

Finding Home in Merry Hill: Appalachia Beyond the Mountains in Arnow's *The Dollmaker*

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Table of Contents

Introduction: Appalachian Roots: “My Help Cometh from the Hills”.....4

Chapter 1: Restorative Memory: Seeing Appalachia in Merry Hill.....27

Chapter 2: “Whittling Foolishness”: Experiencing Appalachia through Community.....47

Chapter 3: I See the “Living Christ”65

Conclusion: Appalachia in the Heart.....80

Works Cited.....83

Introduction: “My Help Cometh from the Hills”

*“Let my heart rest this purple hour
 With slow wandering in dull passages of breath,
 In unwoven air, in sleep withdrawn from death,
 And voiceless span the mountain’s crumbling tower.
 Let me lie here unstirred, unwoke and still,
 Let my heart lean against this fallow hill.”*

“Let This Hill Rest” -James Still

In Harriette Arnow’s *The Dollmaker*, the Nevels’ arduous migration experience from Kentucky to Detroit questions the durability of Appalachian identity within two distinct, clashing cultures. Through the eyes of Gertie Nevels, a strong, self-reliant Appalachian woman, raised among the fields and wooded hillsides of Kentucky, the tension between rural, agrarian life and the noisy, mechanized world of Detroit also invites inquiry into the longevity of cultural values and customs. As described in the novel, Detroit of the 1940s little resembles the way of life Gertie has a propensity for in the mountains of Kentucky. Coming to the city during the height of war, mechanized production, and mass migration, Gertie faces a cultural world that is not only vastly different than her own but often unwelcoming to her as an Appalachian. In Merry Hill, devout followers of prejudiced religious doctrine and socialites that worship the economic system challenge Gertie’s “Appalachianess” because they see her manners and values as antiquated and subordinate to the progressive idealism of modernity.

When Gertie first moves to Detroit, the culture of the city overwhelms her and demands that she assimilate to the proper social codes of life in Merry Hill. However, if Gertie were to let go of her Appalachian roots entirely, she would simply become another cog in the city’s

economic machine. This transformation of cultural identity never fully takes place for her, though, as she chooses to embrace parts of her Appalachian identity in subtle but noteworthy ways. A close examination of Gertie's experiences in Detroit reveals how she holds onto her Appalachian identity by reliving and nurturing memories of the mountains, building community with her neighbors, and staying spiritually rather than religiously grounded in the overwhelming urban world.

Set in the 1940s, *The Dollmaker* takes a close look at the migration of an Appalachian family, whose abandonment of their home is a response to the tragedies of World War II and the advertised wealth of working in the congested city factories. Since Clovis Nevels, Gertie's husband is unfit to be a soldier, he deserts his Kentucky homeland to work with machines and labor in the Northern factories. Gertie desires to stay in Appalachia, but criticized and demeaned by her mother's religious proselytizing, she inevitably follows Clovis to Detroit with the five children in tow. The assimilation of Clovis and the majority of the children appears flawless, as they each modify their mannerisms to suit the more accepted way of speaking proper English, navigate traffic in the bustling streets, and participate in the public school system and union strikes. Gertie, however, struggles to adapt to life in Detroit. In *Harriette Arnow*, biographer Wilton Eckley remarks on the cultural commentary present in the characterization of Gertie. In the only biography to date on Arnow's life, Eckley describes the soul-crushing effect of the city on the quiet, Appalachian Gertie, as her family, little by little, begins to pull away from her (125). Gertie remains Appalachian, and in doing so, ostracizes herself from connecting with her family who take on a new cultural identity. Unstoppable forces like war and money may pull Gertie away from her home in the mountains, but her family continue to pressure her as an

outsider. Many people in Detroit display upturned noses at Gertie's "Appalachianess," and she, in turn, questions the appropriateness of their cultural manners in the city.

Looking at the desperation, impoverishment, and prejudice of the Merry Hill community she moves into, Gertie wonders how much better life could be in Detroit with such conditions. From the moment Gertie and the children step off the train in Detroit, they are labeled as hillbillies, making their status as migrants the most defining characteristic of their identity. The city itself offers a frightful landscape of heavy, blanketed snow along the streets and ice crawling on the walls of the car. Gertie's introduction to the city during the cab ride is overwhelming, and the place seems otherworldly to her: "Here there seemed to be no people, even the cars with their rolled-up windows, frosted over like those of the cab, seemed empty of people, driving themselves through a world not meant for people" (Arnow 184). Already, Gertie sees the influence of machinery and the consuming power it has on the city and people of Detroit. The cab driver nonchalantly comments that the Nevels' new home is "[r]ight in u middle of some a Detroit's pride and glory—war plants" (Arnow 183). Production, war, and machinery devours all signs of Kentucky for Gertie, and even the sky unveils the bright red silhouette of a pour from a steel mill, engulfing the stars. Gertie often feels one step behind the timetable of the city, especially the way people spend money for unnecessary conveniences such as the ice-man, the paper boy, and constant peddlers. It is a rhythm of city life that Gertie cannot quite seem to fall in line with (Arnow 265). Gertie is a woman used to working with her hands, growing food from her land, cooking from a wood burning stove, with room to move in her house and fewer knocks on the front door, waiting with a "cupped [hand] for the down-dropping silver" (Arnow 265). Filled with cold and impersonal units and constructed with little regard for comfort, the row house feels unfamiliar to her, deepening her sense of being an outsider.

The tension between “true Detroit citizens” and cultural outsiders builds a wall of sectarianism and superiority between neighbors in the Merry Hill community and the workers in the factories. This prejudice of Appalachian culture does not appear in every home on Merry Hill, but in the rough, dogmatic language of the Daly household across the street, and the conversations among factory workers that hint at preferential treatment for laborers of certain cultural backgrounds. Clovis talks about the “Pollock foreman” he works with at the Flint plant, declaring, “[I]f he don’t like a feller’s looks he puts him on a job he thinks he cain’t do. He’s like th Dalys an all th rest a these foreigners—he hates everthing an everbody that ain’t just like hissef” (Arnow 386). The model of a modern Detroit citizen appears to fluctuate with whoever has the most sway, wealth, and the vested interest of the majority on their side at a particular time. Detroit immerses her in the tension among that cultures that have migrated to the city and an economic and labor system that leaves much to be desired. Allowing partiality to taint the workplace means that the welfare of the workers falls aside in favor of profit. Gertie’s up-close view of these systems in Detroit through her husband Clovis, reveals alarming conditions in the factories that further question the value of living and working in the city.

Often, Gertie finds the culture of Detroit to be lacking in humanity. The tired eyes of the overtaxed factory workers, who face the possibility of losing life or limb each day, show that Detroit views human suffering as profitable. She even overhears her husband and his coworkers discuss the hazardous working conditions: “Gertie had never known there were so many ways for a workingman to die: burned, crushed, skinned alive, smothered, gassed, electrocuted, chopped to bits, blown to pieces” (Arnow 355). To Gertie, this revelation about life in Detroit appears to be an unbalanced trade-off. If the values of Detroit culture allow the abuse of laborers, Gertie finds it difficult to see the advantage of giving up her Appalachian heritage. In

Appalachia, Gertie flourishes in an encouraging community invested in the well-being of each other. Her vision of idyllic Appalachia centers on a respect for human life, which seems absent in the labor force of the city and cut-throat economics. However, as Eckley points out, Gertie grows through this trial: “More than learning about city life, Gertie experiences a kind of revelation. Her creative spirit that flourished so freely in Kentucky is crushed in Detroit, but in return she achieves an understanding of humanity that was not available to her before” (125). The poor treatment of exhausted and endangered workers hardly seems worth the troubling of adapting to city life until Gertie sees the value of community being upheld by her female neighbors. Her discovery of beauty and goodness in the actions of the Merry Hill women does not ameliorate the suffering she faces with the changes in the city. Through these friendships, though, she finds that the suffering often goes hand in hand with hope, because without the experience of pain, faith will lack conviction. In her Merry Hill community, Gertie finds the “faith” to keep her Appalachian identity because she recognizes the importance of this cultural practice. Building an Appalachian-style community in Detroit provides the needed support and hope for people to no longer have to face an uncaring social system alone.

Furthermore, Gertie’s Appalachian identity must also resist the consistent degrading comments of vicious neighbors and her own family’s disdain for her backwoods manners. Her Appalachianism makes a prime target for the prejudice of people such as Mr. Daly, who sees himself as above other migrant workers. Despite the cold shoulder she receives from a few, Gertie comes to find what Eckley calls the “indomitable spirit that, though occasionally stifled, can never be permanently erased” (127). For Gertie, the “indomitable spirit” becomes inseparable from her “Appalachianism.” Who she is as an Appalachian and the values that constitute the culture not only frame the way she sees the world, but also how the world responds

to her. With such discord between the cultures of Appalachia and 1940s Detroit, Gertie's decision to yield but never fully surrender her heritage is a prime example of her courageous steadfastness to maintain her identity. Gertie finds strength and wisdom to live in the city without becoming a fully indoctrinated modern citizen from the knowledge and practice of her Appalachian heritage.

When the others treat Gertie as an outsider, the cultural distinctions between Appalachia and Detroit become even more pronounced. The city culture that the Nevells are encouraged to adopt functions using wider social constructs and economic interests rather than shared human experiences such as the bonds of suffering, friendship, kindness, and support. In *Culture and Anarchy*, Matthew Arnold suggests that the commonalities between groups of people makes a strong, progressive culture (62-65). Arnold's claim seems contradictory when looking at the representation of Detroit in the novel. Instead of encouraging intercultural connections, the city relies on mass assimilation to a lifestyle that lacks empathy and a critical eye for cultural traits and practices that bond people together. "Progress" in 1940s Detroit appears with institutions such as religion, capitalism, consumer culture, government agencies, and mass media that contribute to a society of greed and self-centeredness. Gertie struggles to come to terms with these differences from what she knew in Appalachia, but she makes these adjustments for her family. Her acceptance of these changes in Detroit does not mean she fully gives up her cultural identity as a woman from the mountains. She makes allocations like learning to pay taxes and making do with the cramped spaces and thin walls of her home in Merry Hill. She accepts the way of life in Detroit with one condition: her Appalachian identity stays. No matter what, Gertie knows she will always be Appalachian, and she cannot help but let that show with her accented speech and the swing of her handcrafted Josiah basket.

When she is in the city, Gertie's connection to Appalachia comes through in a clear set of values and practices associated with the rural region. Before simply ascribing these traits to Gertie, it is important to define the boundaries of Appalachia and how culture has come to be viewed in this region. Many researchers have attempted to define what tradition and culture look like in Appalachia, but such a task is quite challenging because of the extensive landscape and cultural climate that Appalachia takes up. Of course, this belief depends on the researcher's point of view on the boundaries of Appalachia. Those who firmly stand on the diversity of "Appalachianess" often find that Appalachia spans a variety of sub-regions in the mountains, which incorporates a much larger stretch of land than the more rigid view that only certain states or sub-regions are the true Appalachia. The exact borders of this region have long been debated, often providing little clarity on the precise boundary lines. However, the more widely acknowledged view tends to be that Appalachia encompasses a wider stretch of land travelling along the eastern side of the country (Drake vii-ix). For the sake of this work, the belief that Appalachia ranges from Alabama to Pennsylvania with a variety of sub-regions and carved out sections of states will be held as the primary resource for defining "Appalachianess" and the value set ascribed to this cultural group.

In Drake's map from *A History of Appalachia*, it appears that Appalachia is comprised of various sub-regions that hold unique economic, social, and traditional roles within the larger region. *The Dollmaker* focuses heavily on the Cumberland-Allegheny Highlands that includes most of the mountainous region of Eastern Kentucky. Even though the Nevels live in the fictional, agrarian town of Ballew, Kentucky, the industry, culture, and setting description match that of Eastern Kentucky during the 1940s. The Cumberland-Allegheny Highlands takes up quite a large section of the Appalachian Mountains, extending from Pennsylvania all the way down to

Alabama. Like the representation of regions in other countries, the sub-regions often include some cultural variations when compared to their neighbors. Appalachia is no exception, especially since the territory is quite large. Naturally, there are bound to be differences in tradition and lifestyle from Appalachians in Pennsylvania to those living in Kentucky.

Geographic diversity can account for subtle agricultural or linguistic preferences, but certain Appalachian cultural traits seem to be accounted for time and again, despite the vast landscape.

From Gertie's perspective, the soul of Appalachia embodies tranquility, abounds in rich natural resources, and offers the needed ingredient for an ideal life: land. In *Appalachian Values*, Loyal Jones catalogues several characteristics that he believes to be native to Appalachian culture, which play a part in the forming of their heritage and traditions. The few listed in this work are chosen because they most closely reflect the attitude and beliefs of Gertie, who acts as the caretaker for Appalachian culture in the streets of Detroit. Gertie understands that traditions are a connection to one's roots in a world that tries so hard to mold people into the perfect citizens of modernity. She is wise to the notion that if progress is a never-ending search for what is better in life, then the ideal citizen would seem to be an elusive concept, especially when considering Arnold's description of culture as the challenge to pursue moral ideals and beauty with one mind (62-65). But the focus on individualism in Detroit would seem to make model citizens somewhat self-centered, believing their welfare to be more important than the good of the community. Arnold's take on culture as a group effort dedicated to filtering the wisdom of various cultural backgrounds does not apply to Detroit. Instead, the city and people struggle to form a strong cultural identity because unity cannot come from disrespect, prejudice, and selfishness. What Arnold's view of culture does seem to connect to, however, is some of the cultural beliefs that Loyal Jones speaks of in *Appalachian Values*. These values are not universal

to all Appalachian people, but they are represented as part of the cultural tradition and appear in Gertie's interactions with her neighbors in Detroit.

The importance of these listed traditions to the continuation of Gertie's Appalachia in Detroit cannot be underestimated. The standards of Appalachian traditions are rooted in experience and human connection and often have a tight hold on the people from the region. A few of the traditional beliefs associated with Appalachian culture that can be noted in Gertie's behavior both inside of Kentucky and on the streets of Detroit are the value of faith, self-reliance, loyalty to family, respect for others, love of home, and sense of beauty (Jones). In "The Borrower Is Servant to the Lender' (Prov. 22.7): Slavery, Freedom, and Stewardship in Harriette Simpson Arnow's *The Dollmaker*," Jessica D. Allen also agrees that these traits are easily recognizable in Appalachian life and includes Jones' perspective on Appalachia's values in her own work (Allen). Each of these values of Appalachian culture are inseparable from the notion of tradition, as they have been passed down through the generations, making them a part of the long-standing traditions often expected of the Appalachian way of life. While there are other values listed in Jones's and Allen's works, those that have been chosen are most easily seen in Gertie's display of Appalachian culture. This decision does not invalidate the other traits or make the above more "Appalachian" in nature; they simply come through more strongly in Gertie's experiences.

Gertie frequently quotes scripture to herself and others, trying to reason through her migration experience, disconnection with her home, and her neighbors' boorish behavior. She is no stranger to biblical principles, but Gertie's understanding of religion is much more in tune with the natural world of the mountains than her other family members. Her mother's reverence of the traditional fire and brimstone message unsettles Gertie, who hopes that Christ is more

merciful and more closely aligned with scriptural redemption than the preaching in the country churches. While her faith may be a bit unconventional to the denominational preferences of her Kentucky home, Gertie's value of faith and spiritual guidance do align with the Appalachian tradition of relying on faith to trudge through the hardships of life. Discussing the religious beliefs of Appalachian folks, Jones finds that, "[h]ard work did not always bring a sure reward, and so perhaps some of mountain religion is more fatalistic than elsewhere. The point is to get religion—get saved—and try to keep the faith and endure, hoping for a sure reward in the hereafter" (46). Holding out for better days is certainly part of Gertie's mindset, but she also tries to combat the fallenness of the world using scriptural wisdom. Sometimes Gertie's use of scripture provides comfort for the trials she faces, but other times, it only shows the brokenness of the world around her.

Through her woodworking skills and dedication to hard labor, Gertie is the ideal example of self-reliance. Constantly toiling in the rich, mountain earth, Gertie understands the importance of working with one's hands and using the available resource in the mountains. Jones comments on the independence of mountain living: "We [Appalachians] also value self-reliance, to do things for ourselves, whether or not it is practical to do so—like make a dress, a chair, build a house, repair an automobile, or play a banjo, fiddle, or guitar. We get satisfaction from that, in this age when people hire others to do work they used to do" (63). Getting up before the rest of her family, Gertie prepares breakfast, brings in water from the spring, and starts a fire to warm the house before anyone else stirs. The home that Gertie creates is also self-contained as the family raises their own crops, tends livestock, and uses the nature around them to fill in any gaps. Part of this self-reliance comes from a deep appreciation of the land itself. Jones notes the importance of Appalachia to the people who live there: "Sense of place is one of the unifying

values of mountain people, and it makes it hard for us to leave the mountains, and when we do, we long to return” (99). Gertie’s communion with nature connects her to Appalachian culture.

Family and community are crucial components of Appalachian culture that Gertie tries to maintain both in the mountains and city. Even though the Nevels are displaced from their mountain community in Ballew, Kentucky, the value of caring for others never leaves Gertie. Jones clarifies that Appalachians value relationships, seeing and interpreting the world through people they are kin to or are in some way acquainted with. Jones refers to this trait as personalism, claiming that Appalachians are more inclined towards neighborliness (81-82). In the tight knit community of Ballew, most people help take care of one another, especially in hardship. When Gertie goes to the local store to wait on the day’s mail, she automatically begins to tend the garden of the elderly store owner. Gertie shares a strong loyalty with her community members and carries out the importance of relationships in her actions. In fact, Jones claims that “[w]e [Appalachians] may not always like or approve of other people, but we normally accept them as persons and treat them with respect” (82). Whether she is in the city or mountains, Gertie treats those around her with kindness and dignity. Even when her city neighbors only offer her cruel and prejudiced comments, she refrains from lashing out. For Gertie, holding on to her value system is more important than getting even. Her Appalachian heritage comes first.

The beauty of the mountains connects people from Appalachia. The rolling hillsides and mountain earth provide an equal landscape that encourages a similar agricultural lifestyle and use of resources among Appalachian people. A sense of community comes from this similarity and can be seen in the way Gertie associates with and supports her neighbors. The beauty and richness of Appalachia’s nature also encourages the unique crafts and handmade goods that come from the region. As Jones claims, “Great pride was taken in the handicrafts—in the beauty

of the wood in a chair” (115). The simple beauty of the landscape comes through in the carvings and crafts that Gertie makes and often gives away in the novel. Each gift of “whittling foolishness” that Gertie creates introduces a piece of Appalachia into Detroit culture. Gertie perpetuates Appalachian life and customs with her regionally based talent for woodcarving.

Throughout *The Dollmaker*, Gertie acts out the traditions of Appalachia in three specific ways: in her fond remembrances of home, chosen communities, and unrelenting faith. Her drastically different life in Detroit may ask her to compromise some ways of mountain living such as adjusting to taxes and scheduling life around the clock, but in ways that most significantly impact her life, Gertie does not relinquish her heritage. The way she treats her neighbors in Merry Hill reflects the caring and respectful manner so often seen in Appalachian communities. Her deep, unyielding faith unveils Christ to be much more compassionate than stricter religions would claim. In the end, Appalachia is never far away from Gertie, as her memories of home always bring Appalachia wherever she is. When Gertie walks through the alleyways of Detroit, Appalachia is always right beside her.

***The Dollmaker* and New Historicism**

Gertie’s roots in Appalachia influence how she sees and responds to the vastly different culture in Detroit. Using the theoretical lens of New Historicism to examine Gertie’s character and her relationship to culture provides a clearer understanding of the cultural clash she faces both in the city and the mountains. Applying New Historicism to Gertie’s choices and the interaction of cultures in *The Dollmaker* highlights the importance of a cultural perspective in the make-up of identity. Gertie views the world around her through the values and practices of Appalachia, but the life going on around her in the streets of Detroit follows different rules that complicate her relationships and her role as a caretaker. Understanding these cultural differences

spotlighted by a New Historicist reading of the novel helps respond more clearly to Gertie's struggle with her cultural identity. Her complicated relationship with life in Detroit challenges her rooted identity in Appalachian traditions, but a New Historicist view shows how this complex dynamic does not mean the erasure of her heritage.

"Culture" is a difficult term to define since many scholars and historians disagree on what should be included in its characterization. However, for the purposes of this work, the review of culture by new historicist Stephen Greenblatt and cultural critic Matthew Arnold proves to be helpful with evaluating Gertie's experiences and the intermingling of Appalachian and modern American culture. In "Culture," Greenblatt discusses how a careful analysis reveals that culture often includes a "system of constraints" ("Culture"). These constraints ask cultural members to "practice a code of manners," whereby their continued acceptance in the group depends on how well they display their knowledge of the customs. Whether in Appalachia or Detroit, keeping up appearances by following this "code of manners" allows Gertie to find a way to carve out a place for herself and her family in both cultures. The constraints Greenblatt mentions are crucial to defining a specific culture and are not dismissed by Gertie when she evaluates how to interact in a given place ("Culture"). She understands conceding to these constraints in Detroit benefits her family, so she makes allocations with her Appalachian practices. One such change is her vocabulary. For instance, the colloquial term "youngens" gets replaced with the more updated, modern, and fashionable term: "kids." In addition, her pace of life needs to change; the clock now dictates when the children go to school, when they return, and when Clovis punches in and out of work. Unused to the fast-paced city, discomforted with her lost strength and self-sufficiency amidst the constraints of organized religion, relegated to the cramped domestic space of her row house, and burdened by the economic system of buying on time, taxes, and store

credit, Gertie misses the simplicity of life in Appalachia. These constraints represent the limitations she must accept in order to survive in Detroit.

In *The Dollmaker*, Detroit seeks to progress, transforming into a version of life that is deemed better than the past. As Greenblatt acknowledges, cultures are often adapting and altering constraints to prepare for the future, but the shallow institutions and constructs Gertie sees in Detroit do little to reassure the peoples' future outside of what seems to profit the system ("Culture"). Individual happiness frequently comes at great monetary and moral cost. The system's brokenness appears through people like the Daly's, who sit by the radio, drinking in the divisive preaching of Father Moneyhan and the violence of union members. Cultural and religious tensions pressure outsiders like the Nevels to become different people not just with buying on time or paying taxes, but with their ethical boundaries that are crossed simply to survive. Clovis becomes violent and distempered, and Gertie sells her craft cheaply to the efficiency of a jigsaw machine. Compromises must be made to appease the constraints of the city.

Some of the constraints that Gertie faces comes from new and frustrating technology that she has to contend with in her home. Through radio broadcasts and consumerism, contentment is promised to come from owning the latest technological advancements and seeking more money to spend on dime a dozen, manufactured trinkets like the children's plastic toys bought at Christmas. In "Migration, Material Culture, and Identity in William Attaway's *Blood on the Forge* and Harriette Arnow's *The Dollmaker*," Professor Stacy I. Morgan suggests that "material culture serves not only to *reflect* but to *shape* the lives of poor and working-class Americans" (715). Growing factory jobs and overtime work enable Detroit dwellers to purchase products that claim to set them apart from their envious neighbors. When Clovis buys Gertie the Icy Heart

refrigerator for Christmas, many of her neighbors come to the door wanting to look at the shiny, new machine they had heard so much about over the radio. This simple machine fascinates the rest of Merry Hill, but Gertie can never seem to get the hang of working with the ill-humored refrigerator, and she often discovers ruined food in the freezer. Troublesome machinery and dissatisfying, lower quality store-bought foods cause Gertie to struggle with her daily tasks as a wife and mother. In Kentucky, Gertie fluidly moved from one task to the next when preparing meals: “She punched out flat rounds of dough and laid them in the bake skillet, shoved the skillet into the oven, turned the sowbelly, pushed it to one side of the frying pan, and then got the now partially thawed eggs out of the warming oven and broke them into the hot grease” (Arnow 88-89). The routine of cooking is simple, familiar, and nearly effortless for Gertie. However, her skill set with making her own preserves and taking care of her chickens in Kentucky does not translate well to Detroit, which creates dissension in the family. Clovis is especially frustrated with Gertie’s unwillingness to thankfully accept the machinery, but what he fails to consider is the loss that total assimilation would cause for her. In many ways, the refrigerator tries to replace tradition and Gertie’s learned method of cooking and preparing meals in Appalachia, asking her to give up her heritage for a machine that is sub-standard to her own way of doing things.

Gertie is unwilling to fully commit to the process of being culturally fluid, but she cannot entirely avoid the constraints of the city. To keep the blood of her cultural identity pumping, Gertie finds areas of modern culture that the call for assimilation does not quite reach. Greenblatt claims that “if culture functions as a structure of limits, it also functions as the regulator and guarantor of movement” (“Culture”). Future generations (or new migrant families) must be able to carry on the traditions, so some flexibility is needed for the culture to progress. Greenblatt also acknowledges that every culture is different in how much room for change and

improvement is functional and acceptable. The question rests on how far modern America is willing to go in allowing Gertie to carve out her own piece of dirty, snow covered alley. The constraints in modern America are quite powerful, though, pulling her into capitalist ventures, exposing her to the constant noise of mass media, and pushing her into the world of consumerism. But outside that window of economics and burdensome institutions, Gertie finds that her own cultural view cannot be taken away from her. Travelling to Appalachia in memories spurred by people and symbols permeating the alleys and seeing her heritage in the supportive community of women and factory workers, Gertie glimpses her culture living and breathing.

The difference between the world of Kentucky and that of Detroit can also be viewed in light of an eighteenth-century sociological analysis of people groups. sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies's work, *Community and Society*, describes the differences in community life versus that of a larger social system that often evolves around cities and larger towns. Gertie's depiction of the cultural group in Kentucky resembles Tonnies's definition for a community where the people have a strong connection to the land and each other and live out traditional folkways that bond them together (257-258) (33-34). On the other hand, life in Detroit reflects Tonnies's explanation for a functioning society, where capitalist interest comes first before the welfare of the people (258). Gertie experiences life in both social groups, but she consistently chooses to participate in smaller communities because they align with her cultural values. She is forced to engage in the society of Detroit for survival, but she finds that her identity as an Appalachian is more acceptable in the Merry Hill community.

Tonnies's description of society and community clarifies the dynamics of the social groups in Appalachia and Detroit and lends itself to a deeper analysis of modern culture as impersonal and flawed. Arnold also comments on the dysfunction of cultures that do not pursue

the diverse knowledge and well-being of the collective (62-65). In Kentucky and Detroit, Gertie lives among smaller communities that believe in supporting their neighbors and offering compassion when needed. The Merry Hill women reflect Appalachia's style of community building and often hold to the same values cherished by the region. The broader cultural society of modern America is present in both Appalachia and Detroit and counters the caring relationships and team effort of the respective communities. Because of the dissension and prejudice of mainstream culture for migrant or rural communities, Arnold's vision of idyllic culture does not pertain to modern America. Arnold shows the chinks in the armor of modern culture, some of which can be mended by the value system and community mindedness of Appalachian culture.

In *The Dollmaker*, the connection between Gertie's woodworking craft and her roots shows how Appalachian culture can be maintained in her artistic expression. In "Resonance and Wonder," Greenblatt clarifies how cultural objects resonate within their own cultural milieu, encouraging historical interest while simultaneously instigating wonder at the beauty and history of a people inscribed in the work of art (30-32). Greenblatt claims that both concepts should be present in order to develop the greatest appreciation of the art (34). Gertie's art is a testament to her heritage, and when she carves, a part of her culture is restored to her. These moments are deeply emotional and draw her back to a place and time that she feels more connected to her "Appalachianess." Her craft may be reinvented to include mechanized tools that follow the code of progress and serve to get the job done faster and more efficiently, but this decision does not take away her woodworking skills nor does this change in working style alter the cultural worth of the art created without the use of machinery.

Gertie's artistry is an expression of her heritage and a reminder of Appalachia's beauty. In "Resonance and Wonder," Greenblatt suggests that wonder leads the beholder of beautiful art to see the cultural significance that sparked its creation (34). Gertie's woodworking originates in the mountains of Appalachia. Respecting the culture that nurtures her craft is integral to appreciating her artwork, but this admiration, according to Greenblatt, relies on the audience first emotionally responding to the art ("Resonance and Wonder" 32). Her neighbors in Merry Hill respond with the "surprise, delight, [and] admiration" that Greenblatt claims is crucial to comprehending the cultural nuances behind artistic expression (32). Gertie's craft inspires this awe, which makes owning her art desirable. When the smooth strokes of her knife are replaced by the blades of the jigsaw, the cultural significance of her work is undone. Her expressiveness is taken away when she can no longer use the traditional methods that made her creations unique and distinctly Appalachian. Commodification diminishes the cultural significance of the jumping jack dolls she sells near the end of the novel, but it does not change the value of the other handmade whittling foolishness that she gives out to her neighbors.

Gertie's desire to see the cultural shadow of Appalachia in the dingy Detroit alleys is an act of free-will that keeps her identity intact. Greenblatt analyzes how culture is not a mindless abstraction that leaves no purpose or agency to the people who live under the agreed-on conditions ("Resonance and Wonder" 15). Even though Gertie may be subject to the constraints and conditions of the city, she has the agency to decide how she will respond. Greenblatt goes on to suggest that the cultural structure is ever-changing, consistently influenced by man's will and determination. He clarifies that "[e]very form of behavior ... is a strategy: taking up arms or taking flight are significant social actions, but so is staying put, minding one's business, turning one's face to the wall. Agency is virtually inescapable" ("Resonance and Wonder" 15). Gertie

acts on this agency consistently through her memories of Appalachia and her fellowship with the Merry Hill community. Her efforts to keep Appalachia alive in Detroit may be tempered by the constraints of the city but are not controlled by them. In her silence and internal dialogue, Gertie's protection of her cultural identity is heard quiet clearly by the reader.

Feminist Theory in *The Dollmaker*

The study of Gertie's connection to culture would seem incomplete without acknowledging the complexity of her experience not just as an Appalachian but as a woman caught between cultures. By applying a feminist lens to Gertie's challenges with migration and the city of Detroit, her role as a mother, wife, and caretaker becomes more pronounced, showing how easily influenced such tasks are by culture and tradition. Looking at her life in Appalachia with a feminist perspective also unveils that the culture she most identifies with is more malleable in allowing Gertie to act on her own decisions. As a woman in Appalachia, Gertie finds more flexibility in her own cultural traditions and is not relegated to domestic responsibilities inside the house. Despite her mother's religious chastising that depresses Gertie's confidence as a non-stereotypical woman, she consistently refuses to give up her strength and agency as a provider for her family. She hides away money to support her own future plans from her husband and even makes a deal to purchase land without Clovis' backing. These plans may be stopped by the limiting gender expectations of her mother and John Ballew, but the mere fact that Gertie feels the freedom to take such initiative clearly shows her comfort within these cultural boundaries. Even though breadwinning is traditionally considered part of men's roles, she chooses to be the provider for the family by working in the fields and selling produce. She even stands unflinching in front of two military men, demanding their aid to get her son to the town doctor. Often, scholars of feminist theory such as Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of*

the Rights of Woman focus on female autonomy and women's ability to make judgments outside the domestic space. Applying feminist theory to Gertie's experiences reveals that she has more influence and power when she practices Appalachian traditions. Whether she is in the mountains or Detroit, Gertie's agency fluctuates depending on if she upholds her own cultural values or yields to the constraints of the city.

Looking at Gertie's characterization through the lens of desired agency, Gertie's dual responsibility as both caretaker and provider supports the goal of women being more influential outside of the home. Gertie's agency is more obvious in Appalachia, but it does continue in a somewhat smaller, more monitored role in Detroit. Using this feminist perspective, Gertie's migration at first appears to regress her back to the singular role of caretaker, but Gertie and her resilient spirit does not stay here. For a while, Clovis takes on the role of provider, working long hours in the factory and expecting Gertie to be a dutiful housewife. She does her best to cook and tend to the needs of the children at the same level she did in Appalachia, but the constraints of the city make such normal tasks unfamiliar and confusing. Machinery takes precedence over her own skill, making her lose power even in the domestic space. Much of her time in Detroit is spent doing women's work until Clovis goes on strike. Gertie must then take up the mantle of provider and sell jumping jack dolls on the street and advertise her skills as a washerwoman. But her woodworking craft is overseen by Clovis, who demands that she use the jigsaw to make the whole carving process easier and faster. Her influence over her own artwork is limited by her husband, who views her work as a commodity to be sold into modern consumerism. Gertie's agency is closely monitored in the city but never fully dispelled. She resists the system of indoctrination by keeping her Appalachianess and the traditions of that culture, which shows that her fortitude may wax and wane but is never truly abandoned.

Throughout the novel, Gertie's agency often appears subtly, coinciding with her resistance to the constraints of the city. In *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History*, historian Gerda Lerner suggests the importance of including a "new history" written to "reflect the dual nature of humankind—its male and female aspect" (160). *The Dollmaker* provides this woman's perspective in the characterization of Gertie by evaluating the hardships she faces inside and outside the domestic space and in the clashing cultures. Gertie holds two distinct positions throughout the novel: she is both the motherly caretaker and the strong, capable provider who brings needed money and resources into the home. Her confidence in these roles fluctuates depending on whether she is trying to adapt to culture in Detroit or practicing her own Appalachian customs. In "Harriette Arnow's Exile from the Promised Land: *The Dollmaker*," Elizabeth Jane Harrison clarifies that Gertie's rugged mountain strength and assertive agency that places her as the undeclared head of the home in Kentucky cannot translate to the city. Harrison suggests that "[Gertie] can never assert the power or knowledge she gains as long as society does not recognize or value it" ("Harriette Arnow's Exile"). Gertie's Appalachian style of approaching routine chores such as cooking and whittling constantly find criticism. Even though the social codes of the city do not extend grace in these areas for Gertie, the women of Merry Hill certainly find merit with her kindness, work ethic, and advice. She finds a somewhat stronger tone of voice among these women, allowing her Appalachian speech and mannerisms to come out in the safety of her community. Practicing being true to her Appalachian roots is easier inside of the region and away from judgmental eyes, but that does not mean she allows a lack of value placed on her culture to dissuade her from owning her identity.

In some ways, Gertie's assertive agency as an Appalachian woman becomes an asset to the family in Detroit. Lerner discusses the importance of the housewife for the workingman,

claiming, “The unpaid services of the blue-collar-worker’s wife are in effect what enables him and his family to survive inflation, occasional unemployment, or setbacks due to sickness” (135). As the caretaker of her family and their home in Merry Hill, Gertie’s domestic labor is necessary for their survival, and her actions with selling the jumping jack dolls becomes a way to bring money in for the struggling family. Lerner goes on to consider how the role of housewife during this period of industrial growth and increased factory work resembles that of “the farm wife or frontier housewife” (135). Gertie is quite familiar with this survivalist mentality and the need to make ends meet as she practiced such domestic duties in Kentucky, but the newness of the city and the constraints placed on her work cause her to be less efficient when the family first arrives in Detroit. Gertie gradually grows her skills and begins to take on more responsibility with managing income. Branching out of the domestic sphere becomes a critical contribution to the family’s welfare in Detroit.

Gertie’s Appalachian culture resonates in Detroit in small ways, arguably becoming a part of the social background in the city. The force of the assimilation tactics in Detroit causes Gertie to question her ability to survive in the city, but since Appalachia remains alive and well even in the most minute ways, she can pull strength and knowledge from her culture to make a home. She resolutely practices community values of generosity and support that are integral to her heritage, showing kindness and mercy even to the same people that persecute her. Where organized religion seeks to overwhelm and condemn people that do not hold the same doctrinal values, Gertie finds a “living Christ” in the faces of her neighbors. She develops a spiritual connection to God that she comes to know in Appalachia but finds existing in the people of Detroit. Even her craft that is commodified and sold on street corners never loses the spirit of Appalachia entirely with pieces of whittling foolishness scattered throughout the houses in Merry

Hill. All these nuanced aspects of Appalachia remain alive and well in Detroit, walking right beside Gertie.

Chapter One: Restorative Memory: Seeing Appalachia in Merry Hill

*“Being of these hills, being one with the fox
Stealing into the shadows, one with the new-born foal,
The lumbering ox drawing green beech logs to mill,
One with the destined feet of man climbing and descending,
And one with death rising to bloom again, I cannot go.
Being of these hills I cannot pass beyond.”*

“Heritage” -James Still

Being away from the mountains results in Gertie’s longing for the rich soil and quiet, forested hillsides of Kentucky. Her desire for home manifests in frequent remembrances of the land and people of Appalachia. In “A-Building: Industrial Progress and the Drowned Landscape in Flannery O’Connor and Harriette Simpson Arnow,” Jimmy Dean Smith recognizes the value of memory in the novel: “[Gertie] can at least attach memory to place—a landscape, that is, that she dreams of returning to once her family’s sojourn in Michigan is over” (10). Over and over in the dilapidated alleys of Merry Hill, Gertie’s memory is sparked by family members who still carry-on traditions of home, or simple, symbolic reminders that arrive through dreams and physical manifestations of the mountain landscape. The strong pull of Detroit affects Gertie’s children and her husband, causing them to alter their vocabulary and see opportunities for profit everywhere. Gertie, however, still looks for the stars at night and longs to see flowers sprouting from the overcrowded alleys. Always searching for Appalachia, Gertie often only finds her wooded hillsides in her own imaginative memory. Through recollections, Gertie keeps Appalachia relevant for herself and even for some of her neighbors that catch a glimpse of Kentucky through her eyes.

On the train to Detroit, memory of her Appalachian home surfaces amongst the cramped quarters of the passenger cars, carrying her away from the depressing atmosphere back to the clean air and solitary mountains of home. Her everyday routine of going to the spring and tending the fields comes back to her as she sits on the train headed for her new life. Naturally, Gertie feels apprehensive about moving her family away from all she knows in Kentucky, and the environment on the train does not help. The stench of too many people packed in a tight place makes her choke. Soldiers vomiting in corners and unchanged babies resting on tired passengers's laps fill the rows on the train (Arnold 161-162). Gertie's own children are packed tightly around her in the small seats, making the long ride even more uncomfortable. All signs on this train seem to question the world outside the mountains and whether life in Detroit offers more prosperity. From the compact, overcrowded train car, many people appear to have bought the ideology that a better future awaits them in the cities and suburbs. However, deplorable conditions in which people are stacked like cattle inside the train taint the journey to this land of opportunity. Looking at the state of the sick and overheated people in the train car, Gertie has every right to question the fate in front of her.

Even before Gertie reaches the outskirts of Detroit, a sense of foreboding settles in as she looks at the tired passengers. She comments on the unsavory conditions in the train, saying, "Maybe she was dreaming; in a minute she would jump out of bed and hurry to the spring, for it was moving day and she had a lot of work to do. She'd go outside and smell the good clean air; there would be a melting snow smell and a pine smell on the ridge top, and by her own house the smell of cedar through the creek fog" (Arnold 161). Trying to escape her surroundings, Gertie reminisces about life in the mountains, daydreaming that any moment she would wake up from this nightmare to the fresh, clean mountain air and the familiarity of her own home. Gertie

describes the comforting sights and smells of Appalachia as well as the natural rhythms of her ordinary, mountain life. She is often up well before the children or Clovis, starting the day with a walk to the cool spring. On this walk, she considers the stars in all their glory, noting that “the pine boughs were mixed in with the stars, as if the trees carried stars instead of cones” (Arnow 86). This description may seem a romantic reflection on the landscape, but these details make up Gertie’s experience with Appalachia. For her, the land holds an enchanting tranquility that no other place on earth can compare to, and its charm seeps through in the most mundane of everyday tasks. In the quiet morning hours, Gertie takes time to appreciate the simple allure of Appalachia and evaluate her attachment to the land. On the train, Gertie tries to recapture such moments by finding the beauty and peace of home in conjured dreams and memories.

The unfamiliar surroundings on the train act as a catalyst for Gertie’s memory, sending her back to the mountains in fitful dreams. Resting on the train is nearly impossible, but when Gertie does doze off, she wakes between worlds. In her dream state, Gertie realizes “[s]he’d done a thing she’d never done in all her life—slept till past sunrise. The sun was in her eyes, and Lizzy was bawling, but it was way past milking time...She rose swiftly; she’d better milk even before she built the fire” (Arnow 160). Instead of rising early and beginning her chores on the farm, the long train ride throws Gertie out of her normal schedule. Her efforts to rest in the uncomfortable train seats are mostly unsuccessful, causing her to wake at odd hours and drift between the reality on the train and the life she knew in Kentucky. At this intersection of dream and reality, her responsibilities are calling to her, asking her to remember her life in the mountains and all she left behind. Gertie’s concern comes through in the urgency of her language, which also shows how much leaving home has affected her. However, it is not just her old life pushing her to wake. There are two voices here demanding her attention: the past and present reality. On the

one hand, she subconsciously remembers the demands of the farm that she has neglected. To Gertie, rising early represents an important part of the agricultural lifestyle, and she recognizes that she has fallen out of the needed routine to manage life on her Kentucky farm. Despite her urgency to get to work, Gertie becomes simultaneously aware of being outside the mountains, as the sun streaming through the train windows wakes her up. Gertie's oversleeping acts as the first warning sign that her present circumstances are not part of the routine she has always held back home. Her mind, however, does not immediately accept this new reality and reverts back to life on the farm, praying that the lurching, noisy train is the true dream.

Gertie often experiences flashbacks around people that trigger her connection to Appalachia. Some, like her son Reuben, are a direct representation of mountain living that call her back home through daydreams and hopeful wishes. Others ask Gertie to remember by calling on her for a dream. Gertie's next door neighbor Max is a lonely, married woman dissatisfied with life in Merry Hill and hoping against all odds she will find a way to escape. Until she can physically leave the limits of Detroit's streets, Max asks Gertie to give her a dream. On the night that Gertie and her family arrive, she sees Max staring at her from the young woman's back porch, groceries bags piled in her hands. Boldly, Max tells her, "I gotta have a dream" (Arnow 195). Max's desperation incites sympathy in Gertie: "She hadn't slept; she couldn't dream; but the eyes needed a dream. 'Paradise,' Gertie said" (Arnow 196). Gertie's one-word response to Max's request reflects her own spoken desire to return to the mountain paradise she knew in Kentucky. This image of rural life is Gertie's dream, which she passes on to Max. Even on her first day in Detroit, Gertie remembers life in Kentucky at the sound of a neighbor's simple request. This word, however, holds a deep connection to Gertie and the promised land that she envisions Kentucky to be. In fact, Gertie's reply to Max represents a repetition of her experience

on the train. During the journey, Gertie tries to find some peace and quiet, whittling in the restroom and striking up a conversation with a young woman travelling to meet her husband in “Paradise Valley” (Arnow 165). Gertie mulls these words over, thinking about how hopeful the woman sounded saying them. The timber of the woman’s voice sends Gertie back to the hills of Kentucky, where the taste of rich, ripe muscadines created the same comforting and nostalgic effect as the woman’s words (Arnow 166). The innocent optimism in the woman’s speech hurts Gertie because she must leave her paradise behind. Being forced into someone else’s dream in Detroit, Gertie visits her paradise only in memory.

Even her connection to Reuben pulls Gertie back to the mountains. Sitting on the train to Detroit, Gertie notices that her son wears a suit bought by her mother-in-law. Gertie stares at Reuben, but seeing him in those clothes, she has a hard time recognizing the boy. In the mountains, twelve-year-old Reuben works hard, often helping in the fields at their rented property and at her father’s farm. Not only is he agriculturally minded, but he is also an avid hunter, looking to the resources of the land to contribute to the family’s needs. In fact, when Gertie looks at her son, she sees that “[h]e had her eyes and bigness of bone and cast of face—a straight mouth, and still gray eyes, solemn, that to a stranger might seem sullen” (Arnow 42). To Gertie, her son’s similar features are not just a reflection of her outward appearance, but also of her Appalachian spirit. She sees in Reuben the same stalwart nature made for growing crops and caring for the wooded hillsides of Kentucky that makes the cement sidewalks and train blasts an ill fit for the life he wants. In the little box house in Merry Hill, Gertie conjures up the memory of mother and son working in the Kentucky fields. Gertie remembers that “they worked the corn together, hill by hill, row by row. He had hoed while she had plowed, and they gathered the corn together” (Arnow 382). He holds the same love of the mountains as Gertie, caring for the land

right beside her, step for step. When the family moves to the city, Reuben becomes more withdrawn, and when Gertie comes to check on him in his room, she sees him staring out the window at a train car with “the words ‘COAL’ and lower, smaller, [words] ‘Kentucky Egg’” (Arnow 363). Everything about him reminds her of home, even her loss of it. She wants just as much as he does to recognize some semblance of Kentucky, even in the writing on the side of a passing train car. By following Reuben’s gaze, Gertie imaginatively recollects the hills, a place where she had more agency to live out her Appalachian ways without curious or condescending stares. Detroit is far from Kentucky, but such small reminders that cause her, even if just for a second, to relive a part of her old life and conjure Appalachia in the city streets brings home to her.

The move to Detroit molds Reuben into a constant reminder of the mountains. When Gertie looks at him, she sees his desperation to hold onto his mountain ways and often finds herself filled with despair at being far from Appalachia. In “Harriette Arnow’s *The Dollmaker: A Journey to Awareness*” Dorothy H. Lee believes that:

Her [Gertie’s] clearly defined relationships to the earth itself, to artistic endeavor, to family and community give insight into the sources of fulfillment available in the Kentucky hills. Then, as her painful experiences in Detroit emerge, they force an evaluation of the effects wrought by the loss or modification of these relationships. The farm Gertie is forced to leave is all the paradise she desires ... Life there [Kentucky] entails difficult labor and physical privation, but it offers to Gertie the possibility of rewards commensurate with her value system, with her dreams. By contrast, the urban, industrial society cuts her roots, disorients her physically and psychologically, and threatens her values and autonomy. (92-93)

Lee recognizes that Gertie's bond to the people and land of Kentucky make up the base of her Appalachian culture, and when she leaves the safety of the hills, she finds a greater intolerance for how she views and responds to the world. Gertie faces challenges with the constraints of modern machinery that takes over the running of her home and a school system that tries to take away her children's unique cultural traits, but her displeasure with these changes can be combated by her agency as a member of culture ("Resonance and Wonder" 15). By choosing to reflect on Appalachia, Gertie asserts her ability to see life in Detroit with her own perspective, tinged by the values and traditions of her heritage. As Lee points out, the disorienting city seems to place Gertie in a voiceless position to reverse the persistent chipping away of the city at her connections to Appalachia. However, her decision to keep her identity alive in memories and dreams of the mountains subverts the notion that the city can take away all semblance of cultural roots. Many such memories are sparked by her conversations with Rueben and other neighbors such as Max in Merry Hill. Appalachia, then, remains part of Gertie's identity and becomes influential in the lives of other city-dwellers as well.

Gertie's memories of Appalachia allow her to find flexibility with the cultural constraints that keeps her identity intact. When Gertie finally splits the faceless cherry wood carving at the end of the novel, she comes to understand that she has not been severed from her home or her values; her memories are enough. Rueben, on the other hand, does not wait for such revelation. Greenblatt's "code of manners" that appear in the novel's representation of Detroit cause Reuben to struggle with finding a place for his Appalachian identity in the unwelcoming city. His anger at being deemed an outsider for his cultural differences outweighs his judgement, and he does not look for those areas of cultural flexibility like his mother does in the city ("Resonance and Wonder" 15). The pain and frustration plainly written on his face from the taunting of prejudiced

people like Mr. Daly and his schoolteacher, Mrs. Whittle deeply hurts Gertie for her son, but her limited wisdom when they first arrive in the city means that she can offer Reuben little comfort or help. Both mother and son bear the burden of being outsiders, but instead of bringing them closer together, the cultural friction only adds to the tension between them. Reuben blames Gertie for not standing up to her mother and staying on the Tipton Place. She can see “all his disappointment for the lost farm, all the hatred for Mrs. Whittle, Mr. Daly, the hillbilly crying children turned on her” (Arnow 379). Gertie and Reuben may act as physical reminders of Appalachia, but they are far from a united front, leaving the burden of preserving Appalachian ways to Gertie after her son runs away. Her memory and point of view as a migrant show how the residents of Merry Hill respond to her “Appalachianness,” and how Gertie herself continues to practice the speech and customs of home.

In the city, Gertie ultimately becomes the only one willing to keep her Appalachian identity. Her son may share a love for the mountains but finds the cultural minutiae necessary for city life too overwhelmingly different from his life in Appalachia. In fact, when he tries to subvert the city constraints with traditions of Appalachia, the results are almost catastrophic. Naturally, the customs in the city are different than the mountains, and Reuben chooses to maintain one distinct tradition in the city: the carrying of knives. As a tool, keeping a knife handy in Appalachia is fairly commonplace and essential for chores on the farm, but having a knife in the city is illegal. Reuben, though, does not heed this law, refusing to give up this integral part of his culture. As a rebellious move against the city mandates, the mountain rules Reuben follows almost get him in grave trouble when he confronts Mr. Daly in the alley. All the neighbors are anxiously watching, including Gertie, to see the conclusion of Appalachia versus Detroit. Looking at the anger on Reuben’s face, Gertie remembers the old habit and knows that

he is preparing to pull his knife on Mr. Daly, and she chooses to intervene before this devastating action. The avoided violence causes Gertie to speak condescendingly of city culture: “Only a city fool wouldn’t know he was opening a knife” (Arnow 348). The diverse customs of the two cultures are made clear in this confrontation, and Gertie’s knowledge of Appalachia becomes an asset for the condescending Mr. Daly. Unknown to him, Gertie uses her knowledge of mountain customs to save his life, and her actions in this moment highlight how her memory of an outside culture becomes an advantage to the people of the city, and even highlights her Appalachian value of caring and respecting for all people. In such culturally tense moments, Reuben’s presence in the city urges Gertie to never forget her roots, no matter how difficult the road in Detroit.

Gertie recognizes the importance of the cultural bond she shares with her son, and when she looks at him, she remembers the value of her simple Kentucky life. In Appalachia, Gertie was not just a mother to her children but a teacher and a provider. She could answer questions about life and scripture for them, and she had the agency to assert change when needed. The cultural shift in Detroit, however, deprives her of these clear-cut responses because Gertie is also trying to learn the social codes of Detroit. Lerner addresses how women in a working-class home such as Gertie’s in Detroit provide the necessary support when difficult times hit (135). Gertie faces such an issue with Reuben’s discontent, but she no longer has the same control in the domestic space and culturally minded answers she did in Appalachia. Conflicted on how to address the challenges ahead for her son, Gertie reflects on how much alike they are. When Reuben leaves the designated path planned out for the school children to meander through side streets on his way home, Gertie sees a part of herself that longs to discover nature and a reminder of the Kentucky landscape amidst all the brick and concrete. All she knows for sure is that “[h]er

own feet cried for a path, earth instead of dirty ice-covered cement” (Arnow 378). She cannot judge Reuben for wanting the same small comforts of home that she also craves, but the only words that she offers him are “It won’t allus be like this” (Arnow 382). Gertie can only provide a distant hope to Reuben that he will one day have the freedom to fully embrace his Appalachian identity again, but she also realizes that her words lack power because she struggles to believe them herself. She recognizes that “[t]he trouble was that he was Rueben the same as she was Gertie” (Arnow 382). They love the land and nature, a kind of living that the mechanical sameness of Detroit with trains running in all directions and the red heat from the still mills rising in the night air could never equal. Gertie finds a small comfort in her memories of Appalachia; something that Reuben never quite can.

Sometimes Gertie’s reflections on life in Appalachia do not provide comfort as much as a lesson for her. She feels guilty for allowing her mother to shame her into leaving Appalachia, but even more so, she experiences remorse for not being able set an example of flawless adjustment in Detroit. She considers how Rueben might be different, happier, more willing to change if he saw the same ability in his mother. Gertie muses “If she had taken her mother’s Christ and Battle John’s God and learned to crochet instead of whittle, and loved the Icy Heart...if she had walked straight down the alley the day the gospel women had came, just watching Mrs. Daly as Mrs. Bommarita had watched” (Arnow 382). If she had only found herself willing to give in to her mother’s doctrine and to look away from the cruelty of Mrs. Daly and her chastising broom, Gertie might be different, more adjusted, and through her example, so might Rueben. Nevertheless, Rueben’s mountain roots run just as deeply as hers, and every time she interacts with her disappointed son, Gertie comes face to face with her own failures to choose the future in Appalachia that she wanted for the family. When she looks at him, she is reminded of the life in

Kentucky they were so close to having with the Tipton Place, and the beauty and joy their home could have been if she had only stood her ground.

When Reuben leaves Detroit, his absence becomes another reminder for Gertie of being away from home. He takes twenty dollars from his father's wallet and boards a train for Kentucky, but his ghost remains in the house on Merry Hill. Gertie thinks about her son and what it would be like to have "cross Reuben" in the house on rainy days when all the Nevels children were trapped indoors (Arnow 415). It does not matter to Gertie that Reuben only leaves a note for Clovis, demonstrating his anger and hurt at her; he will always be her son, and the one who loved Appalachia as much as she did. Reuben's abrupt departure from Detroit shows that he cannot come to terms with the city's "code of manners" ("Culture"). He interprets his mother's intervention during the fight with Mr. Daly to be a betrayal of the Appalachian culture they share. Gertie, though, does not want Reuben to carry his knife in this city because she foresees the trouble that will come from it. Reuben becomes resentful because he does not understand that Gertie is not asking him to abandon his roots and reinvent himself to become like people in the city. She simply wants him to try and play along with the other children and no longer carry his knife in the city streets. As Gertie recognizes, his sacrifice with no longer carrying the knife does not diminish the cultural value of the tool. Reuben only needs to come to terms with certain limits to survive in the culture of Detroit. She does not want him to change or let go of his "Appalachianess;" she only wants her son to remain safe, which can be difficult under the critical eye of the city. Nonetheless, Reuben cannot understand the constraints of modern American culture, seeing every concession as a further loss of his identity ("Culture"). Whether the knife travels in his pocket or sits on a shelf at home, it will always be a reminder of Appalachia and the culture he cherishes. Even though the tradition of carrying the knife with him

may be stifled by the restrictions of the city, the connection he has to the object that resonates with him as part of his heritage cannot be taken away (“Resonance and Wonder” 34). The memories imbued in the object from his days in the mountains will always be part of Rueben’s identity in Appalachian culture, but he can only see the malice and forced adaptation of city life.

In her row house on Merry Hill, Gertie searches for images of Appalachia. In fact, the strangeness of her own home in Detroit where she seems more of an outlier than a contributive member causes Gertie to search outside the domestic space for familiar scenery. She looks out her kitchen window, watching the birds hop around her yard in search of food. She recalls that “[t]he birds were ugly-voiced and dirty-looking, but standing so, with the inside door shut behind her, there was for the moment a feeling of being alone with them, the way it had used to be back home” (Arnow 304). Even though the birds are covered in the grime of the city, Gertie stills sees their beauty and representation of life back home. Her longing gaze towards the natural world outside her door is a tragic representation of how trapped she feels in the city, and her loss of Rueben only makes her sense of loneliness worse. She misses him not just because she is his mother, but because he is one of the only other people who understood what she faced. She thinks about moving back to Kentucky after the war ends, and how that would make the “family whole again with Rueben” (Arnow 417). Gertie’s ruminations come before the tragic accident with Cassie, but nonetheless, show how the loss of her son causes her to return home in her daydreams.

Even the rude behavior of Mrs. Whittle, Rueben’s teacher, encourages Gertie to reflect on her understanding of culture and life in the mountains. Before Reuben permanently leaves Detroit, Gertie tries to make his experience better by talking with his teacher. She attempts to discuss Reuben’s unhappiness only to find “Miz Whittle’s” back turned towards her and the

teacher's disinterested tidying of her hat and lipstick in the mirror (Arnold 371). With all the new words that Gertie tries to take in with the city, she cannot remember the correct terminology for Mrs. Whittle as Reuben's "home-room" teacher. Instead, she tells the impatient teacher that "[y]ou've got him more'n th other teachers, and you'll keep on a haven him an" (Arnold 372). Mrs. Whittle interrupts Gertie, clarifying the vocabulary and snidely remarking that "of course it's his teacher's fault your child is unhappy" (Arnold 373). Gertie simply tries to explain the situation to Mrs. Whittle, telling her that Reuben was a capable student "back home" to which the teacher vehemently reacts: "'Back home' ... 'You hill—southerners who come here, don't you realize before you come that it will be a great change for your children? For the better, of course, but still a change'" (Arnold 373). Mrs. Whittle catches herself before she fully commits to her prejudiced thinking, but her words still make her discourteous opinion clear. She recounts how Reuben slapped a child who called him a liar after explaining what it is like to hunt in Kentucky (Arnold 374). Gertie's anger rises at this news, and she sees the adjustment the school teaches in a new light. Listening to Mrs. Whittle talk about how children must learn "to adapt one's self to one's surroundings," Gertie reflects on the teacher's explanation: "You mean when they're through here, they could—if they went to Germany—start gitten along with Hitler ... an if they went to Rome they'd start worshipen th pope?" (Arnold 375). Gertie comes to see Reuben's ill-adjustment as a testament to the importance of holding onto one's cultural roots. She tells Mrs. Whittle, "But he cain't hep th way he's made. It's a lot more trouble to roll out steel—an make it like you want it—than it is biscuit dough" (Arnold 376). Gertie understands that the city requires concessions, but she is also aware that letting go of her Appalachianess completely is not necessary. Because of Reuben, Gertie finds that her heritage grounds her in a

way of life rich with community and a distinct set of values that help her to translate the world in a way that the education system in Detroit never could.

Moreover, the people around her are not the only factors who cause Gertie to wander back through her memories of the hills. The rhythm of the city itself unbalances Gertie, making her wish for the comfortable familiarity of her routine in Kentucky. Unsure of the city's charm, she feels reluctant to sell her heritage for what appears a cheap, manufactured lifestyle. The society she would be sacrificing her "Appalachianness" for promotes factory-made goods that lack the uniqueness and durability of handcrafted, mountain products. Her Christmas gifts, an Icy Heart refrigerator and washing machine, power a new way of running the house that fills the rooms with a loud, disruptive jostling and the constant purring of the freezer (Arnold 311). Token holiday fixtures also do not look the same in the housing project. Her oldest daughter, Clytie layers the Christmas tree with artificial snow, covering the natural beauty and leaving this monument of the woods with "no memory of earth, or wind or sun or sky" (Arnold 305). Gertie sees how "[l]ifeless it was," and the tree becomes symbolic of how her Appalachian roots are treated (Arnold 305). Society pushes her to set aside her heritage so she can be remade into a shiny, fabricated piece of the modern system. Nonetheless, Gertie's reminiscent language shows that she prefers the authentic naturalism of Appalachian traditions that can live and breathe outside the reach of culture in Detroit. In referring back to the traditions and values of Appalachia, Gertie keeps them at the forefront of her daily life, sheltering them inside herself and her memory beyond the reach of the city's destructive constraints.

Even when Gertie goes shopping in Detroit, she reflects on her life in Appalachia. The experience of shopping in the city looks vastly different than the slower pace communal trading that takes place in Kentucky. In the city, Gertie encounters grocery stores, department stores, and

produce peddlers that are nothing like the simple, family run country store back home. In fact, the small trade shop that Gertie visits in Kentucky also doubles as a postal service and community gathering place. In essence, this building wears many hats, unlike the grocery stores in Detroit that are cold and impersonal, focusing only on the transaction between buyer and seller. Near the beginning of the novel, Gertie visits the country store once to wait on news about Clovis and finds a warm welcome from her mountain community waiting for her at the front door. Community members respectfully interact with one another as an important part of the Appalachian value system, one that Gertie also endorses even among her neighbors in Merry Hill. Lee notes how “[s]he [Gertie] functions cooperatively, lifting a sack or digging potatoes for a neighbor; she can derive identity from peers, work, and the land” (96). Gertie’s identity as an Appalachian woman is irrevocably tied to the land and people of her home in Kentucky, appearing as part of tradition that has been passed down through her family and practiced among the Ballew residents.

Even at the country store, where Gertie interacts with her neighbors, and in her own, quiet way encourages them through wartime, cultural values of respect and compassion materialize. For the distraught Mamie, one of the community members who comes to the store for news of her husband, Gertie offers her daughter Maggie to stay at her house and watch her children so she can walk unencumbered and without worry (Arnow 114). Concern for each other’s welfare and simple, everyday small talk at places of business usually do not occur in the city, as Gertie notes the fast-paced interactions between the community women and the produce peddler Joe. While the women socialize among themselves, their communication with the vender is, for the most part, strictly business (Arnow 241-242). Words are infrequently exchanged because money is the most important commodity in the city. Gertie looks at the high prices of the

produce on Joe's table and wishes that the costs of food in Detroit would mirror that of cheaper Appalachian goods (Arnow 242). In a task as simple as shopping, Gertie slips back into her memory of home, pulling Appalachia into simple everyday routines.

Furthermore, Gertie's memory of Appalachian customs lays the necessary groundwork for her to stay more closely tied to her identity. The description of her one visit to the country store in Kentucky and her reflection on agrarian life and trading in the mountains highlights the importance of cultural values to sustaining the Appalachian spirit. When Gertie moves away from the mountains, these common routines become upended, which means that her memory becomes all the more valuable with preserving these practices. In, "Agrarian Tragedy: Harriette Arnow's *The Dollmaker*," Steve Mooney finds Gertie's struggle to be the strong provider and caretaker of the family she once was in Appalachia to be a result of her passivity in the city (37). Gertie may be more passive when confronting prejudice and expressing her feelings about Detroit, but Gertie chooses to internalize her perceptions of the city, evaluating them in her own mind rather than sharing her opinion with others. Her memory serves as a way for her to compare her cultural experiences of Appalachia and Detroit. In "Free Will and Determinism in Harriette Arnow's *The Dollmaker*," Kathleen Walsh notes that "Gertie's sense of powerlessness and her fear of being in the wrong are manifest in the meekness with which she accepts the loss of the Tipton Place" (94). Gertie's personality is not confrontational by nature, and her distrust of herself leads her to constantly question her place under her mother's piercing gaze and the ever-watchful eye of Detroit society. Naturally, Gertie is not as self-assured in Detroit, but when it comes to her holding on to her Appalachian roots, she subtly resists the demands of the city by remembering her old life. Gertie shows some agency by refusing to forget her mountain heritage.

Hemmed in by the walls and alleyways of the Merry Hill housing project, Gertie can only travel back to the Kentucky hills through memory. At night, Gertie's thoughts wander back to the mountains:

Tonight was no better than other nights...Half her mind wondered how soon the alarm would go off. The other half listened to the wind or, in the spells of silence between the sob and shriek of it, the night sounds of the city, lonelier seeming than by day, as if she lived in a world where nothing else lived. If in the silence she could hear the creek over the rocks, the wind in living trees, the bark of a fox, the cry of a screech owl—anything alive, not dead like the clock and the Icy Heart. (Arnold 366)

The keeping of electronic time and modern conveniences such as the refrigerator are symbolic of city life and make Gertie feel out of place. In her Appalachian home, she never used to run her life by the ceaseless ticking of the clock, rather the position of the sun told her when to begin and end her day. Gertie reflects on how even the small, decorative clock resting in her mother's home was "more ornament than a god measuring time" (Arnold 231). The routines of Appalachian life are "shaped by the needs of the land," and Gertie finds breaking out of this cycle and watching the clock for when to make supper and expect the children home challenging (Arnold 231). Even the advertising for the refrigerator that claims the product to be the best on the market seems false, as Gertie can never get the cantankerous contraption to work correctly. Always freezing the food past usefulness, the Icy Heart embodies the dysfunction of Detroit for Gertie. Similar to the faulty machine, Gertie represents the broken piece in the perfect machine of modern culture. She is an outcast, an unmalleable piece of Appalachian steel, and the pace of city life always seems just beyond her grasp.

Gertie's memories of home provide some peace away from the constraints of the city that frustrate her and complicate the running of her home. Gertie's middle child, Enoch recognizes that his mother labors unsuccessfully to fully transition to the social customs of the city. Enoch jabs at his mother's trouble with buying groceries: "They're allus a maken a fast buck on you, Mom" (Arnow 393). Gertie is not familiar with buying produce or meat at the stores or outdoor street vendors in the city. Unfortunately, the sellers take advantage of her innocence, and Gertie loses money on food that cannot go to feed her family. She is disheartened by these experiences, feeling even more distanced from her role as caretaker: "She had wasted Clovis's money for rotten bananas and poor meat and all the other things they didn't know about—the box of pepper half full, the rotten eggs, the rotten oranges, the sweet potatoes bought as a treat one night but all black in their hearts, yet showing no sign from the outside" (Arnow 393). The imagery of the rotten potatoes represents the cunning consumer culture of the city. From the outside, Detroit seems inviting and prosperous, but if migrants cannot find their footing quickly, the darker side of the city that extorts unsuspecting customers appears. What keeps Gertie pushing through is the needs of her family, her memory of the quiet river's flow, and the wind whistling through the Kentucky mountains.

As an additional reminder of home, the garden that Gertie eventually plants is reminiscent of the agrarian culture and natural beauty of Appalachia. The soil in Detroit is tough and often frozen in layers of winter snow. However, when summer hits and the ground thaws, some of the neighbors try to plant small flowers and maybe a few hardy vegetables that can withstand the harsh conditions of Detroit's inhospitable ground. If the residents happen to miraculously get a few plants to grow, they are almost inevitably destroyed by the rough and tumble games of the Merry Hill children. Despite the consequences, Gertie tries her hand at

growing a few flowers outside their door. Running her hands through the dirt and watering the budding flowers reminds Gertie of her agrarian life in Kentucky. This small act of caring for living things brings Gertie at least some joy in the overrun alleys. She is a farmer at heart, and being able to practice this skill, even in a small manner, brings her back a piece of herself. Walking through the tiny, fenced in garden outside her house, Gertie notices “the heavy sweet odor of flowers” (Arnow 524). The flowerbeds are just beginning to grow, but the fragrance is unmistakable. Because Gertie has set to work her knowledge of farming and plants, Detroit is made over with soft grass and the peaceful, sweet aroma of flowers, making life in the city appear ever so slightly, like the hillsides of Kentucky. This miniature garden embodies the Appalachian spirit: growth and resilience. With the cultivation of her small patch of flowers, Gertie has brought a little bit of Appalachia into the housing projects of Detroit.

In her memories, Gertie often visualizes her love of Appalachian nature with the wooded mountaintops and the wildflowers growing in the valleys. These images bring her a semblance of comfort, which Gertie desperately needs after Cassie’s death. Grieving over her loss of Cassie, Gertie returns to the mountains:

She was back on the old Ledbetter place on the ridge top, cleaning up a patch of brush to make a new-ground cornfield. The wind rocked the pines, the creek was a roar from the white rain that had brought the wild plum to full bloom all in one night. Cassie was the baby, but big enough to walk hanging on to Gyp; she couldn’t hear her chatter for the wind, a kind of begging, crying wind, scattering the redbud flowers, but still a voice crying: “How yu comen?. I gotta have a dream kid.” (Arnow 481)

As Gertie’s memories show, Appalachia is much more than place. When she dreams about home, she does not just envision the alluring landscape or see herself working with her hands,

making new life grow in the waiting fields; Gertie sees her daughter alive and whole again. Her memories of home restore to her what the city takes away.

To be Appalachian is to own the spirit of the mountains, not just to live among them. Gertie holds onto the beauty and pride of her heritage by remembering their importance to her own life. Wishing for the nearness of nature, Gertie sees the opportunity to cultivate a small patch of Appalachia in the dirty city streets of Merry Hill. In doing so, she creates a physical reminder of home not just for herself but also her neighbors. This symbolic recreation of agrarian life subtly highlights Gertie's resolve to nurture her heritage beyond the mountains. Even in Merry Hill, Gertie sees pieces of her culture in the lives of the people closest to her, which draws out memories full of appreciation and longing for home. No matter how far from the mountains she goes, Appalachia will never be far behind.

Chapter Two: “Whittling Foolishness”: Experiencing Appalachia through Community

*But there are those who learn what is told here
 By convolutions of earth, by time, by winds,
 The water’s wearings and minute shapings of man.
 They have struck pages with the large print of knowledge,
 The thing laid open, the hills translated.*

-“River of Earth” James Still

The shape of life in Ballew and Detroit appears disparate with no apparent connection. Detroit is a social system run by capitalist venture, a violent labor force, and an incessant desire for commodified products and wealth that can advance people from the status of lower class. Ballew, on the other hand, fits within the structure of an agrarian community, where people live and work together, providing support to neighbors and respecting the dignity of one another. The differences in the two appear to come down to the values of a shared community pitted against the expectations of a broader social system. However, complications arise in the intermingling of the groups. Society seeks to exist in the mountains, and community pushes to survive in the city streets. The nostalgic vision of agrarian Appalachia that Gertie remembers from her childhood does not exist separate from the economic interests of dominant modern society, but neither does this system have total control in Detroit. The appearance of Appalachian and modern culture in both regions shows that no one cultural group governs or lacks agency to affect the other. Appalachian heritage may not be as prevalent in the city, but the values of community, behavior, and speech practiced by Gertie and other Merry Hill residents means that Detroit has, at least, a little of the mountains flowing through the streets.

Outlining differences in community and society adds clarity to Gertie's challenging migration experience from Appalachia to Detroit. Life in the city looks vastly different from simple, plain Kentucky, and Gertie's Appalachian ways cause her to stick out in the social crowd. She gets introduced to a world of new rules and behavioral expectations that often feel mechanical and unnatural to her. In *Community and Society*, Tonnies discusses how large-scale society functions with less connection than smaller, traditional communities. For instance, Tonnies notes that *Gesellschaft*, which stands for society in German, "is public life" that "is transitory and superficial" (33-35). He also discusses the lack of depth and connections that such societies have because they include such a large group of people and constantly change to meet a new vision of success. The result is a "capitalist society" that favors loyalty to the pursuit of wealth and the system of consumerism (258). Gertie's time in Detroit reflects this emotionally distant society that finds individualism, industry, and commercial capitalism to be the best combination to propel humanity's progress forward.

Gertie, however, finds such impersonal and pre-packaged living uncomfortable, especially since the rules for conversation and interaction do not accommodate her "Appalachianess." Coming from Ballew, Kentucky, Gertie's lifestyle resides more with Tonnies's description for *Gemeinschaft* or community (33). In her quaint, mountain community, Gertie's neighbors work together not for individual gain but for the good of everyone. Tonnies claims that kinship often motivates kindness and connection with people that live in a rural village community (257). In Ballew, Gertie has grown up knowing many of the residents and has developed trusting relationships that make a strong foundation for living and working together. Such a community, Tonnies claims, forms through "a common relation to the soil" and an "enduring self" that not only grows from an awareness of a common language but also comes

through continued fellowship that upholds a particular lifestyle (257-258). Many people in Ballew whom Gertie associates with still hold a more traditional agrarian way of life, looking to the land and each other for the resources to survive in the mountains. Tonnies notes that tightly connected groups such as Ballew can also be brought together by similar “folkways” and “beliefs” (33-34). Along with caring for the land, Gertie’s Appalachian community in Kentucky practices the values outlined by Loyal Jones that includes a respect of all neighbors and kin, as well as an appreciation for self-sufficiency.

The ancestral bond and culture that Gertie shares with the mountain folk represent a more nostalgic way of life that she also finds in the faces and behavior of the women in Merry Hill. In “The Search for Community in Appalachia,” Ronald D. Eller claims that “[r]oots...don’t exist in a singular vacuum; they require commitment to others—an interconnectedness that gives life to the whole” (47). Eller suggests that heritage can only be preserved and appreciated when all members dedicate their time and sacrifice their own self-interest for the well-being of the whole. For Appalachian culture to be maintained, commitment must come from more than one person. Eller’s claim finds support with Arnold’s perspective on the importance of embracing all members of a culture group to pursue beauty and goodness in life (62-65). Eller may be only referring to Appalachian culture, but his point strongly connects with Arnold’s belief about encouraging the communication of all cultural backgrounds. Gertie takes Appalachia with her and applies it to the community of women in Merry Hill, creating a stronger support system representative of the respect and kindness that her neighbors in Appalachia practice. Her interactions with Appalachian community members such as John Ballew put into perspective the bond these Kentuckians share. When Gertie agrees to buy the Tipton Place from John Ballew, he clarifies why he asks such a reasonable price for the land: “It’s fer yer ole pop” (Arnow 121).

“Uncle John,” as Gertie calls him, relays what her father told him: “He’d give his good leg to know you could allus be close by him—close enough that he could come set in your house sometimes” (Arnow 121). Family connections are important to keep the community functioning, but so are good-hearted neighbors. The same can be said for the women in Merry Hill, who help to look after one another’s children and provide support with their friendship. By continuing the old traditions of Appalachia, Gertie combats the individualism and prejudice of modern Detroit that would do away with the practices and customs of her culture.

Even the notion of independence as an Appalachian trait does not mean living and working by oneself. Gertie has a fervent desire to live independently in the mountains, buying her land and harvesting the crop she plants with her own hands. But she understands that without the kindhearted, unselfish help of her neighbors, Gertie’s dream of self-sufficiency would fail to be realized. Independence in Appalachia is not about living isolated and working the land away from any community support. As Tonnies suggests, the spirit of togetherness often compels neighbors to support each other through hard times (257). In Gertie’s Kentucky, self-sufficiency is a group effort; forged by love of the land and kept burning by the peoples’ commitment to one another. For instance, the “traden” at Mrs. Hull’s country store considers humanity and compassion, which is lacking in the grocery stores in Detroit where sellers peddle spoiled produce (Arnow 111). In Appalachia, Gertie engages in a barter system older and less rigid than the transactional approach of modern Detroit stores. “Traden” is based on trust and respect of the people in the community, and Gertie has faith that Mrs. Hull will offer a fair exchange of goods. Developing communal relationships is a part of Appalachian culture that also becomes a critical component of Gertie’s life in Detroit. Consumerism in the city may not encourage kindness and simple human connection between buyers and sellers, but the women in Merry Hill practice this

cultural trait inside their own community. In doing so, Gertie not only sees Appalachian culture alive in the city streets, but also perceives the value of her cultural customs that promote decency and compassion among neighbors.

Gertie's loyalty to family and neighbors in Ballew suggests that altruism and trustworthiness are qualities mountain folk take seriously. This belief becomes especially evident when Gertie takes these traits with her to Detroit. When her neighbors call on her for help, Gertie offers a supportive shoulder to lean on. In many ways, this safekeeping of Appalachian communal life provides a deeper connection among her neighbors in Detroit and becomes a vital part of the people's ability to keep moving forward in the impoverished conditions of the housing community. Gertie embraces this Appalachian spirit. She is the dollmaker, the carver of "whittling foolishness" that infuses the Appalachian spirit with every stroke of the knife (Arnold 413). She is the neighbor who tends gardens while husbands are away at war. She is the mother who rides bareback on a mule and contends with uninterested army officers to get help for her son. Gertie Nevels embodies the strength, resiliency, and compassion of Appalachia, sharing these traits with her Detroit community that reciprocate these same values.

Cherishing and passing down heirlooms and handmade furniture is another way that Gertie stays connected to folkways and antiquated practices of Appalachia. As her parents and grandparents before her, Gertie has grown up in Ballew and recognizes the importance of holding onto whittled pieces and homemade decorations that embody her cultural roots. When she travels to her mother's home, Gertie looks around at the mementoes in the rooms that comprise her family's legacy. Tools, such as her great grandmother's old Dutch oven and her father's handmade furniture, promote her family's Appalachian heritage to all guests (Arnold 69-73). Even in her own home, much of the furniture has been handed down from her mother, and

her grandmother's old cedar bucket causes her to be "filled for a moment with a proud consciousness of ownership, something solid and old, known and proved long ago by hands other than her own" (Arnold 85). These pieces of history have been crafted by Appalachian hands and have spent years caring for the generations living in the mountains of Ballew. To Gertie, the longevity of these simple, handcrafted items acts as a reassurance of their value to Appalachian life, and in many ways, symbolize the steadfastness of her own heritage.

Safeguarding family heirlooms and appreciating homespun artistry harken back to the values of self-sufficiency and sustainability crucial to Appalachian life. By using the resources of the land to create lasting tools and furniture, Appalachian families like Gertie's live out the traditions of the region and preserve these customs by passing them on to the next generation. Gertie also takes this practice of making handcrafted items with her to Detroit. She carves crucifixes and small toys for her neighbors' children, carrying on the tradition of passing down hand-made goods and sharing Appalachian culture with the people of Detroit.

By leaving Kentucky, Gertie realizes that her culture roots do not disappear once she passes the boundary of the mountains. In fact, the novel portrays that many families during World War II leave the area seeking better opportunities in cities across the country. Walking in the woods with her youngest daughter Cassie, Gertie notes all the empty houses left neglected on the side of the path (Arnold 106-107). The Tuckers and Millers had long abandoned their lives in the mountains for larger towns and "bigger money" (Arnold 107). The promised economic growth and plentiful work from outside industries like timber and coal fell flat in Appalachia once the war broke out, leaving many families with unreliable income. Both of these families made their living from trucking and the railroad, and when the work became inconsistent or the lure of more wealth called to them, they left the economically declining region (Arnold 106). The

emptiness and hollowed out atmosphere of the ramshackle homes are symbolic of how 1940s economics primarily from urban America left stains on Appalachia's hills. Gertie sees how the Millers' "uncurtained windows shone blindly in the sun like the unseeing eyes of the dead" (Arnow 106). Her musing on the death of mountain culture comes through in the houses' empty and lifeless windows and foreshadows the sacrifice of her own dream in Kentucky. Essentially, the after-effects of this economic shift have broken and dismantled pieces of this community and scattered the people. Gertie soon follows in the footsteps of such families straight to the streets of Detroit. It does not matter that Gertie toils as a tenant farmer for fifteen years, saving every dollar that she stores in her worn-out pocket to one day buy the Tipton Place (Arnow 39-40). Her mother's religious beliefs that a wife should follow the husband's lead stops Gertie, and she never calls the small cabin home (Arnow 154). While Gertie will always desire to own land and embrace her mountain roots working in the rich soil of Kentucky, she eventually realizes that the true spirit of Appalachia is not contained in the earth itself but in the hearts of the people that call this place home. Over time, Gertie learns how to "practice the manners" of the city, without losing her cultural roots altogether ("Culture").

Stepping off the train into the bustling crowds of the Detroit train station, Gertie immediately becomes labeled an outsider. In fact, while she struggles to get her bearings amidst the rushing masses and unfamiliar sounds, Gertie meets with no small amount of hostility. Since Clovis does not come to the station to retrieve his family, Gertie is left completely alone with the children to find her way to Merry Hill. Fighting against the tight, compact quarters of the platform, Gertie accidentally bumps into a woman with her split basket. Faced with immediate anger, Gertie cringes as "a woman's eyes under a red scarf glared at her, and a wide red mouth said, 'Hillbilly,' spitting the words as if they shaped a vile thing to be spewed out quickly"

(Arnold 171). Immediately the face of disapproving Detroit society appears in that of the passer-by, and her words become a brand that Gertie endures consistently in the city. Nonetheless, the city's social order is not the only voice rising from the alleyways. In "The Image of Detroit in *The Dollmaker*," James Seaton argues that the city appears in two ways: "The image of 'Detroit' remains strange, frightening and mysterious throughout this long, meticulously detailed novel. On the other hand, 'the alley,' the section of the Merry Hill housing project where the characters actually live their lives, becomes, despite its cramped physical space, 'bigger than Detroit'" ("The Image of Detroit in *The Dollmaker*"). Detroit society encourages the citizens' unwavering gaze towards economic and government concerns that leaves little time for more human kinship. But the real condition of life playing out in the alleys and perpetuated by the community of Merry Hill women is greater than any social code. The building materials of strong community, compassion, and fellowship, so ingrained in the Appalachian spirit show clearly that Gertie's folkways still live on, pushing against society's fabricated system in favor of true human connection.

In the heart of the city, Gertie sees a more intensified concentration of social codes and institutions that run the lives of Detroit dwellers. Not only is the appearance of the city different with the traffic filled streets, busy shops, and rows of houses stacked together, but the people also indulge in the avarice of capitalism and the consumer market, buying all that the voices over the radio tell them will enhance their lives. Individualism and prejudice flow through the multicultural alleyways, creating isolation when people need a shoulder to lean on the most. In the constant search for wealth and status, the social structure of Detroit is much more rigid, meaning that people must adopt the customs of buying and selling as well as adjust to appropriate speech and interaction to fit in with the social crowd. Acceptance appears important,

but even more intensely valued is the pursuit of individual gain. Detroit's eye turns away from community building, which as Greenblatt discusses with the flexibility of cultural constraints leaves this value open to the negotiation of pushing the limits and incorporating some of Appalachia in the city ("Culture"). Amidst the pressure of debt and the noise of prejudiced voices, Gertie finds community in the women of Merry Hill, who support her through her transition to life in the close-quartered alleys.

Outside this community of women, Detroit society provides little in the way of mercy and compassion for struggling migrant families. Falling into consumer culture, the Nevells quickly become pressured by the debts piling up with grocery and department stores. When Clytie confesses to getting credit from Zedke's store, Gertie ruminates on how "nothing was for free, and whatever it was it wasn't a bargain" (Arnow 486). Gertie knows that in Detroit, leniency always runs out when the bills come due. Gertie must solve this indebtedness with singular ingenuity, as these businesses operating within the greater scheme of modern capitalism rarely offer extensions or handouts. Even Merry Hill's project office that handles rent seeks their share of the profit with little consideration for the challenges the early 1940s present. For instance, Gertie goes to the project office to place an advertisement about her services of washing and cleaning in the window and overhears the dismissive final words of the project manager telling a young woman there is no help for her. Gertie watches as the young woman hurries away in tears, noticing how it was "a wet sloppy crying that had seemed out of place in the neat bare office with its adding machines and typewriters" (Arnow 652). The crank of the machines never stops, not even in the face of a young woman's desperation and fear. Humanity has no place in the mechanized efficiency of the office. This method of doing business is foreign to Gertie, and her interactions with the people in these positions of power are often impersonal or

stilted by her struggle to understand the right words for the transaction. Essentially, these people perpetuate the values of broader Detroit society that are uninterested in the everyday plights of the common migrants in the housing projects. The compassionate community Gertie remembers from the mountains little resembles the wider social world she deals with in Detroit.

When the war ends in 1945, Gertie's husband goes on strike from his job at the factory. His loyalty to the union becomes more important to him than the well-being of the family. To make ends meet, she starts making toy dolls with the jigsaw Clovis gets for her. The Nevels family struggles financially, and Gertie recognizes that society will leave them behind if she does not figure out income. She astutely discerns the values of the city: "This strike, though, might be long, real long...He could maybe, make enough to keep the rent paid; a factory hand could usually get grub enough together on credit to keep from starving, but not rent, especially in these government projects where there was never any fooling around about evictions" (Arnow 612). Gertie is not only worried about life without Clovis' paycheck; she sees how her Appalachian values differ from Detroit's concerns. Simply, Gertie believes in treating others with respect and kindness, finding comfort in community, and providing a helping hand when trouble comes. Detroit society only sees the needs and profit of the social institutions, which as Arnold points out, leaves little room for the "progress" desperately sought after by the culture (62-65). Most of her family, though, has bought into the promises of modern life, believing it is more up-scale and lasting than their backwoods ways. Clovis gets the factory job he always wanted, and three of the children, Amos, Clytie, and Enoch, enjoy the broadcasts on the radio, movie theatres, first-rate education of the public schools, and the "talk" of the city. But with the luxury comes a price, as humanity is replaced by impersonal, perfunctory ethics that favor the survival of the system. Society's eyes are rarely turned towards the well-being of the people; instead, a blurred image of

“progress” consumes everyone’s attention. Gertie sees clearly that the people’s self-interest will not ask questions about unpaid rent. Instead of a hand-up, she and her family will simply be shown the door.

The city’s coldness, however, does not shake Gertie’s perseverance. She is determined to do what she can to keep food on the table and a roof over their heads. However, sheer willpower does not solely give Gertie the strength to accomplish her task. Her slight resilience to the constraints of mainstream culture begins with her value system from Appalachia. The community Gertie shares with the women of Merry Hill functions because of certain values she chooses to practice. When Detroit turns away from offering mercy for an overdue payment, Gertie shows sympathy for neighbors like Sophronie, who leaves her sick children with Gertie to work her shift at the factory (Arnold 342-343). This is not to say that all her neighbors are accepting of her Appalachianess, but her alley holds women who have struggled in their own ways with adjusting to city life, making them more receptive and sympathetic to those who move against the grain of social expectation. In “‘Beholden to no man’: Artistry and Community in Harriette Arnold’s *The Dollmaker*,” Kristina K. Groover highlights how these women support one another: “[S]he [Gertie] discovers that in Detroit, as in Kentucky, the female community forms a subculture of care and support which challenges a dominant culture marked by bigotry and violence” (55). In the Merry Hill community, women such as Sophronie, Mrs. Anderson, Max, and Mrs. Schultz, form their own community dedicated to the well-being of each other. For instance, when Gertie’s youngest daughter, who is most like her in spirit and imagination, gets hit by a train, these women step in to help her through her grief. Likewise, Gertie also extends a helping hand, taking care of their children and being a listening ear when desired.

The communal relationships of the Merry Hill women represent Appalachia in Detroit. In “The Commodity Culture and Other Historical Pressures in Harriette Arnow’s *The Dollmaker*,” author Michael Barry recognizes that the connection the women of Merry Hill share mirrors Gertie’s communal experiences in Kentucky (“The Commodity Culture”). When Sophronie or Max come knocking on Gertie’s door, these city women build the bonds of kinship common to smaller, rural communities such as Ballew. In essence, they promote Appalachian tradition without even realizing it. On the subject of lost culture, Barry also notes that Gertie’s migration to Detroit becomes a decision in which “she gives up some of her cultural heritage” (“The Commodity Culture”). The key word that Barry uses here is “some.” In the case of Gertie’s whittling, her carvings become commodities and an alternate income for the family. In some ways, her craft becomes tainted by the economics of the city, specifically through the machine-heavy process of making the jumping jack dolls. This endeavor is no longer about art for Gertie but profit, and even though she finds it distasteful and “crie[s] out at ... [the doll’s] ugliness,” she is cognizant of the family’s need for quick cash (Arnow 553). However, it is equally important to remember that artistic pieces such as Maggie’s chickadee and the little carved doll for the Daly’s baby still exist in Detroit (Arnow 580), adding just a hint of “whittling foolishness” to a mechanized city. While there are constraints that Gertie must abide by, which often do not appreciate the use of her culture, there always appear to be nuances in which her roots surface. The community of Merry Hill women is perhaps the strongest representation of this connection to Appalachia. To make a life in Detroit, Gertie finds that she must have the support of these women, just like she needed her neighbors in Ballew.

As seen with the women in Merry Hill, not everyone views the display of her culture as an affront to the social status quo. When Gertie traverses the streets and alleyways, she almost

always carries the Josiah basket (made by Josiah Coffey) she brought from Kentucky on her arm (Arnold 227). The basket swinging beside the hip of a woman in Ballew would not be an uncommon sight. In the city, just a glance at the intricately woven strands reveals her connection to the mountains, which automatically sets her apart for scrutiny. Old habits are difficult to quell, though, and she is unwilling to surrender this small comfort. Mr. Skyros, a teacher at the children's school, admires the craftsmanship of the basket, finding beauty in the handiwork of her hometown. Unlike Reuben's teacher, Mr. Skyros understands the value of heritage, especially its capacity for enriching one-dimensional Detroit when he says, "Most of us do [adjust], but there's always hope that one—" (Arnold 228). He trails off from the words, but his meaning is easily understood. The school's policy for helping students "adjust" to life in the city often means that they are remade into carbon copies of the ideal, compliant modern citizen that contributes to the system. People like Mr. Skyros are rare in Detroit, but similar to the women in Merry Hill, Gertie finds encouragement in their acceptance of her Appalachian ways.

Even the severe and unyielding Mrs. Daly, who stands resolute in her vision of Americanness and Catholic superiority, develops a softer heart for the women of Merry Hill. Gertie's introduction to the fiery Irishwoman comes rife with tension, as Mrs. Daly hurls insults and dirty water on a mild gospel lady asking to share the Word of God on her doorstep. Mrs. Daly's anger inflames at the gospel woman's persistent attempts to proselytize, and she hits her over the head with a broom because Mrs. Daly views herself as a "good patriotic Christian American" (Arnold 246). One strike proves ineffective, though, and with the broom raised in the air for a second blow, Gertie finds her own arm holding it still above the gospel woman's head (Arnold 245-247). Gertie's respect and compassion for people places her in a difficult position, as she has shown her cards and proven herself incapable of turning a blind eye to suffering and

cruelty. Mrs. Daly's brutal reaction ends up encouraging the community of unconventional women to rally around the gospel woman, and they all bond over a shared responsibility to help her. However, Mrs. Daly's coarseness does not continue, and she even begins to participate in the women's tight-knit community. In "The Image of Detroit in *The Dollmaker*," James Seaton discusses that "Mrs. Daly, a stereotypical example of ethnic prejudice at first glance, becomes by the end of the book an example of the difference between Detroit as lived, personal experience and Detroit as the summation of impersonal forces" ("The Image of Detroit in *The Dollmaker*"). Mrs. Daly has two sides, one that passionately defends her political and religious righteousness in line with the greater vision of society, and a smaller, more human connection with the immediate crisis and pain of people living and breathing in these alleys. The more caring and compassionate side of Mrs. Daly's character allows her to participate in the valuable women's community that stands in contrast to the suffering and poverty that Detroit society allows in Merry Hill.

Mrs. Daly's display of compassion provides a clear example on the important role of community in Detroit. The ice surrounding her heart begins to thaw as she recognizes the equal plight of struggle and suffering in the eyes of her neighbors:

"Yu gotta realize that it ain't like them Japs was good white Christians...but,' and she looked about her and spoke softly, guiltily, as if her words were treason, 'Yu still gotta say, people is people. Why them Japs live something like this,' and she waved her hand over the flowers, the low houses, the child-flooded alleys, the babies, 'all crowded up tugged-er inu towns; little cardboard houses kinda like what we've got; and maybe lotsa—you know—kids.'" (560)

Mrs. Daly asks Gertie for flowers to take to the grieving Mrs. Saito, whose home country of Japan has been bombed in the war. Her prejudice slowly thaws, being replaced by the humanity she sees in the other women's kindnesses. In "The Multi-Ethnic Community of Women in Harriette Arnow's *The Dollmaker*, Charlotte Goodman comments on the same scene in which Mrs. Daly's heart softens: "these women, of different ethnic backgrounds, are able to demonstrate compassion for one another even at a time when America is waging war against Germany and Japan" (53). The world may be engulfed in war, but the women of Merry Hill find peace and kindness within the confines of their own created community.

Inside the Merry Hill community, Gertie's kind treatment of others does not just appear in her work ethic and compassionate nature. Her connection to the women also evolves through her woodworking craft. Often, Gertie finds peace and a little bit of home in the stroke of the knife gliding through the wood. She is an artist, bringing tools and intricate carvings to life, creations that she shares with her neighbors. In Ballew, Gertie's woodworking tends to be more practical, crafting handles for axes or sturdy buckets. But all the advanced technology and machines mean that such items are not as needed, so Gertie's craft changes into a more creative pastime, as she makes little carvings for the neighbor children like Maggie or crucifixes like the one requested by Victor (Max's husband). In *Selling Tradition: Appalachia and the Construction of the American Folk, 1930-1940*, Jane Becker notes that "[a]s producers of handcrafted goods marketed beyond their local communities, they [Appalachians] were no longer merely protectors of the nation's past; now they were also participants in a mainstream consumer culture" (191). Becker recognizes the commodification of Gertie's artwork, specifically the importance of the carvings to Detroit because they represent a simplistic way of life that no longer exists in the complex city. It is important to note, however, that not all of Gertie's work is constructed by

unfeeling machines nor intended to be sold. With the cherry wood carving and Maggie's chickadee, there is a person moving the knife, imbuing the wood with meaning and a sense of human connection. Gertie's woodworking produces Appalachian artworks that embody Stephen Greenblatt's belief that cultural objects take the observer back to the culture of origin and instill a feeling of awe in the viewer ("Resonance and Wonder" 30-32). Looking at Gertie's craft with Greenblatt's cultural lens shows how Appalachian culture finds appreciation even in people that resent her heritage.

Additionally, Gertie allows her craft to be commodified in order to provide for the family. Clovis shows little concern for Gertie's art and her fears with being untrue to the tradition of whittling that she was taught, telling her, "They's millions a crosses with a feller on em they call Christ; all out a sawed lumber with th Christ straight agin em, glued on, an now you want to change em. That's one a yer big troubles, Gert...you won't give in to bein like other people. But it's somethen millions and millions a people has got to do, an the sooner a person learns it, th better" (Arnow 412). Eventually, Gertie gives in to using the jigsaw machine to make jumping jack dolls. Feverishly working on the dolls, Gertie looks at the "too bright colors" and "side-wise rolling eyes," coming to terms that "in the end it was always the same—ugliness on the pretty, fine grained maple wood" (Arnow 565). For Gertie, these manufactured dolls are a shameful representation of her craft and an unfortunate use of good, solid wood. As Kristina K. Groover suggests, "her [Gertie's] art reflects the sometimes tortuous tension between relationship and artistic expression" (56). She does what she must to take care of her family, altering the process of her skill out of need. However, that need does not mean she loses the tradition of the craft. Gertie continues to practice her whittling, even though Clovis, as the voice of Detroit society, tells her that she does not have the time. Greenblatt's suggestion that,

depending on how strict the constraints, culture is malleable appears here in Gertie's resistance to Clovis' demand ("Culture"). She continues to fulfill the order for machine made dolls, but her constant work on the cherry wood Christ keeps her grounded with whittling, and when community members like Mrs. Anderson watch her work, they see that she is and always will be Appalachian at heart.

Woodworking in Detroit is a lifeline for community, bringing the people of Merry Hill together to appreciate the artistry of the mountains. Gertie's actions with giving her artistic wood creations away, as she does with Maggie Daly and the little wooden chickadee, builds connections just like her woodworking does in Appalachia. The end product may look different from the practical handles and tools she made back home, but her spirit and that of Appalachia remains in the work. When Mr. Skyros asks if Gertie "carves," she says "Carve? Oh, you mean whittle—axe handles an sech, but sometimes a little foolishness like a doll fer a youngen" (Arnow 227). What Gertie calls "foolishness," the people of Detroit find beautiful and want to possess a piece of this heritage. While the jumping jack dolls are a result of desperate need and a concession of her craft to satisfy financial burdens, Gertie still does some "whittling foolishness" on the figure of Christ. As Groover recognizes, "The true face, the true presence of Gertie's Christ—and the true expression of her artistic vision—is to be found not in isolated, solitary pursuit, but in the familial and communal life of the alley" (56). Her craft is not lost entirely to commodification, and when the prying eyes of neighbors and their children come to watch her whittle, they discover the beauty and value of her Appalachian roots.

The culture of Detroit may be an ever-present shadow looming over the people in Merry Hill, but their communal bond and dedication to the well-being of their neighbors brings comfort and a little of the Appalachian spirit into their daily lives. In many ways, these women in Detroit

are also looking for their own “Appalachia”—a simple existence unburdened by institutions that keep them rooted to the false promises of the city. Gertie preserves pieces of the mountains by offering a helping hand, accepting kindness from her neighbors, respecting the people around her, and even giving away some “whittling foolishness” to display in Merry Hill homes. In the faces of her neighbors, Gertie sees the work ethic and compassionate nature of her home. The landscape may be different, but Appalachia’s presence can still be felt in the simple, everyday gestures and kindnesses of the Merry Hill community.

Chapter Three: I See the “Laughing Christ”

This is the bright road to the mountain top

Beset with shadows and with paths astray,

By dangerous crag, by cliff's sudden drop

Into eternity. This is the way

That man might climb upon the verdant sod

And find among the peaks the peace of God.

-“The Bright Road” James Still

Organized religion in both Appalachia and Detroit functions as part of a larger cultural system that advertises concern for the welfare of humanity, but more often than not, provides a disguise for people to cruelly treat and berate the differences in others. In Appalachia, religion relays a fire and brimstone message, condemning people like Gertie who see God as merciful. Similarly, the divisiveness of organized religion in Detroit fractures relationships, discourages community building, and justifies the rejection of people from Appalachia. This religious persecution often comes in the form of prejudiced comments and stereotypes that attempt to excommunicate those that do not have the same religious or political worldviews. Even the children in the alley pick up the language and beliefs of their parents, punishing anyone who is labeled an outsider. Organized religion, instead of being a uniting factor, acts as a point of cultural contention. Gertie, however, bases her beliefs on a spiritual communion with God and finds truth in scriptures pulled from the Bible instead of the doctrine found in organized religion. She develops her faith in Appalachia, seeking God in the natural beauty of the mountains. Because her faith is rooted in Appalachian imagery and values, Gertie’s vision of God, the

world, and biblical teachings will always be shaped by her heritage rather than the religious dogma the world uses to persecute her.

The constraints of the city challenge Gertie, but she tries to learn the language and manners of Detroit by equating them to her knowledge of Scripture and culture in Appalachia. Gertie's life in the city is not an easy one. Tall, lanky, and stronger than most women (and even some men), she is easy to pick out of a crowd, and when she speaks, her thickly accented words draw unwanted attention towards her heritage. Her worn hands and weathered skin highlight a life of hard labor in the outdoors, digging and planting in the Appalachian soil. Even her vocabulary reflects her knowledge of life in Kentucky, such as when she has to re-translate Mr. Skyros' use of "carve" into "whittle" (Arnow 227). Because she wants to better communicate with other people in Detroit, Gertie tries to learn common terms and phrases of the city. In a conversation with some of the neighbors, she talks about her method for retaining the new vocabulary of Merry Hill:

[T]he words of the gospel woman had been running in her head for days, the way the Bible did or a piece of poetry. All the new Detroit words—adjustment, down payment, and now Whit's eviction and Communism—would get into her head and swim round for days until she got them fastened down just right so that they lay there, handy to her thinking; like the stars when she looked at them told her the heavens declared—. (Arnow 271)

Gertie equates her learning of Detroit to the way she allows scripture to flow through her mind. She works and works at the words until they are carved into a shape she can easily recognize and use at the appropriate time. Her developing vocabulary receives the same importance as scripture

memorization, almost tantamount to how she values her heritage. By equating the city speech to biblical principles, Gertie finds a way that she can relate and learn the language.

Well versed in scripture, Gertie often uses the Bible to come to terms with her experiences in life. In “Silence and Captivity in Babylon: Harriette Arnow’s *The Dollmaker*,” Professor Frances Malpezzi notes how “Gertie’s words reverberate Solomonic wisdom, Pauline injunction, Proverbial lore, Jobic questioning, or Psalmic praise” (87). In Appalachia, Gertie hears the sound of an approaching car, and answers the intrusive noise with the scriptural reference, “My help cometh from the hills” (Arnow 124). Gertie finds comfort in the connection of nature with scripture in Psalm 121, especially when she hears the crunch of car tires coming closer to the mountains. Gertie views Bible verses and the lives of biblical characters as a way to see and understand the world, while devoutly religious people like her mother wield scripture as a tool of condemnation. Gertie’s mother portrays herself as a helpless but opinionated woman who thrives on pity and attention. She finds this behavior to be more socially appropriate to her gender, which makes Gertie’s silent strength abnormal to Mrs. Kendricks’ view on a woman’s place in society. Gertie is the kind of woman that rides a mule into the middle of a highway, stopping traffic and commandeering a military vehicle to get her son, Amos, to the town doctor. Her quiet authority and extraordinary strength make Gertie not just a caretaker in the home but a resilient provider, who leans on biblical teachings to maintain her family’s welfare. However, her mother’s religious mission seeks to convert people like Gertie, who live outside the socially acceptable bounds of womanhood. Nonetheless, the roots of Gertie’s faith run deep in her understanding of scripture, where Christ appears not in socially minded religious doctrine, but in the intersection of life experience and Biblical truth.

Gertie's connection to faith and biblical teachings stands in stark contrast to the condemning nature of organized religion wielded by people such as her mother. In fact, organized religion becomes a point of division between the two. Devoutly religious, Gertie's mother finds her truth in the fire and brimstone doctrine of the local preacher, Battle John Brand. Gertie, on the other hand, always felt like a condemned sinner under his scrutinizing gaze. Gertie grew up in the pews of Battle John's church, sitting in agony through each Sunday's sermon on damnation. Her mother, though, firmly believes in his warning about the repercussions of sin to be the only way a person gets to heaven or hell. Kathleen Walsh suggests that Gertie "is anguished by her mother's easy weeping and her disapproval, but her own forgiving nature leads her to reject the hell-fire preaching of the hill evangelists" (93). Her mother's God who judges without mercy is not the Creator that comes to Gertie when she seeks understanding. Sitting in mother's home, Gertie comes to terms with the fact that "[s]he never, no matter how hot the coals or bright the flames that Battle John made, was able to say such things, but sat in sweaty-handed guilt and misery" (Arnow 72). Gertie cannot accept a life where organized religion dictates her connection to God.

Furthermore, Gertie shrinks away from Battle John's message on damnation and her mother's trust in political authorities because of brother's death. After her brother Henley prematurely dies in the war, Gertie sees the responsible party as the government system that took him away from the mountains. Her mother, however, believes that every man should do their due diligence and fight for their country, saying, "Gertie, Gertie, if you'd lost a son like me you'd know they was a war on...After my poor Henley went an give his life, I feel that ever man—" (Arnow 69). To Gertie's mother, Henley's obedience to fight and give up his life for the war effort resembles an honorable sacrifice that all patriotic Americans should be proud to endure.

Loyalty to the system in modern America is of upmost importance to Mrs. Kendricks, and Henley's death is noble because it serves the greater purpose of furthering the system's agenda. Gertie, however, does not see the authority of the system as all powerful or all good. To her, Henley's life has been stolen from him. She curtly interrupts her mother, saying, "God didn't give Henley his life to give away" (Arnold 69). Gertie believes that God's opinion on life and death should be more highly valued than obedience to the military. She knows that such social institutions are governed by fallible men capable of making misjudgments. Gertie's mother has aligned herself with a system that views God as flexible to the will of men, a dangerous position that places man as the ultimate authority rather than a merciful and omnipotent Creator.

In Appalachia, Gertie begins to see Christ as a figure of love and warmth; a God who delights in His creation and longs to be in communion with them. Gertie finds this gracious and caring Creator in the image of Christ she sees coming down the mountain:

[T]he Christ she had wanted for Henley was there, ready to come singing down the hill, a laughing Christ uncrowned with thorns and with the scars of the nail holes in his hands all healed away; a Christ who had loved people, had liked to mingle with them and laugh and sing the way Henley had liked people and singing and dancing. That Christ walked down the hill now and stood by the door asking to be let in, because it was Henley's home and he knew Henley. (Arnold 67)

Gertie's belief that God is kind, loving, and intent on knowing and being known by people is revealed in how she envisions grace for Henley. Her mother falls into hysterics after the news of Henley's death because she believes she will not see her "unsaved" son again. As she and Battle John would have it, Henley has been escorted to the place of eternal flame and torture. Gertie, though, cannot buy this religious dogma. She loved her brother and saw beauty in the kind and

personable way he treated people along with his infectious enthusiasm for life. Gertie tries to tell her mother that “mebbe they’s another side to Christ. Recollect he went to th wedden feast, an had time to fool with little youngens, an speak to a thief an a bad woman” (Arnow 67). Her mother’s angry dismissal, however, causes Gertie to look past her towards the hills where she sees the “laughing Christ” walking towards her (Arnow 67). Gertie’s relationship with her mother acts as a catalyst for her unreligious faith, and without her mother’s demonizing, Gertie may have missed this vision of Christ—her Christ that came to save her brother. Where her mother finds no hope, Gertie sees Christ whole and healed with no trace of suffering or pain, and He is knocking on the door of the one person who loved and laughed the most like Christ (Arnow 67). Found in the kindness of her Appalachian neighbors and her brother’s generous and jovial heart appear the reflection of a living Christ, not the crucified, angry God of religion, but a Christ whose goodness and mercy appears in the altruism of community.

Gertie’s vision of Christ in Appalachia highlights how her heritage helps shape her faith. When Cassie asks about the vision of Jesus that Gertie sees, she tells her daughter that he wore “overalls like a carpenter” (Arnow 81). Gertie views her Creator in the light of her own heritage with a Christ that knows and works the land just as she does. Similar to Gertie’s love of land and Appalachian traditions, Christ appears as a laborer in Gertie’s eyes, and she tells Cassie, “I didn’t see his tools. He’d been in the woods, though, a looken fer somethen, fer he was carryen a big branch a red leaf” (Arnow 81). Not only does she see Him as a more natural figure, taking delight in His creation, but she also imagines Him as an artist that creates through carving. In some ways, Gertie has carved Christ in a similar fashion as herself, making Him a figure that she can relate to and understand better.

In addition, her down to earth vision of God makes Him more approachable for Gertie. She tells Cassie, “Jesus walks the earth, an we’re goen to have us a little piece a heaven right here on earth” (Arnow 81). Owning land is the same as heaven for her, and she can see a peaceful future full of hearty crops grown from a place where her name is on the deed. After inheriting money from Henley, Gertie tries to buy the Tipton Place only to find resistance from her mother and John Ballew. Her “piece of heaven” becomes her tragedy when her mother tells her that buying the Tipton Place while her husband is away goes against scripture. Mrs. Kendricks laments, “She’s never taught them th Bible where it says, ‘Leave all else an cleave to thy husband.’ She’s never read them th words writ by Paul, ‘Wives, be in subjection unto your husbands, as unto the Lord’” (Arnow 154). This insult is two-fold: she is condemning Gertie’s skills as a mother and is taunting her lack of scriptural knowledge. This manipulation tactic works and leads Gertie to pack up and head for Detroit following after Clovis. Gerda Lerner suggests the importance of autonomy in women’s stories, where they have the freedom with “defining themselves and the values by which they will live” (161). Her mother’s religious dogma in Appalachia is cut from the same cloth as organized religion found in Detroit, and Gertie’s dream shatters because of the constraints that outline a woman’s proper place in society. Simply, her mother’s religious chastisement coupled with old-fashioned gender roles ultimately hinder Gertie’s agency to decide what she believes is best for her family.

Gertie’s agency, however, changes depending on where she finds flexibility in the constraints of culture. In Appalachia, Gertie knows that she cannot contest her mother’s demand, but in Detroit, organized religion does not include the pressure of her identity as an obedient daughter. In “‘For a Living Dog is Better Than a Dead Lion’: Harriette Arnow as Religious Writer,” Danny L. Miller investigates her relationship to religion and her own valued faith:

“Gertie apparently feels throughout much of the novel that her Christ, a loving and living Christ, is dormant in the modern world and in modern ‘religion.’ Gertie’s is, in fact, the very modern dilemma of faith: is God alive in the world? Gertie seeks a living Christ, not the dead Christ on a crucifix” (35). As Miller points out, believing in a “living Christ” seems counterintuitive to the modern religious doctrine of Gertie’s mother, Battle John, and the Dalys, which is rife with death, destruction, and hopelessness. Unlike Gertie’s image of a living, breathing Christ in Appalachia, the vision of Christ in the city focuses on his death on the cross (crucifix). If Christ is only a symbolic figure of suffering used by artists for their craft and left to hang on the walls of people like Victor, and not a living savior capable of intervening in the grief and agony of reality, then life would be only aimless hardship. Gertie ponders the aliveness of Christ in a world so full of calamity. When she moves to Detroit, she faces the misery of losing two children and living in a place that she often feels unwanted. The destitution and pain of the people around her only add to her questions. Nonetheless, in Detroit, Gertie finds room amongst the varied uses of organized religion to ponder these contrasting images of Christ and question her view of faith without giving in to the condemnation.

The constraints of the city also cause Gertie to disconnect with beloved family members, making cruel and prejudiced words only part of the suffering that she faces in Detroit. The world of Merry Hill is certainly not one of beauty and hope, as all the houses are the exact same, with thin walls and not enough space for the growing families that come to work in the factories. Children run aimlessly through the alleys, picking fights with one another, and mirroring the tension and dissatisfaction of their parents. Even kind, supportive Sophronie, Gertie’s next-door neighbor, drinks past coherency, wandering blindly into the streets and embarrassing her children with her scant clothing. The depression and suffering of the city are difficult to ignore. In “The

Christian and The Classic in *The Dollmaker*” Barbara Hall Rigney notes how the limitations of modern American culture change Gertie’s role in her own home:

Gertie’s former pride now reduced to abject humility, she stands to serve food to her seated family in Arnow’s version of The Last Supper. Before Gertie was capable of performing even the miracle of resurrection from death, as she saved her son by performing an emergency tracheotomy with her woodcarving knife; she now cannot even feed her family, let alone muster the power to protect them from death. (69)

The mystical powers that Gertie once possessed in Appalachia are not transferrable to the streets of Detroit. Her lack of agency that Lerner suggests is crucial to women’s lives results in the tragic loss of her beloved daughter, Cassie. Unaware of an oncoming train, Cassie plays on the tracks while Gertie reaches for her through the slats in the fencing, yelling in vain over the roar of a passing plane (Arnow 453). The formidable machinery and symbolic fences that segregate and isolate people drown out Gertie’s voice and keep her from reaching her daughter, making the constraints and institutions of Detroit seem more powerful than Gertie’s image of a merciful Christ.

When Gertie suppresses Cassie’s imaginative play, she not only mirrors the constraints of the city, condemning her daughter for her differences but also changes the shape of their mother-daughter bond. Back home in Appalachia, both mother and daughter have more powerful agency and feel free to interpret the world with their own imaginative lenses. Gertie dreams of a living Christ while Cassie creates her own imaginary playmate called Callie Lou. The little “witch child,” as Gertie calls the fictional girl, is a free-spirited creation, wild and independent, just like Cassie and her mother feel in the mountains (Arnow 413). However, when the family moves to Detroit, Cassie is mocked by the alley children, which urges Gertie to tell her to let go of the

“witch child” (Arnold 413). She tells Cassie, “There ain’t no Callie Lou” (Arnold 426), effectively shattering her daughter’s child-like imagination and sense of wonder. Gertie fears for Cassie’s well-being and tires of hearing the neighborhood children’s jeers of “cuckoo” thrown at her, but Gertie repeats the mistake she made with Reuben by asking Cassie to adjust (Arnold 49). Gertie not only mirrors the constraints of the city by demanding Cassie let go of her child-like ways and fantasies, but she also puts strain on their mother-daughter relationship. The wild “witch child” is Cassie’s “help in troubled times,” just as the image of the “living Christ” is for Gertie and taking this part of Cassie’s self-expression away from her, Gertie exercises the same constraints the city places on her own imagination and artistic creations (Arnold 413).

The constraints that Gertie places on Cassie costs her daughter dearly, and Gertie cannot help but question her faith when so much suffering is allowed within the city limits. To honor Cassie’s memory and assuage her own guilt, Gertie works feverishly on the cherry wood carving, trying to find the right face for the figurine. Often, she feels conflicted about who is being carved in the “whittling foolishness,” going back and forth between the image of Judas and Jesus. As Walsh notes “The carving is an outlet not so much for Gertie’s imagination as for her guilt; it gains prominence as the means by which this reserved and confused woman examines her failure to protect her family” (101). She could not save Cassie from the train, and she could not provide the wisdom Reuben needed to survive in the city. At each turn, the city drives her further and further away from the “laughing Christ” she knew in Appalachia. Gertie’s guilt causes her to feel like Judas, betraying the people she loves and giving them up to the city’s harshness. However, she also wonders if she has been betrayed by the forgiving and kind image of Christ she conjures in Appalachia. The suffering she sees in her neighbor’s faces, and the pain she experiences

herself places doubt about the benevolence of a God that could look away from the city's broken and grieving families.

Furthermore, Gertie and her family are not exempt from the harsh world of Detroit, which makes the compassionate image of Christ seen in the Kentucky hills seem like mere deception in the city. However, Gertie eventually realizes that she is looking at the environment around her for Christ's face. In Appalachia, she saw her Christ in the homespun attire of the mountains, working with His hands and taking in the beauty of His own creation. That kind of environment is nowhere to be found in Detroit, so it seems to Gertie that the Christ she has communed with—who knows and understands her way of life—has abandoned her. All she can see in the city is a commodified image of Christ: “There were so many sellers of Christ in the alley; He was offered on Christmas cards, punch boards, rosaries, revivals, bingo parties, books, Bibles, and pamphlets (Arnow 584). The forgiving and loving Christ that Gertie remembers appears to be replaced by a commodified replica, an image with no soul made to put money in the seller's pocket. Gertie longs to see the natural image of her Christ walking down the mountains towards her. She tries to find some resemblance to the naturalistic world in Kentucky: “She stood a moment on her stoop, searching for the stars, but a pour was crimsoning the sky, and there were none” (Arnow 438). When steel is being poured at the mills, flashes of red burn the sky, making the visibility of God's creation overshadowed by man's work.

The image of Christ in Detroit appears in stagnant carvings and images, making God seem like a distant religious symbol dependent on people following religious practices rather than a living Savior that desires to commune with His creation. The religious doctrine of the city does not encourage fond memories for Gertie, but some of her children want to practice the rituals of Catholicism that they have heard about. For instance, Clytie tells her mother that the

family has to keep “tres ore,” a Catholic service commemorating Christ’s death on the cross, in order to appease the religiously devout in the city (Arnold 430). Clytie wants to start observing the service simply because the radio told her to do it, even though she does not fully understand the religious sanctity of the practice. She wants to assimilate into the culture of the city in as many ways as she can, but Gertie is exasperated with all the rules and religious dogma: “I ain’t so certain Christ ever heard uv it either” (Arnold 430). For Gertie, knowing Christ as God is not about following rituals and commands of the church. It is about experiencing who He is and His goodness in life. Christ is action, not a crucified figurine carved into maple wood.

Despite the attempts of people involved in organized religion to condemn Gertie into submission, she still desires to see her living Christ. Not all of Gertie’s neighbors believe in the superiority of organized religion, but people like Mr. and Mrs. Daly begrudge migrant families their share of wealth and well-being because they are outsiders who do not follow Catholicism. Speaking right to Gertie at the bottom of her porch steps, Mr. Daly claims, “Detroit was a good town till da hillbillies come” (Arnold 349). His words strike at the heart of the divisive prejudices that have created tension and conflict in the Merry Hill streets. Even the name he calls Gertie and her family, “hillbillies,” is a stereotype to make people like the Nevels feel they do not belong. This desire for self-importance comes through strongly in Mr. Daly’s argument with Reuben in the alley. Gertie drags Reuben away from the confrontation, but Mr. Daly refuses to give in, saying, “Yu gotta behave. I, Joseph Daly, will see to ut yu do. I’m a dacent, respectable, religious good American” (Arnold 349). Not only does Mr. Daly use derogatory name-calling to fuel his arrogance, but he also calls on modern institutions of organized religion and patriotism to support his higher social status among his peers. He is “decant” because he practices the preaching of modern Catholic doctrine and can be defined by his faithful love to his country

(Arnold 349). Such large-scale religious zeal of people like the Dalys holds no appeal for Gertie, which makes managing the intense pride and bigotry of some Merry Hill neighbors challenging.

Mr. Daly's wife also holds this same cavalier attitude, and when the gospel woman comes to talk with her on her porch steps, she feels the full weight of Mrs. Daly's "hospitality." The defenseless gospel woman has a bucket of water with roman cleanser thrown on her as well as a rap on the head with Mrs. Daly's broom. Her words are almost a mirror image of her husband's, shouting, "I mean git. I'll call a cops; da red squad. Youse can't talk about u gover'ment thataway in front of Kathy Daly, see? I'm a good patriotic Christian American" (Arnold 246). Like Gertie, the gospel woman finds little to praise about the government and other such systems that contribute to the running of Detroit. To Mrs. Daly, these women are heathens that do not honor their country and have no religious affiliations that can vouch for their label as Christians. Mrs. Daly mentions that the gospel woman's kind of people do not revere the American flag, to which she responds, "Bow down to no graven image" (Arnold 246). This declaration sends the Irish Catholic into another round of hysterics, but Gertie stops her second assault with the broom. She inadvertently takes a stand against cruel treatment enacted in the name of religion, but she is not alone. Other women in the Merry Hill alleys band together against the prejudiced slurs and ill-treatment of people like the Dalys. Women like Sophronie, Gertie, and Max form their own supportive community that sees the goodness in people and the representation of Gertie's "living Christ" in the faces of one another.

The community of women in Merry Hill inspire Gertie to develop her faith despite the religious chastisements and attempted segregation of her family for their Appalachianess. Gertie reconciles the image of her Creator with the Christ-like generosity, love, and forgiveness acted out in the Merry Hill community. These people do not follow the religious standards that

value man's words over God's, nor are they overly concerned with their reputations as "good Christian Americans" like the devout followers of organized religion, who have carved their own graven image out of modern society. With such people continuing to support and uplift the brutal social system in Detroit, Gertie and others like her that walk their own path both in faith and cultural custom are left with only one another for support. But Gertie finds that this small, reliable community is all she needs to see her Christ. Miller claims that "[l]ike Callie Lou, Christ lives in the lives of Gertie's neighbors and friends, like Victor, Sophronie, Max and Maggie Daly. Christ had to be crucified in order to rise in spirit and redeem the world" (37). It is not her mother's religion, the city's multiple religious institutions, or even the solid earth of Appalachia beneath her feet that proves Christ's existence; it is people and their actions towards one another. Gertie sacrifices her craft, happiness, and dreams of an idyllic agrarian life in Kentucky for her family, but she rises anew in a greater understanding of her faith and what is actually important in life: people. She faces suffering and tribulation in the city, but so did Christ on the cross. He died for people, and when Gertie sacrifices for others, she is living out this image of Christ. The same goes for her neighbors when they give up their time, money, or war-rationed resources to offer each other compassion.

Gertie's last sacrifice with the cherry wood carving represents her letting go of the image of Christ to finally recognize the faces of a living Christ in the compassion of her neighbors. In an interview with Arnow, Rigney questions the author about Gertie's sacrifice of her artwork. Arnow simply replies, "She doesn't need it anymore" (69). Gertie finds a lapse in the constraints of Detroit's culture where the commodification of her whittling, the chastisement of organized religion, and the pressures of finances fade into the background, and people take priority over social institutions. When Gertie goes to have the cherry wood carving split to make dolls, the

man at the scrap-wood lot takes one look at her work and knows that Gertie wanted it to be a depiction of Christ. He is curious why she never put a face on the carving, but Gertie understands that the added step is not necessary. She does not need the stagnant wood to hold a lifeless representation of Christ, because he appears to her every day in the subtle kindness of her Merry Hill community. Gertie explains to the man that "...some a my neighbors down there in th alley—they would ha done" (Arnow 677) as the inspiration for Christ's face. In the small community of wives, mothers, and factory laborers, Gertie has found her "living Christ."

Hypocritical organized religion in the novel appears capable only of adding to the tension of a multicultural society that does not all believe or live the same way. For Gertie, religious dogma both in Appalachia and Detroit attempt to break down her faith in a "living Christ," a God who cares for the well-being of his people no matter their cultural background. With all the suffering that she endures with her migration to the city, her belief in Christ's inherent goodness and omnipotence becomes questionable to her. It is not until Gertie is able to reflect on her experiences in the city, remembering the people that have helped to see her through hardships, that she realizes Christ is not in her imagination, relegated to the beautiful woods of Appalachia, or etched into the divisive words of doctrine. Christ is living through the compassion, resiliency, and respect of the people around her.

Conclusion: Appalachia in the Heart

The cultures that Gertie Nevels interacts with in *The Dollmaker* are vastly different in structure, but each way of life occupies the space of the other and influences the people of the respective regions. To fulfill her part as the caretaker and housewife, Gertie follows her husband to Detroit where she is met with a new set of constraints and cultural demands. For better or worse, Detroit becomes part of the cultural structure of Appalachia, changing the economics and industry of the rural, Ballew community and vice versa when the Nevels family migrates to Detroit. Helped along by the troubling effects of World War II and the shifting economics in the region, Gertie's dream of an agrarian lifestyle and owning her own piece of land slowly fades from the mountains with fewer families left to practice the customs in the Appalachian community. The constraints Greenblatt suggests shape culture appear for Gertie in both the mountains and the city ("Culture"). In the voice of her mother's religious persecution, Gertie hears the demand that she should alter her behavior and fall into stereotypical gender roles and her mother's view of biblical doctrine. However, Gertie stands firm in her faith, keeping her image of a living Christ and identity as an Appalachian woman with her even in the strict culture of Detroit.

The constraints or "code of manners" that Gertie finds in Detroit resemble her mother's chastisement for her lack of adjustment to social expectation but even more amplified within the boundaries of the city ("Culture"). The rapid growth of industry results in mass production taking place in factories, which in turn, encourages a system of consumerism among the people in Detroit. Gertie falls into this transactional world of buying and selling, which is vastly different from the way of bartering and trading goods typical in her Kentucky community. Her lack of knowledge in this new economic system causes her to struggle with simple, everyday

tasks that were easy and natural for her in Appalachia. The machinery introduced into her house are products of Detroit's vision of "progress," but each time she uses them, it seems like she is set back rather than propelled forward into the future. Even the multicultural voices in the alley offer either support or condemnation. Organized religion in Detroit tends to be used as a way for people to assume superiority over their neighbors, claiming them to be beneath their own label of "good American citizens" (Arnow 349). Since Gertie is from Appalachia, she often garners criticism for being backwoods and incapable of adjusting to the "high culture" of the city. She is looked down on by some prejudiced groups including the Dalys and Rueben's teacher, but not all people cruelly judge her because of her status as an Appalachian migrant. The community of women in Merry Hill that welcomes and supports her while she lives in the city offers an example of compassion and kindness in an environment where self-centeredness and isolation are considered part of the cultural norms. Their practice of values that Gertie also held sacred in Appalachia makes their community a reflection of Gertie's home. When Gertie interacts with these women, taking care of their children or offering in conversation a "dream" for a better future, she sees her heritage living and breathing in a different cultural environment.

Gertie's life in the city is a mix of conceding to the social status quo and practicing small values and traditions of her Appalachian background. As Greenblatt acknowledges, the intersection of these two cultures results in different outcomes for Gertie depending on the demands of the culture that is more prominent in the region ("Culture"). Gertie is more at home in Appalachia and the traditions associated with her own heritage, which often makes her agency as a woman that can work and influence life both inside and outside the home more noticeable (Lerner 161). In Detroit, Gertie faces stronger constraints that she is also unsure how to navigate. But in this process of learning, Gertie comes to discover what Greenblatt explains about the

malleability of culture. Because of the flexibility of cultural norms, Gertie can find opportunities to see and enact her own cultural traditions in the city (“Resonance and Wonder” 15). Being part of the Merry Hill community, Gertie comes to discover that her roots have never really left her. By looking in her neighbors’ faces, she can see Christ’s goodness in their kind words and actions, and in watching these small, compassion-filled interactions, Gertie recollects an image of home.

Despite the clashing cultures, Gertie eventually comes to understand that the decision to keep her culture alive is up to her. Gertie’s identity as an Appalachian woman is hers alone, and only she can decide its value in her own life. Admittedly, there are constraints and changes in her daily existence, especially in Detroit, that she has minimal choice but to adjust to. However, learning to pay taxes or shop in a grocery store does not make her any more or less Appalachian. These practices simply make her identity less noticeable to others. This understanding is where the value of memory, community, and spirituality come into play. Cultural customs and constraints can make one culture more idealized than another, but they cannot take that identity away from someone. As long as Gertie continues to stow away pieces of her mountain home in her memory, show compassion and respect for her community in Detroit, and own her faith in a living Christ, Appalachia will never be far from her. Compromising her Appalachian spirit is entirely her own decision, one that Gertie finds worth the suffering and condemnation. Through all her hardship, she comes to realize that her Appalachian roots are as much a product of her own choice as they are her environment. To stay Appalachian, Gertie only needs to listen to her own heart.

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