“The only light shot out as usual”: Defining an Appalachian Grotesque

Shelby Caroline Roberts

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Katrina Powell, Chair
Carolyn Commer
Ashley Reed

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ABSTRACT

With the success of podcasts like Serial and This American Life’s S-Town, the calamity of J.D. Vance’s Hillbilly Elegy, and the dawning of “Trump’s America” as a regional branding, Appalachia has once again found itself laid bare on the national stage. As the romanticization of Appalachia as poor, packing, and white persists, the question becomes: how can Appalachian peoples access these negative images as tools of resistance, reformation, and community making? How does an American gothic find home in Appalachian narratives?

This project explores clashes between national othering and local othering in Appalachian identity making as a tangible production of an Appalachian grotesque, a grotesque constructed through the subversion of the modern American gothic as a critical model for exploring Appalachian identity, particularly nationally othered and queered identities. The scope of this project ranges from contemporary, such as the popular memoir Hillbilly Elegy (2016) and the record breaking podcast S-Town (2016), as well as Robert Gipe’s debut novel, Trampoline (2015), and their historical counterparts: the 1967 documentary Holy Ghost People and the 1976 documentary Harlan County, U.S.A.

Through the lens of contemporary gothic readings of identity that come to form the grotesque, a framework for deconstructing notions of Appalachian fatalism begins to emerge. By specifically looking at ideas of violence, whether economic, cultural, or physical, and theories of erasure through the lens of land distribution and acquisition in Appalachia and its effect on self
and community identity built up in the anchoring texts, defining and cultivating an Appalachian grotesque allows for a quantifying of Appalachian persistence within a history of critical thought, for better or for worse, as a way of both critiquing and fortifying the identity of Appalachia.
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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

The narrative of Appalachia, as white, poor, uneducated, barefoot, etc. that defines conceptions of the grotesque in contemporary media, such as more classic movies like 1972’s Deliverance, the tale of four ‘city boys’ from Atlanta during a bloody trip through the mountains, most famous for its “Dueling Banjos” scene, or more recent movies such as 2017’s Logan Lucky, a heist movie centered around two brothers’ plot to rob a NASCAR race in North Carolina, interacts with concepts of American masculinity and femininity through two prominent categories: hunger and disgust. Through the literary positioning of the body as a site in which hunger and disgust interact/react, as well as the subsequent relationship between sex and desire as defining features of a productive, and reproductive body, southern gothic tropes are encapsulated and re-imagined through a grotesque Appalachian lens. It is through this cyclical process of hunger and disgust, and sex, desire, and production, in the social, political, and economic spheres that an Appalachian notion of the grotesque is formed.

Using these concepts, the scope of this project ranges from contemporary, such as the popular memoir Hillbilly Elegy (2016) and the record breaking podcast S-Town (2016), as well as Robert Gipe’s debut novel, Trampoline (2015), and their historical counterparts: the 1967 documentary Holy Ghost People and the 1976 documentary Harlan County, U.S.A.
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CHAPTER ONE: Gothic to Grotesque

1.1 Introduction

With the success of podcasts like Serial and This American Life’s S-Town, the calamity of J.D. Vance’s Hillbilly Elegy, and the dawning of “Trump’s America” as a regional branding, Appalachia has once again found itself laid bare on the national stage. As the romanticization of Appalachia as poor, packing, and white persists, the question becomes: how can Appalachian peoples access these negative images as tools of resistance, reformation, and community making? Or, alternatively, how does an American gothic find home in Appalachian narratives?

The narrative of Appalachia, as white, poor, uneducated, barefoot, etc. that defines conceptions of the grotesque in contemporary media, such as more classic movies like 1972’s Deliverance, the tale of four ‘city boys’ from Atlanta during a bloody trip through the mountains most famous for its “Dueling Banjos” scene, or more recent movies such as 2017’s Logan Lucky, a heist movie centered around two brothers’ plot to rob a NASCAR race in North Carolina, interacts with concepts of American masculinity and femininity through two prominent categories: hunger and disgust. Through the literary positioning of the body as a site in which hunger and disgust interact/react, as well as the subsequent relationship between sex and desire as defining features of a productive, and reproductive body, southern gothic tropes are encapsulated and re-imagined through a grotesque Appalachian lens. It is through this cyclical process of hunger and disgust—-and sex, desire, and production—-in the social, political, and economic spheres that an Appalachian notion of the grotesque is formed.

This process also involves differentiating the Appalachian grotesque from the already defined southern gothic, which Arthur Redding defines in “Burial Grounds and Dead Lovers:
Places of Interment in the Gothic Modernism of the American South” as “a critical term that traditionally refers to literature produced by Faulkner and other key modernist writers of what was termed the Southern Literary Renaissance of the 1920s and after,” and the overarching tropes of the American grotesque being explored by contemporary researchers (72). For example, *Serial* and *This American Life’s* 2017 podcast, *S-Town*, and J.D. Vance’s 2016 bestseller *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* in particular offer a place in which to enter the grotesque within a national conversation because of their continued prevalence in discussions of rurality and “post-Trump whiteness.” I argue that the effects of *S-Town* and *Hillbilly Elegy* on Appalachia in the national imagination and the ways in which these two texts build off of a history of critical thought has come to define Appalachian narratives in the contemporary public sphere. I will use these two examples as a way of building a framework for understanding Appalachian identity making through a seemingly inescapable fatalism that can only be broken by a queer, future-thinking grotesque in order to apply this framework to a wider range of storytelling genres.

### 1.2 The Appalachian Grotesque: Southern Gothic in Context

In order to begin creating and identifying a queer, future-thinking grotesque, this project holds two specific purposes: to define and exercise a queer reading praxis that is essential to arguing for the definition presented of an Appalachian grotesque, and an acknowledgement of the movement between, and through, Southern gothic narratives to an Appalachian grotesque using relevant examples. This chapter will specifically look at *S-Town* and *Hillbilly Elegy* as entry points into understanding how the grotesque is formed within the southern gothic.
This thesis is considering the Appalachian narratives discussed to fall under the Appalachian Regional Commission’s (ARC) 1965 definition of Appalachia. The ARC’s construction began under John F. Kennedy’s tutelage but ultimately developed into a federally funded interest group under the Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ) presidency (“ARC History”). The ARC confines Appalachia to 13 interest states, including all of West Virginia, and parts of Virginia, Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi (“The Appalachian Region”). It is important to recognize the full scope of states included under a federally ratified definition of Appalachia. For the ARC, these states are connected by an industrial and socioeconomic background under Census measurements, while Appalachia in a national conversation is typically connected by geographical features, rather than a consensus of poverty that is more reflective of a national understanding of poverty than the one assigned to Appalachian peoples by external narratives. These external narratives, represented in new media like *S-Town* and *Hillbilly Elegy*, contextualize Appalachia in terms of both geographical isolation, as well as social and cultural isolation from a broader national imagination. It is this narrative of isolation, located from within the historical implications of the ARC, that begins to form Appalachian narratives within the tradition of an emerging American grotesque, which will be described in Chapter Two.

However, before even acknowledging the process of assigning individual states and counties an “Appalachian identity” under a federal umbrella, it is important to acknowledge the implications of this rhetorical history on identity-making as an idea. Johnson’s “War on Poverty,” declared “‘unconditionally’” in his 1964 State of the Union address, seemingly brought Appalachia, and Appalachian-ness, into the political limelight (qtd. in Kilty 220). Keith M. Kilty, a
professor of social work at Ohio State University, reflects in “Fifty Years Later: Did the War on Poverty Fail?,” published in the Journal of Poverty in 2014 (whose title offers its own set of social problems), that LBJ’s address makes clear that “LBJ believed that poverty could be eradicated, not just reduced” (221). Kilty goes on to posit that “no matter how we may feel about his disastrous policy of war in Southeast Asia, LBJ left a legacy of profound change for the poor, the disenfranchised, and the vulnerable—the excluded in America,” which the ARC’s understanding of poverty developed through federally-run Census evaluations and monitoring seems to fortify (221; “The Appalachian Region”). The Appalachian Regional Commission’s website currently boasts that “the Appalachian Region's economy, once highly dependent on mining, forestry, agriculture, chemical industries, and heavy industry, has become more diversified in recent times, and now includes manufacturing and professional service industries” (“The Appalachian Region”). The declaration that Appalachia “has become more diversified in recent times” through the inclusion of “manufacturing and professional service industries” is, in effect, counterintuitive to the way even the Federal Census Bureau calculates and defines poverty thresholds (“The Appalachian Region”). The U.S. Census Bureau measures poverty through the idea of thresholds, comparing absolute thresholds, which are “fixed at a point in time and updated solely for price changes,” and relative poverty thresholds, which are “developed by reference to the actual expenditures (or income) of the population” (“How the Census Bureau Measures Poverty”). The actual measurement of poverty exists somewhere within this binary, as even the Census Bureau’s formulaic definitions of poverty cannot fully explain and demonstrate what poverty is as a national idea and the very realities that come to create and maintain that understanding. This binary definition of poverty often confuses statistical realities for definitive realities of what it
means to actually be poor. In this way, the very notion of a government mandated and regulated
definition of poverty begins the systematic appraisal of those who live below the poverty line as
an entity comprised in the “other.” In terms of the success of the ARC’s programs, a diversifica-
tion of economy through the inclusion of broader or more technological labor is not an address of
economic and social (or sociopolitical) inclusion and access in the national sphere because it still
posits Appalachian value as inherently tied to bodily labor, production, and, by extension, repro-
duction. It is not the ‘eradication’ of poverty that manifests these issues in the rhetoric surround-
ing Appalachia, it is the rhetoric of poverty within a “legacy of profound change” in academic,
political, and historical spheres, which the ARC adopts through their own federal obligations, as
an eradicable cornerstone of Appalachian identity that contributes to the Appalachian fatalism
this project is working to understand and undercut (Kilty 221).

Returning to Kilty, Kilty’s argument that LBJ’s “War on Policy” continues to promote
‘success’ in the public sphere is because of Johnson’s own position as a southerner (although
LBJ is from Texas, a state whose financial and geographical opportunities do not align with ex-
periences of Appalachia). However, this political posturing still continues today. Mitch Mc-
Connell, the Republican Senate Majority Leader and a representative from Kentucky, pushed
back against Donald Trump’s attempts to federally defund the ARC in his 2017 budget (Schim-
mel). This pushback falls in accordance with a more long standing effort of the Republican party
to eliminate the ARC completely (Schimmel). In the wake of these attempts, according to an ar-
ticle published in April of 2018 by the Public Radio Service of Western Kentucky University,¹
McConnell appointed his longtime aide, fellow Kentucky Republican Tim Thomas, as co-chair

of the Appalachian Regional Commission (Schimmel). Thomas echoed Lyndon B. Johnson’s declaration of eradication by declaring that his “vision for the ARC is to see the day that this agency can shutter its doors because its goals and objectives have been reached in large measure” (Schimmel). The consistent rhetorical echo of Johnson’s original call for the eradication of poverty has been morphed into a call to eradicate the blemish of federal failure in Appalachia through supporting an Appalachian self-eradication. In other words, the dominating narrative of federal interactions with Appalachia in which it is argued that, in accordance with Steve Fisher and Barbara Ellen Smith’s contextualization of national Appalachian rhetoric in “Internal Colony–Are You Sure? Defining, Theorizing, and Organizing Appalachia,” “persistent poverty in Appalachia [is] the result of a defective folk culture that ill-equipped its population for participation in the modern world” and indicates a need for further separation from Appalachian identity-making models (46). The confusion of Appalachia and poverty as rhetorically interchangeable in national conversations of the region and identities of the region as a whole offers a place for Appalachians and scholars alike to begin deconstructing the federal and lived divide of Appalachian experiences brought forth through decades of legislation and cultural othering.

Through the construction of Appalachian peoples as “other” produced by a seemingly welcomed isolation, first seen in works like Fisher and Smith’s, which describes this othering as a positive attempt to preserve and reaffirm Christian purity in the light of social and industrial progression, and then later renewed as a fatal flaw in the social conditioning of Appalachians as those “outside” normative social spheres, a juxtaposition of self as both public and private becomes illustrated. Within this juxtaposition of the self as public and private, James Goodwin ar-

2 Although this form of isolation was often pushed on Appalachia by the very external perceptions of Appalachia this paper is working to deconstruct.
gues in *Modern American Grotesque: Literature and Photography* that literary critic Kenneth Burke’s anthologizing of the grotesque as a literary method, as well as Burke’s contention that language and identity perception are formed through “‘public grammar,’” is ultimately connected through “an attitude toward history” (1). Or, as Goodwin concludes, “linguistic and symbolic modes or ‘actions,’ no matter how seemingly individualized in their expression, are always to be understood within larger frames of shared consciousness” (2). In other words, understanding the political, social, economic, and historical configurations of Appalachia is the only way to begin accessing ways to employ the method of the grotesque. Goodwin posits that Burke’s definition of the grotesque can be boiled down to an “attitude of history” in that “the grotesque operates . . . as a primary poetic and symbolic mode and configures ‘the mental equipment (meanings, attitudes, character) by which one handles the significant factors of his time’” (1; 2). The “‘significant factors’” of one’s time—“‘meanings, attitudes, character’”—are, in some way or another, heavily present in all the of the works I explore as a part of the Appalachian grotesque (2). To put it another way, Rebecca Scott argues in *Removing Mountains: Extracting Nature and Identity in the Appalachian Coalfields* that

> Appalachians are constantly asked to sacrifice for the nation to which they belong, but this belonging is problematic. As prototypical white rural citizens, they are in some senses ideal Americans, but at the same time they are culturally and economically marginalized, and the national/corporate interests they are asked to serve are not necessarily compatible with the survival of their communities and practices. (31)

Scott’s understanding of Appalachian identity at the opening of her book works in conversation with Burke’s definition of the American grotesque. It is through this understanding that Ap-
palachia and the grotesque are linked through three distinct features: people, region, and story. Through Goodwin’s subsequent interpretation of Burke’s work on the grotesque, the rhetorical positioning of Appalachians as homogeneous “prototypical white rural citizens” represent the “(meanings, attitudes, character) by which one handles the significant factors of [their] time” (Scott 31; qtd. in Goodwin 2). Appalachians as representative of a white, rural morality, of a return to both nature and naturalized sex practices (i.e. strictly enforced gender roles and heterosexual, patriarchal reproductions of ‘offspring’ for further labor, the animalistic implications of the latter being not lost in a conversation about the grotesque, etc.) are referenced and re-enforced in both Appalachian communities, and the national sphere. In “Burial Grounds and Dead Lovers,” Arthur Redding calls this reinforcement a form of “ethno-gothic” or “diasporic gothic” in which contemporary gothic writing has . . . worked to undo national and progressive American narratives “by excavating alternative histories or ghost stories, imaginatively summoning into presence those voices and beings that have been sacrificed to the march of progress and the consolidation of American literary and cultural traditions.” (qtd. in Redding 72)

The Southern gothic, as Redding defines it, represents a critical framework for understanding Southern identity, and in this case, as applied in this paper, Appalachian identity, as a composition of time and space in both Southern and national imaginations. Furthermore, Goodwin argues that, in the same vein as Redding, the American grotesque operates within a twofold hybrid of recognition and identification, which echoes the cyclical nature of Appalachian identity mak-

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3 like the prevalence of internal colonies in national critical frameworks for understanding Appalachia

4 As well as the places these two things intersect.
ing in the face of national impositions of Appalachian identities, whether through federal entities such as the Appalachian Regional Commission or Johnson’s “War on Poverty.” Goodwin calls this twofold hybrid the “hybrid of tragicomedy” as a way of “making correlations between the grotesque and the absurd,” which is where traditional American grotesque, embraced by writers like Edgar Allen Poe, Washington Irving, Herman Melville, William Faulkner, Flannery O’Connor, and Cormac McCarthy operates (10; 9).

While Scott’s understanding of Appalachian identity in *Removing Mountains* never directly utilizes a grotesque as a framework for understanding Appalachian methods of identity making, her work follows the twofold tradition outlined by Burke in her positing that “Appalachia maintains its unified regional identity in the national imagination” through “some kind of environmental and cultural alchemy” (44). Throughout the remainder of this paper, I argue that the “environmental and cultural alchemy” Scott addresses is, on the whole, a sociopolitical inferencing of the grotesque. The word “alchemy” as a method of both “imagination” and “identity,” especially in relation to the goal of extracting identity outlined in the text’s title, is rhetorically connected to the surface level understanding of the grotesque as an expression of all things that creep and crawl in the night (44). “Alchemy” demands change, sacrifice, belief, and ambition, all traits on the opposite side of a white, isolated, violent, dirty, immoral Appalachian coin (44).

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5 O’Connor and McCarthy are considered cornerstones of southern gothic writing following a literary lineage made popular by writers like Faulkner.

6 The text’s title is *Removing Mountains: Extracting Nature and Identity in the Appalachian Coalfields.*
1.3 Destination: Shittown, Alabama

It is at this crossroads of identity making that the world meets John B. McLemore in 2017’s *S-Town*. More accurately, it is the crossroads where the ghost of John B is met. Through a mixture of sound bites from interviews, phone recordings, and narration from Brian Reed, the show’s host, *Serial* and *This American Life*’s seven episode podcast (averaging about 50 minutes each) investigating the life of McLemore in Shittown, Alabama—and all who surround him—was released collectively on March 28, 2017, two years after McLemore’s suicide.

The podcast reads like a southern gothic to its core. John B., an outcasted, intellectual, former clock repairer/horologist turned eclectic eccentric maze builder and dog caretaker contacts journalist Brian Reed, one of the main voices in *This American Life*, about a supposed murder of a local boy, Dylon Nichols, being covered up by the authorities of Woodstock, Alabama, which John calls Shittown.\(^7\) The murder turns out to be a wrongful exchange of information brought about by local gossip (following the stereotype that southern people love to be in everyone’s business), but the story of Nichol’s rumored murder, with its own implications of economic stratification because of the class lines involved, becomes subsumed by the characterization of McLemore himself. The remaining five episodes of the seven episode series focus solely on Reed’s quest to piece together who McLemore is through the stories of the people who knew him. The story also involves a treasure hunt, general lawlessness, family drama, a spooky house accompanied by an overstuffed workshop filled with some of the rarest antique clocks in the world strewn precariously about on the floor, a large hedge maze, and a supposedly unrequited queer love. All the levels of “alchemy” needed for a nationally digestible grotesque (Scott 44).

\(^7\) Leading to the title of the podcast, *S-Town*, which already implies areas of censorship for commercial viability or national digestibility.
At this point it is important to note that at no part in the series or the press that follows after does *S-Town* assume itself to be an Appalachian narrative. The podcast is produced in New York under the direction of Brian Reed, who posits himself as an outsider looking in throughout the show, although his connections to the story as a journalist become blurred by his own developing friendship with McLemore and his obsessive need to categorize his death. The relationship between Reed and McLemore, as well as the relationship between *Serial* and *This American Life* and the audience as a whole, has been in contention since the podcast’s release last year. In this regard, Wyatt Massey argues in “What *S-Town* Misses About Life in Rural America” that “the show’s success is due to its appeal to an urban, educated audience, and the story is presented through an urban, educated lens. Listeners who have no experience with rural life are fed sound bites that confirm tropes of Southern, rural living—specifically racism, ‘white trash’ poverty and a ‘backward’ way of thinking” (57). However, Woodstock, located in Bibb County between Birmingham and Tuscaloosa, or 60 miles outside of Tuscaloosa as the podcast situates it, still technically falls within an ARC defined region of Appalachia (“Counties in Appalachia”). While *S-Town*’s separation from Appalachia as a southern gothic may have more to do with cultural understandings of Appalachian-ness as tied either geographically or industrially to the region, rather than a significant decision by the producers of the podcast who are, in effect, ‘outsiders’ to McLemore’s experience, McLemore’s own description of Shittown is what allows this work to stand out as a contemporary example of an Appalachian grotesque. In one of the opening scenes from the first episode of the podcast, McLemore describes “Shittown” as

Yeah, Woodstock. This whole area needs to be defined. If you look at the demographics charts of the state of Alabama and go over the poorest counties, Bibb County is maybe
the fifth worst county to live in. We are one of the child molester capitals of the States.

We have just an incredible amount of police corruption.

We have the poorest education. We've got 95 churches in this damn county. We only have two high schools and no secondary education. And we got Jebus, 'cause Jebus is coming and global warming is a hoax. You know, there's no such thing as climate change and all that. Yeah, I—I'm in an area that just hasn't advanced, for lack of a better word.

(00:07:12-00:07:53)

The grotesqueness of McLemore’s narrative is not in his manner or cadence of speaking, nor even in the picture of Alabama, and the South as a whole, the podcast’s framing creates. Instead, the grotesque is entrenched in McLemore’s own complicated views of Shittown and his place in the world. On one hand, he is trapped by his own love of the town, and on the other he is trapped by a need to remain in a place where he is known. The external and internal worlds of national and Appalachian identity making collide in a “whole area [that] needs to be defined” (00:07:13). In this way, McLemore’s obsessions with Shittown begin to shift throughout the podcast, as he turns instead to a more national obsession with global warming, joblessness, tattoos, pedophilia, and poverty. In other words, the “‘meanings, attitudes, character’” of ‘our’ time (qtd. in Goodwin 2). However, in contrast to Burke, Goodwin offers a more contemporary set of three in which to label the grotesque: “presentiment, perception, and comprehension” (2). As mentioned previously, John B. is a flawed, “eccentric” character who speaks in a deep Alabamian accent. He is a doomsday prepper who does not actually live long enough to prep, obsessed with checking weather patterns and solving supposedly unsolvable puzzles about the world and its operations.
He is crass and often times cruel, but, in the end, he is dead before the podcast’s opening music even begins to play.

Although there has yet to be a significant amount of critical work published considering the impacts of *S-Town* both culturally and politically as, according to *The New York Times*, *S-Town* is the most downloaded podcast in history released at a time of heightened political tension, there are a large number of news publications that point to the downfalls of the podcast as a whole (Stevens). The same article detailing the proclivity of *S-Town*’s success, written by Matt Stevens entitled “‘S-Town's' Treatment of Its Main Character Was Riveting. But Was It Unlawful?,” also investigates the lawsuit filed by John B. McLemore’s estate currently pending against the podcast’s production team. The estate argues that the podcast unlawfully gains from McLemore’s story by using his recordings without the express permission of McLemore for publication, especially since the original premise of the show was a murder investigation. However, *The New York Times* also concludes that “an expert who reviewed the lawsuit, Derigan Silver, confirmed it is not a case of libel or invasion of privacy. Multiple experts, including Mr. Silver, said those kinds of cases would be very unlikely to succeed because the dead do not have reputations to damage and people lose the right to privacy when they die” (Stevens). The stripping of the dead of both privacy and voice contributes to a national “alchemy” of understanding Appalachian identity as a site of production, like Scott’s work reveals, that serves only to produce labor and profit for a national good (Scott 44).

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8 As stated previously, the podcast was released simultaneously in March of 2017 during the first full year of the Trump presidency.

9 Which is made even more complicated by the fact that McLemore was willfully recorded both in person and on the phone by the producers of the show, as well as all the other voices heard throughout the series.

10 *The New York Times* posits that the lawsuit will not hold under a ‘right to publicity’ clause (Stevens).
As always, the grotesque is twofold, the story of John B. McLemore embodies the grotesque in its subject and narrative form, while its production and subsequent release into the social sphere continues the tradition of the Appalachian grotesque as rooted in the hunger and disgust captured by Lyndon B. Johnson’s “War on Poverty.” Ultimately, *S-Town* brought the world to Shittown without contextualizing the realities of Appalachian selfhood. Tyler Goodson, John’s pseudo-adopted son, remarked in an interview with *Esquire* a year after the podcast’s release that “it’s hell being famous without the rich part. If money came along with it, I wouldn’t feel near as bad about it” ("It’s the Same Old Sh*t Town"). The show leaves Tyler in the middle of a court battle for rights to McLemore’s property, as well as rights to care for McLemore’s aging mother, both of which John promised to Tyler early on in the podcast, yet the podcast does not actually compensate Tyler for his labor. Despite all of the show’s success, it has remained unclear whether or not those who participated were given any compensation for the othering of their experiences. Claire Shaffer argues in a review of the podcast for *The Wesleyan Argus* that “‘S-Town,’ for the most part, sidesteps this major pitfall by releasing its seven chapters all at once. That way, there’s no threat of setting off an amateur Reddit investigation in between episodes, no room for carelessly doling out theories regarding McLemore's sexuality, his fate, or the innocence or guilt of the people around him” (“‘S-Town’ Frustratingly and Fascinatingly Innovates the True-Crime Podcast”). However, as Shaffer notes, “this hasn't prevented internet sleuths from tracking down McLemore's estate” (“Frustratingly and Fascinatingly Inno-

11 John tells both Brian and Tyler explicitly that he desires his property and “gold” to be left to Tyler and Tyler’s brother.

12 The pitfall of personal and private extortion claimed by John’s estate and critics alike.
vates”). The podcast once again opens up a personified, or alchemied, vision of Appalachia to national scrutiny without giving its subjects an active role in their own identity creation.

1.4 Hillbilly Elegy: Rubbernecking in the Public Eye

It seems that a conversation about Appalachia, and Appalachian peoples’ role as national spectre, cannot occur without the mention of J.D. Vance’s 2016 memoir *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis*. Vance tells the story of his childhood as he moves between his parent’s chaotic homes to the structure and morality of his grandparents’ home as he moves between the coal communities of Kentucky and the displaced coal workers seeking industrial work in Ohio. However, as Vance outlines in the books’ introduction, the text automatically assumes a political stance as Vance uses his experiences to bolster Appalachian experiences overall as secondary to his own successes. Following in the footsteps of narratives outlined in Johnson’s “War on Poverty” or the ARC’s continual fight to remain funded and federally necessary, Vance, who is a self-labelled “Scots-Irish hillbilly at heart,” frames the project through a need to articulate Appalachian failure as uniquely and inherently Appalachian, claiming that

I want people to know what it feels like to nearly give up on yourself and why you might do it. I want people to understand what happens in the lives of the poor and the psychological impact that spiritual and material poverty has on their children. I want people to understand the American Dream as my family and I encountered it. I want people to understand how upward mobility really feels. And I want people to understand something I

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13 A narrative emphasis or trope that implies a return to a ‘pure white morality’ as discussed in section two of this chapter.

14 Although later on Vance will recenter this alignment to his connections to the Rust Belt during his press tour.
learned only recently: that for those of us lucky enough to live the American Dream, the
demons of life we left behind still continue to chase us. (3; 2)

Vance calls Appalachian poverty a “family tradition” made up of anti-WASP\textsuperscript{15} “working-class
white Americans of Scots-Irish descent who have no college degree” (3). From the get-go, unlike
works like \textit{S-Town}, Vance establishes a narrative of difference and distance made rhetorically
interchangeable in conversations about the Appalachian region. Appalachian poverty is made
“unique” in its specific ethnic heritage of “Scots-Irish” who represent masculinity, fertility,
strength, religion, and a hearty sense of rebellion in the national imagination, as well as Vance’s
own claims that the cultural traditions of “Scots-Irish” identity represent “an intense sense of
loyalty, a fierce dedication to family, and country” (3). The spectre of the “Scots-Irish” haunts
Appalachian Studies because of the very connections and claims Vance employs as a way of en-
gaging a national audience without losing the difference of being Appalachian. Vance takes pride
in an ahistorical narrative of traditionalism in order to demonstrate both the ‘uniqueness’ of his
experiences in spite of national progressive politics, as well as a way of garnering respect for his
ability to distance himself from the cultural immorality of poverty and join the ranks of ‘norma-
tive,’ educated society.

However, Vance makes it clear that he is not interested in solely paralleling Appalachian
uniqueness and his ability to remove or distance himself from that uniqueness as a personal jour-
ney. Vance continually calls into focus Appalachian peoples across the ARC’s regional definition
by equating the aforementioned hegemonic white, masculine, working-class “Scots-Irish” with a
homogenous Appalachian identity-making method. Vance’s understanding of Appalachian identi-

\textsuperscript{15} White Anglo-Saxon Protestant, which here refers to in Vance’s work as a marker of class status and not inherently
as a mark of white wealth.
ty harkens back to Steve Fisher and Barbara Ellen Smith’s work in “Internal Colony–Are You Sure? Defining, Theorizing, and Organizing Appalachia,” as Fisher and Smith argue that, historically, “persistent poverty in Appalachia [has been seen as] the result of a defective folk culture that ill-equipped its population for participation in the modern world” (46). Like the ARC’s celebration of the ‘industrialization’ of contemporary Appalachia, Vance calls on an ancestral legacy stemming from “day laborers in the Southern slave economy” of history to the “coal miners . . . machinists and millworkers” of today (Vance 3). In accordance with Fisher and Smith’s characterization of Appalachia within the historical prevalence of an internal colony framework, Vance contends that, according to an unnamed “observer,” Appalachian “family structures, religion and politics, and social lives all remain unchanged compared to the wholesale abandonment of tradition that’s occurred nearly everywhere else” (qtd. in Vance 3). Although Vance himself does not do, *Hillbilly Elegy* embodies the Appalachian grotesque through the repetition of homogenization and cultural frameworking. Even the nameless “observer” who defines Vance’s definition of Appalachian values reflects an externalized other moving from within the internal colony of Appalachia to the outside through the subjugation of other Appalachian voices and perspectives. By presenting his memoir as a singular and comprehensive view of Appalachian poverty in the era of “Trump’s country,” Vance upholds the idea of Appalachian identity as a singular entity carved out from the national imagination by a resistance to and then subsequent failure to conform to national morality.

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16 As Appalachians as a whole are seen as too poor to own slaves in the national narrative of southern slavery.

17 Another instance of identity stripping enacted on Appalachian peoples and narratives by an ‘outside’ force.
The external/internal divide of Vance’s work invites a reading of *Hillbilly Elegy* as an Appalachian grotesque because of Vance’s consistent use of fatalism as a building block for his own rise and defeat of the “demons of the life [he] left behind” (2). Like *S-Town*, the sociopolitical impact of Vance’s testimony is deeply felt throughout the United States as its release coincided with the election and inauguration of Donald Trump in 2016. Like the contemporary critical conversation occurring about Lyndon B. Johnson’s “War on Poverty” discussed earlier, Vance’s narrative continues to be touted by critics, politicians, and academics alike. Rod Dreher characterizes Vance in “Hillbilly Energy: J.D. Vance and the Forces that Elected Trump,” published in the 2017 January/February issue of *The American Conservative*, as a new type of conservative focused on bridging the political instability of working-class voters and Republican values (44). Dreher portrays Vance as someone looking toward a new understanding of home in the national imagination because of a renewed “sense of gratitude and mission” brought about by the success of the book (44). In this sense, Dreher claims that “as detailed in *Hillbilly Elegy*, loyalty is both a signature virtue and vice of the Scots-Irish Appalachians from whom [Vance] is descended” as “Vance can’t shake the sense that he owes it to his people to go back home and do what he can to help” (44). This further echoes Kenneth Burke’s definition of the grotesque as a function of “a primary poetic and symbolic mode” that “configures ‘the mental equipment (meanings, attitudes, character) by which one handles the significant factors of his time’” (qtd. in Goodwin 2). The notion of Vance as a helper who exemplifies the “‘(meanings, attitudes, character) . . . of his time,’” or, alternatively, as a savior of Appalachia, implies that the fatalism impressed upon and reinforced within Appalachia necessitates a return to traditional configurations of Appalachian identity, a framework for understanding Appalachia deeply rooted in a historical grotesque
(Goodwin 2). Instead, the fatalism of works like *Hillbilly Elegy*, or even *S-Town*, demands Scott’s sense of “alchemy” (Scott 44). Kenneth Oldfield argues in “Hillbilly Elegy: Deconstructing J. D. Vance’s Views on Government Intervention, Merit, Outlaws, and Slackers” that by not only recognizing a need for the diversification of Appalachian voices and narratives, but also working to create opportunities for that diversification on the national scale that

Reverses the cliches and mythology used to rationalize inequality. It opens closed questions. The problem of poverty becomes the problem of inequality. ‘The poor will always be with you’ becomes ‘The rich will always be with you.’ ‘Poor but honest’ becomes ‘Rich but honest.’ Including counter-narratives in policy considerations greatly expands our range of choices. (169)

The mystery of a homogenous Appalachian can only be broken by a forward-looking envisioning of the “alchemy” of the grotesque as a tool for understanding and deconstructing the prevailing myth of Appalachia as a single site of production. Using Vance’s work as a jumping point allows a place from which Appalachian peoples can begin to assert their own voices and work in the academic sphere by drawing into conversation those who have “gone on” to join the external identity of American first and Appalachian second, and those who remain toting the line between the right and the left side of the Appalachian coin.

1.5 The Future of Fatalism

Just as the socioeconomic and political implications of work like J.D. Vance’s *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* has brought the national imagination back to Appalachia, the fatalism of narratives like *S-Town* offers no conclusive hope of contextualizing Shittown outside of McLemore’s testimonies, which are ultimately rendered through the gaze of
the podcast’s production team. Works like *Hillbilly Elegy* and *S-Town* bring the Appalachian grotesque to light for a new generation of well-meaners and social savvies without offering a voice to those left to put the pieces together after the tape stops rolling. However, all is not lost. As Rebecca Scott argues

> In reality, Appalachia and the coalfields are as complicated a mess of groups, geographies, and problems, with as blurred boundaries and as many connections to other places and people, as any place at all. Their identity as the culturally and economically marginalized places America knows must be constantly reaffirmed and reiterated. (62)

In other words, the degradation of the Appalachian grotesque takes constant work to maintain within the national imagination. The co-opting of Appalachian narratives as fatalist by voices that do not work to contextualize Appalachia within its full and complicated wholeness decentralizes the globality of capitalism and environmental destruction that permeates current national conversations of “Trump’s America.” The fatalistic, twofold “hybrid tragicomedy” of the Appalachian grotesque provides an avenue to deconstruct—rather than reinforce—notions of Appalachian identity in the national sphere, thus marking the Appalachian grotesque as a queer, future-thinking narrative framework that warrants being further explored (Goodwin 2).

As this paper progresses, I will examine a selection of passages from Robert Gipe’s *Trampoline: An Illustrated Novel*, surrounding mountaintop removal (MRT), published in 2015. In Gipe’s novel, my focus is on *Trampoline* as a genre blending approach to Appalachian identity and story telling that not only defines the role and importance of an Appalachian grotesque, but also shows how the Appalachian grotesque can be used as a tool for deconstructing Appalachian fatalism. Appalachian fatalism can be combated or re-appropriate for empowerment in works
like Gipe’s through positing the grotesque as a rhetoric of place that anticipates and uplifts oth-
ered voices through the production of queered, or ‘taboo,’ places to ultimately answer the ques-
tion: what does the grotesque do?
CHAPTER TWO: Understanding the Grotesque

2.1 Introduction

In continuing to work through the question of the grotesque as a viable and useful tool for understanding Appalachian narratives, I return again to the “alchemy” of Rebecca Scott’s argument in *Removing Mountains*. Scott’s work identifies the suffering of Appalachia as a “routine” entrapment of the rural body in the national American mindset (58). By positing Appalachia as a symbol of isolation and a symbol of the dismemberment of a land and a people in order to continue to flush the American energy infrastructure, Appalachian suffering sinks into the background of rurality, upholding part of the backdrop of the ‘American moral tragedy’ as a necessary sacrifice in the face of American morality and progress. As Goodwin argues, this ‘American moral tragedy’ is what encapsulates Burke’s “tragicomedy” of the grotesque because, as I have mentioned in the previous chapter, it “operates . . . as a primary poetic and symbolic mode and configures ‘the mental equipment (meanings, attitudes, character) by which one handles the significant factors of his time’” (1; 2). However, Goodwin’s exploration of the grotesque as a theoretical term does not stop with Kenneth Burke. In the first chapter of *Modern American Grotesque*, Goodwin breaks down the grotesque into its root Italian word *grotta*, which comes to be ‘grotto’ in Latin (5). This distinction, besides establishing a history of the grotesque throughout the historical constructive language of art and architecture, where it initially found its home as a descriptive term, also posits a particular set of imagery. The grotto represents a sacred, hidden place that “retains the reference to a place of shade or semi-darkness unearthed” and “brought to light” (6). In other words, the grotto represents a state in which the “shade” or “semi-darkness” is

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18 Written in single quotation marks here because it is discussed but not specifically identified with this same language in Scott’s work.
a welcomed reprieve from the extremities of light as a destructive, rather than positive, image (6). By contextualizing the grotesque within this root, historical image, Goodwin’s argument serves as a way of beginning to connect the grotesque to a queer Appalachian future. As Goodwin himself says: “for all the associations of the grotesque in later centuries with repulsiveness, depravity, and terror, we do well to remember the grotto’s original significance as an accommodating, hospitable, restorative place” (7). The grotto as “an accommodating, hospitable, restorative place” is what allows Rebecca Scott’s “alchemy” to thrive as the grotto represents a place of community and identity making not seen from the outside. The internal colony narrative is marked as a positive in this reading as it allows Appalachian people to access the “restorative” “semi-darkness” of their own experiences, voices, and stories in order to begin asserting their authority within the national imagination (6; 7). Moreover, the grotto acts as both shield and stage, providing the space for Appalachian peoples to create themselves in their own image while seeking solace in the accessibility of their own voices and voices like theirs, which is the benefit, as I argued at the end of the previous chapter, of *S-Town* and *Hillbilly Elegy* becoming emboldened in national rhetoric. The darkness of the grotesque allows Appalachian people their own grotto to root and grow in.

In the following chapter, I take the language of the grotesque I began establishing in the previous chapter using *S-Town* and *Hillbilly Elegy* as examples of more accessible texts in popular culture and use this foundation to expand upon and grow the grotesque into a reading praxis. I then take that reading praxis and apply it in a more concentrated way to fictional Appalachian writing.
2.2 “Out in the country”: Appalachian Grotesque as Queer Reading Praxis

The image of the grotto also serves as another intersection between the work of Goodwin and the work of Scott as Scott’s *Removing Mountains* focuses on “dehistoricized” Appalachian mysticism as a progressive and future-seeking place for Appalachian peoples to cultivate their own land-based narratives (62). For Scott, the idea of Appalachia as “a forgettable region” in which it is “backgrounded as a place where nothing happens” ties Appalachian identity solely to the cultivation of land as a site of production, as has been reiterated throughout all of the primary scholarly works explored in this paper (63). For Goodwin, the physicality of the grotto as space “retains the primarily topographical designation” in the phrase “‘like a grotto’” that “serves in the description of the isolated, daunting natural settings, places that stimulate intense emotional experience and that are thus sought out by a restless or adventurous soul” (17). One of the great struggles in Appalachian studies is the desire to both uphold and deconstruct Appalachia as a unique place of experience and to lean into Goodwin’s grotesque “restless or adventurous soul” as a characterization of Appalachian resilience because of the correlation between the Appalachian region and its land (17). However, part of Scott’s “dehistoricized” approach to the national mysticism of Appalachia is through the image of the grotesque Goodwin is articulating (Scott 62). Goodwin argues while exploring American grotesque traditions that “one of [the grotesque’s] earliest uses is in comedy of manners and social satire, where grotesque is indicative of ill-suited language and behavior, and, in a more generalized sense, it applies to garish pretensions and self-delusion” (17). The movement between the safety of the “semi-dark” grotto to the “garish pretensions and self-delusion” of the grotesque again functions as both shield and stage (6; 17). Although the identification of “garish pretensions and self-delusion” marks a harsh self-
identifier, it is the space that allows Appalachian peoples to continue to hold their own under the weight of the external narratives placed upon them because of the very fatalism it encourages (17). The negativity or fatalism of the modern grotesque is the very thing that makes Appalachia a region that cannot fade into the background as a “place where nothing happens,” made evident by the resilience of voices like Dawn Jewell’s in Robert Gipe’s 2015 novel *Trampoline: An Illustrated Novel*, which is the primary focus of latter parts of this chapter (Scott 63).

Building off of Goodwin’s and Scott’s foundational arguments, and especially in building the context necessary to identify *Trampoline* as a positive example of a negative Appalachian grotesque rooted in self-identification, one other avenue of the grotesque as a genre of materials (such as art, architecture, sculpture, writing throughout the centuries, etc. as well as the entrapment of the body, isolation, darkness, etc.) that needs to be discussed is the role of disgust in creating and maintaining the grotesque. Like all concepts discussed in this paper, the abjection of disgust holds a dual purpose in discussing, defining, and identifying the grotesque. Michel Deville and Andrew Norris argue in their 2017 book, *The Politics and Aesthetics of Hunger and Disgust: Perspectives on the Dark Grotesque*, that the body functions as a grotesque figure, although not like the negative images of bodily autonomy brought forth by false depictions of hillbillies and rednecks conjured in works like *Hillbilly Elegy* or *S-Town*. Instead, for Deville and Norris, the state of the body acts as both a symbol of isolation (the body is a singular experience until it is enacted upon by movement and action) and a physical manifestation of change as a tangible space. In other words, the body represents the space for “alchemy” and mysticism that is not taken up by problematic images of otherness and uniqueness, but instead demands impression as a space that is always in change, thus necessitating an understanding of queerness as a trans-
mutable transference of body between two worlds: hunger and disgust and the external and internal worlds of Appalachia.¹⁹ Deville and Norris characterize the relationship between impression and change through the language of hunger. Though the predominant images of the book are the works of performance artists and their impact on societal viewings of the body, Deville and Norris argue that

the spectacle of the intense physical and emotional pain displayed by the starving body (whether it belongs to a character in a novel, a survivor of a Nazi concentration camp or an anorexic fashion model) is liable to occasion a state of unwilling excitement and voyeurism not unlike those which are exploited by horror movies or forensic TV dramas.

(57)²⁰

In Deville and Norris’ language, the body acts as a mirror to the signification system of identity making established within a specifically American context. Likewise, the physicality of the body, meaning the body’s ability to experience hunger, and therefore experience death and decay, is indicative of what Deville and Norris call a “body in transition”²¹ (76). As an external representation of self, the Appalachian body is characterized by production and reproduction in order to sustain energy labor (what was once coal), but the internal configurations of selfhood, or of self-making, are entirely dependent on access to the ability to instill movement in oneself, whether metaphysical or physical. Deville and Norris argue that this type of movement stems from “the

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¹⁹ Which is the role I argue Trampoline fulfills in Dawn’s narrative voice.

²⁰ The visual impact of hunger and disgust “exploited by horror movies or forensic TV dramas” will be discussed in chapter three (57).

²¹ The queer language in this quote, the language of bodily transition, is manipulated by Deville and Norris as an equation of the body’s ability to deconstruct itself as a mechanism of survival, which fits within my specific reading of the body demonstrated later in the chapter.
transformation of hunger and fasting into a bodily performance” which “delivers a spectacle in
which the audience is as much teased and repelled, seduced and viscerally attacked as they are in
their perception of themselves as unified and self contained creatures” (57). To put it another
way, the physical hunger of the body, the need for food, water, and shelter, can be considered a
universal experience, yet that experience is then divided up by socioeconomic stratification along
lines of geography, race, ability, appearance, marketability, morality, etc. As Deville and Norris
point out, some people’s hunger is considered beautiful or artistic,22 while the physical hunger of
poverty as the dominant narrative of Appalachian peoples is permeated by a narrative of disgust.
It is this disgust, in accordance with Deville and Norris’ argument, that allows the external narra-
tive of Appalachia to remain so prevalent within the national imagination.

As the vocabulary of the Appalachian grotesque begins to develop, words like
“isolation,” “hunger,” “disgust,” “impression/movement,” “semi-darkness,” or even Burke’s
“meanings, attitudes, character,” it becomes easy to lose the tactility of the grotesque as a tool for
both understanding Appalachian narratives and creating space for those narratives to thrive. Dev-
ille and Norris’ language, though an important part of the work of defining the Appalachian
grotesque that I am pursuing here, is centered around the viscerality of disgust as an emotion that
is tied to both morality, which the work of Appalachian scholars like Rebecca Scott or Barbara
Ellen Smith agree with, and physical revulsion.23 Deville and Norris play into an image of the
grotesque built upon a collective image of otherness in the intersections of hunger and disgust
that I argue are not a helpful application of the grotesque, especially when applying it to Ap-

22 This beauty is always centered around white supremacy and patriarchal control. The control of beauty is inherent-
ly the control of bodies, and therefore the control of production and reproduction.

23 Which in application would notably contradict my previous work with Goodwin, Burke, and Scott.
palachian narratives, as it uplifts an idea of Appalachia as wholly mystic or unique. However, there is one final image from Deville and Norris that I argue must be considered when working to define and apply the grotesque as a theoretical concept. Deville and Norris embrace a darker rendition of Goodwin’s “hybrid of tragicomedy”\textsuperscript{24} because of the claims about the role of the physical body in American morality narratives (10). Specifically, Deville and Norris’ work seeks to answer what makes us so uncomfortable about a “body in transition” (76). To this, Deville and Norris posit that

If we agree with Susan Miller that “disgust is about skin” (S. Miller 17), then it is the tearing apart of our corporeal envelope that is the source of some of our most unsettling fears: disgust originates in the metaphorical or literal cutting of the skin and flesh that separate the inside from the outside. It is about the trickling out of blood and other bodily fluids and the escape of vital organs from their bodily sheath that enacts the final collapse of bodily integrity. (75)

In keeping with a discussion about the language used to both discuss and read the grotesque, especially through a queer praxis, Deville and Norris’ centering of “bodily integrity” is the essential connector that runs between Goodwin, Burke, and Scott and a positive reading of the negative images of the grotesque (75). “Bodily integrity” is enacted on Appalachian bodies because of the ties between acceptable bodily autonomy (the physical and moral capability to work, i.e. bodies devoid of difference or opioid addiction\textsuperscript{25}) and production (coal) (76). However, by acknowledging this process of enactment, through labor movements like the 1973 Mining Strikes

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24} As I noted in the first chapter, Goodwin uses this distinction as a way of “making correlations between the grotesque and the absurd” (9).
\item \textsuperscript{25} Other images associated are ‘welfare queens’ or the demoralized hillbilly/redneck.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
in Harlan, Kentucky documented in *Harlan County, U.S.A.* (1976) or the teacher strikes currently happening across West Virginia, space for community organizing is made accessible to Appalachian peoples across socioeconomic lines\(^{26}\) because they are united under the image of Appalachia as othered in the national imagination. Though Deville and Norris acknowledge that the grotesque is intended to be “the source of some of our most unsettling fears,” it is those fears that tie experience to our bodies and allow us to begin to create ourselves (75). By tearing down the physical body, the body as self can be born, turning the act of reading and writing about Appalachian stories and people to enact a praxis, rather than a theory. The implementation of praxis allows space for Appalachian peoples to determine and define their own understanding of the self and the body under the umbrella of a queer vision of the body as a mutable object embodied within social castings.

2.3 “Why deprive myself of the last marvel?: Hillbillies, Rednecks, Mountain People

It would be an injustice to the genre of Appalachian writing to get this far into a project without discussing the historic prevalence of hillbilly horror in different arenas of American—or, really, popular—culture. In Bernice M. Murphy’s 2013 project published by Palgrave Macmillan, *The Rural Gothic in American Popular Culture: Backwoods Horror and Terror in the Wilderness*, Murphy argues that “the United States has a very long history of representing the inhabitants of its own isolated rural places or backwoods communities as monstrous, grotesque, diseased, and polluted” (qtd in Murphy 134). Murphy’s work moves through a history of this representation to defining and characterizing what makes a hillbilly. Like Deville and Norris’ hunger

\(^{26}\) I want here to acknowledge the ways in which wealth is distributed in Appalachia by implying that despite levels of acceptable wealth gained through coal mining and other exploitative measures made in part by Appalachian peoples, those peoples are still othered in the overarching American view of Appalachia because of their ties to coal as a land-based industrial economy.
and disgust, Murphy argues that the disdain for the historical image of the mountain settler as rebellious and external to society comes from an “almost compulsive mobility” that differs from the industrialized stability of early American cities (134). In connecting Murphy and Deville and Norris’ work, this compulsivity is indicative of “the tearing apart of our corporeal envelope that is the source of some of our most unsettling fears” as “disgust originates in the metaphorical or literal cutting of the skin and flesh that separate the inside from the outside” (75). The movement between “inside” and “outside,” or the “compulsive mobility” of the body acting as “envelope” for “some of our most unsettling fears” is the source of difference that is internalized in media and writing about mountain culture because it informs the “meanings, attitudes, character” of Burke’s original characterization of the grotesque (Deville and Norris 75; Murphy 134; qtd in Burke 2). Murphy’s argument reworks these different positionings on the grotesque to argue that the “persistence of the hillbilly trope” is explained by the fact that the typical hillbilly portrait ‘stems from the dualistic nature of this cultural conception—which includes both positive and negative features of the American past and present.’ These positive features include: a pioneer spirit, strong family and kin networks governed by benevolent patriarchs, clearly defined gender roles, closeness to nature and the land, and authenticity. (146)

Instead of a trifold narration like Burke/Goodwin, Murphy argues that the image of the hillbilly is “dualistic” in the positive and negative, which I argue is what gives agency to the grotesque as an accessible form of identity creation in Appalachia (146). Murphy goes on to contend that the “negative aspects” of the “hillbilly trope”
‘show the anachronistic incompatibility of such values to twentieth century America.’

The pioneer spirit becomes social and economic backwardness; strong kinship ties become inbreeding (which is frequently implied in the backwoods horror film), domestic violence, and feuding; individuality means stubbornness and an inability to adapt to changing circumstances; and closeness to nature means savagery and promiscuity. (146)

It is these negative images, images of incest, violence, and perversion, that dominate stories about Appalachia, from *Hillbilly Elegy*, to *S-Town*, to *Deliverance*, precisely because these stories do not give direct agency to Appalachian peoples by speaking over and through their experiences.

To come full circle, by placing Murphy in conversation with Deville and Norris, Murphy transmutes the “unsettling fear” of hunger and disgust by drawing on Simon Estok’s ecophobia, a land/geography-based fear that situates itself as “‘an irrational and groundless hatred of the natural world’” (Deville and Norris 75; qtd in Murphy 181). For Estok, and Murphy quoting Estok, ecophobia “‘is one of the hallmarks of human progress’” because “‘it is what makes looting and plundering of animal and non animal resources possible’” (qtd in Murphy 181). Murphy takes Estok’s argument and contends that “American eco-horror serves much the same function [as ecophobia], combining an urgent sense of present-day crisis with a much older awareness of the fraught relationship between the white colonist and the unfamiliar landscape inhabited by potentially hostile plants, animals, and humans” (181-2). As with Deville and Norris, for Murphy, the grotesque, the “eco-horror” of the rural gothic, is intrinsically tied to the autonomy of the body interacting with the natural world (181). The space the rural body occupies is always inherently tied to tensions between the unnaturalness of human construction, of nature encroaching on the
man-made, and the naturalness of the land as a living and thriving shadow of human endeavors. Through identifying the tropes that encompass the image of the hillbilly, the tension between body and land—between hunger and disgust—creates the grotto where voices like Dawn Jewell’s in *Trampoline* roots and thrives.

2.4 “Her stories smelled of sassafras and rang with gunfire”: Voice and Echo in *Trampoline*

In *The Rural Gothic In American Popular Culture*, Murphy organizes the backwoods hillbilly tropes into two helpful lists: “the ‘good’ backwards family” and “the ‘bad’ backwards family” (149). Murphy uses these two lists to break down several different visual depictions of hillbillies in popular culture (primarily film), but I argue that this list provides a helpful starting point for understanding and deconstructing the Appalachian grotesque in Robert Gipe’s 2015 novel *Trampoline*, which is the primary focus of this chapter. Murphy’s two lists look like this:

The ‘good’ backwoods family
1. Agreeable folks with their own homespun wisdom.
2. Family oriented.
3. Members of a close-knit rural community, even beyond the nuclear family.
4. Representative of the ‘real’ US.
5. God-fearing and moral.
6. Poor, but happy.
7. Close to nature.
8. Hardy and physically resilient.
9. Pragmatic and proudly individualistic.
10. Proud owners of their own ramshackle but beloved homestead filled with cherished homemade furniture, furnishings, heirlooms, etc.
11. Self-sufficient—they rear their own animals, pickle and preserve their own fruits and vegetables, and do their best to survive on what they can.

The ‘bad’ backwoods family
1. Racist and ignorant/uneducated.
2. Inbred and incestuous.
3. Insular and xenophobic.
4. Representatives of the ‘Other’ US—and not in a good way.
5. Fanatical and intolerant.
6. Deeply resentful of those who have more economic power.
7. Feral, savage, and degenerate.\textsuperscript{27} 
8. Physically and psychological misshapen. 
9. Brutal, callous, and psychotically idiosyncratic. 
10. Deeply attached to a squalid, filthy, nightmarish, hovel furnished with Ed Gein-style human remains, trophies from previous victims, and other visual signifiers of deviancy (such as the oddly unsettling sight of a chicken in a tiny cage in \textit{The Texas Chain Saw Massacre}).\textsuperscript{28} 
11. They treat fellow human beings like animals and preserve their remains in the form of smoked meats, barbeque, or stashed away in dirty old jars. The line between human beings and other animals does not exist for them: everything and everyone is considered fit for consumption. They survive, but at the cost of their humanity. (149-50) 

These two lists encompass the totality of rurality in popular culture that works like \textit{Hillbilly Elegy} and \textit{S-Town} speak to, forcing a moral narrative on Appalachian stories that is subsumed within the national narrative of rural people as inherently other and outside of the moral majority.

Bearing Murphy’s list in mind, \textit{Trampoline}, set in 1998, tells the story of Dawn Jewell, a fifteen year old high school student struggling between teenage rebellion and her own (externally imposed) moral obligations/connections to the mountain top removal (MTR) fight happening in Canard County, Kentucky, a fictional county situated in southeastern Kentucky. The novel opens in the midst of this conflict as Dawn’s grandmother Cora tells Dawn that “‘that’s where they’re going to strip,’ she said, nodding at the crest of Blue Bear Mountain. ‘They’ll start mining on the Drop Creek side. But they’ll be on this side before you graduate’” (1). The novel is told in five “acts” that build to the final concluding choice: to stay in Canard County or to leave it. Dawn’s story is peppered with dialectical Appalachian phrasing and hand drawn images by Robert Gipe that are fully integrated into the story, giving Dawn the authenticity of voice that is fully realized in the grotto of Appalachian writing written by and for Appalachians. Through a series of repeat- 

\textsuperscript{27} I.e. pinnacles of the hunger and disgust Deville and Norris argue for

\textsuperscript{28} Which is seen in films like \textit{Deliverance} but will not necessarily be discussed in depth in this project.
ing images—the trampoline, trucks (and truck stealing), the woods, the ridge, her grandmother, her mother—Dawn’s voice creates an echo of the grotesque that calls attention to the anti-MTR fight Gipe’s work is engaging in. Dawn is bawdy and gaudy in equal measure, but she is also lost in an American coming of age story. Without bending to the desire to call Appalachian stories and voices that are telling stories of poverty and land-based exploitation wholly unique, Trampoline’s “fuck you” attitude lends itself to a conversation about the grotesque because of how internally central voice is in the novel, rather than an external (read: exploitative) attempt to engender sympathy or connection with an ‘outside’ audience.

As Murphy’s lists implies, rural Appalachian stories are supposed to conform to one singular narrative, either good or bad, in order to teach the reader a moral lesson. However, Gipe’s careful crafting of Dawn’s voice as one that is defiant and declarative straddles the line between “the ‘good’ backwards family” and “the ‘bad’ backwards family” (Murphy 149). Dawn, as well as all of the other characters in Trampoline, is messy and complicated and not always right, and it is in this contention that the fatalistic implications of the grotesque thrives within Appalachian narratives by giving them a place to rest and resist in equal measure.

2.5 Barrelling Down the Ridge Line: Three Scenes in Trampoline

While I posit that all of Gipe’s Trampoline is an invaluable resource for understanding and defining the Appalachian grotesque as a whole, I am limiting my analysis of the novel in order to be able to incorporate other types of texts in my overarching project. The following section covers three essential scenes that I have identified as most beneficial to articulating the Appalachian grotesque as a critical framework for understanding Appalachian narratives.

“Jesus Christ, Tricia”
While the image of the trampoline is continually referenced throughout the novel—including the title—the trampoline as an object dominates two specific scenes, one near the beginning of the novel, which I will discuss here, and a scene at the end of the novel in the culminating moment where Dawn makes her decision about the role she will play in her family and the MTR fight. This first trampoline scene comes in “Act II: Reckoning,” which is the second cluster of chapters in the text. In this scene, Dawn’s mother, Tricia, drunk and high, has climbed a poplar tree in Drop Creek (a road that Dawn continuously returns to in the novel) and cannot get down. When Albert, Dawn’s brother and Tricia’s son, asks their mother, who “looked crow-sized she was so high up in a poplar tree,” what she is doing, Tricia simply replies “‘my business’” (84). Immediately after this exchange, a drawing of Dawn (see Figure 1) depicting her facing away from the crowd surrounding the base of the poplar tree says “we knew right off she was high,” which is followed by the normal text formatting in which Dawn admits that “we were scared for her; but her buzz brought a tiredness, an about-wore-outness to our worry” (84).

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29 As a reminder, the novel is broken up into five acts with three chapters in each act that all connect with one another chronologically.
The “about wore-outness” of this scene could describe much of the images of life in a failing coal town in Southeastern Kentucky in the novel (84). However, as I argued previously, Gipe’s work resists the encroachment of this image on his work, of Appalachia—and Canard County, Kentucky—as an inherently doomed place by embracing the dilapidation and physical manipulation of the people and the land of the novel by outside forces.

In Trampoline, Appalachian fatalism is a grotto of salvation for Dawn and all of the people she interacts with because it is what puts the warring images in her life into perspective. Dawn struggles with her mother’s addiction, but it is not the all consuming plot of the novel. The novel is largely filled with Dawn’s struggle against the prominent figures in her life, but in the end, the voice of Dawn rings clear. The novel is her story. The choice to stay is her choice, and the good, the bad, and the ugly of that choice are all wrapped up together. To articulate this, Gipe moves between the emotional depletion of navigating addiction within a community integrated in nature throughout this scene as Dawn acknowledges that as “her mother looked over the strip job,” she “wished [she] could see what [her mother] was seeing. [She] wished [she] knew what it was like to be on the level with a woodpecker’s call. The sky screamed blue. The tree branches surrounded my mother” (86). While in traditional narratives of Appalachia, like J.D. Vance’s descriptions of physical space in Hillbilly Elegy, land moved from a symbol of human rebellion and freedom, as demonstrated by Murphy’s inclusion of numbers seven and eight—“close to nature” and “hardy and physically resilient”—in her “good’ backwards family” list, to a symbol of human isolation and moral struggle, embodied in number seven on the “‘bad backwoods’ list—”feral,
savage, and degenerate” (Murphy 149-50). The juxtaposition of the strip job site and Tricia’s vantage point from the top of the tree plays into Murphy’s tropes. The land is ravaged by exploitation, and Tricia, in turn, is a by-product of this consumption, yet this scene is a transformative moment for Dawn because of her ability to see these tropes in tandem with her own experiences. As Dawn says later in the novel while thinking about her mother, she “wanted to be a part of what my mother was going through, but I was too young. There were simpler games I should be playing, games that wouldn’t make my stomach hurt so bad. I felt like I was watching a show people my age weren’t supposed to be watching, except that the show was my life, and I was watching by myself” (205). The rest of the scene follows in this same pattern, introducing parallel images of industrial production and exploitation set against Dawn’s struggle to contextualize her mother in this moment.

Just after Dawn compares her mother to being “level with a woodpecker’s call,” another image (see Figure 2) is incorporated into the text of Dawn, now depicted all in black, yelling to her mother that “‘it will be all right Momma’” (86).
Fig. 2. Dawn yells to her mother in the poplar tree from: Gipe, Robert. *Trampoline: An Illustrated Novel*. Ohio UP, 2015, p. 86.

Again, the physical text immediately juxtaposes Dawn’s assurance to her mother in the tree as Dawn herself says that

In a way, I did not want her to come down. I was glad to see her so high up. She had not escaped, but she was closer. And she was not so detailed to me there in the tree. I could not see vomit crusting on her cheek. I could not see the red swirl in the whites of her eyes like peppermint candy. All I could see was her beautiful stick-thin body wedged in the Y of the tree, the gold at the edge of her hair. (86)

This movement between Dawn’s assurances to her mother and Dawn’s own distancing from the image of her mother in the tree works to mimic Scott’s “alchemy” by mobilizing Appalachian fatalism as a tool for positive construction (Scott 44). The juxtaposing of negative images with nature, two strong examples of which come after the above passage: “my nose filled with the smell of molding wood, my ears with the pinging of the cooling four-wheeler engines” and “her [Tricia’s] skin was torn, and the bark mixed with her blood,” does not impede the narrative of the text because they are wholly Dawn’s voice and Dawn’s observations (87). Gipe uses these images as a way of creating a voice within Dawn that is fully developed and gives stake to the choices the narrative is asking her to make about who she is and how she will be seen by the novel’s external audience.

These repeating juxtapositions culminate in the rescue of Tricia from the tree via jumping down onto a trampoline with the help of Denny and Dawn’s cousins, which is one of the first times a physical trampoline is engaged with in the novel. This is the same trampoline and the
same tree that Tricia’s brother Hubert will try to hang himself on at the end of the novel, and it is also the same tree and trampoline where Dawn stops Hubert from taking his life, one of the scenes that helps Dawn make a choice to stay and fight with her grandmother for Blue Bear Mountain (the MTR site). The trampoline is “old” with “springs half-busted,” but it is a source of life and community that Dawn returns to throughout the novel (88). Dawn, describing the scene, tells us that

The trampoline stopped and the rope went tight, and the spot where my mother and Denny were in the tree ended up directly over the trampoline, and my mother’s legs come loose from the tree, and they dangled, like two strings, like the fringe on a cowboy shirt, and Denny’s arms circled her ribs, and her shirt rode up and I could see her belly beautiful and rounded, like a perfect sausage, and Fred went, “There you go,” and my mother come loose from Denny, from the tree, and she dropped to the trampoline, and she bounced with an “oh,” and two cousins reached out to keep her away from the place where the canvas sagged from the broken springs. (88)

The structure of this passage is noticeably different from the rest of the novel. The entirety of the passage is one continuous sentence in which continuing actions are connected by descriptive phrases, such as her mother’s dangling legs looking “like the fringe on a cowboy shirt” or her mother’s exposed belly as Denny moves to drop her being “like a perfect sausage” (88). However, the passage is also structured by connections. Dawn’s mother’s body is removed from the tree (i.e. nature) by Denny, who–prompted by Fred, Tricia’s father and Dawn’s grandfather–then drops her onto the trampoline where “two cousins reached out to keep her away from the place where the canvas sagged from the broken springs” (88). These connections are not insignificant
when applying the grotesque to a reading of this novel because it is these connections that ultimately tie Dawn to not only her identity as a youth in Appalachia enduring turmoil over mountaintop removal, but ultimately encompass the reason she stays. In the car ride following the trampoline tree scene, Dawn’s mother tells Dawn’s grandmother, her mother, that she “‘care[s] too . . . about strip jobs. About things getting torn to pieces’” to which “Mamaw didn’t say anything right off. Then when I though she wasn’t going to say anything at all, she said, ‘I know you do, Tricia’” (89). Like her grandmother, Dawn’s voice does not shroud her mother in pity, but it does give agency to her situation by acknowledging all of the parts of her that work in tandem, from the busted “about wore-outness” of the trampoline to the trampoline as a symbol of change and connection in her life (84).

“I ain’t never seen nobody throw up smiling like that”

Outside of her mother and grandmother, and eventually her Aunt June in the latter half of the novel, the other primary female influence in Dawn’s life is Decent Ferguson. Decent Ferguson is, as the name suggests, decent, and like Dawn she straddles the line between the hunger and disgust side of the grotesque. As Dawn characterizes her, she is the sort of woman Dawn wants to be—different. Decent outfits number nine on Murphy’s “‘good’ backwoods family” list as she is “pragmatic and proudly individualistic” (Murphy 149). She is “a big woman. Older” with eyes like “two humming outboard motors pushing a boat across summer water” and “gray-headed but still had freckles like a girl” (Gipe 93; 99). She had also “gone to college back in the wild free days” (93). Like almost all of the adults Dawn encounters in the novel, Dawn and Decent are distantly related, yet Dawn views Decent as external to the narrative of her family, again a trait of a “‘good’” hillbilly because of her “individualistic” appearance (Murphy 149). In Dawn’s eyes,
Decent has chosen not to succumb to Blue Bear Mountain, she is neither apart of the MTR narrative, nor uninvolved. Decent presents an untetheredness that juxtaposes what Dawn views as the cost of staying in Canard County, and she presents a motherly hand that Dawn does not receive from her distant mother nor her grandmother Cora, who is the voice of the MTR fight on Blue Bear and is also largely absent from the novel outside of her role as the family matriarch.

But as both sides of Murphy’s trope lists indicate, family matters in rural narratives. Dawn gravitates towards Decent because of her external projection of freedom, but as Dawn finds out in “Monster Birds,” this freedom is a mirage of choice that Decent never did nor never could make. This particular scene begins at a party in Decent’s trailer. In the ten pages the party scene encompasses, Dawn—who is fifteen—is called a monster for her “big old Sasquatch hand,” what Murphy describes in number eight on her “‘bad’ backwoods family” list as being “physically and psychological misshapen[ed],” propositioned for sex by the man she stole a truck from who the party goers call Cinderella (and who is considerably older than Dawn), and ends the sequence vomiting all over the trailer’s living room floor and being comforted by Decent (Gipe 94; Murphy 150). This scene follows immediately after Dawn and her family have taken her mother to the hospital after her jump out of the poplar tree, and also comes after Dawn’s own attempted suicide jump from the top of the ridge—another example of Gipe’s use of parallels to demonstrate the familial connection to destruction via the dismantling of the rural landscape. Besides being a pristine example of the callus treatment of Dawn by the adults in her life, this scene also holds some of the strongest articulations of the grotesque in Gipe’s descriptions. Dawn describes the trailer as “dark, too dark,” which means “nobody could see I still had mud from jumping off the mountain on my pants, still smelled of gas from the four-wheeler ride back to Denny’s, still had
the smell of gauze in my nose from taking Momma to the hospital” (97). Like the previous section of the novel illustrated, bodily interaction with the earth is ever present throughout the text. Dawn’s attempted suicide, though unprobable in its success as she is not jumping from a great height by any means, haunts her throughout the novel, and in this sequence of scenes particularly. After making the decision to attempt to end her life by jumping off of one of the ridges on the very mountain her and her grandmother are working to save, her trauma is made unnoticeable in her interactions with her family because of how prevalent the land is in their lives.

However, Gipe presents three contrasting images in this sentence: the mud, the gas, and the gauze (97). The gas, the man-made product produced in part by land exploitation and extraction, and the gauze, an external tool used to stopper bleeding—or, in other words, a metaphor for the external, moral society bandaging the hemorrhaging immorality of contemporary, rural Appalachian bodies—engulf Dawn’s own positioning of her selfhood. Trampoline is as much about Appalachian identity as it is about selfhood, childhood, and girlhood. By positioning her own trauma in relation to everything else that is happening in tandem around her, Dawn’s anger is brought to the surface as “every kid who had both parents at home, got what was on his Christ- mas list, slept in the same bed in the same house every goddam night of his goddam life felt their power over me,” but instead of having her confront this power inequity in her life, Dawn is

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30 It is important to note that the physical description of the setting that Dawn presents right after this passage also clearly connects different points from Murphy’s list. Dawn tells us that in the living room there is “a wood box yawning open like a drunk in church on the coffee table. Box was black-lacquered with brass hinges, red velvet inside, somebody’s dope box, a baggie full hanging out of it” (Gipe 97). This warring description of a carefully described ornate box being used as a dope box helps fill out the tone of the party scene as it conflates number ten from Murphy’s “‘good’” list, that rural people are “proud owners of their own ramshackle but beloved homestead filled with cherished homemade furniture, furnishings, heirlooms, etc.” and number ten from the “‘bad’” list as negative portrayals of rurality focus on rural people as “deeply attached to a squalid, filthy, nightmarish, hovel” functioning as “visual signifiers of deviancy” (Murphy 149-50).

31 Although this would not be why land in Southeastern Kentucky such as the fictional Blue Bear Mountain would be mined.
forced to ruminate in her anger (96). Although according to Murphy’s list of tropes, this expression of anger and unfairness would fall under the “‘bad’” list as it is indicative of being “deeply resentful of those who have more economic power,” the moment is not transformative until it is compounded upon by her other experiences in the novel (Murphy 150). Dawn’s choice at the end of the novel is made from a culmination of experiences, which in turn allows this particular moment of the grotesque to be future-moving—it is not about qualifying her anger in a way her audience can sympathize with, but instead speaking to a commonality of community found in the echo of Dawn’s external address to the audience. Her voice functions as a culmination of the mud, the gas, and the gauze, not in spite of it.

In turn, the power dynamics Dawn identifies are only heightened by Cinderella’s advances and Pickle Peter’s, one of the other men in the scene, characterization of her as a ‘monster woman’ (95). Cinderella tells the party that if he had not been “throwed in jail” after Dawn stole his truck, he would “still been in jail and not for no drunk and disorderly. They’d a jacked that jail up and throwed me under it,” implying that his choices end in two results: violence or sex (96). Not long after this confession, Cinderella tells Dawn that he has “‘been following [her]’” and that “‘soon as I got out of jail I come right straight looking for you . . . cause I wanted to see you again’” (99). Now that the party has come to a hush in order to listen to the exchange between Dawn and Cinderella, it is at this moment that Decent attempts to step in and asks Dawn how old she is. Decent puts her arm around her as a method of deflection, telling Cinderella after he contends that “‘she’s older than that’” because “‘she’s a giant’” (again referencing the monstrous nature of her body as a grotesque figure morphed by her environment), that he “‘can’t tell
time” and would not understand how old she is anyhow. Again this scene positions two of Murphy’s tropes simultaneously. Decent’s protection of Dawn’s decency—her age should equal moral innocence in the context of the external American ideal—places her in the “‘good’” backwards category, while Cinderella’s willful dismissal of Dawn’s age is indicative of his inherent “feral, savage, and degenerate” nature (Murphy 150). The reaction in the room to this exchange only further aggregates the power dynamics happening in this scene as Keith Kelly, Dawn’s mother Tricia’s boyfriend, asks Decent “‘what are you, some kind of lezzie?’” because she “‘aint her momma. You aint her friend. And it’s obvious she aint normal [referring to Dawn]’” (Gipe 101). The familiality of Decent’s jester’s towards Dawn are inhibited by the power dynamics Dawn recognizes among the people gathered. Despite their shared socioeconomic experiences as Appalachian people, familial kindness and guardianship is labelled perverse by the men in the scene.

I bring this particular instance in the novel up because of the implications of family found in the interactions between Dawn and Decent Ferguson and Dawn and the rest of the people she is loosely related to in the text. As I stated previously, family connections are one of the core tropes in labelling and understanding any rural story forms because of family’s inherent ties to naturalized sex practices that are reflected in not only the rearing of animals and crops, but in the extension and strengthening of a family’s economic opportunities based on the number of

32 She is a “‘good’” hillbilly on Murphy’s list because of the pragmatism she displays here (149).

33 Number seven on the “‘bad’ backwoods family” list.

34 Note that this dynamic does shift somewhat throughout the novel with Dawn and Hubert’s relationship as she deals with the absence of her father after his death in the mines.

35 I.e. heterosexual and within the confines of Christian marriage.
children born and produced as laborers. Murphy places this at numbers two and three on her “‘good’ backwoods family” list as Appalachian peoples are “family oriented” and “members of a close-knit rural community, even beyond the nuclear family” (149). However, as with much of the tropes present in *Trampoline*, Dawn’s family is expansive, but their connections are weak. Dawn’s grandmother and grandfather are separated and no longer living together (although still both involved in family life) and Dawn’s own mother Tricia is continually implied to be sleeping with multiple men in grief over her husband’s death in the mines, though she is sure Keith Kelly is the ‘one’ for her. These divisions are what drive Dawn to place particular value on her perceptions of characters like Decent Ferguson, or her Aunt June later in the text. The key word here is perceptions. Keith Kelly labels Decent a “‘strong woman,’” yet as Beverly Olson Flanigan argues in “Appalachian Women and Language: Old and New Forms as Reflections of a Changing Image,” the archetype of the ‘strong Appalachian woman’ is subverted by the external positioning of the Appalachian woman as homemaker who is, as in accordance with Murphy’s tropes, inherently tied to the moral narrative of the home (Gipe 101; Flanigan 188). Although Flanigan ties this subversion to the shifts in linguistic traditions made by Appalachian women both inside and outside of the home (as synonymous with place), these linguistic changes that come to constitute the image of the moral, self-sufficient Appalachian strong woman is because of the aversion to the association between Appalachian-ness, womanhood, and “poor education, isolated or enclave groups, and/or working class-men” (Flanigan 189). In Decent Ferguson’s case, Dawn is inherently attracted to her as a familial and motherly presence because of her supposed identity of difference. Dawn recognizes her as someone who is outside of the realm of Dawn’s own expe-

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36 Rebecca Scott addresses this same argument in *Removing Mountains.*
periences of femininity. Just after Dawn begins to throw up at the end of the party scene, an image appears of her, accompanied with the articulation that “everybody scattered . . . except for Decent” when she began to vomit, surrounded by crossed out sketches of three women with Dawn’s arm hanging outside of the frame (see figure 3; Gipe 102).

![Fig. 3. Dawn surrounded by women from: Gipe, Robert. Trampoline: An Illustrated Novel. Ohio UP, 2015, p. 102.](attachment:image)

Dawn is trying to escape the external narrative of femininity placed onto her by the American moral imagination, but she is also standing in the image in equal height to these women, one of which on the left-hand side of the drawing matches the earlier description of Decent (see fig. 3).

Decent takes Dawn back to her home to recover instead of sending her back to her grandmother’s, or where ever else Dawn might have been able to crash for the night. Instead, Dawn wakes up in Decent’s “quilt-thick bed at the back of her little house dwarfed by its big-ass garden plot,” again recalling the self-sufficiency trope associated with rural goodness as her bed is “quilt-thick” and her garden is large and encompassing (102). However, this image, like all of the images Gipe employs, is later contradicted by “her bad sulphur water,” the smell of which
“was in the clothes piled at the end of the bed and in every chair” (102). Dawn again recognizes and specifically calls out a mirroring trait in Decent that she herself had just had pointed out in the previous scene. Decent’s hands are “meaty, red rough and raw,” yet instead of being monstrous, they are indicative of Decent’s positioning as a motherly figure in Dawn’s eyes. Even though Dawn herself recognizes the familial distance between her and Decent relationally as she “could tell” Decent “didn’t mean it” when she said Dawn could talk to her about “car stealing and jumping off mountains”—a fact that is brought up by Decent herself as she asks Dawn if she has anyone to talk to about “what’s going on”—she still views Decent as a safe confidant (103). It is also in this conversation that Dawn is told she reminds someone of Aunt June for the first time in the novel. Decent tells Dawn that she reminds her of June “around the eyes” because

“You’re dark. Your eyes are always moving too. June’s eyes were like that. Are, I guess.”

Decent drew again [from her cigarette]. The smoke swirled again. Always smoke in the air. Always forest fire season. Decent wiped her nose on the back of her hand. “So you seeing anybody?” (104)

This is a crucial moment in the novel for Dawn. Dawn as a character is already disillusioned by the authority of adults by the time the novel starts because of how unstructured her familial connections are, yet here is the one person she has reached out to to try to articulate who she is to someone outside of the reader and herself and her value is intrinsically tied to her ability to form connections that are productive. Dawn’s “heart dropped when Decent asked that. Decent was freedom to me. Not chained by man nor kid. She rode her own personality like it was a horse. She wasn’t good looking. Lumpy face, crooked smile. But in that moment I saw I had to have a boy to have something to talk about. I didn’t want a boy” (104). The importance of the end of
this passage is affirmed by the inclusion of another drawing of Eve saying that she “don’t want a boy” with her teeth and arms exposed, one of the only times she is pictured with so much of her physical body visible in an image, concretely illustrating the vulnerability she is exhibiting in the exchange (see figure 4).

Fig. 4. Dawn talking to Decent from: Gipe, Robert. *Trampoline: An Illustrated Novel*. Ohio UP, 2015, p. 104.

Later on in the novel, Dawn will come back to this same moment with Aunt June while contemplating her budding relationship with Willett, an 18 year old radio DJ in Kingsport, and will come to the same conclusion: “I came to Kingsport to find somebody wasn’t all the time trying to run some game on me . . . I was not looking for a boy, I was looking for something I could lean on, something deeper rooted” (244). Dawn continually reaches out for familial comfort, yet is denied her expectations based on her perceptions. The tropes of the “‘good’ backwoods family” are constantly inverted, and it is only through these inversions that Dawn is able to continue to define her own voice as an Appalachian woman and embrace the grotesqueness and fatalism of her reality and re-purpose them in a positive, future-thinking way (Murphy 149).
“You couldn’t pay a person to run unless they had something sharp in their hands”

The third scene I am choosing to highlight comes shortly after the previous scenes involving Dawn and Decent Ferguson. However, in this sequence of scenes, Dawn is again with her mother, this time in Hubert’s house while Hubert is out working.37 “Waterlight,” the third and final chapter in “Act II: Reckoning,” begins with Dawn seriously considering the implications of her father’s death in the mines on her internal perspective of herself and the people around her for truly the first time in the novel. It is also in this opening section of the chapter where Dawn gives a description to what life at her grandmother’s is like as “generally Mamaw kept things pretty junked up. Heaps of paper grew like spring flowers beside her bed, on the couch, everywhere. Her mind ran hot, buzzed like a blow-dryer, taking in information, calculating, talking on the telephone. Slow down to clean the house and the assholes would run roughshod over America. There wouldn’t be nothing left” (107). Again the nature of Dawn’s environment moves between ‘nature’ imagery—“heaps of paper grew like spring flowers”—and industrial, external work (107). The house is not clean because if her grandmother takes time off from the MTR fight, “the assholes would run roughshod over America” (107). But Dawn also recognizes that this is not the only pressure at play here as she remarks that the house is clean, which is not the norm, because “a day of pulling her daughter out of a tree and a night of waiting for me to get back from first Crater and Priscilla’s [where the party in the previous section was held] and then Decent Ferguson’s must have took it out of her. She’s struck a lick getting the house shipshape and then lit out through a cloud of dollar store pine scent” (107). Don Johnson argues in “The Appalachian Homeplace as Oneiric House,” found in The Poetics of Appalachian Space, a collection of criti-

37 He works at a local general store and runs a moonshining business out of the back.
cal work applying Gaston Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space* to Appalachian rhetoric and storytelling, that the emotional labor of maintaining the metaphorical structures of the house (neatness and tidiness, number ten on Murphy’s “‘good’” list) “collapses into the vehicle of the simile” because of the “dislocation and dissolution” caused by the collapse of the socioeconomic structure in white Appalachian communities (43). For Johnson, “the house is not a structure from memory inhabited by spirits from the past. Instead, it becomes a metaphor for the life that seeks to incorporate those memories but at this moment cannot” (43-4). Cora, Dawn’s grandmother, prefers her house to be full of the by-products of consumption because of the emotional fullness that accompanies it. A full house is equated to a happy and full home, which Cora’s revolving door of family does not necessarily represent as evident in Cora’s meticulous cleaning during two stressful encounters. However, Johnson also quotes Gaston Bachelard as arguing that “the space we love is unwilling to remain permanently enclosed. It deploys and appears to move elsewhere without difficulty; into other times, and on different planes of memory” (qtd in Johnson 45). Dawn moves from home to home and space to space, and while she romanticizes her grandmother’s house (“heaps of paper grew like spring flowers beside her bed, on the couch, everywhere”), she also has to grapple with the loss of permanency contained within the home as a concept in the novel (107).

This contrast is especially strong between Dawn’s description of Cora’s house and Hubert’s house, which is where this next set of scenes takes place. Hubert is Dawn’s uncle and her father’s brother and, as Dawn says, “nobody went to Hubert’s to trade up. Always down” (110).

38 Johnson’s work primarily focuses on white experiences of space, because, as he argues, “‘abandonment’ is a luxury peculiar to rural America, owing quite simply to our culture’s emphasis on mobility and to the vast amount of land available for habitation” found in the “descendants of the original white settlers,” which does not necessarily uphold the queer focused practice I am establishing in this project (41).
Standing in Hubert’s kitchen talking to her mother, who had returned from the hospital the night before with a broken ankle from jumping out of the tree onto the trampoline, about running away to Mexico, Dawn observes that the kitchen lights “had all been knocked out” seemingly overnight, although Hubert is supposedly in the county drunk tank while all of this is happening (112). Despite the fact that the kitchen’s connections to man-made electricity (i.e. coal powered energy) has been compromised by the broken lightbulbs, the kitchen is not bathed in darkness by any means. Dawn says that the “light come in through cracks around the foil and cardboard over the windows. Most of the light come through one fresh-busted window over the kitchen sink” to which Dawn’s mother Tricia tells Dawn that “maybe we ought to bust out another window . . . for the light” (113). This series of images again recalls the struggle between the perceptions of the human body and nature occurring throughout the novel. In this scene, violence is the catalyst for change. Violence marks the difference between being in the dark with no light bulbs and busting out another window in order to be able to see. Unliked the picturesque idea of the homestead that Don Johnson argues for as being “oneiric,” Hubert’s house, even compared to the messiness and chaos of Cora’s house, removes the barriers between the body and the outside world by embracing this violence (Johnson 43). By breaking out the windows in order to see, Tricia’s insistence on solving an issue through destruction is inherently rooted in the grotesque. Not only does this exchange of violence for resource respond to Gipe’s overarching narrative about MTR, but it is also reflective of Burke’s own definition of the grotesque as “the grotesque operates . . . as a primary poetic and symbolic mode” that “configures ‘the mental equipment (meanings, attitudes, character) by which one handles the significant factors of his time’” (qtd in Goodwin 2). Tricia, Dawn, Hubert, Cora, Aunt June, Decent Ferguson, Keith Kelly, and all of the
other “backwoods” characters in the novel use their “‘meanings, attitudes, character’” to subvert the system in some way (Murphy 149; qtd in Goodwin 2). Tricia encourages Dawn to create her own subversion by dying her hair green.

Before the conversation about the lights in the kitchen, Dawn and her mother are discussing where Cora has gone. As it is Thanksgiving weekend when all of this is happening (Dawn’s attempted suicide, Tricia’s tree jumping, Decent Ferguson), Tricia asks Dawn if she is ready to return to school. Dawn’s negative reply prompts Tricia to tell her that she “‘need[s] to do something with your hair’” (111). When Dawn questions this, Tricia says she needs to “‘show them . . . they aint broke you’” (111). The “‘they’” here is ambiguous, referring neither specifically to the girls who bully Dawn at school for being ‘white trash,’ nor even Dawn’s broken familial support system (111). Instead, the “‘they’” represents the silent external audience embedded in the form of the novel (111). Tricia and Dawn go to Hubert’s house because “‘that girl Jan has a bunch of hair dye stuff left from Halloween,’” Jan being a friend of Tricia’s and one of the women that hangs around Hubert’s trailer (112). Jan, like Dawn, is described as being a large woman. Dawn even refers to her as Big Jan when she is describing her. The other characteristic that Dawn and Big Jan share is how their hands are described. When Jan agrees to help dye Dawn’s hair green, Jan “slapped her palms together . . . rubbed them back and forth, and I swear it smelled like meat cooking” (113). Not only are her hands big, but they are meat-like in their movements, which falls under number eleven on Murphy’s “‘bad’ backwoods family” list: “they

39 Dawn later sees Jan again at Hubert’s high on oxycodone, but it is never explicitly stated if this is why people outside of their family stay at Hubert’s.

40 In contrast, Dawn describes her mother’s hands as having the “beauty draining out of her fingers a little bit every day,” while later in the novel Willett, a radio DJ from Kingsport who Dawn falls in love with, tells Dawn that he “‘missed [her] hands’” (115; 270).
treat fellow human beings like animals and preserve their remains in the form of smoked meats, barbeque, or stashed away in dirty old jars,” further giving evidence to the conflation of the rural body as product in the national imagination (Gipe 113; Murphy 150). Additionally, Jan offers her own solution to the kitchen light deficiency discussed in the previous paragraph as right after she rubs her palms together “she went and got two miners’ caps with batteries and lamps” (113). Mining equipment is not truly visible in the landscape of the novel until later on in the text, yet here it is used casually to solve a discrepancy in resources. In terms of the Appalachian grotesque, this repurposing of equipment falls in line with Rebecca Scott’s “alchemy” as it demonstrates a transformative use of the fatalistic methods of production employed in Appalachian coal extraction (*Removing Mountains* 44). Jan’s small gesture exhibits the “‘meanings, attitudes, character’” of subversion that is essential to surviving the narrative of *Trampoline* (qtd in Goodwin 2).

In the actual haircut and dying scene, another image of Dawn appears with three unidentified women in the background (see figure 5).

![Figure 5](image)

**Fig. 5.** Dawn getting her haircut from: Gipe, Robert. *Trampoline: An Illustrated Novel*. Ohio UP, 2015, p. 115.
Although it can be assumed that these women are Tricia and Big Jan, the third is unknown and unrecognized. This image in the text is small and Dawn’s face and dialogue takes up most of the frame, which contrasts with the image on the following page where Dawn declares that she “don’t want green hair” with her face and chest prominently outlined by an empty black background (see figure 6; 116).


Interspersed between these two contrasting images, two other important things are happening: the haircut itself and Tricia’s recount of seeing the strip mining site on Blue Bear Mountain from her vantage point in the poplar tree discussed earlier. Tricia tells Jan while they smoke weed and cut Dawn’s hair that from her view in the tree, “‘it was like I could see things growing back . . . I could see how it would be in a thousand years, in a hundred thousand years. Trees growing huge, new dirt layering in, rain coming in drops as big as beer cans’” (116). Tricia’s vision of growth and restoration contrasting against the “whack[ing]” of Dawn’s hair—an extension of her bodily integrity—is indicative of both the natural body and the metaphysical body, what Deville and Norris label a state of “transition” (Gipe 114; Deville and Norris 76). The act of transitioning, of
growing from the destruction of the land by strip mining to Tricia’s vision of thousands of years of restorative growth, is subverted by Dawn’s own physical transformation via the chemicals of hair dye. For Dawn, the “machine noise” of the clippers soothed me, but Big Jan laughed louder than the clippers. She walked barefoot through my falling hair and the crushed glass of the busted-out light bulbs from the night before. Momma run the clippers up my neck, got it all bristly. Then they put the bleach to me. It went on like birthday cake frosting and burned like the candles. (Gipe 115)

Like the two illustrations, these two images, of the “falling hair” and the “crushed glass of the busted-out light bulbs from the night before,” as well as the bleach “like birthday cake frosting,” which she describes on the following page as “eating [her] alive,” again call back to the duality of the body interacting with the world that Murphy characterizes in her lists (Gipe 115; 116).

Murphy’s lists do not simply serve as a touchstone for identifying “backwoods” tropes, they also serve as a way of understanding how Appalachian experiences are written in between the stark moral lines drawn in the depiction of rurality, working in tandem with the hunger and the disgust to produce meaning and experience within the self (Murphy 149).

2.6 “Ain’t got brain enough to be happy”: Trampoline in the Grotto

Although Robert Gipe’s 2015 novel Trampoline remains one of the strongest contemporary examples of the Appalachian grotesque, these select scenes in no way represent the totality of the grotesque in the novel. From the descriptive language to the dialect in the dialogue to the repetition of images, Gipe devises a story that embraces the fatalistic nature of the predetermined national Appalachian narrative in order to ruminate in the choice Appalachian peoples have to make about themselves and the land/pace they inhabit. At the end of the “Waterlight” chapter in
“Act II: Reckoning,” Dawn leaves Hubert’s house to return again to the Drop Creek forest and “walk til [her] hair grew back long” (119). There in the woods she has to confront “the winged monster bird I had feared all weekend” who she envisions as ripping her body to shreds as she moves through the woods (119). Again Gipe gives us a visual dialogue between Dawn’s internal narrative and the external expectations of the reader. Dawn knows her vision of the bird “was dope talking,” as she had smoked earlier with her mother and Jan, yet “knowing wasn’t enough” (119). The Appalachian grotesque functions in much of the same way. Knowing is not enough to dispel the ‘mysticism’ of Appalachia that Scott identifies. It is only by embracing the fatalism the grotesque presents–of an Appalachia doomed to fail regardless–that the self-embracing nature of the grotesque can form a path to freedom from the external expectations Dawn is fighting against.

The closing passages of this chapter bring home the realities of the grotesque in Dawn’s story. Right after she acknowledges that “knowing wasn’t enough,” an illustration appears of Dawn’s shadowed face–which further recalls illusions to the grotto–surrounded by the black-inked trunks of trees with the bolded text: “I wanted out of the woods” (see Figure 7; 119).
Dawn, in all her roughness and all her mangled edges, uses the final few pages of Act III to reach out the audience. As the “woods dripped,” Dawn notes that there is “light in the woods,” but she couldn’t tell where it came from. It seemed it came from the water in the mountain. The total amount of water in the mountain began to freak me out. I did. I freaked out about the water. Stupid. I sat down on a fresh fallen log. The wind crackled through the leaves clinging to the limbs. Sounded like a clutch of old women whispering at the back of a cold, empty church. The light was dwindly and low, and I wished you were there.

Who? (120)

The above passage is immediately followed by this illustration:

**Fig. 8.** Dawn in the darkness speaking to the reader from: Gipe, Robert. *Trampoline: An Illustrated Novel.* Ohio UP, 2015, p. 120.

The rhetorical model of questioning, of identifying who is being identified within the ambiguous calling out by Dawn, invites the reader to be there in Drop Creek with Dawn, instead of casually
observing from the outside. The “alchemy” of Dawn’s narrative is in her ability to transcend through words and images and still come out as a wholly realized fifteen year old in her characterizations. She is a complicated, embodied character who makes choices and experiences trauma in equal measure. The traditional grotesque imagery Gipe employs in the passages discussed in this chapter—of blood and change and spooky forests—does not signal an undefinable doom in Dawn’s story. Canard County, Kentucky is doomed because the world is doomed, not because of some unique moral problem in Appalachia. The collective experience of isolation Dawn invites the reader to understand in this moment (see Figure 8) places Appalachia as an extension of Dawn and who she is, not an exemplar of Appalachia itself. The grotto of the grotesque gives Dawn the space to be free, and to make her own choices about who she is as both a teenage girl and an Appalachian, including how she will exist moving forward.
CHAPTER THREE: Visualizing the Grotesque

3.1 Introduction

In addition to the role of memoir and fiction, which are discussed at length in chapters one and two respectively, the visualization of Appalachia in both photography and filmmaking rounds out the Appalachian grotesque by representing Appalachia as either wholly desolate or wholly debauched by some moral depravity. Sometimes that depravity is structural, as implied by the 1976 documentary *Harlan County, U.S.A* about the Brookside Mine Strikes, and sometimes that desolation is upheld by an apocalyptic search for meaning, like in 1967’s *Holy Ghost People*. Although the inclination when discussing visual representations of the Appalachian grotesque would be to lean on *Deliverance*, I instead posit that movies like *Deliverance*, which was released in 1972, are born out of the visual traditions established by works like *Holy Ghost People* and lead into the success of documentaries like *Harlan County, U.S.A.*

Either way, these two documentaries that *Deliverance* sits between give unique insights into the role of filmmaking in creating and preserving ideas of Appalachia in the national imagination. As James Goodwin argues in *Modern American Grotesque*, “the grotesque retains strong visual assumptions about its means and its impact” because “an identification of a particular image as grotesque is as much a function of the viewer’s response as it is one of image content or structure” (8; 29). Filmmaking offers a space in which identity creation either thrives or dies, giving the grotesque either the power of meaning-emphasis or meaning-upholding. In other words, the Appalachian grotesque in visual form either provides transformative spaces for identity declaration, or deafening spaces of extraction and enactment. *Deliverance* falls in the latter

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41 I also argue that *Deliverance*, while a clear example of the grotesque, complicates the role of rurality narratives without leading to direct avenues of agency like the other works described in this project.
category by upholding all 11 of Murphy’s “‘bad’” tropes list from *The Rural Gothic in American Popular Culture* (150). However, going back to Goodwin’s statements about visual representations of the grotesque, that “an identification of a particular image as grotesque is as much a function of the viewer’s response as it is one of image content or structure,” does this imply that the grotesque is manifested and not intended (29)? Yes and no. According to Rebecca Scott in *Removing Mountains*, part of the national success of storytelling about Appalachia is because “we know exactly what will happen and why” (47). For Scott, the more pertinent question that can be addressed by the grotesque as a whole is: whose narrative survives? Scott argues that external photographing of Appalachia—for example, John Dominis’ 1964 LIFE photo essay documenting LBJ’s visit to eastern Kentucky to declare official war on poverty—is an act of selection. It determines what narratives get brought to the public and which narratives stay in the grotto. For Scott, the legacy of visual work *about* (key word: about, not from or by) Appalachia is tied into a clear moral legacy developed in the national imagination.

This legacy is replicated in works like *Holy Ghost People* and *Harlan County, U.S.A.*, yet these works also circumvent some of these tropes in some way or another. As Grace Elizabeth Hale argues in “Documentary Noise: The Soundscape of Barbara Kopple’s *Harlan County, U.S.A.*,,” films like *Harlan County, U.S.A.*, as well as *Holy Ghost People*, need to be understood within a contextual framework that considers these films historically, and not just with contemporary theoretical applications. By placing these films into the history of filmmaking in Appalachia and the larger South during this time (the 1950’s to the late 1970’s), the role of the grotesque images in these films posits the Appalachian grotesque as a framework for understand-

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42 See Chapter Two, section title: “Her stories smelled of sassafras and rang with gunfire”: Voice and Echo in *Trampoline* for a complete list.
ing Appalachian storytelling and selfhood with the power needed to corrupt or override the implications of the very images that uphold it. Hale follows this history from the tradition of “song catchers,”43 outside intellectuals and collectors who travelled parts of rural Appalachia, particularly mountainous Appalachia, during the early twentieth century collecting songs, stories, and ‘artifacts’—quilts, pottery, baskets, farm tools, etc.—to bring them back to cities, museums, and fairs in order to preserve and share the ‘Appalachian way of life’44 with a white, middle-class audience (14). By alluding to this history, Hale argues that during the time of Harlan County, U.S.A.’s filming, “video and film crews became as common in the hollows as song catchers had been in an earlier era” (16). The visual foothold was strong in Appalachia throughout the middle of the twentieth century and beyond as Hale points out that white, middle-class activists, spurred by the ending of World War II in the 1950’s and the growing Women’s and Civil Rights Movements in the ‘60’s and ‘70’s foregrounded by the Vietnam War, sought to merge their activism with labor struggles throughout the rural U.S. (16). Hale goes on to point out that

Documentary films about the South fall into roughly two categories: films made by the three major broadcast networks, National Educational Television and, after 1970, PBS, religious organizations, and local public television stations, usually using strong voice-over narration and demanding some sort of reform, on the one hand, and more self-consciously artistic films made by independent filmmakers influenced by the direct cinema movement on the other. (16)

43 A concept that inspired the 2000 film Songcatcher, which is a work I considered discussing in this chapter because of its explicitly queer leanings, including a committed lesbian couple.

44 A way of life that is always tied to the good morality of Murphy’s “‘good’” tropes list (149).
Echoing the other scholarship discussed in this project, Hale recognizes that for the filmmakers of this time, Appalachia presented an “island of otherness” to draw from, but for people like Barbara Kopple, the director/producer/sound engineer/filmographer of *Harlan County, U.S.A.*, “the process of making a film about political activism was itself a form of political activism” (14).

For Hale, the soundscape of documentaries like *Harlan County, U.S.A.*, which I also argue applies to *Holy Ghost People*, presents an avenue in which the grotesque images so closely associated with Appalachia in the visual landscape of popular culture can be capitalized on for socioeconomic and political gain.

### 3.2 All the Prayers Go Up at Once: Singing Through Scrabble Creek

When discussing the impact of the grotesque on visual storytelling, Goodwin takes special care in *Modern American Grotesque* to distinguish between human and artificial images. The role of the documentary as a human method of relation and self-making/self-identifying is crucial to understanding not only how the grotesque functions, but why. The artificiality of movies like *Deliverance* produced outside of the contextual landscape it represents, i.e. without the input of Southern voices as a whole (despite its heavy reliance on the grotesque as a storytelling model) can only replicate the grotesque. In contrast, documentaries like *Holy Ghost People* and *Harlan County, U.S.A.* embody the grotesque because of the ways in which perspective is manipulated by the directors and the participators. This is not to say that no fictionalized or stylized film could embody the grotesque as a tool. As Hale points out, creative collectives like Appalshop, located in Whitesburg, Kentucky, have been providing opportunities to Appalachian filmmakers, photographers, and storytellers to capture Appalachia in its wholeness since the invasion of outside filmmakers in the early ‘60’s. For a contemporary example, Queer Appalachia, a collective
started on Instagram, has moved from functioning solely as a space to create a web curated ‘zine
to a sprawling collective of artists and queer Appalachians who provide services and create
community across the region.

When looking at the sociopolitical vibrancy of these two groups, especially when com-
pared to the federal obligations of the ARC discussed in chapter one of this project, it is hard to
imagine that these storytelling opportunities are born out of documentaries like *Holy Ghost Peo-
ple*. Unlike *Harlan County, U.S.A.*, *Holy Ghost People* takes a largely hands-off approach to
“participatory documentar[ies]” (Hale 20). The film crew is not embedded into the visual narra-
tive, but is aurally acknowledged at different points by the people in the room. Released in 1967,
*Holy Ghost People*, filmed in Scrabble Creek, West Virginia, documents the illegal snake han-
dling traditions of Holiness Pentecostal Churches throughout Appalachia. The film is entirely in
black and white, moving between closely cropped shots of the churchgoers during their service
to expansive shots of the church as a whole and individual people discussing their experiences
within the snake handling practice. However, this continuity does not flow throughout the film as
the beginning, which displays brief scenes of worship paused and interrupted by total silence
with name cards that detail who produced the film (Thistle Films), the title of the film, and the
director, Peter Adair. Peggy Dunn Bailey describes this sequence in “Coming Home to Scrabble
Creek: *Saving Grace*, Serpent Handling, and the Realistic Southern Gothic” as feeling “similar to
being underwater for a moment, holding our breath in the sudden, pregnant stillness” (424). As
both director and participator, Adair plays an interesting role in the narrative of the documentary.
After the initial chaos of the shifting cameras interspersed with silence at the beginning of the
film dissipates, Adair begins a two minute long voice over monologue laid over scenes of the
film crew entering Scrabble Creek convoy style, explaining the basic premise of the film: Adair has travelled to Scrabble Creek to document a snake handling service, a place where people believe that snake bites are God’s judgement and refuse to seek medical attention for them, a place where the Appa-LAY-shuh mountains separate the churchgoers from the rest of the country (00:01:46-00:03:56). Adair’s structuring of the film exemplifies the “songcatcher” tradition Hale discusses in “Documentary Noise” (16). Outside of the church members he interviews, who all remain unnamed and uncredited, both within the actual film itself and the end credits of the piece, Adair’s voice is the only external voice heard. As a narrator, Adair is disembodied from the grotesqueness of the visual narrative in Holy Ghost People, but he also sets up the structure of the entire narrative in the first two minutes, reducing the unnamed people he interviews as secondary to the narrative of the film for the middle to upper class audiences this documentary would have reached in 1967.

The rest of the documentary follows in a mix of different images punctuated by songs and episodes of preaching, praying, and speaking in tongues. However, it is the integral use of songs in the film that originally drew me to it as a valuable source to explore when working to define the Appalachian grotesque. The people in the church are supposed to be obviously associated with the working class, and more largely with coal, but their industrial labor is never directly mentioned, discussed, or filmed throughout the entire 52 minutes the documentary lasts. What is depicted outside of the church, however, is domestic work. Women are often central visual figures throughout the film. Women’s voices are a constant source of aural repetition in the documentary, whether it is singing, praying, or shouting. Because of the prevalence of sound in the film, women hold equal weight in the moral narrative Adair is constructing, no matter how ex-
ploitative it might be. The almost “b-roll”-like footage overlaid with the voices of singing women throughout the film tells a very specific story about Appalachia that directly contrasts the narrative of taboo morality Adair focuses on in the Preacher’s prominent vocalizations. Instead, Deville and Norris argue in *The Politics and Aesthetics of Hunger and Disgust* that women play a central role in facilitating whatever it is that makes us uncomfortable about the grotesque. Although the women interviewed and featured in the documentary are very much alive in the film itself, their abject removal from and aversion to the ‘normalcy’ of the national moral narrative places a stopper between them and the world of the ‘60’s housewife. These women are different, and even if Adair’s audience could not pinpoint why, there is something about the images of women holding both children and snakes that does not sit well. In this regard, Deville and Norris argue that “some dead women looked like ‘marble statues in the mire,’ thereby casting an uncomfortable light on the powers that bind terror, the grotesque and the aesthetic sublime in visual culture” (86). The documentary is not just an ethnographic look at Holiness churches in West Virginia, Appalachia, or the Deep South, it is a strong moral judgement about the values of the people depicted, especially as they remain as unnamed and unidentified as a corpse throughout the visual text.

The disembodiment of the women from the chaos of the visual landscape of the documentary, as well as the very nature of the documentary’s subject–irreverent worship in taboo forms–works to form the grotesque through two primary mediums: visual stillness and sound. As I stated earlier, the women’s voices are the most congruently prominent throughout the film, whether singing, speaking, or bursting into tongues. For Peggy Dunn Bailey in “Coming Home to Scrabble Creek: Saving Grace, Serpent Handling, and the Realistic Southern Gothic,” the
landscape45 of *Holy Ghost People* “establishes an association between the American Gothic text and what may be termed an American Gothic reality, one marked by a complex and frightening relationship between religious intensity and violence, especially violence within the family” (425). The “American gothic reality” Bailey argues *Holy Ghost People* “establishes” in 1967 is based on a reading of both the documentary and the genre it encompasses as “Gothic texts” that encode obsessive preoccupations with blood and inheritance, religion, sexuality, and sacred place (ancestral land, family home, the church) . . . they are typically meditations on trauma by characters (and sometimes authors, filmmakers, readers, and viewers) who feel compelled to return to that trauma—to speak of it, hear it, watch it, experience it again. While Gothic novels, stories, and films may rely upon overtly supernatural characters such as vampires to generate horror, often the most artfully rendered—and arguably the most frightening—are those marked by a realism so intense that it can accurately be called documentary, so unrelenting that it can, ironically, generate accusations of fraudulence or exaggeration. (425-6)

For Bailey, as well as the works discussed in this project, the grotesque is a living breathing manifestation of the hunger and disgust aesthetics of Deville and Norris’ work. By simultaneously acknowledging traditional visualizations of the gothic across a varying degree of mediums, and then subsequently shifting the lens of gothic from those “supernatural characters,” the realism of the grotesque “fully informs the Southern Gothic” because it embraces a reality that is tangible to those who experience it. In *Holy Ghost People*, as with all of the other works I have

45 This is an intentional use of the word landscape as an analogy of both the soundscape Hale argues for in *Harlan County, U.S.A.*, as well as referencing space and land and interwoven concepts in Appalachian narratives.
discussed so far, trauma is cyclical, yet by acknowledging this process, the grotesque creates
space to “speak of it, hear it, watch it, experience it again,” whatever “it” is (426). The disem-
bodied women with their visually removed voices—the visuals and the audio of *Holy Ghost Peo-
ple* are hardly linked if a face-on shot of a person being interviewed is not being shown—gain an
“omni-present, inescapable power” through the ‘supernatural’ monstrosity assigned to them by
the documentary’s external viewer. The difference of the people catalogued in *Holy Ghost Peo-
ple* affords them a queer otherness that gives them the freedom of ambiguity and anonymity
needed to craft one’s self in one’s own image. The visual landscape of *Holy Ghost People* reads
as so wholly outside and other to the experiences of Adair’s audience that the grotesqueness of
the story breaks the morality narratives assigned to Appalachian peoples in the national sphere.

Bailey’s work on *Holy Ghost People* articulates the crux of the Appalachian grotesque.
When beginning this project, I knew instinctively that I wanted to write about *Holy Ghost Peo-
ple*. I wanted to understand why I was so repulsed by the narrative story of Appalachia Peter
Adair and his team create, yet why I am also continually drawn to the documentary itself. Part of
the freedom of the grotesque that Bailey’s work expresses is the cyclical nature of trauma exhib-
ited by these types of narratives. From *Holy Ghost People* to *Trampoline* to *S-Town* to *Hillbilly
Elegy*, the language of trauma and dissection are integral parts of the hunger/disgust dynamics at
play. Rebecca Scott’s “alchemy” is not just about the magic of Appalachian-ness, but of the ways
in which Appalachian stories are subsequently shaded by and simultaneously working to destroy
the idea of the grotto as a whole. As Bailey argues while comparing Lee Smith’s *Saving Grace* to
*Holy Ghost People*, the “American gothic reality” “identifies a central tenet of the Gothic: the
limits, if not the utter illusions, of self-determinism” (427). The idea of Appalachian peoples as
wholly unique in their moral ties to land, rebellion, and perseverance are false delusions that the grotesque exposes. The fatalism that is so inherently linked to Appalachia in the national imagination is broken by extracting the power of pain and trauma from various storytelling forms by embracing the queer “it” of being that Bailey’s work expresses (426).

3.3 “I knew they were enemy”: Coming ‘Round to Harlan

No discussion of Appalachia is complete without giving some nod to the struggles for and against industrial coal throughout the region. The topic of the rise and decline of coal production in the region is so sociopolitically dense that a balanced and detail description of its impacts on the national perception of Appalachia, as well as Appalachian communities themselves, could not be completed in a project of this length and scope. However, by reading the 1976 documentary Harlan County, U.S.A., as well as returning again to Rebecca Scott’s Removing Mountains, through the Appalachian grotesque as a queer reading praxis, the importance of narrative space in Appalachian storytelling emerges. Scott argues that the construction of mining as an industrial concept inherently ties it to sexual reproduction as the link between geographical land and metaphysical space–two concepts that largely unite critical Appalachian frameworks. More specifically, Scott argues that “by constructing living quarters for their workers, the coal companies prescribed a particular heterosexual lifestyle for their employees” (73). Consequently, Scott also notes that “in a narrative space where coal mining is the defining activity of the region, women’s paid work becomes nearly unrepresentable” as “women (even those who work outside the home) are still held primarily responsible for parenting and domestic labor, and a few miners’ wives emphasized that the house and children were their territory”\textsuperscript{46} (75; 76). Although the latter parts

\textsuperscript{46} Scott is discussing her ethnographic work here.
of Scott’s work focus on a visual analysis of Appalachian photography, her historical revelations about the engendering of production in coal camps places works like Harlan County, U.S.A. in a sociopolitical historical light. In other words, by placing the grotesque, Scott, and Harlan County, U.S.A. all in one conversation, the tension between luxury and leisure and its relation to the whiteness of coal imagery develops.

*Harlan County, U.S.A.*, released in 1976, is an accidental documentary film about the Brookside Mining strikes in Harlan County, Kentucky that began in 1973. According to a 2006 special on *Harlan County, U.S.A.*—released by the Criterion Collection called *Making of Harlan County, U.S.A.*—to commemorate the documentary being released on DVD, the film is accidental in that its driving force, Barbara Kopple, as well as the rest of her small team, were in the process of recording footage for a documentary about the strained presidential race happening within the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), the union that helps spearhead the mining strikes in Harlan, until someone recommended that they take a day trip to see the strikes happening in Kentucky (*Making of Harlan County, U.S.A.*). Barbara Kopple and her team from New York carried audio and recording equipment on their backs into the middle of often violent protests to document the continuing labor efforts happening in Kentucky, which is a notable place for coal-related political upheaval as the strikes in the documentary come after the historical strikes that earned Harlan County the nickname “Bloody Harlan” (*Making of Harlan County, U.S.A.*).

Yet despite being a film about coal mining, it is largely devoid of visual depictions of labor outside of the domestic scenes and establishing shots sprinkled throughout the production, which I will discuss later in this section. In a 1977 review of the film, Peter Biskind argues in *Jump Cut* that “*Harlan County, U.S.A.* is about the strike” but “we don’t learn much about what it
feels like to work beneath the earth or get much sense of the texture of daily life lived in the shadow of the mine. The film is not an ethnographic study of a quaint community of mining folk” (3). Biskind instead contends that

the film rarely aestheticizes the miners. The one or two shots that do remind us of the iconography of the 1930s—the thin, pinched faces, sunken cheeks, round eyes of men who have worked long and hard for too little to eat, who have seen too little of the sun and known too little joy—merely serve to remind us how far we are from that frozen world of dignified poverty. (3)

The distancing of, by, and from the “frozen world of dignified poverty” that critics like Biskind saw the documentary working from in 1977 suggests that the grotesque visions of Appalachia were already heavily saturated in new media, which Hale acknowledges in her own historical recounting of “songcatchers” in “Documentary Noise” (Biskind 3; Hale 14). Despite the clarity of the immediate impact of work like Biskind’s draws, it is Hale’s work that drove me to include *Harlan County, U.S.A* into a discussion of the Appalachian grotesque within the critical framework I am cultivating in this project. In regards to Biskind’s critique of the film, Hale’s argument offers a more realistic view of the documentary for contemporary audiences as she contends that “Kopple evolves [a] history of folk romanticism as much as she subtly critiques it; her subjects’ performances are ultimately put on display for the outsiders that make up most of the film’s audience” (24). Biskind’s position that the documentary features “rare” aestheticization of miners works against the grotesque as a future-thinking framework or queer reading praxis (Biskind 3).

The defining feature of *Harlan County, U.S.A* is the presence and power of women. One of the cornerstones of the documentary’s narrative is the collective of wives that forms around
the strikes in support of their husbands. Although this dynamic holds many redflags about the nature of gender stereotypes and expectations in a hyper-industrialized socioeconomic sphere, the women hold some form of agency in the role they play in both the strike and the film. The women function as a lens to help organize, lead, provide, and ultimately understand the role of the union and coal mining as a whole in a culture of production. Hale argues this production is most easily recognizable in the aural landscape of the film, a critical model I adopted for my earlier critique of *Holy Ghost People*. According to Hale, the defining feature of Barbara Kopple’s directing is her use of the establishing, grounding shot and its accompanying sound or lack of sound. More specifically, Hale argues that “a slow visual disclosure in which temporarily non-diegetic sound carries whatever meaning is available. The disembodied sound, especially voices, comes first, and then the source of the sound, especially bodies, comes later” (22). By separating the voice and the body, Kopple effectively decentralizes the body as a source of value in Appalachia. By accompanying the grotesque images of domestic housing interspersed with shots of machine guns and police lines, the physical violence of the labor struggle is superseded by the sounds it produces. In this regard, Hale argues that “in particular, the disembodied audio tracks disrupt easy comprehension. They suggest this place and these people are not so open to the eye, not so easily knowable, as other documentary photographs and films of eastern Kentucky have suggested” (22). The use of sound is twofold, mimicking the twofold hybrid of Goodwin’s understanding. Not only does it disengage the body from visual representations of violence, but it also disrupts traditional Appalachian representations as Hale argues that Kopple “labors to use these sounds in ways that disrupt the powerful cliche of singing mountain people” (24). By plac-

47 Kopple won an Academy Award for the film.
ing the women as the visual center of the film’s narrative, the sound/visual twofold hybrid gives further agency by disrupting the concept of Appalachia as a whole.

I began this project with the image of Appalachia as poor, packing, and white, but as Scott illustrates in *Removing Mountains*, all of these images are superseded by the heterosexual masculine figure. The ability to reproduce as a consequence of the value of bodily labor is not absent from works like *Harlan County, U.S.A.*, but the reason it is included in this project is the way Kopple’s choices reflect an accessible and useful model for addressing and understanding Appalachian fatalism. Kopple and her crew are outsiders from New York, and none of the women, or even the majority of the men, are ever identified on screen outside of verbal communication. The people who hold power in the labor fight, however, are introduced with text overlaying scenes of them speaking, which are often in black and white. In Hale’s view, “male voices speaking with Appalachian accents, voices singing, and women’s voices all embody the striking miner’s side of the fight, while educated male voices speak for Duke Power” (26). Yet it is not these figures of power that occupy the most memorable parts of the film. The twofold hybrid of the film is a tragicomedy in which Burke’s “‘meanings, attitudes, character’” of ‘our’ time transitions into Goodwin’s more contemporary trio—“presentiment, perception, and comprehension” (qtd. in Goodwin 2). Goodwin’s re-envisioning of Burke works in the context of *Harlan County, U.S.A* and Hale’s argument because it leans into the “perception[s]” necessary to administer the hunger and disgust dichotomy of the grotesque. The people of *Harlan County, U.S.A* are at once distant, disembodied voices, as well as fully realized labor strikers, capable of violence and peace in equal measure (2). For Hale, the key to finding hope in this dichotomy is through sound because “music always supports the strikers,” especially in the latter half of the
documentary as the protest song “Which Side Are You On?” plays intermittently until the closing credits (Hale 26). According to Hale,

If Kopple cannot keep fiddle tunes and ballads from signifying primitive authenticity, she can push them to convey labor militancy as well. Machine sounds—of the carts and conveyor belts that take coal out and men into mines, the machine that grinds the coal at the face of the seam, and the carts that the strikebreakers drive day after day up to and usually past the picket lines—support mine owners. (26)

By subverting the traditional fiddle tunes associated with the backwoods, Kopple’s choices in disconnecting voice from body and Appalachia from bluegrass works in that it illustrates what sounds are not effectively serving Appalachian storytelling. The sounds of machines become inherently tied to unjustified and uncompensated labor, especially as they mix with the city sounds of New York when the UMW sends protestors from Harlan to mimic the picket line in front of where Duke Power—the company that owns the Brookside Mine—sells stocks (00:27:40). However, the industrial connections Kopple’s use of sounds makes is not simply limited to the labors of men, the women are heavily involved in a picket line raid near the end of the film that involves the firing of guns from the police and the secondary groups the mine has brought in to control the protests. The women are as central to the aural landscape as anything, allowing the exploration of the film in a contemporary context to begin to deconstruct some of the assumptions that traditional media in 1976 would have assumed to be true about Appalachia and Appalachians.

3.4 “Ain’t no healing for a scab”: Deconstructing Visual Legacies

Out of all of the medium’s of story telling, visual mediums such as traditional filmmaking and documentaries, as well as even the increasing role of social media in navigating sociopoliti-
cal and economic lines of influence, have a significant impact on how external audiences come
to know, experience, and ultimately other Appalachian narratives. Goodwin’s trio of “presenti-
ment, perception, and comprehension” is not only a theoretical model, but a reflection of the way
the grotesque has permeated the national imagination (Goodwin 2). Goodwin’s three step plan
for recognizing how the grotesque is constructed and used is captured in the visual legacies of
films like Holy Ghost People and Harlan County, U.S.A. Hale sums up this relationship in the
closing paragraph of her article “Documentary Noise” as she describes the effects of Kopple’s
work in not only the world of documentary-making, but also in disrupting the pattern of overex-
posure produced by other visual mediums of the decade (60’s/70’s). Hale contends:

Not simply a film that stands chronologically between direct cinema and subjective
filmmaking, it is also a film that refuses this choice. It is about Kopple and how her pres-
ence at the events she is filming and recording changes the lives of other people and the
course of the strike, but it is also about how those other people are shaping that history
and her history, too. It is about the local people of Harlan County, the limits of Kopple
and her audience’s ability to know them, and the efforts of both Kopple and those local
people to push through those limits. It is about the problematic nature of insider and out-
sider as cultural and political categories. (30)

The relationship between the visual legacies of Appalachia is complicated, and like Hale articu-
lates about Kopple and Harlan County, U.S.A.’s place in this cinematic history, no single piece
gets it right. However, Holy Ghost People and Harlan County, U.S.A. both offer spaces to try.
Both documentaries disrupt the previously established narrative forms assigned to Appalachia in
order to complicate the vision of Appalachia seen in mainstream media. As a whole, both films
induce the grotesque beyond just images of gaunt faces, spooky houses, and abandoned coal
mines. Instead, both documentaries create an aural landscape that allows for the grotto of the
grotesque to be found in the anonymity of Appalachia voices through their literal disembodi-
ment. By removing voice from the body, whether through the black and white chaotic group
shots found in *Holy Ghost People*, or the aural distancing of voices from bodies in *Harlan Coun-
ty, U.S.A*, the body is free to write its own narrative in the safety of the hidden grotto of Ap-
palachian filmmaking. The people are unknown, but their stories are not unknowable to those
who know how to look for them. The grotesque is the uniting aesthetic factor that allows this
process of recognition, of “presentiment, perception, and comprehension,” to take place (Good-
win 2).
CHAPTER FOUR: Using the Grotesque

4.1 Conclusion: “No heroes, no oracles”

*Walk Till the Dogs Get Mean: Meditations on the Forbidden from Contemporary Appalachian* is one of the rare texts that actively works to embrace the ‘taboo’-ness of grotesque Appalachian narratives. In the 2015 essay collection, Jessie Van Eerden, in an essay of the same title as the anthology, illustrates the discursive intersection between the internal and external choices of being Appalachian in the national sphere. Speaking out from the text, Eerden tells the reader that she “wanted to write (that *self* was still there), that the days could have a shape, and I felt a glimmer of possibility that I could say *I am here* and Here could mean Home and Home could be a fertile place again. Everything became bound up in this movement: *Walk till the dogs get mean then walk a little further*” (25). The Appalachian grotesque works within the same embounded movement. In *Removing Mountains*, Rebecca Scott calls this movement “some kind of environmental and cultural alchemy,” and while she also argues that this “alchemy” allows Appalachia to “maintain its unified regional identity in the national imagination,” the grotto it represents brings power too (44). By embracing Burke’s foundational argument that “the grotesque operates . . . as a primary poetic and symbolic mode and configures ‘the mental equipment (meanings, attitudes, character) by which one handles the significant factors of his time,’” the fatalism of Scott’s homogeneous “alchemy” invites Appalachian peoples into a space of their own without also identifying Appalachia as a place of unique abjectness (2). As Lyndon B. Johnson’s “War on Poverty” declaration illustrates, poverty is a universal experience of industrial, heterosexual capitalism. It is only through “walk[ing] till the dogs get mean” and “then walk[ing] a little further” that the usefulness of the grotesque comes to life when deconstructing the links between poverty.
(and everything it includes) and Appalachian-ness (Eerden 25). For Eerden in “Walk Till the Dogs Get Mean,” “this metaphor is not a neat one. The dogs aren’t neat symbols for things that terrify me and clamp me down; they simply begin to flesh out a living space of interior wreckage; they populate as they cower and rage; they’re all part of me, what I’m capable of in cruelty, in mercy, in love, in hate, in anger, in calm, in creativity; they are shame and failure and fear and loneliness” (25). For Burke, this is the “meanings, attitudes, character . . . by which one handles the significant factors of [their] time,” for Scott this is the “alchemy” that Appalachian scholarship should work to rail against, and for Eerden, this is the dogs nipping at her feet pushing her forward (qtd in Goodwin 2; Scott 44).

I set out with the intention to do two things in this project: to define and exercise a queer reading praxis that is essential to arguing for the definition presented of an Appalachian grotesque, and to orchestrate an understanding of the movement between, and through, Southern gothic narratives to an Appalachian grotesque. Using a variety of different sources, spanning time, space, experience, impact, and medium, I argue that exemplary sources such as Hillbilly Elegy (2016), S-Town (2016), Trampoline (2015), Harlan County, USA (1976), and Holy Ghost People (1967) demonstrate the ways in which the grotesque operates as a theoretical model in Appalachian works. This is not to say that the Appalachian grotesque as a critical framework is applicable to every Appalachian work across space and time, but the Appalachian grotesque as a whole creates a grotto of space in which Appalachian peoples can begin to address questions of the future. In other words, the grotesque affords a freedom to embrace the fatalism assigned to Appalachia in the national sphere without giving in to the stereotypes externally placed on the region. By embracing the taboo-ness of a queer reading praxis, Appalachian narratives can tran-
scend the southern gothic tropes that Bernice M. Murphy outlines in *The Rural Gothic in American Popular Culture* because of the fatalism they entail, not in spite of that fatalism. Appalachian futures are made new by the grotesque precisely because the future is fatal. Deville and Norris posit in *Hunger and Disgust* that

Through doing, freedom is bound to the idea of something rather than nothing, since doing is always doing something. Activity (or hyperactivity, as it increasingly becomes) is inscribed within the productivist ethic of capitalism, where inactivity, or, worse still, idleness, is considered a form of subjugation to unproductiveness, a mode of being which puts the brakes on accelerating growth and so enslaves the rest of us to economic and social decline. In consumer capitalism, of course, the principal way of being active is to consume; and what distinguishes this kind of activity is that it requires an object. According to the *ad hoc* logic of capitalism, the consumption of the object equates to freedom because (a) we are being active and (b) we are exercising choice. The exact nature of the consumer object at the heart of the imperative may be determined by the consumer (this is the choice); but choice there must be (this is the non-choice). (119)

In an Appalachia that is still finding its footing between the grotto of the internal colony and the external fatalism, there is no “non-choice” (119). Reading Appalachian works from a queer perspective is to see the “alchemy” of Appalachia as transmutable and malleable. It means embracing the possibility of an impossible future, and working within the internal/external hybrid tragedy-comedy to still come out on the other side. The Appalachian grotesque is ultimately a call to “walk till the dogs get mean” and find freedom in the sound (Eerden 25).

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48 See page 35 for a complete list of tropes.
4.2 The Future Looks Fatal

While I argue that the grotesque is a transmutable concept, the totality of its effects and impacts have not been explored in this project. As James Goodwin argues in *Modern American Grotesque*: “an identification of a particular image as grotesque is as much a function of the viewer’s response as it is one of image content or structure” (29). I cut out several works throughout the duration of this project because of both the amount of scholarship necessary to include in order to establish a theoretical foundation, as well as a desire to perform the queer reading praxis I establish in a more concise and considered way. Some of the works I considered including in the project, but ultimately decided did not serve my argument at this time, include Ron Rash’s 2011 short story collection *Burning Bright: Short Stories*, which I would have examined in conjunction with Robert Gipe’s *Trampoline*, as well as works like Shelby Lee Adams’ 2003 photography collection *Appalachian Lives*. In the future, I envision expanding this project to look at more contemporary models of Appalachian identity creation using new media texts such as the Queer Appalachia Oral History Project archived by the University of Kentucky, as well as Queer Appalachia’s Instagram-based online community, which exemplifies a “real world” space where the grotesque is embraced and used as a tool for envisioning and creating queer futures. I also argue that value can be found in exercising the grotesque by expanding the canon of Appalachian literature through examining other types of texts, whether literary, visual, or aural, in order to continue to develop and refine the ideas posited in this project.
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