



Given Ground

Ann Pancake

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

Given Ground

Ann Pancake

Given Ground Ann Pancake

Departing from Appalachia's 150-year-old literary legacy of formula and caricature, West Virginia native Ann Pancake uses the texture of language, an intense attention to place, and complexity of characterization to recreate the region -- its tragic history and fragile culture, the interior landscapes of its people, and their deep rootedness in a threatened land. Her characters, already marginalized economically and socially, confront what many perceive as an invading outside culture, enduring and at times transcending the loss of their "place," both literally and figuratively. Their stories undermine the assumption that just because people don't articulate what happens inside them, nothing much is happening at all.

Given Ground Details

Date : Published July 1st 2001 by University Press of New England

ISBN : 9781584651185

Author : Ann Pancake

Format : Hardcover 152 pages

Genre : Short Stories, Fiction, American, Southern

 [Download Given Ground ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Given Ground ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Given Ground Ann Pancake

From Reader Review Given Ground for online ebook

Kirk Smith says

In the front of this book the publication data is 1. Southern States-Social life and customs-Fiction and 2. Maturation (Psychology)-Fiction. I can't seem to define what makes me like these short stories so much, but I think it has something to do with that word "psychology". I think the author has an insiders knowledge of my brain, maybe yours too. It's a style that is so pleasantly satisfying, sometimes direct, other times so obscure the "non-telling" of the story provides inherent meaning. The reader is meant to be carried along on the stream of language. It is a veering accumulation of sentences. The style is firm, faintly hypnotic, with the crispness and sinuousness of the sentences creating a sort of magic. I am declaring this a Classic among short story collections.

D says

Another heavyweight entry into the sadly non-existent canon of vernacular American short fiction. Pancake's invocation of the landscape is so masterful that Appalachia is almost tactile in her stories.

Jolo is one of the greatest short stories I have ever read, with *Ghostless* and *Bait* snapping at its heels.

Kirsten says

There are prose stylists who whittle their sentences to a fine point, a perfectly-tuned object. There are prose stylists who breathlessly append and append and append to their sentences, extending them outwards; as if, in casting this web of words over experience, somehow its multifarious "reality" can be expressed. Pancake falls into the latter category.

If you have the opportunity to see her read a story in person, by all means do it. That breathless accumulation proves absolutely riveting during a reading (and her accent doesn't hurt, either). Her style, in its extension of time, is nothing if not suspenseful. The writing in this collection is lyrical, visceral, and profoundly effective. However, as with many lyric prose writers I've read, I had a hard time locating the action of the stories - I couldn't picture what was happening; I couldn't picture the characters; I caught myself tangled in the sheen of the language, and its rhythms. I loved the first story, though. It gave me the best kind of chills. I didn't finish the last few, but plan to eventually.

Bill says

Amazing language around her love of this region. Great set of stories!

Josh says

A few notable quotes:

"Every Christmas Lindy'd stand beside the conveyor belt under electronic monitors with the other passengers, well-dressed and cologned. Behind her, silent and just out of sight, the odor of hunting jacket, of little-washed man, and of the wood smoke he's carried all the way from the house. She knows her father'll try to merge his rust-bitten Chevrolet Citation onto the freeway outside the airport and be forced onto the shoulder before he can snatch his little piece of road. They'll sit across the plastic table under fluorescent lights in Leesburg while he halves a Big mac with his pocketknife, rinses the blade in a cup of water, and dries it in his handkerchief." pg 14

"Shane cuts her a look with snakebit in it. When she leaves the bedroom, he tries to slam the door behind her, but flimsy like it is, it makes only a shabby smack.

She finds herself on the heap of cinderblocks that is their front stoop. The block she sits on wobbles. From under the trailer, a white cat skits out, petrifies at the sight of her, then bullets around the back. It shows clear the knobs of its shoulders and hips, and Lindy recalls first moving out of here. Then most of the dogs and cats outside looked fat. Now the ones inside looked skinny." pg 17

"Her mother had lost several between Lindy and DeeDee. 'Your mother's people have always had an easy time getting pregnant, a hard time staying that way,' her father would say." pg 18

"Connie, on the other hand, is neither disfigured nor desirable. She was born, she knows, with a mild mistake for a face. Her hips and thighs have blossomed enormous, the way the other girls' will, it is true, shortly after high school, but instead of that inspiring sympathy for Connie, it just makes her more ignored. Connie a fleshy premonition no wants to acknowledge, prematurely middle-aged even by the yardstick of a place where middle age can strike in one's twenties." pg 25

"Nearly every other night when Connie wedges herself out the first-story window, suspecting nothing. Their oldest daughter, as far as they're concerned, as sexual as a potato." pg 28

"Kenny's picture sat on top of the TV for years, him startled and midgety under his hat. Army hat like a stewpot upside down on Kenny's tiny head, that big chin looping out like a gourd. Eventually the picture traveled to the bookcase and then on to the wall of the basement stairs, but by that time Mommy, too, had passed. Held on for nine months after the diagnosis and got religion near the end, but she never gave up those cigarettes. Tempered the tar with God." pg 58

"I knew that although neither one of us was happy, she'd learned not to ask her disappointment as many questions." pg 97

"Richard always called it love. Ten years of late suppers and, even on weekends, him asleep in front of the TV by eight p.m. Two hours later, he'd wake and they'd shift to the bed, the brief bucking there. Afterwards, he'd sleep again, as sudden and as deep as if he'd been cold-cocked. Richard was a good boy and a hard worker. And now he's waited two weeks, in his patient, plodding way, to be killed in a car wreck. That week's driver asleep at the wheel ten miles short of home after a day of drywalling." pg 106

"Most of this land would have been my inheritance, and I grew up hunting it, cutting wood off it, running it. I know it better than anyone still living, including the man who owns it now. Never have I seen it so tired, with the deer paths wide as cattle runs up and down the hollow sides, and acornless ground. And the deer themselves, gaunt and puny and sorrowful. Quivering under their flies." pg 113

"The moment the sun falls through, two eyes flash a flat green. Then they go out. I stare harder, but the creature's shrunk from the light. It does not sound again. Something curls inside me. The dry has drawn it into the well, and there it starves and won't ever get out. And me the last thing to see it, and I can't even tell what it is." pg 115

"As I rode along the smooth-graded gravel road, I squinted to find the good crossing place, where I'd shot a big-bodies eight-point when I was seventeen or so. But near as I could tell, the crossing ran straight through a kit log cabin. And the feel of moving among all those new vacation houses, yet not a soul around. The houses creating an expectation of presence, then their emptiness sucking that expectation inside out. So much emptier on Joby Knob now than when it was just trees." pg 115

"The bullet only has to strike the right place, no bigger than your thumb, and like a key in a lock, it shuts down everything below." pg 134

Karen says

One of the best short story collections I have ever read. Ann Pancake has a keen sense of place and dialect. Her characters from Appalachian rural life are full of strength and stubbornness. While many of the stories seem hard and bleak, any reader who sits down with Given Ground will walk away amazed at the characters' sheer fortitude to trudge through life.

Jamie says

I could only read one or two of these at a time, the weight was so heavy. A good weight. A necessary weight. A weight made all the more powerful by Ann Pancake's powerhouse words. But, a weight is still a weight.

"Ghostless," "Dirt," "Bait," and "Redneck Boys" are tremendous. Especially "Ghostless" and "Redneck Boys." And "Bait."

Katy says

Anne Pancake was a visiting writer at Converse College and I happened to be taking a short fiction course at the time. We had the opportunity to read some stories from Given Ground and speak with her in class. She is a passionate person in a complex relationship with her home state of West Virginia. Her stories are dark, bleak, and for the most part devoid of hope, but meeting Pancake makes you realize that she writes out of love for the people of West Virginia, her people, and writes to shed light on the exploitation of the land and people there. I think she encourages a better understanding of the human consequences of years of mining and the troubling new phenomenon of mountaintop removal. Despite her emotions and motivations, Pancake is adventurous with her prose and her characters are fascinating "grotesques" in the new gothic tradition.

Lori says

Ann Pancake is an amazing writer. Her writing is just so beautiful and lyrical and it also has great emotional depth. These are stories to read slowly and savor. Sometimes though I am seriously overwhelmed by the density of her prose, which is why the four stars instead of five. "Jolo" is awesome. I also enjoyed "Redneck Boys." These stories are worth re-reading.

Rupert says

There are some books so turgid that you can smell their plodding evil all the way from the parking lot of the Jiffy Book Mart. Others provide you with a temporary thrill at the beach and take your mind off the sharks gnawing through human flesh only yards from your towel. Then there are the rare volumes that are a feast for the soul and mind and that provide rich new treasures with repeated reading. Ann Pancake's *Given Ground* is just such a book.

Given Ground is a collection of 12 stories written over a 13-year period. These are poetically textured tales of class and identity struggle in contemporary Appalachia, with the natural environment of West Virginia itself a main character throughout. As the narrator of "Crow Season" observes from the bed of his truck: "The way the land lays in here looks more like a human body than any land I've ever seen, pictures or real. And I often wonder if that's the reason for the hold it has on us."

It's the human characters' sensual connection to nature that separates them from the "outsiders," "imports," and "weekenders" who come into their land through outside wealth, often to exploit the resources of the land or the labor of its people. No one wants to trust folks who "talked like people on TV, that whitewashed talk of people from no place."

At least two of the stories--"Ghostless," from which the quote above comes, and "Bait"--deserve to be anthologized and passed on through time. "Ghostless," the first story of the collection, is the tale of a young boy who is taken from his home when his father dies and sent to live with relatives. His father saw ghosts regularly, but the spirits didn't frighten father or son. "Here was thick with ghosts as it was with deer, my daddy told me, all of them pushed in from the outside. Think, he told me. There's no place else for them to go." When the son leaves his home, he leaves the ghosts behind too.

The only fearsome ghosts in these stories are the metaphorical ones characters become when cut off from their roots. This theme shows up often in this collection, most notably in "Crow Season," wherein a character reveals, "I keep no mirrors in my place. I tell what I look like in others' faces, me make-them-gasp identical. I know that I've grown into a ghost."

"Bait" is somewhat of a comic-relief piece set in the middle of the more serious and brooding stories, although the humor is dark and gently macabre, along the lines of David Lynch's *Twin Peaks*. A teenaged bait-shop employee deals with her morbid boss--a differently abled uncle who believes he is a rescue worker and is constantly in search of bodies--and the possibility that she may be pregnant. As she shepherds her uncle and answers people's questions about the latest car wreck on the accident-prone road in front of the shop, she frets about her late period, fearing that if she is pregnant she will be caught forever in this feeble whirlwind of life.

Pancake's stories are often visionary in their way of revealing a peoples' consciousness, which is alive with an almost pantheist appreciation of nature. The tales in *Given Ground* place her in the tony lineage of William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, and Toni Morrison.

Margaret says

Jolo--say it...Jolo." Jolo is one of the most interesting characters I have read about in recent years. At the age of four, he was in a house fire from which he escaped with grave injuries. His father and baby brother died in this same fire. The skin on his stomach was burned off, as were his nipples. His left ear was partially burned off. The Jolo story is only one of many.

In another, Pancake writes the story of a young boy whose father teaches him how to see ghosts--mostly those of Confederate soldiers. Then the boy's father dies, and his coffin is placed in the corner of the family's house for a wake, and then...

I bought this book at the state book festival. My original plan was to read it and give it to my cousin. I had the author sign it "Best Wishes" in case I changed my mind and wanted to keep the book. I changed my mind. This is a collection of short stories full of interesting characters and scenarios. With a lot of the stories you are left hanging, and you have to decide what happened. Some of Ms. Pancake's sentence structure is a little unconventional, and you have to stop to figure out what she meant. Despite the occasional odd sentence, I really enjoyed this book--enough to read it (or at least some of the stories) again. When you read this book, you just feel that Ms. Pancake is very close to these characters and has experienced some of these things (or knows someone who has).

Sheryl says

This is one of the best books I've ever read. If I had to run out of my burning house, and I could save only an armload of books, this is one of the first I'd grab. I will only do it an injustice by trying to describe it. Just read it. It's brilliant.

Eldonfoil TH*E Whatever Champion says

Shaking on the way home with this book in hand, finishing the first story "Ghostless." I did not see, nor hear, anything else around me on the bus/subway ride through Philadelphia. I am not sure how I made it back to the apartment, but it has nothing to do with Swedenborg. Whatever the rest of this collection offers, Ann Pancake's name is one I will think of as often as the leaves shiver. Yes, I am ready to move.

Three days have passed since I wrote the above paragraph just after reading "Ghostless." I have now finished Ann Pancake's stories and must say this woman stays brave and intense to the very end. To describe her to someone who has not read her, I would say these stories are Breece Pancake meets Faulkner meets Virginia Woolf. Ann Pancake succeeds in so many difficult areas with this collection, crafting the stories with such delicacy and urgency. The language and lyricism is stunning, building from sounds and images, breaking all the rules of traditional sentence structure, creating word combinations that were just meant to be. But like

Woolf, unlike many others, the lyricism works to build something even grander and more beautiful. She puts you in, on, and under the West Virginia dirt, quite literally and metaphorically, while simultaneously sifting and lifting and revealing that soil's mythic dimensions. You can separate her from much of the Appalachian fiction being written today: there is not a stereotype one in these stories for an outsider to latch on, but there are lots of ghosts and lots of mythic history. Chilling is one way to put it: the love which Ann Pancake put into these stories, not only from the angle of language and storytelling, but from her own spirit, puts them into a class that very few writers can touch. This is not only a talented and rare voice, but one with the vision to match.

Drew Lackovic says

Pancake's writing style is one that is both truly unique and breathtakingly powerful. Reminiscent of the great southern writer William Faulkner, Ann Pancake weaves stories of rural Appalachia in the full spectrum of grit and hardship, but she avoids falling into common hillbilly traps of ignorance and destitution. These stories are a gut punch in the best way. They hit hard, and they leave their mark. I read this initially right when it came out, and "Jolo" still haunts me eight years later--that's the power of Pancake's fiction.

Rhonda Browning White says

Ann Pancake's *Given Ground* consists of twelve short stories that strike me as the author's search for truth, for an uncovering of life's harshest realities, a means of baring them to the light so that we can all learn from them. Pancake uses dialect common to many rural parts of West Virginia in a way that is conversely harsh and poetic, but is nonetheless true to what I know, having lived twenty-four years in those same mountains. It is more than regional vernacular that causes Pancake's stories to resonate long after readers close the book's covers, as the subjects she writes about (such as teen pregnancy, natural disasters, dysfunctional families), affect people from all areas, social classes and levels of education.

Highly recommended!
