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Piece of the Berlin Wall at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, presented to him on 12 April 1990.

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poetical conventions.[46] Some intellectuals looked at Rimbaud, with his *alchimie verbale*, as at the real creator of a new art, and set his courage against Laforgue's incapability.[47] Gertrude Stein probably knew this, because many poets and writers of her times were regular visitors of the Saturday evening meetings in 27 Rue de Fleurus. The opinion Stein had of herself, on the contrary, was quite high: she thought she was a real modernist, breaking with the traditions of the previous century to mark the beginning of a new age of literary creation:

> Gertrude Stein had written the story of Melanctha the negress, the second story of Three Lives which was the first definite step away from the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century in literature.[48]

Again, two opposites seem to coexist in the same work: a poet who had perceived the necessity of changing literature but had not been brave enough to do that to the end, and a writer who, despite the indifference of the critics of her times, paved the way for modernism. If we consider a last possibility, then, and imagine that Gertrude Stein identified in Laforgue the burden of those who did not dare to create innovations, in the use of the epigraph there could be one of her most hermetic provocations, to which her readers are quite used: on the first page of *Three Lives* there is the last example of nineteenth-century prose, in the pages that follow a new literary epoch begins.

46 See *ibid.*, p. 115.

47 See Jean Paul Crespelle, *La vie quotidienne à Montmartre au temps de Picasso* (1905-10), Paris: Hachette, 1978, Italian translation by M. Grazia Meriggi, *La vita quotidiana a Montmartre ai tempi di Picasso*, Milan: Rizzoli, 1987, p. 9.

48 Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, p. 61.

'I ain't never seen a nigger': the discourse of denial in Lee Smith's *The Devil's Dream*[1]

Daniel T. Stein

Abstract

This essay investigates the marginalization of African American musical culture in Appalachian native Lee Smith's novel The Devil's Dream (1992). It contrasts the author's fictional treatment of country-music history with musicological and historical documentation of cross-cultural interaction between black and white folk musicians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In particular, the essay traces a discourse of denial through which the first-person narrators of the novel negate black influences while implicitly acknowledging them.

Keywords

Lee Smith
The Devil's Dream
Southern regionalism
Country music history
Denial of black presence

Workings of denial and the Africanist presence

> [T]he subject of the dream is the dreamer. The fabrication of an Africanist persona is reflexive; an extraordinary meditation on the self; a powerful exploration of the fears and desires that reside in the writerly consciousness. It is an astonishing revelation of longing, of terror, of perplexity, of shame, of magnanimity. It requires hard work *not* to see this.[2]

The uneasy denial of an African American presence in the fictional Appalachia of Lee Smith's novel *The Devil's Dream* is best understood through Toni Morrison's deconstruction of literary whiteness and her rereading of American literature with its close connections to a 'black presence' in America. Smith creates an assortment of first-person narratives told by fictional characters; some of them are based on historical figures who recount the story of country music and its developments among white Appalachian family musicians as an exclusively 'white' phenomenon. In *Playing in the Dark*, Morrison laments the conventional 'knowledge' among literary critics, which 'holds that traditional, canonical American literature is free of, uninformed, and unshaped by the four-hundred-year-old presence of, first, Africans and then African-Americans in the United States'.[3] Morrison continues: '[S]uch knowledge assumes that the characteristics of our national literature emanate from a particular "Americanness" that is separate from and unaccountable to this presence.'[4] Tracing the establishment of literary traditions from the very beginnings of colonial literature, Morrison discerns a continuum of influence that this 'Africanist presence' has exerted on constructions of 'whiteness' and 'Americanness': 'Through significant and

1 An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 'Southern Writers, Southern Writing' Conference at the University of Mississippi in July 2002. Winfried Herget's seminar on 'Regionalism in American Literature and Culture', held at Johannes-Gutenberg-Universität, Mainz, in 1999-2000, inspired the following investigation of *The Devil's Dream*'s politics of racial absence.

2 Italics in the original, Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, New York: Vintage, 1992, p. 17.

3 Morrison, pp. 4-5. See also Shelley Fisher Fishkin, 'Interrogating "Whiteness," Complicating "Blackness":

underscored omissions, startling contradictions, heavily nuanced conflicts, through the way writers peopled their works with the signs and bodies of this presence - one can see that a real or fabricated Africanist presence was crucial to their sense of Americanness.'[5]

Morrison's observations illuminate the marginalized position of African Americans and the denied influence of black modes of expressivity on the Anglo-Saxon mountain culture portrayed in *The Devil's Dream*. African Americans appear in the stories of the Appalachian narrators mainly as 'niggers'; they never speak and are never granted a voice of their own. This ambiguous position - neither wholly excluded nor allowed into the narrative realm as subjects rather than objects[6] - evokes a quality of Americanness in the self-definitions and the music of the white mountaineers that purports to be separated (geographically as well as culturally) from the Africanist presence in American literature and culture. Since black musicians are neither completely banned from the text nor given significant space and attention, simple assessments of exclusion must be substituted with Morrison's 'significant and underscored omissions, [the] startling contradictions' that characterize Smith's literary involvement with a 'fabricated Africanist presence'.[7]

Morrison's criticisms inform the following analysis of workings of denial in *The Devil's Dream*, which underlie the marginalization of 'black' contributions to country music as they appear in the accounts of Smith's storytellers and as they are reproduced by the author herself through her choice of speakers, narrative perspective, and setting. Even if, as one might argue, Smith's historical fiction substitutes the multicultural origins of country music with a depiction of the 'authentic' thoughts and words of isolated mountain musicians, her narrative grapples with its invocation of a 'fabricated' presence or, more aptly, with an acknowledgement of a black influence on Appalachian mountain life through an insistence on its absence.

In an essay titled 'Southern Exposure', Smith contends 'that the whole South runs on denial ... The traditionally Southern way to handle problems is by not mentioning them, the very definition of *denial*'. Talking about her own family, she mentions sex, death, mental illness, politics, and divorce as topics that 'had been edited right out of the family ...'[8] Absent from her enumeration are the ambiguous attitudes toward African Americans that the speakers in *The Devil's Dream* express and which are deeply embedded in the text. As the passage from *Playing in the Dark* quoted at the beginning of this essay suggests, Smith's treatment of the African American presence should be seen as an extension of the writer's own struggle with what being an American in the South means. If Morrison is correct in assuming that the portrayal of blacks in the fiction of white writers is a reflexive, an 'extraordinary meditation on the self' and 'a powerful exploration of the fears and desires that reside in the writerly consciousness', then we cannot ignore the problematic implications that the denial of the influence of black musicians

Remapping American Culture', *American Quarterly*, 47: 3 (September 1995), pp. 428-466.

4 Morrison, p. 5.

5 Morrison, p. 6.

6 Henry Louis Gates, Jr., calls the African American struggle a 'perilous journey from object to subject'. See 'Introduction: On Bearing Witness', *Bearing Witness: Selections from African-American Autobiography in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., New York: Pantheon, 1991, p. 7.

7 Morrison, p. 6.

8 Italics in the original. Lee Smith, 'Southern Exposure', no date, no page, 28 May 2002. http://www.leesmith.com/exposure.html.

on country music and on Appalachia in general have on the authorial position from which Smith writes.[9]

We can understand the concept of denial in Lee Smith's fiction as a continuous repression of memories of (racial) conflict that the narrators have not been able to resolve and which remain a significant disturbance in their lives. A number of critics have written on the practice of negation (the verbal expression of denial) in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), and we can utilize some of their ideas for our discussion of *The Devil's Dream*. Winfried Herget detects a paradox in the linguistic phenomenon of the negation: '[I]n words something comes into existence by the assertion of its non-existence, something becomes a mental presence by the linguistic act which posits its absence.'[10] Thus, when Alice Bailey, one of Smith's narrators, states, 'I ain't never seen a nigger' (note the vernacular double negative 'ain't never'), she acknowledges the presence of African Americans by insisting on their absence. She does this with the objective of satisfying the people present at her act of speaking: '[I]n order to make sense, such negations have to be related to some expectancy. In a communicative act they have to be interpreted in terms of the underlying expectations - the implicit assumptions - on the part of the speaker/writer, or in terms of what the listener/reader is presupposed to expect.'[11]

These social forces, safeguarding the realm of acceptable speech, are supported by psychological factors. François Pitavy maintains in his reading of *Absalom, Absalom!* that 'a negative statement allows the analyst to have access to what has been repressed: the negation lifts the repression, yet without acceptance of the repressed material.'[12] Translating Freudian theory into the context of Faulkner's literary South, Herget detects workings of denial that reappear in *The Devil's Dream*. He notes about Rosa Coldfield, one of the characters in *Absalom, Absalom!*, that

> [b]y denying certain hopes, fears, and intentions, she is compelled to acknowledge them. Taken as a strategy of evasion, her negations can be interpreted in light of Freud's observation that negation serves to express the suppressed. Furthermore, in the process of accumulating negations, imagination and language tend to turn upon themselves. The way in which experience is made up in the telling assumes a greater significance than the actual experience it refers to may have had.[13]

The repeated marginalization of African Americans and their music in the accounts of *The Devil's Dream*'s storytellers suggest that the limited impact of black culture on the narrative universe of the novel has taken on such tremendous weight because it has been denied and wished away for so long and with such vehemence. Pitavy's statement that 'negativity can be seen as the unconscious of discourse - unconscious, but existing as a constituent', comes to mind here.[14]

9 Morrison, p. 17.

10 Winfried Herget, 'The Poetics of Negation in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*', in *Faulkner's Discourse: An International Symposium*, ed. Lothar Hönnighausen, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1989, p. 34.

11 Herget, pp. 33-34.

12 François Pitavy, 'Some Remarks on Negation and Denegation in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*', in *Faulkner's Discourse*, p. 25.

13 Herget, p. 34.

14 Pitavy, p. 25. Roberto Maria Dainotto connects Freud with regionalism differently. Freud, Dianotto explains, imagines the 'psyche as a "place" where all historical epochs can still be admired ...' For Smith's narrators, storytelling is a folkloric version of psychoanalysis, just as the writing of historical novels might be comprehended as a search for regional origins and their 'eternal availability'. See '"All the Regions Do Smilingly Revolt": The Literature of Place and Region', *Critical Inquiry*, 22: 3 (Spring 1996): p. 499.

In *The Devil's Dream*, we can find residues of these repressed experiences. The storytellers feel the need to deny their connections with African American culture because black music is an integral part of their own music-making traditions; it is reflected in the country music they play and in their definitions of community. Racial inclusion and interaction, however, clash with the narrative of Anglo-Saxon genealogy, racial purity, and social stability that is becoming more and more essential with the growing impact of industrialization and modernization, which threaten to overthrow traditional life in the mountains.

Beginning the narrative in the nineteenth century, before the Civil War, and ending it in the 1970s, Smith tells more than the story of the Bailey family: She depicts country music from its infancy to its recent forms and ponders the monumental transitions the American South has undergone in the twentieth century. Smith shows a secluded society of rural Appalachian mountain folk who fight social change and embrace a vicious brand of cultural and religious conservatism when they are faced with modernization, commercialized entertainment, and racial integration. The blurring of cultural, regional, and racial identities endangers the stability of the mountain society, and it is therefore perceived as a threat by its members, who, because of their past of relative social isolation, eye the increasing dismantling of racial boundaries with suspicion and fear. Since *The Devil's Dream* takes the story of country music as its main subject, we must also investigate if Smith's focus on the Appalachian Mountains as an exclusively Anglo-Saxon birthplace of country music constitutes a form of historical reductionism - a neglect of country music's multi-regional and multi-racial roots.

Smith refers to the Appalachian mountain hollers (the small and isolated valleys between mountains) and the poor south-west Virginian valley in which the narrated action of *The Devil's Dream* unfolds as 'an almost secret South'.[15] In terms of social and cultural life, they present a unique setting: '[O]ur formidable geography acted as a natural barrier for so long - keeping others out, holding us in, allowing for the development of our rich folk culture, our distinctive speech patterns, our strong sense of tradition and our radical individualism. Appalachian people are more rooted than other Southerners.' These other Southerners, Smith explains, belong to the novels of Faulkner and are part of a South characterized by slavery and an attachment of people 'to the soil in a mystical blood-bound Faulknerian way'.[16] Appalachian mountain folk, we are told, have nothing in common with the Deep South:

> ... Appalachia has no resemblance to the rest of the South. I grew up in the mountains, so a lot of my experience is very different from the great ... Deep South writers ... [T]hat has given me a wonderful source for my fiction. Very little about Appalachia is like the Deep South - I mean we never had any black people, we never had any racial guilt ...[17]

15 Lee Smith, 'White Columns and Marble Generals', no date, no page, 28 May 2002. http://www.leesmith.com/columns.html. Wolfram and Christian define the boundaries of the area: '[T]he area most typically referred to as *Appalachia* ... encompass[es] parts of Kentucky, Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and all of West Virginia.' Italics in the original, *Appalachian Speech*, Arlington: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1976, p. 5. Jocelyn Hazelwood Donlon adds, 'Appalachia, a distinctive cultural region, extends throughout the central and southern highlands of the Blue Ridge and Smoky Mountain ranges, the Allegheny and Cumberland plateaus, and the Great Valley in between ...' See 'Hearing Is Believing: Southern Racial Communities and Strategies of Story-Listening in Gloria Naylor and Lee Smith', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 41: 1 (Spring 1995): p. 33.

16 Smith, 'White Columns'.

17 Quoted in Claudia Loewenstein, 'Unshackling the Patriarchy: An Interview with Lee Smith', *Conversations with Lee Smith*, ed. Linda Tate, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001/1993, p. 111.

Disassociating the Appalachian hollers from the Southern histories of racism and slavery enables Smith to purge her fiction from what Henry Louis Gates, Jr., calls a 'burden of the past [that] plays itself out rather differently in the white and black literary traditions'.[18] Gates argues that 'canonized texts and canonical critical interpretations can prove to be ... delimiting ways of seeing and restricting modes of analysis. The curse ..., then, is the presence of an enshrined collective cultural memory, one that can confine and delimit just as surely as it preserves continuity and enables the extension of tradition.'[19] The 'collective cultural memory' resurrected and celebrated in *The Devil's Dream* enacts this fight for an extension of tradition: on the part of the fictional storytellers, who face a fading Appalachian culture, as much as through Smith's historical fiction, which transports her conception of the Appalachian past to our reading about it in the present. Those seeking access to an African American collective cultural memory, however, are confronted with its absence.[20]

Smith's depiction of the Appalachian Mountains is at odds with studies of the region's demographics in the nineteenth century, and it can be perceived both as a refutation of Appalachia's involvement in, or at least knowledge of, slavery and racism - a rejection of regional origins contaminated with negative attitudes against blacks - and as an attempt to allocate the roots of country music in the family traditions of white mountaineers. John C. Inscoe cites 'a number of studies in recent years [that] have effectively demolished the myth that African Americans were a negligible presence in Appalachia. Slavery existed in every county in Appalachia in 1860, and the region as a whole included a black populace, free and slave, of over 175,000.'[21] Inscoe concludes his reading of Appalachian attitudes in the nineteenth century by stating that '[d]espite demographic deviations in their racial makeup and their political alienation from the South's dominant slaveocracy, white highlanders' views of African Americans in theory and treatment of them in practice were for the most part well within the mainstream of attitudes and behavior elsewhere in the South ...'[22]

Due to its narrative perspective, *The Devil's Dream* faces an intriguing paradox. Moulding her fiction closely around folkloric knowledge of mountain life, Smith recreates the world-views of characters who only want to tell a partial story. This story rings true for those who share the narrators' views, and it resurrects voices that have been silenced in many discussions of Southern music - women are tradition-bearers and the creative well for the music, but their stories of sexual subjugation and hard work have often been sacrificed for male perspectives.[23] However, Smith establishes the 'white ethnic culture' of Appalachia only by reiterating the silencing of another group of speakers: Southern black musicians.[24] Due to their geographic isolation, the mountaineers cannot explain the interweaving of musical styles that occurred in times of slavery; they are often ignorant of interracial musical cross-fertiliza-

18 Gates, p. 5.

19 Gates, p. 5.

20 Elsewhere, Gates writes about race as 'an invisible quantity, a persistent yet implicit presence' in the literature of the United States. See 'Introduction', in *"Race," Writing, and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985, p. 2.

21 In addition, 'no area of Virginia saw more lynchings than did its mountain counties.' John C. Inscoe, 'Race and Racism in Nineteenth-Century Southern Appalachia: Myths, Realities, and Ambiguities', *Appalachia in the Making: The Mountain South in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Mary Beth Pudup, Dwight B. Billings, and Altina L. Waller, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995, pp. 106, 120. Bruce E. Baker documents how racial practices are conserved in musical idioms in 'North Carolina Lynching Ballads', *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South*, ed. W. Fitzhugh Brundage, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997, pp. 219-45. David C. Hsiung deconstructs 'Appalachia and its accompanying stereotypes' by looking at roads in Appalachia between 1780 and 1800. Acknowledging differences in accessibility and degrees of isolation, he nonetheless concludes: 'By the turn of the

tion in other regions of the country. Moreover, the restrictive social codes of their immediate community forbid them to acknowledge any form of cultural interaction with racial Others.[25]

Smith has given a fictional voice to the 'other South' by letting her characters recount experiences in the vernacular. Their stories occupy a curious position between oral history, a search for a past that is perceived as 'true', and Smith's own vision of Appalachia expressed within the fictional world of the text. Smith positions herself in the role of the participant historian who seeks to keep alive history by translating the personal recollections and stories of actual people into a fictional narrative. In her interview with Claudia Loewenstein, she states: 'Everything I write, particularly all the mountain stuff, is really in this attempt ... to set down things I've heard about - the way it was ... Almost nothing is made up.' Talking specifically about *The Devil's Dream*, Smith claims, 'I mean, it's true, it's true.'[26]

This 'truth', however, is the selective and communal truth of folklore and recalls Zora Neale Hurston's evocation of a particularly female narrative truth for Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*: 'Now, women forget all those things they don't want to remember and remember everything they don't want to forget. The dream is the truth.'[27] George Lipsitz regards the political and historical potential of a so-called 'counter-memory' expressed by writers like Hurston as 'a way of remembering and forgetting that ... forces revisions of existing histories by supplying new perspectives about the past' and as an act of remembering which 'focuses on localized experiences with oppression, using them to reframe and refocus dominant narratives purporting to represent universal experience'.[28] This 'counter-memory' exists in *The Devil's Dream* in the form of an uneasy stand-off between new perspectives about the past (challenging 'hillbilly' stereotypes and the silencing of women) and the dominant narrative of racism and denial that the Appalachian narrators appropriate for their own cultural and social objectives.[29]

Therefore, the invented first-person accounts in *The Devil's Dream* should be read in connection with ethnomusicological studies of country music. Oral and folklore historians bring a natural level of suspicion to their 'texts', and the theoretical frameworks established in their scholarship prove helpful in the search for a repressed and denied presence of black music in *The Devil's Dream*. Ronald J. Grele cautions: 'The way in which an event is remembered, ... its importance, and the significance of the role the individual talking played in that event are subject to a variety of interpretations. The discussion is always filtered through memory and ideology ...'[30] Storytellers speak their own histories and thereby participate in the construction of a tribal history. They seek, in Jocelyn Hazelwood Donlon's words, 'to secure ownership of events that belong to them', invoking their 'own authority as teller' in the same way in which Smith herself is seeking control over the representation of Appalachia.[31]

nineteenth century ... these Appalachian residents were "connected" with others in significant ways.' See '"Seeing" Early Appalachian Communities through the Lenses of History, Geography, and Sociology', in *The Southern Colonial Backcountry: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Frontier Communities*, ed. David Colin Crass, *et al.*, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998, pp. 162, 172.

22 Inscoe, p. 123.

23 Many critical evaluations of Smith's work deal with the author's construction of femininity. Corinne Dale discusses issues of gender and sexuality from a psychoanalytical perspective in 'The Power of Language in Lee Smith's *Oral History*', *Southern Quarterly*, 28: 2 (Winter 1990), pp. 21-34. Rebecca Smith reduces the novel mostly to gender issues while overlooking the racial dynamics that intersect with patriarchy and female suppression. See 'Writing, Singing and Hearing a New Voice: Lee Smith's *The Devil's Dream*', in *Southern Quarterly*, 32: 2 (Winter 1994), pp. 48-62.

24 Smith opposes the assumption that the South is a homogenous region and stresses her characters' status as outsiders. Lizzy, who is Nonnie and Ezekiel's daughter, recalls seeing the Baileys playing

Mark A. Sanders formulates a method of interpreting transcribed oral histories by reading between the lines as well as beyond the surface story. He urges critics to 'read for the silences, the fissures, for disjuncture and the moments of upheaval the method of composition necessarily creates.'[32] Grele's and Sanders's observations offer possibilities of rereading *The Devil's Dream* in order to excavate what remains untold, repressed, and denied by contrasting narrative dynamics with scholarship on the cross-cultural constitution of country music.

The Devil's Dream and music history

African American influences on Appalachian music can be divided into four stages, which Robert Cantwell summarizes as follows:

> Deeply conservative by nature and protected by isolated circumstances from sweeping or cataclysmic change, Appalachian music displays an ontogeny of black influences that represents stages in the life of mountain culture, from early Piedmont emigrations, to the visits of minstrel shows on the riverboats, to the incursion of the railroads and, finally, of radio and phonograph.[33]

The first stage of black cultural influence on America began before the settlement of the Appalachian hollers. The roles and functions of music in African cultures and the transmutations of African traditions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in America established a black sensibility in American music. Cantwell cites a number of references to black musical activity by writers as prominent as Thomas Jefferson, who reported in 1781: 'The instrument proper to them [slaves] is the Banjar, which they brought hither from Africa, and which is the original of the guitar, its chords [strings] being precisely the four lower chords of the guitar.'[34] In addition to introducing the banjo to American culture, black slaves saw in music a process of communication and creative improvisation that included polyrhythms, syncopation, and audience participation, all of which could be found in many early forms of folk and country music.[35]

In *The Devil's Dream's* first segment, we listen to several speakers structure their lives and the life of the community in narrative form. Although fiddle-playing, singing, and dancing are presented in Old Man Ira Keen's story as the guiding forces for the Malone family and for himself, there are no references to slave fiddlers despite the fact that they, according to Bill C. Malone, 'were omnipresent in the South in the nineteenth century', an assessment corroborated by Robert B. Winans's study of references to fiddle- and banjo-playing in the narratives of ex-slaves.[36] 'The Devil's Dream', the song that is played and sung in Smith's novel and which gives it its title, is not only a Scottish air but is also quoted by Winans among the tunes former slaves were playing in the late nineteenth century.[37] Southern musical traditions, as 'The

'Melungeon Man': '[T]hat ballad captures such a feeling of *otherness*, of being outside, cut off from the rest of humanity, that I never heard them sing it without feeling a chill.' Italics in the original. Lee Smith, *The Devil's Dream*, New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1992, p. 104.

25 See Eudora Welty's 'Powerhouse' for a more different negotiation of (Deep) Southern racial relations. *A Curtain of Green and Other Stories*, San Diego/New York: Harvest/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979 (1941), pp. 254-74.

26 Quoted in Loewenstein, pp. 117, 125.

27 Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, New York: HarperCollins, 1999 (1937), p. 1.

28 George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990, p. 213.

29 Paula Gallant Eckard overlooks this when she celebrates similar narrative strategies in *Oral History* as a type of 'prismatic past'. 'The Prismatic Past in *Oral History* and *Mama Day*', *MELUS*, 20: 3 (Autumn 1995), pp. 121-35.

30 Ronald J. Grele, 'On Using Oral History Collections: An Introduction', *Journal of American History*, 74: 2 (September 1987): p. 572.

Devil's Dream' exemplifies, are subject to multiple mixings and perpetual cross-influencing.

While the fervently Baptist Bailey family sees the fiddle as the devil's instrument and condemns those who play it as possessed by the devil, the reader is not privy to the inspirations and motivations of the less isolated and less conservative Malone family.[38] This is crucial: they live in Cana, a small town less remote than the Baileys' home in the mountains and a place of possible contact with black music, even if only in the appropriated form of minstrelsy and blackface comedy. Furthermore, Zeke (Kate and Moses Bailey's son) undertakes frequent trips to country dances outside the hollers, but there are no reports of encounters with black culture in any form.[39]

The choice of an unnamed voice of the community for the portrayal of people who go beyond the mountains illuminates Smith's interest in presenting life from the community's point of view. By denying Zeke a voice in the novel, she demonstrates how the storyteller who narrates his life employs it as a warning for others not to submit to the lure of city-life and as a means of passing on the community's suspicion toward influences from the outside.[40] In adhering to the restrictive communal point of view, Smith, however, also denies the reader an alternative glance at this outside world and thus prevents us from challenging her narrator's version of Zeke's life.

Following the chapter on Zeke is a striking account of an interracial relationship between a Melungeon man named Jake Toney and the Appalachian girl Nonnie Hulett. Melungeons, according to Smith, are 'a whole racial group, they live in East Tennessee ... Some people think they were the lost tribe of Roanoke Island; other people think they were Portuguese who were shipwrecked and intermarried with black Americans and Native Americans'.[41] Again, the narrative perspective excludes the voice of those involved in the act of violating the mores of the mountain society: Zinnia, Nonnie's 'ugly' and jealous sister, recalls the events. While Nonnie describes Jake as 'not from around here' and 'real different-looking', Zinnia is quick to endorse her father's assessment of the situation: '... Daddy told us about the Melungeons, that is a race of people which nobody knows where they came from, with real pale light eyes, and dark skin, and frizzy hair like sheep's wool ... "Niggers won't claim a Melungeon", Daddy told us. "Injuns won't claim them neither".'[42] On the following pages, we learn of the negative reactions of members of the community, who call Nonnie's baby 'a Melungeon's leavings' and cause her father to send Nonnie away and force her to marry Zeke.[43]

The Melungeon episode is an example of the discourse established and perpetuated by the mountain storytellers. In Foucaultian analysis, discourse is a set of meanings 'that conditions what counts as knowledge in a particular period' in history.[44] Looking at 'discursive formations', Foucault detects rules that regulate what is talked about and in

31 Donlon, pp. 16, 29.

32 Mark Sanders, 'Theorizing the Collaborative Self: The Dynamics of Contour and Content in the Dictated Autobiography', *New Literary History*, 25 (1994), p. 446. Sanders's observations connect with the psychoanalytic approach outlined earlier. While the psychoanalyst looks for breaks in a patient's story that hint at repressed anxieties, fears, and desires, the critic of oral history does the same in order to reveal the rules that govern a storyteller's discourse. *The Devil's Dream* is, of course, not an interaction between an interviewer and an interviewee. It is, however, exactly this illusion of disengagement of author and narrators that induces the reader to believe that Smith is reporting rather than inventing speech.

33 Robert Cantwell, *Bluegrass Breakdown: The Making of the Old Southern Sound*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984, p. 136.

34 Quoted in Cantwell, p. 91.

35 cf. Cantwell, pp. 91-114, 136. The Appalachians are unaware of these developments. When R.C. is presented with a banjo by a salesman, '[i]t was certainly the first banjo I [Lizzy Bailey, his wife] had ever seen, and it may have been the first that R.C. ever saw as well.' *The Devil's*

which way. Discourse theories also link language to social control; discursive formations govern 'the serious possibilities for talking about things' and exercise power over the expression of marginalized social groups.[45] In *The Devil's Dream*, the rules of communication are determined by a patriarchal order that is often enforced violently - Moses Bailey beats his wife and children when they disobey - or through sexual domination - Zinnia's father, Claude, rapes her mother, Effie. Religious doctrine provides additional legitimization: Claude justifies his actions by calling them God's will.

Nonnie's romantic involvement with Jake shows her fascination with the racial Other and her desire to transgress the boundaries her community has erected to prevent cultural and social change. Dreams of escape and of a life away from home are permitted because they help people cope with the hardships in their lives, allowing them to go on narrative excursions and explore imaginary territory coded in language and song. However, to act upon these fantasies means to give in to what Donlon calls 'impulses toward intimacy [that] are forced to compete with anxieties that accompany unfamiliarity' and to risk exclusion from the tribe because it challenges the group's social codes.[46] The inclusion of Nonnie's affair into the narrative thus exemplifies the elaborate workings of denial: Zinnia knows what has happened, and she is eager to reshape the events into a story of her own desires and fascinations, but she undermines the reality of Nonnie's actions by calling her 'dreamy' and 'bent on destruction'.[47]

A second period of interaction between black music and Appalachian mountain musicians unfolded in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when mobility increased because of improved roads and when minstrel and medicine shows delivered music, comedy, and working-class entertainment to remote areas in the South.[48] Malone explains how the music and instruments of African Americans made their way into the mountains. Even before radio and records, he argues, 'black folk musicians had been seen and heard on street corners or in work camps. Both the guitar and the blues form may have ventured into the mountains with black laborers who followed the highways and railroads as they gradually inched their way up the Appalachian ridges.'[49]

Interfaces between the Appalachian mountain folk and black culture often occurred when the mountaineers left the hollers for work camps and small towns and on occasion joined travelling entertainment ensembles. In *The Devil's Dream*, R.C. Bailey talks about working in lumber camps and fiddling at night. He never mentions encounters with African Americans or with their music, but his anger and pain over the discovery of his Melungeon father illuminate the deep fear of the racial Other he retains outside of the hollers.[50] Because of his hatred for the non-white blood in his heritage, and because of the racist attitudes common among Appalachian mountaineers at the time, R.C. is unlikely to focus his narration on racial interaction.

Dream, p. 92.

36 Bill C. Malone, *Country Music, USA*, revised ed., Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985 (1968), p. 19.

37 Robert B. Winans, 'Black Instrumental Music Traditions in the Ex-Slave Narratives', *Black Music Research Journal*, 10: 1 (1990), p. 52. Smith explains her relationship to the song in Renee Hausmann Shea, '*Belles Lettres* Interview', *Conversations with Lee Smith*, p. 104. For an astonishing rendition of the tune by an African American fife and drum ensemble in the 1940s, listen to Sid Hemphill, 'The Devil's Dream', *Afro-American Folk Music from Tate and Panola Counties, Mississippi*, CD, Rounder, 18964-1515-2, 2000/no date.

38 Kathy J. Ogren, in a chapter titled 'From Devil's Music to Jooking', describes a sacred/secular rift in black communities during slavery similar to conflicts among rural Southern Anglo-Saxons. Referring to folklorist John Szwed, Ogren speculates that this 'opposition to "fiddle music" probably derived from both Anglo-Saxon and African religious beliefs that precocious musicians received their skills from supernatural forces'. See *The Jazz Revolution: Twenties America and the Meaning of Jazz*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 111.

The medicine show, in which fake doctors sold 'medicine' to country folk, included music, comedy, and blackface minstrelsy and 'provided an early commercial outlet for country musicians, who were often employed by the traveling shows'.[51] Cantwell mentions black banjo virtuosos who, after the end of slavery, utilized their new freedom of relative mobility and followed minstrel shows throughout the South.[52] These shows accomplished three things: They attracted folk musicians from the remotest areas of the country; they disseminated an appropriated, or expropriated, form of black culture; and they provided a format for black musicians to present their musical craft to a growing number of listeners.[53]

Smith picks up the thread of Nonnie Hulett's life in a later story told by another unnamed community narrator. This episode, in which Nonnie runs away from her husband and elopes with a medicine show, allows for references to minstrel entertainment that seek to establish historical accuracy and provide a colourful backdrop for Nonnie's adventures. Significantly, Nonnie's interest in entertainment and blackface comedy is regarded by the mountaineers as an act of treason, and the narrator, by framing and manipulating Nonnie's story, employs his or her narrative power to punish Nonnie for betraying her family. The tale warns others who might think about leaving the mountains: Nonnie perishes in a hotel fire, alone and alienated from her clan.

The unfiltered depiction of blackface minstrelsy - a 'blackface-nigger dancer' called Sambo caricatures black dancing and enacts the racial stereotypes of the day; Sambo speaks in an exaggerated black dialect, is clumsy, extremely lazy, childlike, overly sexualized, and generally the butt of the jokes supplied by other actors[54] - obscures the dynamic at work in the show. By watching the presentation, Nonnie and the audience affirm their 'whiteness' and veil their culture's investment in 'blackness'.[55] With no blacks present, the spectators can enjoy the spectacle and hide their fascination with things black: the blackface actor is white underneath the paint, and the songs and dances he performs are 'whitened' versions of 'black' cultural material. Berndt Ostendorf's assessment that '[i]n minstrelsy, American vernacular culture began to imitate, incorporate and acknowledge the black idiom' and 'anticipated on stage what many Americans deeply feared: the blackening of America' illustrates the difficulties of Appalachian mountaineers in coming to terms with the arrival of black culture in their home region: It is denied on the surface but addressed implicitly through minstrelsy's 'symbolic language and ... comic iconography for "intermingling" culturally with the African Caliban while at the same time "isolating" him socially'.[56]

The minstrel scene in *The Devil's Dream* is significant because it captures the inexpressible for Smith's characters. As musicians and isolated folk, the mountaineers are interested in black expressive culture, but their restrictive self-codification disallows them from

39 This takes place in the 1850s or 1860s. Children's rhymes ('Eeny meeny miney mo, catch a nigger by the toe') suggest that stories and sayings travelled to the region as well. *The Devil's Dream*, p. 68.

40 The portrayal of Zeke's, R.C.'s, and Nonnie's experiences in Southern cities represents a tradition of anti-urban biases in the rural South and in country music. cf. Malone, *Country Music, USA*, p. 7.

41 Quoted in Loewenstein, p. 125. Rebecca Smith describes a Melungeon as 'a person of mixed white, black and American Indian ancestry common in the southern Appalachians (and recently discovered to be of Moorish descent combining also Portuguese, Spanish, Berber, Arab and Jewish stock) ...' *op. cit.*, p. 52.

42 *The Devil's Dream*, pp. 56-57.

43 *The Devil's Dream*, p. 59.

44 Thomas Flynn, 'Foucault's Mapping of History', *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Gary Gutting, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 29.

45 Joseph Rouse, 'Power/Knowledge', *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, p. 94.

46 Donlon, p. 18.

47 *The Devil's Dream*, pp. 53, 48.

48 Cantwell notes that the relative inaccessibility of the region did not become a deterrent for travellers until the 1850s, when new infrastructures throughout the nation compelled people to head to areas in the South that could be reached more comfortably. See pp. 258-59.

engaging in a conscious search for Otherness. Eric Lott has described this ambiguity, this fascination with, and simultaneous fear of, 'blackness'. Lott writes:

> Minstrel performers often attempted to repress through ridicule the real interest in black cultural practices they nonetheless betrayed - minstrelsy's mixed erotic economy of celebration and exploitation, what Homi Bhabha would call its 'ambivalence' ... and what my title loosely terms 'love and theft'. The very form of blackface acts - an investiture in black bodies - seems a manifestation of the particular desire to try on the accents of 'blackness' and demonstrates the permeability of the color line.[57]

Throughout *The Devil's Dream*, both Bhabha's 'ambivalence' and Lott's 'desire to try on the accents of "blackness"' appear. However, these qualities remain unexplored, residing always below the surface of the narrative's discourse, or, as Lott phrases it, 'at the very edge of semantic availability'.[58]

Nonnie's move out of the holler represents larger cultural shifts in which rural and mountain musicians set out for the cities, into recording studios, and onto the stage of the 'Grand Ole Opry' and other commercial theatres. These developments initiated a third wave of communication between white Appalachians and African American music during the 1920s. As soon as record companies discovered that the country sound of Southern music was marketable, they began to seek and record the music played by 'hillbilly' artists. What they found were segregated populations but integrated - in the form of musical crossovers - musical styles. The so-called 'race' and 'hillbilly' records in the 1920s and 1930s, however, expressed the segregationist spirit of the times and relegated black performers to the 'race' category even if they played 'hillbilly' music, and white musicians to the 'hillbilly' label even if their repertoire consisted mainly of blues tunes.[59] Malone's explanation, going beyond a simple reference to racism, rings true. 'While the archaicism of southern folk music was one source of its appeal', he argues, 'its identification with a presumed racially homogenous culture was an additional attraction to those who saw America's own supposed racial purity disappearing in the years surrounding World War I. The southern mountains seemed to be one of the last remaining repositories of Anglo-Saxonism in the United States ...'[60] Commenting on the 'particularly ethnic factor in the rise of American modernism', Heinz Ickstadt offers further possible reasons for the success of traditional old-time music in the 1920s and 1930s: 'The urge to close gates, to erect walls, to re-establish lines of separation ... came, however, not only from the effort to maintain racial purity, to preserve the United States as an (in origin and essence) Anglo-Saxon nation ...; it was also ... a defense against the boundary-dissolving, fusing and confusing, merging and melting experience of modernity.'[61]

49 Malone, *Country Music, USA*, p. 5.

50 *'Mamma is a whore, and I am a bastard'*, he screams. Italics in the original, *The Devil's Dream*, p. 7.

51 Malone, *Country Music, USA*, p. 6.

52 cf. Cantwell, p. 104.

53 For more on minstrelsy and blackface see Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996; Thomas L. Riis, *Just Before Jazz: Black Musical Theater in New York, 1890-1915*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989; Dale Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and Their World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

54 *The Devil's Dream*, pp. 73-74.

55 cf. George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998.

56 Berndt Ostendorf, *Black Literature in White America*,

'Hillbilly' music nonetheless continued to be produced under an African American influence (the blues, jazz, and ragtime people heard on the radio or on records) and with the participation of black musicians. A.P. Carter, the head of country music's most famous family, the Carters, and one of the historical figures on which Smith bases her novel - R.C. Bailey shares many traits with Carter; chapter titles such as 'This World Is Not My Home' are lines from songs made famous by the Carters[62] - toured the mountains and other areas in the South on a quest for original song material with a black guitar player named Leslie Riddles.[63] Even though the extent of Riddles's influence on the Carter sound is difficult to gauge, it is safe to assume that he did play a major role. While A.P. was writing down lyrics, Riddles learned the melodies and invented guitar parts he would later teach to Maybelle, A.P.'s wife. Many songs in the Carter repertoire - Wolfe mentions 'Sunshine in the Shadows' and 'Can't Feel At Home' - derive from the African American gospel tradition and were staples of Riddles's musical language.[64] 'In fact', Nager adds, 'many of Maybelle's best-known arrangements, in a bass-picking format known universally as "Carter style", seem to have come directly from Riddle, including the guitar showpiece "Cannonball Blues".'[65]

In *The Devil's Dream*, however, R.C. is 'the presiding genius of the group. It was he who "worked up", as he called it, the songs, figuring out new arrangements for ... old classics ...; it was he who found new songs for them to sing.'[66] Even though we have to be careful in reading the novel as a historical account of country music (it is a retelling and revisioning of it), it still is striking that the many similarities between the Carter family and the Baileys end when it comes to the interracial collaboration between A.P. and Riddles. What we have here is a central paradox in Appalachian social and musical adaptations to change. On the one hand, as Malone states, Appalachian musicians 'were sufficiently isolated and socially conservative to retain musical traits long after they had ceased to be fashionable elsewhere', but on the other hand, and this explains why we find black songs and styles in early country music but hardly any accounts of black and white interaction in the testimonies of musicians, they were 'remarkably receptive to new and externally originated musical influences, and prone to change them to fit their own tastes and styles'.[67] These new - and often 'black' - styles were then redefined through the oral histories of the community and recategorized as indigenous traditions.

The Carters participated in early country music's most significant recording session in Bristol, Tennessee, in 1927, an event that makes up a short chapter in *The Devil's Dream*. Ralph Peer, Victor Record's field producer, tells R.C. that he has made 'race' records with Mamie Smith, Louis Armstrong, and others. His attitude toward black artists, however, is one of exploitation, racism, and ignorance: '... I have been recording nigger music for many years ... [N]iggers can't write [songs]', he tells

Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1982, pp. 66-67.

57 Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 6.

58 Lott, p. 6.

59 Wolfe reports that 'there was a time when "black hillbilly music" was everywhere across the South.' He asks: 'Why weren't more examples of black hillbilly music recorded? The biggest reason was a sort of commercialized racism on the part of the big Northern record companies. As ... Columbia and Victor began to discover the market for Southern roots music in the 1920s, they decided only white people would buy "white" music and only black people would buy "black" music; thus, the white music was pigeonholed as "hill-billy" or "old-time" and the black music was labeled "race" music.' 'Hillbilly Fever: The Lost Tradition of Black String Bands', *No Depression*, 38 (March-April 2002), p. 112.

60 Bill C. Malone, 'Neither Anglo-Saxon nor Celtic: The Music of the Southern Plain Folk', *Plain Folk of the South Revisited*, ed. Samuel C. Hyde, Jr., Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997, p. 23.

61 Heinz Ickstadt, 'Trans-National

R.C.[68] The narrator of this episode, again an unnamed voice of the community, is in no position to challenge Peer's claims: He or she is largely unaware of African American artistic creativity and does not mention other sessions Peer recorded that featured integrated groups.[69] One musician, however, who could have testified to the abundance of original material by black musicians, was Mississippi guitar player and singer Jimmy Rodgers. Rodgers had learned his craft from black blues players as a member of a medicine show and as a water boy among black railroad workers. At the Bristol sessions, Rodgers was singing what Ralph Peer called 'nigger blues', but he is mentioned only briefly in *The Devil's Dream*.[70]

Even more connections between black and white strains in country music in the 1920s appear when we take a look behind the curtain of the 'Grand Ole Opry', the Nashville barn dance and radio show that was a smash success by the end of the decade. In his research on Opry founder George Dewey Hay's life before he started the dance in 1925, Nager connects elements of the Opry programming with the years Hay had spent in Memphis as a newspaper reporter.[71] Hay wrote a minstrel-style column for the *Commercial Appeal*, attended black vaudeville shows at the Beale Street Palace Theater, and took in the blues and jazz played in Beale Street venues. When Hay started to work for Nashville radio in 1925, he, Nager writes,

> created a way to sell black-style entertainment to a larger white audience. The Grand Ole Opry was less a barn dance than a down-home mix of vaudeville with plenty of minstrel-show touches. Replace the Opry's fiddle bands with blues and jazz combos and you had the makings of a typical T[heatre] O[wners] B[ooking] A[ssociation] show at the Beale Palace.[72]

The Devil's Dream includes a scene narrated by Alice Bailey in which her father, Durwood (R.C.'s brother), takes her and her sister up on a mountain, where R.C. has assembled a radio and where a large number of folks have gathered to listen to the Opry broadcast. When the so-called 'Harmonica Wizard', whose playing recalls the quintessential blues motif of trains passing by, appears on the show, Alice recounts that '[s]ome of them up there on the bald said that the Harmonica Wizard was a nigger, but I don't know about that. I ain't never seen a nigger.'[73]

The Harmonica Wizard's name was DeFord Bailey (no apparent connection to Smith's fictional family), an African American musician who had grown up with 'black hillbilly music', the form of old-time country music that spread widely throughout Southern black communities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[74] Charles Wolfe argues that '[i]t may seem curious that a radio audience ... did not recognize DeFord's blackness ..., but DeFord seldom spoke on the air and confined his act largely to playing music.' Wolfe also suggests that it may have been in Hay's interest to keep Bailey's blackness a secret.[75] It

Democracy and Anglo-Saxondom: Fears and Visions of a Dominant Minority in the 1920's', *Ethnic Cultures in the 1920's in North America*, ed. Wolfgang Binder, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1993, p. 2.

62 cf. The Carter Family, 'Can't Feel At Home', *Sunshine in the Shadows: Their Complete Victor Recordings 1931-32*, CD, Rounder, 1068, 1996.

63 cf. Malone, *Country Music, USA*, p. 67; Larry Nager, *Memphis Beat: The Lives and Times of America's Musical Crossroads*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998, p. 114; Charles K. Wolfe, liner notes, *Sunshine in the Shadows*; Cantwell, p. 56; Tony Russell, *Blacks, Whites and Blues*, New York: Stein and Day, 1970, p. 41. Nager and Wolfe spell the guitar player's name 'Riddle', while all others refer to him as 'Riddles'.

64 Wolfe, liner notes.

65 Nager, p. 114.

66 *The Devil's Dream*, p. 104.

67 Malone, 'Neither Anglo-Saxon nor Celtic', p. 29.

68 *The Devil's Dream*, p. 122.

69 cf. Russell, p. 62.

70 cf. Nager, pp. 112-14.

71 Nager, pp. 107-09.

72 Nager, p. 110.

73 *The Devil's Dream*, p. 115. In *Oral History*,

is striking, however, that 'black' and 'white' Southern musical styles at the time sounded so much alike that audiences could not tell the difference on the radio.

Alice has never seen 'a nigger', but she hears his music and is enthralled by its tone and quality. This again attests to the mountaineers' desire for faraway places and events. Nonetheless, the older people in the community reject music played by blacks even if they have been influenced by it. Alice's referral to Bailey as a 'nigger' indicates the power of the mountain discourse; processes of naming are equated with social power and control over others. Kimberly W. Benston has written about fictionalizations of African Americans that often result in an 'insistence on misprising the whitening of experience as a fulfillment of self while assigning all experience of blackness to nameless being'.[76] When the narrators in *The Devil's Dream* say 'niggers', they are not just speaking the language of the day. Rather, as Benston maintains,

> [a]llotting black people the brand of 'nigger' indicates a desire to void the possibility of meaning within the 'blackened' shell of selfhood, thereby reducing substance to a repetitive echo of a catachresis. 'Nigger' is a mechanism of control by contraction; it subsumes the complexities of human experience into a tractable sign while manifesting an essential inability to *see* (to grasp, to apprehend) the signified ... 'Nigger' ... is a name for difference which serves the ideological function of imbuing 'whiteness' with a 'sense' it primordially lacks.[77]

What do we make of Smith's portrayal of the Opry show in the distant mountains and of her choice of a narrator who, unlike others present in the scene, has never left the mountains and never seen a black person? Speaking at an unspecified point in time as an adult, Alice recreates the attitudes of the elders and her own ignorance of goings on outside of the mountain universe. Her recollection does not go beyond her youthful lack of knowledge, and the story of DeFord Bailey, who is a part of the multicultural roots of country music but who had to struggle in a segregated and racist society, remains untold.[78]

In this episode, we see the problematic dimension of Smith's fictional project and its relation to historical inquiry. *The Devil's Dream* constitutes the author's reimagining of Appalachian history, a process Klaus Ensslen has termed 'amalgamating historical fact and fiction'. Like David Bradley, whose novel *The Chaneysville Incident* (1981) Ensslen discusses, Smith uses 'the oral tradition as a narrative vehicle' to give an agency to her interpretation of Appalachian history.[79] Smith's invention of oral histories that retell historical events and are spoken by characters who are moulded around existing families downplays her authorial control over the text and its language and seeks to pass for a mere recording of the speakers' subjective experience. *The Devil's Dream*, if we follow Karlheinz Stierle, employs mechanisms in which 'the verbal structure of

little boy Jink Cantrell says: 'What you'd do with a nigger anyway. They used to be slaves, ... but that was immoral. I seen a nigger once, but not close up. They sent a bunch of them over here from the prison farm where they was building the hard-road, and ever morning they'd bring them in, and ever night they'd carry them back out in a prison truck. We won't have no niggers in this county after sundown, that's for sure.' See Lee Smith, *Oral History*, New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1983, p. 191. The song Alice heard was most likely DeFord Bailey's 'Pan-American Blues'. Refer to *Harp Blowers (1925-1936): The Complete Recorded Works of John Henry Howard, De Ford Bailey, D. H. "Bert" Bilbro, George Clarke*, CD, Document Records, DOCD-5164, 1993.

74 See Charles K. Wolfe, *A Good-Natured Riot: The Birth of the Grand Ole Opry*, Nashville: The Country Music Foundation Press and Vanderbilt University Press, 1999, p. 120; Wolfe, 'Hillbilly Fever', p. 112; Wolfe, 'Rural Black String Band Music', *Black Music Research Journal*, 10: 1 (1990), pp. 32-35.

75 See Wolfe, *A Good-Natured Riot*, p. 122.

76 Kimberly W. Benston, 'I yam what I am: the tops of (un)naming in Afro-American Literature', *Black Literature and*

the narration is veiled in order to make the passage from fiction to referential illusion as easy as possible [and] ... to disguise the effect of language at the origin of such illusion making'.[80]

If we approach *The Devil's Dream* as historians, which Smith seems to encourage by appending and explaining the sources she studied as background material for the novel (they appear after the frame narrative), the obvious omissions discussed earlier allow us to challenge Smith's allocation of sources and her sacrificing of historical material for the telling of a particular story. Jerome Bruner argues that '[t]he act of constructing a narrative ... is considerably more than "selecting" events either from real life, from memory, or from fantasy and then placing them in an appropriate order. The events themselves need to be *constituted* in the light of the overall narrative ...'[81] In *The Devil's Dream*, then, to apply Bruner's words, '[t]here seems indeed to be some sense in which narrative, rather than referring to "reality", may in fact create or constitute it, as when "fiction" creates a "world" of its own ...'[82]

If we take the oral history form of the novel at face value (in a willing suspension of disbelief that permits us to read the words of the speakers in the text as *their* words), more problems arise. As Grele reminds us, 'the best story is not always the most historically useful', and as readers of Smith's historical fiction we are denied essential knowledge of the mountain discourse's construction.[83] Oral historians hold that in order to decipher an oral account, we must know as much as possible about interviewer, interviewee, the relationship between the two, and the situation of the talk, '[s]ince oral histories are joint creations [where] knowledge of the interviewer is as critical to an evaluation of the source as knowledge of the interviewee.'[84] In *The Devil's Dream*, however, we are denied access to these pieces of information; we do not know when the speakers speak (1992, the year the novel was published? At some specific point in the past?) or to whom they tell their stories (they address a person present at the telling, but is it Lee Smith, a fictional oral historian, a family member, or the reader?). These questions remain unanswered and thus pose a central problem for our understanding of the novel: By removing herself from the surface of the text, and by shrouding in mystery the modes of textual production that stand behind the work, Smith produces an illusion of seemingly independent and historically accurate speech acts uttered by her semi-historical narrators.

If we, finally, read *The Devil's Dream* as Smith's fictional vision of Appalachia, we could argue that the text says more about the Appalachian writer of the 1990s than about the place evoked by the actual narrative. The Southern author cannot escape the entanglements of race; as Morrison observes, the 'fabrication of an Africanist persona' - here in the form of the 'niggers' who appear frequently in the narration - 'is reflexive', a 'meditation on the self' and 'a powerful exploration of the fears and desires that reside in the writerly consciousness'.[85] The subject, then, of Smith's devil's (i.e. troubled, haunting) dream, is the

Literary Theory, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., New York: Methuen, 1984, p. 156.

77 Italics in the original, *ibid.*, pp. 157-58. Rebecca Smith restricts her discussion of naming in *The Devil's Dream* to the white Appalachian mountaineers, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51. Although her explanation of biblical connotations is important, the naming of African Americans as 'niggers' must not be overlooked.

78 In their biography of Bailey, Morton and Wolfe quote the harp player's wish for historical representation: 'He wanted a biography done so his grandchildren and later generations would know "the truth" about him.' *DeFord Bailey: A Black Star in Early Country Music*, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991, p. xvii.

79 Klaus Ensslen, 'Fictionalizing History: David Bradley's *The Chaneysville Incident*', *Callaloo*, 35 (Spring 1988), pp. 290, 283.

80 Karlheinz Stierle, 'The Reading of Fictional Texts', trans. Inge Crosman and Thekla Zachrau, *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation*, ed. Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 86.

81 Italics in the original, Jerome Bruner, 'The

dreamer, the writer herself, and not merely the history of an area and its music. The truth of the storyteller, as Hurston tells us, is the dream itself; for Smith to become a truly Appalachian storyteller means to forget all those things she does not want to remember and to remember everything she does not want to forget.[86]

In the last quarter of *The Devil's Dream*, Smith introduces two additional characters: rockabilly singer Johnny Raines (based loosely on Johnny Cash) and Katie Cocker (with parallels to Tammy Wynette and Loretta Lynn). Touring the South in the 1950s - the post-war era is the fourth stage of cross-racial musical interaction - Johnny performs material he has learned from 'a huge black man named Rufus Main who played nigger blues on the guitar, with a lot of string pushing and choking ...' Johnny had met Rufus in the army, and the black guitarist 'taught him all his licks and runs, real patient, niggers always act like they've got all the time in the world, which is one thing Johnny likes about them, he hates hyper little white dudes like the kind that run everything in this fucking country. He'll take a big slow nigger anytime.'[87] Johnny's statements indicate the importance of African Americans in definitions of Southernness. He claims rights over his privileged understanding of 'blackness' while his self-definition and musical craft depend on the existence of the 'big slow nigger', who seems somehow more 'authentically' Southern and country than the white man who represents the urban music industry.[88]

Country star Katie Cocker concludes *The Devil's Dream's* narration by detailing the many changes in her career. Although Katie's words provide a compelling critique of the sexism and commercialism in the country industry, her narrative does not extend this criticism to the racism that accompanies and intersects with discriminatory gender roles and exploitative capitalist practices. Katie wants to 'keep it country', claiming that '[t]he Sixties didn't happen to everybody ... They didn't happen to me.'[89] The Sixties, a decade associated by Katie mainly with radical feminism, unpatriotic liberalism, and the disappearance of regional identities, is also the decade of the Civil Rights movement, the Civil Rights and Voting Acts, the struggle for racial integration throughout the South, and a new black consciousness expressed in music: Motown pop, Stax soul, free jazz, and the R&B/country crossover released on King Records.[90] Thus, by insisting that the Sixties didn't happen to her, Katie Cocker denies that the social and political changes that have taken place around the country - including the church bombing in Alabama that inspired John Coltrane's 'Alabama' and the embattled integration of schools that incited Louis Armstrong to denounce Eisenhower in 1957 and motivated Charles Mingus to write 'Fables of Faubus'[91] - had any effect on her, her music, and the self-understanding of her home region.

The workings of denial become obvious when we look at the number of black characters who saturate Katie's account. Most of them are ser-

Narrative Construction of Reality', *Critical Inquiry*, 18: 1 (Autumn 1991), p. 8.

82 Bruner, p. 13.

83 Grele, p. 573.

84 Grele, p. 571.

85 Morrison, p. 17.

86 Hurston, p. 1.

87 *The Devil's Dream*, p. 179.

88 Johnny's evocation of Rufus Main also provides a blunt summary of rock and roll and rockabilly's expropriation of black rhythm and blues. He recognizes the popular potential of Rufus's music without granting him status as a human being; his black teacher is merely a natural resource. In a later scene, Johnny eats at 'a nigger joint'. He struggles to imagine the life of some of the restaurant's black patrons, but his observations never go beyond racist visions that speak to the fact that Johnny - and parts of the South - still live in a racially divided world. See *The Devil's Dream*, pp. 182-83.

89 *The Devil's Dream*, pp. 265, 283.

90 For an analysis of the African American civil rights struggle and music, see Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998; see also Craig Werner, *A Change is Gonna Come: Music,*

vants or babysitters, but Roberta Boyd, the last African American mentioned, sings beautifully during a church service and later hugs Katie, making her realize 'how needy [of physical and emotional affection] I was.'[92] As conciliatory as this scene is, symbolically uniting the white and black Southern women, it does not break with the stereotypical presentation of African Americans: as a soulful singer and mammy-like provider of love. Roberta is part of a long history of debasing popular images of black women.

Conclusion

In his groundbreaking work on county music history, *Country Music, USA*, Bill C. Malone wrote:

> Of all the southern ethnic groups, none has played a more important role in providing songs and styles for the white country musician than that forced migrant from Africa, the black. Nowhere is the peculiar love-hate relationship that has prevailed among the southern races more evidenced than in country music. Country music - seemingly the most 'pure white' of all American musical forms - has borrowed heavily from the black. White Southerners who would be horrified at the idea of mixing socially with blacks have nonetheless enthusiastically accepted their musical offerings: the spirituals, the blues, ragtime, jazz, rhythm-and-blues, and a whole host of dance steps, vocal shadings, and instrumental techniques.[93]

In the case of Smith's Appalachian mountaineers, the borrowings from black musicians often occurred indirectly - through instruments like the banjo and the guitar, through minstrelsy, through song material written or played by black travelling musicians, and over the radio and records - but on occasion, musical crossovers were created through direct interaction, as DeFord Bailey's prominence on the Opry cast and Leslie Riddles's collaboration with A.P. Carter demonstrate. Smith's storytellers, however, deny these influences, and they cling to their deep racism until the very end of the novel.

In the narrative present, the 1970s, Katie decides to record an album of old family songs with the help of four generations of Bailey family members. Her claim that 'I know where we're from. I know who we are,' leaves us wondering if her desire to recall the past and her 'authentic' family roots does not oversimplify the complexity of her musical and familial origins.[94] David Sanjek suggests a valuable approach to the question of cultural and historical authenticity when he reminds us to 'recognize that all transcendent realms of authenticity are fictions and that any given cultural identity will retain a mixed, relational dimension'.[95]

Smith appears to acknowledge this point at least partially. The Bailey genealogy contains 'non-white' blood (Jake Toney), and the climate that fostered folk music is not a nostalgic one: life is hard work, women are raped by their husbands, child death is common, and social

Race & the Soul of America, New York: Plume, 1999; John W. Rumble, 'Roots of Rock & Roll: Henry Glover at King Records', *Journal of Country Music*, 14: 2 (1992), pp. 30-42; Kimberly W. Benston, *Performing Blackness: Enactments of African-American Modernism*, London: Routledge, 2000.

91 John Coltrane Quartet, 'Alabama', *Ken Burns Jazz: The Definite John Coltrane*, CD, Verve, 314 549 083-2, 2000/1963; Charles Mingus, 'Fables of Faubus', *This Is Jazz 6: Charles Mingus*, CD, Columbia/Legacy, CK 64624, 1996/1960; for Armstrong's rebuke of Eisenhower, see *Louis Armstrong: In His Own Words*, ed. Thomas Brothers, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 193-94.

92 *The Devil's Dream*, p. 296.

93 Malone, *Country Music, USA*, pp. 4-5.

94 *The Devil's Dream*, p. 14.

95 David Sanjek, 'Blue Moon of Kentucky Rising Over the Mystery Train: The Complex Construction of Country Music', *Reading Country Music: Steel Guitars, Opry Stars, and Honky-Tonk Bars*, ed. Cecelia Tichi, Durham: Duke University Press, 1998, p. 32. For an examination of the music market and 'authenticity', see Richard A. Peterson, *Creating Country*

Music: Fabricating Authenticity, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

96 Dainotto, pp. 488, 487-488.

97 Dale, p. 26.

and religious rule is strict and often violent. In addition, one might argue that by presenting her characters' racism ruthlessly and openly, Smith in fact exposes and critiques its pervasiveness and narrowness of vision. For instance, Ralph Peer's and Johnny Raines's remarks about black musicians are flagrantly intolerant and speak to a curious mix of hatred, ignorance, admiration, envy, and exploitation. We must, however, consider the characters' roles as negative figures and patriarchal abusers to understand the novel's ambiguous position toward Appalachian racism. As the quintessential 'bad guys' (Johnny in particular), they receive a much less favourable treatment than positive characters like Katie, who harbour racial prejudices nonetheless.

Ending the novel in the 1970s, Smith seeks to situate the text safely in the past and conjure up the notion that a time before a postmodern questioning of origins and the deconstruction of stable identities can be recovered and safeguarded from the attack of new historical and cultural theories. But the way we look back in time and the way history is preserved in writing and speech can reaffirm past boundaries and, at the same time, reinscribe imagined boundaries (by inventing first-person accounts) between black and white cultures. These tendencies in *The Devil's Dream* are ideological frameworks implicit in certain types of regionalist literature that, as Roberto Maria Dainotto notes, are 'trying to imagine yet again a *Volksgeist* or "Spirit of Place" whose boundaries protect a community from the political and cultural negotiations imposed by differences of "economics, gender, race, and creed"'. There is a danger connected to the '"spacialization" of marginality [and] its metaphoric translation into a (regional) place' that can be distinguished in regionalist fiction, Dainotto warns us, because 'this model [might be] flawed by its tendency to essentialize regional cultures, attributing to them a new sort of organic unity ...'[96]

Moreover, Smith set out to do more than recount the folkloric tales of her ancestors. Combining vernacular stories with a scholarly and research-based approach - the appendix of sources and the songs and historical events that form the base of her narrative - Smith invites us to ponder the obvious omissions that characterize the Anglo-Saxon roots of country music as they are evoked in *The Devil's Dream*. Like her storytellers and fictional characters, Smith struggles with the presence of a black influence that has pervaded the core of 'white' country music, and the discourse established in, and by, the text shapes this struggle as a form of denial: if the existence of an African American impact cannot be dismissed completely, the contributions of black musicians can at least be denied by the white narrators and, since we never leave their world of ideas and thoughts, by the author herself. Corinne Dale, who has said that Smith, in *Oral History*, 'shows that vernacular discourse is formalized just as educated speech is', is certainly correct in her assessment.[97] In *The Devil's Dream*, however, we can never be certain if Smith is not subject to the same discursive pressures that shape her narrators' perceptions.

98 Donlon, p. 31.

In her analysis of *Oral History*, Jocelyn Hazelwood Donlon comes to a somewhat similar conclusion. Thinking of Smith's writings as a narrative territory that bans black readers from its discourse, Donlon is convinced that Smith is 'able to participate in White American acts of writing which have been able to subordinate, if not escape altogether, the concerns of a Black reading audience'. In regard to the relative exclusiveness of 'whiteness' in Smith's fiction - encapsulated in the claims 'I ain't never seen a nigger' and 'I seen a nigger once, but not close up' - Donlon states:

> We must question, then, how deeply inside this culture Black readers might want to be positioned. Smith understandably refuses to diminish the unsympathetic side of [her] characters, favoring instead their complexity. But in this representation of a community plainly hostile to a Black presence, we wonder how much legitimate resistance a 'real' African American reader must overcome in order to assume his or her responsibilities of listenership and to authenticate these narratives.[98]

It is not so much a question of how deeply black readers (or any reader, for that matter) want to venture inside Smith's narrative world, but more a question of how deeply black culture is already embedded in, invested with, and an integral part of, the lives of Smith's 'white ethnic' mountaineers. We should be critical both of Smith's fictional narrators and of Smith's own involvement with their stories and world-views.