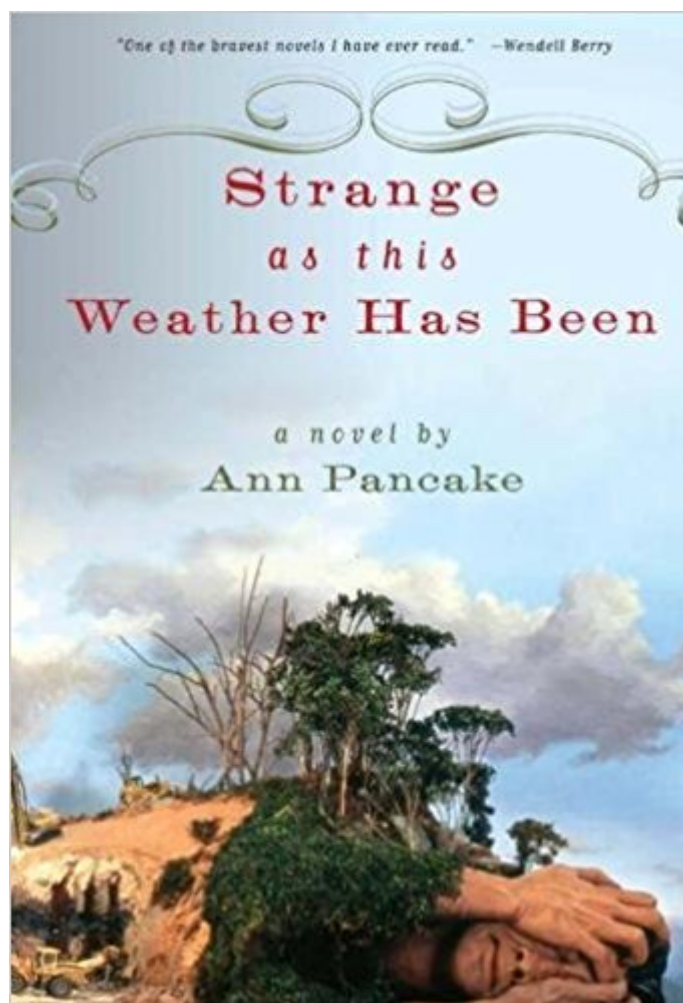


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Strange As This Weather Has Been: A Novel



Synopsis

Set in present day West Virginia, Ann Pancake's debut novel, *Strange As This Weather Has Been*, tells the story of a coal mining family—a couple and their four children—living through the latest mining boom and dealing with the mountaintop removal and strip mining that is ruining what is left of their mountain life. As the mine turns the mountains to slag and wastewater, workers struggle with layoffs and children find adventure in the blasted moonscape craters. *Strange As This Weather Has Been* follows several members of the family, with a particular focus on fifteen-year-old Bant and her mother, Lace. Working at a "scab" motel, Bant becomes involved with a young miner while her mother contemplates joining the fight against the mining companies. As domestic conflicts escalate at home, the children are pushed more and more outside among junk from the floods and felled trees in the hollows—the only nature they have ever known. But Bant has other memories and is as curious and strong-willed as her mother, and ultimately comes to discover the very real threat of destruction that looms as much in the landscape as it does at home.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A hard-living Appalachian family weathers a contemporary coal boom in the debut from West Virginia native Pancake. Soon after their first meeting in the 1980s, college freshman Lace See and 15-year-old local boy James Makepeace Turrell (Jimmy Make) conceive their first child. Nearly 20 years later, Lace is uneasily settled as a mother to Jimmy's four children as a flurry of strip mining and clear cutting make the mountains she has known since childhood unrecognizable. One summer

right after a strip-mining induced flood, things come to a head. Lace's environmental activism ramps up; daughter Bant, working at a local motel, discovers her allegiance to the mountains and her sexuality; each of Lace and Jimmy's three sons (Corey, Jimmy and Dane) is touched in turn by the collapsing economy and environment. Lush descriptions of the landscape are matched with a hurtling stream-of-consciousness narration to great effect: one doubts neither the characters' voices nor their places in a very complex poverty. (Oct.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Starred Review With her beloved West Virginia hollows and valleys under constant onslaught by a savage coal-mining industry whose raping of the land threatens her home with devastating floods, Lace Ricker finds herself battling callous forces both without and within her own family. As thunderous blasts weaken their home's foundation and poisoned wastewater infiltrates their well, Lace and her daughter, Bant, secretly become more determined to find a way to stop the mines, while Lace's husband pragmatically refuses to fight the union bosses, and her sons tentatively, then calamitously, accept the challenges and adventure of life lived in the shadow of imminent danger. By tracing the devastating impact of coal mining through the eyes of Lace and her four children, Pancake's powerful debut novel evinces a poetic pathos and authentic respect for the land and the people who love it. To comprehend the egregious and tragic environmental damage mountaintop-removal coal mining has wrought on the once pristine vistas of Appalachia, one should read any one of many excellent exposés. To understand the human toll such destruction exacts, one must turn to fiction, for novels such as Pancake's reflect deeper, timeless truths. Haggas, Carol

One of the most profoundly moving books I have EVER read. Witness the destruction of massive areas of WV over many years from the perspective of the people who live there and love and respect the land. No matter where you live, or what your position on mountaintop removal is, this book is a must-read in order to get a full picture. (Either that, or move there and live it.) Characters and events described so clearly you can feel them as if you are/were there. Poetic and brutal at the same time. In my 65 years, I have never had a book affect me as deeply as this. While I lament that it's likely too late to repair the damage done to the land; I pray it may be possible to stop any more.

One of the best books I've ever read, and the first book to begin to accurately record what it is to be young and female in Appalachia. This book will forever have a place on my bookshelf, and I hope it has a place on yours, as well. Thanks, Ann, for giving us a voice!

This novel should be a must-read for anyone who believes we can continue to get energy from "clean coal." Besides exposing the reality of mountaintop removal mining (which is incredibly destructive to both the land and the people of Appalachia), it is beautifully written and emotionally moving. You get caught up in caring about people and their lives. And these are the kind of people usually dismissed as "hillbillies" or "poor white trash." Their strength and courage, and the depth of their attachment to the land their families have lived on for generations, is both awesome and painful to behold. Because in the end everything beautiful in their lives is destroyed by greed. Yet they persevere. The descriptions of flash floods and other disasters are so vivid, I felt as if I had lived through them myself. Terrifyingly beautiful!

Very well written account of the disastrous mining practices in southern West Virginia, as well as a moving account of what the land means to many of its inhabitants. The structure takes some time to get used to, but the investment is worth it.

This book is a game-changer! She's a gifted writer who does a wonderful job of getting her message about mountaintop removal, and its devastating impact on the people of southern West Virginia, as well as the climate. She makes you really care!

I bought this novel for a class on Appalachian literature. It's extraordinarily beautiful and compelling, a haunting portrait of life under the strain of living with mountaintop removal. Unfortunately, the book that sent to me was missing the first 10 pages of the novel, as well any pages that come before the opening of the first chapter. While I loved the novel, I was disappointed in the quality of the product.

I had this book recommended to me by a fellow West Virginian. While I don't live in coal country I care deeply about my adopted state, her mountains and rugged people. Coal vs the environment , it isn't. It is complex and this story grips you with that complexity. Coal feeds the family and runs through the blood while it also rips the heart and the soul and the ground under your feet.

If no one knows of mountain top removal mining this is a must read. Spoken through voices of many characters including several children. Characters appear simple, but faced with a devastating circumstance you dive into their fears and their lives torn by turmoil they cannot control. I could not grasp the magnitude of this problem until I googled it. Hence, some photos in the book showing the

devastation would have been profound.

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