music in Her Mountains, 157-58.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

history and culture framed her sense of place and way of viewing the world, logically leading her to incorporate them into her fiction.

Although Smith has personal memories of Appalachian culture, much of her fictional writing has been based upon extensive historical and interview research. For example, in an author's note included at the beginning of *Oral History*, she lists references she consulted while writing this historical saga. Included among them are works also used in this thesis for comparative purposes, such as John C. Campbell's *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland* and Horace Kephart's *Our Southern Highlanders*, as well as local southwestern Virginia story and folklore collections.<sup>156</sup> Smith has spoken about her reliance on research in many interviews. *Oral History* is particularly mentioned as a book for which she conducted extensive research. In a 2009 interview with Elfrieda Abbe for *The Writer* magazine, Smith explains that prior to writing *Oral History* in the early 1980s, she had conducted oral history interviews with residents of southwest Virginia for several years. She says that she "would tape everybody and write stuff down and so on. [She] was fascinated with the ideas that there is really no such thing as history or there is no such thing as one story. It's always the storyteller's story."<sup>157</sup> This influenced the mainly first-person narrative in *Oral History*, in part thanks to her realization that when a third-person narrator told the story, the characters sounded like stereotypical Appalachian residents.<sup>158</sup> Her choice to allow her characters to take on the traditional Appalachian role of storytellers adds to the feeling of authenticity within the novel. Authenticity in this sense comes from what Richard A. Peterson calls "authentic reproduction, not kitsch."<sup>159</sup> Although Smith does not

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<sup>156</sup> Smith, *Oral History*, 9.

<sup>157</sup> Elfrieda Abbe, "When Craft & Storytelling Come Together," *The Writer* 122, no. 4 (April 2009), 19.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Peterson, *Creating Country Music*, 208.

exactly transcribe interviews she has conducted with mountain storytellers, she has used information she gathered through research to closely reproduce historical scenes and lifestyles.

In addition to collecting oral histories, Smith has also worked to find old mountain songs to help inform her novels. Both *The Devil's Dream* and *Oral History* include mentions of Appalachian ballads. While researching *The Devil's Dream*, Smith wanted to learn more about Cecil Sharp's ballad collecting in the North Carolina mountains. Through a workshop she was teaching at the time for North Carolina teachers, she came into contact with writer and ballad singer Shelia Kay Adams, who lives in northwestern North Carolina's Madison County. Smith says, "I did get a lot of those earlier ideas from Shelia because I went up to visit with her and I stayed with her, and then we went up to visit with her granny Dale Norton and all of them up in Sodom. That's how I got the material from the early ballad part of the book."<sup>160</sup> In this case, Smith built upon a basic knowledge of Appalachian history and sought out primary sources in the form of living Appalachian ballad singers. For earlier books, Smith also took the role of a ballad collector, or a "songcatcher," as she calls it, writing down songs that she heard when conducting oral history interviews.<sup>161</sup>

Smith is a firm believer in the necessity of preserving the past, particularly an accurate representation of the past. During her first years as an Appalachian writer, she felt like she had a specific purpose to preserve and present an accurate depiction of Appalachian culture. She says that "it was like a crusade."<sup>162</sup> She felt a deep desire to find out the truth about what life in Appalachia was like several generations before her birth in the 1940s. In the oral history interviews she conducted, she took care to accurately represent the way her informants spoke and

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<sup>160</sup> Ramos, "Music in Her Mountains," 162-63.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>162</sup> Linda Tate, ed., *Conversations with Lee Smith* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), xii.

specific phrases they used.<sup>163</sup> For example, when writing *Oral History*, she specifically conducted research that would allow her to “honor and preserve the language, the legends, the history, the witch tales, and the mythic nature” of the book’s Appalachian culture.<sup>164</sup> In a critical reading of the novel, Corinna Dale remarks that Smith has an “extraordinary ear for dialect, especially for the speech patterns of the Appalachian mountain people.”<sup>165</sup> For another novel, she says that she filled multiple notebooks with notes from historical sources about what life in Appalachia was like during the 1920s.<sup>166</sup>

However, she also acknowledges that creating a completely accurate portrayal of the past is extremely difficult. Smith shares this concern in a 1983 interview with Edwin T. Arnold. She says, “It’s just the idea that you never know what happened in the past, really. When you go back to look for it, all you ever get is your interpretation of it. And it changes so that what really happened is not what anybody thinks happened by the time the story gets all weakened.”<sup>167</sup> This is a valid concern in researching historical Appalachia; in fact, one of the difficulties in compiling primary sources to compare to Smith and Haun’s fiction for this thesis was the lack of sources written by natives of the region. As such, I worried that the image of Appalachia in the sources I did find might be somewhat inaccurate or biased. Smith expresses a valid frustration that “no matter how much you do and how much you record people and so on, you never really

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<sup>163</sup> Tate, *Conversations with Lee Smith*, xii.

<sup>164</sup> Abbe, “When Craft & Storytelling Come Together,” 19.

<sup>165</sup> Corinna Dale, “The Power of Language in Lee Smith’s *Oral History*,” in *An American Vein: Critical Readings in Appalachian Literature*, ed. Danny Miller, et. al. (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2005), 184.

<sup>166</sup> William J. Walsh, “Lee Smith,” in *Conversations with Lee Smith*, ed. Linda Tate (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 39.

<sup>167</sup> Edwin T. Arnold, “An Interview with Lee Smith,” in *Conversations with Lee Smith*, ed. Linda Tate (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 5-6.

know exactly the way it was.”<sup>168</sup> Her personal experiences have limited the experiences of her fictional characters, as well. In a 1989 interview, Smith was asked about the lack of African American characters in her novels. She replied, “Well, that’s because there were no black people in the county where I grew up. I never saw any black people, I was never aware of them, and they don’t in any way shape – particularly with the Appalachian things I’ve written.”<sup>169</sup> However, even if she did not personally encounter African Americans as a child, her statement that they did not “in any way shape” the Appalachian region is inaccurate.

In a recent interview conducted for this thesis, Carmen Rueda remarked that “what struck [her] most about [*The Devil’s Dream*] is the invisibility of black musicians.”<sup>170</sup> As I discussed in Chapter Three, although *The Devil’s Dream* offers numerous examples of accurate portrayals of Appalachian music, one glaring inaccuracy is the absence of any mention of African Americans’ impacts on the region’s music. Rueda emphasized the importance of African American Lesley Riddle, who “helped and traveled with A. P. Carter. His influence on country music is undeniable, and some even claim he taught Maybelle the guitar technique that made her famous among country musicians. But not a single black musician appears in Smith’s novel.”<sup>171</sup> Rueda also pointed out that Smith references the song “Wise County Jail,” in *Oral History*, which was written by southwestern Virginia musician Dock Boggs in the 1920s. According to Rueda, the song “is a combination of Appalachian folk music and African American blues... but that aspect is never mentioned or referred to in *Oral History*.”<sup>172</sup> In both instances, Smith relied on the

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<sup>168</sup> Arnold, “An Interview with Lee Smith,” 6.

<sup>169</sup> Virginia A. Smith, “On Regionalism, Women’s Writing, and Writing As a Woman: A Conversation with Lee Smith,” *The Southern Review* 26, no. 4 (Autumn 1990).

<sup>170</sup> Carmen Rueda, interview by author, conducted via e-mail, April 29, 2015.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

common perception that Appalachian music only came from a white background. Rueda stated that “perhaps the ‘white purity’ myth of Appalachian music and the notion of cultural isolation cast too long a shadow in her novels.”<sup>173</sup> Smith obviously drew from a variety of sources to inspire her work, but allowed her narrow experiences as a child to shape her selection of those sources, giving her work a sense of inaccuracy that modern readers and scholars have quickly noticed.

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<sup>172</sup>Carmen Rueda, interview.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS

In the introduction to *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland*, John C. Campbell wrote that Appalachia (or, as he called it, the Southern Highlands) was “a land about which, perhaps, more things are known that are not true than about any part of our country.”<sup>174</sup> Historians, sociologists, authors, and residents of Appalachia have argued for over one hundred years about what Appalachia truly is. Scholars have even debated Appalachia’s status as a region, as in Richard B. Drake’s rebuttal of Henry Shapiro’s assertion that the concept of Appalachia was created by late nineteenth century writers who saw in the southern mountains a society completely opposed to mainstream United States culture at the time. Drake, on the other hand, notes that historical sources from educators and Appalachian residents indicate that “a unique and distinctive people existed in the region.”<sup>175</sup> Regardless, residents of Appalachia have been portrayed in an almost never-ending succession of negative stereotypes since the late nineteenth century.

Literature has contributed to a large number of those stereotypes, stemming from the local color movement in the late nineteenth century and continuing with the War on Poverty in the mid-twentieth century. It was not until the 1930s that native Appalachian writers began to emerge and provide more accurate depictions of life within the region.<sup>176</sup> In reading works by these native authors, such as Harriette Arnow and Jesse Stuart, their familiarity with the region is immediately evident. Arnow’s descriptions of the northern migration of many rural Appalachian

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<sup>174</sup> Campbell, *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland*, xxi.

<sup>175</sup> Richard B. Drake, *A History of Appalachia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), ix.

<sup>176</sup> Danny Miller, et. al., eds., *An American Vein: Critical Readings in Appalachian Literature* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2005), xi.

families in the 1940s and 1950s in *The Dollmaker* and Stuart's portrayal of rural teaching in *The Thread That Runs So True* have always particularly stood out to me. However, as a musician, my main interest is always reading about the region's music in an effort to see myself, my family, and my colleagues in the fictional characters. With this thesis, I attempted to follow in the footsteps of earlier scholars (such as those whose work is collected in *An American Vein: Critical Readings in Appalachian Literature*), who have searched for accuracy and truth in Appalachian fiction's portrayals of the region's language, religion, and natural environment.

In conducting this research, I found a large number of correlations between the fictional depictions of music in Lee Smith's *The Devil's Dream* and *Oral History* and Mildred Haun's *The Hawk's Done Gone and Other Stories*, and contemporary historical accounts. Smith's work, especially *The Devil's Dream*, was especially easy to compare to primary sources, likely due to her extensive research on the history of country music prior to writing the novel. In fact, Smith was awarded the Lyndhurst Prize in 1990 to support her study of country music.<sup>177</sup> Haun's work was not as easily compared, especially since several of the instances of music-making in her novel and short stories were not typical of traditional Appalachian music and had few, if any, correlations in the historical literature. Haun and Smith did not use music in the same way in their works, either. Whereas in the two works by Smith, music was almost ever-present and contributed to several plot points, Haun's references to music were made almost in passing. This is interesting, especially due to Haun's role as a ballad collector and folklorist for whom traditional music seemed to be of special interest.

In the introduction to the thesis, I mentioned that I would attempt to pay special attention to minorities and other under-represented figures in both the fictional works and historical

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<sup>177</sup> Peter Guralnick, "The Storyteller's Tale," in *Conversations with Lee Smith*, ed. Linda Tate (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 147.

sources. One population I specifically searched for was women, and I was able to find several sources, such as Emma Bell Miles's *The Spirit of the Mountains*, which spoke of women's musical activities. Ethnic minorities were not represented, however, with the exception of Melungeons. R. C. Bailey in *The Devil's Dream* is half-Melungeon, and one of the songs the Grassy Branch Girls record at the fictional version of the Bristol Sessions is his original composition "Melungeon Man." In addition, several characters in Haun's work, including Mary Dorthula White's love Charles in *The Hawk's Done Gone* are referred to in terms of their dark skin, indicating that they might also be Melungeons. Because the historical sources surrounding Melungeons are often inaccurate, I chose not to include these mentions of Melungeons in my analysis. However, as historical research on Melungeons grows, literary, musical, and historical comparisons may be an area for future research.

Another ethnic group that I attempted to locate in fictional and historical sources was African-Americans. Recent scholarship has emphasized the contributions of African-Americans to traditional Appalachian music. In his "Black Musicians in Appalachia: An Introduction to Affrilachian Music," Fred J. Hay combats the image that historical Appalachia consisted only of white residents, noting that many early bluegrass musicians learned to play the banjo or guitar from African-Americans within the region and reminding readers of Lesley Riddle, the Burnsville, North Carolina native who was a direct influence on the Carter Family.<sup>178</sup> I located few references to African-American music in Appalachia in the fictional works I examined. In fact, several scholars have criticized the lack of African Americans in Smith's works, especially since she frequently discusses the extensive research conducted for her novels. Daniel T. Stein states that Smith's excuse that she did not encounter African Americans as a child does not mean

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<sup>178</sup> Fred J. Hay, "Black Musicians in Appalachia: An Introduction to Affrilachian Music," *Black Music Research Journal* 23, no. ½ (Spring-Autumn 2003): 7-8.

they did not live in the region. According to Stein, about 175,000 African Americans lived in Appalachia by the mid-nineteenth century. White Appalachian musicians likely would have encountered African American musicians within their communities, on records, and on the radio, including harmonica player and Grand Ole Opry star DeFord Bailey.<sup>179</sup> Smith mentions Bailey in passing in the scene from *The Devil's Dream* in which Bailey family members climb the mountain to listen to the Grand Ole Opry. Alice Bailey recalls hearing “this one Opry member that Judge Hay called the Harmonica Wizard.... Some of them up there on the bald said that the Harmonica Wizard was a nigger, but I don't know about that. I ain't never seen a nigger.”<sup>180</sup> Smith again relies on her own personal experiences to flesh out Alice's fictional thoughts. Although Alice's experiences might accurately reflect Smith's Appalachian childhood, they are not representative of the entire region. In dismissing Bailey's music and neglecting to include the influences of numerous other African American musicians, Smith overlooks an important segment of the region's music.

It is my hope that this work might stimulate future conversations and research about the depictions of Appalachian music in the literature of the region. Southeastern Kentucky author Silas House is a more recent writer in whose work music is a prominent feature. The same methods used in this thesis could be utilized to compare House's depictions of music from the 1950s to the present in novels such as *Clay's Quilt* and *The Coal Tattoo*, and in doing so, pick up where Smith's novels stop. As a young musician whose personal preferences lead toward the commercialized world of bluegrass and country music, work such as this might be even more relevant to my own personal relationship with music and Appalachia, allowing me to better

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<sup>179</sup> Daniel T. Stein, “‘I ain't never seen a nigger’: The discourse of denial in Lee Smith's *The Devil's Dream*,” *European Journal of American Culture* 22, no. 2 (2003): 143, 151.

<sup>180</sup> Smith, *The Devil's Dream*, 115.

shape my understanding of my home region, its history, and the numerous people (from all ethnic groups) who shaped it.

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