ABIDING APPALACHIA: WHERE MOUNTAIN AND ATOM MEET
Marilou Bonham Thompson Chickasaw Branch
St. Luke's Press Memphis, TN, 1978
91 pages $8.95 hard cover $6.95 soft cover

The first poet to write about growing up on the atomic frontier in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, Marilou Thompson fuses her Cherokee/Appalachian heritage into a spiritual challenge for the nuclear age. In poetry and prose she creates an unusual synthesis: Cherokees driven from their mountains along the Trail of Tears, pioneers following in their wake, scientists coming to the foothills to split the atom. "Mantled in forests, steeped in mist," the Smokey Mountains have borne the traffic and conflicts of history with an abiding spirit, which is symbolized by Little Deer, Cherokee counterpart of the unicorn.

Marilou Thompson carries into her world view the spirit of Little Deer -- the silent endurance of the Cherokee, the strength of the pioneer woman, the awesome power of the atom and the challenge to control it with reverence, a challenge she raises in "Reactor Regina: The Graphite Queen."

Like the mountain itself, the poet surveys the once all-encompassing machinery of science with calm insight, with a sense of the eternal. There is conveyed in this book a powerful sense of place, a carefully-constructed argument that certain qualities of spirit must be unchanging, if we are to survive. The terrifying complexity of the atom and its strange litany, "Quark, quark," is answered by the poet in the synthesis born of her historical triad: "Deep calls to deep/ and the mountains call their children home."

--Cynthis DeHaven Pitcock
Chickasaw Branch

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Cherokee refugees driven from their mountains, troops hunting them down like game, pioneer families filling the valleys in the wake of the red man's anguish -- the Smoky Mountains endured it all. In ~~this~~ collection of prose and poetry, Marilou Bonham Thompson shows her mountains, "matted with forests, steeped in mist," bearing the traffic of history as well as the destruction of those dwellers who remained for a time. Presiding over the conflicts was the Little Deer.

The symbol moves through the work, "like the spirit of light he comes," hunted by the white man who values his horn as a talisman, threatened by the furious invasion of the technological community at Oak Ridge. Still the spirit of Little Deer prevails, "leaping from the heart of the mountain, leaping from the eye of the atom."

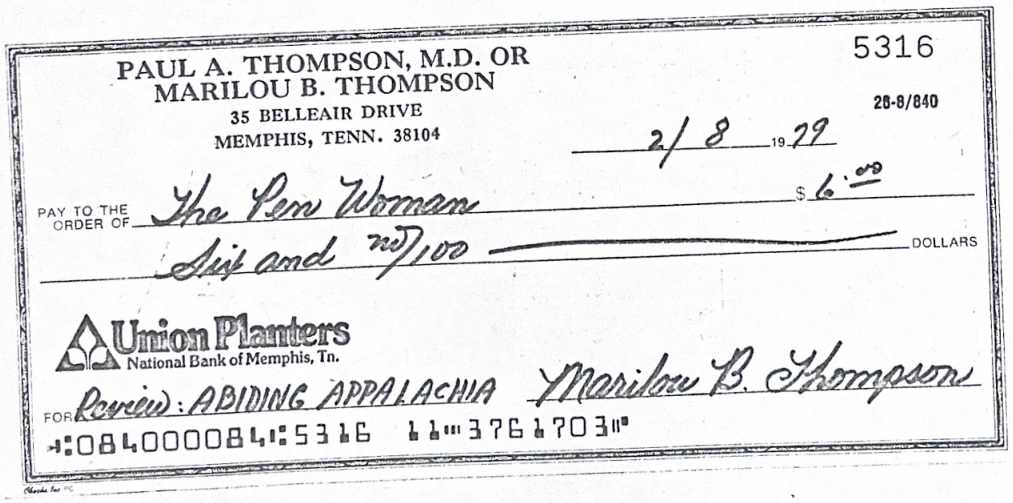
In an implied autobiographical scheme, Marilou Bonham Thompson creates a fusion of the three major historical thrusts -- the Cherokee, the mountain man and the technician -- she deals sensitively with the areas of conflict between these groups. Her own childhood brought her into the first wave of inhabitants occupying Oak Ridge, the newly-created community, carved out of the mounatin forests. Fulfilling the vision of pioneer John Hendrix, "The Bear Creek Valley some day will fill with great buildings and factories and they will help win the grea est war that ever will be, There will be a city on Black Oak Ridge and I say the center of authority will be middle way between Tadlock's farm and Pyatt's place." The child was mystified. "And when I was nine the fullness came, exploding in a mushroom cloud that shook the earth."

There is a coming of age for the writer. She carries into her own world view the spirit of Little Deer, the silent endurance of the Cherokee, the resignation of the pioneer woman;she then revisits the"Reactor Regina, the Graphite Queen." Like the mountain, she surveys the once-powerful machinery of science with calm insight, with a sense of the eternal,for clearly the spirit of Little Deer inhabits this place. It is "Where the Mountain and Atom Meet," and while she moved away from the Smoky Mountains, there is conveyed in this book, a powerful sense of place, a carefully-constructed argument that certain aspects of life may be unchanging.

"And the raven's lonesome cry reminds me that the soul is as it has ever been..." The terrifying complexity of the atom and its strange litany, "Quark, quark," is answered by Marilou Bonham Thompson in the synthesis born of her historical triad. "Deep calls to deep and the mountains call their children home."

--Cynthia DeHaven Pitcock

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