

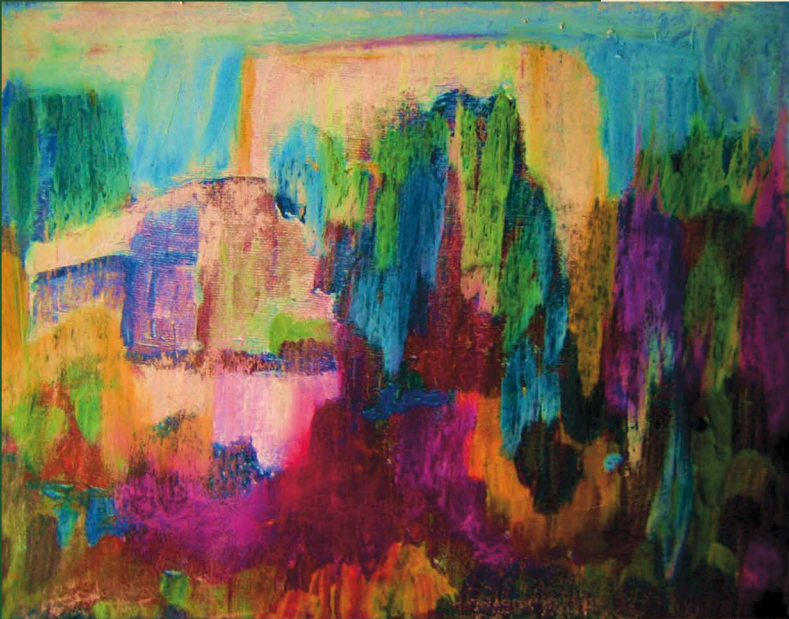
BIBLIOTECA JAVIER COY D'ESTUDIS NORD-AMERICANS

# VOICING THE SELF

FEMALE IDENTITY AND LANGUAGE IN LEE SMITH'S FICTION

CARMEN RUEDA RAMOS

---



PUV



VOICING THE SELF:  
FEMALE IDENTITY AND LANGUAGE  
IN LEE SMITH'S FICTION

Biblioteca Javier Coy d'estudis nord-americans

Directora  
Carme Manuel

VOICING THE SELF:  
FEMALE IDENTITY AND LANGUAGE  
IN LEE SMITH'S FICTION

Carmen Rueda Ramos

Biblioteca Javier Coy d'estudis nord-americans

Universitat de València

© Carmen Rueda Ramos, 2009

*Voicing the Self: Female Identify  
and Language in Lee Smith's Fiction*

1ª edición de 2009

Reservados los derechos

Prohibida su reproducción total o parcial

ISBN: 978-84-370-8404-6

Imagen de la portada: Sophia de Vera Holtz

Diseño de la cubierta: Celso Hernández de la Figuera

Publicacions de la Universitat de València

<http://puv.uv.es>

[publicacions@uv.es](mailto:publicacions@uv.es)

*For my family,  
a clan of fighting spirits*



## Table of Contents

Acknowledgments .....	11
Abbreviations .....	13
FOREWORD by Lucinda MacKethan .....	15
INTRODUCTION	
Voice, Identity, and Place .....	21
CHAPTER I	
Confronting the Looking Glass: The Early Novels .....	43
CHAPTER II	
Strategies of Self-Representation: The Gospels in <i>Oral History</i> .....	75
CHAPTER III	
Addressing the Concealed, Wild Self: <i>Fair and Tender Ladies</i> .....	103
CHAPTER IV	
Singing Self-Creation: <i>The Devil's Dream</i> .....	135
CHAPTER V	
Prophecy, Marginality, and Ambivalence: <i>Saving Grace</i> .....	167
CHAPTER VI	
A River of Words with the Self: Women's Journeys in <i>The Last Girls</i> .....	195
Conclusion .....	215
Appendix: An interview with Lee Smith .....	229
Works Cited .....	249



## Acknowledgments

Writing an acknowledgment is never an easy task for any author, let alone one whose book has taken so long to complete. This is a study that began as a doctoral dissertation years ago. I began formal research for this book during the summer of 1997 during a two-month stay at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. That summer I was lucky enough to meet Lee Smith at Wilson Library one day, thanks to a kind staff member who pointed out to the author that a foreigner was doing research on her work. It wasn't very difficult to spot the foreigner in particular as I was the only one reading books in the room that morning. As I stood up and went to the desk to return a book, I was greeted by a cheerful woman who immediately extended her hand to me. Although I didn't dare shake hands with Lee Smith, I did after my initial moment of shock. Lee Smith offered her help and invited me to come and see her at her home in Hillsborough, North Carolina, to discuss aspects of her work. The interview that can be found at the end of this volume is the result of our discussion—and eloquent testimony of my naiveté back then! After that summer, Lee Smith continued extending her hand, sharing generously across the ocean, and sending me novel after novel. I cannot express how grateful I am for having discovered her work, met such an incredible human being and artist, and learned so much from her mountain characters.

But my writing of this book encompasses more than the four years I spent completing my dissertation. When Carme Manuel contacted me to publish the book in the *Biblioteca Javier Coy d'estudis nord-americans*, I insisted in rewriting portions of it before seeing it in print. This rewriting has taken me forever, I must say! A dreadful succession of events over the last few years prevented me from ever writing the last line of it. So if there's someone that deserves my deepest gratitude for her patient wait and understanding, it is Carme Manuel, "Bless your heart!"

I also wish to thank Montserrat Ginés, who was my advisor, for convincing me of the need to go to Chapel Hill, for her patience through good and bad times, and for the sympathy of her reading, draft after draft. My special thanks go to Lucinda H. MacKethan for listening to my ideas that summer of 1997, for her generosity in reading my prospectus, for reassuring me that the chosen theme was worth working on, and for sharing with me the benefit of her expertise in Lee Smith's fiction then and now. I also wish to extend my gratitude to the Department of English at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for granting me permission for a two-month stay to carry out research during the summer of 1997. A special mention goes to Bill D. Ilgen at Davis Library and to the staff at Wilson Library for their attention, help, and kindness. Back home, I must thank Constante González Groba for his expertise in Southern women's writing and for his constant encouragement and faith in what I was doing then and now.

I wish to thank my dear Joaquín Romero for his unfailing support and invaluable friendship all these years, for contributing to my work in many different ways, for traveling with me and for making me laugh like nobody else can. I am also particularly grateful for the constant nurturing support over the years of Antonia Soler, dear friend and UPC colleague. Catherine Dexter also deserves thanks for reading the whole manuscript and offering helpful suggestions.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their love and understanding all these years, even when I put my dedication to my work before their precious company, without knowing what I would lose in the process.

## Abbreviations

<i>BMB</i>	<i>Black Mountain Breakdown</i>
<i>C</i>	<i>Cakewalk</i>
<i>DD</i>	<i>The Devil's Dream</i>
<i>FL</i>	<i>Family Linen</i>
<i>FTL</i>	<i>Fair and Tender Ladies</i>
<i>LDDB</i>	<i>The Last Day the Dogbushes Bloomed</i>
<i>LG</i>	<i>The Last Girls</i>
<i>OH</i>	<i>Oral History</i>
<i>SG</i>	<i>Saving Grace</i>
<i>SW</i>	<i>Something in the Wind</i>



## Foreword

It has been my pleasure to have been both a classmate of Lee Smith's at Hollins College and her colleague in the English Department at NC State University. During all these years, I have watched her remarkable career take off and thrive, and I have also witnessed the great delight that she has brought, both to critics in the academy and to reading audiences all over the world. Once I was with Lee when a fan came up to say how much she loved *Family Linen*, the novel Lee published soon after she joined the NC State faculty. Then the fan asked, "But where did you GET all those women." Without a pause, Lee answered, "They're all me." In *Family Linen* we hear the distinctive voices of a full chorus of different women—all kin to one another, yet some young, some old, some in-between; some highly educated, some self-taught, some who have seldom or never left home, some who have been long gone and return with dread and hostility. Their accents, their perceptions, their sense of place and of themselves vary widely, yet in writing this novel, Lee gave life and authenticity to all their voices or, as she would probably say, she listened to each individual character and let each one speak for her own self—with a sprinkling of Lee's own self included.

*Family Linen* is one of nine novels that Carmen Rueda Ramos considers in terms of Lee's inimitable talent for "voicing the self." Beginning with Lee's three early works, which follow young women characters struggling to find an identity, Rueda Ramos's study then focuses on the novels which demonstrate the breakthrough that Lee made when she began to write of the colorful, determined women whose voices—and selves—were indelibly marked by their identification with the place that both nurtured and challenged them: the ancient, haunting Appalachian mountains. These mountains have, over Lee's long career, come to constitute her unique "terrain of the heart," a place that becomes palpable not only through her powerful evocations of its natural features but also through the voices and identities of her women characters.

As Rueda Ramos says, there have been many critics who have concentrated on gender issues facing Smith's women characters, many as well who have pointed out her way of linking the achievement of voice to identity, and also many who have stressed the strong sense of place that prevails in her novels. What makes the critical perspective of *Voicing the Self* especially valuable is that it connects the components of voice, place, and identity, demonstrating that these are interdependent forces in the lives of Lee's characters. The artistic evolution that we can trace through the analysis of each novel shows us Lee's ability to craft increasingly complex stories of women who are charged, often reluctantly, with the bold, arduous task of journeying. Their "home places," set deep within the old Appalachians, both nurture and threaten them. As Lee's characters travel, both inwardly and outwardly, each one is most of all seeking herself—as a woman and as an artist. Their task is not only to find out who they really are, but through voice, place, and language, to create and shape authentic selves that have mythic, heroic proportions.

Lee Smith came to her art as all writers do, through her experience of the world. That experience began with her first steps in the Virginia mountain community of Grundy and her interactions within a family and community of storytellers. Her education of course expanded her vision, as she moved on to new places and as her own home place also grew and changed. She and I, with our classmates at Hollins College, belonged, without always being aware of it, to the political and social revolutions of the Sixties. Two months after we arrived at Hollins in 1963, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. By the spring of our graduation year in 1967, the Vietnam War was escalating, there were almost daily anti-war and Civil Rights protests all across the country, and people of our generation were challenging many rules, questioning many values. Like college "girls" everywhere, we were renaming ourselves "women" and trading in our "nice girls" uniform of A-Line skirts and flower print blouses for mini-skirts and blue jeans.

At Hollins, as Lee told Rueda Ramos in the insightful interview that follows this study, we read Joseph Campbell's *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* in our freshman creative writing class and were challenged by our teacher, John Allen, to create poems and stories drawing on the myths of the great heroes that Campbell had collected. Could we too be heroes? We whose mothers had told us, "If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all"? We who in the early sixties believed that our best future lay in finding a good (also handsome and hopefully

wealthy) man to marry and support? Reading Rueda Ramos's incorporation of global myths and legends into her analysis of Lee's journeying women characters, you will find that the answer for Lee was "Yes." Yet to become a hero, and to create heroic women in fiction, would take a leap of imagination, the learning of new languages, and the discovery and practice of new kinds of voices.

*Voicing the Self* enters important new territory through its tracing of the evolution of Lee Smith's heroic female characters within the "stalking ground" of mountain bound communities. Rueda Ramos shows us too that issues of gender and place are not separate: just as the people of the Appalachians have for so long been seen as "other," different, and "less than" those who have power and privilege, so too have women been "othered," and especially southern women, who for so long were trained to stay in the background, to be ladies, to make everyone else comfortable. Lee asks her women characters, especially those in her "Mountain" novels, to break out of the "othering" molds, to shatter the stereotypes of gender and place, to be change-makers and self-shapers. Success in these endeavors, for her as a writer and for her women as characters, involves combining language, self-expression, and love of place in proportions that can only be named heroic.

At the end of Lee's interview with Rueda Ramos, Lee talks of the real women of the mountains whom she has worked with, in writing classes, for close to two decades now. Her students have been women who in most cases lack fundamental literacy skills, and who also have never thought of themselves as people who deserve of respect, much less as artists with stories to tell and visions to expand. Of her teaching experience with them, Lee says, "Women who were real shy and looked away, when I go back a year later... you can really see that once they get language, they just begin to blossom." The stories of these women have always been Lee's story; they are stories in which women "blossom," as Lee Smith has continued to blossom as a writer. Her novels affirm the journey of women looking for a language that expresses who they want to be. In the process, as this study tells us in its conclusion, they become women who "enlarge and deepen the great myth of mankind with female presence."

*Lucinda MacKethan*

Professor of English Emerita  
North Carolina State University



So spoke myself. I listened well;  
I thought that self had truth to tell.

May Sarton, "Myself to Me"

The black shadow on the paper  
Is my hand; the shadow of a word  
As thought shapes the shaper  
Falls heavy on the page, is heard.

May Sarton, "Now I Become Myself"



## Introduction

### Voice, Identity, and Place

A poet has to find the language that makes the common, almost unconscious life vocal; [s]he must be a voice box for something that is in the land, the people.

Seamus Heaney

Lee Smith has an extraordinary ability to entrance her listeners with her voice, modulated by the cadence and musicality of her Appalachian origins, and an even more impressive capacity to transport her readers to a vastly unknown territory where the land and the people tell stories with the lyricism of a mountain poet. Lee Smith does not just write fiction about Appalachia, a forgotten corner of the American South, but writes in the voice of mountain folk who tell stories of love, longing, poverty, despair, country music, religious beliefs, entrapment, endurance, and even artistic ambitions. Her novels portray female characters who use language as a means of self-exploration and self-definition within their world and who often exhibit, particularly in the novels in which Smith works out her own ambivalence towards her roots, a conflicted relationship with their identity and their Appalachian heritage. In her fiction, especially her more mature work, Smith progressively captures the spirit of the mountains, examines the contradictions and limitations of her region, and finds the language with which to express not only her love for the mountains but also the peculiarities and dignity of the place. The words of Irish poet and Nobel Prize winner Seamus Heaney, who has influenced several Appalachian writers (like novelist James Still and more recently poet George Ella Lyon), reverberate in Lee Smith's fiction and become a perfect motto that aptly

illustrates her struggle to voice what she herself has called “the terrain of one’s heart.”<sup>1</sup>

To discover her fictional world and her literary voice, Lee Smith had to first recognize the artistic value of her own roots. Born in 1944 in Grundy, Virginia, a coal-mining region in the southwest corner of the state near the Kentucky border, Lee Smith grew up hearing and writing stories. At Hollins College in Roanoke, Virginia, from 1963 to 1967, and particularly under the influence of Louis D. Rubin, Smith came to find that her own voice was not in the glamorous descriptions of faraway places or in huge event filled plots; it was much closer at hand—it was simply home. In her study of Lee Smith’s formative years, *Lee Smith, Annie Dillard, and the Hollins Group: A Genesis of Writers*, Nancy C. Parrish notes that “The creative writing courses at Hollins propelled Smith toward a more formal perception of what her literary voice in fiction might be. Smith initially resisted the advice to write about the life she knew because she couldn’t write about her life experiences in Appalachia with any depth.” Only when she read the fiction of other southerners who, like her, had discovered the source of their fiction in their own communities could she begin to understand the meaning of her teachers’ counsel: “Write what you know.”<sup>2</sup> Her discovery of James Still’s *River of Earth*, a novel that explicitly mentioned Smith’s hometown of Grundy, allowed her to visualize her “terrain,” to view the mountains as the ground for her fiction, and to pay attention to the voices she had heard all her life. Indeed, exploring the milieu she knows best has become her way of locating the origins of her creative voice. Her best writing springs from the Appalachian mountain communities that shaped her life and from the accurate transcription of the distinct dialect that characterizes its inhabitants, a combination of elements that allowed her to give voice to her own knowledge of a particular part of the South—so different from the plantation South—and to infuse her creative drive with a voice of its own.

The Hollins experience also proved to be pivotal for Lee Smith’s writing on another front, for it was there that she became aware of the relationship between voice and identity, a connection that she has consistently explored in her fiction.

---

<sup>1</sup> Joyce Dyer, ed., *Bloodroot: Reflections on Place by Appalachian Women Writers* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 174, 281.

<sup>2</sup> Nancy C. Parrish, *Lee Smith, Annie Dillard, and the Hollins Group: A Genesis of Writers* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 172; Lee Smith, “The Voice behind the Story,” in *Voicelust: Eight Contemporary Writers on Style*, ed. Allen Wier and Don Hendrie, Jr. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 203.

Rubin taught Lee Smith and a merry group of women writers-to-be, made up of Annie Dillard, Lucinda MacKethan, and Anne Goodwyn Jones, all now established writers and prestigious scholars, “that the essential purpose of literature and writing had to do with self-understanding and self-definition,” a lesson that, according to Parrish, is reflected in the writing of all of these women in some way. The emphasis on identity issues allowed Lee Smith to connect the search for her personal identity, as a southerner, an Appalachian, and a woman, to the search for her own voice as an artist. In the protective, womb-like atmosphere of Hollins, in Smith’s own phrase, the author found “a dynamic, creative, and safe place for young southern women to discover their identities and their voices.” Lucinda MacKethan’s own definition of voice, in her exploration of the development of the southern female voice from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, in *Daughters of Time: Creating Woman’s Voice in Southern Story*, clearly reflects the relationship between voice and individuality. “The word ‘voice’ has come to have for me,” MacKethan notes, “as it has for many women, a metaphorical dimension, encompassing all that goes into the expression of unique selfhood.” The symbolic relationship between expression and selfhood that MacKethan attributes to the meaning of “voice” coincides, perhaps not surprisingly, with the search for one’s own language and identity that Lee Smith has consistently presented in her work. For Lucinda MacKethan, very much like for Lee Smith’s fictional narrators, “women storytellers, black and white, ... address specifically their determination to become, freely, themselves through creative acts of voicing.”<sup>3</sup>

As she matured as a writer, Lee Smith incorporated her growing interest in her region into her female protagonists’ constant search for an identity and a voice of their own. In fact, Lee Smith’s fiction validates Barbara Bennett’s assertion that “For a southern writer, voice and identity are clearly tied to region.”<sup>4</sup> Smith has explored the general southern context in five of her novels, *The Last Day the Dogbushes Bloomed* (1968), *Something in the Wind* (1971), *Fancy Strut* (1973), *Family Linen* (1985), *The Last Girls* (2002), and in her three short story collections, *Cakewalk* (1981), *Me and My Baby View the Eclipse* (1990), *News of the Spirit* (1997), with stories generally set in the suburbs of contemporary small towns. It was not until her fourth novel, *Black Mountain Breakdown* (1980), that

---

<sup>3</sup> Parrish, *Lee Smith*, 71, 211; Lucinda H. MacKethan, *Daughters of Time: Creating Woman’s Voice in Southern Story* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 4, 6.

<sup>4</sup> Barbara Bennett, *Comic Visions, Female Voices* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 17.

Lee Smith used a small mountain town as a setting. Yet the cultural idiosyncrasy of what she truly means by her “region,” the world of the rural and isolated settings of the Appalachian mountains, has been more powerfully portrayed in four of her best novels, *Oral History* (1983), *Fair and Tender Ladies* (1988), *The Devil’s Dream* (1992), and *Saving Grace* (1995).

The themes of voice, identity, and a strong sense of place in Lee Smith’s body of work have evolved from her early fiction to her more mature writing. In her first novel, *The Last Day the Dogbushes Bloomed*, told through the eyes of a young girl, Smith specifically addresses her early preoccupation with authorial presence and the limitations of the feminine world to create a viable identity. Her second novel, *Something in the Wind*, explores the theme of the search for a valid model of womanhood and a new language with which to express her reality. Smith moves from the anxiety that dominated the girls’ rites of passage of her early novels to experimentation with satire in *Fancy Strut*. With *Black Mountain Breakdown*, however, Smith leaves behind parody and focuses again on a single female character to caution women about the disastrous consequences of passive womanhood, of having an unassertive personality, and of silencing your own voice. In order to chronicle the conflicts and mysteries of family sagas in her next two novels, Smith combines different voices that tell their own stories. *Oral History*, a powerful rendering of a mountain family’s curse over one hundred years, serves Smith to penetrate the collective identity and unrecorded history of her native land. Smith skillfully weaves past and present as a number of voices tell their own version of the mysterious spell that has haunted the Cantrell family for generations. With *Family Linen*, however, Smith returns to the tragicomic vision of small town life in the contemporary South, something she had explored in *Fancy Strut*, and to the mystery buried in the mountain family home to analyze family relationships. The author has maintained the same tone of tragicomedy and her exploration of the contemporary South in her tenth novel, *The Last Girls*, through the relationship of the four female college friends who gather to relive their journey down the Mississippi.

Her next three Appalachian novels present powerful females who struggle with their identities and voices. *Fair and Tender Ladies* narrates the endeavor to fulfill the artistic desire in an ordinary mountain woman through her letters to her mad, lost sister and is, undoubtedly, one of Smith’s finest works of fiction. The engaging diction in Ivy’s letters and her courage to preserve her identity seduce the reader

from the beginning to the end of the novel. In *The Devil's Dream*, music and religion become two opposing forces that haunt the members of the Bailey family, particularly their singing females, until one of them, the famous Katie Cocker, brings together the entire family in Nashville to record an album which reunites both sides of the family. Like *Oral History*, with which *The Devil's Dream* has much in common, the novel tells the story of a mountain family in which the different voices sing their stories of madness, repression, fervent devotion, and individual fulfillment. In *Saving Grace*, her ninth novel, Smith gives an honest portrait of snake handlers, the peculiarities of their religious beliefs, and the rites with which they test their faith. In this novel, Smith allows her protagonist, Florida Grace Shepherd, to tell the story of her journey to spiritual salvation and of her coming to terms with her true identity, however shocking it may be. Tormented by the fanaticism of her father's beliefs and her mother's spiritual powers, as well as the terrifying discovery of her own gifts, Grace spends her life turning her back on God, denying herself a prophetic voice, and changing her identity.

Her strong concern with women's voices and identity, both personal and regional, throughout her fiction, places Lee Smith within the group of the second Southern Renaissance writers, which is essentially "a movement of women's voices." Unlike the members of the first Renaissance, in which aristocratic white male southern writers were concerned with coming to terms with the past and guilt, the more varied group of the second Southern Renaissance includes female, black, working class, gay, mountain and city writers. "It is very much a postsegregation literature," Linda Tate has observed, "and while many writers seek to come to terms with the past, the emphasis is much less on apology and the purging of guilt and much more on the reclaiming of one's voice, one's own citizenship in the South." But at the same time, Lee Smith forms part of the lively and plentiful group of female writers that comprise the Appalachian Renaissance, which began in 1970s. "Without question," Linda Tate asserts, "Lee Smith leads this movement of mountain women writing the stories of their region, but in characteristic southern fashion."<sup>5</sup>

This involvement with two simultaneous movements of female and regional voices simply demonstrates her strong identification with the Other, as a woman

---

<sup>5</sup> Linda Tate, "A Second Southern Renaissance," in *The History of Southern Women's Literature*, ed. Carolyn Perry and Mary Louise Weaks (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 492, 491, 496.

and as an Appalachian native, and her commitment to give voice to those marginalized, those that have traditionally been denied the right to define and speak for themselves. Smith's mountain folk, together with all the other invisible people and unheard voices of southern narrative, are "claiming their own rightful space in the region" and embody "the silenced telling their own stories." Like the Appalachian women writers of her generation, who proudly expose their mountain heritage in the autobiographical narrations collected by Joyce Dyer in *Bloodroot: Reflections on Place by Appalachian Women Writers*, Lee Smith is "driven by the important and compelling and passionate mission to define Appalachia for the first time, to see it distinct from the cotton South, to understand its place in women's lives, to write its story, to bring it up to date"<sup>6</sup> and to let their own voices speak about the Appalachian experience.

Deeply aware of the disparity between the traditionally refined South and her mountain region, Lee Smith has sought to voice the cultural otherness of Appalachia. Although the author spent most of her youth trying to get away from the oppressive atmosphere of the hills that surrounded her hometown, it is the mountains, the language, the customs, and the poor people of Appalachia that truly nurtured her literary imagination. Rather than with an aristocratic past of great mansions and genteel manners, Smith is familiar with the poor log cabins of the hollers, with the hungry and barefoot children dressed in rags she met at school, and with the ignorance and backwardness of mountain folk she witnessed in some rural areas. In fact, the absence of a slave-plantation economy on the mountains has given Appalachian fiction a peculiar flavor within southern narrative, in that "southern Appalachian writers," as Parks Lanier Jr. has put it, "have produced a body of literature that is both 'inside' the southern tradition and 'outside' its value system." More recently, in Richard Gray and Owen Robinson's *Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American South*, Linda Tate even states that "Appalachia has often held a stepchild relationship to the larger South and the accompanying field of Southern studies," in order to stress the fact that the region and its literature have not been properly addressed and appreciated. In a deliberate effort to provide an accurate representation of Appalachia through her mountain novels, Lee Smith has gradually penetrated the heart of a region that is isolated both geographically and culturally from the rest of the South and mainstream America, and is even considered a sort of internal periphery. The marginality of its

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 497; Dyer, *Bloodroot*, 9.

geographical location, as an interstitial zone that cuts across North-South and East-West boundaries, accounts for the gallery of poor white people living in isolated areas who populate most of Smith's mountain novels. Though often described as a backward and uncivilized area, the timeless and borderline quality of the region makes it, in Linda Tate's words, a "Southern wild zone" and makes Lee Smith's fiction another "voice on the margins" of the dominant Southern literary trends. Within this transitional space, and like most minority or ethnic writers, Lee Smith portrays the double cultural otherness of her region, which, as Rodger Cunningham points out, "is ... an internal Other to the South as the South is the internal Other of America." Along the same lines, and in an article posted on her official website, Lee Smith herself confirms her belief that "Appalachia is to the South what the South is to the rest of the country. That is: lesser than, backward, marginal. Other."<sup>7</sup>

Significantly, the alterity Lee Smith perceives both in Appalachian culture, historically defined by foreigners, and in female identity, often socially constructed, is what infuses her fiction to speak of difference. Although the theme of otherness in Smith's fiction has not been deeply analyzed, some scholarly critics have already hinted at the relationship between otherness, women, and the lack of a voice. "The 'others' who have become the central subjects in Smith's fiction are most frequently women," Nancy Parrish noted, whereas Paula Gallant Eckard observed that "Defined by forces outside themselves, many of Lee Smith's female characters fall into the realm of the silent Other. Other female characters, however, are empowered with voice and language to counteract the silencing of women that frequently occurs in literature and society."<sup>8</sup> However, Lee Smith does not solely deal with the female silence in society in general. As her writing matured, and particularly in her four Appalachian novels, *Oral History*, *Fair and Tender Ladies*, *The Devil's Dream*, and *Saving Grace*, Smith came to identify female personal

---

<sup>7</sup> Parks Lanier, Jr., "Appalachian Writers," in *The History of Southern Women's Literature*, ed. Carolyn Perry and Mary Louise Weaks (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 309; Linda Tate, "Southern Appalachia," in *A Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American South*, ed. Richard Gray and Owen Robinson (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 131; Linda Tate, *A Southern Weave of Women: Fiction of the Contemporary South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 174; Rodger Cunningham, "Writing on the Cusp: Double Alterity and Minority Discourse in Appalachia," in *The Future of Southern Letters*, ed. Jefferson Humphries and John Lowe (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 45; Lee Smith, "White Columns and Marble Generals," <http://www.leesmith.com/works/columns.php> Dec. 13 2002.

<sup>8</sup> Parrish, *Lee Smith*, 166; Paula Gallant Eckard, *Maternal Body and Voice in Toni Morrison, Bobbie Ann Mason, and Lee Smith* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 133.