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Winter Landscape: Subdivision

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Surprisingly there have been few regional or national heroes in American folktales. The heroes who do exist tend to be local, colorful persons such as Devil Anse Hatfield, renown strong men, big eaters, or other defenders of local mores. These local celebrities earn respect for their exploits, serving as models for behaviors both positive and negative. Again the homecoming or family reunion symbolism is apparent as these heroes often serve as role models for a single extended family. Hero figures, thus, reinforce the mountaineer's ethnic identity with his culture, locale, and unique language.

While folk narratives enjoy fluctuations of popularity, in the mountains they have managed to retain their unique role as a form of symbolic homecoming. The mating of storyteller and audience is an ancient ritual still ceremonially observed in many rural communities. By providing emotionally satisfying companionship, the oral tale makes one feel part of a many-generation traditional family. Tales which range from riddles to moral advice, from near-epic to the brief account, are important to the southern mountaineer as they help preserve cultural traditions, exemplify local norms, and assist in establishing self-identity. Such stories are spiritual nourishment parallel to the familiar covered-dishes of family reunions. May their genre always serve to tie the present to the best of the past!

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Of course you don't want to see it
bringing together the force
of your black trees
a blank resistance
numb fields
broken stalks of flowers you call weeds
and a brown sky for sunset.

Somewhere rumble horses
and sheep move in clots.

Nothing seems emptier
than this land you tamed
laid bare by winter.

—Carol L. Edwards