THE DYNAMICS OF PLACE IN LEE SMITH'S *SAVING GRACE*

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"A house will give you a place on earth. If you know where you live, you know where you are." (Lee Smith: Saving Grace).

Lee Smith's tenth novel, *Saving Grace*, tells the story of Florida Grace Shepherd, the daughter of a snake-handling preacher, whose memories of Scrabble Creek, her childhood home, inform her search for self definition. Gracie as she is fondly called arrives with her family at Scrabble Creek, a mountain community in North Carolina, from Atlanta, Georgia. When the Shepherds arrive at Scrabble Creek her father, Virgil Shepherd, sets about establishing his Jesus Name Church while Fannie, his wife, busies herself transforming an abandoned cabin into the family's home. As they cheerfully embrace a life of poverty Fannie joyfully presides over the hillside with its "bright blooming flowers and new green trees" (88). Blooming daffodils and forsythia combine with Fannie's cheerfulness to produce a convivial atmosphere that will hold for Gracie her most cherished memories. After Fannie commits suicide Gracie's world is torn apart as Virgil, initially moving with her from one fundamentalist congregation to another, eventually abandons her. "As a person […] searching for hard ground in a world of shifting sands" (164), Gracie marries Travis Word, a preacher, but finding no substance in this relationship, runs off to Creekside Green with Randy Newhouse, a young man with whom she falls in love. But there is "no creek at Creekside Green, nothing green either" (234), and her split with Randy over his infidelity leads her to begin her journey back to Scrabble Creek, the only home she has ever known, and to the memories she must confront in order to come to terms with her present.

In this paper, I shall explore Smith's use of memory, storytelling, and naming practices, especially as they relate to Gracie's sense of place and determine how she evolves to tell her story. *Saving Grace* may appear at first glance to be simply affirming a sense of place reminiscent of the agrarian American south where a farm or a gap, for instance, is paramount to maintaining a sense of belonging and security. The remote

mountain community of Scrabble Creek provides the frame for the narrative. Smith's protagonist, Gracie, begins and ends her story at Scrabble Creek in the "dark woods" of North Carolina, the only home she has ever known. However, place in this novel transcends geographical location; for unlike in other narratives about the agrarian south, it becomes clear as Gracie's narrative progresses that place for her is not equivalent to the notion of land. Sense of place becomes intricately linked with memory, for Scrabble Creek is the ground where she struggles to come to terms with what has been a chaotic life: a relationship with a half brother, her mother's death, the loss of a child, a failed marriage resulting from her own adultery, and her ambivalence about her faith through it all. It is this past that she must deal with in order to define herself and move on. As she tells her story and names herself, these two activities both nourish and liberate her, freeing her to create a new path, a new life.

Gracie demonstrates a mythical attachment to Scrabble Creek: to the mountain on which she performs some of her most liberating acts, to the stream in the valley below, to her childhood home and her mother's ghost residing in it. Besides, her father, Virgil Shepherd, literally "grows" his Jesus Name Church in this place, and religion seems to be *the* way of life of the Shepherds and their neighbors, so that Virgil prefers, like Katie Bailey's husband, Moses, in Smith's *The Devil's Dream,* to roam the woods "follering the plan of God" (*SG* 9), instead of providing for his family. Although Gracie is dependent on her childhood home as a vehicle for self definition, however, at the end of the novel she declares that she is leaving there "for good" (270). But even as she leaves she calls up her memories, first of the men in her life, which she consigns to the porch, and then of her mother and sister, onto which she holds as she drives off. Thus connection to place is not ultimately dependent on being in that place; instead, place transcends the material world to reside in memory.

The epigraph of the novel is taken from T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets,* a piece which shares with *Saving Grace* a concern with identity and remembrance. The search described in the "Little Gidding" section of *Four Quartets* is life-long, and Eliot's poem announces as much the journey of its persona as it does Gracie's:

> We shall not cease from exploration

> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time (*SG* [v]).

Gracie's journey takes her back where she started, but the home that she left has become a derelict cabin once again. The home that it was now exists only in her memory. What she discovers for the first time is that this time round her home is a "matriarchal" space where she communes with her mother, whereas before it was presided over by her father and his church. In this space that she feminizes and occupies, she releases her mother's silenced voice, and possibly a muffled history of other silenced voices as well.

Gracie challenges Harriet C. Buchanan's generalization that Smith's female characters are "so frequently lost and spiritually impoverished that they see no solution to their problems" (344). Gracie's problem is that in order to move forward she must first deal with the past. And she does have a solution, but before she can arrive at it she must confront horrible scenes from a childhood she thinks she has left many miles and three decades behind her. It is only when she is able to deal with the past that she can understand the present, and even the future ("what is going to happen next" (4)). Although she travels far from her starting point, she is bound to the past by memories that have set hard: "A house will give you a place on earth. If you know where you live, you know who you are" (14). For Smith, "[p]lace is really pivotal in any consideration of southern writing. It's especially pivotal for me, particularly with the mountain books, because the mountains totally shape the characters."[20] Among Gracie's memories of her home, her most cherished involve her relationship with her mother, Fannie Shepherd.

When Gracie returns to Scrabble Creek this last time, it is not her snake handling father that she seeks or finds there. Instead, her homecoming seems more like a return to her mother and to a second birth-one that will prepare her for the profound task of telling her story in order to rediscover herself. Writing about women writers and the *Künstlerroman* (a novel that traces the development of an artist), Rachel Blau

DuPlessis observes that "the female artist is given a way of looping back and reenacting childhood ties, to achieve not the culturally approved ending in heterosexual romance, but rather the reparenting necessary to her second birth as an artist" (93-94). Although *Saving Grace* is not a classic *künstlerroman,* DuPlessis's paradigm does provide a suitable context for Gracie's lifestory. During this "second birth" her deepening awareness of her mother's early experience and lost voice plays a crucial role in Gracie's achievement of a voice as she tells her story and names herself. Commenting on *The Devil's Dream,* her novel about a multi-generational family, Smith told an interviewer that country-music and church music, religion, repression, and "out-of-control passion" are all "like vines climbing up the same fence" (Powell 293). Fannie is strangled by these vines. Unable to resist Virgil Shepherd's powerful embodiment of sexuality and the sacred, Fannie falls in love with the preacher at a revival and cheerfully embraces a life of poverty and repeated moves from one fundamentalist congregation to another. Gracie says of the Shepherds' early years at Scrabble Creek: "In those years up at Scrabble Creek, Mama was like a child herself, never too busy to stop her work and play with us" (26). After a pale and pregnant young woman visits Fannie to reveal Virgil's secret affair (one of many he has been carrying on for years), Gracie's mother becomes a "witch-like stranger," and all the "bright blooming flowers and new green trees" of springtime fail to bring back the "sweet loving mama" who is emotionally "gone for good" (88). Seduced by Lamar, a teenaged son of Virgil by an earlier wife who conceals his identity from his runaway father, Fannie, guilt-ridden, hangs herself from a rafter in the old tobacco barn. Gracie, earlier seduced by Lamar, seems determined to avoid her mother's doom, but her broader realm of activity is rooted in the memories of Fannie.

In finally returning to her homeplace, Gracie also returns to the mother whose life she recovers and whose garden she explores anew. There seems to be a common pattern in recent Southern women's writing of a daughter's adulthood encounter with a dead or aging mother (often a garden-tending mother) as a necessary means to the younger woman's self understanding and emotional wholeness. Tina McElroy Ansa's *Ugly Ways* and Bobbie Ann Mason's *Clear Springs: A Memoir* present such situations. Lucinda MacKethan discusses the vital "reintegration of mother and daughter" in the person of Ivy Rowe in Lee Smith's *Fair and Tender Ladies* who, as an old woman,

"feels most at home" in the mountainside house where her mother lived (MacKethan 102). After years of wandering, Gracie achieves a parallel, if not more dramatic, reintegration by finding her way back to rural Scrabble Creek, site of her best memories but also site of her mother's suicide, as well as her father's terrifying rituals of snakehandling. It is after her "reintegration" with her mother that she announces her intention to leave Scrabble Creek "for good" (270).

After her mother's death Gracie first assumes Fannie's role as Virgil's assistant when he takes to the road again, from North Carolina to Virginia, then down to Tennessee. Abandoned by her father after a few years, she marries a father-substitute, Travis Word. But Travis does not quite turn out as a good substitute for Gracie's father, for he dreads sex as much as Virgil revels in it. Bored at thirty-three, Gracie turns to Randy Newhouse whose energetic sex invigorates her, and when discovered, runs off with him. Thus Gracie, like her mother before her, commits adultery. However, unlike Fannie who commits suicide out of guilt, Gracie feels no qualms about her sexual escapades, which she describes in religious terms: "Glory hallelujah! I thought I had been born again," she says (225). As Ivy Rowe in *Fair and Tender Ladies* puts it, being ruined "frees you up" eventually (20). Lee Smith admits that "Ivy doesn't stay put and act right,"[21] neither does Gracie. Gracie's sexual escapades with Randy ruin her marriage, but liberate her from patriarchal male/female roles. She pushes aside her female role in the time she spends with Randy after she leaves Travis. "I never did any cooking to speak of at Creekside Green, or kept house much […] I believe Randy was surprised to see that I was not interested in keeping house or buying things," she remarks (235). She has realized that what is expected of her as a good southern girl is crippling.

On her return to Scrabble Creek, her mother comes to her in a dream, pulling her towards her salvation: "I love how the screen of her hair falls around my face when she whispers in my ear," she reminisces (269). Further, she associates her mother's voice with the musical voice of the creek: "her pretty voice […] always reminded me of running water, of Scrabble Creek falling down the mountain beside our house" (3). In Lee Smith's oeuvre, the mountain as womb is a very important metaphor; in this

context it suggests Gracie's reintegration with her mother, discussed above.[22] As she kneels by the creek and drinks from it to her "heart's content" (272), Fannie's voice releases Gracie's voice. Shortly before she leaves Scrabble Creek "for good," she dresses *as* her mother (272), basking in the knowledge that "They say I take after her, and I am proud of this, for she was lovely as the day is long, in spirit as well as flesh" (3). Then stepping outside, she recalls the men in her life and the "hard knocks"[23] she received from each of them "on this very porch," symbolically consigning their memories to the porch as she leaves.

From her memories, Gracie constructs her story, her preamble being her name (3) and a determination "to tell the truth […] even the terrible things" including the fact that Lamar, her half brother, "had lain with [Fannie] as he had lain with me, and that she couldn't stand it, and now she was dead" (113). Unlike her mother who threatens to expose Virgil's infidelity but fails to carry it through (87), Gracie reveals the unpleasant side of patriarchy. Her story is in many ways like Katie Cocker's in Lee Smith's *The Devil's Dream*. Like Katie, for whom "the hard part has been figuring out who I am, because I'm not like any of [my people]" (14), Gracie realizes early in her life the difficulty in achieving an image outside those the various men in her life impose on her. On her first meeting with Randy, for whom she leaves her husband, "he was wearing those mirror shades, I saw myself reflected so wavy and shiny and out of whack" (271). This distorted image is what she must confront head-on as she travels "these old back roads one more time" and enters "these dark woods again" in order "to find out who [she is] and what has happened [to her]" (4).

Hers is thus a metaphorical journey that also takes on an allegorical dimension. This journey is cast in the mold of the traditional Christian autobiography. The allegory lies partly in the names of the people she encounters on her way: Virgil Shepherd, her father; Carlton and Ruth Duty, his faithful followers; Travis Word, the preacher she marries; and Randy Newhouse, the painter-musician for whom she leaves Travis. As in the Christian autobiography/conversion narrative, of which St. Augustine's

Confessions is considered typical,[24] Gracie seems to retrace her life with a particular spiritual goal in mind that determines her perspective on past events. “I was beginning to understand that there was an order to everything,” she says after leaving Randy, “a pattern which would be vouchsafed to me in due time” (261). Virgil Shepherd and Travis Word both believe in a pattern too, albeit a divine plan. For Virgil, everything he does is “follerin’ the plan of God,” even when he abandons Gracie and runs off with a crazy woman (148-149). Travis believes “that everything in life happened for a purpose and fell into the great scheme of God” (202). And both men give their call-to-preach testimonies which they re-order to conform to a pattern, in this case culminating in divine ordination. Thus anointed, these men speak with divine authority. But to a woman everything in the religious tradition to which Virgil and Travis belong represents oppression, and Gracie knows that as a woman she has no voice inside it as “she can’t decide things” (99). Nor can she openly show her disagreement on church matters, “So I agreed with Carlton Duty and the others-but in secret, for the Holiness girl or woman does not have a voice in such as that” (99). Attaining the power of naming, speaking, and voice that are central to determining place, identity, and self-realization is impossible for a woman within the church. It is therefore not surprising that although religion forms a large part of everyday life in her home, it does not seem to form a significant part of Gracie’s conception of home; nor that she demonstrates the least religious zeal in the Shepherd household, having failed to “detect God’s purpose anywhere,” and having expressed the fear that there is “no purpose at all” (202). Thus as she retraces her inner path through the dense thicket of her life, Gracie knows that her “saving grace” is to be found elsewhere.

It goes without saying that unlike Virgil and Travis, Gracie does not regard her “testimony” as part of a divine plan. As she struggles to leave the wilderness of patriarchy, truths for Gracie emerge in the on-going act of telling her story as she experienced it-a saving testimony, rather than a set piece testimony of the saved. Storytelling is a gift she inherits from both parents. But while her father tells stories from the bible, her mother tells stories from her childhood, “like Jack goes to seek his fortune” (9), and stories of the miraculous doings of Gracie’s father. Plaiting her daughters’ hair, Fannie recounts the signs and wonders of her husband’s ministry,

timing “the story of the first brush arbor meeting so that it always ended just when she got to the last rubber band” (22). (Lee Smith says of hair plaiting in her *Family Linen* that it creates “the ritual, defining the moment and making it possible for others to see it,” and that “among women characters, any sort of artistic thing they do is therapeutic, is self-repair, is life enhancing”).[25] On summer nights, as the family sleeps under the stars, they make up stories: “Daddy would start off and then everybody would add on”-such as the story about the little girl and the magic pony, which she hastens to conclude herself so that the ending will come out the way she wants it to (29-30). While in the seventh grade, Gracie and her friend Marie write story books about a girl named Melinda who solves mysteries with her talking horse named Spice. Reynolds Rice underlines in *A Palpable God* the necessity of storytelling: “a need to tell and hear stories is essential to the species homo sapiens-second in necessity apparently after nourishment and before love and shelter. Millions survive without love or home, almost none in silence; the opposite of silence leads quickly to a narrative, and the sound of a story is the dominant sound of our lives” (3). In Gracie’s narrative, storytelling is not only nourishing, it is also a self-defining act.

But liberating as storytelling is to Gracie, before her rebirth (when she declares she will tell the truth, the whole truth) there were stories she could not tell. “I had a lot of secrets that fall,” she recounts, “so many that sometimes I thought my head would burst and they would all fly out into the room like hornets from a nest, stinging everybody” (49). She could not tell Marie and her family her “scariest secret”-that her father’s snake handling caused deaths and sent him to jail and that now he was frail from fasting all the time (49). She could never tell her family or anyone else about her religious doubts-the “awful secret” she harbored as a small child that the devil was growing inside her (4), or the secret of her sexual relations with Lamar, or later yet, the secret of her inadequate sex life with Travis. When her married friend DeeDee talked about her own sex life Gracie was “dumbstruck”: “The fact was that I couldn’t imagine talking about a thing like that” (196). Her father’s infidelity was another taboo subject; she never told of the “hoor” Evelyn saw with him in town, or of the Holiness girl who came to visit her mother, a story her mother herself threatened to tell but never did. “Well, this is the last un. The last un!” she yells at her husband. “And let me tell you

one thing, sir, if you think I'm going to keep my mouth shut this time, you've got another think coming!" (87). When her mother hangs herself, soon afterward, Gracie finds the body in the barn, its face dark and swollen, "mouth open, tongue out" (112). If her mother has been silenced by her marriage and religion, Gracie's tongue has been released by her mother's strangled communication. Confronted by the mute testimony of her mother's corpse, she turns almost immediately on Lamar: "I cringed down in the swinging shadow cast by Mama's body, and when I could finally speak, I spoke the truth as it was given to me at that moment, through my new and dreadful gift of discernment" (113). Exercising her new gift and voicing unspoken truths, Gracie now means to tell the whole story, the whole truth, "even the terrible things," even the secrets (4):

> *This is why I have had to come back now, traveling these dusty old back roads one more time. For I mean to tell my story, and I mean to tell the truth. […] I am not going to flinch from telling it, not even the terrible things, not even the part about Lamar and how Mama died nor the true nature of Travis Word nor what transpired between me and Randy Newhouse. I have entered these dark woods yet again, for I've got to find out who I am and what has happened to me, so that I can understand what is happening to me now, and what is going to happen to me next (4).*

One of the "terrible things" Gracie tells is the story of Lamar, her half brother. Lamar Shepherd's story is particularly relevant as a contrast to Gracie's. His entrance into the family marks its breakdown and a downward spiral that sends Gracie into near oblivion. Unlike Gracie, Lamar is disconnected from place. "One place is the same as another, Sis," he tells her. "You'll see. It don't matter what you do neither" (73). Gracie realizes that her screcy about Lamar contributes to her mother's death and dispels every bit of normalcy that remains from her childhood: "What if I had refused to give Lamar that drink of water, and sent him on his way? None of it would have happened. I felt dirty. Nasty. […] Mama would still be alive today if it wasn't for me" (114). Lamar

follows Gracie to the dark building where her mother's body hangs. Gracie recalls that in blaming him for Fannie's death she speaks to him in a voice that is

> *Not my own. I did not call him Lamar, for I was no longer sure it was his name. I didn't know what his name was, or who he was, or what he was. All I knew was that Mama's death was his doing, and I knew that absolutely" (113).*

It is interesting that Lamar's story ends with her un-naming him, considering how important naming is in her narrative. It suggests her denial of his identity and an erasure of his disturbing image from her memory. A placeless person himself, he causes Gracie's displacement by his doings. Following the funeral, Gracie is displaced when her father returns to Scrabble Creek from a lengthy stay in jail, forcing her to leave her childhood home and travel with him on the road and assist him in his meetings. Gracie does not want to leave, but as she recalls, "I *had* to go with him, then, I *had* to go with him, though my heart sank like stone in my chest" (114). Gracie's departure marks the end of her childhood-she is fourteen at this time-and a journey into premature adulthood.

Gracie's rootlessness persists after Virgil abandons her and she marries Travis. "As a person even then searching for hard ground in a world of shifting sands" (164), Gracie expects to find a place with Travis that will enable her deal with the lack of substance in her own life. Unfortunately for her, all she finds is shadow. Gracie feels essentially placeless in her marital home-the house belongs to Travis and his sister, and she is merely a pampered guest, even after having two daughters and a third baby, a son, who dies at birth. Thus she ends up walking through this portion of her life passively, going through the motions of duty and obligation, but disconnected from any sense of self. Recalling her own life, Lee Smith has said, "I think we spend our twenties being dutiful-acting out some but finally being dutiful. You only begin to figure out who you are maybe in your late thirties."[26] (By the time Gracie returns to Scrabble Creek, she is a thirty-eight year old cocktail waitress with cellulite and bleached hair.) Gracie's life with Randy leads to further displacement. When she marries Randy, whom Lee Smith calls "a would-be rock and roller," their apartment in Knoxville is far removed from any

semblance of Scrabble Creek: “There was no creek at Creekside Green, nothing green either. Nothing but cheap apartments and concrete” (234).
In an interview with Elizabeth Heroin-Sarafidis, Lee Smith remarks about Crystal, the protagonist of *Black Mountain Breakdown* that she is:

> *“damaged, too passive, the world is too much for her. A lot of Americans, in particular southern women, do try to please, I think. So I was writing a book about the dangers of being passive, of letting other people define what your life is going to be like” (14).*

The first thing Gracie does in her narrative is reclaim her own name. She opens her story thus: “My name is Florida Grace Shepherd, Florida for the state I was born in, Grace for the grace of God. I am the eleventh child of Virgil Shepherd” (3). As she “baptizes” herself, she reclaims her name from Travis: “Travis called me Missy but my name is Florida Grace, Florida for the state I was born in, Grace for the grace of God” (273). In a similar gesture of self-baptism (she tells us she feels “born again” [225]), she corrects Randy when, at the end of their first afternoon of lovemaking, he calls her “Missy”. “My whole name is Florida Grace,” she tells him (223). She explains that she must discover her identity and remember (also re-member) her story in order that she can find out “what is going to happen next” (4). Significantly at the end of her story she sheds all her patronyms: she is not Florida Grace Shepherd, or Florida Grace Word, or Florida Grace Newhouse. She is just Florida Grace. Naming, like her storytelling, functions as a potentially subversive act of self-possession. Her father, who performed many river baptisms, felt strongly about the power of names. “In fact, Daddy always baptized in the name of Jesus and not in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for those were not names, he said” (18). If naming functions as a taking possession, baptizing in the name of Jesus signals that the baptized belongs to Jesus, just as Adam claims all that he names in creation (Gen. 2: 19-20, 3: 20). Ernst Cassirer writes of Genesis: “In this act of appellation, man takes possession of the world both physically and intellectually— subjects it to his knowledge and his rule” (83). Feminist theologians such as Mary Daly have long viewed Adam’s act of dominion over woman and beast as the “paradigm of false naming.”[i] Carol Christ and

Judith Plaskow point out that it is only by naming themselves that women will "call themselves and the world into new being" (7).

Thus by naming herself Gracie both subverts the patriarchal biblical narrative and defines herself anew. Gracie's opening and closing acts of self-naming become "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending" (Rev. 1:8) of the narrative she constructs and the truths she reveals. Earlier, hearing that Virgil got his calling while on a mountain, Gracie climbs Chimney Rock, "surefooted as a boy" (58). By referring to her activity in masculine terms, Gracie reveals that going to the top of the mountain is living the male principle.[ii] Her father had often spoken about his vision on Roan Mountain, the day that God spoke to him, when he was anointed to handle a white serpent, and his hair turned white as snow. Gracie receives no divine inspiration on Chimney Rock: "I looked all around me real careful as I climbed, but I didn't see any sign of God or Jesus either one" (60). For the first time she "dare[s] to wonder" if her father's story is true (60). She then performs several self-liberating acts: first, she takes off her (father's) jacket and her shirt; then she pulls her hair loose in the wind; and finally etches her name, "GRACIE" on the top of the rock. "I went over and over the letters, so they would last," she says (59). In effect, the person she finds on the mountain is not Jesus, but herself. In a sense, then, the novel's construction of home, family, and church seems to contain empowering, liberating, even subversive elements.

Once Gracie scratches the letters of her name on a rock "so they would last"; now she takes on the godlike function of naming herself in words that would last. Her name suggests the redemptive impact of her long and agonizing journey home. In short, unlike some of her mountain counterparts, for whom a close relationship with their natural surroundings (a hollow, a gap, or a farm, for instance), is paramount to maintaing a sense of belonging and security, the house at Scrabble Creek provides the locus for Gracie's inward journey, from the "mountainside" of her childhood "where I was lost," to her recent dreams about her "duty -to take something to somebody, to tell somebody something" (4). As Joan Fry notes, "We use narrative to assess cause and effect in a pattern of significance, to claim shared reality with other people, and to identify continuity and specificity of self through memory. In short we use the process

of creating narrative shape to identify our place in the world" (19). Having accomplished this task, she takes one more look at Scrabble Creek before she leaves, fixing the image firmly in her mind. Scrabble Creek, in its power to evoke Gracie's memories, in turn becomes a memory to her, a place that resides within her.

Unlike Thomas Wolfe who, writing from the North Carolina mountains earlier in the twentieth century, presents the past as either a romantic picture of bygone days or an occasion to lament the loss of unrealized and unrealizable potential, Lee Smith, writing from the same mountains in more recent times, views the past as opening the doorway to the future. Like William Faulkner, and like Gracie in *Saving Grace*, Lee Smith has learned to return to the world she knew growing up, the beautiful coal-mining area surrounding her isolated hometown of Grundy in Southwest Virginia, in order effectively to tell her stories. Apart from that, the theme of remembrance runs throughout her works, so much so that the term "Oral History," which is the historians' term for remembrance handed down verbally, became the title of one of her novels. While for others memory comes only as a reflective action, a pining for a guilt-ridden remembrance of the past, Gracie in *Saving Grace* finds memory a proactive foundation on which she can build her future. The past becomes a beginning, a catalyst for the future. The future may be bright, or dim, or uncertain. But in any event memories from the past create the future. For Lee Smith, you must go back to go forward. Together with other women writers of the Southeast such as Kaye Gibbons, Josephine Humphries, and Jayne Anne Phillips, Lee Smith aims at achieving a movement within Southern literature in general and Appalachian fiction in particular, away from post-modernism and dramatizations of intellectual despair, toward a life-affirming fiction that still believes readers as well as characters can be moved and changed by the power of the word.

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