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A Double-Sided Mirror: “Otherizing” and Normalizing the Silenced Voices of Appalachian Women

Issue 10, Spring 2016

Abstract

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Appalachian region was not only exploited for capitalistic gains, but also put on display by outsider voices for being home to a supposed “backwards” and “barbaric” culture. Appalachians experienced exploitation working in mines and other industries that only benefitted those receiving the resources of the mountains. A once self-sustaining, individualized culture was now forced to be dependent and suffer through the “otherization” of its own people. Voices hidden in the murky skies and distant mountains of Appalachia were not only silenced, but more hauntingly, they were spoken for, manipulated, and marginalized. One example of such devastating manipulations of voice lies in the insider voices of Appalachian women and the voices outside of the region that spoke for these women in text. Throughout the research I am presenting here, I will begin to reclaim the stolen, replaced, and marginalized voices of Appalachian women not only in hopes to repair the injustices done to this population some years ago, but also to set an example of how to carry out just research in modern studies of the region.

A Two-pronged Analysis of the Dialectic Voice

As I will later elaborate, my research involves an outsider voice that spoke for Appalachian women in regard to their domesticated gender roles. Juxtaposing this voice are the voices of the women of the region themselves. Before hearing from the dialectic of these voices explicitly, I must explain a two-pronged intervention for analyzing my research. The first move reconceptualizes the way that Lloyd Bitzer originally defined the rhetorical situation. Bitzer originally defined the rhetorical situation as “a context in which speakers or writers create rhetorical discourse.”¹ He extends his definition to entail three elements: exigence, audience, and constraints. Bitzer describes exigence as the need for an utterance or, in other words, the event that initiates discourse. Audience, then, does not just mean the recipient of the rhetor’s utterance, but further, a recipient who has the ability to carry out change or action regarding this utterance. Lastly, constraints are the set of beliefs that affect the way the rhetor presents their utterance regarding the exigence. I have redefined the rhetorical situation not only to mean “a context,” but further to include the discursive, dialectic space in which social and cultural meaning is rhetorically made and interpreted through the use of habitus. To Bitzer’s elements of exigence, audience, and constraints, I add the element of *meaning-making*. Adding this fourth element illustrates the full social and cultural significance of both the exigence and the utterance.

The second prong of my project is to compare my analysis to the idea of a double-sided mirror. By a double-sided mirror, I mean a mirror that two people are standing on either side of; both people can see the reflection of themselves, as well as the person standing on the other side of the mirror. I argue that this same dialectic duality of self and outward reflection happens in the rhetorical situations of both the insider and outsider voices of Appalachia.

Framing Historical Artifacts: Appalachian Women Are Being “Spirit Murdered”

I previously mentioned that to Bitzer’s notions of exigence, audience, and constraints, I have added the element of meaning-making. The rhetorical situation happening through the outsider voices that speak for Appalachian women, which socially and culturally positions them as marginal, leaves out the insider voice of the regional woman herself. As Jacqueline Royster warns us against in “When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own,” these women are being “spirit murder[ed]” by being talked “for, about, and around” but never *listened* to.² The fact that Appalachian women have historically been left out of the rhetorical situation regarding their own lives—their own exigence, in fact—sparked my interest in searching for their voices. In the beginning of my archival research process, I therefore attempted to reclaim the hidden and marginalized voices of Appalachian women.

¹Lloyd F. Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 1, no. 1 (1968): 1.

²Jacqueline Jones Royster, “When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own,” *College Composition and Communication* 47, no. 1 (1996): 38-39.

Archival Research Methods

I would like to reflect on my research methods in finding the insider voices of Appalachian women that were lost and replaced by outsiders. The first text I found was an example of the voices that spoke for the women of the Southern mountains. I introduce “Women of the Mountains,” an address from Rev. Edgar Tuft, Principal of the Girls Department of Lees McRae College in Banner Elk, North Carolina, delivered to the Executive Committee of the Presbyterian Church. After finding this seemingly but deceptively philanthropic address that advocates for the funding to extend women’s education by recounting their hardship from “girlhood days” to “married life,” I was able to search for the insider voice of the Appalachian woman herself. I began by exploring various digital archive databases, such as the *Digital Library of Appalachia* where I had originally found Tuft’s address. After much searching through digital archives using keywords such as “women of Appalachia,” “women and daily lives,” “mountain women,” and “women and churches,” I came across a collection of interviews conducted as a part of the *Appalachian Oral History Project* in 1973. These interviews, kept in Appalachian State University’s Digital Collection, feature both single Appalachian women and married couples living in Watauga and Avery counties of North Carolina. These two locations are a short distance from Banner Elk, North Carolina, where Tuft’s address is given, as well as where Lees McRae College is located. A relatively analogous location in which these rhetorical situations take place is important to my search because it provides similar voices that can be compared accurately. Each interviewee who represents the insider voice of these regional women reflects back on her experiences with religious and educational systems, daily domestic duties, and other familial particulars of the early 1900s. They are reflecting back on a time when each interviewee would have been between fifteen and twenty-five years old. The interviewees that I will be analyzing are Mr. and Mrs. Lee Greene, Mr. and Mrs. Jim Greer, Mrs. G. L. Richards, Mrs. Loura Edminsten, and Mrs. Elizabeth Hartley.

As part of my attempt to reclaim the hidden and marginalized voices of Appalachian women, I wanted to explore whether or not these women agree with Tuft in the framing of their domestic obligations as “depravations,” and, more strikingly, with his assertion that the sole solution to the oppressive nature of these tasks is access to a Christian Industrial School. In the early stages of my research, I expected to find an extreme juxtaposition between the insider voice of Appalachian women that I searched for and the outsider voice of Tuft. However, as I later demonstrate, I found a more subtle difference that proved the importance of justness and deep listening for me as a researcher. It would not have been just for me to impose the juxtaposition I was looking for on my researched group. I had to learn to listen for the subtleties that lied in the voices I found and let them *speak to me*, as opposed to me *speaking for them*.

Looking through Bourdieu’s Lens: Habitus of the Dialectic Voice

Once I found the rich content of these interviews that record the insider voices of Appalachians, I began forming my theoretical lens for interpreting these voices. I previously mentioned that the analysis I perform on both the outsider voices that speak for and the insider voices of Appalachian women is analogous to a double-sided mirror. I examine the element of the rhetorical situations happening in both “Women of the Mountains” and the interviews with Appalachian women by focusing on my added notion of a social and cultural meaning-making process. One way of understanding this meaning-making process is through Pierre Bourdieu’s lens. In “Social Space and Symbolic Power,” Bourdieu outlines language as a meaning-making process by expressing ideas of a hegemonic “habitus” which helps us navigate social space. A social space, subsequently, is a collection of social norms, beliefs, and ideologies specific to a particular community. Habitus “implies ‘a sense of one’s place,’ but also a ‘sense of the place of others.’ For example, we say of a piece of clothing, a piece of furniture, or a book: ‘that looks pretty bourgeois’ or ‘that’s intellectual.’”³ Thus, habitus is created through the symbolic implications of material representations of a culture. Just as Bourdieu points out, a book is seen as “intellectual” because of the ways in which the readings of this material object create habitus, which then allows us to make meaning of a social space. Similar to the nature of my redefinition of the rhetorical situation, habitus is dialectic in nature because it is what is presented, as well as what is read or perceived. My intervention to Bourdieu lies in my emphasis on the symbolic interpretations of material signifiers as the way habitus is employed or, in other words, that which helps us to decode a social space. I use this intervention to emphasize the material signifiers and subsequent symbolism in “Women of the Mountains” and various interviews that illustrate contrasting social spaces.

One Side of the Mirror: The Social Spaces Created by Insider and Outsider Voices

³ Pierre Bourdieu, “Social Space and Symbolic Power,” *Sociology Theory* 7, no. 1 (1989): 19.

Employing Bourdieu's lens of reading a social space through habitus, I would like to examine the social spaces that are created by both Tuft and Appalachian interviewees. The material signifiers that are used to read the differences in the social spaces interpreted by Tuft and Appalachian women both deal with the domestic obligations facing these women. The differences in the rhetorical situations happening in "Women of the Mountains" and these interviews are subtle because the domestic duties or material signifiers are the same in both voices. The subtle difference, then, lies in the framing of these signifiers and, therefore, the type of social space that is being brought to fruition. In "Women of the Mountains," habitus is used to decode material symbols that expose a social space in which Appalachian women are marginalized and disadvantaged by their domestic duties. Tuft details his own experiences in which he has directly witnessed what he frames as the hardships that Appalachian women face daily. He says, "On a cold fall day, I once saw a woman fully a mile from her home with an infant on her hip and a bag strapped across her shoulder into which she was gathering galax leaves to sell, while another baby just able to walk was at her side. This is a picture of hundreds of women of the mountains."⁴ The material images of "an infant on her hip" and the activity of "gathering galax leaves to sell" are, through Tuft's framing, symbolic of the ways in which women were imprisoned by their roles as caretakers and were, in a larger sense, socially and culturally constricted. This symbolism is one that we read through habitus, a reading that brings to light the full significance of a social space in which Appalachian women, as Tuft frames it, were marginalized by their domesticity.

Conversely, interviews with Appalachian women themselves also mention the same domestic duties; however, the social space being illuminated is less constrictive and much more normalized. For example, Mr. Jim Greer speaks about his own mother's domestic duties, but frames them in a much more matter-of-fact manner. He states, "She [my mother] worked around the house and whatever she'd get to for people, haul corn and stuff like that. Wash and things like that; we'd walk way up here to the creek, three miles down here [inaudible] the branch and do a little washing."⁵ It is clear that the material signifiers, such as "haul[ing] corn" and "wash[ing]" present in Mr. Greer's account are being used to normalize the domestic obligations of Appalachian women.

Another instance of a duality in the "otherization" of the domestic duties by the outsider voice and the normalization of such activities by the insider voice lies in the expectations on young Appalachian girls. In Tuft's address, he claims that one of the duties keeping Appalachian girls and women from school is that they must take care of their younger siblings whenever there is illness or disadvantageous circumstances in the family. He states, "It is very hard for girls to be spared from home. They are called upon to help with all kinds of work in the house and outside, as there are practically no servants in the mountains. So when the mother is sick or broken down, which is often the case by the time her children are ready for school, there is nothing to do but keep the girls at home to do the work."⁶ In this illustration of the servant-like work that is performed by women in the Appalachian region, Tuft is "otherizing" this particular familial duty by framing it as something that not only restricts girls from an education, but also that would, in his view, more appropriately be done by a servant, should there be servants in Appalachia. This subtle element of social classing gestures toward another level of analysis that can be performed on Tuft's statement. Yet the act of caring for one's younger siblings as a young Appalachian girl is normalized when it is framed by insider Elizabeth Hartley in her interview. She states, "I's the oldest girl in a family of seven and I took care of the other young'uns."⁷ Mrs. Hartley's unsentimental, straightforward attitude, with which she explains her role as a caregiver as a young girl herself, normalizes this act. She also does not seem to relate this obligation to education in any way, whereas Tuft seems committed to proving that Appalachian women's domestic duties are the sole cause of their lack of

⁴ Edgar Tuft, "Women of the Mountains," Lees-McRae Institution (1899), 3. *Digital Library of Appalachia*. Web. 7 October 2015.

⁵ Mr. and Mrs. Jim Greer, *Appalachian Oral History Project*, 2. *Appalachian State University Digital Collection*. Web. 3 Nov. 2015.

⁶ Tuft, "Women of the Mountains," 1-2.

⁷ Elizabeth Hartley, Interview by Karen Weaver. *Appalachian Oral History Project*. *Appalachian State University Digital Collection*. 3. Web. 3 Nov. 2015.

education. Mrs. Hartley does acknowledge that she was also in her youth when taking care of her siblings by stating “other young’uns.”⁸ However, she does not draw on any connection to education or to the illness of her own mother, even though Tuft generalizes that Appalachian women are commonly “broken down” by the time their children reach school age.⁹ Mrs. Hartley also seems to explain this role in a factual, unemotional manner, whereas Tuft seems to use pathos to elicit a sympathetic response—and therefore funding—from his readers by positioning Appalachian women as deprived, helpless, overworked, and uneducated. The subtle juxtaposition in these excerpts demonstrates one side of the double-mirror analogy. Together the texts demonstrate a dialectic of the ways in which Tuft “otherizes” the culture of Appalachian women while Appalachian women normalize their own culture.

Double-Sided Mirror of Normalizing and “Otherizing”

Though I have already elaborated on one side of this double-mirror analogy, both sides of this notion are applied more fully when examining an excerpt from an interview with Mrs. Lee Greene. She states, “Well, if you work at home you can quit anytime you want to and go some place if you want to go a-fishin’. But when you work on a job ya just don’t have the time. Ya come in late, and it’s time to milk, and time you eat supper, it’s eight o’clock time we eat supper a lot o’ nights.”¹⁰ The material signifier of eating supper here seems to be a reflection by Mrs. Greene on a social space in which domestic duties are freeing and non-constrictive, as opposed to the negative way that Tuft frames similar ideas of working at home. While Mrs. Greene is normalizing the domestic duties that have previously been “otherized” by the outsider voice of Tuft, she is also “otherizing” the value that Tuft finds in a social space that places value on a formalized career and education. Tuft sheds light on the opposite social space that “otherizes” a domestic lifestyle and normalizes a formalized education and career. This is clear in his adamancy for the women’s need of access to a Christian industrial school. Tuft exclaims, “What is most needed for the social, moral, and spiritual uplift of these mountain women? Important and helpful as other things are, we say, without hesitation, nothing is equal to a Christian industrial school, located in their midst, and peculiarly adapted to their special needs.”¹¹

In summary, both parties, Tuft and Appalachian women, are letting what Krista Ratcliffe terms their “cultural blinders” normalize their own culture and “otherize” the opposing culture’s social norms. Their subjective experience of the social space in which they participate limits their understandings of their own and the opposing social spaces. This is shown through material signifiers and symbols that, using habitus, decode social spaces. This theorizing is embodied in the discursive, dialectic nature of my reconceptualization of the rhetorical situation. This dialectic is also why the analogy of a double-sided mirror, allowing for both self and outward reflection, is so fitting for my analysis.

Similar notions of a double-sided mirror of “otherizing” and normalizing appear in the framings of Appalachian women as either a self-reliant society or a group in need of help. Tuft frames Appalachian women as a depraved society in need of help that will be granted through access to a Christian industrial school. However, statements made by Elizabeth Hartley suggest that the culture among Appalachian women was, in fact, a self-reliant, autodidactic one. Mrs. Hartley explains:

Q: Did you teach yourself to read?

A: Yeah.

Q: You did? How did you know how to teach yourself?

A: Well, I just got to reading every little thing I could come across.”¹²

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Tuft, “Women of the Mountains,” 2.

¹⁰ Mr. and Mrs. Lee Greene. Interview with Donna Clawson. *Appalachian Oral History Project*.

24. Accessed through *Appalachian State University Digital Collection*. Web. 3 Nov. 2015.

¹¹ Tuft, “Women of the Mountains,” 5.

¹² Hartley, *Appalachian Oral History Project*, 30.

Tuft has previously exclaimed that Appalachian women are a group in need of an education; however, this statement from Mrs. Hartley proves that some women were educating themselves and were therefore a self-reliant society.

How Can We Rhetorically Listen to Appalachian Women?

The subtle differences exposed through the rhetorical situations created by Tuft and Appalachian women lead to my intervention with Krista Ratcliffe's notions of rhetorical listening and Royster's ideas about refraining from committing "spirit murder."¹³ Both Ratcliffe and Royster urge their readers to practice listening to subjects in research and pedagogy, as opposed to assuming their voices and speaking for them like Tuft does in "Women of the Mountains." An example of rhetorical listening actually lies within the insider voice of Appalachians, but surprisingly, that voice does not belong to a woman. Mr. Jim Greer states of his mother, "With her hands and washboard, paddle board. Stand on big ol' banks and she had the paddle and she'd beat the dirt out with the paddle. It was rough going, I'll tell you."¹⁴ This excerpt demonstrates a male perspective that is successfully showing empathy and rhetorically listening to the voice of his own mother, an Appalachian woman, in regard to her domestic duties. He does not speak for his mother as Tuft does for all Appalachian women. Tuft manipulates the women's voices through both his framing of their duties as deprivations and in deeming himself capable of figuring out a single solution to these, as he saw them, disadvantages. In short, Mr. Greer rhetorically listens, whereas Tuft fails to do so.

Just as Mr. Greer rhetorically listened in observation of an Appalachian woman, it is important that I, as a researcher, also successfully rhetorically listen to the voices of these women. I did so by refraining from imposing some dramatic juxtaposition of their voices and Tuft's that I was originally looking for, but instead, listening to the subtle differences in the social spaces brought to fruition by the dialectic. In Tuft's framing, Appalachian women were participants in a disadvantaged culture that required access to a Christian industrial school in order to be freed from the doom of their domestic duties. Contrastingly, Appalachian women demonstrated a social space that reflected a self-reliant society in which domestic duties were liberating and ideas of a more formalized education and career (as Tuft advocates) are "otherized." As a researcher, I was able to experience the true practice of rhetorical listening by allowing the subtle differences in the insider and outsider voice to speak to me and my research as opposed to imposing my own ideas of what such a juxtaposition should look like on these voices.

My own interest in the topic of reclaiming the insider voices of Appalachian women lies in my upbringing. I am from Watauga County myself and many generations of women in my family lived in this area for much of their lives. It is intriguing to find the voices of women who lived at the same time as my own ancestors and went through similar experiences. If opportunity allows, I would like to find additional secondary sources that display outsider voices speaking for Appalachian women in more detail on topics not covered by Tuft, such as religious institutions, women's role in the workforce, and generational domestic knowledge. I would then like to continue to cross-analyze those voices with the insider voices of Appalachian women, using the rich content I found in the digitized collection of interviews. I plan to visit Appalachian State University's physical archive to explore materials that have not yet been digitized via their digital archive. Additionally, I would like to contact my oldest living relatives who are themselves Appalachian women and may speak about similar experiences. To be sure, there is much more archival work to be found and analyzed using the theoretical lens of a redefined rhetorical situation, a "double-mirror" of "otherization" and normalization, and the material signifier and symbols that indicate a social space that I have triangulated here. In further research, I intend to continue practicing listening rhetorically, as instructed by Ratcliffe and Royster. Through research, rich and intricate analysis, and the justness of rhetorical listening, perhaps more of the silenced voices of Appalachian women can finally be reclaimed.

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¹³ Royster, "When the First Voice You Hear," 38-39.

¹⁴ Greer, *Appalachian Oral History Project*, 2.

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