

# 8 Representations of Literacy and Region: Narrating "Another America"

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In late autumn 1989, CBS News dispatched its *48 Hours* production crew to the mountains of eastern Kentucky. The crew spent several days there documenting life in a remote Floyd County hollow, a place that maps call Muddy Gut and that CBS labeled "another America." A damning recital of statistics punctuated the *48 Hours* broadcast: among other social ills, unemployment and teenage marriage were said to exceed national averages. And the adult illiteracy rate, too, warranted attention for supposedly being abnormally high. "Forty-six percent of the people in Floyd County... cannot read," frowned correspondent Doug Tunnell, his tone implicating illiteracy as a chief source of the hollow's woes. The narrative logic is clear here: No wonder Muddy Gut suffers such economic and moral privation. If only its people could read and write, they might get real jobs, earn a little self-respect, and stop marrying so young.

No doubt economic times are tough in Muddy Gut. The same can be said for communities throughout central and southern Appalachia. Coal has gone bust again, perhaps for the last time. And the regional infrastructure coal built cannot now support the service economy that has kept afloat many a rural town throughout America—though often at the expense of distinctive local culture. More and better literacy cannot single-handedly forestall the economic crisis facing eastern Kentucky and places like it. Yet public discourse (witness *48 Hours*) again and again points to literacy as the particular technology that can restore all other technologies: better reading, better writing, better roads, better paycheck, better life. The consequences of this logic are subtle, and such subtleties are what I wish to explore in this essay.

Henry Giroux, after Gramsci, argues persuasively that literacy is "a double-edged sword" that can be "wielded for the purpose of self and social empowerment or for the perpetuation of relations of repression and domination" (Introduction 2). I would suggest that narrative representations

of literacy contend similarly on this "terrain of struggle" (2). That is, the way people talk and write about literacy concerns not only "basic" reading and writing skills, but also serves as

a cultural marker for naming forms of difference within the logic of cultural deprivation theory. What is important here is that the notion of cultural deprivation serves to designate in the negative sense forms of cultural currency that appear disturbingly unfamiliar and threatening when measured against the dominant culture's ideological standard regarding what is to be valorized as history, linguistic proficiency, lived experience, and standards of community life. (3)

The people of Muddy Gut are different, CBS tells us. That nearly half of Floyd Countians are illiterate would seem to explain that difference conveniently, if not precisely. The assessment of literacy, then, provides a framework within which to evaluate cultural practices. And such evaluation—to extend Giroux's argument—may yield occasions for intervention calculated to conceal or, alternatively, to stigmatize cultural difference.

This process of narrating assessment, evaluation, and intervention necessarily constructs particular versions of reality that serve, innocently or not, the ends of those authorizing the narrative. Thus, CBS promotes a story of illiterate America that is startling—but somehow reassuring—to its middle-class audience. The values of this audience are reaffirmed by images of a place that apparently lacks its values, especially its values pertaining to literacy. The moral of the story is plain enough: failure to attend to literacy and literate institutions has unhappy consequences; there is much to be lost if the middle class succumbs to the creeping illiteracy that claimed Muddy Gut.

This is an old story, and it is instructive to think about where old stories have been before we repeat them. The story of illiteracy in Muddy Gut is the residue of a much more complex discourse on literacy, coupled with a discourse on place, that reached its influential zenith about a century ago. Drawing from texts that circulated in a variety of overlapping public spheres, I will sketch how the discourse on literacy and place exhibited its double-edged potential—to mark difference and to resist such marking.

### **Difference and Resistance**

Narratives of the South as Other are staple in American experience and tradition. The force of these narratives in the popular realm seems to have been amplified in the late nineteenth century as postbellum "redemption" faltered.

Addressing the "Southern problem" in 1880, E. L. Godkin noted the difficulty of converting "Southern whites to the ways and ideas of what is called the industrial stage in social progress" (qtd. in Woodward 142). But Godkin, observes one commentator, was saying nothing especially new (142). He merely echoed the sentiments of antebellum voices such as Emerson's and Lincoln's, voices which had garnered authority by figuring the South as Other in their speaking to (and for) a growing northern middle class. This middle class, according to Burton Bledstein, was made extremely anxious by southern difference—difference assessed tangibly in terms of education and literacy:

The South both stifled the emergence of a class with professional skills and was burdened by the highest illiteracy rate in the nation. An illiterate people, lacking the discipline necessary to avoid promiscuous sex and illicit orgies, was insensitive to the sanctity of the nuclear family with its example of control, planning, and management. (28)

Thus, even before the Civil War, the stage was set for measuring southern difference in terms of literacy: no literacy, no middle class, no progress.<sup>1</sup>

After 1880, as in northern states, a professional middle class was emerging in the central Kentucky "Bluegrass." These "self-made" men and women did not appreciate the implication that they lacked literacy—and more important, the cultural sophistication literacy supposedly affords.<sup>2</sup> James Lane Allen's popular sketches of the genteel Bluegrass might be read in this light as an attempt to assert, against northern critics, that southern living was indeed sophisticated. Wrote Allen in 1886, "The highest mark of the gentleman is not cultivation of the mind, not intellect, not knowledge, but elegant living" (40). Certainly Allen meant not to disparage reading and writing, but rather simply to situate literacy as subordinate in value to "elegant" manners and taste. Of come, in Allen's Bluegrass, relatively few could attain the status of gentleman, so not everyone required the foundation of literacy upon which the gentleman stood. But these few literate gentlemen were charged with providing for the best interests of the many—interests defined clearly in terms of race, class, and gender. In advancing this argument, Allen echoed the dying, distorted strains of a Jeffersonian ideal: some people needed basic literacy to labor, others needed more advanced literacy to govern. But in neither case did being literate mean being cultured. In Allen's world literacy may well have regulated the acquisition of cultural capital, but literacy itself did not constitute such capital.

Thus Allen defended Kentucky culture by inverting contemporary middle-class values, by appealing to the elitist tradition those new values opposed. So even as school reform dramatically reduced the number of illiterate Kentuckians and contributed to the growth of a middle class, Allen insisted on promoting manners, not literacy, as the cultural capital which Kentuckians should aspire to acquire. Had Allen's attitude prevailed in his day, measures of literacy would have continued to mark all of turn-of-the-century Kentucky as problematically different.

Allen's popularity surged at century's end, but as the twentieth century commenced, his vision of Kentucky and the Old South lost its national appeal (Bottorff 86). Before that happened, however, while Allen was still considered "the Hawthorne of his day," a young Harvard graduate returned to his Bluegrass home desirous of winning fame as an author, and a gracious Allen was there to boost John Fox, Jr., toward his goal. Even in Fox's earliest short stories, he exhibited sympathy for Allen's impulse to defend Kentucky from aspersions cast from the North upon the South. But Fox's fictional Bluegrass differed from Allen's in significant ways. Unlike Allen, Fox figured Bluegrass culture as drawing its intellectual wealth from books and its financial strength from a modern industrial economy. Further, in modish "local color," Fox juxtaposed his idea of the Bluegrass with an invented culture that conspicuously lacked both literacy and modernity.<sup>3</sup> He situated this invented culture in the eastern mountains of Kentucky, where he had spent some time traveling in connection with a family coal-mining venture (see Moore 80-82).

Although today it seldom reaches more than a regional audience, Fox's fiction commanded a national readership at the time of its publication. Collections of his stories and the appearance of his first novel, *The Kentuckians* (1898), secured for him recognition as an important figure in the local color movement. Just after the turn of the century, two novels, *The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come* (1903) and *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (1908), became bestsellers and prompted successful Broadway and Hollywood adaptations. Each of these works contrasts mountain and Bluegrass culture; each measures progress toward modernity—or distance from it—in terms of literacy.<sup>4</sup>

That Fox's work attained such immediate and widespread notice enabled him to advance a theory of southern improvement measured against the low mark of supposedly primitive, illiterate conditions in the southern mountains. Over time, Fox's particular narratives have faded from national memory.

What is remembered, though, is an idea of a culturally impoverished region within a region: an eastern Kentucky in which the spectacle of CBS's *Muddy Gut* is tragic, but not surprising.<sup>5</sup>

In Fox's narratives, the power to mark so-called "Appalachian difference" derived, in part, from his privileged position at the confluence of conservative and liberal intellectual currents. Fox received a classical education at his father's academy near Lexington, and at Harvard he continued to excel in classical studies. But at Harvard, Fox also showed interest in contemporary scholarship. The vogue of Spencer's Social Darwinism peaked during Fox's upper-class years in Cambridge, 1881-83; exposure to American strains of Spencer's philosophy was unavoidable (see Cremin 90-100). Thus was Fox equipped to speak of mountain and Bluegrass difference as at once a traditional problem of cultural refinement and a scientific question of societal evolution.

For Fox, the logic of cultural refinement validated *class* hierarchy. Mountaineers were different, then, because they had always been too poor to benefit from the influence of the middle- and upper-class Bluegrass. Fox's notions about social evolution, however, had to do more with *race* than with class.<sup>6</sup> He held fairly steadily to the view that if allowed a place in Bluegrass culture, the mountain would adapt to its civility, if not its gentility. This adaptation was possible, Fox explained in his novels, because the mountaineers descended from solid Scotch-Irish and Anglo-Saxon stock, the same as their Bluegrass cousins. (It should be noted that for Fox, as for many of his contemporaries, certain peoples could not hope for "racial improvement—namely, African Americans and southern Europeans) These themes of race and class assume a special clarity in Fox's first novel, *The Kentuckians*, wherein they infuse a narrative of literacy with dramatic tension.<sup>7</sup>

*The Kentuckians* plots the lives of three characters: Randolph Marshall, a young legislator from the Bluegrass; Anne Bruce, daughter of the governor; and Boone Stallard, the newest state representative in the mountain delegation. The novel initially concerns itself with the romantic interests of these three characters, but as the narrative progresses, romance yields to politics in the relationship between Marshall and Stallard, between embodiments of Bluegrass and mountain cultures. Marshall emerges as thoroughly, classically literate: his speeches before the house are meticulously composed and then memorized; he keeps a journal which serves on occasion as an important aid to memory; and he is shown writing as well as paralyzed by writer's block. Stallard, on the other hand, is a fresh arrival on the scene of literacy—that is, the sort of literacy Marshall exhibits. Although he reads the

law voraciously, he rarely writes; he never composes more than a few notes to prompt the "cyclonic" oratory that earns him notice in the legislature. Perhaps James Lane Allen or Thomas Jefferson might have appreciated Stallard's literacy as appropriate to his agrarian station, but Fox's narrator betrays no such sympathy.

The Marshall-Stallard dialogue remains tense throughout the novel, in large part because Marshall continually articulates a "degeneracy" theory to explain human conditions in the mountains, and because Stallard never adequately rebuts him. Stallard does, however, recognize a counterargument. He wonders aloud whether anything more than "the slipping of a linchpin in a wagon on the Wilderness Road had not made the difference between his own family and the proudest in the State" (16).

Fox does not permit Marshall and Stallard the agency to resolve their own conflict. Instead, he calls in experts to do the job—experts who voice then-popular discourses on race and class politics. Fox introduces a northern newspaper reporter and a southern geologist, two experts whose various professional experiences have led them to form opposing theories of literacy and region. The northern reporter speaks first articulating a class- and race-based theory of degeneracy:

The accepted theory of the origin of the mountaineer, particularly the Kentucky mountaineer, is that he is the descendant ... of exported paupers and convicts, indents, and "pore white trash".... (75-76)

This argument resonates with claims made by Henry Cabot Lodge in his *Short History of the English Colonies in America* (1881), and, at about that time, by John Fiske in public lectures that eventually became *Old Virginia and Her Neighbours* (1897). The theories of Lodge, Fiske, and others committed to Social Darwinism were very much in the air at Harvard during Fox's undergraduate career there. In his narrative, Fox neither explicitly embraces nor rejects Lodge's and Fiske's "scientific racism" (Batteau 61). Instead, Fox nods to the validity of their theories, then claims an exemption for the Kentucky mountaineer. He does so by insisting that eastern Kentuckians are not descended from the racially "weak" populations of the Virginia commonwealth, and so are not prone to the degenerate potential of those peoples. Extending this argument, Fox establishes that the "primitive" nature of mountain people cannot be explained by prevailing theories of racial difference. Fox lets the southern geologist explain:

Some of them [mountaineers] are the descendants of those people ["pore white trash"], of course. There are more of them in the mountains than in the blue-grass, naturally; but the chief differences between them and us come from the fact that they have been shut off from the world absolutely for more than a hundred years. Take out the cavalier element, and, in rank and file, we were originally the same people. Until a man has lived a year at a time in the mountains he doesn't know what a thin veneer civilization is. It goes on and off like a glove, especially off. Put twenty *average* blue-grass families down in the mountains half a dozen miles from one another, take away their books, keep them there, with no schools and no churches, for a hundred years, and they will be as ignorant and lawless as the mountaineer. (76-77)

From the perspective of Fox's geologist, the absence of literacy and literate institutions arrests the development of culture. Such institutions once civilized "*average*"—that is, middle-class—Bluegrass families and, presumably, could do the same again for the mountaineer. In this view, literacy is an instrument for instilling cultural refinement, as well as a tool for assessing it. That Stallard, the mountaineer, is reformed by literacy finally sways Marshall to see that the boundary between mountains and Bluegrass amounts to a class distinction—a distinction marked by literacy.

But Fox's theory of literacy and difference falls short when we consider the following statistics on "illiteracy" drawn from the 1900 U.S. Census.<sup>8</sup> In the county of Fox's birth and childhood, 23 percent of all persons aged ten years and older could neither read nor write. In the Tennessee and Virginia counties where Fox became familiar with mountain life while on coal-mining business, the illiteracy rate as 23 and 21 percent, respectively. In Franklin County, Kentucky, seat of the state capital and setting for *The Kentuckians*, 22 percent of those ten or older could not read and write. In Rowan County, site of the "feud" fictionalized in *The Kentuckians*, only 18 percent of those ten and up were considered illiterate.<sup>9</sup> That same figure, 18 percent, also applied to Fayette County, of which Lexington has always made up the largest part. Put succinctly, comparing numbers from Fox's Bluegrass and his mountains, one finds a relatively consistent rate of basic, self-reported literacy—about 80 percent.

Fox clearly misrepresents literacy in the mountains. In addition to census statistics, numerous documents testify to the presence of literate behavior where, according to Fox, none was to be found.<sup>10</sup> But perhaps Fox's mountains are bereft of literacy because he could not sense it there; the seeming absence of "modern" literate institutions in the mountains—public libraries, daily newspapers—made it difficult for Fox to imagine the presence of literacy

sponsored and valorized by local culture. In *The Kentuckians*, Boone Stallard fails to defend his mountain constituents against charges of illiteracy and ignorance because he is unable to invoke the sign of a single literate institution serving that constituency. Indeed, his own literate career begins only after he leaves the mountains for the Bluegrass, where his literate potential is cultivated at college. Even on the issue of literate potential, Stallard remains silent. Only the expert, the geologist, has the authority to speak to the mountaineers' dormant capacity for reading and writing.

Like Fox's man of science, and so many other educated folk in his writing Fox himself came to be acknowledged as an expert on mountain life.<sup>11</sup> So compelling were Fox's observations that contemporary scholars a variety of disciplines cited him as an authority in their treatises on Appalachian difference. In fact, the literature on Appalachian difference contains many more references to Fox than to the professionals, Lodge and Fiske among them, from whom Fox's thinking about mountain life derived (Batteau 61).

For example, the Southern Education Board issued a report in 1902 on "Educational Conditions in the Southern Appalachian Region" which begins by tracing the ancestry of the region's inhabitants back to northern European origins:

These mountaineers come ... of a noble stock. There are no facts whatever to support the old theory that they are the descendants of indentured servants or renegades from the old colonies. John Fox, Jr., suggests the right theory when he says that the "axle broke" and the pioneer and his little family had to stop and go into camp, with the result that their descendants remain in the mountains today. (3)

Here Fox's name lends credibility to a particular notion of race classification. A decade earlier, with a younger Fox looking on, Lodge and Fiske had injected their science of race into public debate about southern European immigration—immigration they saw as a threat to "American democracy in the purity of the Anglo-Saxon race" (Batteau 61). The Southern Education Board seized upon the public perception that this threat had not abated in ten years' time. Consequently, using Fox's name, the board promoted Appalachia as the "home and training ground of the southern whites" who might stave off the genetic (i.e., racial) and moral degradation of American culture (3). But, the board pointed out, to be useful in cultural preservation, mountaineers would have to become literate.

The twelfth decennial census in 1900 announced distressing news: the South remained the nation's most illiterate section. U.S. Census Office enumerations

placed "native white" southern illiteracy at 16.44 percent, as compared to a national average of 7.7 percent. Andrew Sledd, professor of Latin at Emory College, wrote that "no explanation of Southern illiteracy can . . . be based on the generally accredited statement that our large and almost wholly illiterate negro population lowers the percentage of our section" (2471). The problem, Sledd argued, was with "poor whites," that "body of Southern lawlessness and Southern illiteracy... almost wholly responsible for some features of Southern life that bring odium (not undeserved) on all the section" (2473). Like Sledd, the Southern Education Board measured this odium in terms of illiteracy. While it found adult illiteracy in the southern mountains to be roughly the same as throughout the South, the board did notice several exceptions. It declared excessive Kentucky's illiteracy rate of 21.65 percent and implied that in the eastern mountains illiteracy in "the white population over 10 years of age" might range between 50 and 65 percent (5). This, of course, was hardly the case. As already mentioned, most mountain counties—just like most Bluegrass counties—posted an illiteracy rate of around 20 percent at the turn of the century. At that time, Kentucky's highest illiteracy rates were near 30 percent in its far southeastern counties.

Three of these southeastern counties—Breathitt, Perry, and Knott—were featured in an influential 1898 study by George Vincent, a prominent University of Chicago sociologist. Vincent noted that in the Kentucky mountains "the frontier has survived in practical isolation until this very day," a condition "made vivid" for Vincent by Fox's writing (1). But later, perhaps indirectly referring to Fox, Vincent comments, "We had heard so many stories of the ignorance of the mountaineers that we were somewhat disappointed by their familiarity with a good many things we had expected them not to know" (15-16). What these mountaineers knew, apparently, derived from an array of literate activity. Among other pursuits, Vincent mentions seeing evidence of letter writing, newspaper reading, and organized schooling. Clearly, the conditions Vincent reports do not square with those that Fox and the Southern Education Board characterize in their texts. Yet in spite of his observations, Vincent keeps to the view that illiteracy held back modernity in what had become the southern mountain *region*—its boundaries mapped firmly in both popular and scientific discourse.<sup>12</sup>

### **Consequences: Intervention**

As Raymond Williams reminds us, regional boundaries are at once physical *and* cultural ("Region" 232). And he argues that cultural boundaries manifest

themselves primarily in discursive forms—the regional novel, for example. Such forms of discourse mark the "contrast between refined or sophisticated tastes or manners, and relatively crude and limited manners and ideas" (*Keywords* 265). As we have seen, Fox's writing helped create regional difference of the sort Williams describes. Trading on middle-class preoccupations with tastes, manners, and intellect—the elements of cultural capital—Fox found audiences for a narrative which dramatically juxtaposed Bluegrass progress and mountain decline. Scholarly experts then validated this narrative by working it into the discourse of the middle-class academic professions (e.g., education and sociology).

In this way, the mountains of eastern Kentucky were rather rapidly established as culturally inferior, with this inferiority defined partly in terms of illiteracy. Consequently, by century's end, Appalachia was vulnerable to an onslaught of social reform efforts. One such effort is memorable for its ostensible concern with literacy: the opening of "settlement schools" for mountain children. Most successful among these institutions was the Hindman Settlement School in Knott County, Kentucky, which enrolled its first students in 1902. Founded as a project of the Kentucky Federation of Women's Clubs, Hindman's initial mission "consisted in teaching students how to read and write effectively, and in equipping them with good habits and practical training" (Jim Wayne Miller, "Madly" 239). Historian David Whisnant points out that Hindman's curriculum focused more on practical training—cooking and sewing, for example—than it did on literacy education (51-68).<sup>13</sup> It is not clear whether literacy education took second place to training in practical arts at Hindman, or whether literacy was viewed as a prerequisite to advanced work in these arts. But in any event literacy instruction at Hindman emerged tangled within often conflicting gestures to improve local culture while some-how preserving it.

The production of handicrafts, for example, provided the school with a healthy income, while supposedly affording students the opportunity to conserve their mountain heritage. But many of the handicrafts produced at Hindman were quite unlike local crafts. For example, most weaving and furniture making at Hindman reflected practices imported (along with instructors) from urban settlement houses, industrial schools, and universities (Whisnant 61). Like Fox's mountain tales, Hindman's woven and wooden artifacts of "genuine" mountain life reached a national audience, and thereby confirmed the notion that traditional, if backward, American culture remained unspoiled within the fastness of the southern mountains.

In the process of learning to read and write effectively, then, early Hindman students may have been led to embrace as their own a culture invented for them by middle-class reformers from the Bluegrass. Yet it would be a mistake to dismiss this imposed culture as fraudulent

Or even inauthentic. As Whisnant argues, "One of the paradoxes of intervention-induced cultural change is its very durability and the degree to which imported forms and styles are accepted and defended by local people whose actual cultural traditions they altered or displaced" (100). Thus, rather than impugning the cultural traditions imposed at Hindman, critique should center on the very act of imposition, of intervention. Necessarily, then, attention must also be paid to the enabling role of literacy in such cultural intervention.<sup>14</sup> In this light, we can see the problem posed by Hindman's initial approach to literacy education: Hindman, like schools involved in literacy campaigns nationwide, restricted "the ability to read to learning a particular text or doctrine" (Arnove and Graff 7).

That "particular text," or rather its narrative, is the very one celebrated in Fox's popular novels. It is, too, the single narrative repeated at the turn of the century by academics with a professional interest in mountain life. As we have seen, this narrative, whether popular or scientific, figures the Appalachian region and native as Other. And as reform efforts worked this narrative back into the mountains, the proverbial circle was closed. Children and adults throughout the southern mountains, like those at Hindman, were schooled to accept their otherness precisely as it was understood by those who had invented it. Such is the double-edged nature of representations of literacy.

## **Conclusions**

The turn-of-the-century "literacy crisis" that reshaped Kentucky's cultural geography was far from an isolated phenomenon. Indeed, the discourse of that crisis permeated public discussions of modernity and progress throughout the country, particularly with regard to the threat illiteracy was thought to present to higher education (Susan Miller; Trimbur). Against this backdrop, bringing literacy to the mountains continued to be the goal of many reformers throughout the early part of the century. On occasion, this "mountain work" extended beyond regional boundaries. In the 1920s, for instance, a national "crusade" against illiteracy sponsored by the National Education Association grew out of attempts to teach reading and writing to adults in eastern Kentucky.<sup>15</sup>

The discourse of literacy in crisis did not unify those acting against illiteracy. If students entering Harvard in the 1890s were illiterate, as E. L. Godkin lamented in the *Nation* and elsewhere, it remained that southerners were much more illiterate, and southern mountaineers and African Americans even worse off (cf. Klotter). Redeeming Godkin's illiterate "boys" nationwide demanded that "preparation of the schools should be made sterner than ever, and the standards of the college higher than ever, so that everybody who [was] meant to go to college should" (285). This was not, however, the remedy generally proposed for southern mountaineers and others of rural circumstance.

In 1910, Theodore Roosevelt's Commission on Country Life argued that rural schools should concentrate on teaching "farm and home subjects," not the curriculum of urban schools (123). Rural education that followed the urban model allegedly contributed to "ineffective farming, lack of ideals, and the drift to town" (121). The commission in effect called for "relevant" education such that, as Godkin might have put it, everybody who was meant to live a rural life would do so. Following the commission's advice, the government developed domestic policy that in practice directed educators to ignore illiteracy where it was supposedly the worst. Intentionally or not, then, "country life" policy helped inject the myth of Appalachian illiteracy into the durable mold of federal law.

That myth persists today, having been articulated variously and repeatedly throughout this century. It persists largely because the conditions that first gave it shape have changed so little. There remain economic and ideological tensions between the northern and southern sections. The middle class in the Bluegrass (and elsewhere throughout the South) aims always, if subtly, to resist James Lane Allen's old suggestion that Southerners put elegant living ahead of knowledge and intellect. And still quite useful in that resistance are comparisons to mountain life, portrayed to be as different, as alien, and as illiterate as ever.

Yet in eastern Kentucky, generations of voices have contested the invention of an illiterate Appalachia. Following a public reading by John Fox, Jr., for example, one observer wrote that "the mountain boys were ready to mob him:" The boys claimed that if Fox's "Cumberland tales" were true, "he was 'no gentleman for telling all the family affairs of people who had entertained him with their best:" And if his stories were false, "they were libelous upon the mountain people." But such complaints were not taken seriously. President William Goodell Frost of Berea College, who related this incident, wrote that the boys simply had "no comprehension of the nature of fiction" (102).

Voices of resistance are better heard today, and better received—but mostly locally, and only occasionally. When CBS aired its *48 Hours* program on Muddy Gut Hollow, daily newspapers in Lexington and Louisville covered negative reaction to the broadcast for several days. Over the next month, the papers published letters and opinion pieces critical of CBS. Objections were also heard on local television. An hourlong panel discussion aired just after *48 Hours* on the CBS affiliate serving southeastern Kentucky. The panelists included the governor and various community leaders in eastern Kentucky, who agreed that "the program exaggerated the incidence of teen-age marriages and illiteracy, [and] made spouse abuse appear an accepted practice" (Keesler A13). But the *48 Hours* staff never took a full turn in this conversation. A CBS spokesperson would say only that the network had covered Kentucky fairly over the years, "including shows about the Kentucky Derby and bluegrass music" (qtd. in Keesler A13). More telling, however, are informal comments made by Phil Jones, a *48 Hours* correspondent, upon his return to New York from eastern Kentucky. "It's foreign," he told a television critic for the Lexington daily. "It's awful. It's filthy. They're not educated" (qtd. in White D1).

People in Appalachia struggle every day to resist such damaging representations of life and literacy. It is an especially frustrating struggle: these representations have long been sanctioned by those who control the very forums in which resistance must be registered to have rhetorical effect. Regrettably, the noise generated by the current literacy crisis too often drowns out alternative representations of literacy in Appalachia. Given this situation, how might formal literacy instruction intervene in this discourse of crisis, how might it create a space for representations of literacy that respect the experience of people in the region?

Of course, this question cannot be answered here. Instead, meaningful answers must emerge from dialogue on literacy, dialogue centered on voices heretofore unheard or dismissed in debates about literacy instruction. We can, however, briefly consider elements essential to such dialogue, especially those relevant to the preceding analysis that implicates notions of literacy in the invention of Appalachian difference, of the Appalachian Other.

First, we must recognize that traditional literacy instruction continues—whether by design or by accident—to mistakenly equate a narrow range of literacies with intelligence, even humanity. With this in mind, Giroux urges

us to view curriculum as a historically specific narrative and pedagogy as a form of cultural politics that either enables or silences the differentiated human capacities which allow students to speak from their own experiences, locate themselves in history, and act so as to create social forms that expand the possibility of democratic public life. ("Liberal Arts Education" 119-20)

If we begin with these assumptions about the nature of literacy curriculum and pedagogy, then, a range of possible initiatives follows. Such initiatives aim to challenge restrictive definitions of literacy and to upset oppressive representations of difference authorized by such definitions.

The pedagogy of difference Giroux theorizes speaks directly to problems of literacy education that arise wherever borders—regional, cultural—are negotiated. At its core, a pedagogy of difference addresses "the important question of how representations and practices that name, marginalize, and define difference as the devalued Other are actively learned, internalized, challenged, or transformed" (136). Most schools and colleges choose not to support this sort of pedagogy. But in many institutions, by looking beyond bland course descriptions and into classrooms we can find teachers committed to literacy pedagogies that interrogate cultural difference. At the University of Kentucky, for example, Mary Winslow recently taught a first-year writing course that brought together students from the mountains and the Bluegrass to investigate various representations of Appalachia. Winslow's students analyzed and criticized photographs, broadsides, and short stories that narrate life in the mountains of eastern Kentucky, with particular attention to the economic, political, and cultural consequences that coal mining has had for the region. On a modest scale, courses like Winslow's prompt students to understand how representations of cultural differences between mountains and Bluegrass are rooted in the relations of power that, historically, form the border between the two regions.

Giroux reminds us, too, that a pedagogy of difference must "not only... unravel the ways in which the voices of the Other are colonized and repressed," it must help us "understand how the experience of marginality at the level of everyday life lends itself to forms of oppositional and transformative consciousness" (136). A growing body of work in Appalachian studies models how such transformations of consciousness might be inferred from a variety of texts, "literary" and otherwise (see, for example, Cunningham). But actually raising oppositional and transformative consciousness in the English classroom is quite another matter. Teachers who commit themselves and their students to the sort of critical pedagogy

Giroux describes can easily document the myriad difficulties they daily face. Members of the Eastern Kentucky Teachers' Network, for example, tell of successes and failures in their efforts to challenge traditional forms of literacy instruction that perpetuate "powerlessness" in Appalachia, as Rebecca Eller describes (76). In an ethnographic study of the network, Eller writes that while some teachers achieve "autonomous empowerment"—control over their own professional lives—others are able to attain the "transformative empowerment that would enable them to work for social change." It is these teachers, Eller reports, who attempt "to educate their students for power—power to define their own identities, and power to challenge the status quo." In so doing, these teachers struggle "to provide their students with a more proper, critical literacy" and strive "to fashion a new leadership in the region—leaders who have an understanding of the problems of Appalachia, and who have both the confidence and the ability to confront those problems" (328).

Other stories of reinventing Appalachia by reinventing literacy do not abound, but they do exist. Eliot Wigginton's "Foxfire" pedagogy, in a public school setting, links literacy instruction with the retrieval and preservation of cultural memory in the southern mountains. And the Highlander Research and Education Center in Tennessee has for years immersed students in the discourse of civil rights and radical democracy (see Horton and Freire). But what is most important about Foxfire and Highlander may not be the work they accomplish *in* the mountains. Rather, the specific pedagogy they model, and the attitude about Appalachia they promote, lay the groundwork for an inclusive dialogue *with* Appalachia, dialogue consistent with a "politics of difference and [a] border pedagogy responsive to the imperatives of a critical democracy" (Giroux, "Post-Colonial Ruptures" 13).

If we as scholars and teachers participate in dialogues about the role of literacy in the creation and perpetuation of Appalachian otherness—indeed, any kind of otherness—what should we expect? We should expect, above all else, to be confronted with hard choices: "To write and to teach writing—to teach literacy—is to exercise choice," argues J. Elspeth Stuckey. "Literacy is an idea with a violent history. We can continue that history or we can divert it. The signs are mostly discouraging" (112). There is hope, but only if we can divert our attention from what seem normal and natural ways of talking about literacy and literates, illiteracy and illiterates.

Maxine Greene locates this hope in "the capacity to unveil and disclose." She observes that "these are dark and shadowed times, and we need to

live them, standing before one another, open to the world" (248). We must seek to unveil the historical complexity of literacy and to disclose how literacy can subjugate as well as liberate. Only then can we begin to understand how a place like Muddy Gut, how Appalachia, might come to be viewed as "another America." Only then can we begin to imagine yet another America, one in which the manifold literacies of a plural culture mark regional boundaries as open places that invite us to learn carefully and teach patiently.

### Notes

1. Indeed, such measurement predates the Civil War. As early as 1840, the U.S. Census Bureau attempted to measure the nation's illiteracy, and found the South wanting. By 1880, the year Godkin lodged his complaint against the South, the Census Bureau had gathered data that purportedly confirmed, *prima facie*, that southern states, some fifteen years after reunion, still had the highest illiteracy rates in the nation. Over the next twenty years, assessments of literacy in the South returned the same results. (See decennial censuses for years 1840-1900 for the government's ongoing commentary on illiteracy in the South.)

2. Note, for example, that Barnett Wendell passed over Kentucky letters in his *Literary History of America* (1900). Wendell's gesture merely continued a tradition that dates back to antebellum years, during which certain abolitionist writers contended that investment in slavery was responsible for the "literary pauperism of the South" (Helper 404).

3. In *Appalachia on Our Minds*, Henry Shapiro discusses at length the development of the "idea" of Appalachia—and how that idea served the interests of those who invented and disseminated it. A good explanation of the economic pressures that have influenced perceptions of Appalachia appears in Ronald D. Ellers *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*.

4. According to William S. Ward, Fox's *Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come* as the nation's tenth-best seller in 1903 and seventh-best seller in 1904. *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* appeared as the nation's third-best seller in 1908 and fifth-best seller in 1909. In 1913, Fox's *Heart of the Hills* was the fifth-best-selling book in the nation (139). A silent cinematic treatment of *The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come* was released in the 1920s, and three film versions of *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* were made, all by Cecil B. De Mille. The 1936 production featured Fred MacMurray, Henry Fonda, and Sylvia Sydney (Titus 70, 95).

5. Numerous other "local colorists" situated their fiction, in central and southern Appalachia. See Lorise C. Bogers *The Southern Mountaineer in Literature* for an extensive listing of relevant titles.

6. Alexander Saxton identifies "two thrusts" of Social Darwinism. He argues that in the 1890s a race-finked theory of social evolution came to dominate, supplanting an earlier class-linked theory. The class-linked theory facilitated mass industrialization and justified unequal distribution of wealth; the race-linked theory warranted resistance to immigration and the forced opening of economic markets abroad (369-77).

7. Like *The Kentuckians* (1898) published before them, *The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come* (1903), *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (1908), and *The Heart of the Hills* (1913) invoke literacy as a primary measure of character and intelligence. Also, two essays in Fox's *Blue-grass and Rhododendron*, "The Kentucky Mountaineer" and "The Southern Mountaineer," discuss literacy and culture in metaphors quite similar to those appearing in *The Kentuckians*. Both essays were first published in *Scribner's*, April-May 1901.

8. Harvey Graff makes a good argument for the careful use of census reports on literacy (329-33). He suggests that around the turn of the century people complied in high number with requests for accurate census information. They did so, Graff says, because powerful social institutions—the church, for example—encouraged compliance, and because federal penalties for noncompliance were considerable. Still, we must learn more about the politics of census taking if we are to have an adequate sense of census reliability. Margo J. Anderson's *The American Census: A Social History* (1988) discusses the politics of population enumeration, but more remains to be written about census questions pertaining to literacy.

9. Details of the "feud" portrayed in *The Kentuckians* resemble those of the Martin-Tolliver conflict which beset Rowan County in the 1870s and 1880s. Fox's fictional Roland County is threatened with abolition if law and order are not restored by county officials. In 1887, Rowan County received a similar order from the state legislature after the commonwealth militia, instructed to arrest unruly "feudists," acted to put down a "fantastic melee in the county seat" (Channing 154).

10. S. S. MacClintock a University of Chicago sociologist, followed Fox's lead when he observed that in eastern Kentucky "newspapers and daily mails do not exist." He allowed that [a] few denominational and agricultural papers, mostly weeklies, may be found in the more prosperous homes, but there are many that never see a paper of any kind" (14). In fact, the number of commercial weekly newspapers published in eastern Kentucky before 1900 attests to the presence of considerable literate activity in the mountains. The roster of weeklies active in the late nineteenth century includes the *Kentuckian* (Ashland, c. 1856), the *Mountain Echo* (Barbourville, 1873), the *Sentinel* (Catlettsburg, 1875), the *Times* (Williamsburg, 1885), the *Big Sandy News* (Louisa, 1885), and the *Inquirer* (Ewing, 1897).

11. Even today Fox's authority stands in some quarters. A widely read history of Kentucky states that "in John Fox, Jr., the mountaineers found an understanding chronicler who recorded in his novels their loves, hatreds, and philosophies" (Clark 275). A similar sentiment appears in the most current literary history of the commonwealth (Ward 76). And a new high school social studies text celebrates an "immensely popular" Fox as one who "gained a national reputation as an interpreter of mountain culture" with writing that "contrasts the life of the mountains and the Bluegrass" (Hall 222).

12. The emergence of twentieth-century regionalism is discussed from a geographical perspective by Fulmer Mood and Vernon Carstensen in chapters in *Regionalism in America*. The conventional formulation of sections and regions they summarize is questioned by John Alexander Williams in "A Regionalism within Regionalisms: Three Frameworks for Appalachian Studies," and is challenged and revised by Edward Soja in *Postmodern Geographies* (163-65). The relationship between region and literature is considered by Jim Wayne Miller in a chapter in *Geography and Literature*.

13. In *The Heart of the Hills*, Fox characterizes a mountain settlement school teacher from the Bluegrass: "She taught the girls to cook, sew, wash and iron, clean house, and make baskets, and the boys to use tools, to farm, make garden, and take care of animals; and she taught them all to keep clean" (64).

14. Rhonda George England argues that Whisnant assesses only the "cultural losses" brought about by the founding of the settlement school at Hindman. She tallies the "cultural gains," among them what "the teachers learned from the mountain people" (6). Harry Robie takes an opposing view, insisting "that on balance the settlement schools were harmful to the culture of the southern mountains" (6). Several readers of Robie's argument responded to his "fallacious indictment" of settlement schools with observations drawn from experiences as students at such schools (Deacon, Flannery-Dees, and Hobgood 45).

15. Cora Wilson Stewart, a native Kentuckian, headed the NEA's Illiteracy Commission after steering a similar body in Kentucky. A former school superintendent in Rowan County, Stewart founded the "moonlight schools" for "adult illiterates" (see Stewart). News of Stewart's schools spread outside Kentucky after they were featured in a 1913 Bureau of Education bulletin, *Illiteracy in the United States and an Experiment for Its Elimination*.

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