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Reading the Temporal Nature of Lee Smith's Fair and Tender Ladies  
through Oral History

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By  
Don L. Butler

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## Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1	5
Chapter 2	23
Chapter 3	41
Conclusion	58
Works Cited	62

## Introduction

Southern writers have particularly demonstrated an affinity for addressing the popular theme of time in their work. According to C. Hugh Holman, "The southerner has always had his imaginative faculties excited by events in time and has found the most profound truths of the present and the future in the interpretation of the past" (1). Robert J. Higgs and Ambrose N. Manning observe of Appalachian literature: "In story after story there is an attempt on the part of the characters to come to terms with the past . . ." (217). Lee Smith, an Appalachian writer, is no exception in that she too explores time in her novels Oral History and Fair and Tender Ladies. However, Smith's method is a distinctive one. Singularly, each novel demonstrates a particular handling of the time theme. But when read together, Oral History, published in 1983, and Fair and Tender Ladies, published in 1988, work to create a larger theme that not only shows how time passes, but also shows the importance of one's perception of the passing of time. Although Smith published other works between these two novels, and these stories are about different characters in different settings, thematically, these two novels comprise a symbiotic relationship similar to the parts of the serial novel. That is to say, both novels together create a thematic whole.

In the former novel, Smith, within the framework of a college student's oral history project, chronicles the change and progression of a family through time. Through a series of narrators, the history of the Cantrell family unfolds, revealing a single story from multiple perspectives. Thus, Oral History is an outcome-based exploration of time. The use of varying narrators limits a true

perspective and connection to the events that mark the passing of time. The narrators reveal the Cantrell history, as Ivy in Fair and Tender Ladies would say, "as a tale that is told" (316). None of the characters realizes that the story becomes the means to an end. Unable to make the personal connections necessary to understand time, the characters in Oral History reveal a story that in its "organic whole" (a phrase used by Robert B. Heilman in his seminal essay on "The Southern Temper" [10] ) demonstrates the basic passing of time and what remains as a result of the process.

Since Smith wishes only to portray the movement of time in Oral History, it is in Fair and Tender Ladies that she completes her initial exploration of the time theme by developing further a singular perspective of the events that mark the passing of time. The protagonist, Ivy Rowe, discloses her struggle with time and with a changing world in an effort to understand herself through five sections of letters, termed "bundles" by Carla Huskey (44). Smith uses each "bundle" of letters to portray Ivy's development through her struggle to understand time in perspective.

In the first three "bundles" of letters, so grouped for purposes of this study, Smith explores Ivy's development from a little girl to a young woman. The life Ivy knows as a little girl on Sugar Fork ceases to exist in the wake of the general disintegration of her world and becomes for Ivy, in the midst of all her loss, a romanticized memory by which she is held captive, tied to the past and unable to forget it. Though Ivy attains freedom and independence as she grows into a young woman and moves from Majestic to Diamond, her affection for Sugar Fork and the past hold a much greater appeal for her. Ultimately, Ivy rejects all that, in her mind, is uncertain, for the unrealized reality that awaits her on Sugar

Fork. In this sense, Ivy retreats into her familiar past in an attempt to hold on to it.

The fourth and fifth “bundles” of letters demonstrate Ivy’s desperate need to put the past in a perspective that will enable her to live in the present and move into the future. However much Ivy intends to restore her past by returning to Sugar Fork, though, her plan fails. Now married to her childhood friend Oakley Fox, Ivy occupies a new role in life. Consequently, her romanticized, childhood perception of Sugar Fork disappears in the myriad of tasks and responsibilities of adulthood. Her attempt to restore her past fails, as she becomes overwhelmed with her new role as wife and mother. In a desperate attempt to deter the cyclical nature of time and not fall into the same role as her mother Maude, Ivy shirks her responsibilities for an affair with Honey Breeding, who makes her feel like a girl again. But Smith shows that time cannot be recovered or even frozen. While Ivy is away with Honey Breeding, her daughter Lulda dies. When Ivy realizes that the pain she feels from her tragic loss will not kill her, she decides to live in the present and comes to understand the ever changing tide of life.

Reading the second of these two novels through the first provides a more complete view of the thematic treatment of time in Lee Smith’s work. While Oral History provides a general look at how time passes, and Fair and Tender Ladies explores a more introspective view of time, both novels address the temporal nature of life and leave one to contemplate what survives. In the former novel, Smith shows how having little regard for the past and the connection of events through time creates a questionable history, perhaps as dissimilar from fact as the theme park Ghostland is from real mountain life. However, in the latter novel, Smith offers a reprieve. Ivy’s struggle to understand her past in



perspective ultimately allows her to live fully in the present and further affect the future through her love, her children, and her writing. Through these novels, Smith shows that factual events alone do not make history. Understanding the connection of events through time determines the future.

I.

"The way I tell a story is the way I want to . . ."

### Reality and the Nature of History

In Oral History, Smith's chronicle of a family which spans four generations, Smith explores the change and progression that result from life over a period of time. The multiple and varying narrators offer an interpretation of history according to their own perspectives of it. In a 1991 interview, Smith says, ". . . [one] thing that fascinates me about the notion of oral history is that I think it is an oxymoron: if it is spoken it is not history, if it is spoken it is automatically the storyteller's tale" (Herion-Sarafidis, 11). Moreover, Smith shows the effect time has and the history it becomes. Oral History, then, is an oral account of one family over four generations, their perceived lives, loves, losses, deaths, all they comprise, and what survives and transcends time--the history of it all.

Oral History begins in the present creating a framing device wherein the character Jennifer Bingham returns to her mother's family in the mountains for information to complete her oral history project. Jennifer, however, lacks any real understanding of or connection to her mountain relatives. For,

*She grew up loved and petted, sensitive and nervous and "artistic," a shy little girl with bronchial asthma and a collection of forty-two dolls from foreign countries and a giant dollhouse that her father made himself, with tiny little upholstered chairs in it. Her father has given Jennifer every advantage all along. . . . (16)*

Jennifer's mountain kin, however, certainly have not had the same advantages.

The geographical distance that separates Jennifer, who grew up, *"about fifty miles east of this holler,"* from her kin is eclipsed by the more obvious distinction between her lifestyle and that of her mother's *"backward "* family (16). With Jennifer's return to her roots, Smith explores the results of opposing forces coming to meet over time: past and present, old and new, and perception and reality.

Most notably, first, Smith explores the past and present in the novel's structure. Juxtaposing the frame story of Jennifer's assignment in the present with the flashback story of the Cantrell history, Smith accomplishes two things. First, consciousness is raised to the time element in the novel's frame. Jennifer hopes to impress her current professor by researching her past and producing an impressive project. The reader, therefore, may infer that the past impacts on the present. Second, the actual technique of flashback suggests the presence of the past in the present. The main story, the history of the Cantrells, unfolds onto a tape recorder. But, before exploring the time element of the main story, one needs to pay closer attention to the frame.

Jennifer's trip to Hoot Owl Holler not only implies the present nature of the past, but suggests the real threat of a disappearing time. Smith bombards the reader with conflicting images throughout the frame story that show the separation of the old and the new and, at the same time, the transition from one to the other. The omniscient narrator portrays the opening scene of the novel, allowing for the impact progress and change have had over time on Smith's mountain characters, for example, Little Luther Wade who

*. . . just sits out there in the porch swing, swaying back and forth with his new suspenders on, a little bitty old shriveled-up man so short that his feet in the cowboy boots can't even touch the floor. .*

. . . *Every now and then he strums a little bit on his dulcimer. . . . He's wearing his Western shirt with the flowers on it, too. He knows how cute he is.* (13)

Smith deliberately dresses Little Luther Wade in "Western" regalia to symbolize the impact of civilization on her "backward" character. Still, Little Luther himself represents the remnants of a world disappearing into the abyss of time. So, too, does Ora Mae, whom Smith introduces immediately after, but with, Little Luther. The former playing his dulcimer and breaking out into song and the latter "*in her chair making a brown and yellow afghan in the star pattern, her fingers busy, busy, busy, without her even looking down at her hands*" (13) create a strong contrast to their younger relatives.

As much as the clothes might suggest the "Western" or more civilized influence on Little Luther Wade, who is essentially symbolic of the past, the younger members of the family offer a clearer understanding of how times have changed. Debra with her "*black T-shirt with 'Foxy Lady' written on it in silver glitter*" and Roscoe yelling out, "*It's time for Magnum*" (14), indicate a new world in the wake of the more pastoral one that Jennifer expected. Significantly, while the omniscient narrator sets the scene clearly conveying the impact of change and progression over time, Jennifer's own journal entry offers a different perspective of the scene.

Jennifer's attempt to document her experience lacks any of the aforementioned indications of progress or change beyond the pristine environment she romanticizes into consciousness:

The picturesque old home place sits so high on the hill that it leaves one with the aftertaste of judgment in his or her mouth. Looking out from its porch, one sees the panorama of the whole

valley spread out like a picture, with all its varied terrain (garden, pasture, etc.) stitched together by split-oak fences resembling nothing so much as a green-hued quilt. (18)

The diction Jennifer uses parallels the geographical superiority to her relatives in the position where she is writing: "*Jennifer finds a flat rock like a table and sits on it. . . . She looks . . . back down at Al and Debra's house*" (17-18). Smith emphasizes Jennifer's condescension by placing her above and looking down on her folks. Jennifer's prevailing impression of her mother's family, though, comes through her stepmother's condescending remarks:

*. . . Jennifer never would have thought of this if she hadn't happened to overhear Martha telling a couple they played bridge with, over a bridge game, how backward his first wife's people were and how of course they've lost contact with them now, but listen, this is really a riot, the last Martha heard, her parents had moved out of their house because it was haunted. Haunted! In this day and age!* (17)

Martha certainly implies that hers is a new world, one in which superstition plays no part, and further suggests a temporal distance between her and the mountain folk. Conversely, while Martha is astonishingly embarrassed by this "backwardness" and feels some sense of a higher status because of her opposition to it, Jennifer, through her professor's interest, discovers a romanticized desire to recapture her past.

Smith uses Martha's negative comments to rationalize Jennifer's air of superiority as well as the professor's positive interest to explain Jennifer's perspective upon arriving at Hoot Owl Holler. Suzanne W. Jones, in her article "City Folks in Hoot Owl Holler: Narrative Strategy in Lee Smith's Oral History."

explains:

Taught by her upwardly mobile father and stepmother to look down on her real mother's family, Jennifer now sees her relatives from another perspective--that of her "Yankee" folklore professor who finds Jennifer's tales of the haunted Cantrell homeplace and Hoot Owl Holler lore fascinating material. (102)

Thus, Jennifer's perception is doubly tainted. On the one hand, she has been predisposed to the belief that her family is "backward" and, therefore, inferior in some way to her through her stepmother's attempt at self-affirmation. On the other hand, the romanticized concept of her roots is instilled in her by her professor Dr. Ripman. The impact of these two perspectives colors Jennifer's perspective of reality. Suzanne W. Jones writes:

Through Jennifer, Smith satirizes amateur folklorists--the latest breed of curiosity seekers in Appalachia. Although their collection of oral history and analysis of mountain culture is supposed to be objective, Smith suggests otherwise. While Jennifer, like some amateur folklorist, tries to prove that a pastoral past still lives in the present, Smith is at pains to paint a more complex picture, making sure that for every cotton quilt there is an aluminum lawn chair and for every log cabin there is a custom painted van. (102)

Smith deliberately creates conflicting messages to the reader, from Jennifer's romantic thoughts-- "*. . . it is just beautiful in this holler, so peaceful, like being in a time machine*" (15)--indicative of her notion that the mountains have evaded time and progress, to the evidence of the contrary such as Little Luther's clothes and the television. In these seemingly conflicting images lies the answer to understanding the larger, main story, and Smith's message as a whole:

perception colors history. The frame story then sets the tone for a major theme in the novel, exploring what happens to people and their way of life over a period of time, how the old affects the new, and what remains from it all.

Dorothy Combs Hill, in her book Lee Smith, points out, "Three major narrators--Granny Younger, Richard Burlage, and Sally Wade--tell the stories of Hoot Owl Holler. . ." (53). Smith uses these three narrators symbolically, strategically placing them so as to create a structure parallel to and reinforcing the theme of an ubiquitous past. First, Granny Younger reveals the Cantrell history in a romanticized tale of tradition and superstition. Then, Smith contrasts Granny Younger's perspective with the "outsider" perspective of Richard Burlage, who attempts to travel back in time to find his identity. Finally, Sally Wade, unable to make the connections of the past herself, with her husband Roy's help is able to view the past in such a way that she is not debilitated by it.

The past becomes present in the tape recorder. Smith begins the recounting of the Cantrell family, around the turn of the century, with Granny Younger. According to Hill, "Granny Younger's name implies a bridging of opposites, as does 'oral history'" (58). Thus, she amplifies the concept of the past being present. The oldest person to remember Almarine completely, Granny Younger not only witnessed the events she is so willing to disclose, but she "bridges" the past and present:

. . . I am an old, old woman, and I have traveled a lot in these parts. I have seed folks come and I have seed them go. I have cotched more babies than I can name you; I have put the burying quilts around many a soul. I said I know moren you know and mought be I'll tell you moren you want to hear. (37)

Just as Granny Younger's name implies the "bridging" or bring together of two

opposites, so does her role. That she has been the constant in life, having “seed folks come and . . . go,” and witnessed births as well as deaths, suggests that Granny is time itself. As such, Granny’s contribution to the novel is to emphasize what lasts. Through her stories, Granny will live forever.

However, Granny’s is a story of subjectivity. No one has witnessed all that she has, and therefore no one can dispute her story. Further, Granny adamantly informs us that this is Almarine’s story, but she will tell it as she pleases. Then, before beginning the actual story, she offers a Chaucerian disclaimer: “The way I tell a story is the way I want to, and iffen you mislike it, you don’t have to hear” (37 ). While Granny Younger discloses the storyline to the reader, Smith makes it very clear that Granny, the narrator, cannot be trusted. If Granny represents the past through her ubiquitous presence and knowledge, and if the past as it is related by her is subject to her own tainted perception of it, then the story told is questionable; so, too is the integrity of all else over time.

Smith first casts doubt on Granny Younger’s story in her description of Almarine Cantrell. Being so pretty, with “all that pale-gold hair,” with “them light blue eyes” (36), and “sweet when nobody else in that family was” (28), Almarine is overly romanticized by Granny. Concomitantly, we learn of Red Emmy through much the same perspective. The tale of Almarine following the redbird down a trail to find Red Emmy bathing in a pool of water is very prophetic. Granny describes the scene:

She was down on her knees leaning forward, dipping up the water in her hands. She was naked from the waist up. Her black skirt was pulled down around her hips and her shirt-waist was throwed on the ground. The skin of her back showed the whitest white that Almarine ever seed, and her hair fell all down her back to her



waist. And that hair! Lord it was the reddest red, a red so dark it was nigh to purple, red like the leaves on the dogwood tree in the fall. And the redbird perched on a rock to the side of the pool and directly he started to sing. (43-44)

The dreamlike state in which Granny relates the story lends a subjectivity to her perception, though. And, although she readily contends that "Folks'll say anything" (47), Granny encourages the local superstition by maintaining that Red Emmy is a witch. In addition, the use of superlatives in the descriptions of both Almarine and Red Emmy creates an ideal or standard that implies a supernatural element.

More importantly, Smith uses Granny to establish a sense of order and correctness in the novel. Although Granny knows "that what you want the most, you find offen the beaten path" (37), she implies that it is the wrong or more problematic path. Red Emmy, the "woman [who] orter bind up her hair" (49) but refuses, does not disappoint Granny's insight. It is Emmy that Almarine finds "offen the beaten path":

This little redbird sings the prettiest song a body has ever heard. The little song is so sweet and so sad it brings tears into Almarine's eyes, or mought be it's only the cold. But it makes a pull on Almarine's heart. He knows he is going to foller it whether or no. The little bird flies up in the crook of the tree, offen the down side of Snowman Mountain. Almarine follers it offen the trace without even considering what he's about or where it might lead him. (42)

Indeed, the redbird leads Almarine astray and into the disorder that Red Emmy brings to the holler. As a result, Almarine finds that he must "run her off" (57) in

an effort to save himself and restore order and, subsequently, credence to the superstition. According to Granny, "A witch will ride a man in the night while he sleeps, she'll ride him to death if she can" (53). Red Emmy's sins lie in the fact that she refuses to conform. Everything about her is out of the norm and contrary to tradition. Accounting for her very existence, Granny says, "Some says he [Isom, Emmy's father] had him a wife and he kilt her, and others says he just drempt Emmy up outen the black air by the Raven Clifts. Others says he stole him a baby from West Virginia" (46). Thus, Emmy is "offen the trace." She is a sexual being, and, as such, Emmy rebels against the female role of the time.

Also, Almarine has been abandoned by everyone close to him in the past. His father died early, leaving him to a less than compassionate mother who, as a result of a dispute with her other son, would leave everything to Almarine. His only possession is the holler that he returned to after a five-year period of undisclosed absence: "I come back here a free man . . . I served my time . . . I growed up here, Granny . . . I love this holler . . . I ain't a-going to lose it" (55). In essence, Almarine returns to his past by returning to the holler.

Smith uses Almarine's homecoming to contrast with Jennifer's in the frame. Unlike Jennifer, Almarine has something to return to. He left the holler of his own free will and returns to it with a knowledge and understanding of what awaits him there. He understands the connections. Almarine, therefore, is able to go home again and prosper, unlike his great-granddaughter, who is too far removed and who lacks any bridge as a connector to her roots.

If Almarine and Red Emmy's relationship is only sexually charged passion, and so doomed, then his relationship with Pricey Jane is complete. As Hill says, "No longer screaming at panthers, Almarine is a settled farmer; gone is the woman, sexual at dawn" (68). Almarine requires a woman

who will accommodate him and the situation he occupies. Granny expresses her approval of Pricey Jane:

And work! Lord, she turned that cabin upside down and sideways cleaning it, she was a-drying apples on the shed roof, she churned butter so light it'd melt in your mouth. And it was a sight the way she follered Almarine around, and how she'd reach right out and touch him whenever they passed in the house. (63-64)

Granny's account of Pricey Jane is no less romanticized than that of Red Emmy, though. And, despite Granny's insistence that Pricey Jane "weren't a foreigner neither, or leastaways not as much of one as them others was" (63), she was indeed a newcomer to the holler. Unlike Red Emmy whose reputation was pervasive throughout the holler, Pricey Jane is virtually unknown. Moreover, she has no roots indicative of a past.

Regardless of Granny's romanticized view of Almarine Cantrell and his loves and losses, she colors a vivid picture of an era still defined by tradition and superstition, yet to be encumbered by progress and change. However, Granny represents more than the past in isolation. Her role is that of a bridge. Just as she bridges the past to present on the tape recorder, through her birthing of babies, she connects the past and present to the future. In her own words, "I couldn't move no way but forward" (37).

Smith's second major narrator, Richard Burlage, disillusioned by World War I, attempts to escape his own world in hopes of discovering his identity. Smith clearly does not want the reader to share in Richard's identity crisis, though. His name, Burlage, "Burl age," literally means veneer age. Thus, determined to surpass the surface of society and answer his own questions about life, Richard retreats to the mountains for answers. In an effort to refute

his brother Victor's belief, "This is it, this is it, and this is *all there is to it*" (97), "There is pain and the absence of pain" (99), Richard begins his "pilgrimage back through time, a pilgrimage to a simpler era, back--dare I hope it--to the very roots of consciousness and belief" (97). Ironically, the life and prescribed philosophies he decries are the very qualities that prevent him from achieving self-discovery.

Richard contemplates his Richmond house: "Huge white columns support that house--Grecian columns. It is a house supported by the past, and the past, as we all know, is dead. Yet we perpetuate its anguish, preserve its romance, and appreciate, by God, its beauty" (98-99). And he declares, "My consciousness of these things produced in me again the claustrophobia which has caused me, finally, to flee" (99). However much Richard protests the past's presence in anything more significant than architecture and nostalgia, he parallels the concept romantically with his trip to a place that represents the past in the present.

Richard, suffering from the many losses he has incurred, wishes to escape his world of

irrevocable loss: the happy, close family of my youth, gone; my college days, which now seemed a mere exercise in frivolity, nevertheless gone; Melissa, the girl I had hoped to marry, engaged to another man; my religious faith and the sanguine equanimity with which I had been wont to face the world, gone . . . .

(101)

Traveling "back through time," Richard retreats to that "simpler era" that he romanticizes the mountains to be. Like Jennifer in the frame story, though, Richard's perception of the mountains is tainted by his own personal quest. He

needs the mountains to be an untouched, pristine environment, unencumbered by modernisms and conducive to personal realization. During his train trip, he philosophizes, "I thought: two ways to face the world. One way . . . simple, unassuming, a kind of peasant dignity, a naturalness inherent in . . . every move" and "The other . . . smartness, sophistication, veneer without substance" (102). Having experienced the latter with a prevailing emptiness, Richard looks to the former for fulfillment, unaware that it is he that is the veneer.

Smith best portrays Richard's limitations on the ride to Black Rock with Wall Johnson. Seeing only the back side of the girl riding in the truck, Richard visualizes her as a mountain beauty, "giving her all Melissa's most attractive attributes, yet correcting Melissa's flaws--in my mind's eye I created for this unknown girl, a Grecian nose rather than Melissa's shallow little upturned snout, for instance" (110), only to find that "She was hideous" (112). Just as Richard attempts to create a perfect vision of the girl, so he expects to find a flawless, natural place and time in Black Rock. Also, interestingly enough, Richard assigns the girl a Grecian nose. In doing so, he contradicts his own earlier protestation of romanticizing the "dead past" regarding the Grecian columns of his house.

In all his efforts to get past societal customs and the veneer that inhibits purity, Richard does succeed and experience passion with Dory. However, she only represents Richard's limited idea of what the mountains are. Richard cannot envision Dory out of her natural environment: "I try to imagine taking Dory to a picture show, walking along a sidewalk with her, as we did tonight, yet she seems to exist for me only in that shadowy setting--those three mountains, that closed valley--whence she came" (148). Richard's inability to see Dory beyond the mountains indicates his limited perception of her. Nancy C. Parrish

asserts, "Richard . . . treats Dory as a piece of art rather than a woman" and "as soon as he confronts the reality of loving her as a real woman, he reverts to form by inscribing his attraction as an aesthetic experience" (42). He cannot really know Dory. Likewise, Suzanne W. Jones says, "With Dory's example of how to openly express emotions, Richard experiences passionate love, a feeling of ease with himself, and a oneness with Dory. But Dory's love is only one side of the expressiveness of mountain culture" (108). The passionate love Richard feels for Dory overshadows his other experiences in Black Rock. And, ultimately, Richard's underestimation of the mountains costs him the love he gained through Dory, for Ora Mae intercepts the letter to Dory asking her to return to Richmond with him.

Richard's naivete also costs Dory. Jones continues:

Of course what he has missed is made clear to the reader through the oral history that precedes his second series of journal entries. He has injured Dory unwittingly. For while Richard goes back to Richmond, marries a bishop's daughter, and continues to praise himself for his "sensitivity," Dory bears him twin daughters of whose existence he is never aware. . . . Richard, who like his granddaughter Jennifer, sees Dory and his mountain experience chiefly as the means of his own self-discovery . . . never once considers the effect he has had on Dory. (110)

Whatever Richard missed in his written documentation of his first visit to Black Rock, he comes prepared to capture on film in his second visit. But even with the camera and his "foolish notion--to capture a bit of the past" (217), Richard cannot see the effect he has had on Dory. Even though he sees his own twins playing in the yard, Richard never thinks they are his. However, while he never

realizes the impact he had on Dory, both emotionally and physically, Richard does recognize the impact of the past. He says, "Nothing is ever over, nothing is ever ended, and worlds open up within the world we know" (229). Richard understands the concept that the past perpetuates the present, but he is unable to make the connection between concept and life.

If Richard Burlage's attempt to escape societal evils encumbering his perceptions by retreating to a "simpler era" fails, then Smith's final major narrator, Sally, accomplishes that end. She completes the Cantrell story with an unaffectedness significant of an objectivity heretofore not seen. Sally, busy living her life, represents the present. In fact, the only reason we hear her story is because her husband Roy broke his leg and was laid up for a while. Thus, the fated interruption of their lives allows for reflection. Unlike the other narrators in the novel, Sally does not feel the need to hold on to the past.

The romantic perceptions pervasive in Granny Younger's and Richard Burlage's respective stories are significantly absent in Sally's story. Superstitious tales of witches and personal escapes from progress and change over time disappear, revealing a no-nonsense, practical, self-affirming attitude. No doubt, surviving her mother Dory's death, the union of her father Little Luther and Ora Mae, and her own personal experiences have diminished the brilliant shine that often illuminates the past. Moreover, Sally possesses a contentment with her life that no one else in the novel achieves. She says of her family, ". . . [M]y whole family is like that. People say they're haunted and they are--every one of them all eat up with wanting something they haven't got. If it's not being double ruby [an Amway term] it's something else" (235). Sally understands her role and the limitations that accompany it.

On the larger scale, Sally's role in the novel is to resolve the past in many ways, discerning what lasts and what is discarded. Sally's explanation of her family's being haunted contrasts with the earliest example in the novel. Granny uses superstition to account for the unexplained. Red Emmy's intense passion surely indicated witchery. And Pricey Jane's dead mother's gold hoop earrings were cursed and so caused her death. The present, then, resonates in Sally's voice, putting things into a modern perspective. Even in her youth Sally's view contrasts with Granny's superstition and she displays an ability to deal with life realistically. She just deals with it, as she remarks regarding her disdain for her step-mother:

I grew up with Ora Mae there like anything else we had to contend with, like the flash floods that came in the spring, or how they kill your favorite hog to put meat on the table, or how they would up and lay people off at the mine without telling them first not so much as a by-your-leave.

I grew up with Ora Mae like some kind of natural aggravation.

I didn't care, then. We had a lot to put up with in those days and we put up with all of it and didn't care. We were happy. (239-240)

However, that is not to say that Sally had an easy life. She was unable to escape the ugliness and severity of the struggle to survive in a vanishing culture that eluded Richard Burlage. Consequently, though, her innate understanding of circumstance benefits her. First of all, had Ora Mae given Dory Richard's note, Little Luther and Dory, in all probability, would not have married. Subsequently, Sally would not have been born. Conversely, Pearl, Sally's half-



sister, exists as a result of Richard Burlage's retreat into the past. And, like her father, Pearl wants too much and is forced to ask the question Richard sought to answer earlier in the novel: "I mean, what else is there?" (265).

That Pearl can even ask the question Victor Burlage dared not ask his brother suggests a change and progression in time. But her desperation and inherent proclivity to want too much force her to explore beyond what is available. Ironically, Pearl, sacrificing any real passion, marries to get out of the squalor her father never saw, and, like her mother, perishes because of his perception of reality tainted by passion. For if Richard had really seen Dory, according to Suzanne W. Jones, and not "romanticize[d] her oneness with nature, never seeing it as the natural outgrowth of a life lived close to the land" (108-109), he might have behaved differently. Consequently, Jennifer was born under the same conditions as her mother Pearl, implying a perpetuation of the past.

Returning to the frame of the story, Smith emphasizes what remains. The taunting Jennifer receives from Al regarding her mother's death changes her perception of her kin from one extreme to the other:

*Al is nothing but a big old bully, a joker, after all. They still live so close to the land, all of them. Some things may seem modern, like the van, but they're not, not really. They are really very primitive people, resembling nothing so much as some sort of early tribe. Crude jokes and animal instincts--it's the other side of the pastoral coin. (284)*

Although Jennifer gets an "A" on her project, she still lacks any understanding of her past. However, Jennifer's perception of the past is unimportant to the larger

message of the novel. And like the Cantrell homeplace that lives on as the main attraction at Ghostland, the past will live on to some degree in the present.

In Oral History, Lee Smith explores the different ways that the past survives and how both oral and written documentation are variables in reflecting history. In a 1991 interview with Rebecca Smith, Lee Smith says about the novel, “. . . I had come to the firm conclusion that there is no such thing as history. That it's only who tells the story. And I kind of wanted to reflect that point that the past can never be exactly known” (25). As demonstrated by her multiple narrators, there is an irretrievable loss that occurs over time. Particularly, in this novel, the loss is the inability of its characters to make the connections. Even Sally, the objective one, balks when her husband asks for the connection in her stories. While he maintains “There's always a connection,” Sally responds, “No there is not. Sometimes things just happen, is all. . .” (253). But Roy, the lineman, must help Sally to recognize the connections.

Sally's section near the end of the novel culminates Oral History's theme of time and the exploration of it over several generations and perspectives. Certainly the reader is left able to see how the ties bind within the novel. But Smith does not provide any true revelation of the connection of events through time to any character. Not even Sally, whose account concludes the main story of the novel and resolves some unanswered questions, acquires a true understanding of her past. In effect, her aloof attitude and manner toward the past suggest that Sally has dismissed the past as simply factual, as various events over a span of time with no personal connections. In Fair and Tender Ladies, however, Smith moves a step further and completes her exploration of time and how it affects people. She chronicles change and progression over

time through the singular perspective of her protagonist Ivy Rowe. Ivy struggles with her own need to hold on to what was good in the past and to let go of what no longer works. Unlike Sally in Oral History, who never connects with the past in any real sense, Smith develops in Ivy Rowe a character who deals with the past, comes to understand its place in the present, and is able to move on to the future.

## II.

"Slow down, slow down now, Ivy. This is the taste of spring."

### The Past and Present Conflict

In Fair and Tender Ladies, Smith continues the exploration of time she began in Oral History. Her protagonist, Ivy Rowe, struggles with the fleeting aspect of time in an effort to understand herself. Ivy's development throughout the novel comes in the form of letters she writes to various people, none more than her sister Silvaney. Through these letters Ivy's voice first rings out from her unfortunate circumstances and paves the way for her to follow. Thus, Smith discloses the singular perspective of life through one woman's eyes as she deals with change, the passing of time, and her own personal growth. Ivy's letters reveal a genuine love that allows her the ability to withstand the cruelties of life and loss of the past while affording her a validation of existence in the present and a purpose for the future. Unlike the characters in Smith's earlier Oral History, Ivy realizes the connection of things past and present and understands that "there is a time for every purpose under heaven" (317).

In the first three sections of the novel, Ivy struggles to put her life and the lives of those around her into perspective. A prisoner of her own love for her family and a vanishing way of life, Ivy seeks out ways to escape the hardships. In a large family, living on a mountain with a disabled, dying father, Ivy's is not the easiest life. Quite the contrary, Ivy's life consists of endless chores and care-taking of her younger siblings, leaving little or no time for herself. In the midst of harsh conditions, though, Ivy endures by embracing the familiarity of it all with her abundant love. The result is a romanticized view of the past and a longing

to recapture it. However, ultimately, her attempt to go back in time and restore all that she lost as a girl fails. She cannot recover her past losses. Moreover, Ivy cannot recover her girlhood perspective. But afraid of falling into the role of her mother Maude, Ivy refuses to be bound by the traditional female roles of the past and progresses beyond the female status quo typical of the time. Witnessing the change and progression that takes place over time, Ivy realizes the need to put the past in perspective and live in the present.

Ivy's story begins with her letter to Hanneke, the girl with whom she attempts to forge a pen pal relationship. Ivy starts her story at the beginning, telling Hanneke how she came to live on Sugar Fork:

My momma Maude was then fifteen, her momma had died of her lungs in the year 1866 so that Maude was the light of her daddy's life, and the only joy of his heart. Then my daddy come to Rich Valley and she took up with him, and her and him set to walking out together of an evening like you do.

Mister Castle said NO I forbid it, he has no prospects, and said he would send my momma to her mother's sister in Memphis Tennessee where my momma never had been or even heard tell of to learn her some sense and how to act like a lady at last. (3-4)

John Arthur Rowe and Maude were forced to elope in the middle of the night, and he took her to where "you can't go no further . . . here in my daddy's house which was his daddy's house afore him way up here on Blue Star Mountain" (5).

However, the romance of the story diminishes through time-rendered hardships. Just as the trip proves to be the end of Lightning, the horse John Arthur and Maude use to elope on, so does the fairytale aspect of the relationship end. What began as a story of forbidden lovers triumphing over

insurmountable obstacles is transformed into a life filled with endless sacrifice and struggle for survival. The mountain life and living close to the land offer a freedom that often costs more than simply being "beholden" to someone (15). But the lessons are costly for Ivy. Harsh reality prompts Ivy to seek companionship outside her world that is strangely familiar and kindly cruel. Ivy writes:

Sometimes I am afeared so and I culd not tell you for why, it is like a fire in my hart when my daddy coughs so loud or Momma sets her face agin us and will not speak. And I look at Silvaney who smiles with the ligt in her eyes that scares me for she does not understand. So I will love to have a letter from you. (12)

Surrounded by all her family, Ivy is alone.

Smith further emphasizes Ivy's isolation in the description of her address. Ivy tells Hanneke that although she lives in Sugar Fork, "you must put Majestic, Virginia, U.S.A." on the envelope (6). That Sugar Fork is not recognized by the post office reiterates Ivy's alienation from the rest of the world. That same alienation causes her to reach out to Hanneke in an effort to escape her own world and, at the same time, seek validation for her own existence.

Ivy, though, finds disappointment not only in her own world, but from a far away world also. When Hanneke fails to respond, Ivy says, "I hate you, you do not write back nor be my Pen Friend I think you are the Ice Queen instead" (17). Ivy needs the outlet the "pen friend" would provide to distract her from the harsh conditions of her life. Moreover, her vehement response shows a desperation indicative of her genuine need to be heard and to escape. The unanswered letters to Hanneke ultimately benefit Ivy. Although the "pen friend" does not oblige her with any response, Ivy comes to realize the importance of writing.

Regarding her mother and father's story, she says,

Now I am glad I have set this all down for I can see my Momma and Daddy as young, and laughing. This is not how they are today. For I have to say they did not live haply ever after as in Mrs. Browns book. I reckon that migt even of been the lastest time my Daddy ever lifted her up, or lifted ary thing else heavy. (6)

Writing allows Ivy a perspective otherwise unavailable to her. The letters show Ivy's perception of her surroundings and reveal her own self-development throughout the novel, as she struggles with love and loss. Amid the unfavorable conditions, Ivy sinks into her own little world filled with pretense, stories, and her letters, all of which afford her an emotional outlet for the love she possesses and the loss she incurs.

Ivy takes refuge from life's difficulties by thinking about love. She says, "I take an interest in Love because I want to be in Love one day and write poems about it. . . . But I do not want to have lots of babys thogh and get tittys as big as the moon. So it is hard to think what to do" (7). She is torn between the romance of love and the reality of it. She knows that her "momma was young and so pretty when she come riding up Sugar Fork, but she does not look pretty now, she looks awful, like her face is hanted, she has had too much on her" (7). Life at Sugar Fork comes with a price. Ivy's mother Maude is all too aware of that price and dissuades Ivy from reading: "[It] will just fill my head with notions, Momma says it will do me no good in the end" (7). Maude knows from her own sacrifice for love that knowledge of other things only amplifies the suffering and hardships incurred in life. She left a Richland life of luxury to follow her heart and true love to Sugar Fork, where love brought her all the trials of poverty.

Thus, according to Maude, Ivy's ignorance of opportunity beyond Sugar Fork will provide contentment and happiness.

However harsh the conditions are at Sugar Fork, Ivy's love for her family overshadows all the misfortune. For she, having been taught by her father to enjoy "the taste of spring" (35), deliberately tries to focus on the positive aspects of her life. But this task is not easy for Ivy. Focusing on the positive aspects of family and love proves to be very difficult in the face of extreme loss. Ivy laments in a letter to Hanneke: "You dont want to get you a pet hen, you will be sorry, nor a pet pig like Lizzy that was mine" (8). In Ivy's world, the fight for survival supersedes the luxury of owning a pet. Her simple attempt to share her love with an animal teaches her a valuable lesson: love costs.

Smith paints a bleak and hopeless picture of Ivy in the first "bundle" of letters that is "Letters from Sugar Fork." Ivy experiences what appears to her to be the general collapse of her world. Everything that she has known and loved abandons her or turns out differently than she had expected. Her father, who taught her to love life, dies, and her brother Babe returns to Sugar Fork only to upset Silvaney through an implied incestuous relationship and is eventually killed. Her uncle Revel Rowe leaves town in an effort to escape the pain of not having the woman he loves, who happens to be Ivy's revered teacher. Finally, Ivy must leave Sugar Fork.

The last letter in the opening "Letters from Sugar Fork" reveals a frightened Ivy, apprehensive about a new, unfamiliar life and lamenting the old life that has abandoned her. In her letter to her deceased father, Ivy says, "for all I have loved is here" (74), suggesting her attachment to the past and a reluctance to move forward. In addition, her losses have taken a toll on her, and she displays a sense of hopelessness: "I do not even want to be in love any



more, nor write of love , as it is scary. Too many things can happen in this world" (75). Ivy reminisces, "Oh Daddy dont you rember how you took us up the mountain ever year about this time to gather birch sap, it was so sweet and tart on yor tonge, and you said, Slow down, slow down now, Ivy. This is the taste of Spring" (76). Ivy experiences this same bitter-sweetness in her progression. She realizes that every new experience costs her something.

Ivy's last letter in the first section of "Letters from Sugar Fork" is to her deceased father, and her first letter in the second section, "Letters from Majestic," is to Silvaney. Having Ivy write to these two characters at this point in the novel is particularly significant. The letter to John Arthur, for Ivy, validates her past and all that her life has been on Sugar Fork. Ivy feels that she has "come to the end of all things" (74). The hopelessness of surviving at Sugar Fork and the promise to return one day are the only way that Ivy can deal with leaving. Having left her father buried at Sugar Fork, Ivy's only other connection to the past is Silvaney. Inasmuch as Ivy longs for restoration of the past, Silvaney accommodates her. In a world full of inconsistency, Ivy's one constant is Silvaney. When Silvaney was little, "she run a fever for days and days it has burned out a part of her brain. . . . So Silvaney is bigger and oldern me, but it is like we are the same sometimes it is like we are one" (10). Silvaney, unable to develop mentally and forever frozen in time, remains the same. As such, she is Ivy's connection to the past, seemingly the one surviving remnant of her life on Sugar Fork. Therefore, as Ivy incurs new experiences in Majestic, Silvaney is the one to whom Ivy writes as a means of holding on to a time since gone.

Smith's characters, clearly, have adopted their own traditional system of functional beliefs. Never is the power of tradition more effectively displayed than in Ivy. Typically, Smith explores the dichotomous nature of the power of

tradition regarding Ivy. On the one hand, tradition saves Ivy as exemplified in the first bundle of letters. The Cline sisters' stories are Ivy's only refuge from the harsh daily mountain routine. Disillusioned and having resolved in the midst of great loss that "Nothing lasts . . . nothing not nary a thing," Ivy retreats into the Cline sisters' stories (28). They offer the consistency and stability that Ivy longs for in her world. Ivy explains, "Daddy used to take us up ther to hear ther storys. . . . Gaynelle and Virgie Cline are maiden ladys and have not been apart for a minute. . . ." (25). They are one of the few familiar constants in Ivy's life. On the other hand, the escape which the Cline sisters and their stories provide Ivy creates a denial of her harsh reality and later causes a romanticized view of her world.

Smith's "Letters from Sugar Fork" establishes a history from which Ivy will survive and grow. While the story is told from the first person point of view in the present time, in the course of events that is the novel, the first section becomes, in time, Ivy's past. That is to say, the reader experiences the events through time as do the characters. The result is a first hand account of the present becoming the past and the latter's impact on the former. Thus, the reader simultaneously experiences the novel with the characters and is affected by the passing of time.

In her second "bundle" of letters, "Letters from Majestic," Smith continues the development of Ivy through an early transitional phase. Ivy not only leaves Sugar Fork and all that she loved, but she also leaves behind her childhood. In her first letter to Silvaney, Ivy laments her developing breasts. The newness of Majestic and her own budding sexuality further complicate her conflict with the past. As much as Ivy attempts to hold on to the past, her body experiences a sexual awakening, indicating a physical progression analogous to the emotional growth she attains. Through her letters to Silvaney, particularly, Ivy

demonstrates a yearning for the past that contrasts with her new experiences.

Ivy recounts to Silvaney:

I rember I looked back when we crossed Sugar Fork for the lastest time and I seed that Blue Star Mountain was all covered in mist and low clabbered clouds, and then the wind blowed strong for a minute and I thoght I seed our house, then it was gone. I cryed all the way from Home Creek to Daves Branch, and Momma said nary a word. Finely Mister Rolette said Now Ivy, what ails you? Your mother will need you to be a big girl now, come on, you used to have so much spunk. (81)

Ivy is accustomed to being the strong one in the family; there is no time to be weak. Only a word from Mr. Rolette helps her to regain her composure and move on. The scene epitomizes the transition that Ivy makes not only geographically but also emotionally. Ivy has to look back. She has to deal with the past in her own way before she can leave it and continue in a new life.

However much Ivy misses Sugar Fork and her old life, though, she finds some advantages to living in Majestic. Ivy has her own room for the first time. Even though "it is not as big as a closet . . . It is mine" (81-82). The room, for Ivy, signifies her first taste of individualism and independence, which she was certainly denied at Sugar Fork. She finds great pleasure in looking down from her window on the town:

This town is mine, Majestic Virginia, U.S.A. The Presbyterian Church steeple is up on a level with me, and I can see the Methodist School down the way with hopscotch chalked out in the dirt. . . . If I look strate down I see our own backyard with the storehouse and the old well and the clothesline and the fethery

tree wich is called, Mimosa. It is very beutiful. If we still lived up  
on the mountain and played party this wuld be my name, Mimosa.  
But I will write no more of that as it makes me cry . . . . (82-83)

The God-like view Ivy possesses in her new room suggests an emphasis on perspective. That Ivy's view of Majestic and the Mimosa tree leads her to remember the past further suggests that her perspective is affected by the past. Her sense of survival and adventure excites Ivy and, simultaneously, conflicts with her desire for things to stay the same, and she remembers the old Cline sisters' story of Whitebear Whittington. When the Detroit hunters told tales of the big bear, Ivy thought, "It is Whitebear Whittington! but I never asked them if it was white. For I did not want to know, if it was NOT" (85). Having endured such catastrophic loss at Sugar Fork, Ivy longs to hold on to something constant and unchanging. Ivy's time in Majestic not only allows her to think on the past, but it also allows her to see herself in the present in a new and different sexual perspective. She tells Silvaney, "I see them starring at me sometimes it makes me feel funny and bad. I know that lots of girls my age is maried but I do not wish to be maried nor have them star untill it is like ther eyes are touching my boddy underneath my dress" (80).

If Majestic serves as the catalyst for Ivy's romanticizing all that she had and lost on Sugar Fork, then Miss Torrington is the agent of opportunity and potential for Ivy. Moreover, Miss Torrington, refined and cultured, epitomizes all that Sugar Fork is not and reproaches Ivy: "[W]hen will you learn to drop these backward customs?" (99). She continues:

I feel that you have been given to me by God as a sacred  
responsibility. . . . I am perhaps espeshally suited to help you fulfill  
your destiny, Ivy. I can educate you, I can dress you, I can take you

to Europe. For there is everything, everything to learn! I am a woman of some means, Ivy. I can give you the world. (101)

Miss Torrington offers Ivy an alternative that completely contrasts with the life Ivy knows, as is seen in the drawing lesson. Ivy asks, "How do you do this? How do you make the mountain seem so far away," to which Miss Torrington replies, "That is perspective. You will need to learn perspective, Ivy Rowe" (105). But for Ivy, already lamenting leaving her mountains, Miss Torrington makes the mountains seem too far away. While Majestic provides Ivy with new experiences and exposure to town life, it also offers her something for the first time to measure Sugar Fork against, forcing her to deal with the past, perhaps in a new light. Moreover, while Miss Torrington can give Ivy the world, she does not acknowledge Ivy's positive roots. Life on Sugar Fork was hard and demanding, but the love Ivy shared with her family and the beauty of the mountains are precious to Ivy.

Although Ivy yearns for the new and exciting experiences beyond Sugar Fork that Miss Torrington promises, she cannot deny her past. In the face of every new opportunity, Ivy remembers her roots: "And all of a sudden Silvaney I recalled the Christmas before daddy died and how me and Ethel made angels in the snow. It seems so long ago! It seems almost like other people! For I am a town girl, a smart girl, and almost a lady" (99). Ivy's zest for life and adventure in Majestic does not mean that she no longer cherishes her mountain memories. For Ivy, Majestic is a world away from Sugar Fork. However, she seems bound to remember out of a seeming sense of impending loss.

In essence, Majestic opens up a whole new world of opportunities for Ivy. Just as life was hard at Sugar Fork, even so she finds that Majestic offers its own problems. Ivy is not exempt from loss there either. Only now, with her

newly established independence, Ivy's actions afford their own consequences. Her sexual development costs her her privacy. Having sex with Lonnie Rash not only compromises her, but it also compromises her feeling of independence and privacy. She explains, "I looked out my window and felt so sad, and then all of a sudden I knew why, because I have lost it now, Majestic Virginia which used to be mine. And this room in Geneva Hunt's boardinghouse is not my own ether, not any more, I have lost it too because of bringing Lonnie up here. . . . I have lost it now" (107). Proclaiming "I do NOT believe that if you make your bed, you have to sleep in it forever" (111), Ivy refuses to accept the role of the fallen woman. Instead, she responds, "I am glad I am no lady now" (115). Later, she reiterates, "it is a fact that if you are ruint, like I am, it frees you up somehow" (164). Just when she decides to go to Boston to study, Ivy discovers she is pregnant, pregnant out of wedlock, and betrothed to a man she does not love. Further, Maude, Ivy's mother, dies. A captive of the past, she cannot survive in Majestic.

Despite Majestic's pitfalls, Ivy experiences for the first time the freedom to make her own decisions. Now she can create her own destiny and consequences for her actions. But even with the loss of her mother and the trauma of being pregnant, Ivy's is an enduring spirit. She says in a letter to Silvaney, "I need a new start in life, so I am leaving. . . . I am excited to leave, for you know I have always wanted travel. I am ready to get out of here!" (125). Burdened with enough loss to last a lifetime, Ivy feels the need to go somewhere and start fresh. However much Ivy has lost, though, she reciprocally gains as much in strength to keep going. She prepares to move to Diamond and live with her sister Beulah and her family to reap the benefits of the Diamond Mining Company.

The third bundle of letters that is "Letters from Diamond" further follows Ivy's development through the coal mining industrialization of Diamond. Smith uses the "boom town" setting of Diamond symbolically to represent progress and change. The setting provides a seemingly sharp contrast to any single place heretofore seen in the novel. However, a closer look at Diamond reveals a combination of Smith's two previous geographical settings. Sugar Fork and Majestic combine to create Diamond, a town on a mountain, "row upon row of houses and people in every one like bees in a hive, you can not believe it is such a town! It seems to have sprung from the mountain already-made like mushrooms spring up on the mountain after a rain" (134). As Sugar Fork serves as Ivy's birthplace, the source of her memories, and her past, and Majestic offers her adulthood and freedom, Diamond provides Ivy with an objective look at life. While she lives in Diamond, Ivy learns much about her own powers of perception and the reality of change.

If Diamond geographically represents the merging of Sugar Fork and Majestic and the culmination of Ivy's experiences in each, then coupling Ivy with her sister Beulah creates the perfect contrast. While Ivy clings more closely to Sugar Fork, Beulah's main ambition is to get as far away as possible. More interested in acquiring high society status and acceptance, Beulah regards her past at Sugar Fork as nothing more than motivation to urge her husband Curtis up the Diamond Mining Company ladder of success. But Ivy, ever mindful of the past, is little more than intrigued with the mountain-come-to-life atmosphere the coal industry creates. She is much more interested in Beulah's antics and her attitude toward Sugar Fork. Beulah vehemently reprimands Ivy at the suggestion of Granny Rowe's birthing another Bostick baby:

Dont you ever . . . I mean ever Ivy Rowe, call old Granny over here

with all her crazy old ideas. I wont have it. I will not. . . . I will not forget . . . how we lived on Sugar Fork, how I bore that one . . . by myself on a cornhusk tick and cut the cord myself with the hatchet. I will never forget it. . . . And I will not have that for my boys . . . or for me and Curtis, or for you Ivy, or for your baby. We will have more. (130)

Beulah cannot regard her years at Sugar Fork without disdain. She remembers all too well “working her hands to the bone up there, and her with a baby to boot. She had a hard time.” Ivy realizes, “We all had a hard time, and that was all we knew. But I never thought about it--too busy thinking about myself all the time, I reckon! Poor Beulah.” Beulah’s disenchantment with Sugar Fork challenges Ivy’s perception of her past: “[Beulah] hates Sugar Fork when she thinks of it, and yet I love it. . . . She hates Sugar Fork and all the old ways” (130).

Beulah’s and Ivy’s views contrast regarding Sugar Fork and the “old ways.” Despite Beulah’s protestation against Granny’s birthing another Bostick baby and her proclamation that “we will have more” regarding her and Ivy, Granny does show up in time to birth Ivy’s baby Joli. As Granny represents the past, Smith shows how Ivy depends on the past in her present life. Ivy relishes having Granny birth Joli: “I was so glad to have her! I was so glad she was here” (139). Further, that Granny brings Ivy’s baby into the world demonstrates the past’s impact on the present and the future, with Ivy symbolizing the present and transitional phase of the time dynamic. Just as Diamond is the geographical combination of the old and the new, so Joli provides yet another perception of life. In a letter to Geneva, Ivy says, “she is beautiful, and she is all mine! . . . I do not recall but one doll-baby ever, and Silvaney used to grab her



and run off. Well, now I have got a doll-baby all my own, and nobody can take her away. . . . You know I have lost so many that I love, I am determined to watch over this one good!" (140-41). Ivy does watch over Joli, so well in fact that time begins to escape her. But Ivy writes to hold on to her memories.

With Joli comes a world of responsibilities, and Ivy struggles seemingly for the first time since a child to "taste the taste of spring." Until Joli's birth, Ivy does not date her letters. She did not need to; her memory and letters were enough. However, Ivy believes "This is important, I want to remember this, it is all so important, this is happening to me" (145). The little girl from Sugar Fork, so unimportant that not even her pen-friend would respond to her, who only dreamed of far away places and experiences, finally has something important happen to her. She has someone to love.

Joli provides Ivy with at least a partial family unit again. Not since Sugar Fork has she known an intense familial love. While in Majestic, Maude, a shadow of her former self and so lost to grief, could not afford Ivy the love she desired. So Ivy spends her life prior to Joli's birth looking for something to fill the void. Earlier, her precociousness in Majestic prompted Miss Torrington's admonition--"You need guidance, a firm hand. You do not know what comes over you. . . . You are buffeted about by every wind that blows my dear" (100)--and then her landlady Geneva's advice--"You can't just rush into things the way you do honey, without them catching up with you sometimes. You have got to slow down, and not put yourself out so much, or you will frazzle your nerves before you are twenty" (117). Now that Ivy has Joli she must slow down, as her baby becomes the rejuvenating spring that Ivy's father John Arthur Rowe advised her to cherish earlier in the novel: "Slow down, slow down now, Ivy. This is the taste of spring" (76).

The contrasting elements in this bundle of letters culminate in Ivy's finding true love. Throughout this section, the importance of Diamond and its "boom town" economy is pervasive. Industry and business on the mountain create a false sense of security for the mountain folk. Ivy is no exception. Even she marvels at how a town seems to have "sprung up" on the mountainside. But when the mining industry diminishes, Diamond does also. The exploitation of the mountain folk by the outsiders serves as a metaphor for Ivy's relationships. The mountain folk sunk themselves into debt in order to benefit from what they thought to be a secure investment. Ivy says:

They have given up their land, those hardscrabble places we all came from, and they have no place to go back to. They have lived here so long they have forgot how to garden anyway, or put up food, or trade for goods, or anything about how they used to live. So they have got nothing now. They have got nothing but what they owe to the company which is so much they will never pay it off. (155-56)

The mountain people blindly accepted the progress and change the coal industry sparked. Had the mountain people not been so quick to let go of the "old ways," they would not be so desperate. Analogously, Ivy does the same thing with Oakley. Having known Oakley since childhood, Ivy dismisses him romantically and protests his suggestion that she is his girl: "Oh come on Oakley. . . . You are my best old friend, now dont be crazy" (154). While Ivy adamantly holds on to other parts of her past, she neglects to notice Oakley's place in her life. Distracted by the mysterious Franklin Ransom throughout most of this section, Ivy does not realize that she is remiss in holding on to the most important part of her past until she almost loses Oakley.

Smith uses Ivy's love interests metaphorically to emphasize her struggle between past and present. While Oakley, as his name suggests, connotes the reliably strong presence that parallels Ivy's perception of her past, Franklin Ransom offers Ivy nothing more than immediate excitement in her life. Ivy and Franklin's relationship echoes the same passion and romance as that of Ivy's parents, John Arthur and Maude, that ended tragically. The similarities of the two relationships foretell the tragedy that will result in the possible union of Ivy and Franklin. Although part of Ivy longs to explore the more adventurous side of herself that Franklin excites, she cannot sacrifice her past to do it.

Franklin Ransom symbolizes everything in the present, progress and change. He is the Diamond Mining Company superintendent's son and, as such, represents the detached, exploitive, and industrial spirit that plagues Diamond. Franklin has no real connection to the mountain such as Ivy's to Sugar Fork. Further, Smith reiterates Franklin's role in the novel through his name. According to The Oxford English Dictionary, one definition of ransom is "to free from captivity or punishment by paying a price" (145). As his name Ransom suggests, Franklin would only serve to free Ivy of her past. Ivy would be released from captivity of the past for payment that is her past. But the past is important to Ivy, and she cannot just forget it. Ivy does not want to be rid of the past. Moreover, she simply wants to be able to understand the past in perspective, relative to the present. Ivy needs someone who will allow her not only to keep her past, but to acknowledge that the past does impact on the present; while Franklin is not that person, Oakley is.

Ivy and Oakley share a common past on the mountain. When they were only children, Oakley provided Ivy with her first kiss. Smith creates in Oakley the steadfastness and enduring spirit that Ivy needs. Not only did they grow up

together, but, now, they also are able to create a life together in the present. By marrying Oakley, Ivy finds a way to acknowledge her past in the present. In this sense, Oakley is the answer to Ivy's conflict with time. Through him, she believes that she can restore the past while creating her own present that is her family with Oakley and Joli. However, as Ivy struggles to hold on to the past in the blinding light of industry, she is almost deprived of a life with Oakley.

The failing economy encourages cutbacks, and negligence pervades the mining industry. Employers ignore safety issues. People are so desperate for work that they will risk their own safety by working in substandard conditions. When, as a result, a mine collapses, trapping Oakley and his co-workers and killing some, Ivy feels compelled, unwittingly, to go to the mine and wait to see who survived. Ivy does not know it, but she is waiting for Oakley when

the huge black mouth of the mine yawned smoky and wide before me and three men came walking out. One of them was Oakley. Limping and holding his arm funny, black-faced--still I could tell him by the straight forward shock of his hair and his square shoulders, the way he held himself. It was like the mouth of the mine had opened up and let him go, like he had been spared, or like he had just been born. (173-74)

Oakley's presence represents the ubiquitous past. He has been with Ivy all along, comes from where she comes, and understands her. Ivy and Oakley's marriage restores the complete family unit that Ivy once enjoyed on the mountain. Moreover, their move back to Sugar Fork fulfills Ivy. She can live among her memories in the past she holds so dear while creating a life of her own, facing and determined to conquer the same challenges the mountain offered her parents.

In the first three “bundles” of letters in Fair and Tender Ladies, Smith shows Ivy’s development from a young girl seeking more out of life than her mountain environment can offer to a vibrant young woman who finds in her own family the love she loses over time. The interim is filled with her struggle to put the past into perspective so that she can move on and grow. “Letters from Diamond” ends with Ivy and her new family returning to Sugar Fork, retreating into her past to “slow down and taste the taste of spring” that is her life.

### III.

"Your life is not going to start later."

#### The De-Romanticization of the Past, the Reality of the Present, and Time in Perspective

The fourth "bundle" of letters in Fair and Tender Ladies, "Letters from Sugar Fork," suggests, for the first time, a cyclical nature within the novel. Repeating the title of her first "bundle," coupled with Ivy's return to Sugar Fork, might be misconstrued as regression. However, Smith now addresses two types of movement in the novel, linear and cyclical. While Ivy's struggle up to this point in the novel has been linear in nature, attempting to move forward, disconcertingly restrained by the past, Smith begins to show that Ivy's emotional development in the novel is only a small part of a larger dynamic, time. Ivy tries to assuage her struggle to put the past into perspective by returning to Sugar Fork and, in essence, returning to her past. However, Ivy does not find the past she remembers, full of storytelling, play parties, and snow angels. Instead, Ivy finds herself in much the same unfortunate situation that her mother Maude suffered in the beginning of the novel, struggling to survive off an unyielding land. The move to Sugar Fork does not quiet the conflict within Ivy to hold on to her past while creating a new life with Oakley. Ivy becomes so consumed in her own life's duties and responsibilities necessary for survival on the mountain that she loses the very part of herself that she sought to rejuvenate by returning to Sugar Fork. Consequently, Ivy's disillusionment with her present life with Oakley on Sugar Fork prompts her to pursue more desperate measures as a means to recapture her girlhood freedom, spunk, and zest for life. While Ivy's

physical movement in returning to Sugar Fork creates a cyclical dynamic in a geographical sense, her emotional growth and development continue to progress in a linear fashion as a result of the cycle. Returning to her past and acknowledging it in a new perspective allow Ivy to continue to grow emotionally.

Ivy's move back to Sugar Fork is a way for her to reclaim some of her losses. In her mind, one of her major losses is her freedom. Not since a girl on the mountain, when she "used to run [the] hills the livelong day and not say boo to a soul" (179), has Ivy felt the freedom of not being "beholden" to someone. In Majestic, she worked for room and board at Geneva Hunt's boarding house and felt indebted to her for her kindness toward Maude. While in Diamond, Ivy felt compelled to adhere to Beulah's ideas about social advancement and entertain Franklin Ransom as compensation for her stay with the Bosticks. "[S]ick to death of being grateful" and "tired of being beholden," Ivy longs to be free again, like she was as a girl (179). Despite the endless chores that constitute a life on Sugar Fork, Ivy realizes that there she was not "beholden."

However, Ivy's present situation is much different than when she was a girl, and duty and responsibility factor more significantly. Ivy finds that her new role as mother and wife dominates all her time and renders her "beholden" to the life she has chosen with Oakley and her children on Sugar Fork. As she becomes caught up in the mundaneness of her own life, Ivy loses sight of the past and the traits she once possessed as a girl. In a letter to her brother Victor, Ivy explains, in terms of her relationship with Silvaney, her need to return to Sugar Fork and, in doing so, to the past: "I have felt like I was split off from a part of myself all these years, and now it is like that part of me has died, since I know she will never come. I feel she has gone to a foreign land forever" (180). At this point in the novel, the reader believes Silvaney to be in the Elizabeth Masters

Home and does not realize Ivy is referring to her sister's death. Silvaney represents the wild, spirited side of Ivy that yearns to be free of the adult duties and responsibilities that confine. As long as Ivy feels that she can return to Sugar Fork and reclaim Silvaney, restoration of the past is possible. However, the realization that Silvaney will never join Ivy indicates to her that she has lost her past forever. More than ever, Ivy feels the present absence of her past self and, therefore, a more desperate need to reclaim it.

While Ivy suffers the loss of her past self and situation at Sugar Fork, the cyclical nature of the novel resets the present with images of the past. Repeating the title "Letters from Sugar Fork" indicates Smith's purpose for this "bundle" of letters. Further, Smith stages the setting with similar attributes from the former section with the same name. Earlier in the novel, Smith juxtaposes Ivy with Silvaney; here she does the same thing with the characters Joli and Martha. However, Martha, Ivy's friend Violet Gayhart's daughter from Diamond, comes to live with Ivy and Oakley while Violet works to unionize the coal industry that killed her husband Russ in the same accident that Oakley survived. Martha restores for Ivy a constant in life. Unlike Silvaney and later Joli, Martha does not leave the mountain, but makes it her home. Although there are similarities between the two "bundles," Smith's purpose is not to allow Ivy to restore the old order. To infer such would suggest that Ivy cannot live outside the past. Moreover, Smith shows how Ivy comes to terms with the past and is able to progress in her own life. Ivy comes to understand that in this cyclical nature of time, her adventurous, un beholden, irresponsible time is gone. But she does not gain this perception without extreme cost.

Ivy's new understanding of her past is indeed a change in perception. She does not disavow her past; moreover, she learns to use it in a constructive



way. Smith continues Ivy's conflict between holding on to the past and being able to go on with her life by Ivy's own recognition of a new perception of Sugar Fork. She acknowledges in a letter to her sister Beulah, "everything is smaller than I thought, or remembered, or imagined. . . . I find that all has shrunk some way, and I do not like it" (186). Ivy perceives Sugar Fork differently because she is not the same person. Although the familial situation mirrors the one in the former "Letters from Sugar Fork," Ivy's role is not the same. Now, she occupies the role that her mother did in the first "bundle" of letters. However, Ivy endures in a way her mother Maude could not. Despite her inability to let go of the past, Ivy's practicality will not allow her to be a victim of it. Ivy demonstrates this practicality in a letter to Beulah. Regarding the contents of her mother's old chest, Ivy says:

[Y]ou will not believe what I found inside! The beautiful crazy quilt stitched together with golden thread, that Momma used to call her burying quilt. And I thought to myself, now Momma is dead and buried in Rich Valley these many years, so she will not need her burying quilt, and I am alive and making a house here with Oakley Fox, and we need a pretty quilt worst in the world, and so I just snatched it up and aired it out and put it on our bed, now it is the prettiest thing in our whole house! (186)

Smith uses the quilt scene to emphasize the usefulness of the past in the present. The scene also marks the beginning of Ivy's ability to loosen herself from the strong reins of the past in order to live in her present, a foreshadowing clue that Ivy will endure.

However, Ivy gets too caught up in her life and loses touch with herself. She notes in a letter to Silvaney, "You know I used to have so much spunk.

Well, I have lost my spunk some way. It is like I was a girl for such a long time, years and years, and then all of a sudden I have got to be an old woman, with no inbetween. Maybe that has always been the problem with me, a lack of inbetween"(193). That Ivy realizes her problem suggests that she will be able to resolve it, but not before more costly lessons. Always an avid reader, Ivy shows the first signs of losing herself in a letter to Miss Torrington. As Ivy announces the birth of her twins Danny Ray and Bill, denoting her increased responsibilities, she says to Miss Torrington, "I do not read much any more. I do not have the time. . . . Ever since my little twins were born, it is like I don't have near enough hands, or time either one. The time just slips away" (190). Smith goes on to emphasize the passing of acknowledged time through Ivy's letters. Ivy does not write for a period of four years. In her January 10, 1935, note to Miss Torrington, Ivy does not even finish her thank-you note. Further, Ivy does not write again until two years later to announce the latest birth of Lulda and the previous birth of Maudy. That Ivy does not write indicates a total loss of self for her in the present. Family, duty, and responsibility have weighed Ivy down and stifled the life out of her. She writes to Silvaney: "I have been caught up for so long in a great soft darkness, a blackness so deep and so soft that you can fall in there and get comfortable and never know you are falling in at all, and never land, just keep on falling. I wonder now if this is what happened to Momma" (193). Ivy realizes the danger in not being able to "taste the taste of spring" and seeks rejuvenation.

Ever susceptible to progress and change, however, Ivy's enduring spirit refuses to be destroyed. With more than six years having passed without any significant writing, Ivy awakens to light of the "rural electrification" project (192): "For all of a sudden when I saw those lights, I said to myself, Ivy, this is your life,

this is your real life, and you are living it. Your life is not going to start later. This is it, it is now" (193). Smith uses the light of the "rural electrification" project symbolically. Just as the lights illuminate the houses along the mountain, so too does the light shine on Ivy's situation and disclose the reality that her life is now. Once having been excited by progress and change, Ivy sees those lights and realizes just how lost she has become: "I have fallen down and down into this darkness, I can see it all so clear now, and bits and pieces of me have rolled off and been lost along the way. They have rolled off down this mountain someplace until there is not much left but a dried-up husk, with me leached out by hard work and babies" (193). But as Ivy tries to come out of the darkness, Oakley is not responsive to her needs: "his face is turned away" (200). Oakley "has had a lot to contend with, it is true. For a man that likes farming as much as Oakley does, not to be able to do much good at it is awful" (202). Ivy knows that she does not suffer alone. But as she tries to pull herself out of the darkness, she has no one to help her do it, no one to help her feel young, vibrant and alive. Smith's description of Oakley during this time echoes that of Ivy's mother Maude earlier in the novel. She too "turned her face away" from Ivy unable to give her the nurturing she needed. In the cyclical nature of the novel, if Oakley occupies Maude's position, then Ivy is left to occupy her father's role, John Arthur, who dies defeated by life. But Ivy's innate zest for life and enduring quality demand she persevere. Desperately, she searches for a lifeline and finds it in Honey Breeding.

Just as Ivy delves far into the extreme darkness of her routine adult life, she catapults herself into excitement with equal fervor. Ivy explains: "For a long time I thought I was old, Silvaney. I sat in my chair in the breezeway like Momma sat in hers, feeling old. But now I am on fire" (209). Honey Breeding

brings to Ivy an excitement and freedom that she longs for but feels deprived of in her daily routine. Having lost that side of herself in the face of her present reality, Ivy is drawn toward Honey. Smith demonstrates Ivy's longing for freedom analogously to her association with Honey Breeding. Most notably, Ivy describes Honey as being "exactly the same size" as she and goes on to say, "It's like he is me, some way , or I am him" (217). Smith says in a 1991 interview with Rebecca Smith:

Ivy and Honey Breeding were exactly equal. . . . I had this idea that he was her other part, an alter ego. She had all those children, and she had to stay put. . . . She stayed put because of the children. But he was her other self, her alter ego, and being with him was somehow her expressing or living out that kind of male principle that she was unable to live in her own life--like going to the top of the mountain. She could never go if a boy didn't go with her. (21)

The affair with Honey Breeding signifies Ivy's desperate state of mind and attempt to regain her lost self. While she is with Honey, Ivy restores her adventurous girlhood spirit. Moreover, Smith uses Ivy's hair symbolically to mirror her emotional status. When Ivy spends time with Honey, she has her hair down, symbolizing a sense of freedom she so longs for in her life. Conversely, upon arriving back at the house after a rendezvous with Honey, Ivy pins her hair up, further significant of the constraint she feels at Sugar Fork (216-218).

Despite her real love for Oakley, the allure of freedom entices Ivy to leave with Honey. Having been lost for so long in the "darkness," Ivy cannot resist the urge to be with Honey when he makes her feel alive and like a girl again. Honey provides Ivy with the one thing that not even returning to Sugar Fork

could provide her; she is able to escape her reality into a past unencumbered with the responsibility and beholdenness a family brings. Ivy, lost in her worry-free world of Honey, notices the flowers on the ground: "The bald was covered with little white flowers like stars, like a carpet of stars" (225). Ivy's "carpet of stars" symbolizes a reversal of order in the novel. Smith uses the imagery of the stars on the ground to signify a disorder or inappropriateness present in Ivy's actions. Ivy does have responsibilities and duties to her family and cannot just ignore them in an effort to restore a season of time that is no longer hers. While she attempts to regain a part of her lost self and freeze it in her relationship with Honey Breeding, Ivy becomes ill and has to return to Sugar Fork.

The physical illness that Ivy suffers mirrors, metaphorically, her emotional and physical development. Just as Ivy became lost in the darkness of her present life as wife and mother, her abandonment of the present for a renewed freedom costs her her health and her daughter. While Ivy's mother Maude could not make the transition from Sugar Fork to Majestic, and so died, Ivy cannot regress into the metaphorical past and live in the real present simultaneously. She returns to her family only to find that Lulda is dead. Smith reiterates the concept that for everything gained, inadvertently, something is lost. Ivy regains, at least temporarily, her girlhood freedom to roam the hills and quench her thirst for excitement, and, as a result, she loses Lulda. Content that she must pay the consequences for her actions, Ivy mourns Lulda's death as her own fault until Oakley says, "Get up, Ivy, and take care of your children, and I [Ivy] did" (240). That Ivy does get up and take care of her children indicates her realization that now is her time to be a mother. She must live in the present.

The fourth "bundle" of letters, "Letters from Sugar Fork," signifies the cyclical, recurring nature of time and the recurring roles people come to fill

throughout time in the novel, but the section does not reflect Ivy's life in the present. It portrays the height of Ivy's lost self and her need to regain it. While Ivy physically attempts to restore her lost self by moving back to Sugar Fork, she sacrifices her present life. Not until the end of this "bundle" does Ivy come to understand that her life now is imminent, and she must live not in the past but as a result of it. Thus, this understanding allows Ivy a new perception of her present life as wife and mother despite her loss of what was. The Sugar Fork she returns to as an adult is not the Sugar Fork of her youth, simply because she is different.

Naming the last "bundle" of letters "Letters from Sugar Fork" also, Smith shows how Ivy comes to terms with her past and is able to overcome the fate of her own parents who were defeated early in life. While cyclical in nature in the sense that Ivy acknowledges and assumes her role as wife and mother as appropriate for this season of her life, she develops in a linear fashion emotionally. In this final section, Ivy develops an understanding and functional perspective on her life, allowing that "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven" (303). Understanding that time passes and that progress and change will occur without her consent forces Ivy to accept change more readily. No longer is Silvaney the main recipient of Ivy's letters. However, through her family, Ivy still finds connections to the past. While she learns to "taste the taste of spring" in every season of her life, Ivy satisfies her need to remember the past through her connections with her surviving siblings. She begins to focus on others and her relationship with them in a way that heretofore has not been seen. Ivy becomes more involved with her own family and learns to appreciate a new season of life, and she writes to other members of her family more frequently than to Silvaney, who represents the frozen past.

As Ivy says farewell in this last section of the novel, Smith shows the importance of past relationships in the present and the future.

Still grieving over the death of her daughter Lulda, Ivy begins the last "bundle" of letters still "lying in the bed she has made for herself." While Ivy laments Lulda's death, though, time does not stop: "It don't feel right to me for things to go on blooming like they always do, for the garden to come in, for me to make watermelon pickle and pickalily the same as always, or for the sun to rise or the rain to fall or the mist to hang over Bethel Mountain, or the days to go on like they do. It don't seem possible" (243). Ivy's recognition that life does not stop for pain or loss foreshadows her impending healing. Geneva says, "Nobody in the world is near as important as they think they are, you included" (244). Ivy's pain and suffering, although traumatic, are not the end of the world. She is still alive and must live her life. Ivy acknowledges: "Life goes on, and I reckon now that I've got to live it" (248).

Significantly, as Ivy comes to terms with her life, past and present, and attempts to seek out the positive aspects of both, she writes Silvaney less frequently. While Silvaney represents, throughout most of the novel, Ivy's alter ego and past, Ivy thinks less about herself and more about her relationship with others as she realizes the seasonal nature of things. Keeping in touch with her family becomes important; Ivy finds comfort in remaining connected to the past through her siblings and simultaneously affecting the future through her own family. Describing a seemingly mundane breakfast scene, Ivy says, "I felt like church. I mean I think I felt the way you are supposed to feel in church, which I never do. . . . I thought how funny it was to have everybody there at the same time" (248-49). Smith uses the church imagery to portray a more content and peaceful Ivy than heretofore seen. When Ivy realizes she will not die from loss

and change, she says, "however much I may have wanted to die, I am stuck right smack in the middle of this life" (249). Her ever enduring, practical spirit helps Ivy to keep living.

Although Ivy laments her sin and Lulda's death, she comes to appreciate her present life with Oakley on Sugar Fork, and she also likes to remember the old days with the people from her past who understand the old ways. When she learns that her younger brother Garnie is coming to visit, Ivy writes: "Oh Garnie! It is only me and you and Ethel and Victor now, of all them that was here so long ago. This is why it means so much to me, for you to get in touch. We are the only ones that remember the same things. . . . A lot has changed here. But you will see, you will see" (250). So Ivy delights in news that her younger brother Garnie is coming to town. However, Garnie lacks Ivy's interest in the past. And perhaps more than anything on the mountain, Garnie has changed. The mere mentioning of their mother causes Garnie to scowl, "I am no child of hers. I am a child of God" (257). Further, having heard of Ivy's sins, Garnie comes to Sugar Fork with the intention of forcing her to repent. When a contrary Ivy refuses to comply, Garnie, "with a furious face and drooling spit and panting out loud like a dog," begins to take off his belt. Ivy says, "I reckon he was fixing to whip me with his belt, but I don't know for sure because all of a sudden there in the middle of it all was Oakley who was the last thing I saw. . ." (262). More important than the whipping Garnie receives, Oakley's actions concede that Ivy need not repent for her sin of adultery. Oakley forgives her.

Smith's reestablishing Oakley and Ivy's relationship in the novel redeems Ivy's behavior with Honey Breeding. While Ivy was "caught so far down in the darkness," Oakley had begun to "turn his face away" from her. Both Oakley and Ivy share responsibility for her adultery. Had Oakley been more



nurturing and Ivy been stronger, the infidelity would not have occurred. However, Smith's purpose is not to assign blame to either Oakley or Ivy. Moreover, Smith establishes the toll that life on Sugar Fork takes on a person, particularly on Ivy, as a contrast to her nostalgic perception of the past. Ivy explains to Silvaney, "it is a funny thing, but that time I ran off with Honey Breeding helped not hurt, with me and Oakley. He has been new for me ever since, some way, and me for him, and even though I am way to old now to think on such things, I blush to say they come to mind often, they do! I am always ready for Oakley to lay me down" (270). The restoration of passion in Ivy's marriage suggests and parallels a new contentedness with her role as wife. But just as with everything else in Ivy's life, when she comes to understand and appreciate each particular season of her life, it changes.

For Ivy, Oakley is a constant in her world of loss and inconsistencies. While she struggles with the passing of time and tries to understand the role of the past in her life, Oakley is contented: "he has got all the time in the world" (203). Oakley's steadfastness and consistency in the novel provide Ivy with a way to hold on to the past and move into the future. After Ivy's affair with Honey Breeding, Oakley takes Ivy back without reticence, further emphasizing the constant nature of his presence in Ivy's life. Oakley's patience that previously contrasted with Ivy's preoccupation with the passing of time ultimately benefits Ivy. Ivy describes Oakley: "He is patient beyond belief. . . . I have seen him sit on the porch and whittle for a whole long rainy afternoon without hardly moving, or saying a word, turning out one little animal after another, squirrels, turtles, bears" (247). Oakley's patience and love for Ivy give her the time and space she needs to understand her ever changing role in life and allow Ivy to move into the future.

Oakley's death presents Ivy with yet another loss and inadvertently a new season of life for her. While she mourns the death of her husband, Ivy's enduring spirit once again rises above the tragedy in her life. Through Oakley's death, Smith begins to reveal a measurable growth in Ivy as she accepts her widowed status:

I can read every book that John O'Hara ever wrote.

I can make up my own life now whichever way I want to, it is like I am a girl again, for I am not beholden to a soul.

I can act like a crazy old woman if I want to which I do.

I can get up in the morning and eat a hot dog, which I did yesterday. I don't know what I might do tomorrow! (278)

Having seen many changes and experienced many losses in life, Ivy learns to accept change more readily and look for the positive aspects in it. Her many life experiences teach her that change is inevitable despite one's protestation.

Smith further emphasizes Ivy's growth through land. Land in the novel has long symbolized a place of belonging and permanence. After her father's death, when Ivy and her family suffered extreme poverty and had to depend on the kindness of Geneva Hunt, Maude refused to sell the land, asserting, "it was John Arthurs land and I will not sell it. It was all he had" (89). Despite ultimately selling the mineral rights to the land, Maude expresses the value of land and honoring tradition in her family. As Ivy comes to understand her independence as a widowed woman, she releases the ties to the past that the land symbolizes in order to live in the present. In an effort to help her daughter Joli go back to school to pursue a writing career after a divorce, Ivy assures her, "Do not worry about sending money as I have sold off a little more land, we will get by fine"

(280). Selling some of her father's land in order to survive in the present, Ivy shows an understanding of how the past affects the present.

Smith does not intend, however, to suggest that Ivy's selling land to survive indicates a total disenchantment with the past. Her struggle throughout the novel has been to hold on to the past without being a victim of it and, at the same time, to be able to move forward and grow. Through the land, Ivy achieves both. The land sustains her physically by the profit in selling. At the same time, the land transcends the past and present into the future. When the mining people come to mine the land that Maude had sold the rights to so long ago, Ivy fights back and wins: "The first thing I did, when I heard of it, was put a No trespassing sign on the road down there by the creek so they could not come up here, but they come up with the first dozer anyway, up as far as the steppingstones. So then I went out there and said, You had better not come any further. I had Oakley's old thirty-ought-six [gun] with me" (307). While Ivy may at her discretion sell pieces of the land to survive, she simply will not have the land wasted. Her grandson David wishes to come back to Sugar Fork and farm it some day, and Ivy, determined that he should, says, "this land will be here waiting for David when he gets back" (309). Ivy finally comes to understand that the past is not a sacred and separate entity unto itself. Moreover, as the land provides Ivy with money and so impacts on her present life, the land also represents the continuum of time. Not only does the land, for Ivy, symbolize the past, but as a legacy for David to return to, it also serves as a connector to the future.

In the same way that the Ivy lives on through David and his love for Sugar Fork, Joli, through writing, continues her mother's legacy. While Ivy's choices in life do not allow for a formal education or a career, Joli goes on to

have a career in writing. Not only does Ivy's interest in writing live on into the future with Joli, but the past does also. Despite Ivy's advice to write about love, Joli is interested in things from the past, such as Ivy's mother's burying quilt and Ivy's letters to Silvaney. But Ivy has neither the quilt nor the letters any longer. Ivy says about the quilt:

I used it until the Christmas that Ethel gave us those new drapes and the comforter she had ordered off for, in the Early American style. . . . Then when Martha and Rufus got married, I gave it to them along with everything else I could find around here that we weren't using, so Martha could set up housekeeping. And you know Martha--she likes the old ways, and for everything to stay the same as it always was, so I bet she is using it still, on her and Rufus's bed. (311)

That Ivy can give the quilt to Martha, who "likes the old ways," shows Ivy's growth. The quilt represents the past, and Ivy's letting go of it indicates a new understanding of time and her role in it. Cyclically, holding on to the past is a stage in her life that Ivy relinquishes to Martha. Ivy's time is to let go and move on into the future.

In a letter to Joli, Ivy explains: "I know that your aunt Silvaney died in the Elizabeth Masters Home in the great flu epidemic that took so many lives. Of course I know it! . . . . For it didn't matter. Silvaney, you see, was a part of me, my other side, my other half, my heart. So I went on and wrote her letters, all the years" (313). The letters to Silvaney represent Ivy's attempt to hold on to the past in an ever changing world. While Ivy must adapt to change in order to survive it, writing to Silvaney allows her to make transitions while maintaining at least one aspect of the past intact. However, as with the quilt Ivy gives to

Martha, Ivy comes to realize the real significance of the letters and is able to let go by burning them: "For I came to understand something in that moment, Joli, which I had never understood in all these years. The letters didn't mean anything. Not to the dead girl Silvaney, of course--nor to me. Nor had they ever. It was the writing of them, that signified" (314). In this sense, Ivy lets go of the past and moves toward the future where she lives on through Joli's writing. Although Ivy never realizes that she, too, is a writer, and says that she did "spend [her] years as a tale that is told," she loves. "I have loved, and loved, and loved. I am fair wore out with it" (316). Even though Ivy has lived a life full of love and feels extinguished by it, her love will live on after her.

Smith uses the land and the letters metaphorically to explore the continuum of time throughout the novel. While Ivy struggles to be able to understand the past in a perspective that will allow her to live in the present and move into the future, the land transcends time, extending from the past, through the present, to the future. Sugar Fork provides Ivy with a comfort in her life, past and present; it will also serve her grandson David, who is determined to return to the land and farm it. At the same time, Ivy's letters to Silvaney demonstrate how Ivy comes to understand the past and its role in her life. Through Joli, Ivy will go on living in the future. Ivy is transitional. Born in 1900, Ivy is destined to experience an internal conflict of the past and present. Her very introduction into existence lies "in between" two centuries, not really belonging to or able to escape either. Over the course of her life, Ivy often remarks how she is caught "in between" things. But Ivy's conflict does not disable her. Instead, the struggle to "figure it all out" is what propels Ivy forward and to an ultimate resolution before her death (296). Understanding the cyclical nature of life, that life has many seasons in it, Ivy realizes that "there is a time for every purpose

under heaven . . ." and as "[T]he hawk flies round and round," so too do the seasons of life change (317). As Ivy slips into eternity, she is comforted knowing that she discovered her much earlier, rather bleak observation that "nothing lasts" is not true. The past is ever present and contiguous to the future. Through Ivy's life, love, children, and writing, she will live on in the future.

## Conclusion

In both of these novels from the 1980s, Smith writes about change and progress and their effects over time. The novels explore two different perspectives as to what survives change over time. In Oral History, Smith follows one family over several generations of much change through the vehicle of stories orally told from multiple perspectives. In Fair and Tender Ladies, however, Smith's method of chronicling progress and change over time comes in the form of one woman's ever changing, developing perspective, demonstrated in her letters throughout her life. Although the novels share many similarities, the singular perspective of Ivy Rowe in Fair and Tender Ladies surpasses that of the succession of narrators in Oral History in exploring the effects of time on a people and a culture.

Ivy and the first "bundle" of letters in Fair and Tender Ladies echo Oral History's Granny Younger section. Just as Granny Younger's narrative begins the main story in the novel and precedes successive narrators who disclose the Cantrell history, so, too, does the early "Letters from Sugar Fork" section function. On first look, one could simply argue that Smith structurally follows chronological order, laying a foundation that is the past to support the present and future. However, what might be viewed as prescribed structural technique, Smith masters thematically. While Fair and Tender Ladies records Ivy's life chronologically through first person narrative, creating a sense of the immediate present, what serves as Ivy's present in the first bundle of letters quickly becomes the past in the next. The result is dichotomous. Never compromising the immediacy of Ivy's voice in the present, Smith continually establishes a past.

In a very different technique, Smith uses Granny Younger in Oral History to bridge the present to the past structurally as the first narrator in the flashback that is the main story.

Both Granny Younger in Oral History and Ivy in the first bundle of letters of Fair and Tender Ladies use tradition to symbolize the past. Granny Younger's history of the Cantrells recounts Almarine's plight through a catalog of superstitious and fairytale-like stories. Granny's early description of Almarine casts an air of mystery and mystique about him that foreshadows what is to come, witchery and spells. While Oral History in its entirety conveys the importance of the oral tradition, Granny Younger's role as founder of the story creates the tradition which succeeding narrators do not break. The tradition and its importance in the mountain folks' lives suggest a lack of outside contact to interfere with "a way of doing things," and so emphasize the isolation of the mountains that is so important in Smith's theme of progress and change, and how they affect people over time.

Characteristically, addressing and coming to terms with her own feelings are what separate Ivy from the characters in Oral History. Particularly, in "Letters from Majestic," Ivy contrasts with Oral History's Richard Burlage. While Richard Burlage attempts to go back to a "simpler era" in an effort to escape to a past that was never his own, Ivy struggles to put her past into perspective so she can move forward. Richard, disillusioned by his own world, can only be compared to Ivy during her childhood. Then, she too sought to escape her surroundings in hopes of finding more tolerable circumstances in pretense, stories and literature. But Ivy's situation as a child was the culmination of a diminishing way of life with an old and unaccommodating set of rules. That Ivy recognizes the rules have changed, and plays by them, suggests a strong and enduring spirit of



survival that Richard Burlage cannot hope to possess. Despite his attempts to infiltrate and be a part of the mountain community, Burlage was never more than a "foreigner" (133). Further, he never really knew or understood anything about Dory. Instead of facing his life and dealing with it, Burlage chooses to retreat from it, whereas Ivy learns to live with the past and move on into the present.

As the characters in Oral History are unable to make the connections of events through time because they cannot deal with the pain, Fair and Tender Ladies offers characters that cannot live outside the past. Ivy's mother Maude cannot leave the mountains, especially Sugar Fork, John Arthur's land. Ivy characterizes Maude in *Majestic*: "little Momma says nothing . . . she looks out at the mountains and smiles . . . . But it is like Momma is talking to somebody else, not her own daughter, it is like she moves farther and farther beyond us in her mind" (109). Haunted by the love and life she shared with John Arthur and unable to use it in a constructive way, like Dory in Oral History, Maude feels that life has nothing else to offer her and cannot progress. Just as her old life expires, so does she. However, Ivy knows that she must adapt to change in order to survive.

Finally, Ivy resembles Oral History's last major narrator, Sally, more than any other in the novel. Like Sally and Roy, Ivy and Oakley have a good marriage. That they can achieve some kind of marital happiness indicates the characters' contentment with the present and the future. They are living their lives. But much more than that, Sally represents the immediate present without any emotional ties or real understanding of the past. The history she knows is more after the fact than her real life experience. She cannot make many of the connections that create her own story. It takes her lineman husband Roy, perhaps because of his profession, to notice and help her make the

connections. Sally has the knowledge of the past but not the perception of it that Ivy struggles to achieve.

Oral History and Fair and Tender Ladies both effectively demonstrate the time theme, showing how the past affects the present and the future. In the latter novel, Smith achieves the theme resoundingly, creating a character in Ivy Rowe that is loving enough to want to hold on to time, perceptive enough to know that it constantly slips away, courageous enough to accept change, and introspective enough to understand it all in perspective. Ivy Rowe's legacy in Fair and Tender Ladies, her abundant love and quest for understanding, will live on through her children and writing as a testament of her life, long after Oral History's Ghostland and the misrepresentation of the Cantrell history disappear.

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