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Angela J. LaGrotteria   Date

Engendering Regions in Contemporary Novels of Appalachia and the U.S. Southwest

By

Angela J. LaGrotteria
Doctor of Philosophy

Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

____
Martine W. Brownley
Advisor

____
Pamela Hall
Committee Member

____
Craig Womack
Committee Member

Accepted:

____
Lisa A. Tedesco, Ph.D.
Dean of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies

____
Date

Engendering Regions in Contemporary Novels of Appalachia and the U.S. Southwest

By

Angela J. LaGrotteria
M.A., San Diego State University, 2006
B.A., Ohio University, 2001

Advisor: Martine W. Brownley, Ph.D.

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a dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
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Abstract

Engendering Regions in Contemporary Novels of Appalachia and the U.S. Southwest
By Angela J. LaGrotteria

"Engendering Regions" offers a series of literary analyses of 20th/21st-Century American Literature that trace the development of women's individual and communal identities in the U.S., focusing on representations of Appalachia and the Southwest in contemporary novels. Regionalism has been crucial to the study of American Literature as a field, but feminist theoretical approaches to region have been neglected. Addressing this gap, my project explores how women protagonists created by Ann Pancake, Toni Morrison, Ana Castillo, Joan Didion, Ann Patchett, and Barbara Kingsolver problematize long dominant distinctions between essentialism and social construction by accepting while challenging both. Juxtaposing regions as sites of origin and relocation, I show how these novelists blur essentialist-constructionist theoretical boundaries by portraying representations of region as simultaneously homogenous and heterogeneous spaces.

My project explores how women reinvent regional and gendered identities by repositioning themselves regionally. Chapter One theorizes in detail concepts of region, gender, intersectionality, performativity, identity, and community. Before exploring the mobility of region and gender between Appalachia and the Southwest, Chapters Two and Three highlight ways in which regionally gendered identities take shape in characters' regions of origin. Chapter Two pairs Pancake's *Strange as This Weather Has Been* and Morrison's *Sula* because in both novels weather metaphors and the implementation of weather as a prominent plot device guide readers to (re)consider how region, gender, and various vectors of identity intersect within Appalachian communities. Comparing Castillo's *So Far from God* with Didion's *Play It as It Lays*, Chapter Three examines how regionally gendered identities are influenced by Southwestern topography and climate and focuses on the roles spirituality and race play. The fourth chapter couples Patchett's *The Patron Saint of Liars* and Kingsolver's *The Bean Trees* to explore how regionally gendered identities, as inflected by race and class, migrate between the Southwest and Appalachia. *Patron* and *Bean* provide a spectrum of women's situations in new regional communities, ranging from feeling like a foreigner to feeling a sense of belonging. In tracing how these narratives demystify standing stereotypes, this study encourages readers to reconsider and redress systems of privilege and oppression based on location and gender.

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Chapter One: Engendering Appalachian and Southwestern Literature

"I didn't want to be different, but I was, either born or made that way or both."
--Bant in *Strange as This Weather Has Been*

In Barbara Kingsolver's *The Bean Trees*, Taylor Greer is amazed that a woman owns a tire-repair shop in Tucson, Arizona, a feat she believes would be impossible in her hometown of Pittman, Kentucky. While Mattie (the owner of Jesus Is Lord Used Tires) lies under a car to fix a tire, Taylor observes: "I had never seen a woman with this kind of know-how. It made me feel proud, somehow. In Pittman if a woman had tried to have her own tire store she would have been run out of business. That, or the talk would have made your ears curl up like those dried apricot things" (Kingsolver 1992, 43-4). Drawn to Mattie's independence and self-confidence, Taylor quickly decides to make Tucson her new home. Taylor's westward journey is motivated by her belief that more opportunities will be open to her in the Southwest. She hopes that changing her locale will enable her to resist socially-imposed regional and gendered expectations. However, while in Tucson, Taylor learns that relocation is not a panacea, and she begins to question her preconceptions about both regions and their residents.

Like Taylor, most people define themselves and are defined by identity categories such as gender and region. And most people interact with others on a daily basis, as active members of any number of communities at any given time. For instance, after meeting Mattie Taylor joins a community of people in Tucson who secretly help immigrants in the United States. Definitions of terms such as community and identity have been expanded, contested, and reformulated arguably to the point at which they collapse on themselves. Instead of claiming definitive definitions for these terms, I explain their associations that best serve this project. These concepts are still viable, even

crucial, points of discussion in the twenty-first century as, for example, immigrants continue to stream into the U.S. and struggle for rights to become legally recognized workers and residents.

In this project contemporary feminist theory, accompanied by feminist geographic analysis, is featured in order to provide literary close readings of novels that expand our understanding of intersections of gender and region. Feminist geographer Linda McDowell opens *Gender, Identity and Place* by asking: "How is gender linked to geography? Do men and women live different lives in different parts of the world? And if gendered attributes are socially constructed, then how does [sic] femininity and masculinity vary over time and space? What range of variation is there in the social relations between women and men?" (1999, 1). Despite disciplinary differences of methodology and epistemology, similar questions about how people and place affect each other and intersections created by such interactions are raised in both feminist literary studies and geography.

My project focalizes McDowell's questions and contributes analyses currently missing from feminist literary scholarship of gender and region in contemporary literature written by women in the U.S. I compare and contrast how region and gender are performed by an individual within her region and community of origin and how this performativity functions when she migrates. "Region of origin" refers to the geographic place where the character was born and has developed community ties during long-term residency. Comparative close readings of fiction set in Appalachia and the Southwest, specifically of Ann Pancake's *Strange as This Weather Has Been* (2007), Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1973), Ana Castillo's *So Far from God* (1993), Joan Didion's *Play It as*

It Lays (1970), Kingsolver's *The Bean Trees* (1988), and Ann Patchett's *The Patron Saint of Liars* (1992) provide compelling case studies of what I term "regionally gendered performativity". I consider how the concept of region functions as an important factor in identity, specifically as it shapes and is shaped by gender, with its raced and classed inflections.

This dissertation complicates Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse's discursive conceptualization of regionalism and Benedict Anderson's dualistic distinction between "the formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept—in the modern world everyone can, should, will 'have' a nationality, as he or she 'has' a gender—vs. the irremediable particularity of its concrete manifestations" (Anderson 1991, 5) by arguing that regionally gendered performativity exists simultaneously as discursive (i.e., constructed within ideological premises yet employed to expose and challenge inequality) and material (i.e., enacted via repeated physical acts and interactions within or associated with specific geographic locations and among other people). In other words, regionally gendered performativity is a function of discourse at the same time that it performs the discourse via tangible acts and physical locations, thereby rendering that discourse intelligible and opening spaces to contest it. I problematize the essentialist/social constructionist dichotomy out of which Butlerian theories of performativity are formulated by destabilizing it along the lines of José Muñoz's assertion that "the labor…of making identity [is] a process that *takes place at the point of collision* of perspectives that some critics and theorists have understood as essentialist and constructivist" (1999, 6; emphasis added). Yet approaching regionalism through a Butlerian lens does enable us to examine how, in regard to Anderson's postulate view

above, people can *do* (instead of passively "have") a regional identity, as he or she *does* (instead of "has") a gender. This examination allows us to explore how regionally gendered performativity facilitates and impedes imagined regional communities.

I employ "regional" or "region" not only as a descriptive locator and identity category but also, following Fetterley and Pryse, as "a mode of analysis, a vantage point within the network of power relations that provides a location for critique and resistance" (2003, 11). In this way regional analysis serves a methodological function that enables us to analyze how privilege and oppression work in certain geographical locations and assists us in offering alternatives. The impetus for comparing Appalachia and the Southwest as case studies began from reading *The Bean Trees* and *The Patron Saint of Liars*, both of which feature migration between the two regions and deploy narratives and textual constructions of Appalachia and the Southwest that support and collapse distinctions between the two. In addition, both novels raise questions of how community and identity shift and re-form when women move between Appalachia and the Southwest. Examinations of all six novels demonstrate the importance of regional inquiry as an integral part of feminist intersectional analysis.

This chapter begins with an overview of feminist theories of intersectionality in order to set up one of the main ideas on which this dissertation rests: region and gender intersect, along with all factors that contribute to identity and community, and each cannot be parceled out definitively. Gender and region are the major foci, but both are considered in terms of their inflections by race and class, which are integral to gendered analyses. I do not mean to imply that any of these categories exists independently of the others or that I consider region and gender to the exclusion of other categories. Yet in

some circumstances, as Patricia Hill Collins argues below, certain aspects of a subject's identity can feature more prominently than others. I aim to show how region and gender are salient for these characters, while always recognizing that individuals experience and enact identity categories simultaneously, thereby requiring intersectional analysis.

Next, the terms space, place (particularly region), gender, and community are explained in light of how they inform this project. Space and place are discussed first, focusing on theories of region and regional identity as they relate to and are informed by considerations of Appalachia and the Southwest. Building on notions of identity as inflected by region, I discuss how gender has been analyzed by feminist theorists and suggest ways in which region and gender intersect and are constitutive of one's identity. Individuals and identity do not exist in isolation, of course; an analysis of community in the novels describes how region and gender instigate, mediate, or impede community formation and membership. The introduction ends with an outline of subsequent chapters and a brief gesture toward the conclusion.

Feminist Theories of Intersectionality

Feminist theory exposes and ideally dismantles structural systems of inequality that create and manipulate constructions of categories such as gender and race to perpetuate stratifications of privilege and oppression. To that end, the interrogation and critical analysis of identity categories such as gender, race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality have long been the focus of feminist theory and literature.[1] Literary critics, such as Annette Kolodny, demonstrate why feminist theoretical analyses are crucial for literary studies, because they show how "the power relations inscribed in the form of conventions

within our literary inheritance…reify the encodings of those same power relations in the culture at large. And the critical examination of rhetorical codes becomes…the pursuit of ideological codes, because both embody either value systems or the dialectic of competition between value systems" (Kolodny 2007, 477).

Like Kolodny, Rosaura Sánchez argues that discourses are "material" insomuch as they are used "to make certain practices appear as natural" (1997, 1011) both within and outside of literary texts. In addition, Sánchez maintains that "various discourses…interpellate characters" and play a significant role in creating subject positions within "the literary reconstruction of economic, political, and cultural spaces within the literary text" (1997, 1012). Since literature serves as a medium through which we can understand how privilege and oppression function, it also serves as a space through which we can learn how to challenge and subvert those ideological codes both within literary texts and analyses and outside of them (i.e., in the actual world).

Feminist literary critics pay close attention to ways in which characters negotiate ideological codes in order to ascertain, for example, how those codes are manifested in disparate places and affect people of diverse genders and races. Feminist theories of intersectionality, which analyze how various forms and systems of oppression converge and combine in ways that position individuals differently in structures of in/equality, assist in these inquiries.[2] Although not a feminist literary critic per se, Patricia Hill Collins employs intersectional analyses in ways that are useful for feminist literary analyses; she shows "that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice" (2000, 18).

Collins explains how individuals experience multiple subject positions simultaneously and differently depending on many factors, such as locale. Yet at times a subject position may be foregrounded. She stresses that

> because oppression is constantly changing, different aspects of an individual U.S. Black woman's self-definitions intermingle and become more salient: Her gender may be more prominent when she becomes a mother, her race when she searches for housing, her social class when she applies for credit, her sexual orientation when she is walking with her lover, and her citizenship status when she applies for a job. In all of these contexts, her position in relation to and within intersecting oppressions shifts. (Collins 2000, 274-75)

Collins' exploration of how privilege and oppression operate within U.S. black women's experiences of work, family, sex, love, motherhood, and activism may be applied on a broader epistemological level to understand how systems of privilege and oppression meet, split, and vary. Applying intersectional analyses to literary texts not only allows us to investigate how systems of inequalities operate but also enables us to challenge and ideally amend them.

Sánchez expands on Collins' ideas by evaluating how discourses, specifically those of class and region, are employed in Chicana/o literature to show how intersecting identities can cause personal and political conflict. Sánchez asks how "differences of race, ethnicity, nation, gender, family, religion, *region* or sexuality…may fragment class alliances" (1997, 1013; emphasis added) in texts published in the early 1990s by Texas Valley Chicano/a authors Américo Paredes, Rolando Hinojosa, Arturo Islas, Roberta Fernández, and Sergio Elizondo (1997, 1021). Paying close attention to ways in which structures of inequality function within social and literary spheres, Sánchez suggests that "the best way to view these social sites is as a cluster of features, all contingent and all potentially determinant at any given moment in time. Given that all these discourses

generated within these various structural and collective spaces are ideological, they may be further analyzed as hegemonic or counter-hegemonic" (1997, 1013). Collins discusses how U.S. black women's positionalities shift depending on the time and place of intersecting oppressions. Similarly, Sánchez shows how regional identity, as one component of a "cluster of features," may be experienced similarly or differently due to ideological discourses working simultaneously. Sánchez's essay, then, is a welcome exception to the general observation that region has largely been overlooked in feminist intersectional analyses.[3]

I address this gap by questioning how region and gender are enacted by women characters in these six contemporary novels by women. Although they do so differently, all six novels problematize region and gender as *either* inherent traits *or* social constructs; instead, they offer perspectives of region and gender that challenge a theoretical binary of essentialism versus social construction.[4] Since individuals' identities are usually experienced in relation to others, I explore the roles community formation and membership play in characters' lives. A focus on how these identities and communities are engendered within and between regional spaces of Appalachia and the Southwest structures these large questions. Accounting for region in feminist intersectional analyses, then, enables us to theorize systems of privilege and oppression as they are tied to specific geographic locations.

Space, Place, and Region

Doreen Massey rethinks "space and place in terms of social relations," concentrating on intersections among space, place, class, and "the construction of gender

relations" (1994, 2). "Space" and "place" are nebulous terms, and Massey devotes her book to thinking through their various incarnations and implications.[5] She articulates guiding definitions of both terms that influence this project. In regard to space, she claims: "Social relations always have a spatial form and spatial content. They exist, necessarily, both *in* space (i.e., in a locational relation to other social phenomena) and *across* space. And it is the vast complexity of the interlocking and articulating nets of social relations which is social space" (Massey 1994, 168). Spaces highlighted in this project are intersections of gender and region which occur while an individual lives in or moves between Appalachia and the Southwest.

"Space" can be an unwieldy concept to deal with when trying to pinpoint specific examples. Thinking of "place" as a more localized entity enables one to consider how "a 'place' is formed out of the particular set of social relations which interact at a particular location" (Massey 1994, 168). "Place" is used in this literary project to designate certain physical sites of gendered and regional interactions occurring between and among characters who live in close proximity with each other. As Massey points out, "the singularity of any individual place is formed in part out of the specificity of the interactions which occur at that location (nowhere else does this precise mixture occur) and in part out of the fact that the meeting of those social relations at that location (their partly happenstance juxtaposition) will in turn produce new social effects" (1994, 168). Localized social relations of gender and region are highlighted in order to analyze which regional and gendered expectations produce and complicate specific interactions and how these interactions produce and complicate gendered and regional expectations. This correlative process can be seen as similar to ways in which "the character of a particular

place [is] a product of its position in relation to wider forces" and reciprocally "that character in turn stamp[s] its own imprint *on* those wider processes" (Massey 1994, 131).

McDowell also emphasizes the importance of the local. She argues that place is "constituted by sets of relations which cut across spatial scales; but in order to analyze these interconnections there must be a local or locality focus. Places, in other words, touch the ground as spatially located patterns and behaviors" (McDowell 1999, 30). Locality is an important aspect of place because interactions and identity can be influenced largely by where the individual physically is. A young girl growing up in rural West Virginia is likely to be affected by issues of mountain-top removal and the coal industry in ways that a young girl in Kansas is not. At the same time, interactions and identity formation are not necessarily limited to one particular location. As a result of migration, for example, people form relationships and develop patterns of behavior or thinking that are influenced not only by the location of origin but also by the location to which she moves and all of the places in between. About such movement and migration, McDowell observes that "combining cultures and habits from 'there' and 'here' to create a new sense of place, requires not just an analysis 'in place' but the unpicking of relationships and spatial practices across space and over time. It is at the nodes in these networks, and through the cultural meanings associated with them, that places are constituted" (1999, 30).

Before expanding on socio-cultural meanings of place, I detail the ways in which McDowell's conceptualization of nodes informs this project. Three of the seventeen definitions of "node" in the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* entry are helpful in thinking through complexities of place and identity as they are discussed here: (1) "a

place at which roads, etc., meet; a junction; a point of intersection or convergence;" (2) "a joint of a plant stem; the point on a stem from which a leaf…arises," and (3) "a point of significance; a crux, a critical turning point; a focal point." The first definition emphasizes features of a node that make possible a crossing of an entity with itself or other entities at certain points, despite the movement of each in different directions. In this way we can think of an individual moving from one place to another, thereby changing physical location and personal positionality in regard to place, yet at times intersecting with previous incarnations of self. For example, Taylor changes as a person (she even changes her name) when she moves to Tucson, but while there she has moments in which she feels she returns to parts of herself associated with her identity in Pittman. The second definition stresses a node's life-giving or cultivating activity. Using the metaphor of the budding leaf we can think of these characters' senses of themselves and their relations to and within communities as outgrowths of their physical environments and as extensions of their continuous encounters with new experiences, acquaintances, and places. The third definition highlights how these moments of intersectional experience profoundly affect characters and their communities. All three definitions enable us to better grasp a concept that is always, in a sense, out of reach.

Similarly, Massey suggests that "what gives a place its specificity is not some long internalized history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus" (1994, 154). Massey's use of "locus" and McDowell's of "nodes" serve as helpful ways to think about how seemingly disparate characteristics between each region converge within identity and community formation, especially when residents migrate. I add, however, that these

may also be points of divergence and dispersal. The resident brings socio-cultural influences from her region of origin, and these combine or collide with those in the region of relocation, forming a kind of spectrum that one can approach by thinking in terms of significant dis/junctions, points of convergence and divergence, expansion and conflation. Under investigation in this study are nodes of gendered and regional norms and expectations as they are enacted within Appalachia and the Southwest and influenced by characters' relationships with these places.

Like Massey's and McDowell's studies, this project considers a specific time frame, certain identity vectors, and the locality of place; it highlights contemporary U.S. women writers who write about region and gender within and in regard to actual and imagined communities of Appalachia and the Southwest. While acknowledging that place is a composite of different locations and times, limiting this project to two regions and migrations between them enables me to account for locality while also addressing the combinations of cultures and habits that continuously create places within places.[6] My aim here is not to argue for "the authentic character of any particular place" (Massey 1994, 121) but rather to explore how both essentialist and socially constructed representations of authenticity or normalcy are embraced and opposed by these characters through enactments of gendered and regional identities.

Government programs and agencies delineate strict geographical boundaries for Appalachia and the Southwest. The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) defines Appalachia as "a 205,000-square-mile region that follows the spine of the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi. It includes all of West Virginia and parts of 12 other states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland,

Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia" ("The Appalachian Region"). The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Region 9 sector

> works to protect public health and the environment in the southwestern United States (Arizona, California, Nevada, and Hawaii). EPA Region 9 also works with 147 federally recognized tribes in the Pacific Southwest. Additionally, the regional office's environmental responsibilities…[include] island jurisdictions [which] consist of the U.S. territories of Guam and American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and other unincorporated U.S. Pacific possessions. ("About EPA Region 9")

Both organizations are dedicated to providing governmental aid and assistance to each region. ARC works specifically with issues of poverty, and EPA Region 9 addresses public health and environmental concerns.

Despite geographic delineations like ARC's and the EPA's, regional locations and affiliations can be ambiguous. In fact, clear-cut regional definitions seem to exist only within government policy. Since examples of various definitions of regional areas are too numerous to mention, a couple of contrasting examples will suffice. Various authors and critics are brought together in conversation here as a sample of the broad and diverse spectrum of regional representations. David King Dunaway and Sara Spurgeon indicate that "by 'Southwest' we refer primarily to Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico, states that share the Colorado Plateau, the upper Rio Grande valley, and the arid land surrounding it" but are quick to point out that "the Southwest's range could be expanded in all directions: North to Utah, South to Mexico, West to California, and East to Texas and Oklahoma" (1995, xxii). Their construction of the Southwest is quite different from the EPA's, and throughout this project I look at how women in these novels draw on, negotiate, and contest multiple definitions and characterizations of region.

In the preface to Dunaway's and Spurgeon's edited collection, Paula Gunn Allen expresses her suspicions of and discomfort "with an historian's definition of this cultural and historical construct, the Southwest," and she is "equally at a loss to discern why a map is used to draw the parameters when there are more telling pieces of information that define it beyond the mesas, mountains, rivers, and geopolitical borders. Indeed, many might place southern California in the Southwest, geographically and culturally, while others are of the opinion that Oklahoma, at least its western portion, must be included…" (1995, xvii). "Southwest" can include or exclude a wide variety of actual and imagined locations. Dunaway and Spurgeon remind us of the extent to which the "Southwest" is a linguistic construction, as such, since "the region is clearly only Southwest if one is looking at it from New England. For Mexicans, of course, it is *El Norte*, and the former northern third of their nation" (1995, xxx). I expand on this point by considering how the construction of a region is in part dependent on the region from which it is being encountered or imagined. Returning to the scene in *The Bean Trees* which opens this chapter, Taylor's expectations of the Southwest are in part formed by ideas of the region shaped by her experiences growing up and living in Appalachia. Comparing Tucson to Pittman, she believes that the former will offer freedom denied to her in the latter. Taylor's construction of the Southwest is partly dependent on Appalachia and is a specific example of how regions are configured as relative to other regional areas: the Midwest is not the Pacific Northwest, for example. Or, in more theoretical terms, Appalachia exists because it is conceptualized in relation to areas deemed not-Appalachia.

Regional parameters are vague in the humanities, which can make organizing anthologies by region or writing history books a daunting task. In Sandra Ballard and Patricia Hudson's anthology *Listen Here: Women Writing in Appalachia*, they explain that they chose the writers to include partly on the basis of the writers' affiliation with Appalachian identity. They define "'Appalachia' as the southeastern mountains and foothills—from the mountainous parts of Pennsylvania and southwest Virginia to West Virginia, eastern Kentucky, East Tennessee, western North Carolina, upstate South Carolina, and northern Georgia and Alabama" (Ballard and Hudson 2003, 3-4). But in John Alexander Williams' *Appalachia: A History*, he follows the official ARC map of Appalachia detailed above (2002, 13). The Williams and ARC outline differ from Ballard's and Hudson's in that the latter does not include parts of New York, Ohio, and Mississippi. Williams acknowledges that "one problem with attempting to view the region whole is that Appalachia has no agreed-upon boundaries" (2002, 9), but he suggests that all definitions of Appalachia try "to link people and homeland, to find some principle of regional demarcations that identifies both the place and its inhabitants" (2002, 12).

Williams, like Massey and McDowell, underscores how both people and place change over time (2002, 12). He aligns his conceptualization of Appalachia with a postmodern approach that

> recognizes that every place is a zone characterized by the interaction of global and local human and environmental forces and that regional boundaries inevitably shift with the perspectives both of subject and object. From this standpoint, it is possible to see Appalachia as a zone of interaction among the diverse peoples who have lived in or acted upon it, as it is also of their interactions with the region's complex environment. These interactions go further toward defining the region than a specific set of cultural or socioeconomic or environmental markers. (Williams 2002, 12)

Novelist Rudolfo Anaya thinks of Southwest literature not in regard to strict geographical demarcations or claims to the region as the area of the author's birth, but as that written by writers who "have a special attachment to the people and the land of the region" (1995, viii). What seem to be indeterminate, perhaps disordered, definitions of these regions prove to be valuable in that they allow for a wider range of perspectives and representations of areas that include diverse populations, landscapes, cultures, and languages.

This project considers the regional area of the Southwest as it is conveyed in novels set primarily in southern California, Nevada, New Mexico, Arizona, and Oklahoma, and the regional areas of northern and central Appalachia as they are represented in novels set primarily in southern Ohio, West Virginia, Tennessee, and Kentucky.[7] While this project does not align itself specifically with a postmodern approach (as Williams' does), it treats the novels included from a perspective that perceives regional boundaries as arbitrary, fluid, and open to interpretation. If one defined Southwestern literature as that which only deals with, for example, Native American, Chicana/Latina/Hispanic, or cowboy populations, one would miss novels like *Play It as It Lays*, which poses questions about ways in which the protagonist's identity is altered but also reified as she travels between the Nevada desert and her home in Los Angeles.

Similarly, if one defined Appalachian literature as that which only deals with, for example, white populations referred to as "hillbillies,"[8] one would miss the benefits of critically analyzing novels like *Sula* as an Appalachian novel. *Sula* takes place in southern Ohio, in an area which can be considered Appalachia, and conveys themes

relevant to and portrayed in Appalachian literature: the importance of the hills as a feature of the landscape, for example. Approaching literature from a regional standpoint does not mean that only certain people can write, relate to, learn from, or be inspired by these texts. On the contrary, a large part of what makes these texts profound and worthy of serious attention is that they speak to and beyond a certain geographical location; they "explore the human condition so deeply and profoundly that the work can touch the heart of any reader" (Anaya 1995, x).

Appalachia and the Southwest traditionally have been represented in literature as having drastically different populations, weather, and topographic characteristics. The Southwest is portrayed often as a microcosm of the American multicultural "melting pot," inhabited by rugged, weathered, white cowboy types, Native Americans, and Mexican Americans, all trying to stake claims to disputed land and cultural territory.[9] Southwestern landscapes are often depicted as perpetually arid, vast, desolate, and unforgiving. In contrast, Appalachians are characterized regularly as a homogenous group of backward, poor, white hillbillies too lazy to work and too provincial to be considered citizens of the United States.[10] Appalachian landscapes frequently feature rolling verdant hills in the humid days of summer, striking vistas of valleys and fall foliage, and snow-covered hillsides out of which bloom the first signs of plant life in spring. It is interesting to note the inverse pattern of representations here: Appalachia's homogenous population enjoys an ever-changing landscape and climate, while the Southwest's diverse population survives a static landscape and climate.

Yet, similarities between the two exist. Regional literature—especially when written by a woman—has historically been judged as nostalgic, mediocre, and even

subpar. Writers and literary critics affiliated with Appalachia and the Southwest stress the particular importance place, or the spirit of place, holds in regard to each region.[11] Furthermore, stereotypes abound in treatments of each. Each region has systematically been represented as "Other" in relation to the "One" nation of the United States and as "Other" in opposition to U.S. regional areas. For example, Altina L. Waller (1995) comments on the "othering" of Appalachia in relation to the U.S. as a whole.

The "othering" to which Waller (1995) refers (i.e., the construction of the "Other") is the result of processes executed by one group to make themselves appear dominant or superior by constructing another group as weaker or lesser. Structures of privilege and oppression are perpetuated by such processes, as Simone de Beauvoir argues in regard to inequality of the sexes. De Beauvoir chronicles the long history of sex inequality, arguing that

> humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being…She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other. (1989, xxii)

She maintains that "otherness is a fundamental category of human thought" and that "no group ever sets itself up as the One without at once setting up the Other over against itself" (de Beauvoir 1989, xxiii). Her thorough analysis of how "othering" functions within systems of sex inequality leads to her famous claim: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (de Beauvoir 1989, 267). De Beauvoir's assertion propels formal academic study of the social construction of gender.

Since 1952 structural processes of "othering" and critiques of essentialism and social construction of gender have been expanded extensively by feminist theorists such

as Hélène Cixous, Collins, Judith Butler, Judith Halberstam, Carole-Anne Tyler, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty. A vast amount of feminist scholarship is available from which to analyze and critique "othering" and how it is employed in regard to categories of gender, race, class, and sexuality. A pertinent example is Massey's critique of an essentialist geographical space designated as "home," which often sets up "places as bounded enclosed spaces defined through counterposition against the Other who is outside" (Massey 1994, 168). Yet Massey (1994) offers counterexamples to this observation about "home," pointing to bell hooks' *Yearning* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (166); both texts demonstrate the importance of questioning whose identity is referenced when we discuss the idea of "home." For example, a black woman's notion of "home" and socio-historical traditions attached to it may differ from a white woman's. A specific focus on how "othering" and its attendant processes are employed in regard to region will enrich feminist literary analysis by advancing our knowledge of how geographical location and its concomitant stereotypes and norms—put in place to construct a region as "Other," as evidenced by examples from the Southwest and Appalachia—influence enactments of region and gender.

Appalachia has long been viewed as "Other" in regard to the United States as a whole: "Other" as it is set up by binaries of technological/agricultural, middle- or upper-class/working-class or poor, educated/non-educated, sophisticated/unsophisticated, and urban/rural. Waller comments on the "othering" of Appalachia that developed largely out of middle-class Americans' perceptions of Appalachians as different from themselves:

> Appalachia became the "other," a place and a people to be admired, patronized, converted, taught, uplifted, disciplined, and sometimes even emulated. The

> importance of such a place, where the people were assumed to be everything most Americans were not, but were still clearly of similar heritage and culture, offers hints as to why myths about Appalachia were, until recently, so deeply ingrained as to make them impervious to scholarly inquiry. (1995, 349)

Waller raises an important point in regard to processes of "othering": "the One" has a vested interest in rendering the processes and terms of "othering" invisible so as not to be challenged and possibly lose its privileged position.

In a vein similar to Waller, Allen shows how the idea of the Southwest is often used as a way to position the U.S. positively by marginalizing the region. Noting several Southwestern stereotypical associations, Allen scoffs at stereotypes that equate the Southwest with Santa Fe specifically or as a kind of haven for New Age spirituality generally. She objects to common representations of the Southwest as both "exotic and quaint," protesting how such portrayals convey the region as being

> as close to a third world country as one can get while retaining the conveniences, personal and political safety, and the comfortable efficiencies the United States provides its inhabitants. As such, it offers many of the preferred ingredients for the Eastern liberal and radical establishment's favorite pastime: revolution without danger to anyone other than the Natives, whether Indian or Spanish American. (Allen 1995, xv)

Stereotypical representations of both Appalachia and the Southwest place each region in a position subordinate to the U.S. as a whole, and both are commonly viewed as some sort of "third world country," as Allen emphasizes. A difference, however, is that Appalachia is not as popular a vacation or relocation spot as Allen claims the Southwest (especially Santa Fe) is. Investigating differences *and* similarities between depictions of these regions suggests new ways of understanding them comparatively.

As shown, debates regarding the specificity of regional classifications often contribute to conflicting conceptualizations and representations of the areas they treat.

Likewise, people's relationships to regions can be uncertain.[12] Some attach themselves to their region of birth with pride and affection.[13] Others may identify more or equally with a non-native region.[14] As highlighted in the fiction in this project, people are attached not only to physical landscapes of a region but also to the less tangible, or imaginary, dimensions of it, such as social codes of behavior.[15] These attachments, both positive and negative, often appear through literary depictions.[16] To some degree then, people imagine regions in terms of textual descriptions; an obvious example is the extent to which Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* shaped people's conceptualizations of and attitudes toward the U.S. South and its residents.

As with geographic locations, people's relationships to and with gender vary. Gender and geography are "implicated in the construction of the other: geography in its various guises influences the cultural formation of particular genders and gender relations; gender has been deeply influential in the production of the 'geographical'" (Massey 1994, 177). Since dimensions of gender and geography are shaped in part by literature, analyzing them at their sources in textual production offers readers critical perspectives from which to question how both physical and imaginary dimensions are portrayed, what is at stake in these portrayals, and how they determine conceptualizations of regional residents. Equally important is how these novels problematize concepts of region, gender, performativity, and community as they are mobilized within one's region of origin and via relocation.

Gender and Geography

Massey argues that we must consider gender in light of geography and geography in light of gender because both are implicated in the social construction of each, and both vary over time and space. As geographers have contested static notions of space and place, contemporary feminist theory considers the destabilization of identity categories, including sex and gender. Broadly speaking, "sex" refers to the anatomical body of a person, and "gender" refers to the social constructs and norms culturally determined and attached to one's sex which individuals are expected to embody and express.[17] Feminist theory has shifted from a predominant focus on material differences between men and women's lives to an emphasis on representation, embodiment, and ontological and epistemological attributions that complicate categories such as sex and gender as they have been defined in feminist studies.[18] Butler's *Gender Trouble* is often considered the watershed text in recent feminist theoretical debates about performativity.

Butler refigures the traditional feminist model of identity which maintains that the gendered subject "I" is known and expressed through women's actions and speech. Her radical critique of identity argues that a stable, gendered "I" does not exist; instead, women are products of historically specific discourses and actions. Women appear pre-discursive because the process of producing the "I" is concealed and naturalized. Butler defines gender as "a kind of persistent impersonation that passes as the real" (2006, xxxi). In other words, gender is performative in its repetition; "gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (Butler 2006, 45). Gender does not simply exist, because there is no "natural" identity that one does or does not possess. Instead, gender is created via an accumulation of actions, like drag, without

any true original. Butler emphasizes that there is no original or true essence of gender: "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (2006, 34).

Butler argues that gender is something we *do*, and I argue that region may be considered similarly. By analyzing gender as a verb, one can consider ways in which it transforms and affects other aspects of identity *and* ways in which it is transformed and affected. Similarly, by thinking about region as performative, as a process, one can analyze how region modifies aspects of identity *and* how region may be modified. Massey foregrounds this position using an analogy to economic structure: "It is an accepted argument that capital is not a thing, it is a process. Maybe it ought to be more clearly established that places can be conceptualized as processes, too" (1994, 136-37). I take up Massey's call for expanding our theorizations of place by investigating new ways of thinking through identities and communities formed by regional and gendered processes. For example, performing a regional identity different from the one expected of the individual or in a different location shows how regional identity can be socially constructed, and, like drag, the performativity of the acts opens up possibilities of empowerment because the individual re-creates identity in ways previously not open to her.

However, I complicate Butler's theory by showing how it also does *not* work to explain characters' identity formations. Like Muñoz's study of performance artists of color, my project "is informed by the belief that the use-value of any narrative of identity that reduces subjectivity to either a social constructivist model or what has been called an

essentialist understanding of the self is especially exhausted" (Muñoz 1999, 5). Moreover, drawing from Muñoz, my purposes here are to "attempt to chart the ways in which identity is enacted by minority subjects who must work with/resist the conditions of (im)possibility that dominant culture generates" and to show how people "negotiate between a fixed identity disposition and the socially encoded roles that are available for such subjects" (1999, 6). Some characters in the novels discussed in this project embody identities they believe are natural expressions of entities (such as hills and land, for example) that exist behind their expressions of them.

Erica Carter, James Donald, and Judith Squires note how "the concern with questions of identity over recent years may at first sight seem surprising, for the consistent logic of modern social and cultural thought has been to undermine the notion of individual identity" (1993, viii). They briefly describe sociological and Marxist, Freudian, Saussurian, Foucauldian, and feminist approaches to show how all of these theories challenge, resist, or subvert the idea of an inherent individual identity, and ask: "So why the return of identity as a theoretical topic and a political project?" (Carter, Donald, and Squires 1993, viii). They point out that identity is often incorrectly conceived as existing on one side of a "dichotomous notion of difference" which "has regularly been mobilised to legitimate cultural and political exclusion, and to assert the dominance of the norm" (Carter, Donald, and Squires 1993, x). To contest how identity has been dismissed or critiqued as either universalist or a construct of difference, they call for "a more fluid and relational notion of difference" which "allows for the recognition of cultural specificity and heterogeneity as the touchstone against which all

political claims are assessed, embraced and/or contested" (Carter, Donald, and Squires 1993, x).

My project follows their assertion that identity "need neither to be assimilated to a neutral norm, nor essentialised as absolute other: they are fluid, migratory identities" (Carter, Donald, and Squires 1993, x). By exploring identity processes that blur the lines between formulations of identity as either essentialist or socially constructed, I challenge current trends of negativity in Women's Studies to consider even the possibility of a positive portrayal of "essentialist" identity. The identity processes of some characters in these novels exemplify conceptualizations of essentialism *and* social construction. For instance, the epigraph of this chapter introduces Bant, who feels she is different from other teenagers and thinks: "I didn't want to be different, but I was, either born or made that way or both" (Pancake 2007, 40). Bant's remark is a provocative response to a question with which Danielle Russell opens her book: "Where do choice and decree intersect in the space/identity equation?" (2006, 1). This project focuses on the "both" in Bant's assertion. Instead of staking out a definitive claim in an essentialist versus constructivist debate (Russell, for example, stakes her ground in the constructivist's camp [2006, 5]), I maintain that some characters simultaneously embrace and defy constructivist and essentialist ideas of self. Thus, identity processes can be both/and instead of either/or because characters "interface with different subcultural fields to activate their own senses of self" (Muñoz 1999, 5). Mediating between reproducing regionally gendered norms and challenging those norms, characters in this study actualize identities through what I term regionally gendered performativity.

Nodes of intersection between region and gender illustrate dialectic processes of performativity. Thus, "from the symbolic meaning of spaces/places and the clearly gendered messages which they transmit,…spaces and places are not only themselves gendered but, in their being so, they both reflect and affect the ways in which gender is constructed and understood" (Massey 1994, 179). Analyzing gender from a geographic perspective shows how gendered expectations and relations between and among men and women can be dissimilar in different locations. For instance, dominant norms of what it means to be a woman (and how gender is expected to be expressed) may vary significantly between urban and rural areas. And analyzing concepts such as space and place from a gendered perspective demonstrates how space and place can be gendered variably. Here Massey offers the classic example of public/private spheres: "The attempt to confine women to the domestic sphere was both a specifically spatial control and, through that, a social control on identity" (1994, 179). I focus broad sketches of intersections between gender and geography by highlighting women's experiences in and affiliations with Appalachia and the Southwest.

The novels in this project depict ties between gender, feminism, and local Appalachian and Southwest environments. The study of "the local" has not always been a respected area of study in geography. Massey cites a major reason why studies that focus on local places have been resisted or discredited as the incorrect conflation (and subsequent denigration) of locality with "special interest topics" such as anti-racism, feminism, and environmental issues (1994, 119). An argument against studying the locality of place on which she expands is one which

> drew upon the associations of 'a sense of place' with memory, stasis and nostalgia. 'Place' in this formulation was necessarily an essentialist concept

> which held within it the temptation of relapsing into past traditions, of sinking back into (what was interpreted as) the comfort of Being instead of forging ahead with the (assumed progressive) project of Becoming. The ways in which, here too, issues of gender though largely buried were really at stake were only gradually to become part of the debate, but the manner in which this characteristic of stable Beingness resonated with ways of characterizing femaleness in our culture could not go unnoticed. (Massey 1994, 119-20)

Critiquing essentialist conceptions of place and femininity is one way in which theories of geography and gender are interrelated. But we should avoid reducing analyses to those which always claim social construction. Such an either/or framework simplifies the argument in ways similar to the concerns raised by Muñoz. Studying local processes of "othering" in relation to place and gender allows us to mark patterns of similarity and difference.[19] When place or femininity, for example, is constructed through binary opposition, each is constructed as the "Other," the lesser, the marginal. Once the processes are exposed and analyzed, we are better situated, ideally, to implement plans geared toward the elimination of inequalities.

As McDowell's model of "nodes" indicates, gender and place converge and diverge at different moments and in different places, and analyses of these transfers yield insights into how gender and region are performed. McDowell notes how

> social practices, including the wide range of social interactions at a variety of sites and places—at work, for example, at home, in the pub or the gym—and ways of thinking about and representing place/gender are interconnected and mutually constituted. We all act in relation to our intentions and beliefs, which are always culturally shaped and historically and spatially positioned. (1999, 7)

By approaching place and gender as "interconnected and mutually constituted," I focus on how gender configures regional affiliation and how regional affiliation shapes gender. The regional juxtaposition in these novels expands on Butler's question: "What performance where will compel a reconsideration of the *place* and stability of the

masculine and the feminine?" (2006, 189). Butler's question draws attention to ways in which performances may instigate reexaminations of what one believes to be normal or natural when enacted and viewed in a place in which they are not usually performed. Throughout this project I consider ways in which Butlerian theories of performativity shed light on *and* are challenged by questions of regional identity.

I maintain that region and gender are performed simultaneously; however, interrelationships among them are not fixed. As McDowell observes: "What people believe to be appropriate behaviour and actions by men and women reflect and affect what they imagine a man or a woman to be and how they expect men and women to behave, albeit men and women who are differentiated by age, class, race or sexuality, and *these expectations and beliefs change over time and between places*" (1999, 7; emphasis added). Identity categories are defined in part by individuals who are positioned within them and in part by socially-imposed codes of behavior. But identity, individuals, and socio-cultural constructs are not static, as Massey reminds us: "the very formation of the identity of a place—its social structure, its political character, its 'local' culture—is also a product of interactions" (1994, 120). Therefore, a study that considers how interactions among people form, shift, and collapse between regions will offer insight into their inner workings in regard to region and gender.

Regionally Gendered Performativity and Community

Regionally gendered performativity not only destabilizes the binary framework of essentialism versus constructivism but also accounts for the processes by which individuals portray regional and gendered senses of self *in view of others*. Sherrie Inness

and Diana Royer's idea of regionalism suggests that a person's ever-changing relationship with physical and natural environments influences and is influenced by his or her "investment in community" (1997, 7). Generally in this project "community" includes a spectrum of feelings ranging from love to camaraderie to aversion (and everything in between) that one feels toward fellow residents of a region—whether those residents live in the region of origin or relocation of the protagonist. Close readings of this selection of contemporary novels focuses on how, why, and in what ways regional location, affiliation, and community participation are crucial factors in women's gendered identity and vice versa. An individual may perceive and therefore enact gender differently in a certain geographical location, and an individual may perceive and enact regional identity based on gender. In Tucson, Taylor works as a capable tire-repair specialist, recognizing Mattie's performativity of gender through her work, although she is convinced that she could not carry out this type of employment in Pittman. Through regionally gendered performativity, spaces can open in which individuals contest dominant representations: "To make oneself in such a way that one exposes [the limits of the historical scheme of things] is precisely to engage in an aesthetics of the self that maintains a critical relation to existing norms" (Butler 2005, 17).

I highlight points at which regionally gendered performativity either is or fails to be recognized by others, both within and outside the region of origin. Taylor's employment in Mattie's shop is an example of how performativity is recognized. In contrast, in *Play It as It Lays*, Maria runs away on several occasions to the Nevada desert in an attempt to escape her life in Los Angeles. Yet she is unable to find a space there through which her challenges to prevalent expectations of her wealthy, famous milieu are

recognized as such. Contrary to Taylor's experience, Maria's case exemplifies how, when "a failed interpellation within the dominant public sphere" (Muñoz 1999, 7) occurs, regionally gendered performativity prohibits an individual's inclusion in community. Interactions among individuals and community play a significant role because an audience—even of one—is required. A spectator's perceptions of an individual's regionally gendered performativity are part of the meaning-making process by which the individual can support or resist, for example, gendered codes of behavior. We will see this at play especially in *Sula*. When the meaning-making process is disrupted, according to Butler, ruptures occur; I explain how these ruptures affect identity and community at the end of this chapter.

In Tol Foster's discussion of "relational regionalism" he articulates how "the regional frame…foregrounds interactions and conflicts between communities," therefore acknowledging difference, and how it "traces contributions and collisions between communities as those events and practices become constitutive of the communities themselves" (2008, 273). Characters in these novels demonstrate in many different ways how "relational space (region) allows constituent identities to formulate themselves both internally (us) and externally (them)" (Foster 2008, 275). Communities often add elements of one culture to another, discard some, and mold others to retain some of their original form while adapting them to fit other purposes.[20] Therefore, communities are not confined or relegated to a particular place.

Massey emphasizes important differences between place and community, and she warns against conflating these terms:

> On the one hand, communities can exist without being in the same place—from networks of friends with like interests, to major religious, ethnic or political

> communities. On the other hand, the instances of places housing single "communities" in the sense of coherent social groups are probably—and, I would argue, have for long been—quite rare. Moreover, even where they do exist this in no way implies a single sense of place. For people occupy different positions within any community. (1994, 153)

In these novels Appalachian and Southwestern communities are portrayed as being located both within and outside the respective region, as we will see in the chapter on migration. Moreover, Appalachian and Southwestern communities are larger than a specific place. They expand over time and space and challenge the idea of a "coherent social group" through their differences of gender, race, class, and even regional affiliation.

The ambiguity of the term "region" permits us to discuss geographic place while also encompassing non-geographic terrain. As Anderson claims about nation and nationalism, region and regionalism are "notoriously difficult to define, let alone to analyze" (1991, 3). He argues that nationality and nationalism are "cultural artifacts" constructed throughout history, linked to socio-cultural and political events and geographic location, and laden with strong emotional associations and attachments (Anderson 1991, 4). Positioned in the borderlands between the actual and the abstract, nation is "an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson 1991, 6). Region functions similarly as an imagined community, shaped in part by shared socio-cultural characteristics (such as language, cuisine, and economic conditions) and in part by proximity of locations that share similar physical characteristics (such as topography, animal and plant life, and climate).

By "imaginary," I do not refer to Lacanian theories of the mirror stage,[21] but rather to Anderson's conceptualizations and to theories of regional space and place

delineated in *Rethinking the Region* by John Allen, Doreen Massey, and Allan Cochrane. Allen and his co-authors suggest that we consider "both space and place as constituted out of spatialized social relations—and narratives about them—which not only lay down ever-new regional geographies, but also work to reshape social and cultural identities and how they are represented" (1998, 1-2). I ask how narratives of Appalachia and the Southwest are constituted via individuals' positionalities in relation to the region, how individuals' positionalities are shaped in turn by these narratives, and how these interactions refigure "social and cultural identities."

In addition to Allen and his co-authors' claim that regions are not exactly quantifiable, Anderson stresses the point that nations are

> *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion…In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined. (1991, 6)

To be sure, imagined regional communities of Appalachia and the Southwest are not entities that can be definitively defined. This project approaches Appalachian and Southwestern communities portrayed in these novels as fluid amalgamations of people across time, space, and place who continuously negotiate interrelations among each other.

Yet we also think of regions as bounded, since "region" does serve to designate certain areas to the exclusion of others. As Anderson says of nations, "The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations" (1991, 7). Since the terms "region" and "community" designate via inclusion and exclusion, these spaces are not usually egalitarian. In *Sula*'s fictional town of Medallion,

Ohio, we encounter an African American community living in the hills, nicknamed "the Bottom," and a white community that claims the valley. Elsewhere, as in *Sula*, systems of inequality influence who can be a member of a community and where that community can live. Like nations in which "actual inequality and exploitation…may prevail" (Anderson 1991, 7), gendered inequalities operate within regions themselves.

In addition to Butler and Anderson, my literary analyses draw from formulations of "regionalism" and "regional literature" developed by Fetterley and Pryse. They employ the term "regionalism"

> to articulate the perspective from ruled places that includes the perception that "regionalization" is not natural; it is not a feature of geography, though topography may play some part in changing economic conditions. Rather, regionalism asserts that the regionalizing premise concerns the consolidation and maintenance of power through ideology and is therefore a discourse…rather than a place. In constructing the literary category of regionalism, in effect, by studying writing that already recognizes itself to be "out of place" even in its relation to place, we are thereby adding a discursive marker to certain texts and inviting readers to immerse themselves in the "open exception" regionalists take to the very power structure that has "regionalized" their characters and their writing. (Fetterley and Pryse 2003, 7)

As Butler claims about gender, Fetterley and Pryse argue that regionalism is "not natural." They complicate the definition of region by disassociating it with location and stressing its discursive construction, positing "region less as a term of geographical determinism and more as discourse or a mode of analysis" (Fetterley and Pryse 2003, 11). They see region as a function of ideology and power upheld via dominant discourses.

However, like Bant, I suggest that many of the characters' identities discussed in this dissertation are "either born or made that way or both" (Pancake 2007, 40). Thus, I add to Fetterley and Pryse's study by suggesting that regionalism is performative in the Butlerian sense and that region is in part an actual place, and I complicate Butler's

theories of performativity in regard to how gender and region function. I modify Anderson's theories of nation to account for imagined regional communities, how they are formed, and how they operate. Overall, along the lines of Muñoz, I suggest that identities should be analyzed from a point of convergence or divergence of what are considered essentialist and social constructivist processes. Close readings of narrative and literary tropes yield patterns that show how characters deploy regionally gendered performativity within imagined regional communities to negotiate issues of privilege, oppression, and resistance as they are related to particular locations and as they are experienced by women.

The following four chapters apply these theoretical considerations to close readings of the novels and their women protagonists. Chapter divisions are determined by region in order to reflect the variability in characters' locations. Before exploring the mobility of region and gender between Appalachia and the Southwest, Chapters Two and Three focus on ways in which regionally gendered performativity functions in characters' regions of origin. Chapter Two pairs Pancake's *Strange as This Weather Has Been* and Morrison's *Sula* because both deploy textual depictions of climate (i.e., temperature, rain, wind, and seasonal patterns) to demonstrate how regionally gendered performativity is enacted and perceived in northern and central Appalachian communities. Comparing Castillo's *So Far from God* with Didion's *Play It as It Lays*, Chapter Three highlights how spirituality (or the lack thereof) is reflected via the Southwest's topography (including climate), and vice versa, and how this correlation influences characters' regionally gendered performativity. Chapter Four couples Patchett's *The Patron Saint of Liars* and Kingsolver's *The Bean Trees* to explore how imagined regional communities

migrate between the Southwest and Appalachia; these two novels offer contrasting examples of how regionally gendered distinctions are supported and challenged via an individual's relocation. In sum, this comparative feminist literary analysis explores how regionally gendered performativity in contemporary literature of Appalachia and the Southwest fosters imagined regional communities through which individuals may contest dominant social norms of identity and behavior. It also addresses what happens when regionally gendered performativity is or is not intelligible to others in the communities.

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[1] For a brief list, see: Truth (1851); Kollontai (1914); Hall (1928); Riviére (1929); Woolf (1929); de Beauvoir (1952); Morrison (1970); Irigaray (1974); Rich (1980); Yamada (1981); Walker (1982); Allen (1986); Anzaldúa (1987); Butler (1990); Collins (1990); Winterson (1992); Frankenberg (1997); Powell (1998); Fausto-Sterling (2000); Mahmood (2005); Baumgardner (2007); Girshick (2008); hooks (2009).

[2] Crenshaw's 1991 essay "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color" is often considered one of the most precisely theorized conceptualizations of intersectionality. She divides the essay into three parts: structural intersectionality, political intersectionality, and representational intersectionality. In the first part she explores how race and gender intersect in black women's experiences of violence in ways that make them "qualitatively different from that of white women" (Crenshaw 1991, 1245). In the second section she critiques "the failure of feminism to interrogate race" and "the failure of antiracism to interrogate patriarchy" and argues that these failures combine to create "a particularly difficult political dilemma for women of color" (Crenshaw 1991, 1252). Using the 1990 2 Live Crew obscenity prosecution as a case study, she argues in the third section that popular cultural representations of women of color and the controversies caused by these representations oftentimes further their "intersectional disempowerment" (Crenshaw 1991, 1245). An exhaustive evaluation of feminist theories of intersectionality is outside the scope of this project. The following is a short list of authors who expand on related issues: NietoGomez (1976); Moraga and Anzaldúa (1981); hooks (1984, 1990, 2009); Lorde (1984); Allen (1986); Rich (1986); Anzaldúa (1987); Collins (1990); McIntosh (1990); Allison (1994); Silko (1996); Garland-Thomson (2002).

[3] Crawford also explicitly calls for region to be considered in intersectional analyses, claiming that "we are now at the critical juncture of uncovering how the constructs of race, gender, class, sexuality, and region construct each other" (2005, 1).

[4] Using intersectionality as methodology enables us to "destroy the binaries that structure race, gender, class, sexuality, and regionalism" (Crawford 2005, 3).
[5] Because these concepts are broad, Massey limits her project by focusing on particular time periods and social relations as actualized through constructs of class, gender, space, and place; she does so in order to produce analyses that, while located specifically, can also be applied broadly. For instance, in the first essay section Massey focuses on the British workforce, class, and economy in the United Kingdom during the terms of Prime Ministers Harold Wilson (1964-1970 and again in 1974-1976) and Margaret Thatcher (1979-1990) to demonstrate theoretical support for her claim that social and spatial change are intertwined and mutually reinforcing (1994, 23).
[6] Foster's concept of "relational regionalism," which "accepts the constructedness and contingency of the notion of a region in both time and space," also recognizes that "a region can be configured differently, depending on which element and historical moment is being traced" (2008, 273).
[7] Included in northern and central Appalachia are all of West Virginia and parts of eastern Kentucky, eastern Tennessee, western Virginia, and southeastern Ohio. McKinney adamantly articulates differences between and among Appalachian regions: "West Virginia is not the Deep South, and despite the fact that our writers have learned much from the writers of the South, the two regions are very different in preoccupations and development….[O]ur writers have been characteristically concerned with more recent history, like the West Virginia Mine Wars, the battle of Blair Mountain, the War on Poverty, the human and ecological disasters at Hawk's Nest and Buffalo Creek, and the devastation caused by man mountaintop removal mining in the southern part of the state" (2002, 2-3).
[8] The notion that all people from Appalachia are white and feel an intense connection with hills often devolves into stereotypical images and ideas concerning "hillbillies."
[9] Allen claims that "there are three cultural bases that define southwestern cultural identity: the Pueblo, the Mexican Hispano, and the American" (1995, xvi).
[10] In February 2009 ABC News aired a sixty-minute program entitled "A Hidden America: Children of the Mountains," in which ABC News correspondent Diane Sawyer reports on the poverty of the Appalachian region, focusing on white children and their experiences. Reports like Sawyer's reproduce a general portrait of Appalachian people as unkempt, uneducated, irresponsible, and poor. The title "A Hidden America" exemplifies how Appalachia is often considered as existing only obliquely in relation to the U.S. Moreover, this "documentary" is one example of exploitation of Appalachia and its people for commercial gain and profit.
[11] See Didion (1968, 1979, 1992, 2003); Norwood and Monk (1987); Barnes and Blew (1994); Castillo (1995); Dunaway and Spurgeon (1995); Higgs, Manning, and Miller (1995); Kingsolver (1995); Silko (1996); Inness and Royer (1997); Dyer (1998); Mitchell (2002); Ballard and Hudson (2003); Fetterley and Pryse (2003); Pancake (2006); Finney (2007); hooks (2009).
[12] In "Heritage", by Native poet Linda Hogan, the speaker's tone is confident that she knows what has been passed down to her through generations of her family. However, the poem ends by expressing a strong feeling of displacement and estrangement from the land and her ancestors: "From my family I have learned the secrets / of never having a

home" (Hogan 1995, 95). While I do not claim that the speaker is Hogan herself describing her experience of moving between Colorado and Oklahoma as a child, I do claim that the poem exemplifies an individual's complicated ties to homeland. For another compelling example see "Conflict" by Julie Pennell (1995).

[13] In "I Y'am What I Y'am," Appalachian poet Rita Bradley explores the intersections of her African, Scotch-Irish, and Cherokee ancestry and proudly states that she "feel[s] secure among the mountains," declaring: "I am here, I belong here, Appalachia is / mine and I am Appalachia's" (1995, 240).

[14] Abbey, who wrote most famously about the Southwest but was born in Appalachian Pennsylvania, depicts a character named Henry Lightcap in the novel *The Fool's Progress* whose migration from Appalachia to the Southwest is similar to Abbey's own. Henry was born on a farm in Honey Hollow, West Virginia, but migrates to Arizona as a young man. He quickly considers Arizona his new home, becoming attached to the Southwest. When he leaves Arizona on what he knows will be his last journey back to West Virginia, he contemplates how he is leaving a part of himself in the Southwest, a part he cannot carry back to Appalachia because it belongs in the Western landscape: "I glance once at the rearview mirror. The snowy mountains recede in our rear, falling away to the west and south. I am leaving the West and bits of my heart fall behind" (Abbey 1988, 298).

[15] Heilbrun critiques Eudora Welty for "camouflage[ing] herself" (in the autobiographical *One Writer's Beginnings*), claiming that Welty "wishes to keep meddling hands off the life. To her, this is the only proper behavior for the Mississippi lady she so proudly is" (2007, 651).

[16] In Arnow's *The Dollmaker* Gertie, her husband Clovis, and her children live hard but happy lives in the Appalachian Kentucky hills, but in order to find work, Clovis moves his family to Detroit. Gertie and her children especially struggle to adjust to life there. Many people in Detroit view Gertie and her family as outsiders who refuse to assimilate to Detroit's socio-regional customs (such as speech patterns, dress, and consumption habits). Gertie and her family are verbally and physically assaulted as a result of the ignorance, fear, and hatred some people direct toward what is seen as the family's Appalachian "difference." For example, a group of children scream at Gertie's children: "Yu mom never had no shoes till yu come to Detroit. Yu mudder's a hillbilly son uv a bitch. Youse hillbillies come tu Detroit un Detroit wenttu hell. Waitansee, waitansee, hillbilly bigmouth whitehead…" (Arnow 2003, 242).

[17] Queer and transgender theory and literature pose important challenges to the dichotomous framework of sex/gender and definitions of both terms. See, for example: Sedgwick (1990); Feinberg (1993); Bornstein (1994); Halberstam (1998, 2005); Middlebrook (1998); Nestle (2002); Scott-Dixon (2006); Girshick (2008); Stryker (2008).

[18] A prominent example of material feminist analysis is *The Feminine Mystique*, in which Friedan introduces "the problem that has no name" (2001, 15) and asks "Can the problem that has no name be somehow related to the domestic routine of the housewife?" (2001, 30). Friedan answers yes and supports her argument with numerous historical and contemporary reports and interviews of housewives who were depressed and unfulfilled even though their lives were a reflection, on the surface, of what society said should make them happy. Charting feminist theory from second-wave texts such as Friedan's

through *Gender Trouble* and recent queer and transgender theory shows the shift I mention here.

[19] Foster submits a similar argument in regard to the local and tribal. He proposes a "historically and theoretically astute regionalism" from which we may "mediate and engage the claims of" people from different positions of power; "thus engaged, we can understand the relation between *Native* and *America* in a way that privileges the local and the tribal" (Foster 2008, 268).

[20] Foster gives the example of canoes and trucks: "Canoes are a central technology for settler nature lovers, and few Oklahoma Natives could imagine a world without their pickup trucks. There is nothing tragic in such adaptations" (2008, 273).

[21] Lacan's theory of the mirror stage describes the moment when a child, seeing one's reflection in a mirror, recognizes the image as her or his own. The child then experiences for the first time the ability to articulate subjectivity via identification. However, Lacan asserts that this identification is based on misrecognition because the unity between the child's body and the image in the mirror is imaginary.

Chapter Two: "You Don't Need a Weatherman" in Appalachia: Region and Gender in *Strange as This Weather Has Been* and *Sula*

"The summer strangely cool and wet following a warm snowless winter, that winter following the worst drought summer in sixty years. Anymore, seemed there was either too much water or too little, the temperature too high or too low. 'Strange as this weather has been,' people would say, or, 'With this crazy weather we've been having.' And I knew Lace believed the weather was linked to the rest of this mess, but I wasn't sure how."

--Bant in *Strange as This Weather Has Been*

"What was taken by outsiders to be slackness, slovenliness or even generosity was in fact a full recognition of the legitimacy of forces other than good ones….They did not believe Nature was ever askew—only inconvenient. Plague and drought were as 'natural' as springtime….The purpose of evil was to survive it and they determined (without ever knowing they had made up their minds to do it) to survive floods, white people, tuberculosis, famine and ignorance."

--*Sula*

In April 2010 an explosion in Montcoal, West Virginia, killed twenty-nine miners. Designated by President Barack Obama as "America's worst mining disaster in forty years," the Upper Big Branch Mine blast dominated public attention and news reports.[1] Immediate suspicion was directed toward Virginia-based Massey Energy.[2] Speculations that the miners' deaths were a result of Massey's negligence were reinforced by nationally-broadcast details which revealed Massey's failure to implement standard safety measures: "Massey Energy Co. has racked up millions of dollars in penalties in recent years. [Upper Big Branch Mine] received 458 citations from federal inspectors in 2009, and more than 50 of those were for problems that the operators knew about but had not corrected, according to federal mine safety records."[3] Massey's dereliction directly affects Appalachian ecosystems: "Federal regulators accused the company of violating its Clean Water Act permits more than 4,500 times between January 2000 and December 2006, sometimes discharging more than 10 times the

allowable amounts of metals, sediment and acids into rivers and lakes in those states."[4] Region plays a crucial role here. It matters that this kind of devastation continues to occur on such an immense level, largely unchecked, *in Appalachia*.

While picked up by the majority of media outlets for its sensationalist mix of politics, mystery, and tragedy, a catastrophic event such as the Upper Big Branch Mine explosion and its attendant circumstances are not so sensational for West Virginians. Erik Reece, in an article detailing activists' call to utilize wind power instead of coal power, astutely argues that socio-cultural stereotypes of a people directly affect local environment, landscape, and community:

> When the rest of the country thinks about…Appalachia, it often thinks of the past—of backwardness even. That image benefits the coal industry immensely, making it much easier for companies like Massey to justify irreparable damage that would never be tolerated in, say, the Adirondacks. These West Virginians were tired of living on the receiving end of that attitude….Now they had a plan, a blueprint for how to disentangle the region from the world's most toxic industry. (2009, 65)

Shirley Stewart Burns (2009) seconds Reece's point that stereotypes of the region's inhabitants as backward, dangerous, and ignorant are a major factor in facilitating the region's exploitation. Especially since the mid-twentieth century, Appalachian communities and environments have been and continue to be threatened by devastating effects of the coal mining industry in particular and prejudice, political corruption, and environmental degradation in general.

Environmental harm caused by mountaintop removal mining (MTR)[5] is immediately visible, even to those only driving through Appalachia. Observers frequently remark on how mountains devastated by MTR look like they have been raped, denuded, stripped bare of vegetation. Similar landscapes are visible in the Southwest. Matthew

J.C. Cella observes how "[t]he story of the [mining] industry's environmental degradation…is writ large on the landscape by hundreds of other ghost towns that lay in ruin across the West, surrounded by gutted-out hills, dredged-out rivers, and dug-up valleys" (2009, 776). It is not coincidental that the remarks above are gendered in terms of sexual violence most often committed by men against women. These gendered metaphors illustrate symbolic and literal interconnections among region, gender, and environment.

Ecofeminists have studied how ecosystems play important roles in formations of and challenges to gendered identities and, conversely, how deployments of gender can reify or contest long-standing perceptions of environments. As Janice Monk argues, the "often unspoken social and cultural beliefs, that is the ideologies which people hold about gender, are important in shaping landscapes. In turn, landscapes set the contexts within which men and women act and reproduce gender roles and relationships" (1992, 123). For example, nature has traditionally been gendered female (i.e., "Mother Earth" and "virgin land"), which in Anglo American patriarchal society demarcates its subordination and facilitates male domination. By challenging the assignation of nature as feminine and subservient, ecofeminists argue for the dissolution of the man/nature power differential.

Feminist regionalists, in turn, draw connections between regional demarcation and oppression. Fetterley and Pryse "argue that regionalism marks that point where region becomes mobilized as a tool for critique of hierarchies based on gender as well as race, class, age, and economic resources. Here we would point to the parallels between the process of creating regions and the ideological construction of 'separate spheres' for

men and women" (2003, 14). Barbara Ellen Smith offers an example specific to Appalachian history:

> The chief protagonist in the history of Appalachia, at least as it's been written for the past 30 years, is a valiant working-class (or small landholding) man, who struggles against planters, land speculators, coal operators, condescending missionaries, local colorists, and disparaging academics to assert his dignity and power. The implicit metanarrative of Appalachian historiography is thus deeply gendered: "mountaineers" (and their academic advocates) act to defend the female Appalachia—symbol of land, hearth, class interests, and personal integrity—from assault. (1999, 4-5)

I argue that Ann Pancake's *Strange as This Weather Has Been*[6] (2007) and Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1973) help reverse this tradition by writing chief women protagonists who act to defend Appalachian land and people from disfranchisement. Narrowing its focus from the first chapter's description of physical, imaginary, and psychic parameters of Appalachia, this chapter highlights central and northern Appalachia, specifically West Virginia and southeastern Ohio, as they are portrayed in *Strange* and *Sula*. While "[m]igration and freedom of movement often receive the most attention," according to Danielle Russell, "the importance of a home (literal or longed for) is also vital to the definition of American fiction" (2006, 2). Before exploring movement between Appalachian and Southwest spaces in the fourth chapter, I consider texts in which characters remain mostly in their region of origin.

"You Don't Need a Weatherman…"

Feminist scholars have investigated at length interconnections among land, environment, and people; to these I add weather as a feminist issue.[7] Weather affects all of us on a daily basis: "[w]e literally breathe the weather. It affects what we wear, what we eat, how we feel, where we live, how we spend our time. The weather is a major

character in the drama of our culture" (Thurlow and Adler 1999, viii).[8] The title of this chapter borrows from Bob Dylan's lyric—"You don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows"[9]—to emphasize literally that one does not require technical training to observe, discuss, or assess weather's effects and to suggest metaphorically that specialized training can be unnecessary. The importance of meteorology notwithstanding, George Freier, a nuclear physicist specializing in atmospheric physics, seems to agree with Dylan. Freier claims that "[s]ophisticated equipment and television often tell us the same thing we can find for ourselves from a weather proverb and careful observation of nature" (1992, vi), and he emphasizes that "everyone other than practicing meteorologists gets most information about weather by simply watching and listening…" (1992, 138).

Stories and proverbs help us process personal and communal experiences of weather.[10] Thurlow and Adler suggest: "Imagine reading a history of mankind [sic] from a meteorological perspective….Did a winter storm rattle the window in Bob Dylan's room when 'Blowin' in the Wind' first popped up on his guitar?" (1999, viii). They "guess, with some confidence, that the weather played some part on those landmark days and millions of others in human history. And we can explain the weather mechanics that can lead to moments of terror, appreciation, or epiphany. What we need are stories that somehow bring the two together" (Thurlow and Adler 1999, viii). *Strange* and *Sula* begin to bridge this gap.

Their plot lines feature quotidian and extreme weather and account for the multitude of ways that characters are affected by it. For instance, weather can foster or fragment actual and imagined communities of people who reside permanently or

temporarily in the same location.[11] In reference to an extreme weather event, Leszek Koczanowicz states that "[a] natural disaster can reveal suppressed and hidden conflict and make visible the tensions that exist in a society….the natural asks questions about the sense and validity of human society's existence" (2007, 755). In *Strange*, Mrs. Taylor notes that the flood changed not only how Buffalo Creek looked but also "how people acted" (Pancake 2007, 207), and the flood has an effect on her son Avery, not "of invincibility, but a consciousness of your own vulnerability, of your own insignificance, an awareness so profound it shakes hands with suicide. There were lots of people, Avery learned, who didn't want to live after Buffalo Creek" (Pancake 2007, 238). Avery's thoughts reflect debilitating despair and isolation, and these feelings in large part prompt him to leave the Buffalo Creek community.

Characters in these texts consistently understand and experience gender and region, as inflected by various identity vectors, in terms of weather, and vice versa. Janet Pérez links the importance of weather as a universal concern to its textual deployments:

> [H]istoric and literary commemorations of climate attest to the ubiquitous nature of a phenomenon whose extremes may vary but whose presence is inescapable and whose long-term changes, even if minimal, may have disastrous effects (cf. global warming, the 'greenhouse effect,' and the hole in the ozone). These considerations plus climate's power over humanity's food supply suffice to make it a universal concern. Humanity's collective experience, reflected in language, has resulted in numerous figurative and colloquial expressions involving weather and climate. (1995, 1-2)

Yet the transparency of weather can be obscured by its very commonness. Koczanowicz maintains that "[w]eather is probably the most capricious and elusive aspect of the natural world. It is also the natural phenomenon most connected with people's everyday lives" (2007, 755). Dominant norms work similarly. Weather can affect people in the same region and community differently; playing on Dylan's gendered "weather*man*",

gender, as it is inflected by race and class, figures prominently in determining various experiences.

In addition to employing weather as a plot device, the authors of these novels invoke metaphor. According to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, "*The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another*" (1980, 5). Obviously, weather and region and gender are not the same. But, all three are "partially structured, understood, performed, and talked about in terms of" each other (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 5). In order to account for this complexity, I analyze the interrelationships among characters' identity processes, weather events and patterns,[12] and community formation.

Weather serves as a suitable way to read regionally gendered identities in light of and against Butlerian theories of performativity because it highlights challenges to and reifications of standardization by showing how variations both unmask and uphold the norm. As explained in chapter one, I complicate Butler's assertion that "*gender* is not a noun" (2006, 34) by showing how *region* is not a noun in these cases. I explore how region and gender *can be* performative, demonstrating that no inherent identity *must* exist behind their expressions or within actual and imagined communities formed out of regional ties. The words "can be" and "must" are italicized to emphasize that I do not claim that these characters' identities are always only socially constructed; rather, the "identity formation" of these characters "locates the enacting of self at precisely the point where the discourses of essentialism and constructivism short-circuit" (Muñoz 1999, 6). Indeed, some of these characters reject social standards of "desirable" behavior in order to enact what they believe to be their "natural" identity. By resisting such pressure, the

characters feel they are enacting a regionally gendered identity with which they are most comfortable, even if others are made uncomfortable. Through the familiar motif of weather, *Strange* and *Sula* depict how region, gender, and various vectors of identity intersect within Appalachian communities and in which ways these identity vectors foster and fragment community formation.

Strange as This Weather Has Been

Pancake's novel, based loosely on actual events, tells the story of a small southern West Virginia community trying to protect their homes, livelihoods, and sanity from the floods and the constant threats of flooding caused by MTR-related destruction inflicted by the coal company, Lyon Energy.[13] We follow Lace See from her teenage years, when she meets Jimmy Make Turrell on her visit home to Prater from Morgantown, through adulthood. Together Lace and Jimmy Make struggle to earn enough money to survive, maintain their marriage, and raise four children: a daughter (Bant) and three sons (Dane, Corey, and Tommy). Lace and Jimmy Make pique Bant's suspicion that Lyon is hiding the extent of their destructive mining practices. They tell her that Lyon caused the May flood by installing and subsequently neglecting maintenance of sediment ponds and slurry impoundments and by deforesting hillsides. Upon seeing the sediment ponds, Bant agrees: "I told myself, yes, this is where the floods come from. From the busted ponds and the confused new shape of the land. From how the land has forgot where the water should go" (Pancake 2007, 16). Bant's attention is now directed toward the unchecked mining practices and flooding that devastate the land and economy.

Lace's family and other residents of Prater and surrounding areas experience MTR and its attendant devastation differently, but all are profoundly affected by it. Desperate for regular, decent-paying work, Jimmy Make moves the family to Raleigh, North Carolina, but Lace becomes despondent, and they return to West Virginia. Many residents believe Lyon's MTR activity must be stopped in order to secure a future for the town. Unlike Lace and Bant, Jimmy Make argues that there is nothing the residents can do to stop Lyon. This difference ultimately affects the family in a way none of them would have predicted. The characters make decisions that significantly change their relationships to family, community, and place. Through weather, regionally gendered performativity and concomitant formations of community are illustrated.

Lace and Bant challenge expectations of Appalachian women's identities, desires, and work. *Strange* opens with Lace recalling the uneasy relationship she had with her central Appalachian hometown in her youth. Dominant cultural stereotypes of Appalachia as a less than desirable, if not outright repulsive, place largely affected her then. In first-person narrative, she remembers how she felt before going to Morgantown for college:

> By then I'd decided I was newer than all this here. Here was fine for Mom, Dad, and [her sister] Sheila—you could take one look at them and see how they fit—but only outside of here would I, Lace See, live real life. Ages one to eighteen were just a waiting for that. Nothing on TV, nothing in books, nothing in magazines looked much like our place or much like us, and it's interesting, how you can believe what's on TV is realer than what you feel under your feet. Growing up here, you get the message very early on that your place is more backwards than anywhere in America and anybody worth much will get out soon as they can, and that doesn't come only from outside. (Pancake 2007, 3)

Recognizing in hindsight how internalized prejudice works, Lace recounts her conviction that she would be the one to achieve in life by leaving Prater. These feelings are

reinforced by a school guidance counselor “from away from here,” who assures Lace of her “own specialness” and that “southern West Virginia was just a holding pen for [her]” (Pancake 2007, 3).

Lace’s confidence (perhaps arrogance), boosted by the counselor’s, increases: “the day I graduated high school, May 1983, I told myself once I got to WVU, I’d never look back” (Pancake 2007, 4). She wants to leave an actual Appalachian community, but only a month into her first term at West Virginia University (WVU), she suffers from “a kind of lonesomeness [she’d] never known there was” (Pancake 2007, 4). Lace does not realize how much she depends on the hills of southern West Virginia until she is in Morgantown. She recalls sitting on her dorm windowsill, “watching the ridges in the distance,” thinking: “I wasn’t touching nothing, and wasn’t nothing touching me back, and yeah, they had hills in Morgantown, but not backhome hills, and not the same feel backhome hills wrap you in. I’d never understood that before, had never even known the feel was there. Until I left out and knew it by its absence” (Pancake 2007, 4).

In addition to discovering her attachment to the landscape, Lace first realizes her affinity with southern West Virginia seasons and weather while in Morgantown: “October made [homesickness] worse” (Pancake 2007, 4). She remembers the “sky never clearer any time of the year, keen mornings and warmish afternoons, sharp color in the hills, and the threat of winter making everything more precious. I’d be sitting in a lecture hall, in the library, trying to take notes, trying to study, and there’d come to me October things I’d thought I’d left behind when I left being a kid” (Pancake 2007, 4). As she matures and as the October sky makes everything clear while the threat of winter makes it dear, she recognizes and values her place in regard to the hills. Lace’s

recognition of her close connection to Prater's landscape and weather proves strong enough to carry her home.[14] Before moving to Morgantown and subsequently returning to Prater, she envisions herself as separate from and better than those who live in Prater, thereby rejecting central Appalachian identity and community. But through a burgeoning appreciation for Prater's climate and landscape, she *develops* an Appalachian identity and *becomes* a member of the community into which she was born.

For the first few months after finding out she is pregnant with Bant, she does not leave her parents' house. Finally, Uncle Mogey asks her to dig ramps (wild leeks) in the woods with him, and she reluctantly agrees. At first she experiences being outside as "a squint with [her] whole body" (Pancake 2007, 91), but after being holed up in her childhood bedroom for three months, she feels alive again in a way that she can only convey as related to the sky: "The sky a fresh-washed watery blue and the clouds on the move, and as I stood out there under it, waiting for [Mogey], my insides felt like that sky. Thin clouds blowing through me" (Pancake 2007, 91). She soon finds herself digging with a passion of which Mogey makes her aware. She continues digging with Mogey and experiences a transformation: "But now, whether he'd meant to or not, Mogey had shown me a way I should have seen from the beginning. Hadn't because of how stuck I still was pretending I was different" (Pancake 2007, 94). She is also frustrated, however, because she is having difficulty finding ramps, molly moochers, and morels. Although she "had plenty of practice" finding them as a child, she "wondered how much [she] must have just followed along as a kid and done what [she] was told" (Pancake 2007, 94). She is coming out of her depression and into an awareness of herself as rooted in these hills, but

still she “wondered how much might have been washed out of [her] by those years of looking hard away” (Pancake 2007, 94).

Lace is uncertain whether she has any knowledge or instinct from which to draw, but she continues looking for mushrooms because she is “hardheaded” and felt she “couldn’t give up” (Pancake 2007, 94). She feels she must work either to remember what she made herself forget or to learn what she never knew. Her determination and perseverance could be considered evidence supporting the stereotype that all Appalachians have an innate and absurd attraction to the hills, but Lace’s is neither. Rather, she “develops an ecological sensibility that begins with a reorientation to her native place” (Westerman 2009, 153).

Lace begins to go into the woods with her mother. At first these expeditions seem isolating to Lace, who remembers them as her mother “moving ahead of” her while Lace was “dragging behind,” and in her memories she “see[s] everything as heavy and on a steep slant…in grays and browns, no green” (Pancake 2007, 95). But “after the first few weeks, Mom would shift. And we’d be grownups together for a while. Then, once in a while, I could again see the beauty of the place. I’d see the beauty quick and sharp, and as we moved into summer, despite the haze, the heat, I started seeing it more often” (Pancake 2007, 96). Place, beauty, and interpersonal connection are all interlinked for Lace, and she begins to experience them in Prater for the first time in the woods with her family. “It was also in the woods where the baby first moved. May,” Lace recalls, “and I’ll always remember the spot, I’ve shown it many times to Bant since….I felt something like a gas pain….I heard myself make a whimper. Mom looked back at me, saw my hand on my belly, and right away she knew. She smiled at me. And if I didn’t feel myself

smile back. There Bant made herself real for the first time" (Pancake 2007, 96). Lace forges her way into the central Appalachian community she once wanted to abandon by conceiving an Appalachian identity for herself while being an active participant in the natural world with her family members.

Bant believes she simultaneously has an innate Appalachian identity and place in the Prater community *and* has developed this identity and community membership. While taking a shortcut to Uncle Mogey's, she expertly navigates the trail despite dense overgrowth because she had "been running this path since before [she] was born. [She'd] started running this mountain when [she] was still inside Lace…and they carried [her] back up just weeks after" she was born (Pancake 2007, 34). Bant realizes how claims to an innate sensibility are often doubted or viewed suspiciously, but she does not falter:

> If I said it out loud, Lace would say I couldn't remember, but I could, the ground moving below me, dead-leaf-colored, how many colors of brown. The smell of November rain on beginning to rot leaves. I helped my grandma from the time I could walk. *Good little helper, Bant. Such a good helper*, creasies, Shawnee, poke, ramps, molly moochers in spring, blackberries in summer, mayapple and cohosh, then ginseng and nuts—hickory, black walnut, butternut, chinquapin, beech—in the fall. Yellowroot after the sap went down. Sumac and sassafras in November, come Christmas, holly and greenery. I knew these things before I could read. (Pancake 2007, 34-5)

From her grandmother (Lace's mother), Bant learns the importance of place and feeling:

> But Grandma never said anything about how the places might make you feel. She wasn't a talker, especially not about things like that. […] She wouldn't touch you much either. What she liked to touch were woods things, things that came out of the ground. But even without the talking, she taught me to let into my insides the real of this place. From her I learned the deep of here. (Pancake 2007, 36)

Bant's and Lace's identity processes disrupt any neat essentialist or social constructivist binary and remind readers of Bant's poignant statement discussed in chapter one: "I

didn't want to be different, but I was, either born or made that way or both" (Pancake 2007, 40).

Bant challenges norms of desire in ways that are influenced by Lace's appreciation for and awareness of place. Both "women are rooted within…agrarian landscapes, where gathering wild plants, gardening, and canning are associated with family health and personal identity, and where disruptions in this way of life by industrial forces are associated with ruin" (Westerman 2009, 152-53). Bant becomes involved with a miner (referred to by some as a scab) from southeastern Ohio named R.L. She is conflicted about her feelings for him because of her stance on mining and his job and wants to ask him (but never does): "'Some hills in Ohio look like these here, how can you?'" (Pancake 2007, 261). Over the course of their relationship, however, Bant expresses to R.L. her grave concerns about the slurry impoundment she fears will break and destroy their lives. She recalls asking him about Yellowroot directly: "'Shit,' he'd say. 'I don't know what's behind that fill. I don't even go near there. That's not what I do, that part of the site'" (Pancake 2007, 262). Bant thinks: "Southeast Ohio boy. Talked more like West Virginia than the workers from other states did, walked more like West Virginia, motioned his hands like men here did. Familiar, it would lull you. Make you trust" (Pancake 2007, 262). Lace pulls her out of this hypnotic-like lust; as Bant remembers: "Then I'd go home, hear the destructing overhead, Lace talking, and I'd come back to myself. I'd come back full to myself, it wouldn't be just the him parts ruling me, and I'd think, how can you? *Now, Bant, you know bettern that*…Ohio scab-boy. He's up there right now. You know he is" (Pancake 2007, 262). She checks her attraction for R.L. by reminding herself that he works for Lyon and is in many ways her

enemy. Instead of becoming consumed by the prospect of romantic love, Bant re-directs her desire toward saving Prater.

These passages, in which Bant describes R.L., are primary examples of how region and gender are simultaneously performed. It might be noted that, since southeastern Ohio and West Virginia are in close geographic proximity to each other, R.L.'s ability to imitate West Virginian mannerisms is not much of a stretch; yet they are distinct places. While Bant sees West Virginia in R.L., she also differentiates between southeastern Ohio and West Virginia by consistently using "Ohio" as a modifier when referring to him. In doing so, she delineates intra-regional difference and suggests that not all residents of a common area have similar motivations, perspectives, desires, beliefs, and deportment. As an "Ohio scab-boy," R.L., despite or perhaps because he performs a West Virginia identity convincingly, is a threat to sustaining her homeplace.

Class also plays a significant role in how identities are interpreted and can be transformed. When Jimmy Make moves the family to Raleigh, North Carolina, Lace is keenly aware of how class status affects her as a woman, and she questions how her association with a state alters her regionally gendered performativity. She is regarded differently in North Carolina than in her small West Virginia town. She notices "the way people looked at us, regardless of how much money they had. Somehow people knew we were different from them, even before we opened our mouths, although I couldn't for the life of me see how we looked much different from anybody else. It took me back to Morgantown again, the way the out-of-state students saw us, the way some professors did" (Pancake 2007, 194). Implications of class, region, and gender are highlighted in

this example, as she ponders what it means it be a West Virginian woman in North Carolina, or even at WVU.

Interestingly, Jimmy Make seems to pass in North Carolina, while Lace is unable to do so: “I was nothing in North Carolina, nothing or nobody I knew counted for anything in North Carolina, while Jimmy Make, he could pass in and out of that North Carolina world. He didn’t love it, but he could move in it. Jimmy Make got a little bigger in North Carolina, while I got a whole lot littler” (Pancake 2007, 195). Outside his region of origin, Jimmy Make falls back on and manipulates his privileged position as a white man and is able to activate a regionally gendered performativity that allows him to pass. Lace, as a woman, cannot, and in her comments we see her despair, isolation, and diminution. She knows she has to leave North Carolina in order to feel at “home” again, and she and her family return.

Back in Prater, Bant’s and Lace’s involvement in MTR activism challenges traditional ways women are positioned in relation to work, public and private spheres, and community formation. Bant and Lace simultaneously employ factual information, concern for the environment, courage, stubbornness, and first-hand experiences in their activities. Bant bravely climbs up to the Lyon site to see the ponds and impoundments. The day she decides to go she “woke up and saw the sky clear as a shout. No haze, deep blue, kind of sky we didn’t often get around here in July, and the temperature unseasonable cool” (Pancake 2007, 100). Bant muses about a reciprocal intimate relationship with the weather: “And it was like this day knew about me—no threat of rain, fewer gnats, less sweat, and maybe the slope would be drier, simpler to handle.

Climbing weather" (Pancake 2007, 100). While ascending the mountain, Bant considers seriously just how strange the weather has been:

> The sky so blue it had a hardness to it, like you might reach up and hit the underside of a blue-domed skull. Usually in July, this time of morning, the sky'd be taking on a haze, and by noon, the whole thing would be milky. Come August, the sky would whiten up by nine AM, sometimes with a tinge of poison yellow, but this year it seemed the seasons were running backwards. The summer strangely cool and wet following a warm snowless winter, that winter following the worst drought summer in sixty years. Anymore, seemed there was either too much water or too little, the temperature too high or too low. "Strange as this weather has been," people would say, or, "With this crazy weather we've been having." And I knew Lace believed the weather was linked to the rest of this mess, but I wasn't sure how. (Pancake 2007, 101)

Immediately following these ruminations is Bant's description: "Then I was in the part where the trees were sliding down the hollow sides, I was passing those sediment ponds, simmering in themselves, so green with God-didn't-even-know-what I couldn't see a quarter inch under their surface" (Pancake 2007, 101). Her observation of trees sliding down hillsides in conjunction with coal company-created sediment ponds, filled with frighteningly unnatural green sludge, explicitly links the deformed landscape, strange weather, and the coal company, and Bant knows Lace's suspicions are correct.

Once Lace starts working at the local Dairy Queen—the community's "main gathering place" (Pancake 2007, 268)[15]—her environmental activism is jumpstarted by observing customers: "The Dairy Queen was one of the few places in town where people could gather anymore, and while Lace was working, she was told an awful lot, and on top of that, she eavesdropped, she overheard" (Pancake 2007, 82). As her maiden name suggests, she also *sees* evidence supporting activists' warnings. For example, she catches Tommy holding dead fish in a murky creek that used to be filled with healthy fish swimming in clear water (Pancake 2007, 265). Lace tells her work friend Rhondell about

the dead fish; Dunky, Lace's nineteen-year-old co-worker, overhears and insists that "[p]oisons in the runoff got em" (Pancake 2007, 266). Dunky knows exactly which poisons because her mother-in-law, Loretta Hughes, "learned about it" (Pancake 2007, 266). Lace asks Dunky to introduce her to Loretta and her co-conspirator, Charlie Blizzard, and when they meet, Lace sees that "Loretta's face wasn't scared of nothing" (Pancake 2007, 267). Loretta, Charlie, and Lace learn from each other and other activists too, "like Patty McComas, and Jim Corbin and his wife Mavis, and Jeannie Thurst" (Pancake 2007, 268). Thus, the activist community in Prater challenges the "implicit metanarrative" Barbara Ellen Smith mentions by showing how a group comprised mostly of *women* acts to protect Appalachian land "from assault" committed by coal companies (1999, 5).

Women in *Strange* not only defend Appalachian land but also themselves from assault against the symbolic Appalachian "mountaineer". Like the strange weather they experience, their actions are considered unusual and even threatening by some in their community. After overhearing at Dairy Queen what people say about the weather, flooding, and coal, Lace becomes even more convinced that Lyon must be stopped.[16] She recalls: "By then, I wasn't any longer just listening at the Dairy Queen. I was talking. I spread the word whenever I could, lots of people didn't really understand what was happening, just like I hadn't, because of how the industry kept it hidden up over our heads" (Pancake 2007, 300). Her activist work now is widely noticed and not unanimously embraced: "Some people would laugh at me, and some would wave me away with their hand, and a few would get mad" (Pancake 2007, 301). Lace's life is even threatened in a convenience store. As she walks out of the restroom a man blocks her

way down the hallway "with his whole leg and [he] pulled out enough of the gun that [Lace] could tell what it was" (Pancake 2007, 305). He moves aside, and she passes. She is terrified but tells no one other than Loretta. While she has made enemies within and outside Prater, she recalls that "the more people I talked to, the more I came to understand that most people, they thought just like me" (Pancake 2007, 301).

Lace's regionally gendered performativity serves as a counterexample to the general theory that "[t]he domestic landscape…can be seen to reinforce identities as well as the subordination of women or the mobility of men" (Dowler, Carubia, and Szczygiel 2005, 7). Her job at Dairy Queen propels her involvement in the community and activist endeavors, and by working outside the home and being the breadwinner, Lace reverses gender roles. Jimmy Make, whose employment is sporadic at best, eats junk food and lies on the couch watching television; he gains weight, apathy, and distance from his family and community in correlative amounts. He belittles Lace's intelligence by turning his acknowledgement of it into an offhand joke: "('My wife's smarter'n me, I'm not ashamed to admit it,' Jimmy Make would snicker. 'Smart enough to marry me, wasn't she?')" (Pancake 2007, 83). He also demonstrates internalized prejudice by deploying the stereotype of Appalachians as ignorant and provincial:

> *Evil*, Lace called it. *All of it*. *Calculated evil*. Jimmy Make'd roll his eyes. *It's not evil*, he'd say. *How can a woman bright as you are be so goddamned backwards? It's just greed and they-don't-give-a-damn. It's money*. *Greed and money and they-don't-give-a-damn* are *evil*, Lace would say. (Pancake 2007, 102)

He accuses her of "backwardness," but she is the one moving forward, actually doing something. Instead of lying on the couch all day watching television, she directs her energy toward combating MTR destruction. And instead of focusing her attention on her

husband's depression, Lace uses her intellect to link climate conditions with coal mining and spur public protest against Lyon.

Jimmy Make, however, resigns himself to hopelessness and passes off any sense of civic duty or responsibility onto what he believes to be a futile fight—Prater residents against the might, money, and apathy of the coal industry. In one of their biggest fights he again plays on both regional and gendered stereotypes to try to undermine Lace:

Jimmy Make: *If you're so goddamned certain that fill's coming down, then why the hell don't you let us leave out of here?*

Lace: *Because a coal company's not going to run me out of my house and off my land. If you had any spine, you'd fight em with me.*

JM: *It ain't a matter of spine, it's a matter of common sense. I've worked for em. I know you can't fight em. You won't never win.*

L: *At least I'll die trying.*

JM: *Yeah, you and the kid, too, not to mention me.*

L: *Thought you believed we wouldn't ever get washed out?*

JM: *I'm talking about starving to death. I'm talking about how there ain't no work around here and you know it.*

L: *Oh, you could get a job around here. You're just too good for em.*

JM: *Well, I will starve to death before I make pizzas. Not when there's jobs going begging in North Carolina.*

L: *You're just like the rest of em. Too chickenshit to fight anything but their wives.*

JM: *And what the hell are you doing to fight? Making phone calls nobody answers? Running your mouth down at the Dairy Queen? Why don't you go on up there and lie down in front of one of them dozers, you're so keen?* (Pancake 2007, 84-5)

Lace's position as head of the family is demonstrated in Jimmy Make's first statement. She responds by vocalizing her determination to stay in Prater and fight for justice. He immediately deploys common stereotypes that women lack common sense and act on feckless emotion to make her appear irrational and sentimental, charges that she promptly refutes throughout this conversation and the entire novel. She accuses him of thinking he is "too good" for Prater, and his weak attempt to couch his reasoning in classist opinions of labor confirms her accusation. She points out his sexism and lack of courage by reproaching him for only fighting with his wife because he assumes she is easier to overpower. Lastly, he disparages her activism, but what matters is that she *does something*. Jimmy Make upholds standard norms,[17] and Lace's efforts to point these out to him are unsuccessful because he refuses to re-consider such norms. Instead, he leaves for North Carolina.

Each final decision—Lace's and Bant's determination to stay in Prater and Jimmy Make's departure—is associated with the autumn season. October, the month when Lace felt compelled to leave WVU and return to Prater, is when Jimmy Make comes back and offers to take whoever wants to go with him to North Carolina. Bant decides to stay with her mother, and the clarity and optimism of her decision are reflected in the sky: "October'd always been the month I loved the best. The mountains blooming good-bye, and how the sky pulls away to show you itself in October. Beautiful blue like we don't

often get around here, and it no longer crouching down on you as it sometimes does" (Pancake 2007, 347). As soon as her father and brothers leave, Bant goes to the "[b]utchered hollow shocking full of that October sky, so few trees left to block it, [she] was completely exposed, anyone could see. But [she] no longer cared" (Pancake 2007, 351). Bant believes she has crafted an Appalachian identity for herself that is recognizable to all those around her, and she considers her confidence and determination to remain in Prater the indications of her success. Lace's narrative ends similarly.

At the end of the novel, Jimmy Make and Lace separate physically (if not legally). Lace believes that staying in Prater is one of the most effective means of activism against Lyon: "What I do know, after almost two years of not even getting anybody to listen, much less take action, is this: the best way to fight them is to refuse to leave. Stay in their way—that's the only language they can hear. We are from here, it says. This is our place, it says. Listen here, it says. We exist" (Pancake 2007, 314). As an Appalachian woman, Lace's bold assertion that she and the people of Prater exist defy regional and gender norms that imply the opposite. By deciding to stay in Prater, Bant and Lace reject social codes that determine their worth by their relocation from "backward" Appalachia to basically anywhere else. And by acting on their love for the hills but simultaneously challenging dominant cultural expectations that success is achieved by escaping them, they create a space to express their affinity for the region's climate and landscape while also demonstrating how this desire, instead of precluding happiness, enables it.[18]

Lace, Bant, and Jimmy Make offer a spectrum of ways in which regionally gendered performativity is enacted and ways in which it facilitates and impedes community. Lace and Bant reject traditional norms by refusing to submit to the idea that

an Appalachian woman must either leave Appalachia or devote herself to a man in order to be prosperous and content. Their regionally gendered performativity is in part successful because a substantial segment of the community recognizes it as such and appreciates it in their shared struggle against Lyon. However, another segment of the community (those who do not want to openly or at all challenge the coal company, like Jimmy Make) rejects it, in some instances even threatening physical harm. *Strange* conveys intersections of region, gender, and class via weather in a predominantly white West Virginia coal-mining town struggling to survive.[19] To compare regionally gendered performativity in rural Appalachia, I turn to a predominantly black community in the hills of southeastern Ohio.

Sula

Frequent references to "strange," "crazy," and "unusual" weather and subsequent occurrences, in both *Strange* and *Sula*, show how weather which deviates from regular conditions not only can cause events that are considered bizarre but also can instigate people to act in ways that deviate from the expected. *Sula*'s chief protagonists—Nel Greene and Sula Peace—are both born in 1910 in "the Bottom" area of Medallion, Ohio, and become best friends at the beginning of their teenage years (Morrison 1982, 52). They share the joys and pains of adolescence, but when Sula leaves their hometown to travel and attend college, Nel stays, marries Jude, and has children. Sula and Nel lose touch for ten years. When Sula returns, Nel at first is overjoyed to see her, but shortly thereafter Sula has an affair with Jude, and Jude leaves Nel for Sula. Sula eventually leaves Jude, but Nel remains devastated because she has lost her husband and feels

betrayed by Sula. As a result, Sula and Nel do not speak for three years, but when Nel hears about Sula's serious illness she visits her. On Sula's deathbed they have a conversation about love and friendship, sex and intimacy, right and wrong. Upset, Nel leaves Sula to die alone in the house. Only after Sula's death does Nel realize what, or who, she was missing all along.

Many of *Sula*'s descriptions of and references towards Medallion's location insinuate its inclusion in northern Appalachia but remain vague. The indeterminate nature of place can encourage contestations of boundaries, which can reveal spaces of possibility amenable to performing region in ways previously not considered. (R.L.'s performance of being a West Virginian when he is actually from southeast Ohio is an example.) I approach the setting of *Sula*—described as "that little river town in Ohio" (Morrison 1982, 5)—similarly. Since Morrison does not pinpoint a geographic region, I propose that Medallion (the valley part of town where the white people live) and its "part of town where the Negroes lived, the part they called the Bottom in spite of the fact that it was up in the hills" can be considered as situated within northern Appalachia (near or in southeastern Ohio) and its residents an Appalachian community (Morrison 1982, 4); no extant criticism analyzes it as such.

My analysis might seem circuitous. I discuss the beginning and end of the novel while temporarily eliding the middle because *Sula*'s narrator first describes the town's current state of annihilation and then recounts its heyday and how it came to be destroyed. The novel opens with an ominous focus on place. The first three words direct the reader to location and the following words to its devastation: "In that place, where they tore the nightshade and blackberry patches from their roots to make room for the

Medallion City Golf Course, there was once a neighborhood" (Morrison 1982, 3).[20] The description on this same page suggests that the neighborhood-turned-golf-course is located in an Appalachian area, where flora such as nightshade, blackberry bushes, beeches, oaks, maples, and chestnuts were abundant before development.

Sula's narrator predicts that "[t]here will be nothing left of the Bottom (the footbridge that crossed the river is already gone)" (Morrison 1982, 3), before describing how it had been "lovely up in the Bottom. After the town grew and the farm land turned into a village and the village into a town and the streets of Medallion were hot and dusty with progress, those heavy trees that sheltered the shacks up in the Bottom were wonderful to see" (Morrison 1982, 5-6). Both Medallion and the Bottom communities follow a traditional line of progress—changing from an agrarian economy into a more commercial one. Barbara Ellen Smith's story of her great-aunt Ellen Fridley corroborates my claim that we can locate "the Bottom" in Appalachia and gives an example of its participation in commerce. Fridley, a prominent member of the Big Ridge ("an ancient mountain that lies on the present border between West Virginia and Virginia" [B.E. Smith 1999, 1]) community "during the 1910s and 1920s" (1999, 9), and her husband Hezekiah sold goods to make money: "Hez did an especially brisk business in the Bottom, an African American neighborhood" (1999, 11). Even though Smith pinpoints the West Virginia/Virginia border, her reference situates a settlement named "the Bottom" within Appalachia.

The Bottom is a community, like Prater and so many other Appalachian towns, dependent at least in part on the coal industry for its livelihood. Several references to coal are found throughout the novel. While lying in bed sick, Sula remembers "the pink

underlid of Hannah's eye as she probed for a fleck of coal dust or a lash" (Morrison 1982, 147). Novels set in Appalachia often describe how coal dust invades all aspects of life, even bodies, as is shown here by Sula's mother plucking pesky coal dust from her eye. The march down to New River Road, fueled largely by the people's anger about unfulfilled promises by employers who were supposed to hire them to construct a tunnel, protests "[t]he teeth unrepaired, the coal credit cut off, the chest pains unattended, the school shoes unbought, the rush-stuff mattresses, the broken toilets, the leaning porches…" (Morrison 1982, 161). This passage suggests that these workers, employed in the mines or by the coal industry, used the company's system of credit and debit instead of cash.[21] The next chapter opens with Nel recalling how, in 1921, "[beautiful boys] hung out of attic windows, rode on car fenders, delivered the coal…" (Morrison 1982, 163). Whether these boys worked directly for a coal company or delivered coal-bins (Morrison 1982, 152) to neighbors, they, along with other members of their Appalachian community, participated in an economy in which the coal industry was or perhaps still is a major factor.

Joyce Dyer raises the always tricky question of what counts as "Appalachian," and she echoes many opinions that Appalachia is not a definitive geographic location but rather a spirit. An interesting perspective she adds to conversations about Appalachian identity and affiliation comes from her conversation with Gurney Norman, who

> reminded [her] to think carefully about Henry Louis Gates's reassessment of the Harlem Renaissance. The concept of Appalachia, he wisely told [her], like the concept of the Harlem Renaissance, is no longer considered confined to a geographical region, to a neighborhood, to a decade (for Appalachia, the dominant association is, of course, with the Depression). It is, Norman said, best understood as a spirit, "a spirit that has leapt out of strict Appalachian ground." (J. Dyer 1998, 5)

Dyer is quick to avert charges of essentialism or exclusion by asserting that "[t]here is not one clear pattern or a simple shape….There are many spirits that walk here, not just one" (1998, 6). In *Sula*, Tar Baby embodies this idea of spirit. A resident of the Bottom, he is described as "a mountain boy" who "sang with the sweetest hill voice imaginable" (Morrison 1982, 40). Following Norman's line of reasoning, I suggest that we consider *Sula* an Appalachian novel, not only because of its location in the hills of southern Ohio, but also because it raises issues prominent in Appalachian literature such as: the importance of hills, coal, and Appalachian climate to people and their livelihood and the struggle to survive and sustain community despite significant attempts by others to destroy their ties to each other and to the hills. Reading *Sula* as an Appalachian novel allows us to consider issues of regionally gendered performativity as they are enacted in a close-knit African American community in the Ohio hills.

Racial lines are clearly drawn in Medallion. A comprehensive analysis of race and place cannot be undertaken in this project, but I want to point to the complex relationship between them. *Sula*'s narrator describes how "white people lived on the rich valley floor in that little river town in Ohio, and the blacks populated the hills above it, taking small consolation in the fact that every day they could literally look down on the white folks" (Morrison 1982, 5). In a clear case of geographic segregation based in racism, black people are relegated to what is considered less desirable land. For example, during a period of intense heat they anxiously await rain because "[t]he hills of the Bottom, as always, protected the valley part of town where the white people lived….So they set about their work early, for it was canning time, and who knew but what the wind would come back this time with a cooling rain" (Morrison 1982, 73). Residents of the

Bottom suffer the heat wave in an unequal proportion because the geographic location in which they live protects the valley and its white inhabitants from experiencing the most severe weather. In this way, race and the hills of northern Appalachia are intertwined.

Cultural geographer David Sibley claims that "[t]he perception of minority cultures as being beyond the boundary of 'society' is associated not only with characterisations of the group but also with images of particular places, the landscapes of exclusion which express the marginal status of the outsider group" (1992, 107).[22] Yet Sibley notes that "to remain hidden, out of sight of the dominant society, may also be to the advantage of the minority" (1992, 120). For a period residents of the Bottom manage to prosper in what is deemed marginal rural landscape and use their relative seclusion to engender a thriving black community. As bell hooks states: "the sense of oneness with nature which offered a transcendental sense of life wherein humans were simply a small part of the holistic picture helped agrarian black folk put notions of race and racial superiority in perspective" (2009, 207).

But, along with the change from agrarian to commercial economy, the Bottom is eradicated by Medallion's expansion. Eventually

> the white people were buying down river, cross river, stretching Medallion like two strings on the banks. Nobody colored lived much up in the Bottom any more. White people were building towers for television stations up there and there was a rumor about a golf course or something. Anyway, hill land was more valuable now, and those black people who had moved down right after the war and in the fifties couldn't afford to come back even if they wanted to. Except for the few blacks still huddled by the river bend, and some undemolished houses on Carpenter's Road, only rich white folks were building homes in the hills….The black people, for all their new look, seemed awfully anxious to get to the valley, or leave town, and abandon the hills to whoever was interested. (Morrison 1982, 165-66)

hooks' views on nature and isolated hills as an ideal escape from "man made constructions" and "white dominator culture" (2009, 7) can be seen as problematic in light of the virulent effects of racism responsible for the Bottom's demise. *Sula*'s narrator laments the loss of both place and community: "It was sad, because the Bottom had been a real place. These young ones kept talking about the community, but they left the hills to the poor, the old, the stubborn—and the rich white folks" (Morrison 1982, 166).

Consequences of racism in *Sula* show how race and place are interlinked, and their fictional depictions reflect actual circumstances. Many black communities in Ohio that existed during the early to mid-twentieth century folded largely because of racism, integration, and shifting perceptions of desirable land.[23] Rebecca Aanerud explores shifting perceptions of race in regard to place, arguing that "the meaning of whiteness, like all racialized identities in the United States, is not monolithic. Instead, its construction and interpretation are informed by historical moment, region, political climate, and racial identity" (1997, 37).[24] Fetterley and Pryse claim that critical work done on regionalism can "make a contribution to 'whiteness' studies. Regionalism as a discursive strategy as well as a literary mode makes regions themselves visible as already marked sites of both gendered interrogation and white critique" (2003, 27). Aanerud's and Fetterley and Pryse's assertions can be read as responses to Morrison's questions in *Playing in the Dark*: "How is 'literary whiteness' and 'literary blackness' made, and what is the consequence of that construction?" (1992, xii). Interconnections among race, gender, and region are highlighted in *Sula*.

The novel revolves largely around Nel's and Sula's friendship and both of their positions in regard to the community. Sula complicates notions of independence, love, and community. But the extent to which these challenges are recognized as such by others is slight. On the contrary, Nel's position as a member of the community is secure. The regionally gendered performativities of Nel and Sula and their experiences as Affrilachian (to borrow Frank X. Walker's term)[25] women are reflected in the weather of the Bottom, specifically wind and rain.

While they are young girls walking on a main street in town, "[a] hill wind….pushed their dresses into the creases of their behinds, then lifted the hems to peek at their cotton underwear" (Morrison 1982, 49). Metaphorically portrayed as making unwanted sexual advances, the hill wind instigates physical sensations not initiated by the girls. Men mingling on the street watch them as they pass, and Ajax "softly but definitely" speaks aloud what all the men are thinking: "Pig meat" (Morrison 1982, 50). The titillation is not lost on Nel and Sula, who "walked through this valley of eyes chilled by the wind and heated by the embarrassment of appraising stares", yet "guarded their eyes lest someone see their delight" upon hearing Ajax's remark (Morrison 1982, 50). They feel the cooling current in contrast to their body heat, which is raised by their acute awareness of the men staring at them.

Although here Nel and Sula experience the wind and sensuality alongside the men's stares, they soon realize that they in fact do not need a weather*man* to create or assess these sensations. Instead, they can attain sensuousness themselves. They

> ran in the sunlight, creating their own breeze, which pressed their dresses into their damp skin. Reaching a kind of square of four leaf-locked trees which promised cooling, they flung themselves into the four-cornered shade to taste their lip sweat and contemplate the wildness that had come upon them so suddenly.

> […] Underneath their dresses flesh tightened and shivered in the high coolness, their small breasts just now beginning to create some pleasant discomfort when they were lying on their stomachs. (Morrison 1982, 57-8)

By running, they simultaneously increase their body temperatures and put in motion a slight wind, which presses their clothes to their bodies and heightens the sensation of their skin. Alone, with only each other as fellow participant and observer, each girl delights in the pleasure she feels from the pressure created by her breasts pressing into the earth and the contrasting heat of the sun and chill of the breeze. Sula recalls this experience later as an adult, but for now this novel sensuality as figured by the wind, temperature, and earth is exciting and empowering. Each girl realizes that she can create the physical sensuality she felt on the street, without the involvement of men, but in the company of each other.

Their relationship changes when Nel marries Jude and Sula leaves to attend college. In the interim, Sula travels extensively, and Nel dedicates herself to being a mother, wife, and respected member of the community. Life changes for the Bottom community and Nel, however, upon Sula's return. In fact, the people of the Bottom believe that her return—"accompanied by a plague of robins"—ushers in evil (Morrison 1982, 89). Unlike the residents of Prater, however, they approach "evil" in a way that acknowledges not only its existence but also the value in "let[ting] it run its course" (Morrison 1982, 89). For, "[in] their world, aberrations were as much a part of nature as grace. It was not for them to expel or annihilate it. They would no more run Sula out of town than they would kill the robins that brought her back…" (Morrison 1982, 118). The residents' response to evil—and its interpretation by others not in their community—

highlights ways in which behavior is largely affected by experiences with racism, regionalism, and weather:

> What was taken by outsiders to be slackness, slovenliness or even generosity was in fact a full recognition of the legitimacy of forces other than good ones. They did not believe doctors could heal—for them, none ever had done so. They did not believe death was accidental—life might be, but death was deliberate. They did not believe Nature was ever askew—only inconvenient. Plague and drought were as "natural" as springtime. If milk could curdle, God knows robins could fall. The purpose of evil was to survive it and they determined (without ever knowing they had made up their minds to do it) to survive floods, white people, tuberculosis, famine and ignorance. (Morrison 1982, 90)

Unlike Prater residents, who view certain weather and its accompanying consequences as abnormal, residents of the Bottom regard Sula, like Nature, as an inevitable though disruptive nuisance rather than an aberration. But despite their generally accepting approach to evil and natural disaster, they exhibit lack of sympathy and even malice toward Sula.

Nel's response, however, is drastically different than her neighbors' reactions; she

> noticed the peculiar quality of the May that….had a sheen, a glimmering as of green, rain-soaked Saturday nights….of lemon-yellow afternoons bright with iced drinks and splashes of daffodils….Even her own body was not immune to the magic. She would sit on the floor to sew as she had done as a girl, fold her legs up under her or do a little dance that fitted some tune in her head. There were easy sun-washed days and purple dusks… (Morrison 1982, 94)

At first Nel feels revitalized by Sula's return, and her attitude is reflected in the child-like movements of her body and the dazzling moist, fertile environment around her. She is not surprised by nor does she view as abnormal the interconnection between weather and people's actions: "Although it was she alone who saw this magic, she did not wonder at it. She knew it was all due to Sula's return to the Bottom" (Morrison 1982, 95). At this point, Nel feels that she and Sula still share the close connection they had when they were young, but shortly after this, Jude leaves Nel for Sula, and Nel feels toward Sula the same

way the rest of the community does. She regards her with distrust, dislike, and wary disinterest.

Readers wonder if Sula is a part of *any* community, real or imagined. Before, "[s]he had clung to Nel as the closest thing to both an other and a self, only to discover that she and Nel were not one and the same thing" (Morrison 1982, 119). While Sula has long been aware that the community does not embrace her, she had always believed that her regionally gendered performativity was recognized by Nel, for it was Nel who not only enabled her to explore "multiple convergences and divergences" of identity but also did so along with her (Butler 2006, 22). In fact, Sula recounts how "Nel was the one person who had wanted nothing from her, who had accepted all aspects of her" (Morrison 1982, 119), but "[n]ow Nel was one of *them*" (Morrison 1982, 120), i.e., an accepted member of the Bottom community. Sula considers herself to be different from the others, and the narrator confirms she is "distinctly different" (Morrison 1982, 118). Nel, on the other hand, sees her roles in life predominantly as mother, wife, and member of the complaisant (in Sula's opinion) community. Perhaps undeservedly harshly, Sula accuses Nel of conformity, inertness, and indifference: "alive was what [the people], and now Nel, did not want to be. Too dangerous. Now Nel belonged to the town and all of its ways. […] It had surprised her a little and saddened her a good deal when Nel behaved the way the others would have" (Morrison 1982, 120). Sula believes that not even Nel can understand that her departure from the Bottom, her college education, her resistance to marriage, and her control over sensuality as she experiences it are all ways in which she challenges stereotypes.

As Russell observes, Sula reclaims her sexuality via direct involvement with a man. While having sex with Ajax, she silently informs him: "*I will water your soil, keep it rich and moist*" (Morrison 1982, 131). Sula subverts the dominant "literary practice of equating the female body with a sexually available natural landscape" by becoming the "element" (rain) "which defines the land (Ajax)" in a scenario in which Nel is absent (D. Russell 2006, 84). Sula also silently tells Ajax: "*I will put my hand deep into your soil, lift it, sift it with my fingers, feel its warm surface and dewy chill below*" (Morrison 1982, 131). By becoming the rain, Sula will be the force behind the "dewy chill" of Ajax's soil. She yearns to feel the heat and then the chill, similar to what she experiences with Nel on the street and in the square of trees, and she learns that she can direct and determine who feels them, when they will be felt, and how these sensations will enhance her sexual experience. This passage shows how Sula alone is able to enact sexual desire and fulfillment by metaphorically becoming the rain and manipulating temperature. Nel is not her partner anymore, as she was when they were girls running to the shade of the trees. No similar example occurs for Nel without Sula's involvement or presence.

Despite having been estranged for three years, Nel visits Sula on her death-bed. Sula, in excruciating pain, remembers when the two young girls first experienced pleasure via wind: "She closed her eyes then and thought of the wind pressing her dress between her legs as she ran up the bank of the river to four leaf-locked trees and the digging of holes in the earth" (Morrison 1982, 146). Sula believes this memory describes what love feels like; it is experienced expressly in an Appalachian space where the combination of wind, water, trees, and earth arouse her (Morrison 1982, 146). Recalling

the breeze and the raw, youthful sensuality it encouraged her to feel, she initiates the following conversation:

> "How you know?" Sula asked.
>
> "Know what?" Nel still wouldn't look at her.
>
> "About who was good. How you know it was you?"
>
> "What you mean?"
>
> "I mean maybe it wasn't you. Maybe it was me."
>
> Nel took two steps out the door and closed it behind her. (Morrison 1982, 146)

Sula's last attempt to challenge dominant norms on which Nel's assumptions are based is futile; these are the last words she speaks before dying. Butler (2005) and Fetterley and Pryse discuss how narratives emerge amidst, because of, or despite of pain and fear and how people require mercy and forgiveness in these scenarios. In this instance Nel does not offer Sula forgiveness, although arguably she does offer mercy in caring for her while she is sick.

After Sula's death, the community exhibits anticipation—"So it was with a strong sense of hope that the people in the Bottom watched October close" (Morrison 1982, 151)—and a sense of unburdening—"even the bubbles of relief that broke in the chest of practically everybody when Sula died did not soften their spite…" (Morrison 1982, 171)—instead of compassion and grief. After waiting for the white people to leave Sula's funeral, black people arrive, singing "over the curved earth that cut them off from the most magnificent hatred they had ever known. Their question clotted the October air, Shall We Gather at the River? The beautiful, beautiful river? Perhaps Sula answered

them even then, for it began to rain, and the women ran in tiny leaps through the grass for fear their straightened hair would beat them home" (Morrison 1982, 173). Nel views the rain as an act of Sula and interprets this act as Sula's way of telling the community who had always rejected her that she does not want their dubious sympathy. In this way, the rain can be read as an agentive act on Sula's part, causing the women to run away and exposing their spurious sentiment. On the other hand, the women's dispersal can be read as one last example of the community's rejection of Sula. The women would rather run from her funeral than let their hair get wet.

Russell reads Sula's position in regard to the community as only partially detached. Expanding on differences between black and white communities portrayed in Morrison's fiction, Russell states that black communities "can be read as sites of rebellion—collective rebellion. Survival for those who are economically and politically vulnerable is found in a group setting. Allegiance to the village does not necessarily translate into conformity; the communal identity is elastic enough to accommodate fringe characters (bootleggers, whores, and madmen)" (2006, 152). If Sula is a "fringe character," she is not accommodated, unless accommodation is conceived as the absence of forced expulsion or physical harm. While some, like Shadrack, are considered strange, community members still enable their active participation in the community by allowing space for that participation to occur.[26] On the contrary, the community has effectively shut down such spaces for Sula. Although she resides in the Bottom, she is not a member of its community. Morrison problematizes, via Sula's ostracism, the notion of community and how it includes by exclusion. One wonders if Sula would have felt more free or more restricted if she had been an accepted member of Medallion's community.

Perhaps she would not have wanted to be a part of the community if membership required adhering to dominant norms.

Russell states that "the absence of a communal connection…is a threat to identity and survival in [Morrison's] fiction" (2006, 154). The community's, and in particular Nel's, denial of Sula seems to be fatal, but the novel ends on a bittersweet note. Eventually Nel realizes what she has lost by losing Sula. While walking alone, she suddenly stops and whispers "'Sula?'" twice, "gazing at the tops of trees" (Morrison 1982, 174). Significantly, at this moment, a breeze stirs: "[l]eaves stirred; mud shifted; there was the smell of overripe green things. A soft ball of fur broke and scattered like dandelion spores in the breeze" (Morrison 1982, 174). Overtaken by the loss and the familiar wind and place in which she and Sula grew up together, Nel exclaims:

> "All that time, all that time, I thought I was missing Jude." And the loss pressed down on her chest and came up into her throat. "We was girls together," she said as though explaining something. "O Lord, Sula," she cried, "girl, girl, girlgirlgirl." It was a fine cry—loud and long—but it had no bottom and it had no top, just circles and circles of sorrow. (Morrison 1982, 174)

Nel realizes it was not Jude she missed and mourned after the affair, but Sula.[27] Although belatedly, Nel grasps how Sula subverted dominant expectations and appreciates the significance of their relationship.

Even though Sula's position in the Bottom's community is controversial at best, Morrison makes a place for her in *Sula* as a regional Appalachian novel. Fetterley and Pryse assert that "[r]egionalism offers unconventional, noncanonical, and counterhegemonic stories of female (and male) development across the life cycle….regionalism calls attention to the paucity of cultural locations in which women and nonwhite and nondominant men might find affirmation" (2003, 30). In telling Sula's

life story, the novel portrays the complexities of life in a small Affrilachian town and highlights the dynamic interplay of regional, gendered, and raced identities. Weather events, specifically wind and rain, largely influence and serve as metaphoric elements of Nel's and Sula's enactments of intersectional identities. The novel also emphasizes the necessity of respect and acknowledgment of difference in community formation. Throughout her life Sula continuously challenges stereotypes by forging her own identity, but the community in which Nel is undoubtedly a member rejects her.

"…To Know Which Way the Wind Blows"

Transgressions of regional and gender norms can be read across individual, communal, and locational levels. In both *Sula* and *Strange*, weather (as metaphor and plot device) facilitates readings of regionally gendered performativity in Appalachian communities. In both novels, characters' daily lives and actions are influenced in large part by weather, and characters enact identity processes in terms of weather events. In *Sula*, instances of wind, temperature fluctuation, and rain illuminate regionally gendered performativity. During adolescence the wind signifies and assists Nel's and Sula's explorations of their bodies and experiences of sensuality; the rain also symbolizes Sula's enactments of desire. At the end of the novel, Nel, who now knows which way the wind blows, understands her intimate relationship with Sula. In *Strange*, "odd" weather patterns point to complex configurations of identity and consequent effects on community formation. Lace and Bant succeed in enacting regionally gendered performativity in ways that not only enable them to be confident and happy but also help them to establish an activist community. Jimmy Make fails to challenge traditional

norms. Lace and Bant embody some identities that are commonly stereotyped as "essentialist," while Sula resists all such aspects of identity. Performativity as discussed here suggests that while no characteristic (of individuals, communities, or place) *mandates* a certain enactment of identity, it *may* influence or contribute to it.

My analyses are influenced by Morrison's and Pancake's comments on important interconnections among literature, literary devices, socio-cultural expectations, and identity formations. Morrison claims that "the alliance between visually rendered ideas and linguistic utterances….leads into the social and political nature of received knowledge as it is revealed in American literature. Knowledge, however mundane and utilitarian, plays about in linguistic images and forms cultural practice" (1992, 49). Similarly, Pancake analyzes how carefully-chosen metaphors influenced American perceptions of the Persian Gulf War and "takes into consideration the ways metaphor can shape a reader's consciousness" (1993, 282). Both Pancake and Morrison explain how literature and metaphor influence and are crucial to political knowing and being, and Pancake's argument about war and metaphor can be applied broadly: "As the metaphor restructures the reader's conceptual understanding of *war*, it changes what is real for the reader about war. Because people act in terms of what is real for them, this new 'reality' has ramifications beyond the reader's mere thoughts" (1993, 284). Likewise, novels reflect people's enactments of and engagements with region and gender and vice versa. In both *Strange as This Weather Has Been* and *Sula*, weather metaphors and the implementation of weather as a prominent plot device guide readers to (re)consider how region, gender, and various vectors of identity intersect within Appalachian communities.

In this chapter I have shown how region and gender are performed by Appalachian residents. Since the overall project considers ways in which regional environments and topography affect intersections of region and gender, a comparative approach illuminates similarities and differences. Literary case studies of Appalachia and the Southwest facilitate the consideration of each region in relation to the other. The next chapter, then, turns to literature from the Southwest, and the fourth chapter will explore ways in which regionally gendered performativity migrates between each region.

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[1] "Obama Urges Probe into Mine Disaster after Last Bodies Found" at http://www.cnn.com/2010/US/04/10/west.virginia.mine/index.html?hpt=T1. The mine disaster forty years before, to which President Obama refers, occurred on 2 May 1972 at Sunshine Mine in Kellogg, Idaho, where ninety-one miners died in a fire.
[2] Massey is "the fourth-largest American coal producer and the largest mine operator in central Appalachia. It churned out 38 million tons of coal in 2009, 1.2 million tons of which came from the Upper Big Branch South Mine, and reported earnings of $497 million" ("Mine Deaths Spark Criticism of Operator's Record" at http://www.cnn.com/2010/US/04/06/mine.disaster.safety/index.html?hpt=T1.)
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Burns describes MTR as "the latest and most extreme version of strip mining in which the tops of mountains are blown away to gain easy access to the coal. This became a predominant form of mining in the mid-1990s, when the Clean Air Act emission standards were strengthened." See Burns for a concise explanation of MTR in "three distinct stages of power relations…among communities affected by MTR."
[6] Hereafter referred to as *Strange*.
[7] Literary analyses of landscape are more common. For examples see: Comer (1999); Norwood and Monk (1987); Scharff (2003); and Westling (1996).
[8] Like Freier's monograph, Thurlow's and Adler's edited collection offers a humanities-based approach to weather.
[9] This line is from the song "Subterranean Homesick Blues" on the album *Bringing It All Back Home* (1965).
[10] An example of a proverb particularly relevant to *Strange* is: "Underground miners can smell rain coming" (Freier 1992, 24)
[11] In his Appalachian Trail (AT) memoir, Bryson recounts how hikers see each other sporadically on the AT. Even though they may not be hiking together, they form impromptu and intervallic communities: "You become part of an informal clump, a loose and sympathetic affiliation of people from different age groups and walks of life but all

experiencing the same weather, same discomforts, same landscapes, same eccentric impulse to hike to Maine" (1998, 50).

[12] Consistent weather conditions form patterns—for example, the humidity of Appalachia as opposed to the dry heat of the Southwestern desert. Irregular conditions mark the disruption of a weather pattern.

[13] Hereafter referred to as Lyon.

[14] Similarly, hooks recounts her strong desire to leave Kentucky upon graduating high school. She "wanted to leave the fierce racial apartheid that governed the lives of black folks," and she "wanted to find the place of freedom" (2009, 9). Hooks leaves but eventually comes back to make Kentucky her home. Her return surprises friends who thought that her "soul was too large…for Kentucky. California and New York seemed to them the places that were right for [her], the places that allowed one to be different and free" (hooks 2009, 219).

[15] Adams corroborates the importance of public gathering places to central Appalachian community formation: "Let's just say that the Dairy Queen in Hinton, West Virginia, is the center of the universe. Have a chili cheese dog and a Pepsi and listen to stories about coal mining and railroads and rivers" (2001, 157).

[16] Lace does not call for the eradication of coal mining: "'my dad and granddad and husband were all miners. I just believe they can do it a better way, a way that would actually give us more jobs and not ruin everything we have'" (Pancake 2007, 300-1). A range of opinions exists regarding the coal industry's relationship to and with Appalachia. For example, Jones (from West Virginia) seemingly praises strip mining. She remarks that beheaded mountains "have proved hospitable to everything from golf courses and wineries to high-tech service centers" and suggests that some changes "fall into the not-exactly-what-we're-looking-for-but-we'll-take-it category: three prisons in eastern Kentucky; Wal-Mart, which entered the region in the 1980s, today providing more jobs in West Virginia than any other single employer" (Jones 2005, 11).

Adams relays another perspective. He asked then-director of West Virginia's Environmental Protection Department: "What would have happened if coal had never been discovered in the state?" (2001, 144). The director replied candidly: "'I've thought many times about what West Virginia would be like if Mother Nature or God had not put coal in these mountains, and I frankly have had to conclude that perhaps the state would have been better off without the coal'" (Adams 2001, 144). One more example: on cars in West Virginia, Scott notes bumper stickers which "range from 'I'm Pro-Mountain and I Vote' to 'I Love Coal'" (2007, 486).

[17] See Scott (2007) for an extended analysis of racialized masculinity in Appalachian MTR communities.

[18] I disagree with Pendarvis' claims that "Pancake is true to the world she depicts, where any idea of deliverance is muted to the point of suffocation" and that "Lace is a strong, smart but defeated woman" (2007, 26). Ray's approach to *Strange*, calling it "a story of catastrophic loss and redemption" (2008, 76) which shows how, "[i]n different ways, [Lace and Bant] are coming of age" (2008, 77), is more accurate.

[19] Although outside the range of this project, an analysis of whiteness in *Strange* stands to contribute important insights about race. Frankenberg acknowledges that studying

whiteness bears the risk of recentering it, but she argues that not studying it—leaving it as the uncritical norm—is more dangerous (1997, 1).

[20] hooks describes how the place one calls home often is the target of destruction by those (in *Sula*, white people; in *Strange*, the coal company) who want to prevent people from forming community: "It is no accident that this homeplace, as fragile and as transitional as it may be, a makeshift shed, a small bit of earth where one rests, is always subject to violation and destruction. For when a people no longer have the space to construct homeplace, we cannot build a meaningful community of resistance" (1990, 47).

[21] Corbin describes how a miner "was paid not in U.S. currency but in metals and paper (called coal scrip), which was printed by the coal company. Because only the company that printed the coal scrip honored it, or would redeem it, the coal miner had to purchase all his goods—his food, clothing, and tools—from the company store" (1981, 10).

[22] While Sibley (1992) focuses on Gypsy communities in Europe and North America, some of his conclusions have more general applicability.

[23] See the Ohio History Central entries for Berlin Crossroads, Black Fork Settlement, Paynes Crossing, and Poke Patch Settlement. By the mid-1900s, not one of these four communities was still in existence, due to, for instance, integration and the purchasing of land by coal companies. For example, "Berlin Crossroads had lost its identity as a separate community. With whites increasingly showing African Americans tolerance, many African Americans began to find acceptance in traditionally white communities. In 1970, construction of the Appalachian Highway resulted in the destruction of much of Berlin Crossroads." The description of Paynes Crossing is particularly reminiscent of the Bottom: "The community was never incorporated as a town. Rather, it was a small hamlet, consisting of several farmsteads. Many of the African-American residents established successful lives, accumulating sizable amounts of personal wealth." However, "[b]y the twentieth century, no remnants of Paynes Crossing survived except for the community cemetery."

[24] In *Strange*, for example, Avery's whiteness both gains and loses stigmatization when he is in Cleveland, Ohio, and when he is in Prater, West Virginia. In *Sula*, Tar Baby's race signifies differently depending on location and observer. To some he is a light-skinned black man; to others, such as Eva, he is a white man.

[25] Walker is credited with coining the term "Affrilachian" in 1991 to recognize and celebrate dual African American/Appalachian heritage and identity often erased in the popular imaginary of Appalachia as a region inhabited only by white people. In the poem "Sara Yevo," in the collection entitled *Affrilachia*, he writes: "I wanted to tell her / that the word Affrilachia / […] / …existed to make visible / to create a sense of place / that had not existed / for us / for any unwealthy common / people of color / now claiming the dirt / they were born in" (2000, 88). Many others employ the term "Affrilachian," such as doris davenport (see "All This, and Honeysuckles Too") and members of the Affrilachian Poets (see http://www.affrilachianpoets.com/).

[26] Shadrack leads the people's march onto New River Road (Morrison 1982, 159).

[27] In the well-known essay "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism," Smith argues that *Sula* is a lesbian novel, not because Nel and Sula are lesbians but "because of the passionate friendship between" them and "because of Morrison's consistently critical stance toward

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the heterosexual institutions of male/female relationships, marriage and the family" (1985, 9).

Chapter Three: How the Southwest Winds Blow: Region and Gender in *So Far from God* and *Play It as It Lays*

"…for a person who had lived her whole life within a mile radius of her home and had only traveled as far as Albuquerque twice, [Loca] certainly knew quite a bit about this world, not to mention beyond, too, and that made her smile as she closed her eyes."
--*So Far from God*

"I have neither heard nor read that a Santa Ana is due, but I know it, and almost everyone I have seen today knows it too. We know it because we feel it….To live with the Santa Ana is to accept, consciously or unconsciously, a deeply mechanistic view of human behavior."
--Joan Didion, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*

Despite or perhaps because of the ambiguity of space and place, we have much to learn from studying relationships between and among regions. Eudora Welty remarks that "[o]ne place comprehended can make us understand other places better" (1990, 128). Studying a single region offers in-depth insight into that region's characteristics and constituents. Extending that analysis comparatively enables us not only to understand each region better—inasmuch as regional areas do not exist in isolation—but also to grasp regional interrelationships. Fictional and non-fictional connections between landscapes of Appalachia and the Southwest pique interest in such interrelationships. For example, bell hooks compares color and dirt: "this red dirt that was the ground of my being and becoming was a color more typically found in the terrain of the southwest and other desert landscapes. Here in Kentucky, it was special, sacred, part of a magical landscape" (2009, 203). In Edward Abbey's novel *The Fool's Progress*, Henry apposes both regions while considering his mortality: "Why I wouldn't trade one morning in the Black Rock Desert of Nevada or the Allegheny Mountains of Appalachia for a complete eternity in Yeat's gold-plated Byzantium, Dante's polyurethane Paradiso or T.S. Eliot's Ivy League Heaven" (1988, 65).

In *Strange as This Weather Has Been* Mogey claims different ways of life are lived in each region despite similar topography. After leaving West Virginia and meeting people from other places he believes that

> people not from here probably don't understand our feeling for these hills. Our love for land not spectacular. Our mountains are not like Western ones, those jagged awesome ones, your eyes always pulled to their tops. But that is the difference, I decided. In the West, the mountains are mostly horizon. We *live* in our mountains. It's not just the tops, but the sides that hold us. (Pancake 2007, 173)

Mogey's contrast between how Appalachians and Westerners live with/in mountains suggests that emotion and perspective factor into how landscape is looked upon and utilized. Lorraine Dowler, Josephine Carubia, and Bonj Szczygiel note: "Whether written, painted or built, a landscape's meaning draws on cultural codes of the society for which it was made, codes which are embedded in social power structures" (2005, 11).

Literary depictions, rather than existing solely in an imaginary context, offer ways for readers to confront socio-cultural and political patterns of power as they are directly related to actual individuals, communities, and regions. Dowler, Carubia, and Szczygiel point out that "feminists now argue that the landscape not only reflects certain moral codes but performs as a medium to perpetuate socially constructed gender stereotyping" (2005, 1). I expand on their claim and revise ideas of identity and community formation by showing how Southwestern spaces also perform as mediums to *challenge* social constructionist and essentialist stereotyping via an emphasis on intersectionality.

Edward Ayers' and Peter Onuf's definition of region highlights ways in which regional intersectionality works. They

> do not see regions as areas filled with a certain kind of cultural ether, but rather as places where discrete, though related, structures intersect and interact in particular patterns. The region *is* climate and land; it *is* a particular set of relations between

> various ethnic groups; it *is* a relation to the federal government and economy; it *is* a set of shared cultural styles. But each of these elements, even the influence of land and climate, is constantly changing. Accordingly, their relationships with one another also are constantly changing. (Ayers and Onuf 1996, 5-6)

I add: region *is* gendered. This chapter focuses on Southwestern climate and land, with an emphasis on how spirituality is exemplified through the intersections of gender, region, and race.

Although "countless ways to define" the Southwest as a region exist (Dunaway and Spurgeon 1995, xxii), an attempt at definition comes from Paula Gunn Allen, who claims that "[t]here are three cultural bases that define southwestern cultural identity: the Pueblo, the Mexican Hispano, and the American" (1995, xvi).[1] Allen highlights links between the aesthetics of Southwestern place, culture, individual and communal identities, and literature:

> As I see it, the Southwest is that space shaped by the deep understanding possessed and expressed by the ancient Pueblos, Mogollons, and Maya and their descendants, the Hohokam, Pueblo, Pima, Yaqui, Diné, and Mexicans of Aztec-European descent. It is this bedrock of a particular kind of Native American civilization and embodied in its central narrative that best distinguishes southwestern literature from that of any other region in the Western hemisphere. That central narrative is characterized by a particular aesthetic that is rooted in the ongoing relationship, or conversation, among the human, the plant and animal, the land, and the supernaturals, each perceived as members of the same geospiritual community. (1995, xviii)

In regard to the Southwest, Janice Monk states that "[p]erhaps most common across the Indian, Mexican-American and Euro-American women [writers and artists] are expressions of a sense of integration between self and land, rather than separation" (1992, 135). Elsewhere Ana Castillo links histories of Natives and Chicano/as.[2] Like numerous Native authors, many Chicana/o writers portray conflicts between individual and group subjectivity (such as family or ethnic identity).

Rosaura Sánchez argues that the family can serve as a microcosm of the region: "Family-centered narratives in Chicano literature are not limited to the private domestic sites of one household, for not only is the concept of family broader, but it often includes the outside community. The 'family' functions then as a microcosm of the ethnic community or of the region…" (1997, 1019). Sánchez acknowledges the traditional portrayal of the family as being "male-centered," but claims that "as the literary production of Chicana women has increased, the family space has been feminized…[certain women writers] have gone beyond the representation of feminine subjectivity in essentialist terms and have chosen to focus on the diversity of subjectivities and on the collective experiences of women in Chicano/Mexicano/Latino communities" (1997, 1019). *So Far from God*[3] exemplifies Sánchez's assertion that many Chicana authors write about women-centered families and communities and employ these "feminized" spaces to blur boundaries of identity processes.

So Far features a Southwestern Chicana family of women engaged in a variety of complex relationships among humans, non-human forms of life, and the supernatural. While I note religious implications in Castillo's novel, I focus more on the "spiritual" as that which "concern[s] the spirit or higher moral qualities" and as "the nature of a spirit or incorporeal supernatural essence" (*OED*). In particular, I consider the "supernatural" as that which "transcend[s] the powers or the ordinary course of nature" and as "extraordinarily great; abnormal" (*OED*). Throughout this chapter I employ these definitions to illustrate how notions of and interactions with the spiritual and supernatural are influenced by region and gender. In *So Far*, spirituality (i.e., the ways in which characters enact their beliefs in the spiritual and supernatural) serves as a vehicle through

which regionally gendered performativity is enacted in and depicted via Southwestern climate and topography.

Joan Didion's *Play It as It Lays*[4] is also set in the Southwest (mostly in southern California and Nevada). Like *So Far*, *Play* "depends upon an intimate connection between setting and theme" (Geherin 1974, 64). *Play*'s Anglo American characters, from an elite Hollywood milieu, offer comparative and contrasting perspectives on how gender, race/nationality, and topography intersect and affect identity and community. For instance, Rebecca Aanerud asserts that "whiteness cannot be understood as a singular entity, existing prior to or apart from other categories of identities. [...] Instead, its construction and interpretation are informed by historical moment, region, political climate, and racial identity" (1997, 36-7). Both *Play* and *So Far* depict how intersectionality shapes identities.

However, *Play* portrays spirituality quite differently from *So Far*. The main protagonist, Maria,[5] insists that "nothing applies," and expresses what H. Jennifer Brady describes as "Didion's reiterated concern with what she speaks of as society's atomization—the breakdown of values traditionally held by the community and passed down through the generations..." (1979, 463). Castillo's concern, I argue, is to show ways in which values may be continuously revised and even challenged but still unite community through strong attachments to the supernatural and physical worlds. In *Play*, regionally gendered performativity exemplifies a struggle for spirituality that ultimately fractures Hollywood and desert communities. The aim of this chapter is to examine how regionally gendered performativity functions for women in Castillo's New Mexico and Didion's southern California and Nevada. I argue that spirituality is reflected via the

Southwest's topography and climate and that this correlation influences women's identities and community allegiances.

So Far from God

Castillo's novel opens with an epigraph: "So far from God—So near the United States," a quotation attributed to Porfirio Díaz, Dictator of Mexico during the Mexican Civil War (Castillo 2005, 15). Thinking about how places are constituted via networks of cultural meanings—what McDowell terms "nodes"—helps us understand how this epigraph immediately introduces the reader to three important points regarding the Southwest and identity. First, Díaz's statement directs attention to how place can be defined as an area created by the convergence of entities or, in this case, the spaces created where Mexican and U.S. borders overlap. These intersections are fraught with divergent power relations: for example, "the changing border that divides the U.S. and Mexico…has placed Mexicans in a continuous neocolonial state" (Castillo 1995, 3). Secondly, rather than highlighting a node's life-giving or cultivating activity, the epigraph suggests the opposite, declaring that to be near the U.S. is to be far from God, devoid of spiritual growth and nourishment. Thirdly, it highlights the complex roles location plays in regard to physical and psychological formations of regions, nation-states, and cultures.

Díaz's statement alerts the reader to issues of space and place as they are inflected by geography and spirituality; to these Castillo adds gender. Laura Gillman and Stacey Floyd-Thomas observe that "within the narrative frame" of *So Far* "the link between location and identity narrows even further—location is problematized in relation to the

positionality of the Mexican-American woman" (2001, 161). Written in a Spanish-English mix often referred to as "Spanglish" and set in the small town of Tome, New Mexico,[6] *So Far*'s narrative revolves around Sofi and her four daughters, Esperanza, Fe, Caridad, and La Loca. The names of these women—which translate as "Wisdom," "Hope," "Faith," "Charity," and "The Crazy One," respectively—signify dominant themes in Castillo's novel. Like Lace in *Strange*, Sofi is a strong woman who survives without the help of her husband. But after twenty years of raising her daughters as a single mother, her husband Domingo returns. She grapples with decisions regarding her personal, family, and communal life, all of which contribute to the wisdom she earns laboriously but then imparts confidently. Esperanza wants desperately to create a new life outside of Tome, which she succeeds in doing even though hope carries her only so far. Fe's beliefs in social conventions, traditional domesticity, and labor rights are gravely challenged. Caridad drastically changes her life after surviving a brutal attack, and her new outlook on how compassion inflects romantic and platonic love lead her to urgent decisions. Loca, whose "phobia of people" (Castillo 2005, 23) causes her to prefer relationships with animals and the supernatural, challenges everyone's ideas of "normalcy" and "madness," their embodiments, and their meanings in life and death.

These themes are delivered in a style that is both serious and entertaining and draws the reader into the women's dynamic worlds. Castillo employs "a variety of genres, including the family saga, the *telenovela*, myth (Pueblo, Apache, and Aztec), *cuentos* (oral stories), magic realism, comedy, tragedy, folkloric elements such as *remedios* and recipes, and religious narratives" (Mermann-Jozwiak 2000, 102). This mix depicts multicultural identities and supernatural experiences and encourages readers to

question ideas of cultural and spatial-temporal boundaries. Kim Barnes and Mary Blew claim that interconnections between gender and landscape bridge genres: "A sense of isolation stemming from gender and physical environment, from being part of the frontier in any number of ways—politically, ethnically, sexually—lends a strong unity to otherwise divergent literary styles" (1994, xi). From the opening scene of Loca's demise and resurrection at age three to other family members' confrontations with life and death, this genre-mixing depicts issues of gender, regional and ethnic identities, and spirituality.

Despite Domingo's eventual return and appearances by some of the daughters' male partners,[7] *So Far* centers on how women's regional and gendered identities affect and are affected by Southwestern space. For Loca especially, region, gender, race, and spirituality are intimately intertwined. Via metaphors of Southwestern topography and climate, Loca's regionally gendered performativity shows how spirituality rooted and enacted in a particular place actually works to expand one's horizons.

Many of Loca's unusual traits are presented via descriptions of her connections with the Southwestern desert heat. After violent jerking that Sofi believes to be a seizure, three-year-old Loca dies.[8] But her life actually begins shortly thereafter in the searing desert heat: "It was 118 degrees the day of Sofi's baby daughter's funeral and the two pall-bearers, upon the instruction of Father Jerome, placed the small casket on the ground just in front of the church. No one was quite certain what Father Jerome had planned when he paused there in the hot sun" (Castillo 2005, 21). What Father Jerome had planned is beside the point because not only does Loca come back to life but also she now has the power to fly. Shocking and frightening the funeral crowd, Loca flies up onto the church roof to avoid Father Jerome's reach and screams, "'Don't touch me, don't

touch me!'" (Castillo 2005, 23). Her audacity is duly noted by the community who does not expect a young girl to interact so boldly with a priest.

Loca's aversion to Father Jerome's proximity extends to most people. She is "repulsed by the smell of humans. She claimed that all humans bore an odor akin to that which she had smelled in the places she had passed through when she was dead" (Castillo 2005, 23). The priest tells Loca that she should come down, and they will pray for her, but Loca has other plans:

> With the delicate and effortless motion of a monarch butterfly the child brought herself back to the ground, landing gently on her bare feet, her ruffled chiffon nightdress, bought for the occasion of her burial, fluttering softly in the air. "No, Padre," she corrected him. "Remember, it is *I* who am here to pray for *you*." With that stated, she went into the church and those with faith followed. (Castillo 2005, 24)

Loca's description here—as a fleeting yet grounded butterfly—depicts her contrasting characteristics. The child takes control and refutes assumptions of how a young girl should act. Amidst scorching temperatures usually experienced as stifling or even suffocating, she resurrects herself, flies, asserts her autonomy to a male religious authority, and leads a group who believes in her despite her incredibility. She becomes a sort of divine figure after being reborn as an autonomous girl amidst the searing Southwestern heat.

Nor is she bothered by her regional reputation. Her rejection of socio-cultural norms fuels her lack of concern that "she eventually earned the name around the Rio Abajo region and beyond, of La Loca Santa," which translates as "The Crazy Saint" (Castillo 2005, 25). However, Loca demands and receives respect in regard to her spirituality, and she embraces the title given her by the community:[9] "Loca herself responded to that name and by the time she was twenty-one no one remembered her

Christian name" (Castillo 2005, 25). The people of the Rio Abajo region regard Loca with a mixture of awe, fear, and reverence—a regard not dissimilar to that usually reserved for supernatural, spiritual, and/or religious figures. Loca knows that this regard lends her prominence. The mysterious distance she maintains between herself and the community promotes the image of her as a supernatural figure and enhances her regional fame.

Even though she has the charisma to lead the group into church after her resurrection, Loca does not often participate in the community at large. The narrator reports that "[t]he occasions when La Loca let people get close to her, when she permitted human contact at all, were few. Only her mother and the animals were ever unconditionally allowed to touch her" (Castillo 2005, 27). Sofi realizes that most people will not understand Loca; therefore "Sofi's baby grew up at home, away from strangers who might be witnesses to her astonishing behavior" (Castillo 2005, 25). Yet Loca's reclusiveness does not sever her ties to the community. According to Carmela Delia Lanza, the home not only plays a prominent role in Loca's development but also establishes her as a member of an important community outside Sofi's house: "Like her mother, La Loca uses the home space as a source of spiritual nourishment and a source of strength….While living in her mother's home, Loca becomes a mythic force in her own right. She becomes a player in a scene far older and larger than her individual self" (1998, 77). Loca possesses supernatural powers unlike anyone else, enabling her to secure a prominent position in the Southwestern cosmic universe in which her family and community members believe. She uses this position as a bridge between the supernatural and regional communities of which she is a member.

Unlike Loca, many of the women in *So Far* leave Tome. Loca "had grown up in a world of women who went out into the bigger world and came back disappointed, disillusioned, devastated, and eventually not at all. She did not regret not being part of that society, never having found any use for it. At home she had everything she needed" (Castillo 2005, 151-52). Like Sula, Loca resists conformity to socio-cultural mandates; unlike Sula, Loca challenges such norms without leaving the town in which she was born. Fe sees Loca as "antisocial" and even "as a soulless creature" (Castillo 2005, 28), yet Loca proves to be anything but "soulless." She devotes much of the time spent in Sofi's house to strengthening relationships with the supernatural, herself, and her sisters.

In ways that could be labeled essentialist, Loca practices spiritual healing.[10] For example, without any kind of training, Loca knows how to perform abortions, and she performs each of Caridad's three (Castillo 2005, 26). The narrator reports that Loca "'cured' her sister of her pregnancy" and that "healing her sisters from the traumas and injustices they were dealt by society—a society she herself never experienced firsthand—was never questioned" (Castillo 2005, 27). The reader does not know from where Loca's knowledge and ability come. But her innate capabilities allow her to act apart from and ignore dominant social influence and control. Theresa Delgadillo explains that "[i]n the Americas, a sense of the abiding validity of native beliefs and practices springs both from existence in the materiality (topography, landscape) of these continents and their human communities, as well as from the uninterrupted insistence of native populations on defining the world and themselves, that is, from their history of resistance to oppression" (1998, 890). Performing abortions is audacious, and Loca defines herself, in part, by rebelling against Catholicism. Silvio Sirias and Richard McGarry assert that "the

discourse in *So Far From God* constitutes a direct confrontation with Catholicism" (2000, 93).[11] In the Catholic region in which they live, Loca's acts are defiant and dangerous, and she challenges religious, regional, and gendered expectations.

Loca is spiritual, but arguably not religious. Castillo claims that "[s]pirituality and institutionalized religion are not the same thing. Spirituality is an acutely personalized experience inherent in our ongoing existence" (1995, 12-3). Here Castillo's definition seems vague, but later in *Massacre* she explains that she conceives of spirituality as a process toward fulfillment, a process most likely full of revisions. She writes:

> So, if a woman decides that she still finds rewards in pursuing the rituals and mandates of the church, or simply by "meditating in the temple" of her own room, or if she constructs an altar in her home, (perhaps not like the one she knew as a child of a myriad of saints and crosses, but of articles that have special meaning for her); or if one day, she discards all religious icons and can embrace herself with self-acceptance and calls *that* her spirituality, she is continuously doing one and the same thing: maintaining her well-being. (Castillo 1995, 147)

Castillo's commentary opens up numerous questions about whether self-acceptance and/or well-being equals spirituality. My focus is on how Castillo underscores ways in which spirituality is gendered by describing the idea in terms of how a woman conceptualizes and enacts it. Loca's spiritual journey in *So Far* is one in which she seeks to maintain her well-being and her mother's and sisters'—even if that well-being is achieved by refusing to abide by rules of Catholicism.

Normally she would have been "excommunicated" for such a refusal, but "Father Jerome took pity on her and finally dismissed Loca as a person who was really not responsible for her mind" (Castillo 2005, 221). Deploying the common stereotype of an irrational woman to his benefit, Father Jerome tries to discredit her. But Loca is not

insane, and she is not subdued by the priest's condescension. She and Caridad make informed decisions to keep the abortions secret because they know they would be expelled by the church, and Loca would be arrested (Castillo 2005, 26-7). While Loca does challenge Catholic mandates, she also purposefully acts in accordance with social directives for fear of being excommunicated and jailed. Therefore she challenges *and* abides by socially-constructed mandates of behavior. Sánchez comments on these seeming oppositions: "Female characters are thus presented as contradictory figures, with no single function, role, or trait to define them; all are situated, however, within their capacity to affirm or counter the dominant practices and values of the ethnic collectivity" (1997, 1020). Although in many ways Loca feels separate from, perhaps even above, society and social mores, she abides by some, showing that she acknowledges the social construction of communal behavior as much as she enacts an essentialist sense of self. Similar to what Sánchez claims about Chicano/a literature's investment in emphasizing the individual as situated in community, Castillo shows through the character of Loca that even a person who has little human interaction still negotiates individual and communal identities.

Loca occasionally leaves the house, though she does not travel far. In fact, an acequia near Sofi's house "was as far as Loca had ever drifted from home, and her place to play and hide since she had learned to walk. Consequently, she knew and loved everything about it. She knew its quiet nature in summer, its coolness in spring; and she didn't mind it in winter when the muddy water was frozen most of the time. It was her own place to be…" (Castillo 2005, 151). The acequia is her "spiritual home"—"a place or milieu, other than one's home, which seems especially congenial or in harmony with

one's nature, or to which one feels a sense of belonging or indebtedness" ("Spiritual" *OED*). The comfort she finds in the seasonal changes of an irrigation canal in the Southwest fosters spirituality as a main component of Loca's intersectional identity.[12]

For Loca the acequia serves as a site of contemplation and communion with the supernatural. Here she often thinks of her sisters, who all leave Sofi's house to pursue endeavors in or outside of Tome. Caridad apprentices with the healer Doña Felicia, and Fe moves in with a roommate. Esperanza, having moved to Saudi Arabia as a news reporter, is a prisoner of war. On a June afternoon with a temperature of ninety-eight degrees, Loca, "finding no relief from the heat in the house, swamp cooler going full blast or not, would seek at least a little comfort from the shade of a cottonwood near the acequia that ran by her mother's house" (Castillo 2005, 150). During this hot afternoon alone at the acequia Loca communicates with the ghostly figure, la Llorona, who informs Loca that Esperanza is dead. Esperanza has been missing for months, and the U.S. military has informed the family "that Esperanza and her colleagues were surely kidnapped when they got too close to enemy lines" (Castillo 2005, 158). Loca rushes back and tells Sofi and Fe the dreadful news. Fe does not believe her, and Sofi is hesitant. Like the community in general, her family does not always accept that "what might be attributed to 'imagination' in others, in Loca's case was nothing short of what had happened, like it or not" (Castillo 2005, 159). In part because of the intimate connection she develops with a Southwestern irrigation canal—through which Southwestern topography and seasonal climate are reflected—she is privy to information about her family that others are not.

Loca insists that "the lady with the long white dress" told her that "'Esperanza won't never be coming back because she got killed over there. Tor…tured, she said'" (Castillo 2005, 159). She disproves Fe's outright disbelief and Sofi's doubt when "the official letter" from the Army arrives, which "confirm[s] that Esperanza and her colleagues were all dead" (Castillo 2005, 159). Benay Blend interprets the "arid landscape" of the desert in Chicana writing as depicting a "refusal to be owned or transformed into someone else's image" (2000, 68-9). Using Blend's interpretation, Loca's life in the Southwestern desert can be read as a refusal to be pressured into conformity. She employs regionally gendered performativity to conduct spiritual practices and facilitate supernatural encounters, but these acts at times distance her from other people.

Loca's affinity with the supernatural and her aversion for humans largely form the basis of the community's apprehension. The narrator reports that

> [s]ometimes a vecino would catch sight of La Loca [at the acequia] and think she was lost. Most people around mistook the fact that she showed no apparent social skills to mean she was a simpleton. None of them realized just how aware Loca was of her surroundings and of all the things that went on outside and away from Sofi's house. And not only that, but how effective she could be in handling circumstances that were beyond most people's patience, not to mention ability. (Castillo 2005, 151)

While the people of the Rio Abajo region do not shun Loca overtly, as the people of Medallion do Sula, they do not recognize the regionally gendered performativity of a young woman who avoids humans, befriends animals, and refuses to conform to standard behavior. Even her family often misunderstands Loca, and what others see as her "difference" engenders pity.

Loca's sisters cannot understand how a life lived entirely within the physical borders of Tome, New Mexico (with the arguable exception of her supernatural journeys), could be fulfilling: "To her sisters, the saddest part of all was that Loca had never had a social life. Her limber horse-riding body had never so much as felt the inside of a dress, much less of a bra! No, Loca had done none of the things young ladies did or at least desired to do" (Castillo 2005, 221). But Loca resists *and* embodies gender roles. She never wears a dress or bra, and she trains animals and plays the fiddle. She possesses innate knowledge that provides her with extraordinary capabilities, such as performing abortions. But she also cooks, sews, and is a caretaker to her sisters. The narrator opines that "it may be said [Loca] had a full life. Maybe not one reserved for a lady, but then, neither had the rest of the women in her family" (Castillo 2005, 222).

These seeming contradictions confound even her mother. For instance, Loca cuts out the label in her jeans because she sees a television report about how workers are boycotting the local jean factory. The report reminds her of how Fe was grossly mistreated at another factory, and the reporter reminds her of Esperanza. Sofi stares "at her daughter in amazement, although that might sound hard to believe after everything Sofi had experienced with her youngest. But it made sense that even if Loca never left her home and seemed to have no use for society, some of her own sisters' experiences had affected her" (Castillo 2005, 222). Loca does learn from others and is keenly aware of actions and consequences. She also taps her innate knowledge of and connection with the supernatural to shape her identity. Loca blurs boundaries of essentialist and socially constructed identity processes, and she does so without ever leaving Tome.

Unlike Lace and like Bant, Loca never experiences Tome as limiting. Instead, Tome facilitates her growth as a person, her communion with the spiritual, and her transition to the supernatural realm. After a noticeable decline in Loca's health, Sofi calls Doctor Tolentino for a consultation. He concludes that, inexplicably, Loca has HIV: "A great wave of sadness, like a dry ocean tide, went over the whole region when the news spread that La Loquita Santa was dying again. ¡A-yyy!" (Castillo 2005, 231). The incongruent image of a "dry ocean tide" is an apt metaphor for the community's mourning: it might seem unlikely that they passionately mourn the fatal illness of someone who is estranged from the community, but they do. In fact, the news looms large, as any thought of a "dry ocean tide" in the desert does.

Many healers try to help Loca—all of whom

> had lived in the Rio Abajo region, that is, in Los Lunas, Belen, Tome, on the Isleta Pueblo, from Alameda to Socorro, all around on their own little no-name rancherías, and up in the Manzano Mountains away from everybody for a very long time, not to mention that most had learned their remedies from grandmothers who had learned from grandmothers. And all who had lived on that tierra of thistle and tumbleweed knew that every cactus and thorn had a purpose and reason, once put into a pot to boil. (Castillo 2005, 233)

In the Rio Abajo region healing knowledge and practices are passed down through women and derived from common desert flora such as thistle and cacti. Medicine originating from and practiced in the Rio Abajo region is regarded as the best, and the women practitioners are deeply respected. Regional location serves as the common factor underlying the most effective methods of healing, also referred to as "special Rio Abajo medicine" that people "couldn't have gotten nowhere else" (Castillo 2005, 237). Instead of being dismissed as "brujas" or "nursemaids," the Rio Abajo women healers are revered for their wisdom and experience. Regionally gendered performativity is

exemplified in these instances by the fact that women of this specific region are considered the most accomplished healers.

Unfortunately, nothing and no one can save La Loca Santa from physical death. During an evening visit from the "Lady in Blue," a supernatural being who resembles a nun, "Loca went to sleep in the Lady's arms thinking that for a person who had lived her whole life within a mile radius of her home and had only traveled as far as Albuquerque twice, [Loca] certainly knew quite a bit about this world, not to mention beyond, too, and that made her smile as she closed her eyes" (Castillo 2005, 245). Just as Loca's illness brings healers from different parts of the region together, her death brings disparate groups together: "young and old, poor and not-so-very-poor, Catholic or whatever, believers and non-believers alike, 'Indian' and 'Spanish,' a few gringos and some others, even non-human (since it was never no secret that all her life animals were closer to La Loca than people) came to that second funeral" (Castillo 2005, 231-32).[13] Not only does Loca expand her own horizons by never leaving Tome, but also in her death she strengthens Tome's community and brings people together from outside the town.

Loca's accomplishments are extraordinary: "The truth of it was that she was just truly a santita from ever since her fatal experience at the age of three and she didn't have to prove nothing to no one. She didn't bother to do it when she was more or less among the living and people figured out eventually that she was not going to try to prove nothing afterward, neither" (Castillo 2005, 248-49). In a deck of tarot cards made to memorialize Sofi's daughters, Loca is depicted as "the Fool."[14] What seems to be, at first glance, a derogatory representation of Loca is the opposite: "The Fool card represented one who walked without fear, aware of the choices she made in the journey of life, life itself being

defined as a state of courage and wisdom and not an uncontrollable participation in society, as many people experienced their lives" (Castillo 2005, 250).

Loca resists and embodies both essentialist and social constructivist conceptualizations of identity. Like Rio Abajo healers, Loca's innate knowledge seems to come from an otherworldly place, but one still based in the Southwest; Roland Walter comments on how "the possibility of change is articulated and actualized through a culturally specific faith in an expanded reality" (1998, 90). Through various enactments of spirituality—many of which challenge gender and regional norms—she proves that she need not leave Tome in order to complicate identity processes as they are tied to local community. As a result, she actualizes "a solidarity that is rooted in local customs, beliefs, and values as instilled in her by her mother" (Gillman and Floyd-Thomas 2001, 168). In *So Far* Castillo particularizes spirituality by focusing on how Loca simultaneously practices it as rooted in Southwestern land, weather, and community and revises it by challenging traditional ideas of gender and region, as they are inflected by race and ethnicity.

Play It as It Lays

Especially in contrast to Castillo's vibrant genre-mixing, Didion's style is minimalist. Her prose is skeletal and leaves plenty of white space on the page, while Castillo's conversational prose fills the physical space of each page. Didion uses a single word or numbers to designate chapters; Castillo's lengthy chapter names provide brief summaries.[15] Together these approaches constitute an interesting way to look at the

desert, because although the desert is stark, often barren land, it is a place that sustains life.

I add to conceptualizations of Southwestern literature by including Didion's story of a wealthy white coterie who travels between Los Angeles and Las Vegas. The main protagonist, Maria Wyeth, claims to believe in nothing and therefore seems to reject spirituality. Maria is an interesting contrast to Loca for many reasons. Living in the Southwest affects them differently; issues of race and class figure prominently. Both women are perceived as "crazy," and both manipulate this perception to cut ties (to various extents) with society, friends, and family. Through this extrication, Maria believes, she will finally be able to live on her own terms, not by the expectations pressed on her.

Under the section heading "MARIA" *Play* opens with Maria's observation: "What makes Iago evil? some people ask. I never ask" (Didion 2005, 3). Maria's dislike for questions is exacerbated by the staff at the psychiatric facility in which she resides when the novel begins. (Like *Sula*, the opening of the novel is the end of the story; the narrative circles back on itself.) In first person she recounts being asked to complete a questionnaire:

> Maria, yes or no: I see a cock in this inkblot. Maria, yes or no: A large number of people are guilty of bad sexual conduct, I believe my sins are unpardonable, I have been disappointed in love. How could I answer? How could it apply? NOTHING APPLIES, I print with the magnetized IBM pencil. What does apply, they ask later, as if the word "nothing" were ambiguous, open to interpretation….There are only certain facts, I say, trying again to be an agreeable player of the game. Certain facts, certain things that happened. (Why bother, you might ask. I bother for Kate. What I play for here is Kate. Carter put Kate in there and I am going to get her out.) (Didion 2005, 4)

Maria is thirty-one years old, divorced, and has one daughter, Kate, who is four years old (Didion 2005, 4). Maria is extremely thin.[16] From her mother Maria inherits looks and migraines; from her father she inherits optimism which she has recently lost (Didion 2005, 5). Born in Reno, Nevada, she moves to Silver Wells, Nevada, population "then 28, now 0," with her family at age nine (Didion 2005, 5). After graduating from high school she moves to New York City to take acting lessons and model. Shortly thereafter she marries Carter and moves to L.A., but she confesses: "I try not to live in Silver Wells or in New York or with Carter. I try to live in the now…" (Didion 2005, 10). She tries to remember nothing, which for her in large part is an exercise in forgetting place.

Play takes place in the late 1960s, depicting the debauchery and despair of the Hollywood elite as they travel between Los Angeles and the Nevada desert. Each of the first three chapters is told by either Maria (an out-of-work actor), her friend Helene (a socialite), or her ex-husband Carter Lang (a filmmaker). Didion then changes to what she calls "close third"—"not an omniscient third but a third very close to the mind of the character" (Thomson 2005, xv)—thereby giving the reader more access to Maria's thoughts and feelings.[17] David Geherin notes that *Play* "is an acutely sensitive record of Maria's mind, moods, and emotions….Everything—events, other characters, objects, *even the weather*—is seen from her point of view, measured by her response" (1974, 76; emphasis added).

Maria has been in two of Carter's movies. Together they have a daughter named Kate, who resides in a psychiatric facility for reasons unclear to the reader. They are friends with BZ (a producer) and Helene—a married couple who have a rocky open relationship and who both have dubious ties to the seedy sides of Hollywood. The reader

follows the demise of Maria's and Carter's marriage amid cliquish L.A. parties, scandalous Hollywood deals, and stark Nevada desert. Symbols such as freeways and dry washes appear frequently in the novel to convey and question themes of futility of inquiry and memory and emotional burdens of pain, grief, and apathy.

Play begins with Maria's assertion that "to look for 'reasons' is beside the point" (Didion 2005, 3), Helene's attempt to visit Maria in a psychiatric hospital, and Carter's recollection of scenes from his tumultuous life with Maria. Maria has affairs, an abortion, and an ambivalent relationship with Carter, all of which bring to the forefront questions about autonomy and love. She "is forced to confront irrationality and silence" (Geherin 1974, 68). The desert serves as a prime locale in which to place these scenarios. Desert landscapes can seem irrational: plants grow with little to no water, and people and animals survive barely livable conditions. Also, desert areas can provide intense quietness and darkness, far removed from city centers, freeways, traffic, and lights, and their starkness can provide clarity.

In the Nevada desert Maria finds herself in a life-or-death situation with BZ in which all of her philosophical musings on life and meaning, as they are influenced by place and gender, culminate in crisis. Samuel Coale remarks on how the "[p]hysical landscape and psychological mindscape" of Didion's characters "merge and reflect one another" (1984, 164-65); I extend his analysis. Via metaphors of Southwestern topography and climate, Maria's regionally gendered performativity challenges ways in which the binary spirituality/lack of spirituality is usually conceptualized. It would be easy to say that Maria is a nihilist. She seems to believe in nothing and to act

accordingly, but, like misleading desert mirages, I argue that she tries to believe. Her struggle is gendered and evidenced through her interactions with place.

Thomas Mallon asserts that "character" refers to "not only the place's look or feel, but its moral strength" (1979, 48-9), and Didion uses weather to portray the character of place and people. The first chapter narrated in "close third" tells the reader that "[i]n the first hot month of the fall after the summer she left Carter…Maria drove the freeway" (Didion 2005, 15). The first month of fall is not usually thought of as hot in comparison to the summer, but in Los Angeles the average high temperatures in September and October are in the low eighties; these are also the months in which the Santa Anas start to blow (Didion 1992, 211). Didion's description of southern California weather, especially the Santa Ana winds, is crucial to understanding Maria's regionally gendered performativity:

> Easterners commonly complain that there is no "weather" at all in Southern California, that the days and the seasons slip by relentlessly, numbingly bland. That is quite misleading. In fact the climate is characterized by infrequent but violent extremes: two periods of torrential subtropical rains which continue for weeks and wash out the hills and send subdivisions sliding toward the sea; about twenty scattered days a year of the Santa Ana, which, with its incendiary dryness, invariably means fire. (Didion 2008, 219)

Basically, Santa Ana is a foehn wind (Didion also refers to it as "malevolent") which "occurs on the leeward slope of a mountain range and, although the air begins as a cold mass, it is warmed as it comes down the mountain and appears finally as a hot dry wind" (Didion 2008, 218). When Santa Anas blow, usually in early fall, "the relative humidity drops to figures like 7 or 6 or 3 percent" (Didion 1992, 211). The winds "dry the hills and the nerves to the flash point" (Didion 2008, 217). Helene sums up the effect: "The wind makes me feel bad" (Didion 2005, 163).

Didion offers substantive proof that these winds directly affect human behavior, feeling, and health:

> Whenever and wherever a *foehn* blows, doctors hear about headaches and nausea and allergies, about "nervousness," about "depression." In Los Angeles some teachers do not attempt to conduct formal classes during a Santa Ana, because the children become unmanageable. In Switzerland the suicide rate goes up during the *foehn*, and in the courts of some Swiss cantons the wind is considered a mitigating circumstance for crime. Surgeons are said to watch the wind, because blood does not clot normally during a *foehn*. (Didion 2008, 218-19)

Didion depicts these serious consequences via Maria. Maria's experiences as a woman are affected by her location, as the Southwestern heat and wind shape her identity formation.

The unexpected hot temperature and aridity of this fall month underscore Maria's unusual habits of dressing specifically to drive on the freeway, with nowhere in particular to go, yet bound by a certain time. She dresses casually and quickly "for it was essential…that she be on the freeway by ten o'clock—not somewhere on Hollywood Boulevard, not on her way to the freeway, but actually on the freeway. If she was not she lost the day's rhythm, its precariously imposed momentum" (Didion 2005, 15). Throughout the narrative Maria states that nothing matters. But the autotelic movement on the circulatory freeways provide meaning for her, even if temporary. Maria travels L.A.-area freeways in particular—"the Santa Monica, the Santa Ana, the Pasadena, the Ventura" (Didion 2005, 16).[18] She drives the freeways "as a riverman runs a river, every day more attuned to its currents, its deceptions, and just as a riverman feels the pull of the rapids in the lull between sleeping and waking, so Maria lay at night in the still of Beverly Hills and saw the great signs soar overhead at seventy miles an hour, *Normandie ¼ Vermont ¾ Harbor Fwy 1*" (Didion 2005, 16). She navigates freeways by immersing

herself in the immediate and urgent pulse of traffic and the illusory images of scenery passing by. Haunted by ideas of place she feels unable to pin down, freeway driving makes her feel grounded and purposeful, no matter how aimless the exercise might seem. As a riverman works against currents, Maria works against ennui. Although eventually she quits the freeway routine, it shows Maria's ability to believe in something.

Her struggle with the spiritual is not simply an ethos of nothingness. She recognizes how the Southwestern heat and wind both give rise to and symbolize actual and illusory peril. In the hot dry weather Maria chooses to sleep outside, by the pool, on a wicker chair with beach towels as cover: "Because she had an uneasy sense that sleeping outside on a rattan chaise could be construed as the first step toward something unnameable…she told herself that she was sleeping outside just until it was too cold to sleep beneath beach towels, just until the heat broke, just until the fires stopped burning in the mountains, sleeping outside only because the bedrooms in the house were hot, airless…" (Didion 2005, 16-7). She senses that her actions—sleeping outside on a chair instead of inside her comfortable home—fall outside the bounds of socially acceptable, but she believes they will make her feel better. That Maria searches for comfort and ways to help herself proves that she does not believe nothing matters.

Maria realizes that the dry heat literally affects her physically and mentally. Didion recalls that

> an Israeli physicist discovered that not only during such [*foehn*] winds, but for the ten or twelve hours which precede them, the air carries an unusually high ratio of positive to negative ions. No one seems to know exactly why that should be; some talk about friction and others suggest solar disturbances. In any case the positive ions are there, and what an excess of positive ions does, in the simplest terms, is make people unhappy. One cannot get much more mechanistic than that. (Didion 2008, 219)

Maria's attempts to mitigate these unhappy feelings are not the acts of a nihilist; instead, she acknowledges the biological effects the heat and aridity have on her, and she takes steps to lessen such negative effects, even if such an undertaking comes at the cost of jeopardizing her adherence to socially acceptable behavior. This kind of jeopardy clearly makes her uncomfortable (underscored by her emphasis that this situation is temporary), but it also causes her to consider socially constructed behavior in ways she previously has not.

Maria understands regional and gender norms via heat and water.[19] The temperature of the pool water reflects ways in which these norms are enforced and regulated. Sitting outside with BZ in the "hot October twilight"[20] Maria notes that

> it was the hour when in all the houses all around the pretty women were putting on perfume and enameled bracelets and kissing the pretty children goodnight, the hour of apparent grace and promised music, and even here in Maria's own garden the air smelled of jasmine and the water in the pool was 85º. The water in the pool was always 85º and it was always clean. It came with the rent. Whether or not Carter could afford the rent, whether it was a month like this one when he was making a lot of money or a month when the lawyers were talking about bankruptcy, the boy came twice a week to vacuum the pool and the man came four days a week to work on the roses and the water in the pool was 85º. (Didion 2005, 24-5)

Didion's prose style reflects Maria's boredom, yet Maria still plays along with Hollywood's excessive standards of appearance. No matter if she and Carter can afford it, one of their top priorities is to conform by making outward appearances seem flawless, which is evidenced by Maria's emphasis on the pool temperature being regulated at a balmy and sterile 85 degrees.

Still, "[s]ometimes it occurred to Maria that maybe the pretty children and the enameled bracelets came the same way, but she did not like to think about that" (Didion 2005, 25). Despite the unpleasant insinuations, Maria parallels the ritual importance of

pool-area maintenance to the importance of adhering to regional gender norms. While a normalized standard of appearance permeates culture, Los Angeles heavily values it. These Hollywood women spray perfume; Maria's garden air smells of jasmine. They adorn themselves with unchanging glossy bracelets; her shimmering pool is always eighty-five degrees. Regardless of the cost, she and the pretty women mentioned in this passage consistently carry out decorative, yet superficial, practices. Maria does not like to think about the parallel because she knows the costs are high, still she recognizes how she and these women enact, within the constraints of ideological codes of behavior, regional and gender norms that comprise (in part) identity and community formation.

Unlike the tight-knit community in *So Far*, very little sense of community exists in *Play*. Maria's and Carter's relationship deteriorates. Maria's acquaintances are not loyal, trustworthy, or stable. BZ constantly provokes her, and "friendship" is probably too strong a word for Helene's and Maria's relationship. BZ's and Helene's tumultuous marriage seems to be based on ulterior motives. Provokingly BZ asks: "'Isn't Helene a nasty, Carter? Haven't I got a bitch for a wife? And question number three, *who am I impersonating*?'" (Didion 2005, 45). Before Carter can reply Helene retorts: "'Yourself'" (Didion 2005, 45). BZ uses regionally gendered performativity to perpetuate stereotypes. He knows his "perpetually tanned, oiled, gleaming" body (Didion 2005, 45) looks like that of a stereotypical southern Californian man. (His glossy skin recalls the shine of the enameled bracelets that Maria considers indicative of the artifice of Hollywood.) He degrades his wife in front of friends to assert control. But Helene exposes the machinations behind both performances by asserting that BZ impersonates himself. Coale argues that Maria and her cohort "remain cinematic selves, trapped in

'lifestyles,' tied so completely to certain acceptable, outward display and social performance that without them, they are nothing. Interior selves, if there are any, evaporate" (Didion 2005, 165). Helene exposes the ruse of BZ's appearance and behavior and therefore unmasks ways in which regional and gendered norms operate. Helene and Maria explicitly acknowledge ways in which regionally gendered performativity functions. Therefore they counter Coale's claim that these characters' identities are completely constructed socially, because, if that were true, Helene and Maria would likely not be able to recognize and critique social construction.

On the beach Maria observes BZ, whose youthful body makes it seem as though he "had an arrangement with mortality" (Didion 2005, 46). Conversely, Maria notices "a certain texture to Helene's thighs, a certain lack of resilience where fabric cut into Helene's flesh" and thinks that "Helene was not quite so immune to time" (Didion 2005, 46). The mandates of performativity in this Hollywood milieu are gendered, and Maria recognizes "that whatever arrangements were made, they worked less well for women" (Didion 2005, 46). Whether Maria's and Helene's realizations come from some sort of women's "interior self" is debatable, but the women do critique social construction in ways the men can or do not. Helene blurs lines between innate and imitation by stating that BZ impersonates himself. Maria blurs these lines by recognizing how a man's body directs attention to the actual flesh of a woman's body. In short, Helene and Maria problematize the essentialist/social constructionist binary out of which Butler's theories of performativity are formulated.

Maria opens spaces to contest dichotomous constructions of the spirituality/lack of spirituality binary. She reluctantly agrees to get an abortion after Carter insists. While

waiting for the man to call and tell her where to meet for the procedure, she restlessly listens to "fire reports on the radio" (Didion 2005, 75). The dry hot air exacerbates her agitation, and as Maria drives to the ominous meeting place, she sees a landmark in the southern California cityscape that symbolizes her ambiguous relationship with spirituality:

> In the aftermath of the wind the air was dry, burning, so clear that she could see the ploughed furrows of firebreaks on distant mountains. Not even the highest palms moved. The stillness and clarity of the air seemed to rob everything of its perspective, seemed to alter all perception of depth, and Maria drove as carefully as if she were reconnoitering an atmosphere without gravity. Taco Bells jumped out at her. Oil rockers creaked ominously. For miles before she reached the Thriftimart she could see the big red T, a forty-foot cutout letter which seemed peculiarly illuminated against the harsh unclouded light of the afternoon sky. (Didion 2005, 76-7)

While the wind intensifies her anxiety, it also sharpens her view of the looming yet wrinkled mountains. She notes the contradiction in the fixity of the lanky and usually swaying palm trees. Yet Maria interprets the clarity as ironically "rob[bing] everything of its perspective." In other words, the heat, dryness, and wind simultaneously magnify her vision and diminish her sense of stability. Maria's struggle with the spiritual is situated in the disjunction between the immediacy of the southern Californian landscape and climate, and the incongruity of these two realities, which usually are not considered incongruous, causes her to feel detached.

Such intense interactions with one's surroundings may be described as spiritual or religious.[21] Many characters in *Play* (and *So Far*) reject traditional organized religion, which "is represented in the landscape of [*Play*] by the giant red T of the Thriftimart, under which the attendant meets Maria to take her to the place for her abortion" (Geherin 1974, 71). Although Geherin does not make this comparison, I interpret his analysis as a

reference to the large crosses overlooking freeways, usually in groups of three and often sitting on a hill so they appear larger than life and "peculiarly illuminated" against the open sky. Maria's doubts about the abortion are manifested in the conspicuous forty-foot, glowing red "T" made brilliant by the afternoon light. The "T" of the L.A.-area supermarket signifies a business she does not patronize; she shops at Ralph's Market (Didion 2005, 101), a grocery store chain in southern California. Because clarity "alter[s] all perception of depth" for Maria, the "T" pinpoints the meeting place but makes murky her moral convictions. While she never expresses an explicit opposition to abortion, she struggles with the decision personally, and the reader is unsure of her motives. Particularity of place often triggers Maria's feelings of dislocation, and this seemingly contradictory process plays a significant role in Maria's efforts to negotiate the space in between spirituality and its absence, a space also symbolized via Las Vegas.

Shortly after the abortion Maria divorces Carter. She takes barbiturates to sleep and drinks heavily in order to avoid dreaming. In an attempt to leave the personal drama of Los Angeles behind her, she goes to Las Vegas.[22] While Las Vegas can be interpreted as a place likely to preclude any possibility of spirituality, Maria experiences it as a place which fosters—perhaps even forces—contemplation of her gendered physicality through sensory experiences of temperature and wind: "Two or three times a day she walked in and out of all the hotels on the Strip and several downtown. She began to crave the physical flash of walking in and out of places, the temperature shock, the hot wind blowing outside, the heavy frigid air inside. She thought about nothing" (Didion 2005, 170).

While she claims to think about nothing, these experiences pull her into a sensory reality that instigates serious contemplation about how she is situated within elements of air and light:

> By the end of a week she was thinking constantly about where her body stopped and the air began, about the exact point in space and time that was the difference between *Maria* and *other*. She had the sense that if she could get that in her mind and hold it for even one micro-second she would have what she had come to get. As if she had fever, her skin burned and crackled with a pinpoint sensitivity. She could feel smoke against her skin. She could feel voice waves. She was beginning to feel color, light intensities… (Didion 2005, 170-71)

Maria's considerations of boundaries between herself and other entities show how interconnected gendered bodies and natural elements are. Her ruminations are gendered because they complicate de Beauvoirian theories of women as the second sex by placing the woman in the privileged spot of the binary and referencing the "other" as natural elements. For her, physical sensations suggest that she will come to know herself via the heightened awareness of physical, emotional, and mental states instigated by what is most intimate for her—Southwestern desert environments. Maria's identity is shaped by both biological factors (the wind and heat literally alter her mood) and socially constructed factors (how she is expected to act as a woman).

The Nevada desert landscape and climate reflect and instigate Maria's actions. Shortly after her solo trip to Las Vegas, she drives to the town "on a dry river bed between Death Valley and the Nevada line" where Carter is filming with Susannah Wood, an actor rumored to be his girlfriend (Didion 2005, 187).[23] In "the still heat of the motel on the desert" Maria and Carter fight and then barely speak (Didion 2005, 184). Despite this tense situation with Carter, Maria spends an evening with him, BZ, Helene, and Susannah in Susannah's room and voices her concern that someone will complain

about the loud music. Susannah taunts her: “Maria thinks we’re going to get ar*rest*ed for pos*ses*sion. Maria thinks she’s already *done* that number in Nevada” (Didion 2005, 190). So hot that her hair is clinging to her neck, Maria retorts: “I don’t like any of you. You are all making me sick” (Didion 2005, 190). Susannah laughs, and Helene tells her she is not being funny. Maria responds: “I mean sick. Physically sick” (Didion 2005, 191). Her disgust with their behavior, intensified by the searing heat, prompts her to eschew social mores of keeping her opinion to herself. Although Maria is surrounded by people, she feels alone, and the sweltering desert magnifies these feelings of solitude.

The harsh desert environment reflects Maria’s solitude, but it does not indicate that she is a nihilist. She grapples with issues of loyalty, love, and sex. BZ insinuates that Carter is sleeping with Helene:

> Maria said nothing.
>
> “If you’re pretending that it makes some difference to you, who anybody fucks and where and when and why, you’re faking yourself.”
>
> “It does make a difference to me.”
>
> “No,” BZ said. “It doesn’t.”
>
> Maria stared out the window into the dry wash behind the motel.
>
> “You know it doesn’t. If you thought things like that mattered you’d be gone already. You’re not going anywhere.” (Didion 2005, 195)

By asserting that who Carter sleeps with—especially when that person is supposed to be her friend—matters to her, Maria demonstrates the desire to believe in love, to believe in commitment. The dry wash symbolizes Maria and Carter’s relationship. At one point water coursed through the dry wash and could again. Maria acknowledges the current

lack of commitment between her and Carter but still feels that what happens between them matters. She “attempt[s] to determine the moral implications of what she has seen, to find some larger, transcendent meaning to the memories she cannot forget” (Wolff 1983, 486).

Although these moral contemplations might cause Maria to feel lonely among her Hollywood cohort, who seem to have no similar concerns, she is not as desperate as Carter believes. She prefers solitude and desires little. Carter does not or cannot understand her inclinations as anything other than negative: “’What’s the matter,’ Carter would ask when he saw her sitting in the dark at two or three in the morning staring out at the dry wash. ‘What do you want. I can’t help you if you don’t tell me what you want’” (Didion 2005, 195). Here the dry wash symbolizes the difference in perspective between Maria and Carter. Maria looks to it as an anchor, a reminder that barrenness does not signify futility or utter despondency; Carter interprets her attention on the dry wash as the exact opposite.

When Maria does not respond to his persistent questioning in a way he deems appropriate, he blames it, in part, on female physiology:

> “I don’t want anything.”
>
> “Tell me.”
>
> “I just told you.”
>
> “Fuck it then. Fuck it and fuck you. I’m up to here with you. I’ve had it. I’ve had it with the circles under your eyes and the veins showing on your arms and the lines starting on your face and your fucking menopausal depression—”
>
> “Don’t say that word to me.”

> "*Menopause*. *Old*. You're going to get *old*."
>
> "You talk crazy any more and I'll leave."
>
> "Leave. For Christ's sake *leave*."
>
> She would not take her eyes from the dry wash. "All right." (Didion 2005, 195-96)

Looking to the dry wash for support amidst Carter's tirade, Maria checks his self-assured arrogance by telling him that she *is* willing to leave him and the milieu in which they are both involved. The hot desert temperatures exacerbate the circles under her eyes that Carter notes: "In the heat some mornings she would wake with her eyes swollen and heavy and she would wonder if she had been crying" (Didion 2005, 196). Because the climate is intimately intertwined with her mental state, the heat distorts her ability to determine whether or not she was or is emotionally upset. Unlike Carter, however, the heat does not aggravate her temper. During the argument she remains calm and detached and therefore resists gender norms. Her "passivity is a form of resistance as much as it is a sign of her psychic scars. Her sparing use of words is meant to show how empty and 'unmotivated' the words employed by others are" (Rhodes 2000, 134). By reacting in such a steady way she emphasizes Carter's prattle and reverses stereotypical gender norms of women acting hysterically. The dry wash's starkness reflects the empty relationship she has with Carter, but it also suggests the possibility of transformation (i.e., it could likely fill with water) in the future. She knows she could leave him, even though he is a famous director and she is unemployed; in Hollywood his position alone might be reason for her to stay. By challenging regional and gender norms via physical actions deployed within the desert, Maria distances herself from the artifice of Hollywood.

Maria's deployment of regionally gendered performativity fractures community but does not translate to a lack of spirituality. The desert topography grounds her. Shortly after this fight with Carter, Maria sits "in the motel in the late afternoon light looking out at the dry wash until its striations and shifting grains seemed to her a model of the earth and the moon. When BZ came in she did not look up" (Didion 2005, 201). Once again the dry wash is a focal point of meditation and contemplation; it humbles her by reminding her of change. Maria perceives the dry wash to model the earth and moon, and in this scenario she situates herself among life forces. She might not believe in a god, but she does contemplate seriously her position in regard to others and the world at large. BZ interrupts: "'Carter is fucking Helene. I thought these things made a big difference to you'" (Didion 2005, 202). Maria walks composedly to the window: "In the few minutes that BZ had been distracting her the light had changed on the dry wash. Tomorrow she would borrow a camera, and station it on the dry wash for twenty-four hours" (Didion 2005, 202). The desert—specifically the dry wash—is her spiritual home in ways similar to how the acequia is Loca's. Loca finds comfort in the seasonal changes of an irrigation canal in the Southwest; Maria finds reassurance in the barren yet dynamic desert dry wash. Maria's intense connection with a topographical feature particular to the Southwest fosters her sense of spirituality yet distances her from other people.

Maria fortifies the distances she creates between herself and others by purporting to believe in nothing. While she is looking at the dry wash BZ says: "'Tell me what matters'" (Didion 2005, 202). Maria replies: "'Nothing'" (Didion 2005, 202). But this answer is not an indication of absolute defeatism. She pretends to expect nothing from the future and tries to remember nothing of the past in order to focus all of her attention

on the present.[24] By accepting that certain circumstances are beyond her control but knowing that she can manipulate others, she wants to play it as it lays. Especially because she spends most of her time in Los Angeles and Las Vegas, her philosophy is not unwise; it is a survival mechanism employed to combat a risk of her region: "Maria survives, emerges slowly from *the California paralysis of consciousness*….she exists in *a perpetual present*" (Coale 1984, 165; emphasis added). In addition to being labeled regionally, such a "paralysis of consciousness" is gendered via the stereotype of women's proclivity to have mental breakdowns. Yet Maria challenges gender roles by proving "[s]he is suffering not from a nervous breakdown, but from the breakdown of a world around her which threatens to engulf her whole being with nothingness" (Geherin 1974, 65). By showing the breakdown to be the "world's," Maria removes the regionally gendered stigma and calls attention to systemic problems that prompt feelings of insignificance.

The dénouement of the story is BZ's suicide. He asks Maria if she wants some Seconal (a barbiturate); she declines and suggests they sleep for a while. Laying on the bed, she awakes when "she sense[s] that his weight had shifted" (Didion 2005, 213). Without looking she knows he is about to take almost all of the twenty to thirty pills (Didion 2005, 213). She says: "*Don't*" (Didion 2005, 213). Ignoring her, he ingests almost all of the pills and asks her to hold his hand while they lay back on the bed (Didion 2005, 211-13). When Carter and Helene find them in the hotel room Carter shakes her and Helene screams relentlessly. Maria "close[s]…her mind against what was going to happen in the next few hours and tighten[s] her hold on BZ's hand" (Didion 2005, 213).

Maria knows what she has done is considered terrible, but she believes that this judgment is the result of misunderstandings of human behavior based in dangerous dichotomous frameworks:

> *If Carter and Helene want to think it happened because I was insane, I say let them. They have to lay it off on someone. Carter and Helene still believe in cause-effect. Carter and Helene also believe that people are either sane or insane. Just once, the week after the desert, when Helene came to see me in Neuropsychiatric, I tried to explain how wrong she had been when she screamed that last night about my carelessness, my selfishness, my insanity, as if it had somehow slipped my attention what BZ was doing. I told her: I knew precisely what BZ was doing. But Helene only screamed again.* (Didion 2005, 203)

Maria challenges the sanity/insanity binary by claiming that, in order to absolve themselves of guilt and blame, Carter and Helene accuse Maria of letting BZ commit suicide because she is insane. Instead, according to Maria, she was operating with full mental capacity at the time and still decided not to stop him. While she does not advocate suicide, she does claim that Carter and Helene took no action to "save" BZ before the actual act and therefore are also implicated in his death. If Maria is considered insane because of how she acted that night, then Maria asks, in effect, are not Carter and Helene insane because of how they acted repeatedly? Are they innocent or "good"? (They certainly are self-righteousness.) This passage recalls when Sula asks Nel how Nel knows that she was the good one, not Sula. Nel and Sula and BZ, Carter, Helene, and Maria all work under disparate ideas of what is good and bad, sane and insane, and they do not or cannot negotiate such differences in a way that facilitates community development. In such cases communities fail to serve as libratory spaces, for Sula and Maria and as we will see in the next chapter, for Rose in *The Patron Saint of Liars*.

In sum, others fail to understand Maria's regionally gendered performativity, and this "failure" further detaches her from community. Through Maria's first-person

interludes the reader learns that after BZ's death she is admitted to a Neuropsychiatric ward. For Maria the removal from society-at-large is a relief; she sees the psychiatric ward and her subsequent residency in a sanitarium as sanctuaries: "*Except when they let Carter or Helene in, I never minded Neuropsychiatric and I don't mind here. Nobody bothers me. The only problem is Kate. I want Kate*" (Didion 2005, 206). With the exception of wanting her daughter in her life, Maria does not want to participate in community.

Maria's regionally gendered performativity upholds some stereotypes (i.e., she is a very thin, white Hollywood socialite) but resists others. Her challenges to regional and gender norms often arise out of ways she interrogates binaries of essentialism/social construction and spirituality/lack of spirituality. Maria's spirituality manifests itself in her moral struggle:

> "*I know what 'nothing' means, and keep on playing.*
>
> *Why, BZ would say.*
>
> *Why not, I say.*" (Didion 2005, 214)

Maria, similarly to Loca, challenges conceptualizations of "crazy," "normal," and "spiritual." At the end of *So Far* Loca is regarded as a saint; at the end of *Play*, Carter and Helene think Maria is insane. However, Maria's ability to survive cutthroat Los Angeles and Las Vegas environments draws from a spirituality she forms in the interstices between belief and disbelief. While she does not believe in a god, she does believe in the importance of perseverance, which for her is an expression of spirituality. She thinks to herself: "*You call it as you see it, and stay in the action. BZ thought otherwise*" (Didion 2005, 210). Maria's "encounter with nothingness does not

completely defeat her but forces her into a new awareness" (Geherin 1974, 66). The heat and wind shape this new awareness. She knows what she must do to survive, and she does it by garnering strength from dry washes and southern California freeways. Her actions occur in and are reflected by the stark topography and hot climate of the Southwest; often they are instigated by the winds that blow there.

Play and *So Far* portray regional and gendered identities as they are shaped by points of convergence between or divergence from essentialist and social constructivist processes. In both novels spirituality is depicted via and instigated by Southwestern topography and climate and serves as a medium through which regionally gendered performativity is enacted. Barnes and Blew note that some of the women writers in their anthology "were both repressed by landscape and instructed by it in the very survival skills they needed to break away from it intellectually and often physically. Others, traveling here from afar, found healing in landscape itself" (1994, xiii). Loca and Maria negotiate ways in which their locales help and hinder them, and they create identities formed in part by landscape. Loca uses Southwestern land to hone her spiritual healing capabilities. Living in the desert teaches Maria how to survive in a world in which sustaining human relationships are sparse, at best. The next chapter analyzes how characters traveling between the Southwest and Appalachia reinvent their identities as women by repositioning themselves regionally.

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[1]Allen's conceptualizations of the Southwest and concomitant identity categories could be considered simply essentialist. While she acknowledges change within the region and its inhabitants, she often returns to what she sees as the Southwest's innateness. She claims, for example, that "[o]ne of the prime characteristics of *mi país*, the Southwest, is its power to ever change and remain essentially the same" (Allen 1995, xx). Note Allen's

use of the Spanish word "país" ("country") instead of "región" ("region"). This difference in word choice speaks to issues of naming and defining territory and land from diverse cultural perspectives.

[2] Castillo, who identifies as "a brown woman, from the Mexican side of [Chicago]" (1995, 1), writes: "While there is admittedly an ongoing growing population migrating from Mexico (as from other parts of the world today), a large percentage of Chicano/as are not immigrants. In fact, the ancestors of many are from the Southwest United States and were not solely Spanish or Mexican but also Amerindian" (1995, 2). She also links the two cultures via the U.S. government: "Chicano/as-Mexicans are the only people besides the Native Americans who have a treaty with the United States. As with many of the treaties between Native Americans and the U.S. government, ours, The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo has been largely violated" (Castillo 1995, 3).

[3] Hereafter referred to as *So Far*.

[4] Hereafter referred to as *Play*.

[5] Maria is "pronounced Mar-*eye*-ah" (Didion 2005, 4).

[6] Although Tome, NM, is an actual city, Castillo's Tome is fictional. According to Morrow, this setting "creates a textual link to a specific history of indigenous women that reminds us of the constructedness of patriarchal economic relations" (1997, 914).

[7] The male characters in *So Far* possess less power than the women. Sirias and McGarry call the men "emasculated" (2000, 89), and Rodriguez points out their "at best, supporting roles" (2000, 71). Like Jimmy Make in *Strange*, Domingo is unemployed and spends his days in the house watching television.

[8] Medical personnel at a hospital in Albuquerque diagnose Loca as an epileptic (Castillo 2005, 25).

[9] In "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," Walker critiques circumstances contributing to black women being called "Saints" (1983, 232), and she replaces the name with "Artists" (1983, 233).

[10] Although outside the scope of this chapter, analyses of curanderismo and Loca would be fruitful. Avila, a curandera (i.e., a female practitioner of curanderismo), stresses that curanderismo is a form and practice of healing that "does not separate the soul and spirit from the body. It is medicine and spirituality practiced simultaneously" (1999, 16). In *So Far* a curandera is described as a woman healer who "not only had the health of her patient in her own hands but the spirit as well" (Castillo 2005, 62). For discussions of curanderismo and *So Far* see Morrow (1997), Delgadillo (1998), and Blend (2000). Delgadillo also discusses *So Far* in terms of liberation theology.

[11] Esperanza's relationship with Catholicism is another example of how *So Far*'s discourse mixes religious and spiritual beliefs. Esperanza "had spent her whole life trying to figure out why she was the way she was. In high school, although a rebel, she was Catholic heart and soul. In college, she had a romance with Marxism, but was still Catholic. In graduate school, she was atheist and, in general, a cynic. Lately, she prayed to Grandmother Earth and Grandfather Sky. For good measure, however, she had been reading a flurry of self-help books" (Castillo 2005, 38-9).

[12] Lanza points out that "Loca doesn't rely on mainstream institutions for anything, whether it be to gain knowledge or spirituality in her life" (1998, 77).

[13] This community-building scenario contrasts with Sula's funeral.

[14] Readers are reminded of the tradition of the "wise fool," as in Shakespeare's *King Lear*.
[15] For example, Chapter Three of *So Far* is entitled: "On the Subject of Doña Felicia's Remedios, Which in and of Themselves Are Worthless without Unwavering Faith; and a Brief Sampling of Common Ailments Along with Cures Which Have Earned Our Curandera Respect and Devotion throughout War and Peace."
[16] Carter sarcastically asks: "'What do you weigh now? About eighty-two?'" (Didion 2005, 175).
[17] Maria's position as the main protagonist is significant because "within the subgenre of the Hollywood novel" *Play* "is one of the very few that focuses exclusively on the effects of the culture industry on women" (Rhodes 2000, 132).
[18] Didion uses grammar specific to the region, as southern Californians place "the" before the name of any freeway.
[19] Goggans reminds us that "land and water, indivisible in the West, are important signifiers in much of California's literature" (2010, 6).
[20] October is referenced throughout *Play* (see pages 30, 44, and 83 for additional examples); in *Strange*, October is the month that Bant loves. In *Slouching* Didion stresses that "October is the bad month for the wind, the month when breathing is difficult and the hills blaze up spontaneously. There has been no rain since April. Every voice seems a scream. It is the season of suicide and divorce and prickly dread, wherever the wind blows" (2008, 3). Suicide, divorce, and prickly dread figure prominently in *Play*.
[21] Leed claims that "the progressional structure that passage lends to experience obviously shapes our world, designed as it is around road structures, with strip architectures, presentations of information keyed to the passing eye, [and] a world of transient but strangely mannered and civil relations" (1991, 129).
[22] *Play* depicts "a random world of chance, suggested in the novel by recurring references to gambling (including the title)" (Geherin 1974, 74). In Winterson's *The Passion*, Henri ponders games of chance: "You play, you win, you play, you lose. You play. It's the playing that's irresistible" (1987, 43). While Maria probably would not use the term "irresistible," she likely would agree with the basic premise that playing is inevitable.
[23] At this point in *Play* Didion intersperses Maria's first-person point of view. Didion writes these short passages in italics, as if Maria is recalling her thoughts to someone (the reader). See pages 183, 200, 203, 206, 208, 214.
[24] Didion discusses negative consequences of forgetting the past and dismissing the future in much of her writing about California's history as a "frontier." For example, see *Where I Was From*.

Chapter Four: "The Distance between California and Kentucky": Migrating Region and Gender in *The Patron Saint of Liars and The Bean Trees*

"[Sissy] tried to figure out how the distance between California and Kentucky came into all of this."
--*The Patron Saint of Liars*

"[Missy] intended to drive out of Pittman County [Kentucky] one day and never look back..."
--*The Bean Trees*

Discussions of migration and populations are important as ever in the twenty-first century, as demonstrated by recent debates about Arizona's ban on ethnic studies in education and U.S.-Mexico border enforcement.[1] Current events such as these remind us of Gloria Anzaldúa's passionate and still pertinent call to honor mestiza identities. Her theories of the borderlands, which refer to what is now known as the U.S. Southwest, posit that cultural integrations are often the result of relocation and concomitant re-conceptualizations of places people inhabit. Out of such integrations arise dynamic and fluid identities and communities that are profoundly intertwined with movement and place.

Studying motivations for moving provides information about population demographics, which sheds light on individual and community characteristics. Official reports of U.S. regional relocation gauge patterns of migrants' and residents' ages, educations, genders, races, incomes, housing, and occupations, among others.[2] Such statistical data help us understand why people move where they do, but here I turn to qualitative questions of how identities and communities shift and take shape during and after relocations. To explore these large questions, this chapter analyzes contemporary narratives of women whose regionally gendered performativity migrates between the Southwest and Appalachia.

As noted in Chapter Three, Southwestern and Appalachian environments are frequently juxtaposed by writers; the authors featured in this chapter—Ann Patchett and Barbara Kingsolver—make such comparisons in their non-fiction and fiction. In an essay about returning to Kentucky, Kingsolver compares creek banks and canyons: "The high bank across from us is a steep mud cliff carved with round holes and elongated hollows; it looks like a miniature version of the windswept sandstone canyons I've come to know in the West" (2003, 178). Patchett stresses the fecundity of Tennessee: "So ripe is this state for the explosive growth of plant life that the species have become extremely competitive. 'Think of those plants growing in the California deserts,' a botanist friend said to me, and I picture the succulents and flowering cactus that thinly dot the vast stretches of sand. 'Those are the plants that can't compete'" (2008, 431). In Patchett's *The Patron Saint of Liars*[3] and Kingsolver's *The Bean Trees*[4] women protagonists contemplate "how the distance between California and Kentucky" plays a prominent role in identity formation and community membership, especially in regard to how each region's topography figures into these processes (Patchett 1992, 321).

In *Patron*, Rose migrates from Marina del Rey, California, to Habit, Kentucky; conversely, in *Bean*, Taylor migrates from rural Pittman County, Kentucky, to Tucson, Arizona. Migrating individuals negotiate their region of origin with the region of relocation, and, in doing so, often support or collapse distinctions between the two regions and among concepts of race, ethnicity, and gender. For example, Paula Gunn Allen asserts that "[t]he majority of Anglo-Americans who relocate to the borderlands take on Southwest customs, costumes, and outlook to one degree or another" (1997, 345). *Patron* and *Bean* ask: "How essentially are we changed by movement among regions?"

(Inness and Royer 1997, 6). In response, this chapter contextualizes my earlier examinations of Appalachia (Chapter Two) and the Southwest (Chapter Three) by investigating how characters negotiate identity and community when they move between the two regions.

While considering the distance between regions is crucial, an analysis of these regions as definitively dissociated would misconstrue the regional relationship as one solely of difference at best and antagonism at worst. Instead of thinking in terms of opposition, then, Doreen Massey's focus on regional interactions serves as a basis for intersectional analyses. Massey claims that places

> are not so much bounded areas as open and porous networks of social relations. It implies that their "identities" are constructed through the specificity of their interaction with other places rather than by counterposition to them. It reinforces the idea, moreover, that those identities will be multiple (since the various social groups in a place will be differently located in relation to the overall complexity of social relations and since their reading of those relations and what they make of them will also be distinct). And this in turn implies that what is to be the dominant image of any place will be a matter of contestation and will change over time. (1994, 121)

Like human identities, the identity of a place is fluid, formed by intersecting social relations both within and outside of a particular locale, and is not contained to a singular physical location. *Patron* and *Bean* exemplify Eudora Welty's assertion that "[s]ometimes two places…are brought to bear on each other…and the heart of the novel is heard beating most plainly, most passionately, most personally when two places are at meeting point" (1990, 130-31). Literary analyses of place help us imagine these overlapping areas and the ways in which seemingly disparate entities constitute each other.

Place is shaped, in part, by narratives, and narratives are shaped, in part, by place. Rudolfo Anaya stresses the importance of recognizing that "[s]ense of place does not merely mean that a writer uses the landscape of the place as background. It means that the spirit of the place affects and influences the characters by shaping their consciousness" (1995, x). Ambiguous terms such as "spirit" and "consciousness" account for possible transformations between and among people, place, spirituality, and land: "This is what the most profound meaning of sense of place describes: our relationship to the spirit of the earth" (Anaya 1995, xiii). Anaya's articulations are helpful in understanding that although place—as physical landscape—cannot literally be transferred (i.e., we cannot move the Appalachian Mountains to New Mexico), the spirit of a place can be and often is carried with people when they move or travel.[5]

Similarly, communities take shape as a result of human interactions and relationships not necessarily tied to one physical location. Mary Louise Pratt coins the term "contact zones" to describe "attempt[s] to invoke the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect" (1992, 7). Focusing on the geographic part of Pratt's definition, this chapter explores how women in these texts shape gendered identities as part of the process of venturing into new regional communities. Of course identity and community formation are fraught with issues of power. Accurate analyses of contact zones, according to Pratt, should "treat the relations among colonizers and colonized, or travelers and 'travelees,' not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power" (1992, 7). I modify Pratt's thesis by focusing

on how regional contact zones are created and inhabited by women and how gendered relations of power work in such spaces.[6]

A brief discussion of gender and travel introduces some of the configurations of power dynamics analyzed in this chapter. "Travelers" and "travelees" refer to those who journey and to the residents (of the destination) who are observed by and subject to the journeyers, respectively. Well-documented are implications of systemic inequalities of race, class, and gender on the decision and ability to travel.[7] Eric Leed asserts that "travel is 'genderized'" in that "historically, men have traveled and women have not, or have traveled only under the aegis of men" (1991, 113). Focusing on theoretical and narrative accounts of traveling, Janet Wolff argues that metaphors commonly used to describe women travelers "produce androcentric tendencies in theory" (1993, 224), and she urges readers of travel accounts in the Victorian age, for example, "to consider how this travel was construed and constructed, both by the travellers [sic] themselves and by the cultures they left and returned to" (1993, 232). This chapter examines how travel shapes women's regional identities.

Women's journeys in *Patron* and *Bean* speak to important questions such as: "How does regional identity (southerner, easterner, midwesterner, westerner) influence how one reacts to people from other regions?" (Inness and Royer 1997, 2). *Patron* and *Bean* provide a spectrum of women's situations in new regional communities, ranging from feeling like a foreigner to feeling a sense of belonging. These considerations are analyzed in light of one of Butler's main questions in *Giving an Account of Oneself*: What provokes the feeling of lack of fit? I also address what provokes the feeling of fit.

I read one of Butler's responses to this issue of belonging as disrupting the split between essentialist and constructed identity as recognized in and by community: "Although I have argued that no one can recognize another simply by virtue of special psychological or critical skills and that norms condition the possibility of recognition, it still matters that we feel more properly recognized by some people than we do by others. And this difference cannot be explained solely through recourse to the notion that the norm operates variably" (2005, 33). Recognition via "social relations…and representation" (Leed 1991, 217) affects how gender and region are portrayed and understood as categories of identity. Bant and Lace ultimately believe the people of Prater consider them as members of the community; in Medallion Sula is rejected. The women in *So Far* experience various kinds of recognition by residents throughout their lives in Tome. Maria never feels recognized by her community (and perhaps she does not want to be), with the possible exception of BZ. All of these are examples that occur within a region of origin. This chapter examines consequences of regional relocation on recognition. Interesting angles to consider are why some individuals develop an identity attached to a non-native place and community, as is the case with Taylor in *Bean*, and why some do not, as we will see with Rose in *Patron*.

Butler emphasizes that intelligibility—when the self is known by others— is a doomed project because the more intelligible one is, the more she is limited by social and discursive practices. In order to avoid the likely outcome of violence, Butler calls for processes of representation and identification to become relational instead of juridical. Whether or not intelligibility is possible, Butler is correct that the process most often

requires an acknowledgement of the limits of one's knowing, forgiveness, subversion, and resistance:

> To be undone by another is a primary necessity, an anguish, to be sure, but also a chance—to be addressed, claimed, bound to what is not me, but also to be moved, to be prompted to act, to address myself elsewhere, and so to vacate the self-sufficient "I" as a kind of possession. If we speak and try to give an account from this place, we will not be irresponsible, or, if we are, we will surely be forgiven. (Butler 2005, 136)

The phrases "to be moved," "to address myself elsewhere," and "try to give an account from this place" outline three aims in my analysis of regional migration, which is to better understand why a woman decides to move to a new region, how she shapes and presents her regionally gendered identities in this new place, and how these identities are understood by others. I suggest that intelligibility can occur as a result of relocation, and I explore this idea further in the discussion of *Bean*.

Thus far this study has examined how Appalachian and Southwestern spaces shape identity and community formation in literatures of each region. This final chapter analyzes how narratives of women's migration between the two regions demonstrate how identities and communities are developed when negotiated outside the region of origin. In *Patron* and *Bean*, Rose and Taylor deploy regionally gendered performativity to challenge binary conceptualizations of identity as either essentialist or socially constructed. How these challenges are received by those in each region of relocation directly affect the women's experiences with community coalition.

The Patron Saint of Liars

Patron opens with a flashback to 1906 when a hot spring breaks through the ground of George Clatterbuck's land in Habit, Kentucky. Miraculously, the spring water

not only cures ailments plaguing George's horses but also saves his daughter from a fatal illness. In 1920 Lewis Nelson erects an extravagant hotel, named Hotel Louisa in honor of his wife, to house visitors who flock to the healing spring from outside Kentucky. However, "[n]o one from Habit ever went inside after the opening day. It made them feel like they weren't quite good enough. Even the Clatterbucks, who were supposed to be partners in everything, kept to the other side of the woods. You couldn't see their house, not even from the third-floor rooms. The guests never knew they had ever been there at all" (Patchett 1992, 4-5). Thus from the beginning distinctions form between those from Habit and those not. When the hot spring dries up, Habit loses its main tourist attraction, and the Nelsons gift the hotel to the Catholic Church. The Church converts the hotel into a home for pregnant girls managed by nuns and renames it Saint Elizabeth's.

Cut to a few decades later (in the 1950s), on the other side of the country, and the reader is introduced to Rose, a young girl living with her mother in Marina del Rey, California. Unsure of what she wants out of life, at the age of nineteen she meets Thomas Clinton, a kind math teacher infatuated with her, and unenthusiastically marries him that same summer. Discovering that she is pregnant forces her to admit she does not love her husband and motivates her to leave him and her unfulfilling domestic life. Rose never tells Thomas she is pregnant. After a consultation with her priest, Rose, now twenty-three, begins a road trip across the country that leads her to Saint Elizabeth's and away from Thomas, her mother, and California.

Divided into three sections, the novel is narrated retrospectively by Rose, her husband Son, and her daughter Cecilia (nicknamed Sissy). In an interview Patchett explains the reason for multiple first-person narrators: "[T]hese characters didn't

communicate with one another. The only way I could structure it was to have three first-person narrations, because they're all feeling things they can't say to the other one" (Johnson 2004, 173). Rose especially struggles to communicate with Son and Sissy, but she forms close friendships with Sister Evangeline, a psychic elderly nun, and fellow Saint Elizabeth's resident Angie. Although Sister Evangeline, Angie, Son, and Sissy form Rose's nuclear community, Rose mostly isolates herself in the kitchen, where she is in charge, and remains reserved. Tensions caused by Rose's competing Appalachian and Southwestern identities are highlighted through her relationships with Son and Sissy.

Migration narratives in American literature often describe an escape from home or reality to the promised land of the West.[8] By abandoning her home in California for Kentucky, Rose reverses the typical trajectory; she "was somewhere outside of Ludlow, California, headed due east toward Kentucky….headed into the desert alone, windows down, radio up" (Patchett 1992, 11). Before considering the implications of this reversal and the gendered significance of the journey, I highlight Rose's reflections on how her identity has been shaped by southern California.

While living in Marina del Rey, Rose does not realize how she is affected by her surroundings. With hindsight and a change in geographic perspective, however, she does. Of her first date with Thomas she recalls:

> It was a night that at nineteen, in southern California in May, was like every other night you had seen so far, but a night that when you remember it years later in a place without an ocean, is like a powerful dream. Everywhere you went you heard the water, the same way you had always heard your own breathing, and would later hear the highway, or trains, or women's voices. But the sound was so much a part of everything that you couldn't hear it at all then. This is what I took for granted: The sound of the water. (Patchett 1992, 18)

For Rose the sound of the Pacific Ocean conjures the rhythm of breath, the throb and excitement of transportation, and the cadence of women's speech. Being, moving, and speaking are gendered via the symbol of water in the specific place of southern California. Allen reminds us that "[a] region's particular identity is established by its characteristic sounds, smells, colors, textures, and flavors" (1997, 345). Rose does not recognize these interconnections, however, until she is geographically and temporally removed from the site of their convergence. This memory encapsulates her nascent understanding of how region and gender interconnect and how such processes and their effects can be conceptualized differently depending on the location from which they are considered.

The "resulting dividedness of self" that can occur when "one takes leave of a localized identity" (Leed 1991, 44) is prompted for Rose by the recollection of California topography and her adolescence. A region's identity is also established by its correlation to other regions, and Rose experiences California differently in Kentucky. She feels split—estranged from her California upbringing and skeptical of a Kentucky present. The above passage from *Patron* introduces comparisons between Rose's regions of origin and relocation and signifies transportation as a crucial turning point in analyses of region and gender.

Like Maria in *Play*, Rose defies gender roles by taking control of the wheel. Historically women have not had equal access to the freedom of the road. Wolff points out that "the ideological gendering of travel (as male) both impedes female travel and renders problematic the self-definition of (and response to) women who *do* travel" (1993, 234). Rose does not let gender obstacles stop her; she "love[s] to drive, the way people

love forbidden things" (Patchett 1992, 25). She drives southern California freeways in order to clear her head and find purpose. Wolff points out that "[w]hen women do travel, their *mode* of negotiating the road is crucial" (1993, 233). In *Patron* this mode of negotiating involves both the ability and inability to drive. Rose describes the pleasure of pursuit: "People think you have to be going someplace, when, in fact, the ride is plenty…I was never interested in where I might go, only the contours of the roads, the kind of lines they made, their shape and width, the views I imagined they would afford me. This is what I was looking for" (Patchett 1992, 27). The physical act of driving provides satisfaction Rose does not feel otherwise.[9] Her nagging discontent, she says, only "seemed to go away…when I was driving. The world moved because of the directions of my hands. I rushed it past my windows as fast as I wanted" (Patchett 1992, 27). On the freeways Rose obtains power via navigation, speed, and risk.

However, when Rose leaves the doctor's office after finding out she is pregnant, she forgets how to drive and has to pull over to the side of the freeway. Her sudden inability to do something so familiar and meaningful makes Rose realize that the conventional domestic life with husband and child is not what she wants: "I had married a man I did not love….I would have to have something else because this could not possibly be my life" (Patchett 1992, 29). She quickly recovers the ability to drive and with it the determination to change direction. She believes that in order to escape stultifying gender norms—especially strict in the mid twentieth-century setting of this narrative—she must drive herself out of her region of origin.

Rose reverses popular passageways by leaving the west for the east, and she takes control over the direction of her life by deciding when to leave, on what terms, and where

to go. In the desert a gas station attendant named Dwight informs Rose that "[w]oman [sic] shouldn't be traveling alone" (Patchett 1992, 34). Defying this articulation of a sexist norm, Rose continues to drive alone until she picks up a hitchhiker in Oklahoma named Billy, whose destination is Arkansas. Billy asks where she is headed, and she replies, "East" (Patchett 1992, 38). He says, "East isn't a place," and she responds: "Well, I'm going east" (Patchett 1992, 38). For Rose "east" *is* a place, both imagined and actual, which symbolizes freedom. "East" is *not* the west, not California, not Marina del Rey. Her migration narrative destabilizes what Wolff sees as the "*intrinsic* relationship between masculinity and travel" (1993, 230). Wolff is careful to stress that "[b]y 'intrinsic'" she does "*not* mean 'essential'; rather [her] interest is in the centrality of travel/mobility to *constructed* masculine identity" (1993, 230). Conversely, Rose's migration destabilizes constructed female identity. Especially during the time period of Rose's narrative, driving challenges gender roles. When she leaves California she believes she is leaving behind her marriage and traditional notions of family and motherhood. For her driving reflects a regionally gendered performativity that propels her to leave social mandates she views as attached to southern California for the freedom she hopes to find in Appalachia.

Freedom is often correlated with the idea of the "frontier," especially in connection with the western U.S. To Rose, however, Appalachia symbolizes freedom. As many do in conceptualizing the West, Rose exoticizes Kentucky. When Father O'Donnell tells her about Saint Elizabeth's she is "interested in the location more than the description" of the home (Patchett 1992, 30). One of the first differences Rose notices between the west and east are the trees: "I had never seen such thick banks of

trees, such softness growing from every surface of a field. Kentucky was another country, and in that country, Saint Elizabeth's was a country unto itself…" (Patchett 1992, 52). She feels doubly displaced geographically because she must negotiate living in a new region and, within that, the sequestered community of Saint Elizabeth's. She knows no one in Kentucky and wants to start a new life there—the kind that only anonymity can provide—but the mirage of Appalachia as frontier and freedom is quickly dispelled.

Rose realizes that she has not left stereotypical assumptions and restrictions behind in the Southwest. Her regionally gendered performativity challenges gender roles associated with women from California. One evening Rose asks Angie how the concept of home is altered by staying at Saint Elizabeth's, because Rose thinks that if a girl has "to come to a place like this" then most likely she "wouldn't have a home to go back to" (Patchett 1992, 56). Annoyed by this question, Angie briefly describes lies the girls and their families tell (i.e., they are caring for a sick aunt or traveling through Europe). Angie's impatient reply gives Rose the impression that "she was tired of girls from California being so stupid" (Patchett 1992, 56). On the contrary, Rose is smart and clever, and she is definitely not a stranger to lying (whether outright or by omission). After getting to know Rose, Angie's stereotypical assumptions about "girls from California" are disproved. Despite or perhaps because of such challenges to stereotypes of California women, Rose often feels like a foreigner in Habit.

Residents of both Habit and Saint Elizabeth's consider Rose to be displaced and unusual. In this way, her conception of Kentucky as foreign is transposed onto her. Unlike the majority of women at Saint Elizabeth's, Rose is self-assured, as shown in a conversation about Sister Evangeline's well-being. Out of concern for the elderly nun,

Son says to Rose: "'But you seem like a smart girl, and Sister Evangeline, she sings your praises, so you'll watch out for her'" (Patchett 1992, 64). Son's veiled supplication assumes that Rose needs to be asked or directed to take care of Sister Evangeline. His use of the future tense "will watch" suggests that Rose will start doing so after he asks her. In addition, his statement that Rose "seem[s] like a smart girl" is patronizing; Rose knows she is a smart woman. She curtly replies: "'I watch out for her'" (Patchett 1992, 64). The sharp tone and present tense of the verb "watch" convey that Rose does not need to be told or asked by Son to take care of Sister Evangeline. By ignoring his comment on her intellect she shows that his opinion is of little significance to her, and without directly addressing the condescension implied by the term "girl," she shows she is a mature adult.

Immediately following Rose's reply Son identifies her as an outlander: "You're not from around here" (Patchett 1992, 65). She answers, "No, I'm from out west, California" (Patchett 1992, 65). She thinks to herself: "How many times had I said that already? Kentucky wasn't a place you could just be in, you had to be from there, or everything about you was strange" (Patchett 1992, 65). He says: "I could tell from the way you talk" (Patchett 1992, 65). By "talk" Son refers to the content and delivery of Rose's speech. Assuming an Appalachian woman will be demure, when he discovers that Rose is not, he explains the discrepancy in geographical terms.

Although Son does not refer to dialect in this instance, Marjorie Pryse's point about the "extensive use of mountain dialect" in Mary Noialles Murfree's fiction is pertinent. Pryse notes that the dialect "draws our attention to the way language functions as its own site of encounter" (2000, 206-7). Murfree's use of dialect creates a contrast

within language (thereby erecting an insider/outsider binary) but in doing so enables readers unaccustomed to the dialect the opportunity to become familiar with it and see it as a medium through which to approach differing perspectives (Pryse 2000, 207). Similarly, Rose's delivery and content constructs insider/outsider positioning by creating a contrast (in Son's view) between her and other Kentucky women. However, what Rose says simultaneously disassembles this construction by providing a means through which to acknowledge and ideally embrace difference.

At this point Son still approaches Rose's positionality from a bifurcated perspective: he does not recognize her as a woman who could live in Appalachia. After a moment's hesitation he continues: "Well, it's not just the way you talk, it's the way you move around too, look people right in the eyes, hold your head up. You don't see too much of that around here" (Patchett 1992, 65). Son identifies Rose as a non-Appalachian based on her confidence and assertive mannerisms. Because regional boundaries can be "both social and spatial—they define who belongs to a place and who may be excluded" (McDowell 1999, 4), Son deploys social norms to create spatial boundaries.

Pryse's discussion of dialect can also be used to analyze essentialism and social construction. Rose challenges Son's essentialist expectations of the deportment of women in Kentucky (i.e., to Son her actions do not correspond with place), and she challenges social construction because she does not assimilate to the regionally gendered behavior that Son expects. He first identifies Rose as an outsider, but through this position of difference the foundations on which he builds such binaries are ultimately fractured because he comes to understand Rose as a Kentucky woman from a more nuanced perspective. Along the lines of José Muñoz's call to destabilize binaries of

essentialism and social construction, Rose's regionally gendered performativity demonstrates that identity processes can be both/and instead of either/or.

Rose's in-between position distinguishes her from Son and the others but also bridges difference by transforming others' suspicion into appreciation. Son describes how the Saint Elizabeth's community depends on her: "You're not like the other girls, Rose….You're half running this place now. Everybody's come to count on you, they're getting attached to you" (Patchett 1992, 106). When Angie goes into labor and Rose and Son drive her to the hospital against Saint Elizabeth's protocol, Angie corroborates Son's point:

> "I can't believe the way they listen to you now…It's like you're one of the sisters."
>
> "That's an awful thought," Rose said.
>
> "No, no, I mean, you've got that kind of power. The way you stared them down and said, 'No, Son and I will take her to the hospital.'" Angie laughed. "Like, la-di-da, I'm running this show now. Well, I think it's something, is all. You stay on, they're gonna be calling that place Saint Rose the Divine." (Patchett 1992, 130-31)

While Angie and Son are both in awe of Rose's command, Son in particular is fascinated by her: "Rose was a strong girl. She's the only woman I ever knew who felt as big as me" (Patchett 1992, 128). Described as "a giant man, maybe six foot six" Son's size is difficult to match (Patchett 1992, 52), but Rose's personality, strength, confidence, and self-sufficiency rival his physical largeness. Son concludes that "Rose could hold her own against anybody" (Patchett 1992, 129). To community members Rose's presence in

Kentucky as a woman from California is extraordinary, and in time they come to understand her in a positive light. Although her regionally gendered performativity can be considered unintelligible in Butlerian terms—those in Habit continuously remark on how she is unlike them—nonetheless she is accepted into the community because of an appreciation of difference. (A similar kind of acceptance happens for Loca; it does not happen for Sula.) While Rose's position within the community of Saint Elizabeth's stabilizes over time, if she ever sees herself as an actual member of that community and of Habit is dubious.

The narrative that describes how Rose decides to keep her baby, marry Son, and raise Sissy demonstrates the regionally gendered performativity that Rose deploys in Habit but eventually abandons. In a new region, Rose realizes she must contend with new *and* familiar gendered expectations. In Marina del Rey Rose would have been expected to keep her baby; at Saint Elizabeth's all girls are expected to place their babies with adoptive families. Rose is unsure what she wants to do, but "walking through the woods alone in northern Kentucky, wearing a man's overcoat that someone had donated to Saint Elizabeth's, [she] felt strangely better off" (Patchett 1992, 92). Rose has considered all the places she could go where she could keep the baby—back to Thomas or her mother or to Billy's in Arkansas—but the only place she believes is appropriate is rural Kentucky. Janice Monk argues that "landscapes can…empower people to creativity and action, to develop cultural alternatives" (1992, 136). While the landscape of Kentucky did not prompt Rose to leave California, once there it provides her with a sense of possibility and autonomy. She thinks: "I was through with giving things up. I wanted something of my own" (Patchett 1992, 112). The distance between Habit and Marina del

Rey—whether real or imagined or both—plays a significant role in Rose's decision and ability to raise her baby.

Now determined to be a mother, Rose is unsure how to break the Saint Elizabeth's adoption protocol. Son suggests they marry and raise the baby together, which will allow Rose to keep her and to stay at the home in Habit. Like Taylor, Rose is accustomed to an all-woman family and does not even consider the possibility of a father in her baby's life until she realizes the possible benefits of Son's offer. However, her acceptance is bittersweet because she feels she is replicating the same scenario that caused her to leave Marina del Rey. She wonders: "Maybe this was the way it was supposed to be for me. God telling me He was right after all. I was supposed to be married, live a small life with a man I didn't love" (Patchett 1992, 115). These feelings of defeat and despondency cause Rose to doubt her decision to move to a different region, and they negatively affect her developing identity as an independent woman. On the other hand, Rose and Son's agreement helps her develop cultural alternatives by raising her baby at Saint Elizabeth's. Regional relocation presents her with new and familiar sets of gendered expectations; while she is able to manipulate some to her benefit (i.e., marrying Son), she still fears that she has only transferred her circumstance in California to Kentucky.

Son assuages these anxieties by assuring her that he does not need to know about her past, and largely because of Son's respect for her privacy, Rose is able for a time to assume a new identity as a mother living in Kentucky. However, Son does not keep his promise, and his inquiries regarding California intensify Rose's need to forget her experiences there. Son thinks Rose is working too much in the kitchen and suggests "she

should take some time for herself" (Patchett 1992, 218), but when he suggests that she return to California, Rose "turn[s] away from [him]" and remains silent (Patchett 1992, 218). Like Maria in *Play*, Rose does not want to remember; to break with the past Rose must forget place. For Rose forgetting involves not only repressing the memory of Marina del Rey but also living only in the immediate present in an attempt to preclude the establishment of a past or future associated with Habit and Saint Elizabeth's.

Although the community in general accepts her, Rose's attempts to avoid temporal roots distance her, especially from Sissy. One of the biggest problems between mother and daughter is the almost complete lack of communication. Rose does not share stories of her life or history with Sissy, and Sissy feels that Rose takes her "do-it-yourself" creed to the extreme, resulting in little to no affection or intimacy between them.[10] Since shared stories and histories "provide a deep sense of continuity within a psychospace" (Allen 1997, 348), this lack causes Sissy to feel discontinuity. Rose resists temporal bonds tied to place in order to maintain distance from the community in which she is otherwise immersed.

Communities often constitute themselves by telling stories of place, but Rose even avoids talking with Sissy about where she is from originally—another example of the extent to which Rose disassociates with California in order to be able to live in Kentucky.[11] Sissy was in eighth grade "before [she] ever knew [her] mother wasn't from Kentucky" (Patchett 1992, 252). Sissy's assumption that Rose is from Kentucky contrasts with Son's immediate ability to point her out as a foreigner. Their differences in ability cannot be attributed to Rose's assimilation into the Habit community or to her self-identification as a Kentucky woman because neither occurs. What Sissy's incorrect

assumption does suggest is Rose's ability to pass as a woman from Kentucky. Interconnections between gender and region are especially emphasized via this concept. Using terms that usually apply to gender, perhaps Rose can "region-switch" or "region-bend." If so, her ability to assume a regional identity that is recognized by some and not others reminds us of Butler's argument that "no one can recognize another simply by virtue of special psychological or critical skills and that norms condition the possibility of recognition" (2005, 33). Her determination to forget place motivates her reticence and contributes to her strained relationship with her daughter.

Rose struggles to negotiate a space in between being a California woman and a Kentucky woman. Although the Kentucky community accepts her as both, Rose does not claim an identity as either, both, or neither. For her, California has "long since ceased to provide straight-forward support to [her] identity. Yet, though the 'homes' which ground and house identities can be denied people physically by enforced exile or lost through chosen migration, they still continue to resonate throughout the imagination of displaced communities" (Carter, Donald, and Squires 1993, vii). Instead of condemning Rose's failure to become a full-fledged community member, one could claim that she, like Maria, establishes a positionality in her new regional community that enables her to survive and temporarily stay—whether this is selfish or desirable is debatable.

When Rose is faced with a visit that would force her to remember and confront Marina del Rey in Habit, she decides she can participate in neither her regional community of origin nor of relocation. After receiving a mysterious letter in the mail, Rose secretly flees Habit. The mystery is solved when Sissy's biological father arrives at Saint Elizabeth's to bring Rose the news that her mother has died.[12] Sissy is intrigued by

this man from her mother's past and wonders "how the distance between California and Kentucky came into all of this" (Patchett 1992, 321). She suspects that in that distance lie answers to questions she has about her mother, but she also realizes that it is partly that very distance which hides the answers.

Rose wants this distance to provide a barrier between her past and current identities as a woman. When the worlds of southern California and Appalachia collapse (or collide), she extricates herself from both the actual and imagined communities associated with each region. In order to escape her past, Rose twice abandons place and family. Sissy explains Rose's decision to leave Habit: "If people do have more than one life in a lifetime, they should be careful to make sure the different versions of the past never overlap. My mother had tried to do that, and when she knew she couldn't hold the two worlds apart anymore, she left" (Patchett 1992, 328). Patchett does not depict Rose as a simple coward or selfish shrew. Instead, she portrays her as a complex character whose anxieties about what it means to be a woman, mother, and wife in two different regions prove to be overwhelming. She cannot live in the Southwest constricted by the roles of wife and mother, and she manages to live only temporarily in Appalachia in these roles.

Overall, Rose's regionally gendered performativity is unintelligible to her and others, and leaves the reader wondering, much like Sissy, what actually happened in the distance between California and Kentucky. In Appalachia Rose forms temporary bonds that do not withstand the stress of Thomas'—her southern California past's—impending appearance. Kentucky is not her "terminal arrival." Leed describes the connection between terminal arrival, home, and identity: "In terminal arrivals—the arrival home, or

anywhere that creates the ties between person and place we call 'home'—the traveler forms what are in some sense permanent bonds, which presumably redefine the social and even the biological self and make the traveler a 'native'" (1991, 111). Rose redefines a regional social self in terms of how the community re-considers gendered norms of deportment. However, she never sees herself as a "native"; she does not identify as a Kentucky woman *or* a California woman, and the in-between space proves inhospitable for her.

Left to surmise what would have had to happen for Rose to remain in Kentucky, the reader can only guess where Rose's non-traditional migration narrative takes her next. Like Rose, Taylor in *Bean* is independent, determined, and sassy. As will be discussed in the following section, they experience regional relocation similarly and differently. A significant similarity is that by traveling Rose and Taylor subvert the idea "that an individual has one, real, consistent persona and character" (Leed 1991, 276), especially in regard to regionally gendered performativity. In addition, they both narrate in hindsight. This narrative style works because it offers characterizations of the women at the present time and then backtracks to show how their migration experiences affect regionally gendered identities. The most clearly marked difference is that Taylor's narrative features a "terminal arrival."

The Bean Trees

Bean tells the story of Missy (who eventually changes her name to Taylor), a girl who spends her childhood with her mother in rural Appalachia but is determined to leave Pittman County, Kentucky, in order to avoid what she sees as the "barefoot and pregnant"

fate of all women who stay (Kingsolver 1992, 3). On her solo trek west Taylor, who is in her early twenties, is asked unexpectedly to care for an "Indian child" by an anonymous woman she sees in a bar in Oklahoma (Kingsolver 1992, 18). She takes the child with her to Tucson, Arizona, where she finds work with a woman named Mattie and makes a home with another single mother named Lou Ann. Both women become her friends and family, and both play significant roles in helping Taylor destabilize boundaries of essentialist and constructed identities. As a result, Taylor, unlike Rose, finds a "terminal arrival" in Tucson and establishes a permanent position in the community there.

Taylor's emerging individual and communal identities are tied to local places—both Pittman County and Tucson—but bring into question regional stereotypes of women. Because of her willingness to question her own conceptions about both regions, Taylor creates an imagined regional community for herself in Tucson through which she challenges stereotypical distinctions between the Southwest and Appalachia. She enacts regionally gendered performativity in ways that are in large part recognized by those around her in Tucson, which helps her establish a secure position in the community. She eventually considers her region of relocation to be "home."

Missy defies regional and gender expectations in order to create her new identity as Taylor. She is "desperate to escape the pressures to conform to the woman's role in Pittman County, Kentucky" (Himmelwright 2007, 124). These roles, as Missy sees them, are to be married and pregnant, and she believes the possibility for any other kind of life in Pittman is slim. Living in Kentucky "threatens her vision of personal identity," and therefore "[f]light is essential" (Himmelwright 2007, 125). A teacher helps Missy secure employment at the local hospital, and after almost six years she saves enough money to

buy a car, in which she "intend[s] to drive out of Pittman County one day and never look back, except maybe for Mama" (Kingsolver 1992, 10).[13] Both Missy and Rose begin their journeys alone, driving toward unfamiliar territory, and both defy gendered expectations of women and mobility by demonstrating the audacity to drive alone, away from their families and homes and into new places and experiences. Missy sees her Volkswagen as a literal and figurative "vehicle out of a dead-end situation as well as a means to escape conventional domesticity" (Smyth 1999, 116-17). Chapter One of *Bean* is entitled "The One to Get Away"[14] because Missy believes she is escaping an undesirable and confining place—Appalachia in general and Kentucky in particular.

When Missy crosses the Pittman County line she changes her name to Taylor because she believes it is "time to make a clean break" (Kingsolver 1992, 11) from her past.[15] Since Taylor has never been outside of Kentucky, she "ha[s] no way of knowing why or how any particular place might be preferable to any other" (Kingsolver 1992, 12). Her migration to the West begins as a journey to a promised land, destination unknown but—she hopes—better than where she was. Before she arrives at her destination, however, she is confronted with the very situation she wants most to avoid—motherhood.

During a pit-stop in Oklahoma, a woman places a child in Taylor's car and asks Taylor to take care of her.[16] After a brief conversation in which Taylor conveys her doubts and disinclination, the woman leaves Taylor alone with the toddler (whom Taylor later names Turtle). This unexpected scenario particularly jars Taylor because she left Kentucky in large part to avoid having a child. She says: "'If I wanted a baby I would have stayed in Kentucky…I could have had babies coming out my ears by now'" (Kingsolver 1992, 18). While pressure to become a mother in Pittman might be stronger

than in other places, she realizes that leaving Appalachia does not ensure an escape from motherhood.

Taylor continues westward with Turtle in tow. She is heading into a hyper-masculinized region as a single woman, now a single mother, and the fact that Turtle is Indian plays a central role in the narrative: Taylor is confronted with immediate issues of region, gender, and race. Himmelwright argues that Kingsolver "evok[es] a nonwhite mythology which will allow for the participation of the female" in traditionally male-centered narratives of the West (2007, 122). She contends that "Kingsolver is able to explore a world which gives voice to the female through the Native American experience. Gaining access to a world and mythology which pre-exists the white male construction of adventure, she is able to navigate a space in which the female story has not yet been defined by the masculine voice" (Himmelwright 2007, 122). Taylor certainly has to negotiate her position as a woman in the West, but Himmelwright's claim that Taylor's narrative must be formed on the back of Native American culture is problematic.

Himmelwright's analysis pits against each other a reductive idea of Native American culture in general and a particular instance of Anglo-American male sexism in order to deploy "the Native American experience" as an antidote to Anglo-American sexism. Moreover, although Taylor and her mother claim to have enough blood to qualify as Cherokee (Kingsolver 1992, 13), Taylor does not identify as Native, and the power dynamics involved with a white woman's gaining agency by raising an Indian girl should not be overlooked. The insinuation that a Native child would have a better life with a random white woman—who does not even choose the position voluntarily—perpetuates the stereotypical assumption that Native Americans cannot take care of their

own children and that any white woman can substitute. Contrary to Himmelwright's position, Kristin Jacobson's concern about "the role fictional locales generally play in further whitewashing narratives" is valid (2010, 185).[17] In these ways *Bean* perpetuates racist stereotypes, but it also challenges norms of how families are created and sustained. Taylor cares for Turtle like her own mother did for her, which is a good example of intergenerational love passed on through unconventional mother-daughter family formations. Taylor provides Turtle with a comfortable and safe woman-centered home (similar to Saint Elizabeth's, with the exception of Son) at Lou Ann's house.

Prior to Taylor's account of arriving in Tucson, we are introduced to Lou Ann Ruiz, whose regionally gendered performativity can be read in contrast to Taylor's. Unlike Rose and Taylor, Lou Ann identifies with her region of origin. She "lived in Tucson, but thought of herself as just an ordinary Kentuckian a long way from home" (Kingsolver 1992, 24). After at least five years of living in Tucson, "it still surprised [Lou Ann] sometimes to open that window and not see Kentucky" (Kingsolver 1992, 62). She resists identification with her region of relocation and maintains that she is essentially Kentuckian, no matter where she lives. Sherry Booth addresses the complexity of essentialist and social constructionist identity formations by positing that "[w]e know intellectually that identity is a concept, fluid and multiple. It is not a tangible thing, something we can depend on to be there in the morning like the view from our window as we sip our first cup of coffee. But we also believe that we possess an identity, a core of who we are" (2010, 337). Some inherent difference does seem to set Lou Ann apart from those in her Southwest community. Bobby Bingo says to her: "You're not

from here? I didn't think so" (Kingsolver 1992, 61). Appalachian topography is an imagined constant for her, and Appalachian self-identification is a bedrock.

Lou Ann *feels* Kentuckian. In feminist theoretical terms, her identity would negatively be labeled "essentialist," in that it rests on her belief that she naturally possesses an essence of Kentucky. However, some women's experiences of migration cause them to identify more with their region of origin because only after leaving the area do they recognize their strong attachment to it. These circumstances can be affected by gender because it may be more difficult for women to develop their own sense of self while still embroiled in gendered expectations dominant in their home and early family life. Perhaps only after they leave the region of origin do they obtain the distance necessary to decide whether or not they identify with that region. For example, bell hooks claims she became "more consciously Kentuckian" after moving from Kentucky to California, and she contends that "[t]his is what the experience of exile can do, change your mind, utterly transform one's perception of the world of home. The differences geographical location imprinted on my psyche and habits of being became more evident away from home" (2009, 13). Hooks' observation parallels Rose's experience of understanding, only after she is in Kentucky, how California topography shaped her identity. And like hooks, Lou Ann's affiliation with her region of origin is strengthened after migration because only after leaving Appalachia does she realize that she identifies as an Appalachian woman.

Unlike Lou Ann, shortly after moving to Tucson Taylor begins to enact a regionally gendered performativity that draws from her identifications with both regions and her complex feelings of belonging (or not) in the Southwest. Taylor decides to end

her journey in Arizona because she is entertained by "a kind of forest" through which she drives where, instead of trees, "puffy-looking rocks shaped like roundish animals and roundish people" sat stacked on each other and "turned pink" in the sun (Kingsolver 1992, 35). The desert's surreal landscape is the opposite of what Taylor knows from Kentucky, and its novelty is reason enough for her to stay. Although Taylor remarks that here she feels like a visitor from another planet (Kingsolver 1992, 37), she finds independence and anonymity she did not have in Pittman: "In Tucson, it was clear that there was nobody overlooking us all. We would just have to find our own way" (Kingsolver 1992, 47). For Taylor, finding her own way includes the distance she needs from Kentucky in order to shape her own identity.

Being outside of her comfort zone excites her, and she feels that migration has relocated her geographically *and* temporally: "[L]iving in the hustle-bustle of downtown Tucson was like moving to a foreign country I'd never heard of. Or a foreign decade. When I'd crossed into Rocky Mountain Time, I had set my watch back two hours and got thrown into the future" (Kingsolver 1992, 46-7). Like Rose, Taylor describes her region of relocation as being like a foreign country, but Taylor adds a temporal dimension: "It's hard to explain how this felt. I went to high school in the seventies, but you have to understand that in Pittman County it may as well have been the fifties. Pittman was twenty years behind the nation in practically every way you can think of, except the rate of teenage pregnancies" (Kingsolver 1992, 47).[18] While in this project my main interest is to explore how gendered subject positions intersect regionally, Taylor's commentary on temporal intersection is intriguing. By using the notion of successive decades, she insinuates that Tucson is more sophisticated and advanced than Pittman. She expects a

narrative of progressive linearity in which "progress" equals "good," and good is symbolized by a lack of teenage pregnancies. Her remarks suggest that temporality and space affect one's enactment of gender and regional identity.

But her assumptions of progress are challenged during a conversation with a young server named Sandi. Upon finding out Taylor is from Kentucky, Sandi tells Taylor how lucky she is to have owned a horse. Taylor informs her that no one in Pittman could afford to own a horse. Incorrectly assuming that Taylor knows how to fry chicken, Sandi is confident that the restaurant would hire Taylor. But when Taylor finds out Sandi has a young child, the roles are reversed, and Taylor's stereotypes of women from and in non-Appalachia are challenged: "I had thought Pittman was the only place on earth where people started having babies before they learned their multiplication tables" (Kingsolver 1992, 51). Making Sandi's acquaintance debunks one of Taylor's regionally gendered expectations, as she begins to think about how her affiliations with both the Southwest and Appalachia intersect with her identity as a woman.

Soon after serving tables with Sandi, Taylor lands a job that shows her how gendered identity can be directly affected by geographic location. Like the continuous curves and budding leaves of McDowell's nodes, identity is constantly in flux and in transit; yet transformations may be temporarily halted in a particular place and time. Chapter One of *Bean* begins with information that becomes significant after Taylor finds a job with Mattie. Missy confesses that she has "been afraid of putting air in a tire ever since [she] saw a tractor tire blow up and throw Newt Hardbine's father over the top of the Standard Oil sign" (Kingsolver 1992, 1). She views the incident with Hardbine's father as the exact moment when she decides her future will not be like Newt's or his

father's: "But the day I saw his daddy up there like some old overalls slung over a fence, I had this feeling about what Newt's whole life was going to amount to, and I felt sorry for him. Before that exact moment I don't believe I had given much thought to the future" (Kingsolver 1992, 1). At this point, Missy is unsure of what she will do in life, but these ominous events in Pittman do not bode well for her possibilities in Kentucky.

After meeting Mattie in Tucson because she needs a new tire, Taylor is impressed with Mattie's position as owner of Jesus Is Lord Used Tires (JILUT): "I had never seen a woman with this kind of know-how. It made me feel proud, somehow. In Pittman if a woman had tried to have her own tire store she would have been run out of business. That, or the talk would have made your ears curl up like those dried apricot things" (Kingsolver 1992, 43-4). Instead of seeing Hardbine on the sign, when she is at JILUT she "look[s] up to see if there was anything tall overhead to get thrown up onto. There was nothing but clear blue sky" (Kingsolver 1992, 40). Because the clear blue sky frames her introduction to Mattie and her business, this scenario of possibility (unlike the one in Pittman) "allows Taylor a greater realization of just what women can accomplish" (Clarke 2007, 127-28). Taylor is astounded by Mattie's capability and confidence as a woman in the automotive repair industry. Mattie "is an inspiration to Taylor because…she does a job that would be done only by men in Taylor's home town" (O'Rourke 2003, 262-63). Taylor's awe is grounded in the specific place of Tucson during the time period of her recent arrival.

But also important is that this disbelief arises out of Taylor's comparison to her past experiences in Pittman. Both locations converge at the point in her life when she first meets Mattie, and this scenario exemplifies the *OED*'s first definition of node that

details a point of intersection. Himmelwright notes that, “[a]lthough Taylor’s mother is also depicted as a strong woman, community is not described as a source of support in Kentucky. In Tucson, Taylor finds a world where women aid and help those around them” (2007, 132). Mattie serves as a mother figure to Taylor in the Southwest. Taylor flourishes under Mattie’s mentorship and as a member of the JILUT crew, and the job enables her to be financially independent. What Taylor believed to be limitations on gender seem to be relegated to her experience as an Appalachian woman, for in Tucson her employment and involvement in community positively affect her identity as a woman. Taylor’s position vis-à-vis Tucson, Mattie, and women’s work can be understood concurrently as a point on a continuous curve of her life and as a distinct point from which Taylor matures and develops as a woman.[19]

An individual may perceive and therefore enact gender differently in a certain geographical location, and an individual may perceive and enact regional identity based on gender. In Tucson, Taylor works for Mattie as a capable tire-repair specialist, recognizing performativity of gender through her work because she is convinced she could not carry out this type of employment in Pittman. As affiliation with the region of origin can be strengthened once one leaves that area (Lou Ann), a parallel question would be how—or if—one could identify more as a woman once she leaves the confines of a regional set of gendered expectations (i.e., Taylor finds employment she believes would be denied to her in Pittman because of her gender). If so, Taylor would identify more as a woman when she becomes a tire-repair specialist, which runs contrary to gender norms that separate the gendered identity of a woman with that of a worker in the automotive repair industry. At JILUT Taylor is a Southwestern woman working on tires; in Pittman

she was an Appalachian woman afraid of them. However, Taylor does not experience these identities as distinctly divided. Instead, she begins to identify with both regions, and this dual regional identity offers her more possibilities for autonomy.

The second definition of node, which stresses its life-giving or cultivating activity, is applicable here. Taylor's regionally gendered performativity influences Lou Ann in developing hers as an Appalachian woman in the Southwest. Using the metaphor of the budding leaf we can think of these characters' senses of themselves and their relations to and within communities as outgrowths of their physical environments, and as extensions of their encounters with new experiences, acquaintances, and places. When Lou Ann and Taylor meet, they recognize each other as Appalachian women and bond over their similar positions as single mothers and migrants from Kentucky to Arizona.[20] After befriending and living with Taylor in Tucson, Lou Ann's identity transforms but still remains rooted in Appalachia.

For most of her life Lou Ann has lacked self-esteem, but she learns to become assertive and confident because of Taylor's influence. For instance, Lou Ann emphasizes how much the door handle at Fanny Heaven ("a combination nightclub and pornography shop" [Kingsolver 1992, 30]) offends her, and Taylor encourages her to "talk back to it" so that she exerts agency and does not let animosity consume her (Kingsolver 1992, 150). Lou Ann asks Taylor where she learned to be assertive, and Taylor replies: "Nutter school" (Kingsolver 1992, 150).[21] Taylor "may change her name and place, but she retains a strong sense of who she is and where she comes from. Indeed, her journey into the future encompasses a great deal of symbolic attachment to the past" (Clarke 2007, 127). She hones her resourcefulness and determination in Pittman, where she learns to

fend for herself as a young girl with no money to buy clothes. Lou Ann did not learn these lessons in Appalachia or the Southwest until she meets Taylor, who carries them with her to Tucson and incorporates a dual identification as Appalachian and Southwestern into her regionally gendered performativity. In a prime example of social construction of identity and behavior, Lou Ann enacts Taylor's teachings. She persuades Taylor to fight when Taylor feels defeated by Turtle's custody battle, and when she starts dating someone new, she says to Taylor: "I've gotten so brave hanging around you" (Kingsolver 1992, 230). Lou Ann identifies as an Appalachian woman and is more open to expanding her identity alongside someone from a similar positionality.

Therefore, Taylor's regionally gendered performativity influences Lou Ann because of their shared regional affiliation with Appalachia. Taylor's identity process shows that one can identify with both communities and cultures of regions of origin and relocation. While these processes run concurrently for Taylor, they seem to operate separately for Lou Ann. Taylor learns from both Mattie and Lou Ann because she identifies with both regions and is open to expanding her identity along those lines. In general Kingsolver "complicates the notion of community…by challenging the power that the community insider has over the outsider and providing an avenue for the outsider to become integrated into the community" (Magee 2008, 19). At stake for Taylor is her ability to deploy regionally gendered performativity in terms of her region of origin *and* relocation because she wants to become a member of her new community.

Taylor negotiates boundaries of insider/outsider in terms of region and race. In light of the third definition of nodes, which highlights how moments of intersectional experience profoundly affect individuals and their communities, issues of nationality and

race/ethnicity are foregrounded in scenes featuring Turtle and her Guatemalan friends Estevan and Esperanza. In a heated conversation with Estevan, Taylor compares her relocation experience with his Guatemala-to-U.S. journey. Like Rose, she describes how she feels like a foreigner in her own country:

> You think you're the foreigner here, and I'm the American….Sometimes I feel like I'm a foreigner too. I come from a place that's so different from here you would think you'd stepped right off the map into some other country where they use dirt for decoration and the national pastime is having babies. People don't look the same, talk the same, nothing. Half the time I have no idea what's going on around me here. (Kingsolver 1992, 135)

Allen's claim that for "[t]he majority of Anglo-Americans" (1997, 345) who move to the Southwest, "residing in the area is in many ways similar to entering a new country, one much like and yet palpably distinct from the one left behind" (1997, 346) corroborates Taylor's explanation. While Taylor's (and perhaps Allen's) statements could be dismissed as a perpetuation of stereotypes, the reader should consider that Taylor's observations, as a native Appalachian, reflect the way she sees Pittman. (As we have seen, some of her perspectives on Pittman are changed by living in Tucson.) Yet, Taylor and Estevan's motivations for leaving their region and country of origin are drastically different: Taylor excitedly leaves by choice to pursue a better life, while Estevan and his wife leave in order to stay alive. Taylor's response to Estevan's narrative of political exile is an example of the near-sightedness often complicit in collapsing analyses of intersectionality. Taylor equates her migration with his, but as a white woman remaining in the U.S., she does not experience issues of race and nationality like Estevan does and she soon sees these differences.[22]

Befriending the Guatemalan couple challenges Taylor's ideas about race, nationality, and region. Taylor, Turtle, Estevan, and Esperanza drive to Oklahoma so

Taylor can officially adopt Turtle by deceiving state officials.[23] Taylor can tell physical differences in Estevan and Esperanza when they drive into "the heart of the Cherokee Nation" and there are "fewer and fewer white people" (Kingsolver 1992, 204). She notices that "the relief showed in their bodies. I believe they actually grew taller. And Turtle fit right in too; this was her original home. I was the odd woman out" (Kingsolver 1992, 204). In this group, Taylor feels she is both an insider (i.e., she is from the U.S. and is with friends and family) and an outsider (i.e., she is white). Leed suggests that "[t]ravel transforms collective as well as individual identities" (1991, 271), and Taylor's experience as a white woman here exemplifies how location can change conceptualizations of who is in the racial "majority" or "minority" and highlights how arbitrary and relative these concepts are. Taylor's individual identity is transformed when she considers it in relation to the local collective in Oklahoma. As a white woman from a predominantly white community in Appalachia, Taylor is unfamiliar with feeling like "the odd woman out," but this experience shows her how conceptualizations of race vary depending on region.

Another example of interconnections between race and region arises in Lou Ann's frustration with her family's stereotypical attitudes toward Mexicans. When her mother and grandmother visit Tucson, she tries to explain how "there were so many Mexicans that people didn't think of them as a foreign race. They were doctors, bank clerks, TV personalities, and even owned hotels" (Kingsolver 1992, 27). Her mother and grandmother are reluctant to believe what they consider a drastic difference in population demographics: "[Lou Ann's mother], who lived in eastern Kentucky and had never seen a Mexican, thought Lou Ann was making this up" (Kingsolver 1992, 28). Having moved

to Tucson, Lou Ann perceives race differently than her family. Their conversation illustrates how regional location can shape and manipulate concepts of race and deployments of racism.

Identifications with and understandings of region, gender, and race can shift or solidify during and after migration. Overall Taylor's regionally gendered performativity is influenced by both Appalachia and the Southwest. In the dialectic relationship of challenging others' regionally gendered stereotypes and having her own challenged, Taylor's conception of the Southwest as a place completely different from Appalachia is de-romanticized. Therefore, she is able to consider both regions from practical perspectives and does not reject affiliation with her region of origin based on faulty preconceptions. She feels innately Appalachian in some regards, but she is also open to learning customs and cultures of the Southwest. Taylor's identity processes blur boundaries between essentialism and social construction by showing how she identifies with both regions of origin and relocation. Taylor, like Rose, becomes "a new social body within the niche of a particular locale" in the region of relocation, but unlike Rose she "establish[es] fixed psychosomatic bonds to land, soil, and topography" (Leed 1991, 112). Taylor feels that she is, in part, a woman attached to the physical geographic location of the Southwest. Lou Ann's identity process leans more toward what would be labeled essentialism in that she thinks of herself as inherently Appalachian, regardless of the fact that she has lived in the Southwest for a considerable amount of time. In short, consequences of migration can assist in shaping a dual regional identity (Taylor), or they can reinforce an affiliation with the region of origin (Lou Ann).

Taylor's regionally gendered performativity is intelligible to those in her region of relocation, which is her "terminal arrival" and becomes her "home."[24] She establishes permanent bonds of community and forms a non-traditional family, both of which assist her in shaping a new regionally gendered identity. Her narrative of identity formation differs from "stories of western male adventure. Rather than relying on the power of the individual and the individual's ability to conquer challenges on his own, Kingsolver creates a female character who is empowered and able to transform herself and others through the act of creation through community" (Himmelwright 2007, 134).

Taylor's community of relocation encourages her to grow as an Appalachian-Southwestern woman by recognizing her regionally gendered performativity. The communities of Habit and Saint Elizabeth's never lose their sense of Rose as extraordinary, but they accept her from a perspective of difference as one of their own. Rose's feelings of ambiguity and awkwardness contrast with Taylor's sense that she is "at home" in Arizona. Although their journeys end very differently, Rose and Taylor challenge expectations of women's roles and behavior via migration narratives in which they develop and deploy various enactments of regionally gendered performativity influenced by Appalachia and the Southwest.

Conclusion

Throughout this project I ask variations of the question: "How important is our sense of place to our conception of self?" (Inness and Royer 1997, 6). Investigations into how region and gender function in/between places expand our knowledge of formations of identity and community that blur boundaries between essentialism and

constructionism. This dissertation analyzes contemporary narratives in which Appalachia and the Southwest are juxtaposed as sites of origin and relocation in order to trace transformations of women's identities and community allegiances in each region. "Engendering Regions" argues that women's narratives portray emerging individual and communal identities that are tied to local places yet resist traditional gender stereotypes. These narratives demystify, and ideally encourage readers to reconsider and redress, systems of privilege and oppression.

Along the lines of Massey's idea of "a progressive sense of place" (1994, 156), places are not constituted in and of themselves, but exist always in relation to other places and locations outside of themselves. "Region" is difficult to define, since it is a concept rooted in both the actual and imaginary,[25] and because the areas demarcated as regional are "generated by constantly evolving systems of government, economy, migration, event, and culture" (Ayers and Onuf 1996, 4). This project centers on the regional areas of Appalachia and the Southwest while acknowledging that these regions are not contained in isolation from places and social relations not perceived to be within their borders. Patterns of juxtapositions between Appalachia and the Southwest in contemporary women's novels call for this kind of comparative study that highlights region and gender.

The analyses in this study portray how region and gender are performed by women within their regions and communities of origin and how this performativity functions when they migrate. Such enactments depict what I term "regionally gendered performativity." Regionally gendered performativity pinpoints ways in which women protagonists form identities and community allegiances that are both rooted in and

resistant to local norms of behavior. By embodying *and* defying such norms, these women protagonists problematize Butlerian theories of performativity and the ubiquitous essentialist/social constructionist dichotomy.

"Engendering Regions" also examines ways in which regionally gendered performativity affects community. At a basic level regional formation is similar to community formation in that "constructing regions centrally involves culturally charged, socially based acts of inclusion and exclusion" (Ryden 2011, 18). I have shown in this project how women's regionally gendered performativity facilitates or impedes community membership. All of the protagonists in this study negotiate issues of individualism and coalition; and "[g]iven the political impetus of feminism, which gave rise to the adage that 'sisterhood is powerful,' it should not be surprising that many feminist writers privilege the collective in their work at the same time that they insist on the right of each individual to her (or his) own quest" (Phillips 1998, 124). Feminist literary readings of contemporary portrayals of region, gender, and spatiality contribute to our knowledge of how intersections of identity and community operate on a daily basis.

Fictional spaces opened by these novels encourage readers to imagine and ideally implement alternatives to current systems of privilege and oppression. Literature reflects the actual world as we know it *and* enables us to experience realities other than our own. Individuals' negotiations of personal and communal identities can reflect larger-scale issues of nationality; Morrison reminds us that "cultural identities are formed and informed by a nation's literature" (1992, 39). Because regional literature is part of this national body of work, its influence can extend beyond the boundaries of the given region to other regions, the nation as a whole, and beyond national boundaries.[26]

Tracking how literature reflects regional changes can help us understand new formations of identity and community that are continually emerging. Interconnections of region and gender vary across times, places, and individuals, and the configurations they take are numerous, possibly infinite. Investigations into how gendered and geographic subject positions intersect yield insight into how people and place coexist. Such investigations suggest ways that these interrelationships, on which we depend for survival, may flourish. I hope that my discussions pique interest in and shed light on the importance of understanding how regional space—particularly topography and climate—are integral to women's identity and community formation.

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[1] In April 2010 Arizona Governor Jan Brewer "signed the nation's toughest bill on immigration into law" (Archibold 2010). Sparking debate and protest, the law "make[s] the failure to carry immigration documents a crime and give[s] the police broad power to detain anyone suspected of being in the country illegally. Opponents have called it an open invitation for harassment and discrimination against Hispanics regardless of their citizenship status" (Archibold 2010). Shortly thereafter, in May 2010, Gov. Brewer signed into law "a bill that aims to ban ethnic studies in Arizona schools" (Santa Cruz 2010). Controversially, "HB 2281 bans schools from teaching classes that are designed for students of a particular ethnic group, promote resentment or advocate ethnic solidarity over treating pupils as individuals….The bill was written to target the Chicano, or Mexican American, studies program in the Tucson school system, said state Supt. of Public Instruction Tom Horne" (Santa Cruz 2010).

[2] In a 2003 U.S. Census Bureau publication Franklin reports: "The highest levels of both in- and outmigration [sic] of all four census regions occurred in the South. Just over 5 million people moved from the Northeast, the Midwest, and the West to the South between 1995 and 2000. During the same period, 3.2 million individuals left the South for one of the other regions. The resulting net immigration rate was 20.2, meaning that the South gained 20.2 people through migration for every 1,000 individuals living there in 1995" (2003, 2). In comparison Franklin writes: "Although the second-highest level of immigration was in the West, at 2.7 million people, this figure was balanced by an almost equivalent number of outmigrants, creating a net immigration rate for the West of just 0.2" (2003, 2). No "Appalachian" region is designated in this report, but "the South" includes the majority of "Appalachian" states: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia

(Franklin 2003, 2). It is surprising to see Delaware in this list. "The West" includes Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming (Franklin 2003, 2). Variation among regional demarcations noted in this dissertation reflects the difficulty in precisely defining region. For additional information see Lichter et al. (2005), Pippert (2006), and Travis (2007).

[3] Hereafter referred to as *Patron*.

[4] Hereafter referred to as *Bean*.

[5] The spirit of place and one's attachments to it can disrupt traditional notions of temporal, historical, and psychic distance. Dyer describes this phenomenon in regard to his experiences traveling: "If successive phases of history can be imagined as sharing a common space, then perhaps, by analogy, chronologically distinct experiences of place—Rome, Detroit, Leptis Magna, Amsterdam, New Orleans—also occur in some ways simultaneously. If the successive can be experienced simultaneously, then perhaps distance can be experienced as immanence. They might be tied to specific locations, but in 'the sphere of the mind,' some experiences—separated, originally, by years as well as miles—end up sharing a single location and a single instant" (2003, 248).

[6] Pryse (2000) discusses how standpoints deployed during interactions between Appalachians and non-Appalachians in Murfree's work exemplify Pratt's ideas of "contact zones."

[7] See MacCannell (1976), Russell (1986), Birkett (1989), Leed (1991), and Roberson (1998).

[8] Two notable exceptions occur in Dorothy Allison's *Cavedweller*, where Delia leaves Los Angeles to return home to Cayro, Georgia, and also in *The Fool's Progress*, in which Henry leaves Arizona to return home to Stump Creek, West Virginia. Unlike Rose, Delia and Henry are "going home" to Appalachia.

[9] Leed notes that "[t]here is not yet a psychology of travel, but if there were it would have to focus upon the pleasures inherent, for some, in motion: its autotelic characteristics, the manner in which passage through space shapes the experience of time and perception in general" (1991, 129).

[10] One of the only intimate experiences they share is when Rose teaches Sissy how to drive, telling her daughter that "[d]riving is the most important thing you can learn….It's the secret of the universe" (Patchett 1992, 286). While Sissy enjoys these rare occasions, overall she harbors resentment and anger toward Rose. In one episode Sissy fantasizes: "I'd go right up to her and tell her she could go to hell for all I cared. She'd done a rotten job. She had never for a minute put me first. Jesus, look around you, I'd say to her. Saint Elizabeth's is full of girls who can't raise their children. At least they're kind enough to give them away" (Patchett 1992, 274). Fleeting moments of intimacy, based on Rose's teaching her how to escape, do not provide a mother-daughter bond for Sissy.

[11] Palencia describes how hearing stories of leaving and staying in Appalachia influence how one learns to live in the place: "While I learned from my father all that was good about subsistence farming and life in an isolated Appalachian community, his sister, my late aunt Glenith, told a different tale—and told it with determination. The stories of those who leave are different from the stories of those who stay. And Aunt Glenith left, as fast as she could. My father and my aunt taught me two opposing but inseparable ways of being from Appalachia" (1998, 202).

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[12] Neither Thomas nor Sissy suspects that they are biological father and daughter.
[13] When Rose leaves Marina del Rey she feels she has to cut ties with her mother completely: "If I gave up the thing I loved most in the world, then maybe God would respect my decision" (Patchett 1992, 32). Missy leaves under very different circumstances: she talks with her mother about moving, she is not pregnant, and she does not feel ashamed. She does feel some guilt, however, because she loves her mother. Rose's mother does not know about Rose's imminent departure, but Missy's mother is supportive of Missy's desire for a different life and wishes her the best on the trip out West.
[14] Rose also says she "wanted to get away" (Patchett 1992, 50).
[15] She takes the name of the town where she first runs out of gas; she shortens Taylorville to Taylor.
[16] Taylor guesses the child's age as "[s]omewhere between a baby and a person" (Kingsolver 1992, 17). A doctor in Tucson decides she is about three years old (Kingsolver 1992, 123).
[17] But Jacobson does not dismiss Kingsolver's body of work: "While racist errors in her early fiction undermine her progressive political goals, these novels still accomplish important political work" (2010, 185).
[18] Although outside the scope of this chapter, an analysis of why rural Kentucky is portrayed in both *Bean* and *Patron* as being a location in which an inordinate number of pregnant girls and women live could shed light on associations between women's (pregnant) bodies and rural space.
[19] The sphere of the workplace may be one through which people are introduced to a new region. Gender, of course, plays a prominent role in who works and how this facilitates or impedes their settlement in the new region. In a study of Appalachia-to-northeast Ohio migrants, Feather notes: "The male migrant became assimilated into the new culture rather quickly by virtue of the workplace….For the migrant's wife, however, assimilation was a slower process" (1998, 5).
[20] Their "hometowns in Kentucky were separated by only two counties" (Kingsolver 1992, 72).
[21] Taylor explains that "nutters" is the nickname given to "the kids that lived in the country" in Kentucky who "would pick walnuts to earn money for school clothes" (Kingsolver 1992, 139). They were outcasts.
[22] From seeing the hardships Estevan and Esperanza endure, Taylor realizes that im/migration is not always desirable or positive.
[23] Jacobson argues that Kingsolver "consciously uses white privilege against the system to obtain the illegal adoption [of Turtle], and yet the novel still fails to consider fully the implications of Taylor's guardianship of the Native American child" (2010, 186-87).
[24] Taylor frequently refers to Tucson, Arizona, and the Southwest as "home" (for example, see pages 217, 225, 229, and 232). Welty acknowledges that "home" can be a location other than that of one's birth: "It is through place that we put out roots, wherever birth, chance, or fate or our traveling selves set us down" (1990, 132-33).
[25] Limerick asserts that "[r]egion is a mental act and region is real, at one and the same time" (1996, 103).

[26] Pryse suggests Murfree's fiction provides a global perspective by helping us "to question…ways in which the contrast between America and Appalachia becomes a metaphor for the larger contrast between the United States and our own 'cultural imperialism' beyond our borders" (2000, 211).

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