

# **Assumptions & Realities:**

## **Searching for Appalachian Culture in Literature**

**March 25, 2021**

# Here's the plan . . .

-  **Brief recap of 1<sup>st</sup> session**
-  **Resources! (so not at last minute) and musical interlude**
-  **“Daisy is a Hillbilly Name,” “Seat Them with Princes,” and “Class Lessons”**
-  **Kari Gunter-Seymour reading “Geaux Jeux”**
-  **Digressions (Keller, House) & musical interlude**
-  **“Kentucke,” and “Mother Nature Sends a Pink Slip”**
-  **Digression (Carson), Judy Bonds (endangered hillbilly), and “Just a Mountain” sung by George Ella Lyon**
-  **“Where I’m From”**
-  **Q&A**

## To summarize, catch up . . .

🔍 **weaving through what we read last week, including “digression” writers:**

- 1) love of land**
- 2) storytelling, love of language**
- 3) family**
- 4) appreciation of beauty, both natural and created**
- 5) what’s on surface does not reflect reality or truth; desire to resist, oppose stereotypes & prejudice; desire to make the simple complex (MaryEve’s informative links re: “pack horse librarians” vs. illiterate stereotype)**
- 6) evidence of strong, determined, resilient culture**

# Places to visit, Organizations, Other explorations

- 🌲 Arc of Appalachia: <https://arcofappalachia.org/preserves/>
- 🌲 Dysart Woods: <https://www.ohio.edu/cas/plant-biology/research/facilities-laboratories/dysart-woods>
- 🌲 The Dairy Barn: <https://dairybarn.org/>
- 🌲 New River Gorge (WV, newest nat'l park); Blue Ridge Parkway
- 🌲 Myth Busting the Rural/Urban Divide in OH: <https://mailchi.mp/wosu/get-in-on-the-conversation-800234?e=9a5555bb49> – **W, Mar. 31, noon**
- 🌲 Urban Appalachian Community Coalition: <https://uacvoice.org/>
- 🌲 Appalachian Voices: <https://appvoices.org/>
- 🌲 Kentuckians for the Commonwealth: <https://kftc.org/>
- 🌲 Foundation for Appalachian Ohio: <https://appalachianohio.org/>
- 🌲 First Book, founder Kyle Zimmer from Zanesville, OH: <https://firstbook.org/>
- 🌲 Women of Appalachia: <https://www.weku.org/post/appalachian-women-dispel-negative-stereotypes-poetry-visual-art-and-short-stories#stream/0>
- 🌲 My annotated bibliography

# Garfield's Blackberry Blossom/Poplar Bluff

Apollo's Fire, courtesy of Laura J. Moorman



# Daisy is a Hillbilly Name

🔍 clues to Miss Golder's character, attitude; details that show us what she's like:

- 1) nickname, "Miss Scolder;" never offers Daisy a seat
- 2) hair is "beauty parlor pretty," dress of watered silk (are you kidding me?!); tropical fish
- 3) lunch: linen napkin, sandwiches w/crusts trimmed of, china teapot & cup
- 4) does not investigate incidents, blames victim of prejudice

🔍 clues to Daisy's character, attitude; details the show us what she's like

- 1) holds her back straight as a broom, walks to office on her own
- 2) curious, full of wonder about fish; marvels at principal's food, soap & water
- 3) shares humor of her mistaken impression of school
- 4) quick to defend herself, pay back

🔍 very short story, but packed – suggestions re: what Annabel Thomas wants us to walk away with about Appalachia, its people, about life in general

- 1) anger about stereotypes, implications, can lead to violence
- 2) flatland vs. mountain conflict: internalization of stereotypes can lead to replication
- 3) education not valued if culture not respected

# Seat Them with Princes

## King James Version

He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, *and* lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set *them* among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth *are* the LORD'S, and he hath set the world upon them.

Samuel 2:8

## New International Version

He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor.

Samuel 2:8

## King James Version

He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, *and* lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; That he may set *him* with princes, *even* with the princes of his people.

Psalms 113: 7-8

## New International Version

He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes, with the princes of his people.

Psalms 113: 7-8

# Seat Them with Princes

- 📍 **clues to Miss Lemley's character, attitude; details that show us what she's like**
  - 1) **heavy gray sweater; wears glasses (not into appearances), smells good**
  - 2) **cares about birds; has suckers in car's glove compartment**
  - 3) **tells Virgil she's proud of him**
  - 4) **understands pride of community, wants her generosity to be a secret**
- 📍 **clues to Virgil's character, attitude; details that show us what he's like**
  - 1) **plans to offer to stay late to clean blackboards, erasers**
  - 2) **guilty about using slingshots & stones vs. crows**
  - 3) **works hard at reading, spelling, arithmetic; a promising student**
  - 4) **wants to protect his new shoes from dirt, slush; they make him feel tall**
- 📍 **again, short, but packed – suggestions re: what Jeanne Bryner wants us to walk away with about Appalachia, its people, about life in general**
  - 1) **mother's awareness of need for schooling, respect for Miss Lemley, gratitude**
  - 2) **help, "charity," difficult to accept; find a way to do so without hurting pride**
  - 3) **education valued if culture respected**

# **“Daisy is a Hillbilly Name” and “Seat Them with Princes”**

- 📍 **teacher & principal as enforcers of conformity**
- 📍 **power dynamic: establish hierarchies, class**
- 📍 **words as weapons = anger, retribution**
- 📍 **prejudice against: name, dress, family, speech, food**
- 📍 **family & school at odds**
- 📍 **education = erase culture (lesson = hide who you are)**

- 📍 **teacher as supporter of human worth**
- 📍 **love dynamic: establish opportunity**
- 📍 **words as support = joy, gratitude**
- 📍 **acceptance of: work, pride, relationship btw body, mind**
- 📍 **family & school respected**
- 📍 **education = strengthen culture (lesson = pride in who you are)**

## Language in the two stories

-  **Daisy = omniscient narrator, who can contrast two ways of speaking**
-  **ain't, tetched, ruint, you'd of, chilluns, fambly, son-of-a-bitchin' (Daisy); sit down, missy, you people, misbehaving, incorrigible malefactor (Mrs. Rand, Miss Lola Golder)**
-  **Seat = Virgil's perspective**
-  **she don't, fixing to give me what for, mosey on up, tarnation, this here note, skunk-sprayed dog, grocery poke, pie safe cupboard, sass, like poison vines choking a rail fence (Virgil, mother)**

# Assumptions vs. realities

 **“All you Kilkinneys are trouble-makers . . . should be made to stay in the hills where they belong.”**

 **“I’m good as ever they are.”**

 **“Minnows couldn’t live with the fish in this tank.”**

 **“Fish is fish.”**

 **poverty = illiteracy, dependence**

 **Virgil’s mother can read and write, has stationery; pride**

 **fear of judgment, punishment**

 **“I want to suck and suck this sweet cherry taste against my tongue and just hold it forever in my mouth. I don’t want Miss Lemley to quit talking about me doing good with double words . . .”**

## **“Facts” in the two stories**

📅 **everyone in “Daisy” is Appalachian: lola is “hillbilly” name, too! flatland vs. mtn.**

📅 **Daisy is 10**

📅 **Miss Golder uses dress, hair, food, tropical fish (money) to establish superiority**

📅 **Miss Golder does not ask Daisy to sit down; never asks Daisy what happened**

📅 **poverty: gov’t milk, flour sack dress**

📅 **area is Black, maybe multi-racial**

📅 **Virgil is first, second grade? can’t read long hand yet**

📅 **Miss Lemley takes Virgil to town in her car, has suckers (has done this w/others?)**

📅 **poverty: biscuits (coffee cup), side meat, not hungry, but shoes bad, no gloves**

📅 ***two* pair: shoes, boots (Buster Brown – ha!)**

# Class Lessons

- ↔ **connections between & among Hansel's poem, Thomas's story, and Bryner's story (2 out of 3 or all 3)**
  - ↔ **decorations in classroom**
  - ↔ **American history, culture: Franklin's sayings, Presidents, holidays (assumptions underlying those?)**
  - ↔ **pride (bun, best dress, handwriting)**
  - ↔ **poverty (biscuits, side meat [more fat than bacon], fried sausages, flour sack dress, trouser hem let down; use snow for ice cream)**
  - ↔ **names convey class**
  - ↔ **paddle: on display in office, in coat room, threat vs. achievement & pride**
  - ↔ **tone of voice: harsh or too sweetly vs. direct, warm; "threatened me w/words"**
  - ↔ **"sin of being country," just like my people: flatland vs. mountain again?)**

# **Pauletta Hansel reading “Class Lessons”**

**<https://www.wvxu.org/post/poem-pauletta-hansel-cincinnati-poet-laureate>**

**Kari Gunter-Seymour, author of *A Place So Deep Inside America It Can't Be Seen*, is 2020 Ohio Poet of the Year and Ohio's current Poet Laureate.**

**Joe Burrow, moved to The Plains, OH when he was 9 and attended Athens HS. He won the 2019 Heisman Trophy. His acceptance speech went viral, bringing in thousands of dollars to the local food pantry.**

**<https://www.facebook.com/FoundationforAppalachianOhio/videos/2656249874613349/> Kari Gunter-Seymour**

## ***A Killing in the Hills*, by Julia Keller**

**Just outside the city limits was a handful of played-out coal mines and, beyond and above them, the corrugated foothills of the Appalachians, their sides dense with sweet birch trees and scarlet oaks, the ground crowded with mountain laurel and black huckleberry.**

**It was a beautiful place, especially in the late spring and throughout the long summer, when the hawks wrote slow, wordless stories across the pale blue parchment of the sky, when the tree-lined valleys exploded in a green so vivid and yet so predictable that it was like a hallelujah shout at a tent revival. You always knew it was coming, but it could still knock you clean off your feet.**

**It was also an ugly place, a place riddled with violence—the special kind of violence that follows poverty, the way a mean dog slinks along behind its master (27-28).**

## ***Clay's Quilt*, by Silas House**

**At the summit, the sun washed out over the earth, so bright and yellow that he could see through the leaves fluttering on the trees. He walked across the top of the old mountain and looked out at the land below. There were no strip mines to be seen from here, no scars on the face of the earth, only mountains, pushing against the horizon in each direction, rising and falling as easily as a baby's chest.**

**He walked along, showing leaves and new buds to Maggie. When he looked up again, he stood in a small clearing that he had never noticed before. The trees here were thin saplings, so small that he couldn't understand how they withstood the heavy winds that sometimes blew at the top of the mountain. Clumps of bluebells grew at his feet . . . There were no birds here, either, and it seemed like he could hear the world turning beneath his feet. A breeze, no stronger than a breath, danced through the treetops. It caused leaves to tremble and limbs to scratch together, and it sounded to him like the high, soft sound of a dulcimer (291-92)**



# Assumptions re: Appalachian demographics

-  **Appalachia = Native Americans, Melungeons, Ulster Scots, English, African Americans, Germans, Italians, Welsh, Hispanics, Asians, Jews, Amish, and Hungarians**
-  **Frank X Walker coined term “Affrilachia” in 1990s after looking up Appalachia in dictionary and seeing it defined as white; co-founded Affrilachian Poets, still vibrant, strong**
-  **“Affrilachia,” title poem in *Affrilachia*, 2000 – will read later if time!!**
-  **Marilou Awiakta, Cherokee and Scots-Irish roots, supports Native writers in various ways, including WordCraft Circle: <https://www.wordcraftcircle.org/>**

# Kentucke allusions

- 📍 **“co-Rupped basketball” – Adolph Rupp, 7<sup>th</sup> winningest coach in NCAA; point-shaving scandal, 1951; all-white team from UK lost to all-black Texas Western team in 1966**
- 📍 **Whitney Young – civil rights leader, Urban League, NAACP**
- 📍 **Mae Street Kidd – business woman (Mammoth Ins., for Blacks), civil rights activist in KY state legislature (13, 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> amendments, fair housing)**
- 📍 **Isaac Murphy – famous Black jockey, won three KY Derbies**
- 📍 **Cassius Clay – Mohammed Ali; heavyweight champion boxer, conscientious objector in Viet Nam War**
- 📍 **Bourbon balls – featuring bourbon (associated w/KY), dark chocolate**
- 📍 **Hotbrown – sandwich featured at Brown Hotel in Louisville, KY: open-faced turkey w/bacon & Mornay sauce (after dancing!)**

# Kentucky



# Mother Nature Sends a Pink Slip

- 📖 uses business memo to “fire” humanity (rhetorical strategy)
- 📖 three warnings; I’m not sure, but here are my guesses given that “decade” is probably 1980s (poem copyright 1993):
  - too hot = Chernobyl (1986) [Three Mile Island, 1978]
  - shaken up home office = Black Monday 1987, stock crash
  - plague = AIDS (1981 forward)
- 📖 According to Grace Toney Edwards, Awiakta’s writing is influenced by her Cherokee ancestry, her Celtic/Appalachian heritage, and her childhood memories of growing up in Oak Ridge, TN, during the Manhattan Project. In *Abiding Appalachia: Where Mountain and Atom Meet*, she uses poetry and prose; in *Selu: Seeking the Corn Mother’s Wisdom*, she combines poetry, myth, legend, fiction, and personal essay.
- 📖 Blends Cherokee respect for web of life with science’s investigation of life

## Mother Nature Sends a Pink Slip



# Oh my good Lord . . . , by Jo Carson

Oh my good Lord, I am not a young man anymore.  
I have spent my life at work  
I felt might help to keep things whole.  
It tears my soul when I see  
the earth spoiled for money,  
for some small increment of time,  
or because it doesn't fit a plan . . .  
some tom-fool set of words on paper  
conceived behind desks in offices w/no windows.  
Behind a desk, there are no fish in water.  
There are numbers, and percentages die  
with certain concentrations of heavy metals  
or changes in temperature, not fish.  
There are no pictures of floating dead on office walls  
and references to the food chain might as well mean  
another billion whoppers passed through the golden  
arches.

I write and no one reads  
or worse, someone does read  
and the scientific language numbs the brain.  
I say some fish by the Latin name  
“contains five times federally accepted standards  
of mercury contamination in its muscle tissue.”  
Who gives a damn? I cannot say  
eating that fish contributes to your death.

I have not helped to keep things whole.  
I have done my work, I have loved the earth,  
but I didn't start shouting soon enough  
or loud enough and now all shouts are muffled  
by the volumes of paper the likes of me produce,  
or else there are no ears.

# Oh my good Lord . . . , cont.

**Who gives a damn? Me. I do.**

**I used to think I knew some answers or could find them. . . .**

**I had some ways, some knowledge,  
and a saving grace, the scientific method.**

**It may be the ultimate in cruelty jokes—remember them?—  
to write what could be without exaggeration  
the beginning to the end of life  
in some small creek, not to mention some small planet,  
and to watch some bureaucrat tear the research up  
and say, “Get me some other figures;  
that set doesn’t fit the plan.”**

**[BRD’s comment: poem copyrighted in 1989; Awiakta’s in 1993; & here we are. I remember reading that Appalachia should be seen as the “canary in the coal mine”: what happened here will happen everywhere if we don’t pay attention. And now? /s happening everywhere]**

# **The Endangered Hillbilly, by Judy Bonds**

-  provides very good history of coal mining, corporate ownership in Appalachia, and the dependence that coal miners created; *Storming Heaven*, by Denise Giardina, covers the same territory in fictional form, and *Matewan* provides a film version of mining, absentee ownership, mine wars, etc. (John Sayles, 1987)
-  Bonds also understands how corporations and politicians act to set people against each other; her savvy continues to be relevant
-  her willingness to take up and sustain the fight; these fights are ongoing, haven't stopped (different version of stubborn independence)
-  George Ella Lyon singing "Just a Mountain"