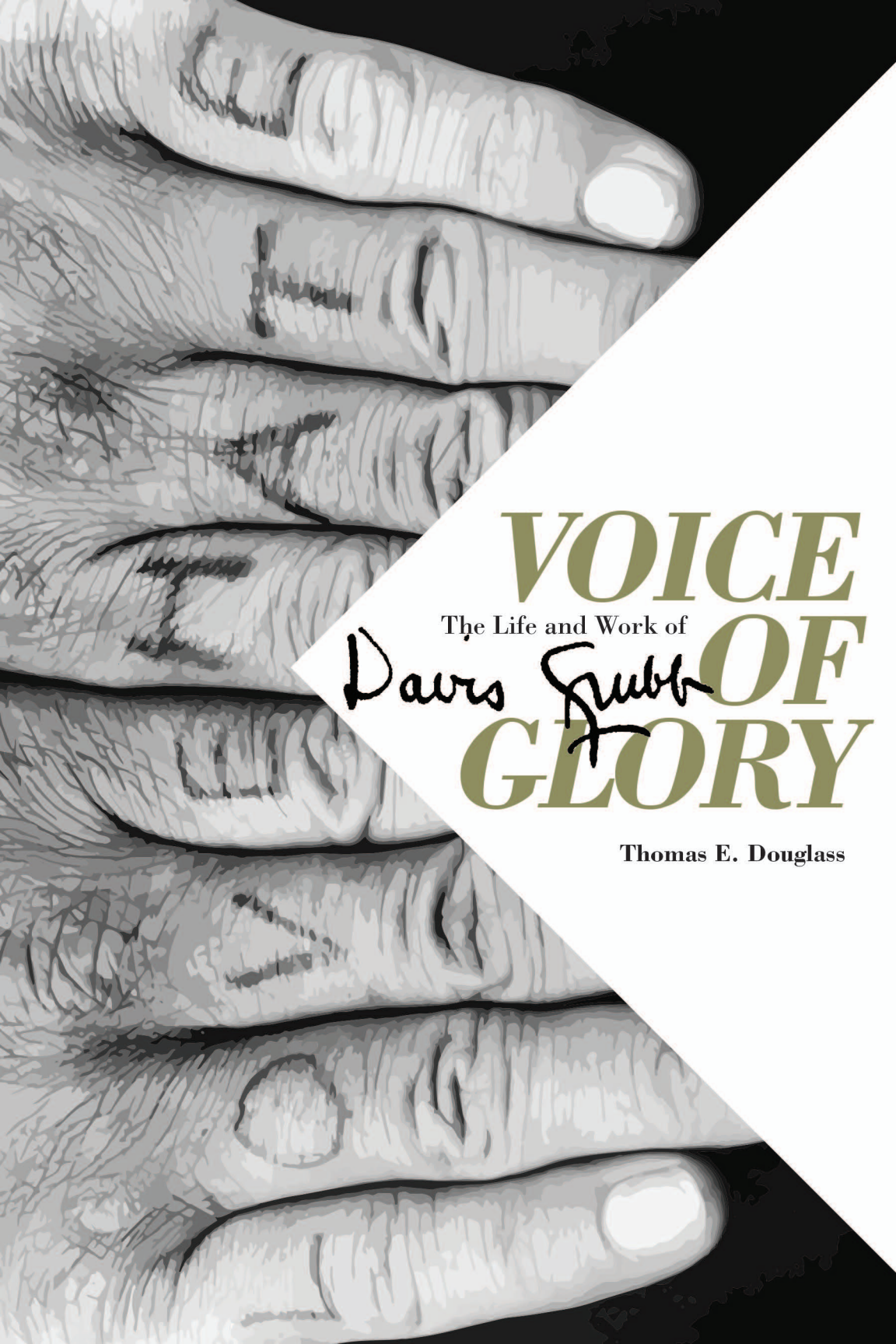

VOICE OF GLORY

The Life and Work of Davis Grubb

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FOR MY MOTHER AND FATHER

I WOULD LIKE TO DEDICATE THIS
TO MY DAUGHTERS—
RACHEL AND ABIGAIL
NOW AND THEN

Contents

Illustrations

Acknowledgments

Writing this book was a journey into the past that lives in the present of Appalachia. On my breaks from working at West Virginia University Library, I read books by Davis Grubb on the library lawn. Turning the pages of a Grubb novel can feel like you are building your own house of the imagination, a place you can call home, and his books were like home to me. I was then living in the same town of my mother's family who had lived on King Street in Morgantown generations ago. My mother's family, had traveled the diaspora road from West Virginia to the steel mills in Gary, Indiana, and then on the familiar route to the steel mills and shipyards of Baltimore, where I was born.

I never met Davis Grubb, but I had friends who knew him. In the late spring of 1980, I had been invited to a party that Davis would be attending, and I was eager to go. Then news came that he had become suddenly ill; he had been taken to the university hospital, suffering from a serious but undisclosed illness. I would never have the opportunity to meet him again.

Years later while I was at Chapel Hill, North Carolina, I searched for the West Virginia that still lived in my imagination and found the threads that would become this book. I learned of Jack Welch's dissertation, entitled "Davis Grubb: a Vision of Appalachia," which was an invaluable beginning. I learned of the first bibliography of works by and about Grubb compiled by WVU librarian Harry Kriz, and I began collecting Grubb's work: *Fools' Parade, The Night of the Hunter*, *The Watchman*, *Twelve Tales of Suspense and the Supernatural, The Golden Sickle*, *Shadow of My Brother*, A *Dream of Kings*, *The Barefoot Man*, *Ancient Lights, The Siege of 318*, and *The Voices of Glory*. Helen Pancake, the mother of Breece Pancake, completed my collection with a Christmas gift—a first edition of Grubb's *A Tree Full of Stars.*

Through my Morgantown friends, Maureen Conley and Dennis Scanlin, I learned about librarian Merle Moore and her close her friendship with Davis.

After corresponding with Merle and meeting her in Charleston, I gained important insights into Grubb during his last years. She and Shirley Mills almost singlehandedly salvaged his career and organized his return to West Virginia, energizing him to complete his last short story collection and his last novel, *Ancient Lights*. Moore's 1978 Back Fork Press edition of *The Siege of 318: Thirteen Mystical Stories* by Davis Grubb, in my view, is an excellent collection of short fiction and needs to be re-issued.

While researching *A Room Forever: The Life, Work, and Letters of Breece D'J Pancake*, I met West Virginia's literary raconteur Phyllis Moore, who put me in touch with librarian Gordon Simmons and archivist Dick Fauss of the West Virginia Division of Culture and History. They provided another crucial resource for this book: "Readings with Davis Grubb," a series of video recordings produced in 1980 by John Calvert and David Shouldis for the West Virginia State Library Commission. This material helped to confirm Welch's account of Grubb's life and filled in biographical details of what was then known.

Phyllis also connected me with David Houchin of the Clarksburg Public Library and Charley Hively, who supervises the Davis Grubb Collection at Waldomore. At one time, a large portion of Grubb's personal library and manuscripts were housed there. David and Charley dutifully provided important research and photographic assistance. And, most importantly, Phyllis led me to Virginia Steele Grubb (1930–2013), the widow of Louis Grubb and literary executor of the Grubb Estate. She invited me to the Riverside Drive studio apartment that she had shared with her late husband in New York to consult the main portion of Grubb's papers. Without her gracious support, this book would not have been possible. Davis's entire personal library of books and music lined the walls of Louis's studio, including notebooks, photographs, unpublished novels and short stories, voluminous ephemera, and a large portion of Davis's autobiography, which served to give a chronological structure to this book and provided a more complete view of the writer's life.

Another source of original interview material that served this book was Preston Neal Jones's *Heaven and Hell to Play With* (2002), a fascinating anecdotal account of the making of the film *The Night of the Hunter.* This fascinating book includes autobiographical observations by both Davis and Louis recorded in 1974 that underscore the close relationship between them.

My thanks to Michael Congdon for allowing me to use another important source for this book: the unpublished memoir of his father, Don Congdon, who was Davis's literary agent.

While in New York, I also met Claibe Richardson (1929–2003), the Broadway theatre composer who was working on the stage version of *The Night of the Hunter*, and Pauline Lappe, who cared for Davis in the months before his death.

I traveled to Moundsville to photograph Grubb's house, his grave at Mt. Rose Cemetery, the penitentiary, which is overwhelming and foreboding even today, and Whitegate Cemetery, the prison potter's field where two men who served as models for Grubb characters lay buried—Harry Powers and Holly Griffith. I toured the town, the ruins of Fostoria Glass, and the Mound for which the town is named. I met the folks working at the *Echo* newspaper office, walked the streets of Moundsville, and listened to the barge traffic on the river.

I traveled to Clarksburg to photograph the Grubb home on Mulberry Avenue, James and Law Books, the place where Davis worked while in school, the library at Waldomore, the site of Moore's Opera House, and Washington Irving High School, from which Davis graduated.

On two occasions, I visited the neighborhoods around Rittenhouse Square in Philadelphia that Grubb knew as a young man, and his apartments on 16th Street and his townhouse on Waverly. My thanks to Philadelphia native Jason Faulkner, who gave me the guided tour, and my thanks to lifelong Philadelphia natives and Davis's close friends, Stephen Berg, Patti Promos, and Ronnie Weingrad, who corroborated the veracity of Grubb's 1973 autobiographical manuscript "I Spake as a Child" and provided another source for this book—Grubb's complete 1975 memoir, "Left Hand Hate, Right Hand Love."

Over time, I also visited the special collections of West Virginia University to see the original draft of Grubb's story sketch "Gentleman Friend," and I visited the Margaret Herrick Library in Los Angeles to view the sketches Grubb made for Charles Laughton. To those librarians, I give thanks for their good service. The librarians at East Carolina University, Rebecca Harrison, David Hisle, William Gee, Sherry Bingham, and Clark Nall, were especially helpful in assembling necessary research, and thanks to librarian Thomas Rowe, who transcribed the hours-long video, "Readings with Davis Grubb," for his enthusiasm and interest.

Cat Pleska of Mountain State Press, Brenna Craig's thesis "The Formation of Mountain State Press," and Karyn Stagg's original Grubb illustrations for *A Tree Full of Stars* also helped in understanding Grubb's West Virginia return.

I received many encouragements while researching this book. These many well-wishes and endorsements proved to be the only antidote to faintheartedness. To

Jack Higgs, Newton Smith, Fred Chappell, Ruel Foster, Kate Long, Norm Julian, Clarence Cross, Steve Fessenmaier, Virginia Grubb, Helen Pancake, Herschel Grubb, Peter Crow, and Scot Danforth, I extend my humble gratitude.

My sincere thanks to Susen Douglass, John Lang, Grace Toney Edwards, Emily Huckabay, and Annalisa Zox-Weaver for their close reading of the Grubb manuscript, and special thanks to Linda Fox for her photographic expertise and gentle suggestions.

There isn't much published criticism about Grubb except for reviews, and highlighting the primary material in this book was a priority. While Grubb's reputation is known in his home state, there is material here that has not been seen before. Grubb's life story in his own words is important to consider, for it clearly displays his sensibility and method. There is little critical self-assessment of his own work in the manuscripts of his autobiography other than statements about what he tried to do or about his philosophy of composition and life. True, Grubb was preoccupied with success and failure, and this is also clearly on display in his own words. The long passages included from Grubb's autobiographical writings "I Spake as a Child" and "Left Hand Hate, Right Hand Love" warrant attention for several reasons. First, I do not think the primary material will become available for scholars any time soon. Second, the colorful recollections of his life help recreate the times and the many places he lived. The past was alive in him. His obsession with his hometown and experiences in Moundsville and Clarksburg, West Virginia, New York, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles are important to understand in light of his own words.

Furthermore, the many endnotes that identify references Grubb made in his writing create a texture of his life (outside of Grubb's own point of view). These notes are necessary in marking the influences on his life and work. Coincidentally, these notes also have many Appalachian/West Virginia connections that are important in view of establishing a literary history of the region.

For a first book about Davis Grubb, I wanted to present as much material as possible and to compose a coherent story of his life. I hope I have done that.

THOMAS DOUGLASS
Greenville, North Carolina

Prologue

"He showed me that I must go back to Lavender Hill and go on writing and stop being a damned young fool. That all living is hunger and that without hunger we perish. That each man's city of refuge must be built within himself - of broken toys. That the only people who truly live are those who are always beginning again. That it was not I, or Cicely, who mattered, but love itself; not my suffering that must be eased, but love that must be served. That only by love do we come to understanding and truth. That the mocking magic that comes and goes is the lamp that is lighting us to beauty. That this beauty is the happiness of God and is not in clouds or on hill tops, but everywhere about us."

(Thomas Burke The Wind and The Rain 287)

"I could not have lived my life in any other way. . . . ."

(Davis Grubb "I Spake as a Child" 911)

Davis Alexander Grubb (1919–1980) was a writer from a small river town in Appalachia who learned his trade in the great cities of New York, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles during the days of pulp fiction and radio. He was a maker of tales that delighted and terrified, tales that returned the reader to childhood and rendered justice for all the hurts and inequities of the adult world. On the page, he was an avenging angel, righting the wrongs of the past in his own life, in his own country,

and putting trust in his own vision of divine love. Off the page, he was riding a roller coaster of success and failure, love and disappointment—a profligate spender, a squanderer of his own passions—desperate to achieve in life the same euphoria he found in his writing. At times emotionally chaotic, he was riddled with demons, made worse by his lifelong affair with alcohol and drugs and with his androgynous bisexual nature in a time and culture where sexual taboos were strong. More than once, he was in danger of losing his life to self-annihilation and to the self-accusation that he was a fallen angel.

This is the story of one of West Virginia's most well-read and favorite authors, a hero in his own state, well known to the reading public. He continually placed Appalachian settings and characters before a national audience without pandering to regional socio-economic or political causes. Instead, much like Hugo and Dickens, he used impoverished settings to dramatize the universal dilemma of want and social hypocrisy, always confirming salvation through poetic justice made possible through sacrificial love. It was a grand theme worked out by using the realities of his own experience: growing up during the Depression, losing his childhood home, becoming fatherless at the age of seventeen, and living within a stone's throw of the three great symbols and confusions of his life—the West Virginia State Penitentiary, the Adena Indian Burial Mound, and the Ohio River—all of which appear time and again throughout his fiction.

His nine-room childhood home at 318 Seventh Street along the banks of the Ohio River in the town of Moundsville is situated a few blocks away from the largest Indian Mound east of the Mississippi. One block farther stands the former West Virginia State Penitentiary with its high stone walls and towers. Routinely, young Grubb saw prison inmates loading brooms or paint or clothing (articles manufactured by the prison industry) onto the decks of waiting steamboats. He also knew that (not as frequently) executions by hanging would take place at 9 o'clock on Friday nights, and the men he saw or heard, or men like them, died.

In his boyhood, he roamed about the Mound and inspected the organized displays of buried Indian artifacts and bones (the displays were supervised by inmates), suggesting tales of Indian kings and kingdoms of long ago. Late in life, Grubb said in reflection, "To have grown up in a town with a 3,000 year old burial mound and a state penitentiary is very heavy for a child. . . . I don't think I know any more about

the mound today then I did when I was five years old and first saw it, as we all see it. And I don't think I know any more about the reason for that penitentiary today in our society than I did when I looked at it with the eyes of a child and saw it as a huge fairy castle, perhaps inhabited by ogres, perhaps by good princes . . ." (qtd. in Calvert).

At home, Grubb heard stories of the river told by his grandfather, former steamboat captain William Davis Alexander, for whom Grubb was named. The 1920s and early '30s were the last days of the steamboat whistles and frequent landings by elegantly made paddle wheel packets, their calliopes playing "Carolina in the Morning" and "The Beautiful Ohio." By 1932, the steamboat whistles of travel commerce had ended.

If this were not enough to invigorate a child's imagination, the tales about the Ohio also included gruesome accounts of river pirates like the Brothers Harpe and the unseen dangers of Devil's Elbow, the treacherous turn in the river just south of Moundsville, where phantom sandbars and submerged crags clutched at the hulls of passing steamboats.

The boy's imagination of horror and fancy, of gothic castles and knights, of pirates and buried treasure, was fed further by a household library filled with the work of Howard Pyle, Hans Christian Andersen, Charles Dickens, and Victor Hugo. At seven, he was writing illustrated stories, learning to draw from his father at the breakfast table, hearing stories read by his mother at night, playing with toy soldiers under the trees, and riding bicycles during the day on the brick pavement that was Seventh Street in the 1920s.

Everything about the town presented stark contrasts to the boy's mind: the penitentiary and the Mound, a place of state-sanctioned executions on Friday nights and the buried bones of native people from long ago. Furthermore, Moundsville was a heavily churched town and the site of massive campground meetings that often attracted 15,000 souls from surrounding towns. It was a place where one often heard sermons of mercy and redemption. The divide between rich and poor was also readily apparent: the nearby steel mills and coal mines thrived with the sweat of the immigrant—the Russian, Pole, Hungarian, Slovak, Italian—and the shopkeepers and town elite carried the names from the established Anglo settlers—the Tomlinsons and the Cresaps, who were Grubb's ancestors. Moreover, when Grubb

was ten years old, the crash of 1929 proved catastrophic for the Grubb family, and he witnessed firsthand the effects of the Great Depression.

Around the corner from Grubb's childhood home stood the office of the Moundsville *Daily Echo*, where on the corner the bundled papers were loaded onto the early morning street cars on Lafayette Avenue, and newspaper boys shouted out the headlines to passersby: ("**114 BELIEVED DEAD IN MINE EXPLOSION**"), the 1924 Benwood mine disaster, "Extra extra," the crash of the dirigible Shenandoah ("**SHENANDOAH FALLS AMONG HILLS AFTER FIGHT WITH STORM**"), the apprehension and death of Pretty Boy Floyd, the Lindbergh kidnapping, and the arrest of Harry Powell, the Bluebeard killer of Quiet Dell.

In grade school, he was a dreamer, bookish, the odd intellectual who worked hard at keeping his grades low for fear of reprisal or ridicule. Not a member of the ball-playing crowd, he was the target of young toughs and often came home with a bloody nose. His precarious position was made more vulnerable by a domineering and doting mother who would come by the school to make sure young Davis had his galoshes. His early aptitude and interests were encouraged by his father, a local Wheeling architect, and by his mother, who had attended "Finishing School" at the Female Seminary in nearby Washington, Pennsylvania, and who had cultural pretensions in the town, inviting the local ministers and the small educated elite to teas in their home.

Outside the house, conflict and confusion reigned, but within that house, everything was all right with the world. Inside that house, he was safe and he belonged. There his imagination was given free range and encouragement, which was to him pure security and joy. To that place, that feeling, he sought continually to return through his fiction.

Two weeks before Christmas of 1936, the house at 318 was foreclosed, and the Grubb family evicted to live in a hillside house in nearby Glendale. Just one year later, his father died of a heart attack, walking up those hillside steps, and Grubb's Edenic childhood world had come to an end. After the death of his father, his new life became alternating moments of light and dark—for every success, a personal tragedy and disappointment, for every hope and ambition, an obdurate fear and uncertainty. This adolescent terror found its way into his fiction, and the intensity of fear often sets his work apart. In a letter addressed to his brother Louis, enclosed

with a published copy of his first success, *The Night of the Hunter*, Grubb wrote: "This is a memory of the day we were evicted from the old house in Moundsville—and began, all of us, to search for our Eden. We are still searching . . . Love, D."

This psychic wound from his youth provided the incredible energy that fueled his storytelling, the mad rush of words onto the page. He wrote ten published novels, two short story collections, and dozens of magazine stories and radio plays—a prolific body of work. In addition, he wrote at least six unpublished novels, and one 933-page autobiographical manuscript. The titles and the tales he told cataloged his life.

From 1946 to 1952, Grubb achieved minimal but encouraging success by writing several short stories in monthly magazines while working as a copywriter for radio and print. Then Grubb vaulted to literary success and national notice when Harper & Brothers published his first novel—*The Night of the Hunter* (1953). Set in the Appalachian river town of Cresap's Landing near Moundsville along the Ohio River, the novel tells the fearful tale of the orphans John and Pearl and their saving angel, Rachel Cooper, who protects them from the lonely-hearts killer and false preacher, Harry Powell. The book appeared one year before Harriette Arnow's *The Dollmaker*. Mary Lee Settle's first novel, *The Love Eaters*, and two years before James Agee's *A Death in the Family*. The only other Appalachian novelists of national importance at the time who wrote of Appalachian settings were James Still and Jesse Stuart.

In 1953–1954, *The Night of the Hunter* remained twenty-eight weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list, and the subsequent movie sale and film production by Charles Laughton and Paul Gregory in 1955 gave him the confidence to experiment in almost every literary genre: *The Dream of Kings* (1955)—an historical romance of the Civil War; *The Watchman* (1961)—a psycho-sexual murder mystery; *The Voices of Glory* (1962)—a story cycle much like Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*; *A Tree Full of Stars* (1965)—a fantasy Christmas book, his version of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*; *Shadow of My Brother* (1966)—a Southern Gothic novel concerning the crisis of racism and lynching; *The Golden Sickle* (1968)—a young adult novel about river pirates and lost treasure; *Fools' Parade* (1969)—a Depression-era novel about a band of ex-convicts seeking justice; *The Barefoot Man* (1971)—a mine wars novel based in part on the biography of Mother Jones; and *Ancient Lights*

(1980)—a postmodern, futuristic science fiction sex fantasy. His experimentation puzzled critics who gauged his work as uneven, surprising, flabbergasting; what they could not argue was the attraction and satisfaction of the tale. However, in every genre, his spirit and vision were the same. Grubb remarked: "I became a writer in the early forties, and fifties, and through the sixties. But I'm now into my eleventh book [*Ancient Lights*][1] and it seems to me that in every book, I try to say one thing. I'm not quite sure what it was, but I know in each book I'm trying to say the same thing more clearly."[2]

Already seeing the world in dramatic contrasts from a very early age, he became a student and devotee of John Donne, John Keats, William Wordsworth, and especially William Blake, author of "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" and "Songs of Innocence and Experience." Grubb constructed his tales on this same oppositional understanding—characters thrown into a struggle between love and hate, good and evil, a battle between the corrupt and pure, the rich and the poor, the common man versus the privileged.

It is no wonder that the most enduring image he created was the tattooed fingers of love and hate on the hands of Preacher Harry Powell, a character imbued with the divine light gone dark, where money, sex, and religion were corrupted into greed, shame, and murder. Like this preacher, Grubb saw himself as a fallen angel, corrupt and lustful, capable of violence, already dipped in the violations of the soul—yet yearning to return, to be redeemed, even willing to be crucified in order to be resurrected. In a large way, the pattern of crucifixion and resurrection, of sin and redemption, guides every one of his novels.

Grubb, the writer, saw himself as a light bringer, a saint, a redeemer, one who could guarantee outcomes because, after all, he was a writer armed with love and optimistic faith. Grubb once wrote: "To reach the very deepest part of your soul and spirit, I have to resort to what you think is the lowest part of your nature."[3]At last on the page, he could take us through the terror and dark night of the soul, the temptations of his own experience, make them real, and deliver us time and again to a just and loving Eden, a Christmas day where we could begin again.

Mythic Ground

" . . . the cord of myth, hearthside hearsay and outrageous history."

(Davis Grubb "The Valley" 56)

Before there was an Appalachian Literary Renaissance, before the Appalachian Studies Association, before Henry Shapiro's *Appalachia on Our Mind* (1978), 1 even before the term "Appalachia" was in common use referring to a particular region, there was the work of Davis Grubb. Between 1953 and 1971, he had written nine of his ten novels, all set in Appalachia, all published by nationally prominent houses—Viking, Random House, Simon and Schuster, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Charles Scribner's Sons, Harper & Brothers. He had sold the film rights to three of his novels, two of which were made into films, The Night of the Hunter (1953) and Fools' Parade (1969), and he had embarked upon a legendary film adaptation of Hunter with Charles Laughton in 1955. He had rubbed elbows with the nation's most famous writers, performers, and musicians—Jim Jones, James Baldwin, Clifford Odets, John Steinbeck, John Carradine, Thomas Mitchell, Robert Mitchum, Charles Laughton, Mort Sahl, Miles Davis, Mel Torme, Alec Wilder, Billie Holiday, Anita O'Day, Lenny Bruce, Ruth Gordon, among others.

Yet for all this ephemeral fame, but real accomplishment, Davis Grubb has been left out of the Appalachian/American Literature canon, remembered mostly for his contributions to the horror/fantasy/mystery genre. Masters of the genre, like Stephen King, have heralded the work of Grubb and acknowledged his influence on their own writing. He had been passed over in the making of Appalachian literary anthologies and cultural critiques because, perhaps, Grubb came of age through the rough workman-like apprenticeship of writing ad copy during the day and writing fiction at night for radio and weekly magazines, like *Collier's* and *The Saturday Evening Post*, before the advent of university writing programs. Moreover, Grubb's experiment with fiction insisted on the pleasure and sound of a tale and, thereby, the selling of a tale, rather than on the literary cachet of social-cultural consciousness, which dominated literary critique in the latter part of the twentieth century.

Grubb was noticed in the national press, and he was read throughout the country and well-read in his home state of West Virginia, and before the emergence of the Appalachian literary scene, he had been putting views of Appalachian life before a national reading audience. Grubb's consciousness, as it was expressed through his fiction, was in part defined by a regionalist assumption that the patchwork of fiction had to be scraped together from the writer's native soil, much like Faulkner, whom he admired and to whom he was often compared; yet for Grubb, the meaning of fiction could not be particularly exclusive to that soil. Once when asked if a writer could only write about his or her native land experience, Grubb vehemently disagreed: "I don't believe that at all! You have to have inspiration and experience. The inspiration comes from anywhere and from everywhere. You can write about anything and everything, but you have to translate it back into your own experience to make it real when you write about it, to make it real to yourself first, so you can then make it real to others. You have to transplant your experience and everybody else's experience and insight from all over the world back into your native soil to make it grow!" (Havern, July 19, 1980, 1).

Upon returning to his boyhood home in Moundsville, West Virginia, in 1978, two years before his death, Grubb told television cameras: "I am on a particular spot of land where I don't know where to start . . . Everything began here, in this yard, in this house, under these trees that were planted by my mother 50 years ago. This is a place of origins for me. If there is a vibration given off by certain parts of the earth, then I am standing in a veritable sun shower right now. Because everything that I

remember, everything that I have written, had its origin in this piece of land" (qtd. in Calvert). For him, imagination was inextricably bound to place.

This understanding of place involved a certain reverence, for it was the holy origin of whatever came out on the page. Furthermore, Grubb believed that one's life could be transformed through the use of imagination. This transformative understanding of literature as something liberating comes from Grubb's admiration for Blake, Hugo, Dickens, and others—writers who influenced both his desire to be a writer and his conception of what a writer must be. "I think this great democratic ideal in Dickens's work, and the works of men like Balzac, Zola, Robert Louis Stevenson, Barrie," Grubb said in 1978, "I think this shred of humanism has gotten tangled in the mesh of certain liberal ideas that have their basis more in economics and politics of our time than they do in the human spirit" (qtd. in Calvert). In sum, he was more interested in fiction that inspired the common man to embrace his own soul, rather than an ideology or a point of view.

Although Grubb was a contemporary of other notable Appalachian writers, Harriette Arnow, Wilma Dykeman, Hubert Skidmore, James Still, Mary Lee Settle, John Ehle, and others, Grubb's philosophy of composition perhaps complicated the critical reception of his work. "[N]o one book should be like any of the others," he said, and he continually experimented with genre and method (qtd. in Arnold 117). Critics never knew quite what to expect and had difficulty labeling Grubb's work.

In 1978, just before the Appalachian Literary Renaissance began to gather momentum, Grubb foresaw the crisis in the publishing world and the dangers of the corporate communications industry. "Frightening images are coming to me from New York," Grubb told West Virginia Public Television. "In the last year I've been there, I heard every prominent publisher say that within a few years, there are only going to be seven or eight big publishers in Manhattan. I don't think there are many more big ones than that now: Doubleday, Simon and Schuster, Random House, Knopf. I think possibly in probably ten or twenty years, there are only going to be two big publishers. So what does that mean for a writer who is coming out of West Virginia, as I was in the 1930s, who's trying to find an outlet for his voice, for his particular viewpoint—because this viewpoint is infinitely precious" (Calvert). Grubb feared the marginalization of the individual, not exclusively an Appalachian individual. Grubb was no Rotarian for a regional *literary* cause. "I think the world is becoming conglomerated into a huge organization which is going to make it

difficult if not impossible for the individual to thrive, and when I say the individual, in my case, I mean a writer" (Calvert). At the time Grubb spoke these words, the great mergers of the communications and publishing industry had not yet occurred.

Grubb lived most of his adult life in the cities of Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and New York; he was a gregarious man who loved to socialize in any nearby saloon. Grubb prided himself in the unique makings of his own biography, lauding the gifts and oddities of his home place among the Manhattan literati: "I've become almost tiresome in certain New York quarters because of my harping on what I think are the unique splendors, horrors and great humors of our state." And, in the next breath, Grubb complained, "The only time the world looks at us, apparently, is when we have a Buffalo Creek disaster,[2] or we have a coal strike." Nevertheless, Grubb couldn't do anything but present a view of Appalachia to a national audience in his fiction, as he admitted: "I just can't think of taking off on any book without a West Virginia base because I can't quite visualize things happening in the world without them happening there" (Calvert). All of his published work, except for a handful of short stories, is set in West Virginia, specifically the fictional small towns of Adena, Elizabethtown, or Glory, in the fictional Apple County, a setting based on his experiences growing up in the Ohio river town of Moundsville and living his teenage years in the hill country town of Clarksburg, West Virginia.

Yet a writer is born into a time as well as a place. Grubb was born in the same year of Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), three years after Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology* (1916), and a year before Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* (1920). At the age of forty-three, Grubb wrote his own version of the times in which he was born: *The Voices of Glory,* published in 1962, which has been aptly compared to Anderson's grotesques, Masters's voices from the graves on the hill, and Lewis's scathing critique of small town hypocrisy and misguided boosterism. Carlos Baker called *The Voices of Glory* "one of the most striking composite portraits of an American small town since Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* . . ." Orville Prescott for the *New York Times* declared, "There hasn't been anything like *The Voices of Glory* ever. . . ." Although favorably reviewed from New York to San Francisco, *The Voices of Glory* quickly fell out of print. Edwin Arnold noted: " . . . *The Voices of Glory* is an impressive work of the imagination . . . and the book deserves more attention than it has received" (119, 120). *Voices,* composed of twenty-eight chapters and twenty-eight voices from the grave, recounts events from the turn-of-

the-century to the present of the 1920s in the fictional West Virginia town of Glory (the first instance of this setting in Grubb's fiction and the one that would reappear in all of his work until his death in 1980). No better portrait of an Appalachian river town exists for that time period.

Coincident to the time of Grubb's birth, there developed a national purpose that often ran roughshod over regional and individual concerns, which further fueled Grubb's sense of threatened individuality and injustice everywhere. According to John C. Hennen's study *The Americanization of West Virginia: Creating a Modern Industrial State 1916–1925* (1996): " . . . the First World War consolidated the dominant position of professionals, business people, and political capitalists as arbiters of national values, and served to catalyze the reorganization of American society in service to these values" (1). Nowhere else was this more painfully evident than in Appalachia, where resources for the national good were abundant and the large proportion of the profit-taking and other real benefits were experienced only by a few who lived outside of the region and by even fewer who resided within. This national spirit equated patriotism, religious conversion, and Rotarian pride with progress.

Opposed to this spirit were movements aligned with the political Left, which Grubb championed. In his work, Grubb often mentioned Eugene Debs, the five-time Socialist party candidate for the Presidency of the United States, particularly in *The Watchman* and *The Voices of Glory.* Debs was convicted of violating the Espionage Act after making a speech in Canton, Ohio, on June 16, 1918, that criticized this Act which prohibited dissent about the war. He served two months (April–June 1919) of his ten-year sentence in the West Virginia State Penitentiary in Moundsville.

Grubb was also born into the age of the Coal Mine Wars (1920–1921) in the southern West Virginia coalfields, and he addressed this history in *Voices*, in several stories collected in *The Siege of 318,* and in another of his novels that deserves reconsideration, *The Barefoot Man*, published in 1971 by Simon and Schuster. *The Barefoot Man* includes a portrayal of Mother Jones[3] in the character of Mother Dunne. Moreover, the epigraph to *Voices*—"When I get to the other side, I shall tell God almighty about West Virginia"—is the last line of Mother Jones's autobiography in the section titled "Medieval West Virginia." Outraged, Jones was responding to Governor Glasscock of West Virginia and the coal operators who wholeheartedly believed in the promotion of big coal as a form of patriotism at the expense of individual safety and justice.

Meanwhile, Grubb grew up amid the condescending philanthropy of Carnegie and Mellon, the struggle of labor organizers Walter Reuther and John L. Lewis,[4] and the phenomena of national evangelists who preached at the Moundsville Campground: Billy Sunday, Sam Jones,[5] and the first media evangelist, William Leroy Stidger (1885–1949),[6] who came to national prominence in Kansas City, Missouri. Stidger was born in Moundsville, three blocks and a generation away from Grubb, and served, in part, as the model for Sinclair Lewis's *Elmer Gantry* (1927). Grubb found the righteous convergence of business, Christianity, and patriotism during this time particularly noxious, but his deeply felt objections provided plenty of plot scenarios in his fiction. Corrupt Rotarian preachers abound in his fiction as well as short-sighted capitalists. The rub of money and of false religion appears throughout Grubb's work, most notably in *The Night of the Hunter* and his 1969 book *Fools' Parade*, in which the corrupt banker Grindstaff pals up with nefarious prison guard/Sunday school preacher Doc Council against an unlikely family of ex-cons—Mattie Appleyard, Lee Cottrill, and Johnny Jesus.

Aside from the spirit of the times and the region's history stood the physical reality of his hometown, Moundsville, and its geography, which included three symbolic monuments for Grubb's imagination—an ancient Indian burial mound, the state penitentiary, and the Ohio River—all within view of his boyhood home at 318

THE MOUND IN 1912. (COURTESY OF WV ARCHIVES AND HISTORY)

Seventh Street. In the foreword to a 1989 collection of previously published Grubb stories titled *You Never Believe Me* issued by St. Martin's Press, Davis's brother, Louis, wrote, "My brother was born in Moundsville, West Virginia, a rather sleepy Ohio River town that was a stopping point for our grandfather's steamboat in the 1880s. . . . Dave's childhood was rather typical for a small town in the 1920s . . ." (vii). However, this small town was anything but sleepy or typical for Grubb's imagination to grow.

Moundsville is named after the many Indian burial mounds in the area. The largest Adena Indian Burial Mound in America is there—standing 69 feet high and 290 feet in circumference, its age of origin estimated to be near 1,000 BC. The top of the Mound rises forty feet above the prison walls of the former West Virginia State Penitentiary, which is across the street.

Recalling his boyhood in the Ohio River Valley, Grubb wrote: "In those years I remember it as a place of daily astonishment, entertainments, mysteries, myths, brags, facts and holy awe. Even the commonplaces of those times were days different as bright, colored beads, strung in endless novelty upon the cord of myth, hearthside hearsay and outrageous history" ("The Valley" 56). The history of Moundsville, once called by Ohio River men "Grave Creek Flats," includes the drama and adventure of a frontier settlement of the Trans-Allegheny in the eighteenth century. The first settlement made by Joseph Tomlinson in 1771 was an outpost for westward development, subject to attacks by the Iroquois and Shawnee, and hampered by the lack of established supply routes. Wolves were common and communication to Fort Henry to the north in Wheeling haphazard. Life along the frontier was violent and dangerous as the etymology of "Wheeling" indicates; taken from "Wiilin" or "Wilunk"a Delaware Indian word translated as "place of the head," Wheeling is named after the decapitated head of a white man impaled on a pole (Duffy ix). Ten miles south from Wheeling, the first white man, Christopher Gist,[7] visited the site of Moundsville in 1752 and named the two streams that flowed into the Ohio—Little Grave Creek to the north and Big Grave Creek to the south. On the wedge of land between the two creeks lived the prehistoric Adena Indians,[8] from 1,000 BC to AD 500, and left behind dozens of burial mounds, including the great Mound.

Grubb's childhood home on Seventh Street is not more than a few blocks from the Mound, which can be seen from his doorstep. In the early 1920s, the Mound was a popular meeting place for young lovers to consummate their first love. It was also appropriated every December for the American ritual of Christmas, adorned

with a Santa, sleigh, and reindeer along with a large Christmas tree at the very top. The mystery of the Mound has never been adequately explained: Was it the royal grave of a great chief and his handmaidens interred along with many treasures of the tribes, or a great chief buried under hundreds of the sacrificed, burned bodies of the tribe whose ashes served as the earth that heaped the Mound so high? In 1838, began the systematic pillaging of ancient Indian artifacts inside the Mound, those "bright, colored beads, strung in endless novelty" (Grubb, "The Valley" 56). These destructive amateur excavations ceased only when the state acquired the site for preservation in 1909. The defilement and subsequent uses of this sacred place led young Grubb to view the Mound as a collision between man's greed to exploit and man's need to revere the sacred, and a collision of one people's history and value with that of another.

In 1841 or '42, according to legend, an old Cherokee Chief [unnamed] passed through Moundsville to witness what had become of the Mound, by then a penny amusement for passersby with the removed relics on full display. According to the *Wheeling Times and Advertiser* of August 30, 1843, the Chief " . . . became so indignant at the desecration and display of sepulchral secrets to the white race, that his companions and interpreter found it difficult to restrain him from assassinating the guides. His language assumed the tone of fury, and he brandished his knife as they forced him out of the passage with his senses steeped in the influence of alcohol." The newspaper also reprinted a poem supposedly authored by this same chief:

'Tis not enough; that hated race
Should hunt us out, from grave and place
And consecrated shore—where long
Our fathers raised the lance and song—

'Tis not enough—that we must go
Where streams and rushing fountains flow
Whose murmurs, heard among our fears,
Fall only on a stranger's ears—

'Tis not enough—that with a wand,
They sweep away our pleasant land,
And bid us, as some giant foe,
Or willing, or unwilling go;

But they must open our very graves
To tell the dead—they, too, are slaves.

(Brantner 151)

Regardless of the poem's authenticity, it portrays the outrage of a grievous injustice and desecration, a feeling that had existed, with or without the Chief's visit, for some time before Grubb was born. Furthermore, Grubb's ancestors had lived in the Ohio River Valley for nearly two hundred years, and some of them had been intimately involved in wresting the land from the Indians.

In particular, Michael Cresap (1742–1775), on Grubb's mother's side, played a minor but infamous role in the years before and after Lord Dunmore's War (1774). Cresap's Landing,[9] along the Ohio River, south of Moundsville, was the site of Cresap's nifty land speculation using the ploy of "tomahawk rights," a technique whereby Cresap acquired thousands of acres, building empty cabins and planting untended corn crops so as to establish settler's rights and ownership by residence. John Murray, Lord Dunmore, the newly arrived governor of Virginia in late 1770, spurred a new land grab west of the Alleghenies, thereby disrupting Shawnee life and inviting unscrupulous land speculators. As a result, several bloody encounters between the English settlers and the Indians ensued. In 1773 and 1774, several land surveying parties were attacked and killed by Indians, and Michael Cresap was elected to lead a retaliatory campaign of "search and destroy" missions against the Indians.

In the spring of 1773, several encounters came to be known as "Cresap's War." The most notorious was the killing of several members of the family of Mingo Chief Logan on April 30. The slayings were particularly gruesome. Enraged by a recent Indian attack, white settlers, probably Jacob Greathouse, under the command of Cresap, killed Shikellimus, Logan's father, and shot and stripped the pregnant sister of Logan, hung her by her wrists, and "[w]hile still living they cut open her belly and left her to die with the unborn infant dangling from her abdomen" (Eckert 81). It is also reported that one of the "whites" who later came across the scene was George Rogers Clark. "It was this loss which turned an old friend [Chief Logan] into an implacable enemy of the whites and resulted in Logan's personally taking thirteen scalps in retaliation" (Rice, *The Allegheny Frontier* 81). What followed was Lord Dunmore's War, a concerted effort to end Indian hostility, which culminated in the Battle of Point Pleasant on October 10, 1774.

Although the Cresap name was eventually cleared of this atrocity (Cresap being in Maryland at the time of slaying), there were other incidents that involved Cresap. Though Grubb admitted that this story had always been part of the family's "fireside indignation" (Welch 7), he mused that the violence in his writing must come from something that had been passed into him as part of his makeup. "It must all be in

me," he told his biographer Jack Welch.[10] "Inside I am a very corrupt person" (7). This self-reproachful confession was perhaps precipitated by Grubb's Whitman-like "Very well, then I contradict myself, I am large, I contain multitudes" sentiment as well as his Manichean understanding of the ongoing battle between good and evil inside every human being. Certainly, the Mound was a reminder of this history and the paradox within him.

Grubb connected the Mound to the other great man-made symbol of the town, the West Virginia State Penitentiary, which is directly opposite the Mound on the eastern edge of town. Grubb wrote:

> In the midst of my village of Moundsville, West Virginia, along that river's shores, rose a gigantic earthen tomb, the burial place of the kings of a vanished people whose name and origins were lost in the smokefire of myths even before the Indians. Some called them Norsemen from the pre-Colombian landings in New England or Mayan expeditions that had crossed the Rio Grande and spanned a continent to seek new fortunes among the eastern Appalachian jungles; no one knew; everyone guessed. The great dirt mound stood imponderable in the midst of my river town, kept secrets among the roots of gigantic trees that were saplings when the Wars of the Roses raged. It looked out across the chimney tops of our infant, century-old community; it stood higher than the bleak, black bastions of the State Penitentiary two blocks away. In the innocence and confusion of my child's mind the great mound and the penitentiary were bound together in ambiguous and dreadful brotherhood. One was the burial place of the unknown dead; the other of the unknown living. These two were the great, dark, earth-colored pre-eminences in my town, each full of its secrets, riddles and whispers of ritual killing. ("The Valley" 56)

His novels *The Night of the Hunter*, *The Voices of Glory*, *The Watchman*, and his 1966 novel *Shadow of My Brother*, inspired by the Emmett Till case,[11] all concern the dramatic contradictions of ritualized killing, whether it is a state-sanctioned execution or a lynching.

THE PENITENTIARY

The West Virginia State Penitentiary is a looming gothic structure of gray sandstone with walls twenty-four feet high, four feet thick at the base, and two feet at the top of the crenellated walls, built on a foundation six feet thick and six feet below ground. Six circular guard towers with turrets rise up from the walls. Construction began in 1866 and was completed in 1875. It has been added onto throughout the