Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

TCLC 196

Volume 196

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights, Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers Who Lived between 1900 and 1999, from the First Published Critical Appraisals to Current Evaluations

Thomas J. Schoenberg
Lawrence J. Trudeau
Project Editors

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Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism, Vol. 196

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Preface

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TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author's works. Volumes published from 1978 through 1999 included authors who died between 1900 and 1960. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, *TCLC* helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in *TCLC* presents a comprehensive survey on an author's career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of *TCLC* is devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

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In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Thomson Gale also produces a paperbound edition of the *TCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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Brossard, Nicole. "Poetic Politics." In *The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy,* edited by Charles Bernstein, 73-82. New York: Roof Books, 1990. Reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism.* Vol. 127, edited by Janet Witalec, 3-8. Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2003.

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Contents

Harriette Arnow
1908-1986

(Born Harriette Louisa Simpson) American novelist, short story writer, autobiographer, and nonfiction writer.

The following entry provides an overview of Arnow's life and works. For additional information on her career, see *CLC,* Volumes 2, 7, and 18.

INTRODUCTION

Arnow, although relatively unknown today, is respected among many academics for her sincere and complex portrayal of rural life in her native state of Kentucky. Arnow wrote essays, short stories, and social histories, but she is most often remembered for the novels that comprise what some critics have dubbed her "Kentucky trilogy," *Mountain Path* (1936), *Hunter's Horn* (1949), and her most acclaimed work, *The Dollmaker* (1954). In these novels and throughout her oeuvre, Arnow explored the conflict between rural and urban life, particularly the individual's struggle to remain independent in the face of societal pressures. In addition to being admired for her thoughtful descriptions of the erosion of rural culture in the first half of the twentieth century, she has been praised for her deft portraits of complex characters that defy the prevailing "hillbilly" stereotypes, as well as for her skillful use of Appalachian dialect. Although an increasing number of scholars have emphasized the universal appeal of Arnow's writing, her fiction is still often relegated to the category of regional literature, a fact that has often skewed interpretations of her work. Charlotte Haines has asserted that Arnow's "canon is powerful in its revelation of her expanding awareness of the interconnectedness of social and personal issues and in its rendering of one writer's struggle to understand the contradictions of regional identification in American life. Given the nature of our pluralistic culture, that struggle . . . in itself—above and beyond her other merits—gives Arnow a significant place in American letters."

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Arnow was born July 7, 1908, in Wayne County, Kentucky. In 1913 she moved to Burnside, Kentucky, with her sisters and her parents, Elias Thomas and Mollie Jane Denney Simpson. The family moved, in part, to accommodate Elias's factory job, but Mollie also wanted to move so that her daughters could attend a school that separated students into grade levels. It was at Burnside Graded School that Arnow first started writing. In 1918 the family moved to Torrent, Kentucky, after Elias found a lucrative job in an oil field. Arnow briefly attended St. Helen's Academy and later Stanton Academy, before the family moved back to Burnside, where she attended public high school. During this time Arnow asked her mother for a typewriter so that she could submit her stories for publication. Her mother, who generally did not approve of Arnow's interest in writing, bought a second cow instead, and agreed that her daughter could sell the milk to buy a typewriter.

In 1924 Arnow graduated from Burnside High School. She studied at Berea College for the next two years and earned a teaching certificate. Soon after, she began teaching at a one-room school in Pulaski County, where she boarded with the family of one of her students. Her experiences teaching and living in the remote community inspired her to write *Mountain Path.* In 1928 Arnow moved back to Burnside and became an elementary school principal. After a short period of time, however, she moved to Louisville and began studying at the University of Louisville. She pursued writing while there, finally receiving the encouragement that she had been seeking. In 1930 she graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in education. Arnow returned to teaching, but her career in education ended in 1934, when she was hospitalized after a particularly stressful year.

Arnow moved to Cincinnati, Ohio, in the fall of 1934 and worked at various jobs while pursuing a literary career. She published several short stories, including "A Mess of Pork," in the *New Talent* and her most anthologized story, "Washerwoman's Day," in *Southern Review.* New York editor Harold Strauss noticed the latter story and encouraged Arnow to write a novel, which led to the publication of *Mountain Path* in 1936. Her next novel, *Between the Flowers,* though written at this time, was not published until 1999. During the Great Depression Arnow took whatever jobs she could find, working briefly as a typist, waitress, and a sales clerk. In 1938, while writing for the Federal Writers Project, she met Harold Arnow, a reporter from Chicago. They were married in March of 1939, and several months later they bought land in Kentucky so they could be subsistence farmers and continue writing. Arnow's first pregnancy, in 1939, resulted in the stillbirth of a son.

She successfully gave birth to a daughter, Marcella Jane, in 1941, although a third child, also a daughter, died only a few hours after she was born.

Arnow wrote very little during this time, but after moving to Detroit in 1944, she worked on another novel, *Hunter's Horn,* while Harold worked as a reporter for the *Detroit Times.* In 1946 their son, Thomas, was born. *Hunter's Horn* met with considerable popular and critical success when it was published in 1949, and the Arnows decided to buy land again, this time in a rural area of Ann Arbor, Michigan. In 1950 they bought a forty-acre farm. After their move, Arnow began writing *The Dollmaker,* her most acclaimed work. During the 1960s she wrote two social histories, *Seedtime on the Cumberland* (1960) and *Flowering of the Cumberland* (1963), both of which recounted the settling of southeastern Kentucky and northern Tennessee from pre-Revolutionary times to the beginning of the nineteenth century. Arnow returned to fiction in the 1970s, publishing *The Weedkiller's Daughter* in 1970 and *The Kentucky Trace* in 1974. She wrote a third novel during this time, but it was never published. However, *Old Burnside,* her autobiography, was published in 1977. During the 1980s Arnow began writing a novel that was to be set in Kentucky during the Civil War. But she died on March 22, 1986, before she could complete the work. The manuscript remains unpublished. Many of Arnow's short stories were collected and posthumously published in 2005, under the title *The Collected Short Stories of Harriette Simpson Arnow.*

MAJOR WORKS

In her first novel, *Mountain Path,* Arnow drew from her own experiences to relate the story of Louisa Sheridan, a young student teacher who moves from the city to teach in Cavecreek, a small Kentucky community. In this work Arnow explores the conflict between the desires of the individual and the demands of society, a theme she repeatedly addresses in her later writings. Louisa's educated upbringing contrasts sharply with the lifestyle of the feuding Southern mountaineers. The families of the community are poor and live in meager log cabins without electricity or plumbing. Many of them farm the worn-out land but also resort to making and selling moonshine to survive. As Louisa discovers, however, their lives are rich in other ways. Singing, playing the fiddle, and storytelling are an important part of their everyday life. Louisa becomes more involved, growing closer to her hosts, the Cals, and even falls in love with one of the men in the community, Chris Bledsoe. But the feuding in Cavecreek eventually leads to the murder of Chris, and Louisa decides to return home and resume her life as before. Because of the setting and basic plot of *Mountain Path,* the book has often been categorized as regional literature. Many recent commentators, however, have noted the significant differences between the novel and other popular regional works written during the time. For instance, critics have praised Arnow's sensitive depiction of Southern backwoods culture, in which she eschews "hillbilly" stereotypes. Arnow also avoids the moralizing tone of much regional fiction, revealing instead her respect for Kentucky rural life through her characters, especially Louisa. As Joan Griffin has observed, "Louisa enters, but she doesn't alter or influence, the valley community. . . . Louisa neither becomes absorbed into nor does she modify this intractable world, and when after seven months she leaves, *she* is the changed person—not the Cals or the other mountain people she came to 'teach.'"

In *Hunter's Horn,* Arnow examines issues of freedom, morality, family obligation, and the pressures of society from the perspective of a male protagonist, Nunn Ballew. At the beginning of the novel Nunn is preoccupied with hunting and killing a large red fox, nicknamed King Devil, that has killed livestock in the community for several years. Nunn's desire to kill King Devil becomes an obsession, which many critics have compared to that of Ahab in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick.* Nunn neglects his family and the farm, spending money instead on two pedigree hunting dogs. At one point in the novel, he resorts to moonshining to make extra money in order to pursue his quest. His new prized dogs eventually find and kill King Devil, and Nunn discovers that the fox was a female, pregnant with pups. Soon after, Nunn discovers that his fourteen-year-old daughter, Suse, is pregnant. Suse has dreams of leaving her home to pursue an education, and she has no intention of marrying the baby's father and entering into a life of poverty. In an important scene of the novel, the community gathers and forces Nunn to decide the fate of Suse and her baby. Suse is confident that her independent father, who has always resisted society's standards of morality and decency, will support her decision not to marry. Nunn, however. bends to the will of the community, declaring that she must marry because he will not support an illegitimate child. Thus Nunn wins the approval of his neighbors by betraying his daughter, as well as his own system of beliefs. Kathleen Walsh has observed that *Hunter's Horn* "has has merits beyond its regional features; in fact, it provides a subtle examination of the code of individuality which pervades American life and literature."

Arnow's best-known work, *The Dollmaker,* is the final novel of her Kentucky trilogy. The novel takes place during the last years of World War II and follows the story of the dislocated Nevels family, who move to Detroit from rural Kentucky. The story is told from the perspective of Gertie Nevels, who struggles to keep her family together when her husband, Clovis, takes a fac-

tory job in the city to help with the war effort. The conflict between urban industrialization and rural life is one of the principal themes of the novel. Gertie is both a physically and emotionally strong woman, well suited to farm life, but her courage and resolve are challenged by the social and economic pressures of industrialized society, including racial and religious prejudice, labor strikes, and job insecurity. When the Nevels lived in Kentucky, Gertie whittled for pleasure, but in Detroit she is forced to mass produce dolls for grocery money. She also instructs her children to abandon the distinctive characteristics of their backwoods culture, so that they can avoid the ridicule of their new peers. Gertie's five-year-old daughter, Cassie Marie, cannot fully assimilate, however, and despite the taunts of the other children, refuses to relinquish her imaginary friend, Callie Lou, who embodies her pride in her past. In a pivotal moment of the novel, Gertie realizes her mistake in forcing her daughter to give up her friend, but before she can reach her, Cassie Marie is killed by a train. The novel offers some hope, however, when the neighborhood children keep Callie Lou alive, even after Cassie Marie's funeral.

Critics have particularly highlighted the feminist themes in the novel and the complex characterization of Gertie, who struggles to balance the demands of motherhood with her own desire for creative freedom. She is able to find some relief and support in the surrounding community of women, who band together despite their prejudices and differences. The artist's struggle to create in the face of adversity is another important theme in the novel. One of Gertie's treasured items from Kentucky is a large block of cherry wood, out of which she hopes to carve a portrait of a "laughing Christ," if she can find a face to inspire her. As she gradually succumbs to the pressures of her new existence, however, she begins to see the face of Judas in the wood grain. Gertie eventually splits the treasured block of wood so that she can manufacture more dolls to feed her family. Many critics disagree about how to interpret Arnow's ending for the novel. While some regard Gertie's decision to sacrifice the wood as a defeat, and as Arnow's ultimate condemnation of the stifling effects of urbanization, other scholars detect hope in the final scenes of the novel. As Gertie has the block of wood chopped into scraps, she realizes that she could have found a suitable face for Christ anywhere, even in the face of one of her neighbors. Some critics have noted that Gertie would never have had this epiphany if she had remained in Kentucky. Despite differing opinions regarding the end of the novel, many scholars agree that *The Dollmaker* is a multilayered and intricate work of fiction, made successful in large part due to the portrayal of its main character. Joyce Carol Oates has described Gertie as "both an ordinary human being and an extraordinary human being, a memorable creation, so real that one cannot question her existence, involving us as she does in the solid fact of life's criminal exploitation of those who live it." Oates concludes that the novel is "one of those excellent American works that have yet to be properly assessed, not only as excellent but as very much *American*."

CRITICAL RECEPTION

During her lifetime Arnow enjoyed critical and popular success. Her books were well received and won various awards. The *New York Times Book Review* selected *Hunter's Horn* as one of the ten best novels of the year in 1949, and in a national critics' poll in the *Saturday Review*, it was voted the year's best book. *The Dollmaker* was chosen as the runner-up for the National Book Award in 1955, after William Faulkner's *A Fable*. In 1971 interest in *The Dollmaker* was rekindled when American fiction writer Joyce Carol Oates favorably reviewed the book in the *New York Times Book Review*. In her article Oates described the novel as "our most unpretentious American masterpiece," prompting its republication, as well as a film adaptation that eventually aired on television several years later. During the 1970s and 1980s many critics were particularly drawn to the strong female characters and feminist themes in Arnow's work. Most focused their attention on *The Dollmaker*, overlooking her other novels, short stories, and social histories. As a result Arnow has come to be, in many critics' view, unfairly regarded as a single-work author.

Despite the renewed critical interest, Arnow remains a somewhat overlooked figure in American literature, in part because her books are often relegated to specific schools of literature, such as local color or naturalism. Many scholars, however, find the confines of these categories too limiting when applied to Arnow's canon. Linda W. Wagner has maintained that "both *Hunter's Horn* and *The Dollmaker* could be termed 'realistic' novels (and have been so labeled), and in many respects they are reminiscent of the Dreiser-Norris-Lewis work twenty and thirty years earlier. Yet Arnow succeeds in making her readers feel that every detail is important, that her selection is discriminate. The stark delineation of recurring themes, the ironic treatments of motifs as difficult to handle as apple pie and motherhood, and the intensity of the climactic scenes make these books important studies of characters who learned how to live despite conventions they found niggardly and restrictive—even life-denying." While some critics continue to categorize Arnow as a regional writer, a title that often connotes a narrow perspective with respect to her themes and narrative techniques, a growing number assert that the concerns of Arnow's characters reach beyond the boundaries of a specific time or place, and that her novels have a universal appeal, and thus a legitimate place in the American literary canon.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Mountain Path [as Harriette Simpson] (novel) 1936
Hunter's Horn (novel) 1949
The Dollmaker (novel) 1954
Seedtime on the Cumberland (nonfiction) 1960
Flowering of the Cumberland (nonfiction) 1963
The Weedkiller's Daughter (novel) 1970
The Kentucky Trace: A Novel of the American Revolution (novel) 1974
Old Burnside (autobiography) 1977
Between the Flowers (novel) 1999
The Collected Short Stories of Harriette Simpson Arnow (short stories) 2005

CRITICISM

Wilton Eckley (essay date 1974)

SOURCE: Eckley, Wilton. "Life and Death in Little Smokey Creek." In *Harriette Arnow,* pp. 63-84. New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1974.

[*In the following essay, Eckley offers a detailed examination of the setting and characterization of* Hunter's Horn, *claiming that the novel is more than just a work of local color, in that it reveals the minds of the characters and explores "a strong life impulse" that exists in "both man and nature."*]

The artistic promise apparent in ***Mountain Path*** reached fruition in ***Hunter's Horn,*** a novel in which Mrs. Arnow once more turned to the Kentucky hills for a setting. If the former work is somewhat encumbered by a melodramatic plot, the latter most certainly is not. In ***Horn,*** plot, setting, and characterization are woven together in such a way that they reinforce one another. The result is a highly unified and carefully structured story that, coupled with the artistic simplicity with which it is presented, makes ***Horn*** a novel of considerable distinction.

Covering a period of approximately two and one-half years in the life of the Ballew family, the novel is indeed almost a daily account of that life. Nunnelly Ballew—husband, father, and a fox hunter par excellence—is afflicted with an obsession about hunting down and killing King Devil, a purportedly huge red fox with supernatural attributes that has been plaguing the countryside for a number of years, killing sheep and chickens and leading hounds to their deaths in midnight chases over the treacherous terrain.

In Nunn's quest for King Devil's hide, he neglects his family and his farm to the point that, in one instance, he is forced into moonshining as a way to get some badly needed money. Early in the story, his old hound Zing is led to his death by King Devil; and Nunn takes an oath: "I hope the good Lord God in heaven sends me to brile in hell through eternity without end if I ever stop chasen that fox till I git him. I'll git him if I have to sell ever last sheep I've got to buy me a hound an sell my mare and my cow to feed him. I'll chase him till I'm crippled an blind an bald an . . ."[1] Taking all the money he can scrape together, Nunn buys two pedigreed hound pups, Sam and Vinnie. He nurtures them and trains them in the ways of fox hunting until they finally run down and kill King Devil. Ironically, however, King Devil is not a huge fox: she is a mere vixen heavy with a litter. Stunned, Nunn can only mutter, "He allus seemed big somehow—bigger lots a times than anything else in the world" (490).

With King Devil's death, Nunn gives up fox hunting, selling Sam and Vinnie for 150 dollars in cash and the "awfullest lots a goods I ever seed" (491). While the elation he had thought King Devil's death would bring seems to have eluded him, he is content to have "nothen on my mind but farmen—them hounds a mine, they caught the fox" (491). What appears to be a happy ending, however, is not quite so: for Nunn discovers that his daughter Suse, whose hopes for going to high school were aborted by his being more concerned with fox hunting than with his family, has become pregnant by a young man, Mark Cramer, who has left the area for Detroit. Nunn, shocked and showing little compassion, sends her away to live with her seducer's parents. His wife Milly, though she herself has been trying to convince Suse to go with the Cramers, is upset that Nunn has sent the girl away. She is even more upset when she learns that he has sold the hounds. Nunn can only take solace in King Devil's red shining hide nailed to the wall—the trophy of a hollow triumph indeed. On this sad and ironic note ***Horn*** ends.

A simple plot summary may leave one with the impression that ***Horn*** is not much more than a hunting story, a story of men and hounds and the ritual of the hunt. To be sure, the novel is a hunting story; and, as such, it is interesting enough. But that is only the surface of the novel, the threshold, as it were, of a deeper and more poignant story that derives not only from the effects of Nunn's obsession on the characters in the book and indeed on himself but also from the forces that impinge upon the lives of all who live in Little Smokey Creek country.

I. A World of Solitude and Silence

Just as in ***Path,*** the setting is a vital element in ***Horn***—even more so because of the increased sharpness with which Mrs. Arnow presents it. Viewed as a series of in-

cidents occurring in Little Smokey Creek country, the novel exhibits many of the characteristics of local color. But ***Horn*** goes far beyond local color, for Mrs. Arnow is not the kind of Realist who produces merely a photographic and phonographic copy of real life. On the contrary, her Realism exposes the minds of the characters—their fears, their desires, their hates, and their loves. In this process, Mrs. Arnow, as she did in ***Path,*** reflects a sympathy for the hill people that emerges not from a sentimental point of view but from an honest emotional detachment and an unyielding artistic integrity.

Like Yaknopatapha County in Faulkner's novels, the Little Smokey Creek country of ***Horn*** is a world as real as any imaginary world can be. From Brush Creek to Keg Head's house to the new graveled road, it is an isolated world that to many of its inhabitants is the only one they know. The men occasionally go to town, and now and then someone leaves the area for the factories of Cincinnati or Detroit. But, in general, people are born, live their lives, and die within the sounds of the hunting horns that echo from the hillsides on a crisp fall evening when a fox may be running. To an outsider looking on, the picture is one of man and nature blending together in a calm pastoral simplicity. Outward appearances, however, are deceiving: for beneath them man and nature contest with each other in an endless battle for survival.

In a world of solitude and silence, the characters of ***Horn*** perform their rituals of life, not with the pioneer spirit of their forebears, but with an almost gentle stoicism that reflects, with few exceptions, an unquestioning acceptance of their environment and the conditions it imposes. Seasons regulate their lives; indeed, the book itself is structured around the coming and passing of seasons; and virtually every chapter opens directly or indirectly with a seasonal reference. From corn planting to molasses making to apple picking and from fall to winter to spring to summer, time passes not in calendar measures but in subtle mergings that are recognized more through the senses than through the names of days and months. Milly Ballew, for example, doesn't need a calendar to tell her when winter is approaching:

> At a casual glance the day looked much like yesterday and dozens of other days of the fall; the sun was warm above the valley, the oak trees were bronze-red still, and red and yellow leaves still clung to the beech and maple trees. But high on the shoulders of the hills, the pines glittered coldly in the sun, and Milly, studying the pattern of light and sound and air, noticed the blackness of the shadow of the leafless walnut by the door. The lines of the farther hills rolling away from the creek gap were no longer softly blurred in an autumn haze, but rose clear and sharp and hard, like rows of blue-steel knife blades laid against the sky. Across the river in Alcorn she could see Willie Cooksey's barn, see it so clearly that she could tell where new shakes had patched the old.
>
> (263-64)

Horn is very much a book of the senses—sights, sounds, smells—all of which are conveyed to the reader sharply and precisely without reliance on any romantic effusion of highly stylized verbiage. As Nunn Ballew is shocking corn on one occasion, the world around him is alive with sense impressions:

> The sun rose higher and took away the chill of early morning fog; the sandy soil, from being damp, grew pleasantly warm through his shoes, and from the steep wooded bluff and hillside above came the smell of wild grapes, overripe now and drying in the sun, of horsemint dried and gone to seed, and the odor of damp, freshly fallen leaves beginning their slow change into earth, a smell that always made Nunn think of fox fire on rainy nights and rotten moss-covered logs.
>
> All these and the smell of the freshly cut corn fodder were pleasant things, like the sight of the wild sunflowers glowing in the sun along the river, the river itself, blue and sprinkled with red and yellow leaves; and the red and white striped morning-glories that bloomed among the corn, only now the flowers were beginning to wilt, each with a pearl of dew caught in its throat; it seemed a sin on this blue-and-gold morning to kill the pretty things as he cut the dead corn they grew by.
>
> The river, higher than on most falls, gurgled softly over the shoals; and in the little space of time between carrying an armload of fodder to the shock and walking back to cut more, when the rustling of the corn was silent, all the little sounds lost on a windy day, but loud now in the stillness, came to him: a peckerwood working on a dead beech limb in the bluff above; the plop, plop of his shoes in the sandy soil; the twittering of the wild canaries as they bounced among the sunflowers; the rustling whisper of a sycamore leaf as it settled after a slow sliding fall against the earth; the buzz of a few late-hunting wild bees among the wild asters; and on the bluff side above him now and again the chattering of a squirrel.
>
> (320)

Through such descriptive passages, Mrs. Arnow establishes a fundamental relationship between her characters and their environment. On this level, the characters know and understand their world. In short, they are at home in it. Moreover, they appreciate the natural world—not in any romantic or mystical sense, but in a very realistic and practical way that makes each season, each day, indeed each moment an isolated one. A winter when there is plenty of food is a good one; one when there is little food, a bad one. Both are taken as they come, the bad with the good.

Although pleasures are few, there are some—ranging from a bout with some of J. D. Duffey's moonshine to a quiet moment like that when Nunn and Milly are sit-

ting on a great square of stone watching the sunset. He has just convinced her that she should chew the store-bought tobacco and he the homegrown; and, as they sit chewing and spitting in silence, the image is one of human affection and innocence—an almost Edenic scene with Nunn and Milly unconsciously playing the roles of Adam and Eve. Indeed, the orderliness is broken when Nunn tells Milly to put her bare feet on his heavy brogans because "Copperheads'ull be a crawlen" (13). The serpent of reality is never very far away from Little Smokey Creek.

The world of Little Smokey Creek is conditioned not only by a relentless natural environment but also by naive superstitions that range from a reliance on folk remedies for diseases to a belief in witches and by a harsh religious fundamentalism that rationalizes all human suffering as a prerequisite for an easier life after death. No part of the story shows more starkly the coming together of these two aspects of life than the chapter describing Lureenie Cramer's funeral—a chapter that may indeed be the best written in the entire book. Because it is thought to be bad luck for the sun to go down on an empty grave and because Lureenie's grave has been dug prematurely, the preparations for the funeral must be hurriedly carried out.

The coffin turns out to be too small, and the men have to place the body in sideways and squeeze to get the lid down. Keg Head Cramer, "with a handful of nails in his mouth, glanced through the open door and saw the house shadow long in the pale wintry sun and said to Blare, through the nails in his mouth, 'Set a little harder on this corner,' and hurried, driving the nails down with short sharp blows" (398-99). The procession to the little graveyard presents a pathetic scene as the men carrying the coffin take "quick short doglike steps, so that the coffin on the seven uneven shoulders bounced and jiggled and at times threatened to slide backward when they went up the steeper places" (400), and the women run clumsily along clutching their babies. In their hurry to get the coffin into the grave, the men tip it too far; and there is the dull thud of Lureenie's body striking the side.

As they are ready to lower the coffin into the grave, the graveyard itself falls into shadow; and, instead of being the focus of attention in the setting, the coffin fades into insignificance as Mrs. Arnow, in a passage illustrative of her descriptive power, pictures the surrounding natural world circling out in all its vast beauty and cold indifference: ". . . the graveyard lay all blue in the shadow, though across the valley the sun still shone on Sue Annie's cabin, and above it the pines, rising up to the ridge crest, were red-black and shining in the dying light, and further up the valley the western windows of the schoolhouse were plated with golden fire" (400).

Throughout the funeral, the people are more concerned with the bad luck they may be bringing upon themselves by failing to get the coffin covered before sunset than they are about giving Lureenie a proper burial: "There was a murmur of whispers in the crowd and a muted argument between Hattie and Milly; Hattie contended that it was foolish to hurry further, the sun had already set on the grave and that was all that mattered, while Milly, thinking ahead fearfully of all the bad luck such a thing could bring, insisted that as long as the sun shone on the high hills it had not set" (401). Only Preacher Samuel's admonition that they could at least take a little time "for a bit of scripture" keeps the group from immediately dispersing to their homes and away from the scene of bad omen. He reads from the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians about the virtues of charity—an apt and ironic choice in light of the failure of the people to recognize Lureenie's need for help until too late. Their very fundamentalism and superstition make it impossible for them to understand except as children. They are not cold-blooded, unfeeling people; it is just that human emotion finds little opportunity for expression in a world as hard physically and as circumscribed socially and spiritually as Little Smokey Creek.

If ***Horn*** comments adversely on any aspect of hill life, it is on that of the institutionalized religion represented by Preacher Samuel's church, an organization more concerned with appearance than with true compassion. Rans Cramer, for example, the man who deserted Lureenie to go to Cincinnati, returns after her death resplendent in a new suit and overcoat and carrying an expensive gold-embossed Bible. Displaying no remorse for Lureenie's hardships and death, he piously states that God has shown him the light. All but Sue Annie and Suse respectfully accept such a statement, for the goal of the "saved" is that their unrepentent "brethern and sistern" will see the light and prostrate themselves on the mourner's bench.

Thus, revivals play an important part in their lives. More women than men have religion, and usually during a revival the unsaved men and boys play horseshoes or drink and talk some distance from the church. But when Battle John, the renowned revival preacher preaches from the text "The harvest is passed, the summer is ended, and still we are not saved," even these unsaved "pressed even nearer the open door, then began a silent, almost furtive slipping into the house, as if God pulled them against their will, and soon they overflowed the backmost benches and stood in the open spaces about the door and by the walls" (412). Battle John pictures heaven as a Promised Land of golden harps and jeweled crowns, and he brings tears to the eyes of the women when he asks if any of their men or sons or daughters will be a part of God's harvest. He describes hell as a raging inferno populated by "serpents with redhot scales and smoking breath that

wrapped themselves about the sinful sons of men" (416); and, as he does so, he strikes terror into the hearts of the congregation—so much so that Milly Ballew forgets that her young daughter Lucy is choking her windpipe from fear and never notices that the baby Bill Dan "had pulled his head from the fresh breast she had given him and that her milk went in a fine spray over her dress and as far as Sue Annie sitting in front of her" (416).

Based on the tension between the hope of salvation and the fear of damnation, this fundamentalism generates a pattern of self-righteousness, hypocrisy, and restriction that exerts a strong influence on the daily life in Little Smokey Creek—an influence that, when superimposed on an already limiting environment, militates greatly against any attempt to break too far away from the accepted mores and customs of the area or, for that matter, to even question them. Thus, instead of serving as a liberating influence that works toward an awareness that life is not composed solely of Little Smokey Creek and that man has the potential for social and cultural growth, this religion exerts an opposite force, one of circumscription. And this force contributes to one of the major themes in ***Horn.***

II. A Twentieth-Century Natty Bumppo

Harsh environment, superstition, and fundamental religion—all have their effects on the individual characters of ***Horn.*** These effects give the novel its deeper significance. On this level, the story is seen through four major characters, each representing a different point of view—Nunn Ballew, Milly Ballew, Sue Annie Tiller, and Suse Ballew.

Nunn Ballew is a kind of twentieth-century Natty Bumppo, an offspring—or perhaps it would be better to say a remnant—of the buckskin-clad hunter who carried the theme of James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales. In another sense, however, he is a descendent of the frontiersman that Hector St. John de Crevecoeur described—the farmer turned hunter, who puts his trust in the natural fecundity of the earth and in the process neglects his fences and his fields. Neither of these descriptions fits Nunn entirely, nor is he a synthesis of them. He is basically a good man who loves his family and wants to do well by them. But, despite his occasional indictments against fox hunting, he is captured by its ritual. His desire to kill King Devil is merely an outward manifestation of something eating deeper within his soul, something that King Devil's death will fail to erase.

If Bumppo was a product of a Romantic imagination, Nunn is not. Natty had all of the virtues of the natural man and none of his faults; and, like the Western movie hero, he could always move on after his successful adventures. True, he was eventually crushed by the civilization for which he had cleared a way; but, while he lived, he was free. Nunn is not a romantic knight of the Cumberland, nor is he free. Civilization has not crushed him; it has just passed him by. His life history is briefly summarized near the beginning of the story:

> Yes, he came from the far end of the county; he had a place at the mouth of Little Smokey Creek on the Big South Fork of the Cumberland. Yes, he farmed some—not as much as he'd like. His old place, it had come down from his great-great-grandfather, had gone pretty much to brush and gullies, but there was still some good land left; besides more than a hundred acres of hillsides in cut-over timber there was a fair-sized piece, maybe sixty acres of rolling almost level land set below the hills in a high creek valley—and a strip of river bottom too.
>
> Oh, no, he hadn't been so lucky as to heir it; he'd lived there as a boy, but he'd gone away and worked in the coal mines and saved his money and bought it. No, he didn't like to work in the mines, but the pay was good. Yes, farming was all right; there wasn't hardly any fence on the old place now, so mostly he kept sheep. Yes, sheep were handy things to have; he had forty-five ewes and ewe lambs, and most of the year they could range in the government forest; that was mostly what there was around his place, timber land owned by the Federal government. Yes, late lambs sold pretty good this year. He'd had thirteen late ones to sell; that was why he was in town. Jaw Buster Anderson had brought the lambs in on his logging truck.
>
> Yes, he fox-hunted considerable, his old Zing was about the best hound in the country. N-o-o, fox hunting wasn't so much fun. Oh, some might hunt for fun, and a sweet-mouthed hound was a pretty thing to hear, but lots of times he got sick and tired of the business. Why, he hunted to catch a fox, a big red fox; he'd hunted him a long while but he was pretty certain he'd get him this fall; and when he spoke of his hunting and the fox he would catch, the easy talkative turn of a man who had had a few drinks left him, and the clerk did not doubt again that he was cold sober.
>
> (3-4)

William Faulkner referred to hunting as "the best game of all, best of all breathing and forever the best of all listening." And fox hunting fits this description better than most other kinds. It is one of the most ritualistic types of hunting, for the men who take part in it are not, strictly speaking, hunters at all. Rather, they are spectators, experiencing the hunt vicariously, as they listen to the singing of their hounds in pursuit of the fox and occasionally praise or denounce a particular hound who pulls ahead or falls behind the pack. Of all the listeners, Nunn is the most discerning, particularly as he waits to hear his own hound Zing:

> But Nunn, as always, heard him first; to the other listeners it was only another noise of the wind, but Nunn knew, and bowed his head and shut his eyes and held his breath for better listening. King Devil had skirted