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Appalachian Stereotypes and Denise Giardina's *The Unquiet Earth*

Novelist, activist, and theologian Denise Giardina was born in the Appalachian town of Bluefield, West Virginia on October 25, 1951. Raised in the Black Wolf coal mining camp until her thirteenth-year, Giardina witnessed the inner workings of the coal mining culture that would define her life and career. When the family moved to Charleston, West Virginia after the closing of the mine, Giardina faced the loss of her home. Not only was she forced to move away with her family, but the coal camp itself was also destroyed, a common practice when a mine was no longer operational. This culture, comprised of both typical and atypical Appalachian characteristics, has been the inspiration for Giardina's novels and the subject of one of her best-known works, *The Unquiet Earth*. In *The Unquiet Earth*, Giardina focuses upon representation, dispelling stereotypes, showing the way Appalachia has been dispossessed by the dominant American culture, and rendering complex characters in the throes of change who, in coming to understand themselves and the world they inhabit, not only learn what it means for a human life to flourish but demonstrate to readers the richness and worth of Appalachian culture.

Outside of the novel, we can see how Giardina's life also breaks the stereotypical mold. Not the typical miner, Denise Giardina's Sicilian father worked as a bookkeeper for the coal company. Her mother worked as a nurse, and Giardina received her education in a

traditional setting. None of these facts seem to fit into the standard formula of the Appalachian lifestyle, yet in reality no one truly fits the popular depiction. For Appalachia is a region rich in ethnicities of all kinds. Many different cultures exist within the Appalachian region. One of these cultures is the coal mine, a place Giardina relates to the reader from her own perspective as a coal town resident and later from her perspective as a displaced person. Almost exclusively, Giardina sets the novel in and around the coal mines of Southern West Virginia in the past, present, and future. Almost every character supports the theory of embracing/dispelling stereotypes, most often through their own differences and similarities to the Appalachian stereotypes through Giardina's characters. For example: Giardina heralds the dreams and ambitions of her characters, their own attitude towards the culture in which they live, and their own occasionally inevitable role in fulfilling the stereotype (Such as protagonists Rachel and Dillon having an incestuous relationship and the readers finding themselves supporting the usually frowned upon practice). Because Appalachian stereotypes evoke such pervasive and hurtful emotions, Giardina attempts to amend the reader's thought process associated with Appalachia and its people. This rhetorical strategy powerfully reflects stereotyping as the reader's schema about the subject is inevitably affected by this turn of perspective.

Appalachian people are often depicted as poor white people of Scots-Irish descent with little to no education. Incest, ignorance, and violence, often associated with Appalachia and the "hillbilly" idea can be found in media of all kind. These stereotypical portrayals fail to convey the true diversity of the Appalachian region. Therein also lies a new type of prejudice known as Environmental Racism, based on the idea that people connect others to location and judge them based on landscape. Rebecca R. Scott explains this concept in her

article “The Sociology of Coal Hollow: Safety, Othering and Representations of Environmental Inequality” with:

> Appalachian stereotypes are distinctive in their conflation of the character of the people with the characteristics of the landscape. Dark mountain hollows shelter incestuous clans of dangerous, backward, inbred mountain men. (Scott 1)

Scott goes on to explain the way that redistribution of wealth and the “War on Poverty” of the Kennedy/Johnson era ironically further promoted the stereotypical idea of poor mountain whites, which of course was not their original purpose.

Giardina’s work and writing deals with change. Thus, she employs careful rhetorical strategies that attempt to reorient the reader. While for careful readers this represents a brilliant strategy, for those who do not delve into a deep reading or for those already invested in their own views of Appalachia, Giardina’s work could be used to re-inscribe Appalachian stereotypes, therefore possibly labeling her a Local Color writer. Local Color writing might be considered over generalized and ignorant of the truth of a region, focusing instead on themes such as dialect and unusual traditions that have henceforth become stereotypes. Appalachian stereotypes have come from many sources over time, often from assumed authorities that have in fact never truly spent any significant time in Appalachia. In *The Unquiet Earth,* when Rachel enters nursing school, her instructor quotes British historian Arnold Toynbee’s *Study of History:*

> The Scotch-Irish immigrants who have forced their way into these natural fastnesses have come to be isolated from the rest of the world. The Appalachian Mountain People are at this day not better than barbarians.

> They are the American counterparts of the latter-day White barbarians of the Old World, the Kurds and the Pathans and the Hairy Ainu. (16)

The instructor obviously implies that Toynbee's outlandish claim holds truth with the following comment:

> If you are to make nurses, you must overcome your backgrounds. You must rise above the handicaps of inbreeding and the filthy living conditions you are used to. At this hospital, we expect you to keep yourselves clean. (16)

The irony of the above statement lies in the knowledge that Toynbee never actually visited Appalachia, and a woman teaching Appalachian women (in Virginia) takes his assumptions as fact. Rachel observes in a conversation with her friend Tommie about a boy they know that, "'You can't expect him to know about the coalfields…He's never been there'" (51). What the girls' instructor Miss Kurtz doesn't realize is that in taking an absurd opinion from an ignorant foreign "authority," she actually propagates the stereotypes even further by implying that the Appalachian people are incapable of defining their culture on their own. As long as the people feel as if someone else decides their fate and their nature, they feel trapped and often unable to escape the assumptions cast upon them by the outside world.

Natives in Appalachia face a unique situation when seeking higher education. Mountain students want education and possess the determination to receive it, but they face the inevitable challenges of misunderstandings and non-Appalachian educators who do not understand them. As a result, no matter how intelligent or able to learn students may be, they often become frustrated with not being understood or respected and give up all hope of the education they dreamed of. Rachel expresses her own frustration with not

being understood when she attends nursing school with, "'I get tired of being different,' I said. 'I get tired of people thinking I'm stupid just because of the sound of my voice.'" (49)

Another example of outside assumptions forming worldwide opinions came from Ellen Churchill Semple'a "The Anglo-Saxons of the Kentucky Mountains: A Study in Anthropogeography." Semple's article on the Appalachian people of Kentucky provides an example of the basis for stereotyping of the region. The article begins with:

> In one of the most progressive and productive countries of the world, and in that section of the country which has had its civilization and its wealth the longest, we find a large area where the people are still living the frontier life of the backwoods, where the civilization is that of the eighteenth century, where the people speak the English of Shakespeare's time, where the large majority of the inhabitants have never seen a steamboat or a railroad, where money is as scarce as in colonial days, and all trade is barter. (Semple 588)

These Local Color-like descriptions of Appalachia facilitated the assumption that they may in fact be true, assumptions still plaguing the people of the mountains today.

In *The Unquiet Earth*, the authority often lies with outsiders and even influences natives like Flora Honaker, Rachel Honaker's mother, believes that the only way her daughter would live a happy and fruitful life would be to "get above her raising." "Getting above your raising" exists as a common theme in Appalachian literature, but it usually represents a negative concept. This may perhaps be due to the negative light in which Appalachia has been cast and the resulting economic disadvantages that manifest in different ways including educational and opportunistic. It might also act as a defense mechanism because if you never try, you will be less likely to fail. In this case, however,

Flora convinces herself that the only way for Rachel to succeed would be for her to rise above her upbringing. Rachel tells of her mother Flora's self-criticizing obsession with outside society with the following:

> The teacher, who was young and fresh from Transylvania College and in the mountains for some kind of adventure. He was a Bennett from Louisville and my mother said they were quality people. She knew about the Bennetts from the Society pages of the *Courier-Journal*, which she read faithfully even though we didn't know a soul in Louisville. (7)

Comment [E1]: Double check this quote – it's a fragment.

Flora Honaker covets a life outside West Virginia, hoping to instill in her daughter the same desire: "Mother longed for me to go to Berea, where she hoped the offending hillbilly would be whipped out of me and I would marry a future doctor or lawyer and live in Lexington or Louisville" (9).

There exists a small piece of irony here, in that the children in fact receive a valid education in the mountains of Appalachia. At the beginning of the book Rachel tells the reader, "It came my turn to recite the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'" (Giardina 8). The rhetorical selection of John Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" acts not only as a symbol of culture, but the theme of the poem also suggests a deeper meaning. Rachel's teacher most likely requires her to memorize the poem because of its place in the canon, yet the poem's suggestion of a timelessness of culture and the standing still of time also relates to Appalachia. It has been suggested that time has somehow stood still in the region and as such, Giardina's choice to use "Ode on a Grecian Urn" could also be a comment on the necessity for the preservation of cultural and regional art and literature. Rachel did in fact recite the poem, and though stereotypes often suggest that Appalachian people remain illiterate or at the very least

have no interest in education, repeatedly proven in this novel, and others, is that this is simply not the case. It seems as though Giardina is clearly attuned to the stereotypes of Appalachian education by her character's recitation of canonized literature, establishing a valid argument in favor of pre-existing education in the mountains.

Often overlooked by those perpetuating these stereotypes in the media, formal education did and does exist in Appalachia, and there also exists an education of principles that runs deep in the culture. Hard work, survival, family ties, and respect for the land in which they live might truly be the characteristics of Appalachia. Entire works have been written about the "wonderful values of Appalachia," most notably *Appalachian Values* written by Loyal Jones, and while Giardina's efforts effectively influence the reader in most cases, in overturning stereotypes, she too tends to make wholly positive generalizations, a long standing trend that dates back to at least 1921 in John C. Campbell's *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland* with this glowing description:

> The chance traveler over the Big Road would know little of the teeming life hidden away in the nearby coves and clearings. Children abounded; in fact they were the chief asset of the community, if community it could be called; and on the opening day of school the Professor, as he now came to be known, faced a group of one hundred eighty-five students, ranging in age from five to twenty-five. (Campbell 2)

Generalizations such as Campbell's above present a problem as they put Appalachians in a difficult situation in which they often feel as if their only defense is to use the same rhetoric as those who generalize. This results in similarly ignorant, though completely positive, generalizations that in reality only encourage further stereotyping.

Comment [E2]: What?

Comment [E3]: Careful – this is most definitely not a novel. It's a small collection of photographs with sparse text woven throughout.

Comment [E4]: ??!! John C Campbell is not Appalachian! He moved to WNC with his wife Olive and set up the John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown.

Examples of such a generalization can be found in *The Unquiet Earth* when Dillon's mother Carrie Freeman makes comments like this one in which she asks what kind of person plays golf:

> I asked Ben who ever plays golf, and he said doctors and lawyers, store owners and coal operators from Justice town. Arthur Lee Sizemore told Ben he should learn to play, but Ben said he is too old and he cannot get used to the idea of working so hard to go home empty-handed. (32)

Here, Giardina talks openly of class distinctions, criticizing the upper class "golf" mentality but also showing that it exists. In doing so, she educates the reader about the diversity of the region; i.e. showing wealthy, poor, *and* middle classes in Appalachia.

While Appalachians have often been depicted as lazy and unemployed, the above statement shows, and history suggests, that when work could be found, the people readily and willingly to took it. As a perpetuation of the "lazy hillbilly" stereotype, cartoonist Paul Webb drew Hillbilly Cartoons for *Esquire* magazine with representations of Appalachians as lazy, unemployed, and illiterate men whose women do all the work while they lie around at home smoking pipes and shooting possums. Alternatively, Giardina's depiction overturns and competes with these long-held images, though on a less visible, and therefore less influential, level. It seems worth noting that Rachel Honaker worked extremely hard to become a nurse and continued to work hard as a nurse in the mining towns, which unfortunately plays into the assumption that women do all the work. William Goodell Frost's "Our Contemporary Ancestors" claims that,

> They unconsciously stepped aside from the great avenues of commerce and thought. This is their excuse for their Rip Van Winkle sleep. They have been

> beleaguered by nature….This is one of God's grand divisions, and of default of any other name we shall call it Appalachian America. (qtd. in Best 1)

This text reveals the source of the beginnings, or affirmations, of the "othering" that occurred in the south and Appalachia throughout America's history. In "The Imagined South," Casey Clabough's writes that "As much as the South and Southern Appalachia constitute different places viscerally and culturally, they also occupy different points both in terms of their respective imaginative developments and the scholarly discourse that seeks to explicate them" (307). This claim suggests that the South exists as America's "Other" with Appalachia as the South's "Other," a much-discussed issue in Appalachian literature.

Comment [E5]: Sorry, but no. You can't draw that conclusion from that quote. I know I already said it, but the right source for that deduction is Rodger Cunningham's essay on double alterity in *The Future of Southern Letters*.

Henry Shapiro in *Appalachia On Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness* also describes this "otherness" with the following:

> Reiterated in some 90 sketches and more than 125 short stories published between 1870 and 1890, [Local Color Writing] established Appalachia in the public consciousness as a discrete region, in but not of America…what characterized them all was the assumption that the mountainous portions of eight or nine southern states composed a distinct region of the nation, with physical, social, and cultural characteristics that made it fundamentally different from the rest of America. (Shapiro xvi)

In *The Unquiet Earth,* Giardina shows through her characters that in Appalachia, there remains an undeniable family bond rooted in heritage, survivorship, and pride in the soil beneath their feet. This bond is discussed in Jack Weller's *Yesterday's People: Life in*

Contemporary Appalachia in a reflection of what Appalachia used to be like compared to modern times in the context of the values of the region. However, it must be noted that Weller inevitably became part of the "problem" of Appalachian stereotyping and began to condescend and reinforce the old ideas. Regardless, the ideas presented about the apparent values of the region remain integral to the culture.

Comment [E6]: Hooray! ☺

Families and individuals alike seem to be tethered to the land on which they lived, often referring to their patch of earth as the Homeplace, something that had to be cared for and defended at all costs. This idea of home becomes apparent early in the novel when Rachel notices her nursing school classmates leaving school to return home:

> Homesickness took them away. It is something you see often in the mountains, for we are tied to kin and land as closely as any people ever were. It is a belief we have, as strong as any religion, that home san be preserved forever and life made everlasting if we only stay put. And school was not like home. (17)

This attachment to home reflects a common theme in Appalachia, but it has also created another stereotype. There seems to be a belief that Appalachians rarely leave the mountains permanently due to a lack of will, education, culture, or simply ignorance. While as with any stereotype this may be true in some capacity, it also rings true that many people leave their mountain homes with the intent of "making it in the world," and experiencing a sense of failure as they realize their hearts lie at home. Though home in Appalachia, especially in the coal-mining regions, often holds little to no economic opportunity, it is still home, and the link between the individual and the mountain surroundings is a difficult one to break. Recent years have seen a rise in books written

about the struggle of life in the coal mines such as Robert Shogan's *The Battle of Blair Mountain: The Story of America's Largest Labor Uprising* which has added to the national awareness of the atrocities that took place at the hands of coal mine owners.

Sadly for many, this experience meant arriving at some acceptance of the outside world's views of the regional culture. This acceptance might involve complacency and a general acceptance of the limitations of Appalachians assumed by the outside world. With this came frustration, resentment, and sometimes the abandonment of dreams. Mountain natives who have left return home to jobs in the coal mines or timber companies, giving up the mineral rights to their properties to make ends meet because they have been swindled out of knowing what selling those rights means. The significance of this lies in the exploitation that occurred so rapidly under the assumption that the victims did not know any better and besides, wouldn't have the representation or support to stop the coal companies from pillaging their land. However in reality, this breeds an even deeper attachment to the Homeplace. In this novel, Giardina's awareness of the stereotyping of Appalachia happened for many reasons. There has undoubtedly been capitalistic manipulation of the region as those in the timber, coal, and development businesses have worked hard to create an image of the "dumb hicks from the hills" that need to be cared for. It proved beneficial to the wealthy to convince the rest of the world that the people of Appalachia might be blessed by the new industries, while in reality they might be being grossly taken advantage of.

From a media perspective, the hillbilly has been the inspiration for a stock character in entertainment, so the perpetuation of the stereotypes continued and became a part of American culture, whether or not wholly accurate. In the novel Jackie describes viewing a

television program meant to allude to the program *Christmas in Appalachia*, which was an actual television special hosted by Charles Kuralt in 1965 that portrayed Appalachians as if they were third-world citizens. Jackie recounts the narration of the program:

> Children who go barefoot. Schools and houses in terrible condition. There is another America hidden away in these hills, like something out of another century, a land time forgot, a life most Americans will never experience. Why do people want to stay here? How will we bring them into the mainstream of American life? (126)

Jackie watches with Rachel and Dillon, explains their reaction to the television show:

> We sit downhearted like we have been beat on. Then Dillon suddenly gets up and flips off the TV set. "Mainstream of American Life! Sonofabitch! Coal Companies been shoving the goddamn mainstream of American life down our throats since my papaw's day. (126)

Reflected in this is obvious anger and resentment, but it also seems as if a sense of pride may also be at hand here. In *The Unquiet Earth,* Dillon is undeniably aware of his own role as a "hillbilly," yet he makes no waves to change anyone else's perception of him save Rachel and Jackie. Instead, he embraces the prideful, rebellious coal miner role and begins a lifelong campaign for labor union organization in the mines. In *Writers and Miners: Activism and Imagery in America*, David Duke deals with activism and the idea of the coal-mining struggle in America. Giardina and many of the characters in *The Unquiet Earth* work as Union activists and reveal both the human and the barbaric realities of the coal-mining power structure. Duke discusses the attitude towards mining in America as one of revered

Comment [E7]: Good!

respect from those with a mining background, but his text shows little interest in the true character and personal histories of the people.

Comment [E8]: This last part of the sentence is still very confusing.

Giardina brings historical fiction into her novel with the introduction of a coal-mine-related disaster in a gripping description of the loss of lives, homes, and spirit that resulted from the flood. The Buffalo Creek Disaster of 1972 was a flood of disastrous proportions that occurred in Southwestern West Virginia because of lack of regulation of the coal mine's waste and infrastructure. Historical accounts of the flood have been published including Gerald Stern's *The Buffalo Creek Disaster: The Story of the Survivors' Unprecedented Lawsuit* and Kai T. Erikson's *Everything in Its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood*.

In the novel, a similar flood occurs that devastates the area and kills many. Jackie, a lucky survivor, recounts the experience of being carried away on a helicopter from the wreckage:

> The mountains are falling away below us. They are ripped and torn like a rumpled gray quilt where the cotton batting shows through. The crown of Trace Mountain is gone, a flat rocky moon pocked by green ponds of acid water. (337)

Dyer's *Bloodroot: Reflections on Place by Appalachian Women Writers* focuses on the importance of place for those writers, as Giardina demonstrates in the quote above quote. The selection also addresses the issue of gender in relation to Appalachian writing with, "Literary history, generally, has not been kind to women who have chosen to write with a strong sense of their regions, and it has perhaps been least kind to women from Appalachia" (2). This book, written by Appalachian female writers, as the title suggests,

Comment [E9]: This is good but is very abrupt and does little to comment on the quote that precedes it.

deals with place, which is extremely important in Appalachian literature, but it also deals with the obstacles presented to writers, especially female writers, from Appalachia. This is a prevalent theme in the novel, as Jackie doesn't understand why anyone would want to read about her people, though she grows up to be a writer.

In *The Unquiet Earth*, Rachel struggles out in the world as a nurse and with this sense of inferiority often comes a defensiveness and adamant rejection of any Appalachian stereotypes that might validate the outside world's disapproval. In this novel, Rachel and Dillon have a life-long romantic relationship that becomes the source of continued strife. For years Rachel and Dillon argue over whether or not a relationship between them should even exist.

Rachel says, "'Dillon, we're first cousins. We couldn't have babies, there might be something wrong with them. And we can't marry, it's against the law.'" Dillon's responds with a little less concern with the conceptions of other with, "'Hell with the law and hell with marriage. We're above all that, me and you. We can make love this very night.'" (29) Interestingly, this situation being placed in the novel suggests that Giardina seems perfectly aware of her confirmation of the Appalachian inbreeding stereotype but instead of glossing over it, or not including it at all, Giardina embraces it and makes it a focus in the novel. The compelling thing about this choice is that very quickly, the reader finds him or herself cheering on Rachel and Dillon's relationship. Previous conceptions about incest fade away, and it becomes a beautifully heartbreaking struggle that the reader, under normal circumstances, would never support. However, the way Giardina presents the impossible situation convinces the reader to support the incestuous relationship despite their preciously held conceptions.

In another attempt to convince the reader to see the Appalachian stereotype of incest in a different light, Giardina seems to be attempting different strategies to accomplish this shift in thinking. When Rachel and Tommie Justice are in nursing school and their instructor Miss Kurtz cites that ridiculous Arnold Toynbee quote, Tommie finds a humorous way of turning the situation around. Instead of getting defensive, or worse, staying silent, Tommie says, "'My cousins over on Greasy Creek, they're all inbred like you said, and they're cross-eyed and they got hair all over their bodies, even on their penises. I just wondered if they might be part HairyAinu?'"(16)

While Miss Kurtz may not have realized what Tommie just did to her, the reader sees that Tommie has just gained an element of power over Miss Kurtz, and readers also appreciate the ability to bring humor into a dismal situation. Throughout the entire novel, not only does Giardina use this rhetorical strategy to change the way in which the reader thinks about Appalachia, but about the way stereotypes are formed and how easy it can be to change that perception. Anthony Harkins speaks of the prevalence of these ideas in *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* with:

> The portrayal of southern mountain people as pre-modern and ignorant "hillbillies" is one of the most lasting and pervasive images in American popular iconography, appearing continuously throughout the twentieth century in nearly every major facet of American popular culture from novels and magazines to movies and television programs to country music and the Internet. (3)

This media portrayal of the "hillbilly" remains a stigma Appalachians live with even today and as such, it becomes necessary to examine the origins of the stock character so recognizable today.

J.W. Williamson's *Hillbillyland: What the Movies did to the Mountains and what the Mountains did to the Movies* explicates the portrayal of the "hillbilly" in American movies and television. Archetypal characters act as representations for every region, but for the Appalachian region, the archetype of the lazy, ignorant hillbilly has reigned supreme as a negative generalization of an entire people. Television shows such as *The Beverly Hillbillies* created a cultural schema in the minds of Americans that consisted of the characteristics found in media and the archetype seemed to take on a life of its own and remain a permanent fixture in American culture.

It must be considered, therefore, the effect such media-driven ideas have on those being stereotyped. Some find themselves feeling shameful, others full of pride, but it seems many more acknowledge the existence of a world view of the region and simply continue to live their lives without much concern. But for some, the pains of ridicule, displacement, and misunderstandings have a powerful hold on everyday life. Near the end of the novel we hear from Dillon, defeated and feeling enormous loss he says:

> I think the boys who leave are like that, returning to the place that is no longer home, coming back again and again until they are cut and bleeding and the pain of loss is all that binds them to these hills. Those of us who stay are like that too, holding onto what wounds us like picking up ground glass. Some day there will be nothing left. Kin will die, the mountains will be

> ground down to dust. Wooden coal camp houses were not built to last the ages. (314)

Giardina has carried the pain and complications of displacement following the closing of the mine, and therefore her childhood home, with her throughout her life. In Thomas Douglass' interview with Denise Giardina in *Appalachian Journal*, they discuss the biographical information and connections in Giardina writing, especially *The Unquiet Earth.* The character Jackie bears an exceptional resemblance to Giardina, and the author's passion for the cause of labor rights and mine safety are very evident throughout the novel. Giardina places herself in her novel as a way of strengthening her story and characters and makes it very clear that all of these issues at hand represent something very personally important.

An activist for the rights of workers and citizens in the surrounding areas of mines, Giardina is often thought of as a political writer. Her Appalachian novels, full of politics and the rights of the people of West Virginia, also address issues of race, religion, sexuality, familial relations, education, feminism, substance abuse, and many more. David Alan Corbin's *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields: The Southern West Virginia Miners 1880-1922* discusses the history of the coal industry in Southern West Virginia, the very region where *The Unquiet Earth* takes place. Corbin comments on the coal mine culture with:

> The Appalachian movement has been exposing the political corruption and economic colonialism that have historically plagued the region, and it has bitterly assailed the "John-Boy Walton" image of Appalachians as a people

> who have passively, if not happily, accepted that corruption and colonialism as well as poverty and exploitation. (Corbin xiv)

Giardina encapsulates this idea in *The Unquiet Earth;* her bold willingness to take on all these issues is in and of itself often presumed to be atypical from the idea of the Appalachian woman. It could be argued that Giardina, and her character Jackie, may qualify as one of the exemplified underrepresented female Appalachian voices**.** In the novel, Jackie is an avid reader and would like to be a writer, but does not see that as a viable option as she says that:

> I'd get a notebook and figure I would write a real story with a happy ending. But it never worked. I'm not a real writer. Real writers live in New York apartments or sit at sidewalk cafes in Paris…So there is not a thing to write about, only hillbillies, and no one cares to hear about hillbillies. (108)

It appears to be part of Giardina's effort to dispel stereotypes by writing about the complexities of the lives of her characters. Denise Giardina has lived with the stereotypes associated with Appalachian people and has struggled, through her characters, with what is true, what is not, and why it matters. As an Appalachian obviously different than the stereotypes associated with the region, Giardina supports her argument that Appalachian people are not necessarily the backwoods hillbillies that society often assumes. Instead, Giardina provides an example, not an exception, of the diversity that exists within the region. Her article entitled "Appalachian Images: A Personal History" in *Back Talk from Appalachia: Confronting Stereotypes* discusses global, national, and local opinions of Appalachia, how they formed, and how they have changed.

Like any region, Appalachia is complex and has undergone a history of change. As such, another issue often associated not only with Appalachia but the American South as well is race. Sim Gore, an African American man in *The Unquiet Earth,* becomes Dillon's partner in his union efforts, despite many of the white miners' issues with his race. While Appalachia was not the only place in the country where race issues existed, the coal mining culture did create a different kind of community because although the races most often lived separately, black and white men worked side-by-side in the mines.

The race issue in Appalachia is an interesting one because most often every hillbilly depiction is comprised of a white person. For a long time it seems African Americans have been overlooked in the region and it seems Giardina recognizes this fact and attempts to amend it. James C. Klotter's contribution to *Blacks in Appalachia*, an essay entitled "The Black South and White Appalachia," deals with this issue. Klotter explains the question of racial difference in Appalachia with:

> What does the similarity in descriptions of the two societies mean for the historian? After all, were not the antebellum "poor white" and blacks often compared in these same areas? Avery O Craven noted, for example, that "the home of the poor white and the cabin of the Negro slave varied little in size or comfort." He found "striking similarity" in the lifestyle of both groups. Adjectives applied to "poor white"-shiftless, immoral, violent- were common to black slaves and postwar Appalachian whites. (836)

Giardina's Appalachian work seems to revolve around the idea that, yes, many stereotypes exist because they carry an element of truth. She carefully acknowledges the presence of the truth in some of these stereotypes, but she also shows the multitudes of exceptions to

the rules. In doing so, she changes the reader's schema associated with a stereotype by treating people as individuals, not as a representation of an entire culture. Appalachia exists as a region and a culture, one ever changing and unique. When once the word Appalachia brought up the grey-bearded, over-all wearing, shot-gun-toting, possum-eating mountain-man-hillbilly image, many people no longer automatically think of the people of the region in that way, partly due to advocates such as Denise Giardina helping to show the world the reality of the hills.

Giardina's integration of a local culture and its struggles reflects the widespread movement in America to value mountain culture and accurately portray difference. Every region has its own unique set of stereotypes and without education to the contrary, outsiders will continue to assume on some level that they hold truth. As a reader, a transformation can occur through relationships with characters and place and in that process, an entire thought process can begin to change. *The Unquiet Earth*, and Appalachian Literature as a whole, attempts to and often succeeds in transcending the stereotypical stock forms and representations of the Appalachian "hillbilly" and in doing so, shows the significance of mindful and artful regional writing.

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