



THE MILDRED HAUN REVIEW

*A Journal of
Appalachian Literature, Culture, and
Scholarship*

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Editor's Note

The Mildred Haun Conference Committee members are proud to offer this selection of some of the best presentations from this past year's conference. The Mildred Haun Conference is dedicated to advancing literary and scholarly excellence; this journal represents just a sampling of the conference offerings. The Mildred Haun Review provides a juried selection of papers on Appalachian literature, culture, and scholarship.

Dr. Viki Rouse, our committee chair, has worked tirelessly to provide a quality conference for our region, and without her dedication none of this would be possible.

Special thanks to all those who have helped make this conference and this journal a reality. Also, thanks to the Office of Communications and Marketing for all of their help and advice.

For more information about the Mildred Haun Conference and how to submit or attend, please visit our website by going to www.ws.edu/mildredhaunconference.

Thank You,

Craig Bradley Owens
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A Transplant Leaves Minnesota, 1973

By Jane Hicks

Miles and miles and miles behind me,
grain elevators mocked my retreat,
stark sentries in my rearview mirror.

I lost them at dusk when I drove in to the first
ripples of Wisconsin. The bowl of heaven arched
infinite over the featureless plains—blazed a searing blue
or transformed to a gyrating beast throwing bolts,
turning loose its spawn, tearing down
what was built up on vast pastures.

I remember they dragged me to the cellar, I clutched my son
as the herd stampeded above, how we came to light
and found rubble, pink house planks strewn for miles.
I gleaned the remains of my life, turned toward the hills
that give me help, give me shelter,
hold the sky where it belongs.

Hicks, Jane. "A Transplant Leaves Minnesota, 1973." *driving with the dead*. Lexington Kentucky: U of Kentucky P, 2014. Print.



A Changing World: An Analysis of Tom T. and Dixie Hall's "One of Those Days (When I Miss Lester Flatt)"

By Brad Owens

The single most engaging element of Appalachian literature is, arguably, the nostalgia extant in the words that the writers of such works present and the images that they create through their words. Nostalgia, as a cornerstone element of Appalachian literature, is present in some form and fashion in many writings within the genre. The nostalgia incorporates a longing for connection to places and people as well as recognition that the world is ever changing. The implication of a changing world can be seen as a positive or a negative occurrence, but the mere identification of the change can prompt reminiscences. This element of nostalgia is also on display in much of the music produced as a direct result of involvement in Appalachian culture. One of the most powerful examples of this nostalgia can be seen in the lyrics of Tom T. and Dixie Hall's "One of Those Days (When I Miss Lester Flatt)." However, the nostalgia of this song is much more complex than a cursory hearing suggests and the exact thing that is 'missed' within the context of the lyrics is in question.

The lyrics of this particular song call to mind a longing to return to a simpler place and time, but more than that, the lyrics reveal a particular preference and desire for a culture that appears in danger of disappearing. The song begins with a recognition of a new world, one in which the speaker doesn't feel completely comfortable or accepted.

The radio's playing a rock 'n roll song
They're having a party and I don't belong
They say I'm too Country, they say I'm not cool
And maybe my thinking's a little old school (Hall)

The detection of a rock 'n roll song on the speaker's own radio promotes the idea that there is a culture surrounding the speaker, which, in part, prompts the nostalgia and reveals the separation from the world he feels. Presumably, he has not changed, but the world has changed around him. After all, it is his radio that has brought elements of this new world into his life. Even worse, this world is described as a party to which the speaker was not invited. Again, the implication is that the world has become a place the speaker no longer recognizes, and it is no longer a place where he belongs. The fact that this world view is brought to him by a radio is significant too.

The radio has always been seen as an invention that brought the world closer. It is a device that sends signals both far and wide. It is a symbol of connection to the outside world. The fact that the radio brings the speaker an unfamiliar world is significant due to the fact that it does not increase the connection he feels to the outside world; instead,

it makes him feel disconnected, even unwanted. In fact, recent events reveal that the world the speaker identifies with might not even want him anymore. In an interview with *Great American Country*, Blake Shelton comments that

Country music has to evolve in order to survive. Nobody wants to listen to their grandpa's music. And I don't care how many of these old farts around Nashville going, "My God, that ain't country!" Well that's because you don't buy records anymore, jackass. The kids do, and they don't want to buy the music you were buying. (qtd. in "Blake")

Voted Male Vocalist of the Year in 2010, Shelton does apologize for the quote and asserts that he was merely suggesting that innovation has always and must continue to drive the genre. However, the implication of his words were lasting and possibly revealing for many of the genre's established artists. If younger Country fans don't appreciate the older music, then the world has truly left Lester Flatt behind and what the speaker in Hall's song is missing is the tradition that built the genre encompassed in the older generation.

This image, of a shifting reality, suggests aging in a way that many of us confront daily. The younger generation has a way of speaking and a way of presenting works of art that might appear foreign or downright alien to an older person. The idea is that the world, as presented by the media, has taken on a different personality than the one with which the speaker is familiar. The assumption is that this has happened quickly and without the speaker's conscious knowledge. But the use of the words "cool" and "old school" suggest that the speaker is not as out of touch as he might appear.

The speaker, although seemingly noticing the change for the sake of introspection, is allowing the new world to creep into his consciousness. He has incorporated the language of the new generation in such a way as to help him identify his own differences from that generation. However, there is more to the particular word choice than might be readily apparent. "Cool" is commonly used in modern English to connote exuberance, but it can also suggest the notion of detachment.

Hall's thesis is that the world has already changed and there is no point in getting overly angry about that fact; however, that does not suggest that there is no room for nostalgic feelings of loss, and the assertion that he is decidedly "not cool" suggests there is a passionate response to the change around him. His "cool"-ness is not detached from emotion, but is rife with it. The use of the word 'maybe' in the final line of verse one does suggest a softening of this passion though. The idea that he feels he just might be considered "a little" old fashioned instead of actually being completely antiquated suggests a tacit acceptance of his place in the new world and a resignation that there is nothing to be done.



The younger generation has a way of speaking and a way of presenting works of art that might appear foreign or downright alien to an older person.

If this is the assertion that Hall is making by claiming he is seen as 'not cool' in the present of the song, then the implication becomes that he is emotionally invested in the particulars of the current shifting of the cultural atmosphere. He asserts that the new world has labeled him different, but he has used the language of the new generation appropriately in order to point out that he is very aware of the differences himself and has no need for labels from the outside world. The idea that the vague 'they' has declared him "not cool" is a strong indication that he feels left out of the world; he is a stranger in his own land, but is his exclusion merely an illusion? A more concrete word, other than 'they,' would suggest exactly what segment of society has deemed him the "other" and would give more indication of what is truly being missed; however, the listener only has the vague pronoun and must conclude that it is Hall himself who has labeled an entire segment of the populace as something different than he.

The distance between the speaker and the referential pronoun creates a reversal by which others have not ostracized the speaker, but the speaker has proclaimed himself outside the norm. This perception of reality is indicative of a typical association with growing older and being supplanted by a newer, younger generation, and it is possible that Hall is remembering a similar episode from his own younger days when referencing Lester Flatt. Through the lens of memory, Hall sees himself as a caretaker for the musical traditions inspired by one of the originators of the musical genre he finds himself a part of still today. Paul G. Dempster, in his study of nursing homes, concluded that the caregivers needed closure when dealing with the deaths of those for whom they provided care. This closure, according to his findings, often took the form of a journey motif.

Through reminiscing about the final journey, workers attempted to re-order thoughts and feelings, mastering the anxiety of separation that death created... To be able to reconnect both to the dead person and to their own sense of continuity, workers entered into a mythic space and time. Hence the concept of journeying is held both within religious and primal myths: it offers a way of presenting death which takes account of the past and future by creating a 'continuous present'. (236)

Hall's investment in the past and his subsequent eschewing of the future holds with this idea of an all-consuming present where Lester Flatt is still performing, Hall is still vibrant, and the world is still knowable. This appears to be what Hall is missing, not the man, but the symbol of a time when everything was moving toward something other than an ending.

The idea of youth and innovation pervading this song provides the impetus to discuss current issues in Appalachia, specifically one dealing with the coal mining industry. It has long been the traditional view that coal mining companies took advantage of the miners to such an extent that a very popular song, "Sixteen Tons" performed by Tennessee Ernie Ford in 1955, suggested they owned the souls of the miners (Vinyhlist). Furthermore, in an article written for the West Virginia Historical Society Quarterly in 2001, Rhonda Janney Coleman sums up the traditional opinion of the relationship of miners to operators as follows:

These apparently vicious men [operators] in the early years hired armed guards like the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency to prevent workers from forming the unions that would later demand higher wages, better conditions and safety and health regulations.

This view seems to have become reversed in recent years. “Friends of Coal” bumper stickers appear to be gaining prominence throughout the coal fields of Appalachia.

On the surface, the prevalence of these stickers would appear to contradict the often held opinion that coal companies are evil entities that endanger their workers for profit, but that would be a superficial reading of this symbol. The stickers, and the attendant support of the coal mine industry, are a desire to preserve the status quo. Coal mining represents tradition to many in Appalachia and moving away from coal mining is an endeavor fraught with fear. Coal mining then represents the saving grace of a community riddled with economic ambiguity rather than a tyrannical industry. The idea of coal becomes a symbol of positive change, innovation, and progress. The stickers metamorphose into a desire to preserve something intangible rather than move toward an uncertain future. This is present in the symbol of Lester Flatt as well—he is that intangible, dichotomous feeling of innovation and familiarity.

The ultimate answer to what Lester Flatt symbolizes can be discovered by inverting the assertions of verse one; therefore, Hall misses feeling just the right amount of country and feeling just the right amount of cool. However, the juxtaposition of ideas occurs when he incorporates “old school” into the equation. The connotation gleaned from this expression invokes antique thinking, which would be diametrically opposed to feelings of once being included in the mainstream. Was there a time when the majority of society was looking back instead of forward? Logically, this is unlikely. Older members of society might very well be given to fond remembrances, but the younger members of the same society would have no associations to remember. So, Lester Flatt appears to be a reference to something other than a period of time that has passed away.

As a member of the legendary Bluegrass duo, Flatt and Scruggs, Lester Flatt was known for his vocals more than his instrumentality; however, Hall references his instrument more than his vocals in the chorus of “One of Those Days (When I Miss Lester Flatt)”:

It's one of those days when I miss Lester Flatt
I see that ole guitar slung over his back
That thumb pick a-doin' a G run or two
And I hear him singing the Salty Dog Blues
It's not a sad feeling, just a matter of fact
It's one of those days when I miss Lester Flatt (Hall)



Coal mining represents tradition to many in Appalachia and moving away from coal mining is an endeavor fraught with fear.

The two lines referencing Flatt's guitar would, arguably, suggest more importance than the one line referencing his vocals, but that would be a faulty summation. Hall sings that he can 'see' the guitar and the thumb pick, but he 'hears' the song. Graham Lawton talks about the problems of memory in his 2011 article "The Grand Delusion."

In 2002, psychologists from the University of Portsmouth in the UK went to a local shopping centre and asked people about their memories of the death of Diana, including whether they had seen "the footage" of the actual crash. Nearly half said they had, despite the fact that no footage exists. An even higher percentage of people confidently "remembered" seeing non-existent TV footage of a Boeing 747 crashing in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, in 1992.

The failing of memory then becomes that humans remember what we want to remember. When Hall says he can 'see' Lester Flatt through the lens of memory, the image, by necessity, becomes an idealized version of reality; however, the trick of this particular memory is that the visual is paired with the auditory stimulus. Seeing the guitar is overshadowed by the emergence of the sound of the song. A recording can be referenced to refresh the memory whereas the visual is lost and must be recreated by the person's brain. He interacts with the memory on a visceral level rather than a physical one. Seeing and hearing then give way to feeling as the chorus closes.

The further juxtaposition of words comes in the form of a blues song that does not invoke a 'sad feeling,' which also suggests that the loss is consequential but the presence of such strong memories dulls the pain of loss to the point of being just an accepted reality of current situations. While the vision of Lester Flatt must be recreated, the song is still present. The extant recording dulls the sense of loss, but it does not eliminate it completely. The reality of the speaker's current situation is summed up in the phrase 'matter of fact' in reference to the emotionality of the perceived atmosphere surrounding him juxtaposed with the 'cool' rationality of memory. The chorus ends with the speaker still missing Lester Flatt, and, on the surface, still missing a time that has passed away.

The second verse continues with the theme of a passing age. The speaker has been around long enough to see the world change and he points out, in this verse, that he is talking to those who would commiserate with him rather than those who would exclude him because of his seeming lack of identification with the "cool"-ness implicit in the new world.

It's one of those days when I could get the blues
I've been there and done that and know you have too
One of those days I can't help looking back
One of those days when I miss Lester Flatt (Hall)



The speaker has now identified his audience. He is not talking to the new generation, the ones he believes would label and dismiss him, but he is talking to those who feel the same as he does. A sense of resignation encompasses this verse as well through the implication of experiences. The speaker has done it all and his audience has as well. The present then shifts from remembrance to longing. There is a force at play in this verse that doesn't just prompt memory; it forces the memories to take hold. The speaker cannot stop remembering, which quickly is supplanted by a longing for whatever Lester Flatt represents in the ethereal world in which the speaker finds himself lost.

Perhaps, the ultimate answer to the question of what Hall is missing comes in verse three.

I see an old bus on a dusty back road
Song book and instruments ready to load
It's hard to explain an emotion like that
Just one of those days when I miss Lester Flatt. (Hall)

Again, Hall incorporates the all-encompassing present in this song about remembrance. He is currently viewing an event that invokes an emotion he finds difficult to categorize. Perhaps that is because the current vision he is viewing could just as easily occurred in his own distant past. The innovation, the drive, the culmination of hard work that are all part of the mythical Lester Flatt of the song are still present on a lonely road where Hall is travelling. The implication here is that there is nothing missing. The song books, a reference to already produced music, and the instruments, a reference to music still being performed, intermingle on this stretch of road in the present. They are "ready to load" in the context of this verse; they are ready to be used. The invocation of the emotion that the speaker cannot identify is immediately followed by the symbol of everything that has passed—Lester Flatt. Therefore, Lester Flatt is not a symbol of a time passing away, but a symbol of youth and innovation that is continually present as long as there is someone to care for the tradition.

In conclusion, "One of Those Days (When I Miss Lester Flatt)" is a song about longing, but it is not a song about the passing away of tradition. Instead, it is an invitation for the next generation to take up the mantle, to load that "old bus" with all the rich history available and to forge a new path that will go beyond the "dusty back road." It is a celebration of the past and a wish for the future; it is nostalgia intermingled with hope, and it is a song worthy of the symbol of Lester Flatt.

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Big Witch Overlook

by Sandy Hiortdahl

Signs for elk crossing: elk!

Saw no elk, nor Cherokee, nor witches either, at Big Witch Overlook, though clearly witches were present in the ether of July heat and honeysuckle, in the mysterious chirp of cicada.

Clearly those witches saw us coming, snickered up their black sleeves, muddling the navigation device of Howard's car, luring the female droid to take us beyond civilization, four thousand feet up the Blue Ridge, past Rattlesnake Gap.

Our navigation droid sweetly promised just a mile, or two, or three and we'd reach the Casino, the Village, dusty little stores lined with moccasins and arrowheads – even as the witches sent us farther, higher, and then our droid voice announced with haughty certitude: .. you have now reached your destination!" There we were, top of the peak, wilderness on all sides, an expanse of fir-treed valley wide as the sky.

How those crones must've cackled when we shouted, "No! No!" and reached for our cell phones, while of course they knew, didn't they: no service out here, no contact at all with the world below, with the world of slot machines and plastic beads.

We ended up back in Tennessee, thirty miles from Gatlinburg, having driven all the way across the Cherokee National Forest, and too weary to turn around and head back through it: another day, another adventure.

But mark this: I have promised those dark ladies we will return.



Illustration by Howard Dale



Return To Cherokee

by Sandy Hiortdahl

Howard said we can't call it "Return to Cherokee"
since we only made it to Big Witch last time.
This time we brought Brad for luck,
who told stories to ward off the witches,
who told us, as we passed into North Carolina
the true color of leaves are gold, amber,
orange, lemon, and dragon-scales red:
chlorophyll makes them green.

We crossed Sam's Gap, steeped
in leaves in their true colors, rock walls
rising about us, sheer drops into
valleys way, way low.
We felt lucky.

We felt lucky, until Maggie Valley
with its abandoned roadside motels,
The Broken Arrow, The Meadowview,
The Stony Creek, others whose signs
had crashed into pavement, others who once
called to nomad families in station wagons,
promising a Cool, Clean Pool,
Real T.V., Free Coffee.
Side by side units, air conditioners
sag in windows.

Just past the Half-Priced Souvenirs,
gone, busted glass, empty fruit-stand tables,
a tumble of boxes: white man's arrowheads
became Made in China arrowheads, gone.

Santaland's Santa with his one gleaming,
lighted eye, the small white and red
Ferris wheel, going 'round and 'round
with nobody on it, the newly painted
rollercoaster, reindeer seats, also empty,
though ready for big crowds
that won't be coming today
or tomorrow.



Sewing Circle Model® for Community Collaboration: A Multicultural Consensus Approach

By Jamie Branam Kridler Ph.D.,
Camille Carter, and Sandra Nuttall

"For nineteenth century women, quilts were the podium, the pulpit and the judges' gavel which their society denied them. Their quilts speak the language of abolition, patriotism, politics, social justice and westward expansion."

Pat Ferrero, Filmmaker, Professor Emerita San Francisco State University

Introduction

The Cocke County Collaborative (a division of Community House Cooperative, Inc.) of Newport and Cocke County in East Tennessee developed a new model for collaboration. The model has drawn a host of interested people and organizations from across the country both in following the progress of the working model and partnering for community based projects. We began with the idea that members of a collaborative group would enter the collaboration as individual people, without designated role or title, and would then be able to turn towards any group with which he or she were affiliated and seek support or involvement for a particular purpose.

For example, one member may engage her family in one undertaking and her employer and her church in another. As we naturally relate and function in this way, we say things like: "OK, I'm wearing my Executive Director's hat now" or "Speaking as a mother..." or maybe "Our neighborhood association wanted to help too." In Newport we are just beginning to document how this ancient "new" model works best, based on our experiences and recollections. Because of our history and our traditions, we call this method the Sewing Circle Model for Community Collaboration.

The Model

"Sympathy is a supporting atmosphere, and in it we unfold easily and well."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

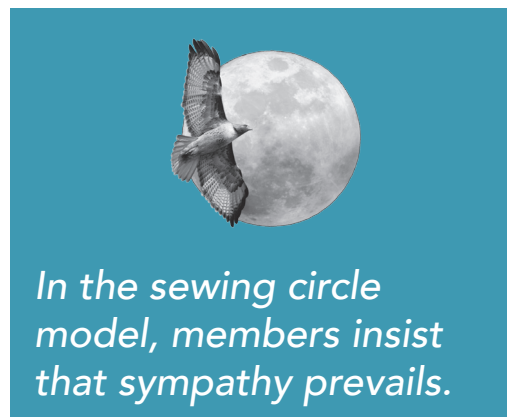
When first required to construct an organizational chart depicting the grassroots collaboration method practiced in Newport and Cocke County, East Tennessee, our group's original attempt produced a hodge-podge that fit no current /prior standards or models but then when the various roles were charted on paper, a quilt-like pattern evolved. We had come together first at a kitchen table and then in an old school building managed

by a Senior Citizens organization, where the quilting tradition was alive and thriving. Our collective decision-making and productivity were born of decades sitting together at tables and standing together at gravesides, and the patchwork quilt symbolized the unity, diversity and equity of the collaborative.

Quilting, sewing, patching, knitting and stitchery are the primeval feminine arts, taught by the women and institutionalized through giving, sharing and preserving cloth and fiber for the health and sustenance of civilization. As the mythic sewing circle meets and creates and perpetuates itself, there are no victors, nor losers, nor victims, nor bosses.

As women have emerged from the confines of domesticity into the workplace, the street, and the corporate board-room, they have tended to accept and adopt for themselves the language, methods, ways of operating, and even the dress, of the male-dominated culture.

In the sewing circle model, members insist that *sympathy* prevails. The most fundamental criterion for decision-making will be born of that “like passion”: that children will thrive, or that peace will prevail, or that resources will be equitably shared – and that profit and control and measuring to any absolute material standards become subsidiary considerations.



The sewing circle model for collaboration eliminates the need for the contrivances of representation and allows each individual to represent herself and her uniqueness first, and then to develop naturally the linkages she brings. In this way, principle takes precedence over personality, temperament, race, sexual orientation, age, etc.

The sewing circle model is beyond consensus. Its shared values and common purpose, its attachment to place and history of natural relationships position it for powerful action unfettered by cumbersome clarifications and contractual agreement-making. Progress is driven by a tradition of understanding and commonality: **core values**.

These sympathetic collaborators take time for *reflection* as well – time for remembering and “shining light again.” There is time for silence needed in order to turn away from the demands of daily living and to consider deeply the events and questions of life’s unfolding.

Membership

Personal belonging in this circle is embraced regardless and independent of employment, class, race, age, other affiliation, etc. but it is strengthened through multiplicity of relationships. (A member’s granddaughter is employed by another member’s family

or a member's nephew is a bench-warmer on the little league team coached by another member's brother...) Matters of everyday life find their proper place as trivial, moderately important or related to central core values – thus not allowing inconsequential matters to eclipse the primary work. Affiliations – personal, family, community, region, state, nation, world – are recognized in ring patterns emanating from the center like a target. Although the sewing circle model is based on the female principles of equitable process, it does not have to do with gender, and men can easily feel comfortable, effective and natural engaging in this model of collaboration.

The sewing circle model for community collaboration holds in high regard the exercise of personal belief or practice, and for experiential learning and, therefore, the elderly, the traveled, the bold, the patient. Different ways of knowing are accepted and celebrated allowing for the youth and the elder, the graduate and the self-taught, the urban and the rural, the male and the female to sit in mutual respect and equity.

Members of the sewing circle bring unique talents and skills to the circle. One member may have the ability to see a beautiful, complete design in the mind's eye. This member often designs and pieces the quilt-top. The quilt-top provides a pattern for the members of the circle to follow as they work to complete the quilt. The designer equates to a visionary in a community collaboration. This person clearly sees the future and how the community is likely to benefit.

Some members of the sewing circle may never design or piece a quilt-top or sew a stitch on the quilt, but they have other skills. The quilt-top, batting, and backing must be aligned and pinned together in order for the quilting to begin. Some members of the community collaborative are willing to provide only one or two services to the group. Some members stay, some depart, and some return again in the future.

The "Way" of the Quilt

Quilters come in all shapes, sizes, ages, genders, and abilities. They complete the day-to-day quilting. Some are quick and accurate; others are quick and less than accurate. Some are most deliberate and approach the work as an art form; some work slowly and see the task as something that simply must get done. Some of the quilters are also designers and makers of the quilt-top. There are a few members that have the ability and willingness to be a part of the entire process. Each member of the sewing circle contributes in his or her own way and makes the circle complete. Community collaboratives also have individuals that fulfill specific roles, individuals that vary in their talent, skills and willingness to contribute, and individuals that have the skill, time, and motivation to participate in the entire process.



Each member of the sewing circle contributes in his or her own way and makes the circle complete.

The quilting frame provides the structure for the aligned quilt-top, batting, and backing and allows the sewing circle to view the entire quilt as they work. The frame hangs overhead from the ceiling and provides the outline of the quilt. The Core Values of the community collaborative can be compared to the quilting frame. Everyone agrees and works within the framework of the Core Values. Issues are resolved and trust maintained as the work continues within the value system.

Eventually the sewing circle finishes the quilting, removes the quilt from the frame, and sews a border around the edges of the quilt. The quilt maintains the shape and is ready for use. Once complete or near completion, the process begins again. The community collaborative removes their work from the “frame” when the work is able to “stand on its own” in the community. The next undertaking begins with the collaborative members using the knowledge and skills they attained or refined with the last project. Like the sewing circle, community collaborative work is rewarding, affirming, and beneficial. The desire to continue is fostered.

The authors thank the Waitt Family Foundation for their ongoing support for this and other important work in Newport and Cocke County. Also, we appreciate the historic support and guidance from Terry Holley formerly with the East Tennessee Foundation and Gaye Evans of the Appalachian Community Fund. The challenge to “build the model” originated during the evaluation process of the Institute for Community Peace (formerly the National Funding collaborative on Violence Prevention) Washington, DC.



Saint Jude and The Gargoyle

By Sandy Hiortdahl

When you move, there's always something left behind, something you meant to bring, a record player with the polka-dotted lid, candy tins, the snowshoes, but with the ache of joints and bones, it no longer matters what's yours.

Except one moving day in East Tennessee, when the boys I'd paid to unload it all came up and said, "We ain't sure what to do with your statue of Satan" and I could not remember owning one, or bringing one, or ever really seeing one, though the boys nodded sagely, led me to the U-Haul, now empty except the far right corner, glowering in the dimness, my garden gargoyle.

I tried to smile, to explain, (felt a little panic as they stared without blinking) about cathedrals, rain spouts and gutters, France and, you know: gargoyles. *Gargoyles*. "It might *look* like Satan..." I heard myself saying.

The boys nodded, still unblinking, as though I'd spoken in Akkadian. The taller one said to the shorter, "Put it next to that statue of Jesus."

"Actually," I started, about to tell how it wasn't Jesus at all, but Saint Jude, patron of lost causes, desperate situations – but luck or Saint Jude stopped me, "... Never mind."

To this day, the gargoyle and Saint Jude sit by side in the back yard as though puzzled by the new arrangement, but willing to abide it.



The Use of History in Ron Rash's *The Cove*

Allison Rash Ensor

Ron Rash's 2012 novel *The Cove*, set in western North Carolina in the closing months of World War I, makes use of one of the most familiar plots in Appalachian literature: an outsider comes into a mountain community and falls in love with a local girl. Frequently their relationship is strongly opposed by members of the family and the community. In this novel, Rash fleshes out his plot with details drawn from the history of that place and time.

The town of Hot Springs, once called Warm Springs, is known today principally as a place where the Appalachian Trail, US 25-70, and the French Broad River intersect. In past times, particularly in the nineteenth century, it was well-known as a resort, one of numerous "watering places" where those with money and leisure gathered to spend their summers. A number of large hotels were constructed, some of which could house several hundred guests. The fame and popularity of Hot Springs increased after a favorable description of the area appeared in a popular novel, "*The Land of the Sky*"; or, *Adventures in Mountain By-ways* (1876) by Frances Fisher Tiernan, who used the pseudonym Christian Reid. One of the last and most imposing of the hotels was the Mountain Park Inn, built in the 1880s (Sakowski 169-70). None of these hotels is still standing; like so many other grand hotels of the past, all of them burned.

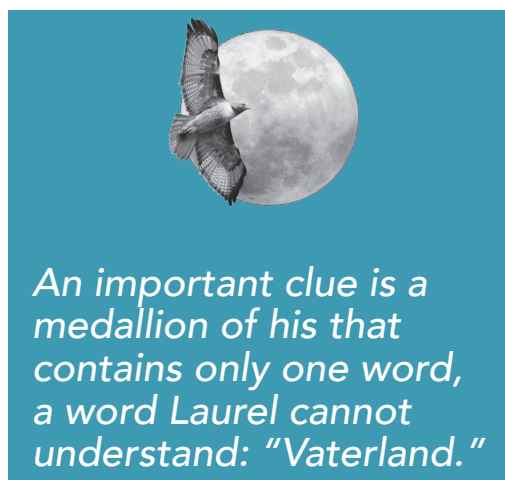
By the time of World War I, the Mountain Park Inn was failing to draw guests as it once had, and its owner entered into an arrangement with the federal government to house on its grounds over 2000 German prisoners. These were not soldiers; none had seen combat during the war. They were men who had been on German ships in New York harbor when the war began in Europe; afraid to risk travel across the Atlantic Ocean, they remained where they were. When the United States entered the war in 1917, they became enemy aliens, and as such were interned.

Most sources I have consulted say nothing about any German prisoners having escaped from Hot Springs, but at least one printed source reports that one man did manage to flee the prison and make his way to New Mexico (Sakowski 171). One can almost imagine that Ron Rash, knowing this story, began to speculate: what if that prisoner had only made it a few miles from Hot Springs? How would he disguise himself? How could he keep from being detected as a foreigner? What would happen when he met some of the local people? What if one of those local people were a young unmarried woman? How might they react to each other? What sort of relationship might they have? Could it have a happy ending or would it be doomed to fail?

Readers of the novel will know precisely how all these questions are answered. I will just say here that the escapee pretends to be unable to speak, so that his German accent will not give him away. He carries a note stating that his name is Walter Smith and that he wants to buy a train ticket to New York. He is taken in by a young woman, Laurel Shelton, who is something of an outsider herself; the superstitious people of the town of Mars Hill regard the cove where she lives as “a cursed place” where “ghosts and fetches” wander. It is a place that even the Cherokee shunned, and smallpox claimed all of the members of the first white family that lived there (17). Laurel’s birthmark confirms their opinion that she may well be a witch. I cannot be sure that Rash had this in mind, but it is surely worth noting that in the New Testament St. Paul began his sermon on Mars Hill with the observation: “... I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious” (Acts 17:22. KJV).

At first Laurel suspects nothing, but gradually she begins to realize that there is something strange about this man she and her brother Hank have befriended. An important clue is a medallion of his that contains only one word, a word Laurel cannot understand: “Vaterland.” It means “fatherland,” of course, but more specifically it is the name of the ship Walter was serving on prior to being sent to Hot Springs. The *Vaterland* was the largest ship ever built, larger than the Titanic, which sank two years before the war began. Following American entry into the war, the ship was renamed Leviathan and was used for the transportation of American troops. Rash relays much of this information, even reprinting a New York Times story from 1916, about a fancy dress program aboard ship intended to raise money to support the war effort of Germany and Austria-Hungary against Britain and France (167-69). Laurel learns most of this when she and a former teacher of hers pay a visit to a professor at Mars Hill College. The college comes under a good deal of suspicion from one of the novel’s worst characters, Chauncey Feith, due to the fact that its library actually has books written in German! He is sure that they are subversive and thinks it would be a good thing if they were all burned. Rash does not translate the German lines his narrator quotes from one of the books Chauncey examines, lines from an 1821 play by Heinrich Heine, beginning “Das war ein Vorspiel nur...” (98). I will paraphrase them this way: “That was just the beginning, because when someone starts burning books, they will wind up burning people.” The statement has frequently been associated with the Nazi burning of books in Berlin in 1933.

The girl’s name, Laurel Shelton, seems almost an inside joke – if that is the word – on Rash’s part. Reversed, it is Shelton Laurel, the name applied to an infamous circumstance of 1863, near the community of that name, in which a number of Union prisoners who were supposed to be taken to East Tennessee were killed by Confederate soldiers under the command of James Keith. A subsequent investigation declared it an act of “savage and barbarous cruelty,” one that earned the county the name of “Bloody Madison” (Sa-



kowski 173-74). (Hot Springs, Marshall, and Mars Hill are all in Madison County.) Rash was of course familiar with the story; he even has a poem, "At Shelton Laurel." I cannot say what Rash may have had in mind by giving his central female character the name he does, except to note that both stories involve prisoners of war who receive radically different treatment. I will note, in addition, that the names Keith and Feith differ only in their initial letter.

In time, Laurel confronts Walter with what she knows, and he acknowledges that he is indeed German and that he had served on the *Vaterland*. He was one of those who played in the orchestral concert described in the *Times* article that the professor let Laurel have. The conductor on that occasion, Otto Goritz of the Metropolitan Opera, was impressed by Walter's skill in playing the flute and had offered him a position with the orchestra. Walter's hope is that, once the war ends, as it seems about to, he can travel to New York and accept the offer that Goritz made. The name Otto Goritz is genuine, but he was primarily a Metropolitan Opera baritone during the years 1903 to 1917. He did conduct on occasion, obviously, as reported in the *Times* article.

Most of the novel takes place north of Asheville, but in one scene Chauncey, the antagonist and super-patriot, calls on a senator in his office on Asheville's Pack Square and then happens to notice a building with the sign "W.O. Wolfe Tombstones and Monuments" (148). Yes, Chauncey was about to encounter none other than the father of Thomas Wolfe. It was eleven years before Asheville's citizens will be outraged at the portrayal of their city in *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929). (Wolfe's father appears in the novel as Oliver Gant.) Even the famous statue is referred to: "By the shop's open door, a huge marble angel hovered over the seeming disarray" (148).

Chauncey and Wolfe converse, as Rash imitates the latter's rather florid style:

"I can assure you, young squire, from my own humbling experience, that as we grow infirm and life's pleasures pale, we long to free ourselves from these sad declining vessels. But enough of such dispiriting parlance. An old man's morbid reckonings are not usually the concerns of youth, nor should they be" (149). Attention is drawn to a tombstone for a soldier, a volunteer from the area who was killed in action in France. Chauncey feels a shudder as he notes the dates of birth and death, 1892-1918. They are precisely his, were he to die in that year. Wolfe quotes from Thomas Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard": "The paths of glory lead but to the grave" (150). Far be it from me to say whether this constitutes a foreshadowing of how the novel will turn out. It stands as a rebuke to Chauncey's imaginings about glory for himself and of the monument that he hopes to have someday – if not in Raleigh or Washington (like Zebulon Vance, the Civil War governor whose monument stands in the middle of Pack Square) at least in Mars Hill.



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Like a number of environmentalist novels these days, *The Cove* makes reference to vanishing species. When Laurel was in school sixteen years before the action of the novel, her teacher had shown the class a Carolina parakeet and told them that "soon there'd be none left, not just in these mountains but probably in the whole world" (7). The teacher was quite right, as the last known Carolina parakeet died in the Cincinnati Zoo in 1918; none had been seen in the wild for years before that. (The last passenger pigeon died in that zoo four years earlier, in 1914.) Several times there is mention of the chestnut blight, which began in New York early in the twentieth century and gradually spread into Appalachia until almost every chestnut had died. The novel indicates that most or all of the North Carolina chestnuts had died by 1918, which may be too early. Most sources place their total disappearance a decade or more later.

It is difficult in a novel of this kind to avoid anachronisms, and Rash introduced one when Chauncey reflects on the possibility of burning the German books housed in the library of Mars Hill College. If he were to set a match to them, he thinks, "they'd burn as quick as that Hun zeppelin did in New Jersey" (99). Surely most readers immediately recalled the German airship *Hindenburg*, which caught fire and burned while attempting to land at the naval air station at Lakehurst, New Jersey. That event, made so memorable by newsreel film and the recorded commentary of WLS radio reporter Herb Morrison, occurred nearly two decades later, on May 6, 1937. The reference does not appear in the paperback edition of the novel.

A curious geographical error appears early in the book, after Walter makes his escape from the prison at Hot Springs. He steals a boat and since the current "went exactly where he needed to go," he floats "downstream" (32), so we are told, with the intention of reaching Asheville and there catching a train for New York. Normally, the French Broad River flows in the opposite direction, not toward Asheville but toward its union with the Holston River east of Knoxville. It may be appropriate to remember Mark Twain's comment about James Fenimore Cooper's novels that "even the eternal laws of Nature have to vacate when Cooper wants to put up a delicate job of woodcraft on the reader" (Twain 183).

The most recent portion of the novel comes first, in the prologue. By then America had been through a world war bigger than that of 1914-1918, and the Korean War as well. The date of the prologue seems to be fall 1953, as a school banner welcomes the "future class of 1957" (2). At first the scene appears to be one found in a number of books and movies: a government man, a TVA representative, an outsider--from Kansas in this instance--has come to tell the local people about the rising water that will soon be covering the cove. But if he expected the usual resistance, he is mistaken. No one will be displaced by the rising waters, as the cove is now uninhabited. One man offers the opinion that the cove cannot be buried too deep to suit him (1). The TVA man drives into the deserted area and makes a discovery that haunts the reader throughout the novel. Someone has died in a well; was it an accident or was it murder? Who was the victim? And who or what caused his death? As with history, we seemingly must give Rash some geographical leeway here: the TVA built four dams in North Carolina, but none were

close enough to Mars Hill to have caused any rise in the water there. Douglas Dam was built on the French Broad in the 1940s and a good deal of land was covered by Douglas Lake, but that is the wrong decade and the wrong place for Rash's story.

That is the beginning of the novel. Its end coincides with the closing days of World War I. The reader of course knows something that the novel's characters do not: it will end on November 11, the famous "eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month." (I presume it was at 11 AM in central Europe, which would of course be hours earlier in the United States). Chauncey plans a great celebration to welcome home a local hero, Paul Clanton, one that he will claim is "every bit the equal" (223) of Tennessee's Alvin York, still remembered as one of the greatest private heroes of the war. So eager is Chauncey for an impressive patriotic ceremony that he desperately hopes that the war will not end before it can occur. He is made uneasy by every sound that could mean the start of a victory celebration (224). Since the ceremony is to occur on November 9, he need not have worried. Later, November 11 arrives, heralded by the "boom of shotguns and crackle of rifles" (249-50) But what of Walter? And what of Laurel? We know that they have no intention of remaining in the cove after the war; his career awaits him in New York, and she is eager to go there with him, escaping forever "a place where only bad things happened." The future looks bright....but wait! We know from the prologue that someone died in the cove, and if that was true, are we really headed for a happy ending? It is Ron Rash who is writing, after all. Where is Jan Karon when we need her? Both places are in North Carolina, but it is a long way from Mars Hill to Mitford – or Mayberry, for that matter.

The critics have not been as kind to *The Cove* as they were to Rash's previous novel *Serena*. Undoubtedly the novel has its flaws. Rash has more or less acknowledged this by the revisions he made for the paperback edition. Two chapters were omitted, along with some other material. The book's principal villain is perhaps too one-dimensional, almost a caricature in his fanaticism. Can a reader look favorably on any character named Chauncey? And when we hear that the name means "chancellor" or "leader" (69), Rash is clearly inviting us to identify him with Adolf Hitler, *der Fuehrer* (the leader), who held the title of Chancellor. This seems really too heavy-handed, and Rash no doubt improved the novel by diminishing Chauncey's role in the paperback revision. The novel's heroine is perhaps too good – though many of that time would have branded her immoral for having sex with two men that she is not married to. Laurel is obviously the very opposite of the evil *Serena*. As I noted at the beginning, aspects of the plot seem all too familiar – the outsider who falls in love with the mountain girl – though here she is an outsider too. There is also the familiar representation of the "cursed place" and the fear, suspicion, and hatred directed against those who live there. Admittedly, Rash has altered both history and geography in his story, taking the facts that are useful to him and changing the rest to suit his purposes. Nevertheless, I find it a significant novel whose message extends well beyond its



time frame. One reviewer of Rash's recent story collection *Something Rich and Strange* (2014) commented on the way he can "pinpoint time...and place...and drag them into the universal." That is surely what has happened here.

Rash's story demonstrates clearly how ready people are to believe the worst about those they fear, those who are not like them. The more the reader identifies with Walter and Laurel, the more he or she wants them to triumph over the small-mindedness, prejudice, and superstition of the small Appalachian town. That they fail to do so makes the story the more memorable.

Why should Rash have told us this story from almost 100 years ago? We do not hate the Germans anymore; the end of World War II is seventy years behind us. No matter... there is always someone to hate and fear: blacks, gays and lesbians, Muslims, liberals, immigrants. Different people have different lists. Rash's novel makes its point, I think, that the passage of time has not eliminated hate, fear, ignorance, and prejudice directed against those who are different from us and for whom we have no sympathy—whether they live in our own country or in some far-off place.

Works Cited

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Uncles in Jail

by Sandy Hiortdahl

At a cookout on Labor Day, talk turns to
Uncles in jail, once fugitives who hid
In tents beside the backyard shed, or wandered
Underground through Appalachian caves, or
Took to lower Alabama highways for years,
but then were caught or turned themselves in,
Serve their time before returning to their people.

Up North, where I am from, they vanish,
Uncles and brothers and sons disappear and
No one gathers them back.

The South owns its uncles, bound to aunts who wait, to
Ma-maws and Pa-paws who fling open a screened door,
Greetings with a cry as nieces and nephews stare and huddle,
And hug, and tell their stories at cookouts on Labor Day.

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