

Satterwhite, Emily. *Dear Appalachia: Readers, Identity, and Popular Fiction since 1878*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 2011. xvi, 379 pp. \$40.00.

On the cover of Emily Satterwhite's *Dear Appalachia*, a professional, middle-class woman stands on a bridge, behind which are the tall buildings of a city. Looking in a mirror, the woman sees herself in overalls standing in a field framed by mountains and cattle in the distance. In this clever image, the cover presents the book's concern with readers who have lost their ties to Appalachia but who find in Appalachian fiction a way to preserve or reaffirm them. Although the book also examines readers who stayed in Appalachia, for the most part the readers Satterwhite discusses are "outmigrants" because they have left Appalachia and migrated to cities and towns, where they have sought economic success and acquired educated or professional lifestyles. These include a taste for high-brow literature or what she terms "high middle brow literature," which is not high art but is equally respectable. Satterwhite divides these readers into several groups: national or metropolitan readers, who are educated elites defending the American virtues of independence and autonomy or opposing the deleterious effects of industrialization or modern consumer society; intermediate readers, who have acquired professional or educated status but still feel ties to and nostalgia for their Appalachian area, especially its sense of community, its white character, and its primitive life style; and local readers, who have stayed in Appalachia, but, because of the growth of the consumer culture, including the distribution of books and movies, participate in the national culture.

As the winner of the Weatherford Award for the best 2011 non-fiction book in Appalachian studies, *Dear Appalachia* examines five different periods of Appalachian best sellers and their audiences: those of Mary Noailles Murfree, who wrote during the 1880s and 1890s, amidst the Gilded Age's "large gaps of rich and poor," great "unregulated corporate power," "influxes of immigration," and "expanded activities abroad" (179); those of John Fox, Jr., who wrote during the Progressive Era (1900-1920), when "schooling and professional work compelled" middleclass people to leave "the places of their childhood" (21); those of Harriette Arnow, who wrote during the 1950s, an age of "suburbanization and rural to urban migration" (22); those of Catherine Marshall and James Dickey, who wrote in the 1960s and 1970s, a period of "U.S. imperialist militarism and civil rights activism" (23); and those of Jan Karon, Charles Frazier, and others who wrote between 1990 and 2001, a period Satterfield terms the "Neo-Gilded Age" because it shares the "large gaps of rich and poor" and other features of the Gilded Age. More importantly, she attributes the success of these Appalachian best sellers to the desire and wish of readers who are "outmigrants" to repudiate the unsettling characteristics of their eras and defend, justify, and reaffirm the Appalachia that they would like to return to or preserve, but cannot.

Satterwhite also discusses the authors' biographies and the features of the texts, noting, for example, that while Fox's *Lonesome Pine* depicts the ugliness of industrialization, reviewers said it supported industrial development. She argues, however, that studies of a text cannot tell us how readers responded. She does accept Raymond Williams' claim that literature forms a community, but, unlike Williams, who argues that literature divides into the dominant, the emergent, and the residual types, Satterwhite maintains that readers form the community fostered by the literature because of their experiences, desires, and interests,

To justify her explanations of the readers' views and experiences, Satterwhite examines the authors' fan mail. Her accounts of this fan mail are well researched and documented, including maps indicating the various places in the United States where the letter writers lived.

More importantly, her accounts of the mail explain in sociological or political terms why the readers believe in the authenticity of primitive Appalachia as well as the fiction's authors. In some cases, the readers even identify the authors with their fiction or their characters. Satterwhite points out, for example, that Murfree, who published her best sellers under the pseudonym Charles Egbert Craddock, was a frail woman who walked with a limp. Readers assumed, however, that she must be a rough mountain man because she displayed such knowledge of Appalachia and its mountaineers. In 1890, when the serial publication of *The Prophet of the Great Smokey Mountains* began to appear, her family forced her to reveal that she was a female who had never lived in the mountains because reporters, who assumed that her father wrote that novel, traced him to his home in St. Louis. As a result, six years after the publication of her best-selling collection, *In the Tennessee Mountains*, which established her masculine authenticity, she went to her editor's office and told him she was Craddock. He, of course, refused to believe it, saying, "But this is impossible, impossible!" (33).

While most readers shared the editor's belief that the author must be, like her characters, a rough mountain man, some "highbrow" readers recognized that, like them, Murfree was sophisticated. Readers of Fox's fiction show similar divisions. What Satterwhite calls "nationally identified readers" considered his *Trail of the Lonesome Pines* a celebration of "mountain quaintness," "industrial interventions," as well as their "nationalism, racism, and imperialism" (56). Local readers found the "stereotypical buffoons," who made up most of the characters, offensive. "[T]ransitional readers" found the mountain girl June moving because her loyalties were divided between her primitive mountain cove and the failed industry of her husband, Jack.

As Satterwhite indicates, Arnow's fan mail shows that, to varying degrees, readers of her very successful novels, including *Mountain Path* (1936), *Hunter's Horn* (1949), and *the Dollmaker* (1954), also expressed a desire for "authenticity," "identity," and "belonging." Satterwhite divides these readers along lines similar to those of the other authors: "metropolitan" readers who held "patronizing views of mountain people" (94), "midwest professionals," who showed condescending as well as compassionate feelings for the characters (94); "elite Kentuckians," both urban and rural," who, thanks to the novels, felt pride in their region but little involvement with the characters; and white "rural to urban migrants," some of whom distinguished themselves from the characters while others identified strongly with the characters (95). In this case too, readers considered Arnow an authentic representative of Appalachia, but this time with some justice, since she was born in the Kentucky mountains. What disturbed readers the most, Satterwhite notes, is that at *The Dollmaker's* end Arnow does not enable the main character, Gertie, to return to Kentucky. "Get poor Gertie Nevils out of Detroit, and back to Kentucky," one fan wrote (122). Another warned the fictional Gertie that "people were not supposed to live that way" (123).

The readers of Marshall's *Christy* and Dickey's *Deliverance* divide into similar types, and these novels performed similar functions for their readers as the previous Appalachian novels performed for theirs. Satterwhite notes, however, some important differences. Promoted by *Christianity Today*, *Christy* satisfied readers' desires for missionary work among primitive peoples and for the basic values denied by an "uncertain world" (138). By contrast, the violent mountain men in *Deliverance* gratified readers' views of primitive Appalachian life as well as their concern for Appalachia's authentic Scottish roots and a virile masculinity denied by modern life.

Lastly, Satterwhite explains how readers responded to the Appalachian fiction of the Neo-Gilded Age. In this case, she examines Jan Karan's *At Home in Mitford* (1994), Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain* (1997), Adriana Trigiani's *Big Stone Gap* (2000), and Silas House's *Clay's Quilt* (2001), but she discusses on-line customer reviews, rather than fan mail, which is not available. In this case too, she divides readers into types: cosmopolitans and Appalachians. They, in turn, divide into several subtypes, including "jaded," "touristic," and "nostalgic" cosmopolitans as well as "charmed," "affirmed," and "offended" Appalachians. In general, like the previous readers, these readers reveal a nostalgia for their or their grandparents' Appalachian hometown, close-knit community, and primitive lifestyle. What divides them is the extent of their desire to live or to just visit there, their belief in its reality, and their identification with the minor characters and their dialects.

Satterwhite also discusses the views of scholars, reviewers, feminists, sociologists, and historians and provides, as a result, many additional insights into readers' beliefs, desires, and experiences. One issue she does not address, however, is why she accepts the distinction between high and popular art. She treats this fiction as best sellers or as regional writing, but one may still wonder what aesthetic faults deny that they are high art or why she does not argue for the revaluation of one or more of these undervalued novels, if that is what they are. This is, however, a minor issue in her very full and thorough explanation and evaluation of the fans' views and reactions to Appalachian fiction of the last two centuries.

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