A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE SHORT STORIES OF MARY MURFREE (CHARLES EGBERT CRADDOCK)

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A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE SHORT STORIES OF MARY MURFREE (CHARLES EGBERT CRADDOCK)

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I pause to dedicate

"a poor thing but my own"

to

W. J. O.,

a man of courage

and veteran of many battles fought in the
money marts of the world with the hope that
four children would read a few books.

Introduction

In 1885 America's literary world learned that the author of the much discussed Tennessee Smoky Mountain short stories was not a man named Charles Egbert Craddock but a small, crippled, thirty-five year old woman named Mary Noailles Murfree.[1] Her literary career had begun when Lippincott's Magazine (May, 1874 - July, 1875) had published some short stories under the name R. Emmet Dembry.[2] In May of 1878, her "Dancin' Party at Harrison's Cove" appeared in the Atlantic under the pen name of Charles Egbert Craddock.[3] This story with seven others from the Atlantic appeared in 1884 in a collection of her stories entitled In The Tennessee Mountains, which created a literary sensation and contributed to that year's being called "the climactic year in the history of the short story.[4] An anonymous writer for Outlook has commented:

> Miss Murfree really discovered a new field. She utilized it to the full from the romantic and the descriptive point . . ..[5]

Before Miss Murfree, the only writer to picture this region successfully enough to cause any attention to be

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[1] Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. XIII (New York, Charles Scribners' Sons, 1934), p. 344.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., Charles Egbert Craddock had been the name of a character in one of her early stories.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Outlook (New York, Outlook Company, August 11, 1922), p. 626.

focussed on it at all was Lanier in his Tiger Lilies (1867). However, such critics as Pattee have judged his work as poor in comparison:

> The Great Smoky Mountains and Chilhowee Mountain--familiar names now--form the background, but the author puts no individuality into the landscape, It might be Germany.[6]

Lanier thus wrote of Murfree's country, but he did not depict it convincingly enough to make his story stand beside her work. She was the first one to linger long and penetratingly over the Smoky mountains, and to her really belongs the title of their explorer for literary fiction. One can say of Lanier only that he first sighted the mountains.

It is a little easier to understand Miss Murfree's importance as a regionalist if one can take a hasty look at the panorama of the literary scene preceding her own. Earlier in the nineteenth century Murfree's American predecessors had been the protesting writers of the social order, Whittier and Mrs. Stowe. Bret Harte's stories began to draw much attention in 1867, however, and after Harris brought out his first Uncle Remus stories in 1880, there followed the greatest flood of dialect literature that America has ever known. The years 1883 and 1884 mark the high tide of this movement, and to Georgia more than any other region may be traced the principal cause.

The cause of the Southern tone which American lit-

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[6] F. L. Pattee, A History of American Literature Since 1870 (New York, The Century Company, 1916), p. 298.

erature took on during the eighties lies in the single fact that the South had the literary material. California gold was quickly exhausted, nowhere else were to be found such a variety of picturesque types of humanity as in the South: negroes, crackers, creoles, mountaineers, moonshiners, and all those incongruous elements that had resulted from the great social upheavel of 1861-1865. Georgia in particular offered congenial soil. At one extreme was the mountain cracker, a type which had been made peculiar only by isolation, at the other were such remarkable men as Alexander H. Stephens, Atticus G. Haygood, and Henry W. Grady. As early as 1835 had appeared _Georgia Scenes_ by Augustus B. Longstreet. In the cities and larger towns of Georgia there was an atmosphere of culture unique in the South. This was an element which allowed the state to produce later, not only Richard Malcolm Johnston and Joel Chandler Harris, but poets like Ticknor and Lanier.

How is Mary Murfree related to the Georgia group? She was born at Murfreesboro, Tennessee, in 1850. Murfreesboro was settled by people from Georgia.[7] On both sides of the border of Tennessee at this time were found a certain wild independence and originality and crude democracy. Then, too, the mountains of the Murfree stories lie along the Georgia border.

The members of the Georgia group and the other regionalists had forsaken Europe and waked up to discover

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[7] _Dictionary of American Biography_, Volume XIII, p. 343.

America. These regionalists chose different sections of America, writing down newly discovered lnd, peoples, manners, and dialect. Twain depicted the Mississippi River, and Miller and Bret Harte selected California; Eggleston told of Indiana and Ohio; Cable wrote of the Creoles of New Orleans; Harris chose the romance of the South; the cane-brakes of Arkansas belonged to Miss French; Mary Murfree chose the queer people in the Great Smoky Mountain region of Tennessee.

One can better analyze the stories of Mary Murfree if he mentally places her among these regionalists. It is helpful, too, to know something of her life. It is easier to criticize her stories when one realizes that she was not a native of the region with which she dealt. There is a tradition in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, that the town was named for one of her ancestors. Her ancestors were prominent people of a proud Southern lineage. One must remember that she was used to wealth and traditions and that she knew the Tennessee mountains only as a summer visitor might know them. For fifteen summers she went to the little mountain town of Bearsheba, prototype undoubtedly of the "New Helvetia Springs" of "The Dancin' Party at Harrison's Cove" and other stories. From there she made excursions into wilder regions of the mountains. Throughout the entire discussion, one must continue to remember that Miss Murfree always saw the mountains and their people through the eyes of the city vacationist. Although all of Miss Murfree's short stories are concerned with this region, she veered

away from it later in some of her novels of historical themes and stories for children.

Aside from their superior excellence, Miss Murfree's stories are more outstanding for analysis than her other work because, as Pattee has said in speaking of the regionalists:

> This condition worked itself out in a literary form that is seen now to be the most distinctive product of the period. This era may as truly be called the era of the short story as the Elizabethan period may be called the era of the drama and the early eighteenth century the era of the prose essay.[8]

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[8] Ibid., p. 307.

I Characters

After one has read short story after short story of Murfree's, few distinctly memorable characters remain in one's memory. One does not feel that the writer has touched the depths of the souls of many of her characters. She does not make us feel that many of these mountaineers are much more than picturesque personages, even to her. Only four or five times do her short story characters seem to have made her suffer and feel completely enough to forget her notebook and pencil. Consequently the reader cannot feel deeply about the characters.

It is easy to believe that Miss Murfree was capable of seeing the ideal artist as one who would follow carefully step-by-step a character's development while tracing a great sin or happiness or sorrow. One can believe that she intended to give us more of her characters' inner lives than she did, for she has written her final analysis of all characters at the conclusion of "The 'Harnt' That Walks Chilhowee", when describing Simon Burney:

> The grace of culture is, in its way, a fine thing, but the best that art can do - - the polish of a gentleman--is hardly equal to the best Nature can do in her higher moods.[1]

This quotation indicates that Miss Murfree was conventionally romantic, for Thomas Hardy and other writers have advanced the same philosophy concerning character-,

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[1] Charles Egbert Craddock, In The Tennessee Mountains (New York, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1895), p. 322.

izations drawn from primitive regions. Hardy has said:

> Social environment operates upon character in a way that is oftener than not prejudicial to vigorous portraiture by making the exteriors of men their screen rather than their index, as with untutored mankind. Contrasts are disguised by the crust of conventionality, picturesqueness obliterated, and a subjective system of description necessitated for the differentiation of character. In the one case the author's work has to be taken as to the nerves and muscles of his figures; in the other they can be seen as in ecorche.[2]

Miss Murfree did not follow her conception of characters as carefully as Hardy did. She expended such care on costume, features, habits of carriage and posture, tricks of expression, and individual oddities that she forgot to depict for her readers what nature could really do "in her higher moods."

She came closer to Hardy's idea of vigorous portraiture with her women than she did with her men. The women caught at her sympathy, and held her imagination, and touched her heart more deeply than the men. Being a woman, she could perhaps understand and be more touched by the pitiful loneliness and heart hunger of the women. Hardy could have done little more for Celia Shaw in "The Star In The Valley" and Cynthia Ware in "Drifting Down Lost Creek" than Murfree did for them, but these women are unusual characters in her repertoive. Her women are all alive, but few of them show us their inner hearts and minds as Cynthia does.

She stops at least to pity most of her women, whether

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[2] Thomas Hardy, "Characterization", The Forum (New York, The Forum Publishing Company, Nov., 1888), p. 498.

they be major characters or not. Murfree believes that these "hill" women lead a sorrowful, hard life. She says of Mrs. Hollis in "Taking the Blue Ribbon at the County Fair":

> Spare and gaunt she was, and with many lines in her prematurely old face. Perhaps they told of the hard fight her brave spirit waged against the stern ordering of her life; of the struggles with squalor,--inevitable concomitant of poverty, . . . and to keep together the souls and bodies of those numerous children, with no more efficient assistance than could be wrung from her reluctant husband in the short intervals when he did not sit on the fence. . . [decorations] These simple belongings were the trophies of a gallant battle against unalterable conditions and the dragging, dispiriting clog of her husband's inertia.[3]

Almost all of her female characters are depicted as futile fighters. She says of Mrs. Johns, a typical minor character:

> She was tall and lank, and with such a face as one never sees except in these mountains . . . elongated, sallow, thin, with pathetic, deeply sunken eyes and high cheek bones and so settled an expression of hopeless melancholy that it must be that naught but care and suffering had been her lot; holding out wasted hands to the years as they pass, holding them out always, and always empty.[4]

Celia Shaw and Cynthia Ware stand out noticeably from Murfree's other short story characters. For example, she has given them a more careful ethical analysis than her other mountaineers. Usually we merely glean the ethics of her characters from a few actions and the barest state-

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[3] Charles Egbert Craddock, "Taking the Blue Ribbon at the County Fair", The Mystery of Witch-Face Mountain and Other Stories (New York, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1895), p. 168.

[4] Craddock, In The Tennessee Mountains, p. 217.

ments; in a few cases she philosophies and goes into detail. One can select passages at random that reveal these women to us. The reader learns of Celia Shaw first when Chevis asks if she is pretty:

> "woll, no, she ain't", said Hi Bates, decisively. "She's a pore, no count critter." Then he added, as if he were afraid of being misapprehended, "Not ez thar is any harm in the gal, . . . She looks like she 'haint got no sort'n grit in her. She makes me think o'one o'them slim little slips o'willow everytime nor I sees her. She hain't got long ter live, I reckon", he concluded dismally.[5]

Then the reader is kept in suspense, anxious to see the slip of willow, until Chevis sees the girl himself. His first impression of her is quoted here because the description, except for the concluding sentence, might be that of any of Murfree's women. She has given us little more knowledge of Una of "Una of the Hill Country", Selina Teake of "The Romance of Sunrise Rock", etc. than she here gives of Celia:

> No creature could have been more coarsely habited: a green cotton dress, faded to the faintest hue: rough shoes just visible beneath her skirts, a dappled gray and brown calico sun-bonnet, thrown aside on a moss-green boulder near at hand. But it seemed as if the wild nature about her had been generous to this being toward whom life and fortune had played the niggard. There were opaline lights in her dreamy eyes which one sees nowhere save in sunset clouds that brood above dark hills, the golden sunbeams, all faded from the landscape, had left a perpetual reflection in her bronze hair; there was a subtle affinity between her and other pliant, swaying, graceful young things, waving in the mountain breezes, fed by the rain and the dew.[6]

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5 Ibid., p. 125.

6 Ibid., p. 131.

However, as Murfree goes farther into her story, she begins to tell us more of Celia Shaw. She stresses the fact that Celia dreamed dreams of Chevis and "with a heart full of pitiable unrealities she looked up at the glittering simulacrum of a star on the crag, while he gazed down on the ideal star in the valley." The author tells us plainly that Celia loved Chevis without understanding him at all, without conceiving the "heights of worldly differences that divided them, more insurmountable than precipices and flying chutes of mountain torrents, . . . : she knew nothing of the life he had left, and of its vigorous artificialities and gradations of wealth and estimation."[7]

After Celia hears the men plotting to murder a "no-count" brother-in-law and his tribe, one begins to see her superior mind and character in her musings:

> "I don't see no sense," . . . --"I don't see no sense in shootin' folks down like they war nuthin' better nor bear, nor deer, nor sumthin' wild. I don't see no sense in it. An' I never did see none. . . .
> "They is powerful no count, critters, I know," . . . "They is always a-hangin' round the still and a-gittin' drunk; but I don't see no sense in a-huntin' em down an' a-killin' 'em off. 'Pears ter me like they air better nor the dumb ones."

Then in the next passage Miss Murfree begins to draw the screen from her heroine's soul:

> Her only hope was to outstrip their speed. Her prayer -- this untaught being! --she had no prayer, except perhaps her life, the life she was so ready to imperil. She had no high, cultured sensibilities to sustain her. There was no instinct stirring within her that might have nerved her to save her father's

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[7] Ibid., p. 136.

> or her brother's or a benefactor's life. She held the creatures that she would have died to warn in low estimation, and spoke of them with reprobation and contempt. She had known no religious training, holding up forever the sublimest ideal. The measureless mountain wilds were not more infinite to her than the great mystery. Perhaps, without any philosophy, she stood upon the basis of a common humanity.[8]

In the second and last sentences of the preceding paragraph Miss Murfree is touching the common fundamentals of humanity which a writer like Hardy believes are so essential for greatness. She is able to make the reader follow and suffer with Cynthia Ware, another heroine, every step of the way in her desperate fight to obtain pardon for her maligned lover in "Drifting Down Lost Creek":

> The descent to a lower level was a painful experience to the little mountaineer. She was "sufflicated" by the denser atmosphere of the "valley country", and exhausted by the heat; but when she could think only of her mission she was hopeful, elated, and joyously kept on her thorny way. Sometimes, however, the dogs barked at her, and the men and women she met looked askance upon her, and made her humbly conscious of her disheveled dusty attire, her awkward, hobbling gait, her lean, hungry worn aspect. Occasionally, they asked for her story, and listened incredulously and with sarcastic comments. Once, as she started again down the road, she heard her late interlocter call out to someone at the back of the house, "Becky, take them clothes in off'n the line an' take 'em in quick" and though her physical sufferings were great, she had some tears to shed for sorrow's sake.[9]

In this passage Murfree has begun to show the development and change coming into the inner-character under the stress of a great sorrow and passion. Cynthia Ware was depicted in the beginning of the story as a very proud, attractive, and beloved girl. She was intelligent

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[8] Ibid., p. 150.

[9] Ibid., p. 51.

enough to realize that people along her new way mistrusted her, thought her queer, and yet her problem to solve was so great that she never faltered, even though "she had some tears to shed for sorrow's sake".

Miss Murfree has not reached as high a plane for her male characterizations, as a group, as the one she has obtained for her female. Her outstanding male characterization is Hoxer of "The Crucial Moment". Murfree gives us something of Hoxer's inner soul in lines like the following:

> This was the moment, the signal, fatal, final moment, that the levee contractor had come to meet that placed the period to his own existence . . . He did not recognize as his own a single action hereafter, a single mental impulse . . .. This thing that was not himself--no, never more! --had the theory of alibi in his mind as he stripped off his low-cut shoes and socks, thrusting them into his pockets, leaping from the door, and flying among the dusky shadows, down the glooming grove, and through the gate.[10]

She depicts Hoxer at the beginning of her s tory as an ordinary man, but after he has been bludgeoned mentally until he murders Major Jeffrey, his character undergoes a complete metamorphosis.

A good example of typical surface descriptions of her people is given in "Una of the Hill Country."

> His long brown hair hung in heavy curls to the collar of his butternut jeans, and coat. His eyes were blue and large and finally set; his face was fair and bespoke none of the midday toil at the plow-handles that had tanned the complexion of his compeers, for

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[10] Charles Egbert Craddock, The Raid of the Guerilla and Other Stories (Philadelphia, J. B. Lippincott Company, 1912), p. 83.

> Brent Kayle had little affinity for labor of any sort. He danced with a light firm step, every muscle supply responsive to the strongly marked pulse of the music, and he had a lithe, erect carriage which imparted a certain picturesque effect to his presence, despite his much creased boots, drawn over his trousers to the knee, and his black hat which he wore on the back of his head. The face of his partner had a more subtle appeal. And so light and willowy was her figure as she danced that it suggested a degree of slenderness that bordered on attenuation. Her unbonneted hair of a rich blonde hue had a golden lustre in the sun; her complexion was of an exquisite whiteness and with a delicate flush; the chiseling of her features was peculiarly fine, in clear, sharp lines--she was called "hatchet faced" by her undiscriminating friends. She wore a coarse, flimsy pink muslin dress which showed a repetitious pattern of vague green leaves, and as she flitted lissome and swaying, through the throng, with the wind a-flutter in her full draperies, she might have suggested to a spectator the semblance of a pink flower--of the humbler varieties, perhaps, but still a wild rose is a rose.[11]

Thus she has carefully given her readers the color of the eyes, the hair, the skin, the carriage and the clothing of her characters. She never goes as far as a writer of the caliber of Dickens, who makes the most out of tricks of expression of his characters, even to telling the manner in which their faces twitch while under going a sneeze or cry, etc.

From the Murfree stories one can gain a knowledge of qualities belonging to each sex of the Great Smoky mountaineers; then one can make a summary of the general characteristics of the mountaineers.

The fact that the women are usually depicted as futile fighters has already been mentioned. The majority of the young ones are described as possessing a certain

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[11] Ibid., p. 112.

wistful type of beauty, "transparent" skins and "wild doe" or pathetic expression. The older women are described as bent by hard work, and some are pipe-smokers. All of the men are pictured as dominating their women and as great lovers of liquor. They hate the representatives of the law from the world beyond the hills. "His Unquiet Ghost" deals particularly with this problem. These mountaineer men were usually a hot-headed, fiery lot if angered whether drunk or sober. The fighting scene at the dance in "The Dancin' Party at Harrison's Cove" is an example of angered mountaineers.

There are not many children in Miss Murfree's stories. She calls attention to them sometimes in her groups, but gives them little individual attention except in "A Mountain Storm" and "The Mystery of Old Daddy's Window". However, one must say that she has made wide contact with humanity, for she seems to know and understand the heart of this child. One of her most clever endings is the one in "The Mystery of Old Daddy's Window" where the child has discovered that he is the cause of the ghost rumors. The boy's conclusions are very human:

> "Kase", he argued sagely, "ef them skeered-ter-death grown folks war ter find out ez I war the harnt--I mean ez the harnt war me--ennyhow," he concluded desperately, "I'd ketch it--sure!"[12]

The most frequently mentioned traits of both sexes of

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[12] Charles Egbert Craddock, The Young Mountaineers (New York, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1904), p. 24.

the mountaineers are: (1) cleanliness, (2) hospitality, (3) courtesy, (4) pride, (5) conservatism, (6) ignorance, (7) fear, (8) superstition, (9) religious fervor. A comment that is a half surprise is the one that the mountaineers are clean:

> On rude shelves against the wall were ranged cooking utensils, drinking vessels, etc., all distinguished by that scrupulous cleanliness which is a marked feature of the poor hovels of these mountaineers, and in striking contrast to the poor hovels of the low-landers.[13]

She calls special attention to the hospitality of the mountaineers in "The Mystery of Old Daddy's Window,"[14] but in "Taking the Blue Ribbon at the County Fair" she points out that social etiquette is not very rigid in the mountains.[15] However, in "The Phantoms of the Foot Bridge" she points out that the mountaineers are so courteous that they abstain from any expression of curiosity.[16] Murfree is particularly impressive when describing the pride of these people whom we from the other world count so beneath us:

> A responsive respect might have been induced by the contemplation of their pride, so intense that it recognizes no superior, so inordinate that one is tempted to cry out. Here are the true republicans!

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[13] Craddock, "The Star In The Valley", In The Tennessee Mountains, p. 112.

[14] Craddock, The Young Mountaineers, p. 15.

[15] Craddock, The Mystery of Witch-Face Mountain and Other Stories, p. 16.

[16] Charles Egbert Craddock, The Phantoms of the Foot Bridge and Other Stories (New York, Harpers and Brothers, Publishers, 1895), p. 36.

or, indeed, Here are the only aristocrats![17]

One cannot help feeling the artificiality of our own world as he reads of the reason for the pride of these mountaineers:

> Their standards of morality and respectability could not be questioned; there had never been a man or woman of the humble name who had given the others cause for shame; . . . they neither stole nor choused; they paid as they went, and asked no favors; they took no alms, nay, they gave of their little. As to the artificial distinction of money and education,--what do the ignorant mountaineers care about money and education.[18]

In "Electioneerin' On Big Injun Mounting" she speaks of "the inherent inertia and conservatism of the mountaineers."[19] One does not have to read far before he becomes convinced that the mountaineers are ignorant, are possessed of fear, and are a superstitious lot. She uses the comet which appears in "The Casting Vote" as one of the objects inciting their fear:

> Small wonder that as the evening drew slowly on, and the flaring, assertive, red west gradually paled, . . . till rank after rank, and phalanx after phalanx, all the splendid armament of night held guidon in the midst--small wonder that the ignorant mountaineer looked up at the unaccustomed thing to mark it there, and fear smote his heart.[20]

Clarsie's call to the bird that she might learn her

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17 Craddock, "The Romance of Sunrise Rock" _In The Tennessee Mountains_, p. 186.

18 _Ibid_., p. 197.

19 _Ibid_., p. 174.

20 Craddock, _The Mystery of Witch Face Mountain and Other Stories_, p. 208.

future in "The 'Harnt' That Walks Chilhowee" is one of the glimpses of their sincere belief in the mystic sphere.[21] The comments of the woman to Old Daddy after he sees the ghost in "The Mystery of Old Daddy's Window"[22] are significantly revealing of the superstitions which these people have built around their lives and their mountains. Stories which contain passages disclosing the religious fervor of the mountaineers are "The Dancin' Party at Harrison's Cove" and "The Phantoms of the Foot-Bridge."

The mountaineers are sometimes a philosophical group of people. Indeed if one wanted to really put his finger on Murfree's humour, he could find it in the utterances of these mountaineers. She has given us two or three short stories with the element of tragedy running completely through them, but one cannot find an entire vein of humour in any of her stories. Her humour creeps upon one slyly and covertly in the utterances that fall from the characters' lips. After the fight in "The Dancin' Party at Harrison's Cove", Rick says to Mr. Kenyon:

> "But I'll tell ye one thing, parson," . . . "Ye're a mighty queer preacher, ye air, a sittin' up an lookin' at sinners dance an then gittin' in a fight that don't consarn ye,--ye're a mighty queer preacher! Ye ought ter be in my gang, that's whar ye ought ter be", he exclaimed with a guffaw, as he put his foot in the stirrup; "Ye've got a damned deal too much grit fur a preacher. But I ain't forgot Shiloh yit, an' I don't mean ter nuther."[23]

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21 Craddock, In The Tennessee Mountains, p. 308.

22 Craddock, The Young Mountaineers, p. 3.

23 Craddock, In The Tennessee Mountains, p. 244.

Other notably humourous speeches are Medory's mother's reflections at the beginning of "Who Crosses Storm Mountain?"[24] The man's speech concerning the foot-bridge in "The Phantoms of the Foot-Bridge" is not funny to him but it is to Murfree's readers. After Vander had supposedly committed murder in "Drifting Down Lost Creek", Mrs. Ware made farcical remarks to her daughter.[25]

One respects Miss Murfree's power of intellect when he begins to clearly perceive how she has been clever enough to give us pictures of mountaineers and yet slyly depict the universality of some human emotions and actions. In "The Dancin' Party at Harrison's Cove," she comments:

> Human nature is the same everywhere, and the Wilkin's settlement is a microcosm. The Metropolitan centres, stripped of the civilization of wealth, fashion and culture, would present only the bare skeleton of humanity outlined in Mrs. John's talk of Harrison's cove, the Wilkin's settlement, the enmities and scandals and sorrows and misfortunes of the mountain ridge. As the absurd resemblance developed, Mrs. Darley could not forbear a smile.

She continues later in the same story:

> Mr. Harrison had four marriageable daughters, and had arrived at the conclusion that something must be done for the girls; for strange as it may seem, the prudant father exists even among the "mounting folks." Men there realize the importance of providing suitable homes for their daughters as men do elsewhere, and the eligible youth is as highly esteemed in those wilds as is the much scarcer animal at a fashionable watering-place.[26]

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[24] Craddock, The Raid of the Guerilla and Other Stories, p. 10.

[25] Craddock, The Phantoms of the Foot-Bridge and Other Stories, p. 4.

[26] Craddock, In The Tennessee Mountains, pp. 223, 226.

Of course she has made the dialect of these mountaineers part of their characters and personality. She was not content to give us mere dialect, but has sometimes commented on it as part of the character as in her description of Mrs. Johns:

> She wore a shabby, faded calico, and spoke with the peculiar expressionless drawl of the mountaineer.[27]

Miss Murfree has made her dialect individual. There is probably as much of herself in the curious forms and perversions as there is of the Tennessee Mountaineers. However, she has used her dialect so convincingly and effectively that critics believe she has made it part of her style. Therefore, I shall give closer attention to her dialect in Section V, Style.

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[27] Ibid., p. 217.

II Plots

Murfree's ornate descriptions and very human touch charm one until he forgets the framework of her plots and often does not realize until the climax, if then, that her plots have been too easy in their unfolding. One cannot blame her for not finding more complication of plot in the scanty materials of the lives of these mountain people in their scattered communities. She would have tended to treat her subject matter unnaturally had she done so. In fact one must feel that she has been rather a magician to concoct some of her weightier, tangled, and unusual plots.

Her faults in plot construction lie, rather, in some weak denouements and in the fact that she has sometimes unnecessarily lingered over the smaller details of her stories. In making the last criticism one must remember that life in these Great Smoky hills and coves is slow, but even the mountaineers do not linger over some of the events of their lives in the same manner in which this writer does. Had she paused over events of importance or to trace the growth of a character, she would merely have added to her technique, but Murfree caught and dwelt upon only the picturesque moments and people. Like Harte, a regionalist whom in many ways she resembled, she lacked the ability to trace the growth of character or the slow transforming power of a passion or an ideal or

a sin.[1]

There is a time and place for slowness that makes it understandable and even adds to the beauty of stories of the type of "Drifting Down Lost Creek," yet lethargy is a deadening influence in "A Victor at Chungke," and "Electioneerin' on Big Injun Mounting," " A Mountain Storm" is an outstanding example of a slight plot structure. She has relied upon very little but the different stages of a mountain storm to hold the reader's interest.

This regionalist's short-story plots may be classified in four groups according to dominant interest: (1) regular mountaineer life, (2) mingling of mountaineer life and the more civilized world, (3) supernatural, (4) tragic.

A plot that belongs in the first class and therefore may be called a typical Murfree story is "Taking the Blue Ribbon at the County Fair;" her usual story has no greater framework than this one. Jacob Brice has wanted Cynthia Hollis to marry him. She evades him for sometime; then Brice and Cynthia's father tie for the Kildeer county fair "Best Equestrian" prize. When she learns that the two would-be prize-winners must race again, Cynthia leaves the fair with Brice and marries him. Many scattered conversations reveal Cynthia loved her "no-count" father, and she had keenly perceived that the prize was the greatest thing in life to him.

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[1] F. L. Pattee, A History of American Literature Since 1870 (New York, The Century Company, 1916), p. 315.

One revealing paragraph gives the key to Cynthia's father, the man who caused her sacrificial act:

> His inner life--does it seem hard to realize that in that uncouth personality concentred the complex, incomprehensible, ever-shifting emotions of that inner life, which, after all, is so much stronger, and deeper, and broader than the material? Here too, beat the hot heart of humanity. . . . He had his hopes, his pain . . . his single aspiration--to take the premium offered by the directors of the Kildeer County Fair for the best equestrian.[2]

The preceding quotation is a good example of Murfree's philosophical sentences which give meaning to the unwinding of the plot. These sentences have given us a glimpse of the soul of Cynthia's father. The author has let us see in occasional conversations that Cynthia cares little for Jacob Brice. Yet she marries Jacob that her father may be left the uncontested winner. The conclusion is subtle and typically Murfree in that it markedly calls attention to the futility and waste of woman's tragic sacrifice:

> They saw Cynthia no more until late in the autumn when she came, without a word of self-justification or apology for her conduct, to lend her mother a helping hand in spinning and weaving her little brother's and sisters' clothes. And gradually the eclat attendant upon her nuptials was forgotten, except that Mrs. Hollis now and then remarks that she "dunno how we could hev bore up again Cynthy's a-runnin' away like she done, ef it hadn't a-been fur that thar saddle an' bridle an' takin' the blue ribbon at the County Fair."[3]

The reader sees clearly from this conclusion that

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[2] Charles Egbert Craddock, "Taking The Blue Ribbon At The County Fair", _The Mystery of Witch-Face Mountain and Other Stories_ (Houghton, Mifflin and Company,1895), p. 193.

[3] _Ibid._, p. 169.

Cynthia knew her action would never be understood, for "She came without a word of self-justification or apology for her conduct," etc. Mrs. Hollis commented upon the marriage; however the father who inspired it seemed unaware. Many of Murfree's plot climaxes are the women's heroic deeds, deeds unnoticed by the men.

The typical Murfree short story plots have no more to them than this "Taking the Blue Ribbon at the County Fair" plot. Some are built around incidents involving the supernatural. The supernatural elements make the stories even more unusual than their Great Smoky setting would naturally make them. "The Mystery of Old Daddy's Window," "The 'Harnt' That Walks Chilhowee," "The Mystery of Witch Face Mountain," "The Phantoms of the Foot-Bridge," "His Unquiet Ghost," and "The Phantom of Bogue Holauba" are stories with hyper-physical elements.

"Una of the Hill Country" is an example of Murfree's originality in plot construction. One would place it in group two of Murfree's plot types. Brent Kayle is a lazy mountaineer whose only accomplishment is the imitation of the birds and animals in the surrounding countryside. Valeria, a girl much above Brent in intelligence and physical attractiveness, is living with her grandparents. The grandparents are troubled concerning the probable loss of their farm. Brent receives inspiration from a ventriloquist at a county fair. He tells Valeria that he has so mastured ventriloquism that he can obtain a circus job throwing his voice into animal cages. She marries him,

believing that he can make enough money to aid her people. The circus officials then tell him that ventriloquistic stunts are far too common and that, to make matters worse, he has the dialect of the mountaineers. However, because of her fragile, uncivilized beauty, the circus officials immediately want to use Valeria as "the girl in the lion's den." Brent is too lazy to take lessons in mastering vowels and consonants but demands that his wife be billed as the wife of the famous ventriloquist. A typical Murfree woman martyr, she proceeds to earn their living and also send home money to her grandparents. This story has both a wistful and a humorous appeal. The effect of the depicted events on the life of this mountaineer girl are sad, but conversations between Brent and the circus people concerning Brent's mountaineer dialect are humorous. It does not seem incongruous to tell of a ventriloquist making animals speak our language, yet it is really no more strange than having lions talk in a mountaineer's dialect. However, this author realizes that we would simply not credit a circus act where the animals spoke their pageant preludes with mountaineer's dialect. Thus one has the feeling that Miss Murfree is winking here at the ways of the world. She is never plainly the humorist; her mountaineers' comic remarks and sly, subtle humour of this Una-of-the-Hill-Country type supply the only types of lighter veins running through her stories. This plot is handled in an original manner because the author has cleverly and convincingly blended the characters and

movements of true mountaineer people with the circus life and characters.

A typical story woven around "harnts" (type three of previous classification) is "His Unquiet Ghost." In this story several mountaineers tell a group of suspicious "revenuers" that they have a covered corpse and not the suspected whiskey in the rear of their wagon. The spokesman envies Walter Wyatt, who is riding beside him, and jestingly gives Walter's name as the corpse's. News of Walter's passing then spreads to neighboring homes and Walter desires to hear what his old gang will say concerning his demise. He hides behind the shuttered window of an old barn, the gang's usual meeting place. The wind blows the shutter and the horrified assembly see Walter's "ghost", only to run screaming away from it. They had been saying very uncomplimentary things about him. There is a clever build-up of suspense here. The mountaineers have far too much fear of the "other world" to make any sort of investigation as one from more civilized regions would have done. In the meantime the moonshiners, still fearful of the revenuers, have dug a grave, supposedly Wyatt's. Murfree gives the reader a spooky, highly intensified description of Wyatt's girl weeping and wailing by Walter's grave. She is petrified when he appears in the flesh, but after a frightened, tearful scene she touches him and convinces herself that he is alive. Moreover, she has become so emotionalized, in a camp-meeting manner, that she marries Wyatt instead of his rival, a more steady

and more successful man. Murfree concludes by telling us that Walt became, in time, a much more dependable, harder working man. She never directly moralizes, but we are left to conclude that the remarks of his companions had not been in vain. She does not often explain her ghosts rationally to the mountaineers; however she seldom fails to "explain" the "harnt" to the reader. In "Old Daddy's Window" the small boy is the only mountaineer to learn the explanation of the mysterious shadow, but the author explains it so clearly to the reader that the fear of the mountaineers seems very ignorant and almost farcical.

Murfree has left us no humorous short story plots. She has given us only humorous touches in occasional speeches of the mountaineers.

Tragedy is a more marked element with her than humour. Although her stories contain many pathetic characters, one does not find a tragic vein running completely through many of them. Her three short stories of greatest tragedy are: "The Star In The Valley", "Drifting Down Lost Creek," and "The Crucial Moment."

The plot of "Drifting Down Lost Creek" is artistic because the incidents are treated with such delicate beauty. She has made this a more complicated framework than her usual one. She has gone more carefully into the inner self of her characters, expecially Cynthia. Cynthia Ware compells one to laugh and cry a little with her as she makes her long, pathetic journeys. This story is one of her more tragic ones. Evander Price's idiot brother kills a man in Evander's

forge shop. Evander is believed guilty. Although two men have courted Cynthia Ware, she truly loves Evander. Evander and Cynthia have made love to one another, but they have come to no definite understanding when Evander is imprisoned for murder.

Cynthia's mother has always complained that Evander is too hot-headed. Desiring to silence her mother, Cynthia has told Mrs. Ware, before the trouble, that she didn't intend to marry anyway. After Evander has been placed in jail, she goes to pitiful ends to obtain a pardon for him, knowing that his brother is to blame. Ignorant as she is, she realizes that her only hope is to place her case in the hands of lawyers and more educated people. They take advantage of her ignorance and treat her in an ignoble, procrastinating fashion. She walks endless miles, harming her health and beauty, but finally is successful in getting attention directed to Evander's case. She finds the governor of the state himself speaking to a crowd of people and succeeds in giving him a well-thumbed petition. Evander is freed, but since the lax officials never tell him who is responsible, he sees no reason for returning. He decided "his dad had done it, or it mought hev been giv' him fur good conduc' an' sech."[4]

A man who has been in the penitentiary for horse-thieving returns to tell that Evander was freed and how he

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[4] Charles Egbert Craddock, "Drifting Down Lost Creek", In The Tennessee Mountains (New York, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1895), p. 71.

had learned so much as a blacksmith in the penitentiary forge that he has gone into business for himself outside the mountains. Cynthia becomes an expert weaver of cloth, devoting her life to helping her neighbors. After a number of years Evander returns to the mountains, speaking of his "school-l'arned" wife; he and Cynthia have the following conversation:

> --"in them days, Cynthy, ye an' me had a right smart notion of keeping company tergether." He did not notice how pale she was and that there was often a slight spasmodic contraction of her features. She was busy with her spinning-wheel, as she placidly replied, "Yes-though I alsays 'lowed ez I counted on livin' single."[5]

Thus Murfree concludes another story with a woman's realization that she has made a futile sacrifice. Her women are always proud in their sorrow.

This writer has also given us other types of pathetic endings, such as news of the hero's death in "The Lost Guidon". Occasionally she uses a small animal or child for a sort of "Jack-in-the-box" conclusion. In "The Curcial Moment" Hoxer's little dog has been following him during Hoxer's entire attempt to escape the law. Men are pursuing him as a murderer. He had loved the little dog, but now he hates it. When he realizes that this barking dog has left foot prints all the way and may stand as a very symbol of his guilt, he contemplates drowning the dog, thus silencing it. The man finally commits suicide

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[5] Ibid., p. 78.

when he sees that he is hopelessly trapped. The little dog stands on the river bank wagging its tail and crying for its master. The small animal then runs to the cabin which both had occupied and searches frantically for any sign of life. Paradoxically, the last picture Murfree leaves us is the little dog returned to the river bank and crying for the master who died hating him.

Murfree's treatment of the beginning and treatment of the end of her stories are two of her strong points.

Some of her beginnings are effective because she points out a particularly lovely setting; her other stories start with conversations. Her conclusions fall into three classes: (1) scenic as in "The Last Guidon" (2) philosophical remark of a character or the writer, as in "Old Daddy's Window" (3) closing picture of an animal or child, as in "The Crucial Moment".

As a whole one may conclude, her plot structures are slight, but within the slight structure the reader finds effective plot technique.

III Setting

The settings in the short stories of Mary Murfree are so powerful and vivid that they dominate the characters and their actions and thoughts. Few writers have made settings so keenly felt. The fact that her settings are the outstanding points of her work did much at first to bring her her fame, and critics believe that the answer to why her stories were short lived may also be found, for the most part, in her excessive attention to scenery.[1]

She saw the Great Smoky mountains of Tennessee with the picture sense of an artist, loving them for their wildness, loveliness, cones, gaps, and summer moods with shadows and light. However, she always observed her mountains and their people through the eyes of the city vacationist and never learned to regard them with the simplicity of viewpoint that the mountaineers did. Her wealth of coloring and lavish use of adjectives make one think of Ruskin. However, she overuses what he terms the "pathetic fallacy." Ruskin has written of the "pathetic fallacy:"

> . . . false appearances, when we are under the influence of emotion, or contemplative fancy; false appearances, I say, as being entirely unconnected with any real power or character in the object, and only imputed to it by us.[2]

Ruskin states the time manner and place that a writer

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[1]See conclusion for further discussion.

[2]John Ruskin, "The Pathetic Fallacy", Modern Painters Vol. III, Ch. 12 (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1918), p. 116.

may feel justified in using certain expressions, but he continues in the same essay:

> But the moment the mind of the speaker becomes cold, that moment every such expression becomes untrue, as being for ever untrue in the external facts. And there is no greater baseness in literature than the habit of using these metaphorical expressions in cool blood. An inspired writer, in full impetuosity of passion, may speak wisely and truly of "raging waves of the sea foaming out their own shame", but it is only the basest writer who cannot speak of the sea without talking of "raging waves". . . and it is one of the signs of the highest power in a writer to check all such habits of thought, and to keep his eyes fixed firmly on the pure fact, out of which if any feeling comes to him or his reader, he knows it must be a true one.[3]

The following word picture, with all details intensified is characteristic of many more lavish Ruskin-like pictures:

> A subtile amethystine mist had gradually overlaid the slopes of the T'Other mounting, mellowing the brilliant tints of the variegated foliage to a delicious hazy sheen of mosaics; but about the base the air seemed dun-colored, though transparent; seen through it, over the red of the crowded trees was but a sombre sort of magnificence, and the great masses of gray rocks, jutting out among them here and there, wore a darkly frowning aspect. Along the summit was a blaze of scarlet and gold in the full glory of the sunshine; the topmost cliffs caught its rays, and gave them back in unexpected gleams of green or grayish-yellow, as of mosses, or vines, or huckle-berry bushes, nourished in the heart of the deep fissures.[4]

After one reads hundreds of pages filled with descriptions very like the preceding one, he becomes convinced that although the author distinctly possesses intensity of vision and an undoubted knowledge of the country, her vision must have been through rose-colored glasses. She has overpainted

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[3]Ibid., p. 122.

[4]Charles Egbert Craddock, "Over On The T'Other Mounting", In The Tennessee Mountains (New York, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1884), p. 258.

her settings until they overpower the simple lives of the characters.

One gleans from the foregoing quotation that Miss Murfree never saw anything so commonplace as a light fog. For her even a mist must have distinct coloring, so she says that it was "subtile amethystine". Nothing was too small for her to color. In this one paragraph she uses "amethystine," "duncolored," "gray," "scarlet," "gold," "green," and "grayish-yellow." In addition the words "tints," "mosaics," "sombre," "blaze," and "gleams" make one think of warm colors. She always uses the contrast of heights and depths of coloring; one reads of "gray rocks" and "blaze of scarlet" in the same paragraph. Red and yellow are her favorite colors, and they are frequently used together; her moons and suns are always intensified reds or yellows.

Laura Thornborough has spent a life-time studying this region and, in her book The Great Smoky Mountains, convinces one that this region is more blessed with a constant profusion of flowers and trees than most sections of the United States. However, in her careful description of this locality, "The Naturalist's Paradise,"[5] she has left no "Arabian Night" impression. One becomes convinced that Murfree gave it a far too oriental cast; she used every possibility of making us intensely feel her settings.

Murfree makes too luxuriant use of details like the

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[5] Laura Thornborough, The Great Smoky Mountains (New York, Thomas Crowell Company, 1937), p. 19.

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following: (1) "rocks wore a darkly frowning aspect", (2) "trees cried and groaned aloud", [6] (3) "dove-tinted tissues in which the night seemed enveloped", [7] (4) "pink and white bells of the azalea rang out melodies of welcome".[8] She went carefully into all details of her settings. However the mountains were a passion to her. She could say with Ruskin, "mountains are the beginning and the end of all natural scenery."[9] The peak that dominates "Drifting Down Lost Creek" is a good example of her mountain descriptions.

> Even when the Cumberland spurs, to the east, are gaunt and bare in the wintry wind, their delicious forests denuded, their crags unveiled and grimly beetling . . . (Pine Mountain) its clifty heights are hidden, its chasms and abysses lurk unseen . . . the dark, austere line of its summit limits the horizon.[10]

After reading such a description one should try to form a true mental picture of the Great Smoky Mountains so that he could compare it with the one Murfree gives her readers. The Eastern mountains of the United States display their full height, rising from approximately sea-level,

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[6] Charles Egbert Craddock, "The Mystery of Witch-face Mountain", The Mystery of Witch-Face Mountain and Other stories (New York, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1895), p. 145.

[7] Craddock, "The Casting Vote", Ibid,, p. 204.

[8] Craddock, "The 'Harnt' That Walks Chilhowee", In The Tennessee Mountains, p. 283.

[9] John Ruskin, "The Mountain Story", Selections From The Works of John Ruskin (New York, Houghton, Mifflin and company, 1908), p. 137.

[10] Charles Egbert Craddock, "Drifting Down Lost Creek", In The Tennessee Mountains, p. 1.

while the western mountains start from a plateau nearly a mile high.[11] One of the Great Smoky Mountains a mile high is thus equivalent to a two mile peak in the west. However, in comparison to all mountains of the United States and the world these mountains are only moderate in height.[12] Yet they seem to soar like the Canadian Rockies in these stories.

One reads of "stupendous ranges" in "A Victor at Chungke"[13] Such words as "abysses", "austere", "limits", and "stupendous" (preceding quotation) all give the reader an exaggerated idea of the height of these mountains.

Mountains always dominate the settings, which in turn dominate her stories. However, she was a careful observer, too, of other important details of her surroundings. She does much with the moods of nature. She has given us a wonderful description of a mountain storm, weaving its de-

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[11] The Encyclopedia Americana, (New York, Americana Corporation, 1937), Volume 27, p. 306.

[12] The New International Encyclopoedia, (New York, Dodd, Mead, & Company, 1916), p. 97 reads: The eastern most of Tennessee is a belt with a maximum width of 10 to 15 miles, the Appalachian region. It is formed by the Great Smoky and Onaka Mountains, whose main ridges average 5000 feet in elevation and places exceed 6000 feet.

[13] Charles Egbert Craddock, "A Victor at Chungke", The Frontiersman (New York, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1904), p. 104.

tailed stages carefully throughout an entire story.[14] In almost every story she sees many stars and plays with changes and stages of her suns and moons. She has given a careful description of a comet in "The Casting Vote".

Fires seem to fascinate her, and she has sought out the most closely hidden little flowers, mosses, bushes, trees, and streams. She particularly likes to make groups of people part of her setting; the opening of "Way Down In Lonesome Cove" is the best example. One may read detailed description of mountain structure in "Old Daddy's Window".[15] Although one can say that she includes the fine points in all her descriptions, he notices details especially in her interiors:

> A hickory fire dispensed alike warmth and light. The musical whir of a spinning-wheel . . . From the rafters depended numberless strings of bright red pepper-pods and ears of pop-corn; hanks of woolen and cotton yarn; bunches of medicinal herbs; brown gourds and little bags of seeds. On rude shelves . . . were ranged cooking utensils, . . . all distinguished by that scrupulous cleanliness which is a marked feature of the poor hovels . . . The rush-bottomed chairs, . . . before the rough, ill-adjusted stoves which did duty as hearth, . . .: various members of the family were humbly seated on sundry inverted domestic articles, such as wash-tubs, and splint-baskets made of white oak.[16]

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[14] Charles Egbert Craddock, "A Mountain Storm", The Young Mountaineers, (Boston, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1897), p. 66.

[15] Craddock, "Old Daddy's Window", The Young Mountaineers, p. 1.

[16] Craddock, "Star In The Valley", In The Tennessee Mountains, p. 137.

This is no ordinary interior description that Miss Murfree has given us, for in one paragraph she has not only cited fifteen typical mountaineer objects and several mountaineer characteristics, but has mentioned the objects which she most often associates with her characters in their movements in the stories. The women are often spinning or stringing peppers; the men are almost always talking in groups.

In many of her stories, especially her early ones, she used place names for part of the title. Their usage shows that the author herself considered the setting the most outstanding part of the stories. The following titles are significant: "The Mystery of Witch-Face Mountain", "Drifting Down Lost Creek", "Electioneerin' on Big Injun Mountaing", "The Dancin' Party at Harrison's Cove", "The Panther of Jolton's Ridge", "Christmas Day on Old Windy Mountain", "The Romance of Sunrise Rock", "A Victor at Chungke", "Who Crosses Storm Mountain?" and "The Moonshiners at Hoho-Hebee Falls".

There is scarcely a story that does not show the influence of some part of the setting upon one or more of the characters' lives.

The writer comments in "Electioneerin' on Big Injun Mounting", "the idea of a constituency might have seemed incogruous enough with these rugged wilds."[17] Thus she infers that their locality in itself is enough to make

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[17] Craddock, "Electioneerin' On Big Injun Mounting", <u>In The Tennessee Mountains</u>, p. 155.

these mountaineers unattentive to an event so common to the other world as an election.

Miss Murfree believes that the melancholy of the mountaineers is attributable to the region in which they live. She writes of Budd Wray:

> There was an expression of settled melancholy on his face very usual with these mountaineers, reflected, perhaps, from the indefinable tinge of sadness that rests upon the Alleghany wilds, that hovers about the purpling mountain-tops, that sounds in the voice of the singing waters.[18]

The character whose life is most influenced, twisted and turned by nature, is Cynthia Ware of "Drifting Down Lost Creek". The creek itself is used many times as a symbol of her life.[19] However, at the conclusion of vivid description of the mountains, the writer likens the western range to a barrier and comments:

> It seemed to Cynthia Ware that nothing which went beyond this barrier ever came back again.[20]

In order to make the mountains seem even more important the artist emphasizes that the creek for which the story was named and which is compared to the heroine's life wanders away many miles between the ranges, "suddenly sinks into the earth, tunnels an unknown channel beneath the mountain, and is never seen again.[21] These comments prepare the way for

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18 Craddock, "Old Sledge at the Settlement", In The Tennessee Mountains, p. 90.

19 For further discussion of this point see section on figures of speech in IV Style.

20 Craddock, "Drifting Down Lost Creek", In The Tennessee Mountains, p. 1.

21 Ibid, p. 2.

Cynthia's conclusion, at the end of the story, that it was easy for her superior mountaineer lover Evander to leave his love for her in the mountains. She decided that his love looked like a very little thing beside the Great Smokies that had for so many years imprisoned him from all he wanted in the world beyond.

A star inspires and influences Celia Shaw in "The Star In The Valley". A comet in "The Casting Vote" is influential in changing lives.

Miss Murfree has studied and commented on the superstitions attached to the Great Smokies. A Mountaineer tells John Cleaver in "The Romance of Sunrise Rock" that Sunrise Rock was painted by the Indians who were in league with the devil and allowed them to stand on air at this height and paint.[22]

The author has tried to point out, too, and underlying spiritual significance to parts of her settings. She contrasts the beauty and strangeness of Sunrise Rock with the small sad graveyard of the mountaineers and reflects through the lips of John Cleaver:

> "Nowhere", he thought, "was the mystery of life and death so gloomily suggested."[23]

Often Miss Murfree uses the device of contrast as part of her setting technique. She likes to contrast

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[22] Ibid., p. 182.

[23] Ibid., p. 183.

some phases of civilization with the atmosphere of the mountaineers. In "The Phantoms of the Foot-Bridge" she calls the great hotel "so incongruous to the wilderness that it seemed even now some mere figment of the brain."[24] She refers several times throughout the story to the difference between the world represented by this great hotel and the region on the edge of which the hotel rests.

Chevis, in "The Star In The Valley", often contrasts in his own mind the more refined and educated world from which he came with the life about him.[25] He goes even farther and reflects upon the "life in this wilderness, more complicated that one could readily believe, looking upon the changeless face of the wide, unpopulated expanse of mountain ranges stretching so far beneath the infinite sky".[26] Thus he marks the difference in the complicated life of the mountaineers and the sameness in the structure of the mountain setting which surrounds them.

She stresses the sharp contrast in the two important parallel mountain ranges in "Over On The T'Other Mounting". The T'Other Mounting tops the highest range while its "humble neighbor" is Old Rocky-Top.[27]

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24 Charles Egbert Craddock, The Phantoms of the Foot-Bridge and Other Stories, (New York, Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1895), p. 38.

25 Craddock, In The Tennessee Mountains, p. 134.

26 Ibid.

27 Craddock, In The Tennessee Mountains, p. 247.

If a reader is familiar with the works of Thomas Hardy, it is impossible not to think of that great writer when he reads such stories as Murfree's "The Mystery of Witch-Face Mountain", "Electioneerin' on Big Injun Mounting", "Drifting Down Lost Creek", "The Dancin' Party at Harrison's Dove", and "The Romance of Sunrise Rock". Nature seems to take cognizance of human tragedy in stories like "Way Down in Lonesome Cove" and "Drifting Down Lost Creek". In stories of the type of "The Mystery of Witch-Face Mountain" the nature element is so strong that the characters are dwarfed even as human beings in comparison; the central character seems always to be the great witch-face on the mountain. There is a symbolic domination of the mountain in this story comparable to that of Egdon Heath in Hardy's "The Return of The Native".

Pattee writes in his American Literature Since 1870:

> It reminds one of Hardy, and then one remembers that when "The Dancin' Party at Harrison's Cove" appeared in the Atlantic, The Return of the Native had for three months been running as a serial in Harper's Monthly, and that, somewhat later, In the Stranger People's Country and Wessex Falls ran for months parallel in the same magazine.[28]

The striking difference between the two artists lies in the fact that the power of Hardy's settings is sustained throughout his delineation, while Murfree's settings are given to us only in brilliant sketches throughout each story. Her power of denoting a setting was the picturing

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[28] F. L. Pattee, A History of American Literature Since 1870, (New York, The Century Company, 1916), p. 311.

power, and each story possesses so many pictures that it gives a scattered effect, while Hardy was able to make Egdon Heath felt constantly as a powerful influence throughout an entire novel, The Return of the Native.

In taking the descriptions from The Return of the Native and "The Mystery of Witch-Face Mountain", one is comparing a short story to a novel, yet one can contrast some elements of Hardy's setting technique with Murfree's by reading the opening description of the setting of each story. "The Mystery of Witch-Face Mountain" begins:

> The beetling crags that hang here and there above the gorge hold in their rugged rock sculpture no facial similitudes, no suggestions. The jagged outlines of shelving bluffs delineate no gigantic profile against the sky beyond. One might seek far and near, and scan the vast slope with alert and expectant gaze, and view naught of the semblance that from time immemorial has given the mountain its name. Yet the imagination needs but scant aid when suddenly the elusive simulacrum is revealed to the eye. In a certain slant of the durnal light, even on bright nights at the full of the moon, . . . a gigantic, peaked, sinister face is limned on the bare, sandy slope, so definite, with such fixity of lineament, that one is amazed that the perception of it came no earlier, and is startled when it disappears.[29]

In the third paragraph of The Return of the Native, Hardy says:

> In fact, precisely at this transitional point of its nightly roll into darkness the great and particular glory of the Egdon waste began, and nobody could be said to understand the heath who had not been there at such a time. It could best be felt when it could not clearly be seen, its complete effect and explanation lying in this and the succeeding hours before the next dawn; then, and only then, did it tell its true tale. The spot was, in-

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[29] Craddock, The Mystery of Witch-Face Mountain and Other Stories, p. 1.

> deed, a near relation of night, and when night showed itself an apparent tendency to gravitate together could be perceived in its shades and the scene. The sombre stretch of rounds and hollows seemed to rise and meet the evening gloom in pure sympathy, the heath exhaling darkness as rapidly as the heavens precipitated it . . . The place became full of a watchful intentness now: for when other things sank brooding to sleep the heath appeared slowly to awake and listen. Every night its Titanic form seemed to await something; but it had waited thus, unmoved, during so many centuries, through the crises of so many things, that it could only be imagined to await one last crises--the final overthrow.[30]

Although there is a similarity in the way these two writers have presented the phenomena of nature which dominate their stories, one can decide quickly that Hardy's presentation is far more the artistic of the two. Murfree is concerned with "sky," "crags," "rocks," "sandy slopes," all definite externals, while one can point to little "surface" dwelling in Hardy's description. He has caught at the very inner soul of man with such statements as, "for when other things sank brooding to sleep the heath appeared slowly to awake and listen". The end is a most artistic climax that fascinates the reader and entices him on. Murfree often makes some section of her setting dominate her story or seem much more important than any of the characters, but she never succeeds in making the consistent compelling force of nature's phenomena that Hardy does of such settings as Egdon Heath.

Miss Murfree has used a description of the surround-

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[30] Thomas Hardy, The Return of the Native (New York, Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1912), p. 2.

ing country as a beginning for almost all of her stories. She has given more full, detailed scenery at the beginnings of her stories, but she has left us a few very beautiful ones as a finale to some of her tales. In writing of Ethelinda and her almost-stranger soldier boy who had promised to return but who was killed, she has written one of her most tender, sympathetic conclusions. It is particularly artistic to the reader who has followed the unexpected manner in which they met and the short time they had together during "red leaves" time.[31]

> Nevertheless, for many years the flare of the first red leaves in the cleft among the pines on the eastern slope of Tanglefoot Cove brought to Ethelinda's mind the gay flutes of the guidon and in certain sonorous blasts of the mountain wind she could hear martial echoes of the trumpets of the guerilla.

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[31] Charles Egbert Craddock, "Who Crosses Storm Mountain?" The Raid of the Guerilla and Other Stories (Philadelphia, J. B. Lippincott Company, 1912), p. 51.

IV Style

Miss Murfree's work is strong in the fact that her style is peculiarly her own. The newspapers of the time had rendered the age almost styleless, but she was able to be individual to the extent that one may identify any page of her writings by the style alone. One cannot say that it is always admirable, for there is a floridness about it and a fondness for stately epithet. Such sentences as the following are typical of her floridness.

> At last she rose and sat by the rude window, looking out through the chestnut leaves . . ., and at the shimmering, translucent, pearly mists that filled the intermediate valleys. All the air was dew and incense; so subtle and penetrating, that it seemed as if some invigorating infusion were thrilling along her veins, there floated upward, too, the warm fragrance of the clover, and every breath of the gentle wind brought from over the stream a thousand blended, undistinguishable perfumes of the deep forests beyond. The moon's idealizing glamour had left no trace of the uncouthness . . ., might have seemed a stupendous alto rilievo in silver repousse.[1]

Such word combinations as "silver repousse" and "shimmering, translucent, pearly" are examples of her ornateness of style. Such phrases as "undistinguishable perfumes" and "idealizing glamour" show dignified use of epithet. Her epithets stand out as particularly stately when compared with those of another regionalist writer, Harte; he used rougher, homelier adjectives:

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[1] Charles Egbert Craddock, "The 'Harnt' That Walks Chilhowee", In The Tennessee Mountains (New York, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1895), p. 305.

On the ragged trunk of an enormous pine hung a few tufts of gray hair caught from a passing frizzly, but in a strange juxtaposition at its foot lay an empty bottle of incomparable bitters,-- the chef-d' oeuvre of a hygienic civilization--and a little beyond this the soil was broken and fissured, there was a confused mass of roughly-hewn-timber, a straggling line of sluicing, a heap of gravel and dirt, a rude cabin . . . .[2]

Juxtapositions were seldom merely strange to Murfree; straggling would inadequately describe a line of sluicing for her. Murfree possessed a vigorous style, but Harte was much more human.

Miss Murfree is at her best stylistically when she is describing, as in the previously quoted passage, one of her beloved settings. Her devotion both to her setting and dialect makes interesting contrasting sentences. It is hard to believe that these sentences come from the same story:

"I never kin"[3]

. . . .

And this is his never failing interest--dark summer nights, when the Galaxy opens a broad avenue of constallated life across the heavens seeming a veritable road--; or when, all bedight in scarlet, Arcturus and his sons are guided into the vernal sky.[4]

The brevity and stark simplicity of the first sentence stands out markedly against the ornately constructed latter one. It is interesting to take an opening paragraph and

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[2] Bret Harte, "Mrs. Skagg's Husbands", Tales of The Argonauts (New York, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1892), p. 29.

[3] Charles Egbert Craddock "The Casting Vote", The Mystery of Witch-Face Mountain and Other Stories (New York, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1895), p. 180.

[4] Ibid, p. 279.

observe how dignified is her plane from the beginning and how she maintains this plane completely throughout her story. One can select a paragraph at random from the earliest stories, compare it with an excerpt from one of her latest stories, and find that she is still writing with grandeur:

The opening paragraph from "The Star in The Valley", (1884) reads:

> He first saw it in the twilight of a clear October evening. As the earliest planet sprang into the sky, an answering gleam shone red amid the glooms in the valley, . . . there was something very impressive in that solitary star of earth, changeless and motionless beneath the ever-changing skies.[5]

The opening paragraph of "Man in The Tree" (1910) reads:

> It might well be called the country of the outlaws, this vast tract of dense mountain forests and craggy ravines, this congeries of swirling torrents and cataracts and rapids. Here wild beasts lurked out their savage lives, subsisting by fang and prey-- the panther, the bear, the catamount, the wolf,-- and like unto them, ferocious and fugitive, both fearsome and feared . . . the scalps of the ravening brutes.[6]

When one reads such lusciously written story beginnings, one reasons "There is depth here; this author has something of importance to tell." Only in her stories containing more than the usual number of humorous speeches, more than the average amount of conversation such as "Them

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[5]Craddock, In The Tennessee Mountains, p. 120.

[6]Charles Egbert Craddock, "Man In The Tree", Century, (New York, Century Company, 1910), p. 429.

Old Moth-Eaten Lovers", does she lapse at all from this dignity.

Miss Murfree has given us beautiful figures of speech. She most frequently uses the objects of nature in the mountains as material for her images. Some of the most artistic of these are given in "Drifting Down Lost Creek". An artistic image of Cynthia's life is given at the beginning of the story:

> She often watched the floating leaves, a nettle here and there, the broken wing of a moth, and wondered whither these trifles were borne, on the elegaic current. She came to fancy that her life was like them, worthless in itself and without a mission, drifting down Lost Creek, to vanish vaguely in the mountain.[7]

To make a most artistic story ending she has reminded her reader of this first image and then added another one:

> Sometimes, to be sure, it seems to her that the years of her life are like the floating leaves drifting down Lost Creek, valueless and purposeless, and vaguely vanishing in the mountains. Then she remembers that the sequestered subteranean current is charged with its own inscrutable, imperative mission and she ceases to question and regret, and bravely does the work nearest her hand and has glimpses of its influence in the widening lives of others and finds in these a placid content.[8]

She has used the same device of a nature-image in the opening of "The Star In the Valley" and closed the story with Chevis likening Celia to a star in his life:

> But Reginald Chevis has never forgotten her. Whenever he sees the earliest star spring into the evening sky,

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[7]Craddock, In The Tennessee Mountains, p. 2.

[8]Ibid., p. 79.

> he remembers the answering red gleam of that star in the valley.[9]

All of her more powerful images are made from the natural setting which she stressed and loved so well. When she wished to emphasize some outstanding characteristic through a figure, she made use of the leaves, the trees, the streams, the roads, the strata of the rocks and mountains. In describing Rufe Chadd in "Electioneerin' on Big Injun Mounting," she writes:

> His face was a great contrast to the faces of the stolid mountaineers. It was keenly chiseled; the constant friction of thought had worn away the grosser lines, leaving sharply defined features with abrupt turns of expression. The process might be likened to the gradual denudation of those storied strata of his mountains by the momentum of their torrents.[10]

Underlying the descriptions in all her stories, one feels that she believes the answer to the mysteries of life may lie in the mysteries of nature. She has made an interesting image from this underlying philosophy in "The Romance of Sunrise Rock":

> He turned from the strange picture suspended between heaven and earth, and looked over the rickety palings into the dismal little graveyard of the mountaineers. Nowhere, he thought, was the mystery of life and death so gloomily suggested. Humanity seemed so small, so transitory a thing, expressed in these few mounds in the midst of the undying grandeur of the mountains.[11]

Since Miss Murfree was sincerely religious and had been a precocious student since childhood, the reader should not

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[9]Craddock, <u>In The Tennessee Mountains</u>, p. 154.

[10]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 161.

[11]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 183.

be surprised to find that some of her images give one a glimpse of her historical and Biblical background. After John Cleaver has cautioned Trelawney in "The Romance of Sunrise Rock" that they must return to the more civilized, ambitious world, Trelawney answers him:

> "I have found contentment, the manna from heaven, while you are still sighing for the fleshpots of Egypt. Ambition has thrown me once; I shan't back the jade again. I am a shepherd, Jack, a shepherd. 'Pastorem, Tityre, pingues pascere aportet ores, deductom dicere carmen.'".[12]

Such phrases as "manna from heaven" and "fleshpots" of Egypt show biblical knowledge. The last quotation reflects her knowledge of classical literature.

She realizes that the mountaineers regard hell as a very definite place. Thus, she frequently uses hell as one of her figures. Mr. Kenyon snatches the revelers from the "jaws of hell" in "The Dancin' Party at Harrison's Cove."[13]

Hell is used more originally as an image in "The 'Harnt' That Walks Chilhowee."

> "An fur a while the bushes was still too; an' then they moved jes' a little, fust this way an' then that, till all of suddint the leaves opened, like the mouth of hell mought hav' done, an' thar he seen Reuben Crabb's face."[14]

Although I am not personally qualified to give a detailed discussion of the mountaineer dialect, I can give a

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[12] Ibid., p. 192.

[13] Ibid., p. 237

[14] Ibid., p. 297.

consenses concerning it. Critics like F. L. Paltee say that Miss Murfree has gone carefully enough into her dialect to make it part of her style. The Dictionary of American Biography says:

> The dialect is faithfully reproduced, with its dry caustic wit and drawling intonations.[15]

One can analyze one section of dialect and point out the outstanding things about all of the Smoky mountaineers' dialect as Murfree depicted it. Blake's reflections in "Old Sledge at The Settlemint" may be taken as a good example:

> "I'm a perfessin' member of the church, an' I dunno one o' them thar kyerds from the t'other; an' what is more, I ain't a-wantin' ter know. I hev seen 'em a-playin' wunst, an' I hearn 'em a-talkin' that thar foolishness 'bout'n highan' 'low', an' sech,--they'll all be low enough fore long. But what's always been a peart, smart boy, an' his dad afore him always war a thrivin' man, 'an Budd Wray war never nobody nor nuthin', --he war always mighty no-'count, him an' all his folks, . . .[16]

The use of er in words in place of ro as in "pervide" for provide in the preceding quotation and "yer" in place of ar as in "kyards" for "cards" is typical of these people. Contracting the words "the" and "other" and drawing out many words such as "a-wantin'" are common marks of the dialect of these mountaineers.

The student of the history of our language is not startled by Laura Thornborough's comment in The Great Smoky Mountains:

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[15] Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. XIII (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 344.

[16] Craddock, In The Tennessee Mountains, p. 86.

> The speech of the mountain people has been much maligned. Strictly speaking they have no dialect. They use old words and phrases common in the time of the Elizabethans, but which have passed out of our general use . . . (referring to a conversation with a mountaineer) "Anticist?" I inquired, thinking I had discovered a new word. Then I remembered that Shakespeare tells us, "Hamlet put an antic disposition on."[17]

A reminiscent student of the language may go on and on correlating thus. The "hit" of the mountaineers is the old Anglo-Saxon form of our "it". The es from some of their plurals, as in "beastes" and "nestes", are Chaucerian and Chaucer used their "holp".

One cannot completely conclude a summary of the high points of Murfree's style of writing unless he remarks that her style was so clear-cut and hardy at first that it was attributed to a man. As the Dictionary of Biography says:

> Her masculine pseudonym, taken from the name of the hero in one of her earliest stories suited her virile, robust forthright style as well as her bold heavily shaded handwriting, which caused Aldrich to write. "I wonder if Craddock has laid in his winter's ink yet so that I can get a serial out of him."[18]

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[17]Laura Thornborough, The Great Smoky Mountains (New York, Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1937), p. 62.

[18]Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. XIII, p. 345.

Conclusion

When one concludes an analysis of the short stories of Miss Mary Murfree, it is only fitting that he should ask, "Is she realist or romanticist?"

One finds a helpful comment in the Cambridge History of American Literature:

> Even Howells was not fully a realist until into the eighties. The new local colour work was not primarily realism. The new writers who now sprang up to portray local pecularities in all parts of the land sought, even as Harte had done, to throw an idealized atmosphere over their pictures. One thinks of Mrs. Jackson and of Ramona . . . . and, in the realm of the short story of George W. Cable and Charles Egbert Craddock.[1]

Mary Murfree sketched realistic plots as the framework of her stories, but she gave all of them romantic settings. Thus one would call her neither realist nor romanticist, but rather a realist with an atmosphere of romance. Two of her supernatural-element stories such as "The Mystery of Old Daddy's Window" and "His Unquiet Ghost" are based upon very realistic, highly possible occurrences, even in "our world." She has simply woven the mountain setting through the plot framework and colored it with the ignorance and fear of the mountaineers. Her descriptions of the women, in which she spares little of the ugliness of their lives, marks her further as a realist. Her sketches of the men in such stories as "The Dancin' Party at Harrison's Cove," especially the hot-headed Kossuth, are especially good for

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[1] Cambridge History of American Literature, Volume II (New York, G. P. Putman's Sons, 1918), p. 383.

their realistic comments, if not for powerful delineation.

The realistic trend of the entire plots of such stories as "The Crucial Moment" and "Over on T'Other Mounting" stands out in direct contrast to such a story as "The Star In The Valley." In the first two stories, Murfree is her most realistic self. Here everything is subordinate to the realist in her; she is busy with her scalpel mercilessly dissecting and exposing the soul and the inner-workings of man. One finds nothing "pretty" in her delineation of Hoxer and Tony Brett nor in the forces and men which drove them to commit their unlawful acts. There is very little screen of romance to shield them.

However, in "The Star in The Valley" she has taken her fairy wand in hand again and erected a gossamer screen of romance. One almost needs to re-read the story to be able to forget the beautiful skies, the looming mountains, and pictorial groupings of mountaineers enough to feel the ugliness of the underlying situation. One must be very clear headed to realize how cleverly and realistically she has portrayed the character of Chevis, the man of "t'other" world, who really loves the little mountain flower, but not deeply enough to stay away from his own false world.

V. L. Parrington has said of the regionalist group:

> In fixing attention on narrow and homely fields they were turning towards realism, for the charm of their work lay in the fidelity to the milieu

the exact portrayal of character and setting.[2]

One cannot draw a concluding analysis of Miss Murfree's stories, a summary of her strength and weaknesses, without asking, What gave her stories such terrific importance when they were published, and why have they failed to receive the same recognition in our own time? The first appeal of her stories lay in the freshness of her materials. However, other regionalists such as, Harris, Cable, Harte, and Twain also whetted the appetites of reading America with their tales laid in strange settings. Why have Murfree's stories not had as forceful and long-lived existence as theirs?

In answering this question, one must make further study of Murfree's work. Since her first short stories were the work of a young writer, they were really a promise of finer things to come. She had studied her field carefully, but rather than take all she could from it, she left this region completely when she began writing novels. In doing so she followed the advice of some critics. Yet, after 1897[3], she produced nothing superior to her early work.

Some might say that she could be excused for leaving the Great Smokies because her materials were scanty. But before one becomes so hasty he must realize that Thomas Hardy had chosen people and a locality just as primitive

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[2] Vernon Louis Harrington, Main Currents in American Thought, Volume III (New York, Harcourt, Broce and Company, 1930), p. 238.

[3] F. L. Pattee, op. cit., p. 315.

for full-length novels. Thus we see that Murfree might have made much more use of what she had already explored.

Thomas Hardy believed that a great story should concern itself with the common fundamentals of humanity, and these fundamentals, he believed, may be studied with more accuracy in the isolated places where the conventions of polite society have not prevented natural expression.[4]

There is really a correlation between Murfree's escape elsewhere for materials for her novels and the dying fame of her short stories. Her failure may be attributed to the fact that she took that which was picturesque from her Smoky mountains, but she did not penetrate their characters thoroughly enough. The large masses of material overwhelmed her rather than compelled her to see their possible force. She desired more to show the cheap barker near his side-show trinkets; only occasionally was she content to take us into the big tent circus, and only a few times did we glimpse the performers on the road back of the tent, minus grease paint and costume. There are very few Hoxers or Cynthia Wares to draw either deep laughs or uncontrollable tears.

An anonymous contributor for <u>Outlook</u> has written concerning her popularity's decline:

> Miss Murfree like many other writers of fiction abondoned her natural line of writing and

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[4] See page 2 of Section I, Characters.

> attempted to be over-subtle and to deal too philosophically with life problems. . . she also inclined to rest too strongly on descriptions of marvelous scenery.[5]

In studying her short stories one is directing his attention to her highest achievement,[6] for her genius was best fitted to express itself in this form. Her lack of depth is much more noticeable in character delineations throughout entire novels. Then, too, she fruitlessly tried historical themes for some of them. Thus, to one looking back in perspective it seems unfortunate that the best years of her life were not devoted to short stories.

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[5] Outlook (New York, Outlook Company, August 11, 1922), p. 626.

[6] Dictionary of American Biography, Volume XIII (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 344.

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