

Storming Heaven. By Denise Giardina. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1987. 312 pp. \$16.95.

John Sayles' *Matewan*, about coal miners' struggles in Appalachia in the 1920s, could well be the best film of 1987. And Denise Giardina's book, also about Appalachian coal miners in the 1920s, is an excellent candidate for the year's best novel.

Storming Heaven is a novel with a difference. Written by a woman who grew up in a coal camp, it recounts in the words of the participants the events that led up to the 1921 Battle of Blair Mountain, in which 10,000 desperate coal miners took on company goons, local police, and eventually even the U.S. Army. The outcome in this anti-union era was foreordained, at least in the short run. But the courage and determination of these people to organize in spite of the obstacles is nothing short of inspiring.

Set in Justice County, W.Va., adjacent to Kentucky, Giardina's history-based chronicle is built around the life of Rondal Lloyd, a union organizer, and those who come in contact with him until he dies of wounds suffered on Blair Mountain. The hero, however, is not one man; it is rather the spirit of a people whose way of life and livelihood have been put at the mercy of an unscrupulous industry that looks upon the laws of private property and the rights of human beings as mere obstacles to be overcome on the way to total exploitation.

In a direct and compelling manner reminiscent of Dickens, Giardina presents issues of great importance to the labor movement as the very substance of otherwise ordinary human beings who are forced by circumstances to risk everything for the sake not only of their dignity but of their very survival. Family ties are severely tested; loyalties are pushed to the breaking point. But in the end it is the dictatorial excesses of the coal companies that transforms a diversely motivated group of workers into a collective instrument of self-defense. In the process, not just the workers but their entire communities become active supporters of their cause. For the alienation effected by the owners is not confined to their workforce; it spills over onto every aspect of the lives of people whose worst mistake was to be have been born and raised in a place that is attractive to mineral mongers.

The characters portrayed in this novel are memorable. But no less memorable about this book is its questioning of the lopsided way in which so-called property rights are understood when the interests of the humble conflict with the greed of the influential. From the opening pages, where

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commences the issue is brought cause of people ing, depends on them. There were perpetrated by Thanks to Denise protest will be to read.

Corrections

"Union Use of 13, Number 3 correct attribution

"The Role of the Grievance was co-authored James Madison

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commences the rape of small landowners, to the afterword, in which the issue is brought down to our own times, Giardina eloquently pleads the cause of people whose legal claim to their property, Locke notwithstanding, depends not on what they have done but on what others can do to them. There was no justice in Justice County, nor has the injustice there perpetrated been undone by the afterthought of bargaining legislation. Thanks to Denise Giardina, however, the sublime dignity of these peoples' protest will enrich the mind and heart of anyone who takes up this book to read.

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Corrections

"Union Use of Public Interest Proxy Resolutions," appearing in Volume 13, Number 3, was incorrectly attributed to Ruth Keener Thompson. The correct attribution is Judith Kenner Thompson.

"The Role of the Steward in Shaping Union Member Attitude Toward the Grievance Procedure", which listed Paul F. Clark as the sole author, was co-authored by Daniel G. Gallagher, Professor of Management, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia.

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