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Capitalizing on Appalachia: Resisting Colonization and Exploitation in the Works of Ron Rash and Fred Chappell

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CAPITALIZING ON APPALACHIA:
RESISTING COLONIZATION AND EXPLOITATION IN THE WORKS OF RON RASH
AND FRED CHAPPELL

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Title: Capitalizing on Appalachia: Resisting Colonization and Exploitation in the Works of Ron Rash and Fred Chappell

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This study of selected works by Appalachian writers Ron Rash and Fred Chappell creates a chronological narrative that focuses on the relationship between the Othering of Appalachian peoples and the ensuing exploitation of natural resources in southern Appalachia throughout the twentieth century. In this dissertation I argue that through these works, Rash and Chappell identify, address, and resist efforts to both colonize and exploit Appalachian residents and the natural resources that enrich the region. I historicize these texts within the rich history of Appalachia, which I contend qualifies as a settler colony, and analyze the role of the creation of damaging and inaccurate caricatures that continue to dominate our cultural consciousness of the region in order to justify the Othering of the Appalachian peoples and facilitate the irresponsible and unethical exploitation of its natural resources.

The application of postcolonial ecocriticism reveals both Rash and Chappell as archivists and activists, and I demonstrate that their writings both preserve a disappearing (or, in some cases, obliterated) culture while they present alternative, fictional futures. In my discussion of Rash's *Serena*, I address the eponymous *Serena* as a great colonizing force, facilitating the Othering of local residents while obliterating the natural resources (namely, timber) that sustain their livelihoods

and culture in the early decades of the twentieth century. Set in the mid-twentieth century and later, Fred Chappell's inclusion of magical realism in his works *I Am One of You Forever*; *Look Back, All the Green Valley*; and *Midquest* provides an imagined alternative to the devastation wrought by the fictional counterpart to Champion Paper, International. I examine how Chappell's techniques also allude to the political and activist roles of magical realism. Continuing the chronological narrative based on environmental events is my analysis of Rash's *One Foot in Eden*, in which I argue that the division of character narratives mirrors a social hierarchy enforced by the geography of the Jocassee Valley. Lastly, Rash's *Saints at the River* embodies the continuing conflict between settler colonies and the imposition of outsiders.

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grateful to all three for the gifts of perspective and love. This dissertation is dedicated to my three Gallo boys.

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INTRODUCTION

“The Road to Nowhere” is infamous in Swain County, North Carolina. Referred to on maps as Lakeview Drive, this scenic road twists skyward from Bryson City into the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Drive this road and, among the eight-mile drive with stunning views of Lake Fontana, visitors see a sign:

Welcome to the Road to Nowhere

A Broken Promise

1943→ ?

The “broken promise” refers to the decades-old unfulfilled agreement between the federal government and the people of Swain County. Between the creation of Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the building of Fontana Dam (the highest dam on the east coast) in the 1930s and 1940s, scores of residents were removed from their ancestral homes; many had never lived anywhere else. In addition to losing homes and communities to Fontana Lake, water also submerged Highway 288, a former thoroughfare that provided access to communities and homes. Generations-old cemeteries remained behind—many of them at high elevations, and thus saved from the water—and the federal government pledged to build a new road linking Bryson City and Fontana, replacing Highway 288, thus providing road access to these cemeteries that would be inaccessible except by boat across Fontana Lake (“The Story Behind”).

Years rolled on and the promised road slowly materialized, one mile at a time. In 1970, though, the discovery of Anakeesta rock in the roadbed prevented

further development. This rock releases sulfuric acid when exposed to water and air, thus raising significant doubts that the road would ever be completed (“NC 288”). For decades the road remained an anomaly, continuing for eight miles into the national park and ending at a gloomy quarter-mile long tunnel that would never see automobile traffic.

The Road to Nowhere represents several issues of great interest and concern that I address within this dissertation. In fact, the removal of residents from their familial lands, a fractured relationship between local residents and the federal government, large-scale environmental events, and environmental concern are easily symbolic of much of Appalachia’s history. For many people, this rich history is often dismissed in favor of images of rolling mountains, great biodiversity, and a traditional folk culture that many consider perhaps the most “unsullied” in contemporary America. Unfortunately, accompanying those bucolic images of an environmental majesty and a rich, if seemingly quaint, cultural heritage are terms such as “poverty,” “isolation,” and “misuse” or “misappropriation of natural resources.” This contradiction of images is a simplified representation of Appalachia itself: Its people are frequently the object of national scorn, while its stunning vistas are an acknowledged source of patriotic pride. To work to understand Appalachia, much like understanding the story behind the Road to Nowhere, is to grapple with many difficult truths, including the source and purpose of damaging stereotypes, the misappropriation of resources, and the significant underestimation of its inhabitants.

Appalachian literature presents readers with a similar juxtaposition: While the genre is frequently marginalized by mainstream culture as a regional subgenre of Southern literature (at best, quaint and at worst, trivial), like much Appalachian creative expression, it has enjoyed something of a renaissance. As Jesse Graves notes, the “surge that began in 1972 has not declined even momentarily in the 35 years since, but has simply been followed in to shore by younger [sic] group of writers of potentially equal ability” (78). Recently “Appalachian” has come to mean, to scholars in the field, not only rural mountainous areas, but also the region’s cities, and its writers to include not only those who reside in the region, but also native Appalachians who have left the region. Writers from the region to achieve national acclaim include August Wilson, Pittsburgh-born recipient of two Pulitzer Prizes (for *Fences*, 1987, and *The Piano Lesson*, 1990); Charles Frazier, North Carolina native who won the National Book Award for *Cold Mountain* in 1997; Barbara Kingsolver, raised in rural Kentucky and nominated for both a Pulitzer and the PEN/ Faulkner Award for *The Poisonwood Bible* (1998); Cormac McCarthy, Knoxville-raised writer whose novel *The Road* won a Pulitzer Prize in 2007; and Nikki Giovanni, also from Knoxville, who won the American Book Award in 2008 for *The Collected Poetry of Nikki Giovanni*. Truly, Appalachian literature is a rich source of creative powers that reflects the vast geographical reach and diversity of the region.

And yet despite these recognizable names, Appalachian writers are frequently considered provincial and regional—terms not meant to flatter the authors. Mindy Beth Miller addresses this treatment, writing that the “mainstream American literary canon often overlooks Appalachian literature, relegating it to

ghettoized 'regional' shelving, ignoring its contributions to the literary world and the importance of its common goals" (198). In 2005, Ron Rash lamented the lack of southern (Appalachian) writers in the *New York Times Book Review* to Robert Birnbaum, telling Birnbaum, "That's what we all hope as writers, that our work transcends the region. If it's significant, it has to."

Despite this frequent lack of national recognition, literature by Appalachian writers continues to flourish. Connected by a clear sense of geography, these authors often serve as both activists and archivists, resisting detrimental cultural and environmental changes imposed by so-called "progress" and preserving what is distinct about their culture in words. Rash has addressed the connection between cultural preservation and literature: "I do believe something can be truly measured only when it's lost. I believe this outpouring of Appalachian writing has happened in part because Appalachian writers are seeing much of their culture disappear" (Biggers 15).

In this dissertation I address the works of two such writers: Rash (b. 1953) and Fred Chappell (b. 1936). I became interested in these writers because of their ability to evoke, in just a few words, a sharp sense of a place that was my home: western North Carolina. However, their various works soon came to represent more to me than sentimental reminiscence. As I continued to read and explore Rash's and Chappell's individual oeuvres, I became aware of connections stronger than merely sharing the same geographical setting. Both writers, accomplished and recognized by their peers, have used literature to either resist or reimagine significant environmental events that were instigated by capitalist ventures or

government reclamation. In short, both authors have published works that incorporate (or focus solely on) the tension inherent in what Mary Louise Pratt calls the “contact zone” between outside forces and local communities. Furthermore, read in a specific order, these novels and collections of poetry represent artistic and chronological interpretations of Appalachian history while making clear statements about the methods and repercussions of these contact zones.

Why draw Rash and Chappell together in one critical study? Though in their works they adopt different literary techniques, Rash and Chappell share a common heritage and have each chosen to focus their literature largely on the same geographical area. Rash grew up in Boiling Springs, North Carolina, a small mill town that Joyce Compton Brown reminds us “reflects Appalachian out-migration, set as it is in the Appalachian foothills, not the higher mountains themselves” (“Power” 26). Despite this upbringing, Rash was “always taught that home was Buncombe County and Watauga County, in the mountains” (qtd. in “Power” 26), and he credits his time spent on his grandmother’s farm as the inspiration for much of his writing; indeed, as Jimmy Dean Smith describes, this farm in Aho serves as Rash’s “spirit country” (111). This emphasis on the physical world remains in the forefront of the works I analyze here, and I discuss it further in Chapter 1.

Chappell shares this upbringing in an industrial town, having been raised in the small town of Canton, North Carolina, home to Champion International. Chappell’s parents lived on and helped maintain his grandparents’ expansive farm, and Lang states, like Rash, that “It was an agrarian lifestyle that shaped the author’s

childhood . . .” and would continue to influence the writer’s life and work (1), which I shall discuss in greater detail in Chapter 2.

Before addressing these authors and their works further, however, I must first discuss the lasting significance of Appalachian stereotypes that continue to inform the position of Appalachia in our national imagination. The role of these detrimental stereotypes, largely created by regional literature or the local color movement of the late nineteenth century, played a role in various industrial ventures that writers such as Rash and Chappell write about, which, in turn, caused environmental devastation.

According to Ronald Lewis, “The idea of Appalachia as a homogeneous region physically, culturally, and economically isolated from mainstream America has its genesis in fiction” (22). This is evident in literature as early as the eighteenth century: In his *History of the Dividing Line* (1728), William Byrd refers to North Carolinians as inherently lazy, content to sleep late and loiter with their pipes (Byrd 125). In the next century, two writers are most frequently credited with creating “romantic portraits of lazy, feuding, and backward hillbillies” (Biggers 14): Mary Noailles Murfree—who published works such as *In the “Stranger People’s” Country* in 1891 under the nom de plum Charles Egbert Craddock and continued to publish throughout the 1890s—and her contemporary John Fox, Jr. (whose *A Cumberland Vendetta* was published in 1896, followed by collections such as *Blue-Grass and Rhododendron: Outdoors in Old Kentucky* in 1901). Though the fictional depiction of the “hillbilly” as poor, uneducated, lazy, unhygienic, and oftentimes mean has inspired culturally popular cartoon and television characters such as Li’l Abner,

Snuffy Smith, *Hee-Haw*, *The Beverly Hillbillies*, and *The Dukes of Hazzard*, the implications of Murfree's and Fox's writings have deeper implications that are ingrained in our collective perception of Appalachia.¹ By highlighting what Will Wallace Harney referred to as "A Strange Land and a Peculiar People" in an article of the same name, both writers "created" Appalachia through their local-color writing. In fact, as Lori Robinson writes, "Historians credit Murfree's work with creating the pervasive stereotype of mountain people completely outside the values of the dominant American culture" (63). Not to be outdone, Fox also contributed significantly to this "Othering" of Appalachian people in the American consciousness; according to Ronald Lewis, he "perpetrated and then perpetuated the myth of Appalachian otherness to facilitate absentee corporate hegemony by marginalizing indigenous residents economically and politically. In short, for Fox (and how many others?), 'Appalachia' was a willful creation and not merely the product of literary imagination" (22).

One might ask why this negative stereotype of Appalachian people was so universally accepted. The answer has to do with both geography and timing. Much of Appalachia is adjacent to or considered part of the American South, a region that, as Jennifer Rae Greeson claims, "As an internal other from the start of U. S. existence, [it] lies simultaneously inside and outside the national imaginary constructed in U. S. literature" (3). This is relevant to the period when the stereotypes were being created: soon after the end of Reconstruction. According to Robinson,

¹ It is interesting to note here that the etymology of the word "hillbilly" stems from Northern Irish Protestant followers of King William III of Orange ("Billy") living in the "hills" of Appalachia. By 1892, however, the term had been appropriated as a negative and stereotypical term meaning "a southern Appalachian U. S. resident" ("Hillbilly").

The desire to write Appalachia into a region that could be possessed by the larger culture happened just at the close of Reconstruction, just as the federal presence was leaving the South. Through these literary texts, this white, Southern region was contained and made safe just at the moment when the larger culture wanted to distance itself from the challenges to regional and racial identity that Reconstruction had made possible. (64)

The creation of these Appalachian stereotypes—and the misconception of Appalachia as a remote, homogenous place—played into the national narrative of mainstream cultural dominance. Because Appalachia was portrayed as both far away in place and in time, it was a safe contrast to the “developing sense of a homogenous, middle-class America” (Robinson 63). The division between America and Appalachia created by regional writing—referred to at the time as “local color” writing—“provides readers with an authoritative introduction to new culture; as outsiders, the act of observing implies hierarchy and superiority of voice of the observer over the observed” (Robinson 64). And so the stereotypes created by local-color literature served multiple purposes at the turn of the twentieth century: Helping the South assimilate back into American culture after the tumultuous Reconstruction period and also providing that same American culture with a marker of progress, a waterline against which to measure success. As Robinson notes, “Local color aided in the coming together of this ‘modern order’ by providing a sense of cultural difference against which it could ally” (62).

The implications of this alliance against Appalachia as a result of these stereotypes perpetuated by local color literature are evident today. The movie *Deliverance* (1972) had cultural import more significant than the narrative it imparted, and the Discovery Channel has aired a docudrama called *Moonshiners* that plays upon our culturally-accepted narrative of Appalachian people distilling moonshine and running from authorities. As recently as October, 2013, DirecTV broadcasted, and then pulled and apologized for, a commercial titled “The Mountain People” that, in promoting the wide reach of its satellite television services, referred to “crazy hillbillies” who are “missing teeth, chewing on root and living in a small shack populated by goats and other animals” (Swanni).

These stereotypes have played an essential role in the exploitation of Appalachia’s natural resources of the twentieth century. The naturalizing of the Othering of Appalachians has enabled industry and the government (at state and federal levels) to essentially colonize Appalachia in the name of capitalism and progress. The process is brutally cyclical: The harmful stereotypes justify the exploitative expansion of industry in the region, and this expansion has made more impenetrable the economic disparities of Appalachia. As Marjorie Pryse notes, “Our own ‘civilization’ has been built on the exploitation of Appalachian labor and Appalachia’s mineral resources. The enormous disparity between the mineral wealth the region produces and the poverty of its residents has contributed to the stereotyping of Appalachians” (6).

Appalachian residents are identified by these stereotypes that are more than a century old, and are continually limited by their strict expectations. Pryse explains,

Outsiders expect Appalachians to produce an enforced, constructed, consumable Appalachian identity. When persons outside the region stereotype Appalachians, however, they not only reproduce this identity but also re-confine Appalachians to an “internal colony” inhabited by a “separate race of humans” whose real work is to not ‘lose touch’ with their low-economic “traditions.” (8)

Appalachian writers are painfully aware of this “consumable Appalachian identity”: Chappell addresses it directly in *Look Back, All the Green Valley* when Jess Kirkman decides to eat at a restaurant named Hillbilly Heaven, an establishment with a sign that depicts a “towering caricature of a mountaineer. The figure was the cliché we all recognize, with its big floppy hat, its goofy facial expression, the balloon-toed bare feet, and the corked jug marked XXX” (93). Rash similarly integrates this culture of consumption in *Saints at the River* in the character of Billy Watson:

He wore a torn flannel shirt and faded overalls. A black beard draped off his chin like Spanish moss. All his costume lacked was a corncob pipe. Billy had a degree in agriculture from Clemson University, and his family owned the biggest apple orchard in the valley, but he’d decided after college that his true calling was playing Snuffy Smith to fleece tourists. He swore if he could find a cross-eyed boy who could

play banjo, he'd stick that kid on the porch and increase his business 25 percent. (21)

Incorporating and mocking these stereotypes is one way these writers resist the identity that has been foisted upon Appalachia and its inhabitants. A more careful reading of these works that draws upon elements of ecocriticism and postcolonial criticism further reveals how Rash and Chappell reimagine significant environmental events—the focus of this dissertation.

While issues relating to the environment have been prominent in the minds of many Appalachian residents for decades, only recently have these issues received the national attention they deserve. Fred Waage confirms that “until recently, ‘natural’ attributes of Appalachia lagged behind other subjects of concern, such as religion, economy, community life, and ‘folk arts’” (146). However, any lack of mainstream attention does not reflect the attitude of its residents or artists. In an interview with Karen Zacharias, Rash verifies that the environment is “an important issue to me. We are inextricably linked to the natural world. If it dies, we die with it. I think it is stupid and shortsighted not to recognize this fact.”

Ecocritical scholars have also been recognizing this fact for decades. Much as a river guide might read a river's rapids and eddies, aware of subtle currents lying beneath the watery surface, a reader can best read and interpret this environmental writing through an ecocritical approach that, as ecocritic Richard Kerridge claims, “strives to see how all things are interdependent, even those apparently most separate” (6). Reading through an ecocritical lens highlights the function of the environment in a given piece of literature, a point Robert Kern emphasizes when he

argues that “one object of ecocriticism . . . is to read in such a way as to amplify the reality of the environment in or of a text” (260). Indeed, an ecocritical reading will emphasize the idea that “nature is not merely a setting or backdrop for human action, but an actual factor in the plot,” as John Tallmadge writes when paraphrasing and agreeing with Buell (*Future* 282).

Ecocriticism’s entry into the field of literary criticism, especially beginning about 1990, meant that scholars were recognizing the significance of the natural (nonhuman) world within texts. In 2005, Buell wrote that ASLE—the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment—grew from a small American organization to a thousand-strong international organization in the last decade (*Future* 1). Despite this flurry of excitement that accompanied its inception and consequential solid following, ecocriticism has suffered from being seen as “less as a monolith than as a concourse of discrepant practices” (Buell *Future* 11). Because the term and approaches vary so greatly from practitioner to practitioner and from text to text, a clear definition of ecocriticism and distinguishing between some of its more prominent methods is beneficial for any budding ecocritic.

The scholar who spearheaded the foundation of ASLE (which began as an outgrowth of environmentally focused scholarship within the Western Literature Association), Cheryl Glotfelty, broadly and intentionally defines ecocriticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment.” Ecocriticism is the practice of analyzing the agency of nonhuman nature and the interactions between human and nonhuman nature within texts. An ecocritic might

consider the natural world as influential to a text as a character and ask, “How does the natural world not only reflect the action, but also contribute to it?”

Despite what must have been good intentions, ecocriticism as a whole was criticized beginning in the late 1990s as focusing almost exclusively on North American literature and privileging a narrow view of nature as pristine, uninhabited, and largely unattainable by anyone other than whites.² Mei Mei Evans echoes this concern when she writes that “[H]eterosexual white manhood is construed as the most ‘natural’ social identity in the US: The ‘true American,’ *the* identity most deserving of social privilege” (183). In naturalizing whites (specifically men), ecocriticism risks perpetuating a binary opposition between white/ black and white/ nonwhite populations, thus furthering potential for environmental racism and slow violence to occur. Similarly, practitioners of other theories often voice concern about conservationist (ecocentric) approaches, which tend to privilege nature above nonhuman nature, often at the expense of humanity. Huggan and Tiffin agree that a purely ecocentric approach is not enough: This shift from

anthropocentric to environment-based (ecocentric) philosophies and practices generally failed to benefit those very peoples whose precolonized apprehension of being-in-the-world had not only been systemically denigrated by Europeans, but had consistently provided justification for Western conquest, the “primitive” being distinguished

² This criticism was addressed at least as early as 1998 by Patrick D. Murphy’s collection *Literature of Nature: an International Sourcebook*. Murphy, who founded the journal *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* in 1993 at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, is an influential ecocritic whose work in ecofeminism influenced the scholars whom I cite in Chapter 4.

from the “civilized” precisely by its proximity to the natural world.

(“Green Postcolonialism” 3)

This lack of consideration for human nature and complete privileging of the natural world has facilitated the relocation of many native peoples, most frequently at the hands of “civilized” colonists.

A myriad of attempts to narrow the approach of ecocriticism include biocentric or deep ecology, ecofeminist, and environmental justice. These terms provide at a glance a wide range of concerns: On one hand, deep ecology addresses almost exclusively nonhuman nature and attempts to place it at the center of concern, whereas ecofeminism analyzes how nature and women have been aligned and naturalized by dominating forces of patriarchy.

Many practitioners of ecocriticism (itself not anymore a nascent school of thought) are primarily activists at heart. Much recent ecocritical scholarship focuses on how literature can bring attention to “ways in which environmental degradation and hazards unequally affect poor people and people of color” (Reed 149). Phenomena such as environmental racism—the practice of negatively altering an environment and disposing of toxic waste most frequently in minority or underprivileged neighborhoods—are areas of concern for the environmental justice critic. Rob Nixon is a leading figure of this movement, and his book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* illustrates the plight of victims of this violence that

occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is

typically not viewed as violence at all. . . . a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out against a range of temporal scales. (2)

While much of the environmental destruction that occurs in Appalachia is dramatic and sudden—such as the blasts of mountaintop removal mining—more falls under the category of slow violence.

If one could imagine environmental justice and bioregionalism combined, the result would resemble postcolonial ecocriticism. This promising merging of fields largely began with a set of four articles in *ISLE* in 2000 Rajender Kaur, Eric Wagner, George Handley, and Lisa Perfetti. Postcolonial theorists have very recently turned their attention to this pairing, as evident by several book-length works including *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* (edited by Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley); *Postcolonial Green: Environmental Politics and World Narratives* (edited by Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt), *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* by Rob Nixon, and *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* by Helen Tiffin and Graham Huggan.

Postcolonial ecocriticism is considered by many an unlikely pairing of theoretical approaches, and Nixon articulates four (frequently cited) clear areas of departure between the two fields:

1. Postcolonialism focuses on hybridity while ecocriticism prefers pristine, uninhabited nonhuman nature;

2. Postcolonialism is concerned with displacement, while ecocriticism focuses on depictions of and connections to place;
3. Postcolonialism's focus is cosmopolitan and transnational while ecocriticism was developed within and continues to focus on an American/ nationalist framework;
4. Postcolonialism attempts to reimagine history; ecocriticism is often ahistorical, instead privileging "timeless, solitary moments of communion with nature." (236)

These differences have historically created tension between theorists from both schools, and Roos and Hunt explain that this tension has caused distrust: Some postcolonial theorists see ecocritics as furthering the agenda of colonialism, promoting class differences and accessibility to resources,³ while some ecocritics see postcolonial theorists as blind to matters related to the environment (4). Val Plumwood confirms the discomfort present in early associations between the two fields: "We are less accustomed to acknowledging . . . the idea that the concept of colonization can be applied directly to non-human nature itself, and that the relationship between humans, or certain groups of them, and the more-than-human world might be aptly characterized as one of colonization" ("Decolonizing" 52).

In addition to the potential for conflict between these two schools, it is important to bear in mind the complexity of discussing any genre of American literature as postcolonial. Given the United States' success as an imperial force

³ It is worth noting here that Roos and Hunt are likely referring to the first wave of ecocriticism. They quickly acknowledge the work of Buell and Gerard in particular as advancing a synthesis between postcolonialism and ecocriticism.

itself, many question whether the U. S. can be considered postcolonial in any way.

As Richard King suggests,

Postcoloniality might be reimagined in terms of change, decentering, and displacement. In the contemporary United States, this ongoing process entails a shift from the celebration, comfortable acceptance, and largely unquestioned appropriateness of conquest and colonization to the predicaments associated with living through the illegitimate, uncomfortable, conflicted aftermath of an irreversible conquest. (7)

Given these qualifications, certain subcultures in the United States may indeed be considered postcolonial; the works that I address in this dissertation focus in large part on the “appropriateness of conquest” (emphasized in Rash’s *Serena*, for example) and “conflicted aftermath of an irreversible conquest” (demonstrated in Chappell’s treatment of *Champion International*).

Other scholars approach this issue from a multitude of angles: Buell argues against the nationalist narrative associated with the study of early American writers and instead identifies postcolonial qualities in authors such as Whitman, Melville, and Emerson, ultimately questioning when the postcolonial moment in American (canonical) literature ended (“American Literary Emergence as a Postcolonial Phenomenon”).⁴ Edward Watts answers Buell’s speculation by claiming that once

⁴ Buell postulates that early American writers are commonly understood as being undiluted and pure in their vision of a fully-formed, defined nationalism, though he argues that critical examination demonstrates these writers were, in fact, both greatly influenced by their English peers and also effectively demonstrating postcolonial qualities (“American Literary Emergence as a Postcolonial Phenomenon” 414). Contemporary Appalachian writers are not dissimilar: Though routinely

Americans imagined the “nation as inevitable” the United States “transitioned to empire, immediately embarking on paths of internal and external empire building, its literature aiding and abetting the subsequent excesses” (448).

Much as ecocriticism has evolved into subcategories of criticism, so has postcolonial criticism, and one such subcategory offers a solution to the problem of considering America “postcolonial”: settler colonies. As Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin explain,

In the case of the settler colonies like the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, land was occupied by European colonists who dispossessed and overwhelmed the Indigenous populations. They established a transplanted civilization which eventually secured political independence while retaining a non-Indigenous language. Having no ancestral contact with the land, they dealt with their sense of displacement by unquestioningly clinging to a belief in the adequacy of the imported language—where mistranslation could not be overlooked it was the land or the season which was “wrong.” Yet in all these areas writers have subsequently come, in different ways, to question the appropriateness of imported language to place. (24)

Rash and Chappell, as heirs to the settler colony with a variety of backgrounds, write primarily in the non-Indigenous language. However, the language and culture of the Cherokee, the primary indigenous group of the geographic area in question, is

dismissed as “regional writing” that represents a unilateral, stereotyped culture, further study of individual works yields a careful purpose and deliberate richness of form and content.

present in various degrees in Rash's and Chappell's works. Their inclusion of Cherokee customs and terms demonstrates their awareness of the imposition of English as the dominant non-indigenous language.

Relevant to this dissertation are two qualities of settler colonies. The first is the liminal location of these settler cultures as "suspended between 'mother' and 'other,' simultaneously colonized and colonizing" (Lawson). Indeed, Appalachia occupies a unique position between colonizer and colonized: While historically the settler colonies of European immigrants displaced many Native American communities—most infamously via the Trail of Tears, the forced removal on the heels of the Indian Removal Act of 1830—Appalachia (and its residents of diverse cultures and backgrounds) has itself been treated as a colony with its vast resources available at will to various capitalist and government-led ventures. The inaccurate and insulting stereotypes perpetuated in the late nineteenth century facilitated and maintained the Othering of Appalachian peoples throughout the twentieth century, while the "discovery" of an abundance of natural resources that seemed to await industry and extraction essentially created an internal colony. Though other cultural models have been advanced by scholars, that of the internal colony is often accepted as accurate. Helen Lewis, Linda Johnson, and Donald Askins argue that "Appalachia is a good example of colonial domination by outside interests. Its history also demonstrates the concerted efforts of exploiters to label their work 'progress' and to blame any of the obvious problems it causes on the ignorance or deficiencies of the Appalachian people" (2). John Williams Alexander, moreover, notes that when the Appalachian Studies Association was created in the late 1970s,

the organization “stressed the exploitative nature of capitalism as the main source of regional problems. Emphasizing Appalachia’s colonial economy and its identity with similarly exploited places in the Third World provided a fruitful basis of criticism” (362).

The second pertinent quality of settler colonies is the prominent role of creative texts in disseminating “important theoretical writing” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 136). This dissertation is dedicated to addressing the importance of key texts by Rash and Chappell and identifying the theoretical impetus hidden beneath each narrative. Creative texts allow for imagination, appeal to readers, and model how to react and teach. Through fiction, characters (such as Chappell’s Jess Kirkman) seek truth and justice.

There is a further reason to apply postcolonial criticism to the regional literature suggested by the title of “Appalachian literature”: Postcolonial criticism calls for a resistance to modernism, which tends to “universalize the conditions of memory and of narrative as existential,” and thus dismisses representations of marginalized peoples. Instead, postcolonialism, like regional writing, “returns to the specificity of sites of memory and of language production, the very specificities of place, gender, race, or class that colonialism has attempted to erase” (Handley 8).

A significant number of texts published in the last few years demonstrate that a marriage between postcolonialism and ecocriticism represents an activist concern for actualizing justice for human and nonhuman nature. Several theorists articulate their justification for this unlikely pairing, and what many agree upon is that the overlap between the concern for subjugated humans and subjugated nature

originates in an understanding of Enlightenment values. W. M. Adams and Martin Mulligan explain that the “bedrock of colonial ideas about nature was the European Enlightenment, and the fundamental Cartesian dualism between humans and nature” (22). This binomial system imposed colonial expansion and appropriation upon the natural world, extending what DeLoughrey and Handley call “an empirical and imperial project” to the nonhuman world. In distinguishing white human nature from nonwhite human nature and nonhuman nature, colonial forces justified the appropriation of resources and peoples to suit. It is this resulting hierarchical view that justified both colonial expansion and subjugation of nonnormative others, as DeLoughrey and Handley explain. The result of this colonizing mindset has been a historical abuse of the natural world and brutal subjugation of nonnormative peoples. Huggan and Tiffin support this reading of colonization when they write that traditional “western constitutions of the human as the ‘not-animal’ (and, by implication, the ‘not-savage’) have had major, and often catastrophic, repercussions not just for animals themselves but for all those the West now considers human but were formerly designated, represented, and treated as animal” (*Postcolonial Ecocriticism* 18).

In addition to the implications created by nomenclature, the treatment of land represents another intersection between ecocriticism and postcolonialism. The act of physically imposing a colonizing power on the land serves as a wedge between nature and culture, which are otherwise connected (Wagner 574). Not only does this separation make valuable resources unavailable to colonized peoples, it also disregards the cultural meaning of these resources, thus in many ways

nullifying the colonized's culture. As DeLoughrey and Handley remind us, "Nature . . . is the past's only true guardian." As such, protecting and responsibly using natural resources become moral obligations. Irresponsible use or wanton destruction of resources is not only bad environmental practice, but serves as an aggressive and proactive measure against collective memory" (DeLoughrey and Handley). However, postcolonial critics are not necessarily against progress itself: The "battle is not so much against development itself as an intrinsically harmful activity or process as against the flagrant social and environmental abuses that continue to be perpetrated in its name" (Huggan and Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* 19). Development or progress can rightfully be called such only if it benefits both human and nonhuman nature.

Many postcolonial theorists are embracing nuances of ecocriticism as it aligns with their concerns for human nature, nuances that are frequently embedded in the complexities of place and placelessness. The placelessness of many displaced peoples addressed by postcolonialism is often problematic, since the land itself that would contribute to their identity has been redefined by imperial powers. However, overcoming this emotional and cultural remove from land is possible if, as Houston Baker suggests, we "set and maintain boundaries" (qtd. in Handley, "A Postcolonial Sense of Place" 9). In creating one's own place, one is able to create identity and re-associate with pre-imperial cultures. Handley notes that "establishing a sense of place is key to a dismissal of colonial discourse because it involves a radical resituation of the marginalized, a speaking from and to those circumstances which have been passed over" (9). The naming and creation of place are clearly important

(as shown above with the significance of Linneaus' all-encompassing binomial system): Our "inability to identify ourselves in land is inherently an interhuman struggle for the autonomy to name our place and identify our history in it" (Handley 9). Without understanding a place's history of human resource use and habitation, we cannot fully understand that which makes it a *place*, according to Tim Creswell's criteria that we see place as a process and Buell's identification of place with others' perceptions of it.

The marriage of ecocriticism and postcolonialism ultimately underscores the need for a "broadly materialist understanding of the changing relationship between people, animals, and the environment" (Huggan and Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* 12). The union offers its practitioners an opportunity to become advocates for complete justice in a way perhaps not included in a focused study of either individual theory: "No social justice without environmental justice; and without social justice—for *all* ecological beings—no justice at all" (Huggan and Tiffin, "Green Postcolonialism" 10).

Given the vastness of this theoretical groundwork, then, why apply a postcolonial ecocritical approach to Appalachian literature, and what might it look like? First and foremost, the unique history of Appalachia must be considered.⁵ It is important to note the irony in approaching Appalachia from anything resembling a postcolonial perspective: After all, the native inhabitants of Appalachia were largely

⁵ Fred Waage deserves special recognition for his work on Appalachia, particularly his article cited in this dissertation, titled "Exploring the Life Territory: Ecology and Ecocriticism in Appalachia." One of the pioneering scholars to apply ecocriticism to Appalachian literature, Waage was an early practitioner of ecocriticism; in fact, his *Teaching North American Environmental Literature* predates Glotfelty and Murphy by several years.

dispossessed of their land and removed less desirable and less fertile bioregions west of Appalachia. Because European colonizers and their descendants came to dominate Appalachian culture, Appalachia should not be considered conventionally postcolonial, but rather as a settler colony, as previously discussed. However, early literature about the region and the discovery of its abundance of resources has led Appalachia to since become colonized within its own country. Appalachians have been characterized as nonnormative others—as slow, backwards, and animalistic. Murfree’s characterization of Appalachian inhabitants as uneducated and animalistic (along with misperceptions about Appalachia being geographically isolated and so separate from the rest of the country) has contributed to the Othering of Appalachia and facilitated its treatment as a colony. It bears repeating that as an Other, in fact, Robinson argues that “Appalachia was made safe through representations that emphasized distance, both distant borders and a distant past” (63).

In this position, Appalachian inhabitants have become what Nixon refers to as “uninhabitants”: politically insignificant inhabitants of “an area targeted for ‘progress’” (153). They are also victims of what Nixon describes as an alternative form of displacement, which addresses not only the “movement of people from their places of belonging, [but] refers rather to the loss of the land and resources beneath them, a loss that leaves communities stranded in a place stripped of the very characteristics that made it inhabitable” (19). Examples of this displacement in Appalachia include communities whose water has been poisoned by mountaintop removal mining or strip mining, or whose timber has been exploited at the expense

of wildlife habitation (and consequently, families' ability to feed themselves), families whose bottomland has been inundated upstream of a dam, individual farms that have been flooded after unannounced dam releases, or, most recently, communities whose water has been poisoned and left flammable as a result of "fracking." These situations exemplify the all too frequent attempts to relegate Appalachian residents to the status of Other. Of these Others, Plumwood states: "They become the 'other' whose prior ownership of the land and whose dispossession and murder is never is never spoken or admitted. Their trace in the land is denied, and they are represented as *inessential* because their land and their labour embodied in it are taken over as 'nature' or as 'wilderness'" ("Decolonizing" 57). These "others" become invisible in the face of "progress."

And so the stage is set to consider the role that literature plays amid the damaging stereotypes, the role of Appalachia as an internal colony, and the interconnection of ecocriticism and postcolonial criticism. A plethora of scholarly works discusses the environmental history of Appalachia and its influence on its inhabitants and their culture. What might poetry and fiction have to offer? Appalachia has a rich artistic tradition, and its literature stems from storytelling traditions that Rash recalled in an interview with Anna Dunlap Higgins: "It has become cliché . . . but it's true: We did sit on the porch and tell stories. . . . I simply wouldn't talk. I would just listen. This was a great gift for me—would be for any writer. All those voices" (50).⁶ Ron Rash and Fred Chappell are continuing the

⁶ The legacy of stories is undeniable given the phenomenal success of the Jonesborough, Tennessee storytelling festival. Part of a revival movement, it grew to include 10,000 attendees in 1997 and became a necessary event for professional storytellers (Williams 387-88).

Appalachian storytelling tradition in their writing, and their works “act as a historical record, a kind of storehouse that can be revisited time and again” (M. Miller 205). More than that, the diverse forms of their works—whether a novel that mimics the structure of a classical tragedy, a multi-narrator novel divided into sections, or a collection of poetry whose sections mirror the Pythagorean four elements—provide the authors with the agency to creatively comment on the environmental, cultural, and political situations that are included within the narrative. Rash notes that the “key moment of a good short story is when we learn about the world in a way not imagined before; haunting because everything else is stripped away” (Fox). Indeed, Rash and Chappell are performing the work that Tiffin and Huggan describe when they claim that the “*righting* of imperialist wrongs necessarily involves our *writing* of the wrongs that have been done—and are still being done” (*Postcolonial Ecocriticism* 21).

Appalachian literature serves a cultural purpose: Its writers do function partly as archivists, using their platform to record their diminishing culture. Stephanie Foote states, “Regional writing seeks to preserve what is in danger of being lost” (28). Higgins furthers this thought when she observes,

It is by telling stories and thus preserving the stories he [Rash] heard as a child and by preserving through story the southern Appalachian landscape—its lay and its history—that Ron Rash deals with change, with the potential for erasure that the so-called “leveling” of America threatens, the spread of suburbia into the unique locales of the region. Rash also deals with the threat of erasure by confronting it in his

writing. In many of Rash's poetic and fictive worlds, the most powerful force is erasure, sometimes communicated through the evaporation of dreams, or the sacrifice of limb to war, or the demolition of homes and cemeteries, often communicated by water, dammed lake, chemical imbalance, drowning, miscarriage, sterile ejaculate. (55)

This "threat of erasure" is present in the works I discuss in Chapter 1 and 3. Rash uses his writing to answer that threat, acting as archivist and demonstrating the role that literature plays in preserving culture.

Chappell offers us perhaps the best justification for using fiction and poetry to resist forces of industry and government: "Any art form which is successful is necessarily its own justification. . . . Because what fiction emphasizes is not sequence, not chain of event, but instead the separateness of moments of time, the extreme individuality of persons and objects" (Chappell, "Six Propositions" 515). By selecting the specific moments of time fictionalized and immortalized in *Serena* (2008), *I Am One of You Forever* (1987), *Midquest* (1981), *One Foot in Eden* (2002), and *Saints at the River* (2004), both Rash and Chappell preserve their cultural heritage while resisting colonizing forces and reimagining more just alternatives.

I have decided to organize my chapters chronologically according to the historical periods dealt with in Rash's and Chappell's works, rather than by their dates of publication. This order allows me to present a nearly continuous history of southern Appalachia, albeit through the artistic lens of fiction and poetry. In this order, then, I address first the timber industry's heyday in the 1920s and 1930s,

leading into the creation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, as captured by Rash in *Serena*. Next is the history of Champion International on the banks of the Pigeon River in the early decades of the twentieth century and through World War II, treated by Chappell in *I Am One of You Forever* and *Midquest*. Then I discuss the purchase of Jocassee Valley and the 1970s flooding of that valley to create Lake Jocassee, depicted in *One Foot in Eden* by Rash. Lastly, I include the implementation of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and the tension it creates following the 1999 drowning of Rachel Trois, fictionalized in Rash's *Saints at the River*. These environmental events serve as the backdrops for an ecocritical and postcolonial literary analysis in each chapter.

Chapter 1 is entitled “. . . ‘[T]his is what the end of the world will be like’: Deforestation, Displacement, and Ron Rash’s *Serena*.” In this chapter I provide a close reading of *Serena*, examining the relationship between Serena and Rachel as representative of the relationship between historical lumber barons and residents of the Appalachian communities at risk. The novel focuses on education and highlights two different types literacies; I discuss how those literacies are evident as well as how they serve different characters. Additionally, I emphasize environmental events that shadow these characters and their impact on real mountain communities.

In this chapter I argue that this novel accurately mirrors the invasion of timber barons and the federal government (as well as unwelcome conservationist interests, represented here by Horace Kephart) into Appalachian culture, essentially creating a lumber empire whose presence unavoidably equals environmental

disaster and the loss of folkways. My discussion of *Serena* analyzes Rash's depiction of an era of monumental environmental and cultural significance of the large-scale deforestation of the southern mountains starting in the late nineteenth century and continued into the early decades of the twentieth century. While many local crews were hired by lumber barons (and thus enjoyed brief economic relief), the loss of timber meant the loss of forest and natural habitat, thus weakening families' and communities' abilities to sustain themselves. Seen through a postcolonial lens, the introduction of clear-cutting and mass deforestation enabled the social hierarchy of the wealthy, entrepreneurial outsiders—here, George and Serena Pemberton— and their claim to dominance over the land and resources over the claim of the local residents, thus perpetuating the poverty of the region and eventually contributing to the status of Appalachian residents as non-inhabitants. During this period of deforestation, the National Park Service and conservationists such as Horace Kephart were vociferous in their desire for a national park in this area, though there was no federally owned land available. Through individual financial contributions, including a sizeable donation by John D. Rockefeller and a substantial sum donated by the federal government, the governor of Tennessee led the buy-out process. The effects of this practice are most easily visible through the mass eviction of nearly six thousand residents that resulted from the creation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. True to the pattern of postcolonial practice, white mountaineers were forced out of lands from which Cherokees had been removed even more brutally and marched along the Trail of Tears a century earlier, in 1838. Ron Rash captures much of this tumult in *Serena*.

In Chapter 2, entitled “ ‘You can’t goddammit shoot/ A river’: Fred Chappell Takes on Champion International,” I highlight Chappell’s treatment of environmental events through his thinly veiled depiction of Challenger International in the Kirkman tetralogy and direct recollection of floods in poems such as “Dead Soldiers.” I begin with a discussion of “The Overspill” (in *I Am One of You Forever*) and “Dead Soldiers” (in *Midquest*), in which Chappell provides readers with glimpses of how an immensely successful paper corporation devalues and negatively affects the quality of life of the surrounding community. I provide a close reading of the characters and setting of both “The Overspill” and “Dead Soldiers,” with attention to the socioeconomic and cultural effects of frequent floodgate releases as recorded by Chappell.

I include a discussion of the historical and environmental processes and politics that contributed to the role that Champion played in Canton, North Carolina. One feature of Champion International with particularly negative environmental effects is overshadowed by the poisoning of the Pigeon River: the building of a reservoir that controlled stream flow for much of the region. Overshadowed by the constant pollution spilling into the Pigeon River, this reservoir caused at least seven floods—in “The Overspill” Joe Robert alludes to these floods as an intentional yet unpublicized opening of the floodgates, while in “Dead Soldiers” the cause of the floods is unclear. The flooding of the creek in each work reinforces the social hierarchy solidified by the presence of Champion International and supported by the state and federal governments: That of the corporate entity over the yeoman farmer and a traditional Appalachian culture, according to which the environment

and its inhabitants are inconsequential in the face of a profit. I investigate Chappell's treatment of the Kirkmans' bioregion and provide a reading of the frequent deluges through environmental justice and postcolonial theory. I conclude this chapter by considering Chappell's use of magical realism across the comprehensive arc of the Kirkman tetralogy. In an analysis of both Jess's and Joe Robert's reactions to the flooding, I argue that Chappell provided a spectrum of reactions to Champion. Ultimately, Joe Robert's lifelong fantasy of achieving retribution from Challenger Paper provides readers with an imagined peaceful alternative to either violent revenge or submissive surrendering of resources.

In Chapter 3 (" 'Lives slip away like water': Water Rights and Drowned Communities in Rash's *One Foot in Eden* and *Raising the Dead*") I continue the discussion of water issues by considering the role of rivers in small communities and the promise of hydroelectric power in Appalachia. The event that anchors both *One Foot in Eden* and *Raising the Dead* is Duke Power's Keowee-Toxaway Project, which I discuss in detail. In this chapter I analyze the various roles that water plays in Rash's *One Foot in Eden* and his collection of autobiographical poetry, *Raising the Dead*. *One Foot in Eden* is a multi-narrated work in five sections, each of which discusses both the looming flooding of the Jocassee Valley and the murder of Holland Winchester, a Korean War veteran and lover of the married Amy Holcomb. I discuss the role of each character, arguing that their development is not unlike diving into a pool of water: With each narrator, readers learn more of the complicated relationships that bind them. The common bond between *One Foot in Eden* and *Raising the Dead* is the actual flooding of the Jocassee Valley to create Lake

Jocassee.⁷ The river that will be flooded by Duke Power in *One Foot in Eden* serves as a line of demarcation between several binaries that I discuss in detail. In *One Foot in Eden* the river divides the technological “progress” that will dislocate the Hollands, the Winchesters, and countless other families from their homesteads from the poor agrarian life that sustains them. *Raising the Dead* is also focused on the flooding of the valley, though is perhaps more autobiographical than *One Foot*. In both works, Rash uses his platform as writer to preserve Appalachian culture, highlight the lasting environmental damage (most prominently through the loss of the Oconee Bell flower), and question the dominant narrative of progress as beneficial to all.

I conduct a closer reading of his accounts of the flooding of the Jocassee Valley by Duke Power to create the Jocassee Reservoir, historicizing them and identifying them as both contact zones and places of hybridity, applying a theoretical approach wherein environmental and human interests mirror each other. Following an ecocritical/ postcolonial approach to these works, I consider the depiction of the (historically accurate) perpetuation of negative stereotypes to further a progressive agenda, the exercise of eminent domain for the sake of profit promised by hydroelectric power, and the eventual mass displacement all for the purpose of drowning valleys.

⁷ Though the correct term to use for this and other similarly-created bodies of water is “reservoir,” I will refer to them with the title “Lake,” as they are known in the region and its literature. However, it is important to keep in mind that true lakes are not man-made. Referring to these reservoirs as lakes is yet another method by Duke Power and other capitalist ventures to naturalize their destructive actions.

Chapter 4 is entitled “ ‘Lost in the river’s vast and generous unremembering’: The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act Versus Sustainable Use in Rash’s *Saints at the River*.” Rash’s *Saints at the River* represents the complexity of the changing enviro-political landscape after the first half of the twentieth century. In this chapter I focus on the river as a contact zone in which competing interests are not only evident, but struggling for viability. I examine several characters closely, showing how Rash has made unique individuals from several common Appalachian experiences. In this text, Rash pits community members against external forces, frequently mimicking the process that “Othered” this region: The perpetuation of stereotypes, dissemination of misinformation, and disregard for resources. The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, passed in 1968, reflects our nation’s growing concern for our natural environment and represents an effort toward conservation. The Act maintains that designated rivers will flow unimpeded by dams, and that their shorelines will be protected up to a boundary averaging a quarter of a mile on either side; however, the Act does not institute eminent domain in giving federal government control over privately held lands on designated rivers. Interestingly, the Act does not negate the need for dams, but rather set up conditions wherein every dam necessitates protection of another river system. What complicates the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act is that designation of rivers as “Wild and Scenic” places the maintenance of rivers under either a federal or a state agency. And so while the Act is to be applauded for its inclusion of landowners in its conservation attempts, it still endorses the presence of federal or state agencies in local communities.

In this chapter I detail the act itself, focusing on implications for landowners, entrepreneurial ventures, and federal government. My main argument centers on the act as a practical application of concerns fundamental to both ecocriticism and postcolonialism: It protects the agency of landowners and the river alike. However, at certain points it pits conservation efforts in the tradition of deep ecology against humanitarian interests. Rash's *Saints at the River* demonstrates this tension in highlighting the conflict over retrieving human remains from the Chattooga River. I provide a closer reading of *Saints*, emphasizing this tension and demonstrating the effects of the Act upon local small businesses, such as small-scale logging enterprises.

In my conclusion, I discuss the roles that Rash and Chappell fulfill as archivists and activists, focusing on regional literature and the growing audience of Appalachian literature. I also highlight several contemporary environmental organizations whose goals mirror the concerns of postcolonial ecocriticism, uniting the wellbeing of communities and environment alike. Lastly, I address the ongoing quest for both social and environmental justice as reflected in Appalachian literature.

Ultimately, it is my hope that this dissertation will achieve multiple purposes. First, I wish to add to the relatively and surprisingly small bodies of criticism on both authors. While Ron Rash is beginning to receive accolades and honors, both he and Fred Chappell are worthy of being esteemed among the great writers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. I hope to further promote the burgeoning relationship between ecocriticism and postcolonial studies through answering Ursula Heise's critical query:

“[H]ow accurately [do texts] portray the realities of colonial exploitation and environmental devastation, and to what extent [can] authors be credited with attempting to resist these processes or with imagining alternatives to them?” (“Postcolonial” 225).

Lastly, I hope to demonstrate that Rash’s “concern with environmental issues” (Birnbaum) and Chappell’s statement that “Justice is a constant theme of mine, whether it shows up in my work or not” (Palmer 407) situate these particular works solidly in the category of activism and resistance.

CHAPTER 1

“THIS IS WHAT THE END OF THE WORLD WILL BE LIKE”:
DEFORESTATION, DISPLACEMENT, AND RON RASH’S *SERENA*

Preacher McIntyre, a logger who has cleared the land for the ruthless Pemberton Lumber Company in Ron Rash’s *Serena*, offers this somber statement; his observation wraps up a fictionalized depiction of a western North Carolina clear-cutting venture so grand in scale that “the valley and ridges resembled the skinned hide of some huge animal” (*Serena* 333). Ron Rash situates this moment at the end of *Serena*, which brings back to life much of the historical conflict between northern lumber barons and inhabitants of southern Appalachia in the early decades of the twentieth century. In *Serena*, Rash draws frequently upon classical themes and characters in creating the portrait of this powerful woman who ruthlessly seeks financial gain from the timber-rich mountains of southern Appalachia. Unlike Fred Chappell’s works addressed in this dissertation, which tend to focus on the microcosm of a close-knit family and offer subtle readings of environmental events that affect them, *Serena* is a work with a broad, sweeping scope. This novel chronicles the Pemberton timber empire, exploring the marriage between Bostonians George and Serena Pemberton and pitting them against a chorus-like group of sawyers, all native North Carolinians. The urgency of the Pembertons’ work is intensified by external pressure to create a national park out of land owned in part by private landowners, in part by massive lumber companies. The title

character stands firm against these pressures; she is frequently likened to Lady Macbeth by reviewers, and Joyce Compton Brown aptly further compares her to Machiavelli's Prince, Goethe's Faust, and Flannery O'Connor's Misfit ("Ron Rash's *Serena*" 84). Serena's daunting character represents a powerful outside interest whose sole motivation in decimating the western North Carolina forests in the early twentieth century was financial gain.

This text accurately mirrors many aspects of the invasion of timber barons and the federal government—as well as unwelcome conservationist interests, represented here by Horace Kephart—into Appalachian culture, creating a lumber empire whose presence unavoidably equals environmental disaster and the loss of local folkways. Despite its foundation in real events, though, this novel creatively pits mountaineer against entrepreneur, allowing readers to envision the successful demise of the exploitative timber industry. With this novel Rash offers readers a creative account of historical events, adding his own fictional protagonist, the cold and merciless Serena. This work demonstrates the role that fiction plays in resisting colonial forces: It stands as a marker of the environmental and cultural devastation wreaked on a region as a result of its vast wealth of resources and allows readers to imagine an alternative present in which the colonizing force is, ultimately, held accountable for its actions. With *Serena* Rash reminds readers of the vast reach of imperialism, using literature to demonstrate this assertion by Edward Said:

Imperialism . . . is an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control. For the native, the history of colonial

servitude is inaugurated by the loss of locality to the outsider; its geographical identity must thereafter be searched for and somehow restored. Because of the presence of the colonizing outsider, the land is recoverable at first only through imagination. (Said 225)

In this chapter I will historicize *Serena*, demonstrating the totality of control imposed upon the geographical area by the colonizing forces of the timber industry. Once contextualized, I focus on Rash's treatment of the land and Othered communities.

This novel, as one such act of imagination, allows Rash to develop in one character the driving force behind the imposition of empire and effective colonization of western North Carolina. *Serena* and Pemberton (and eventually, only *Serena*, following her orchestration of Pemberton's murder) represent the "colonizing outsider," allowing Rash to write from the colonizing perspective. The inclusion of historical and fictionalized figures allows Rash to reconnect nature and history, taking heed of Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley's warning that the "decoupling of nature and history has helped to mystify colonialism's histories of forced migrations, suffering, and human violence." In creating a text that is at once historically realistic and fictional, Rash includes the colonizing perspective to strip it of its mystery—and thus, in effect, its power.

The authenticity of this historical fiction stems from the author's own life. Rash believes that "how and where you were born affects how you see the world and how you see yourself" (Zacharias), and this belief, combined with his upbringing and family heritage in western North Carolina, as well as his current position as the

Parris Distinguished Professor in Appalachian Studies at Western Carolina University, allows him to write about the colonizing efforts of entrepreneurs such as the Pembertons and the resulting widespread environmental devastation from a unique position. Generations of Rash's family represent experiences common to Appalachia: He traces his family lineage back to the Civil War and earlier, and had family on both sides of the Shelton Laurel Massacre (Fox). During Rash's own lifetime, his maternal grandmother lived on a farm outside in Aho, North Carolina (in Watauga County, just outside Boone), while his paternal grandfather represents the cultural change from an agrarian lifestyle to an industrial economy, having been "forced away from his family's farm and into the mill because of certain financial hardships" (Vernon 21). Rash's father also worked in a cotton mill before serving as "the art professor" at Gardner-Webb College while Rash was growing up, and his mother taught school (J. Brown, "Power" 27).

Rash credits his youthful summers spent on his grandmother's farm for his "sense of the world being a place of mystery, a place of wonder. I've always been attracted to the part of nature that is terrifying or unsettling" (J. Brown 28), while acknowledging that those same summers "led me to observe the natural world carefully because I was out in it, and I think that capacity for close observation paid off later in my writing, that I was really paying attention to the physical world" (29). He is also sensitive to the issues of class that are inherent to a work such as *Serena*, telling Joyce Compton Brown,

I was always aware of class distinctions, . . . of that hierarchy and the places that people were supposed to occupy in it, that structure of

complete control. And I also saw that once you were in that caste system, you weren't supposed to get out. I witnessed that. . . . my class awareness, and sometime class resentment, came out of my family's personal experience. (33)

Issues of class and social hierarchy underpin *Serena*, which takes as its subject matter the historically accurate environmental destruction and simultaneous treatment of southern Appalachia as an internal colony by one group of northern entrepreneurs. This direct focus on environmental history differs from Fred Chappell's focus on family history in both the Kirkman tetralogy and *Midquest*, the works that I address in Chapter 2. In order to best discuss *Serena*'s firm grounding in history, here I will first provide a brief overview of the novel and then provide a contextualizing discussion of relevant logging history in the southern mountains. I will then return to *Serena* and examine various aspects of the novel in the light of germane ecocritical and postcolonial theory.

The novel opens in western North Carolina, 1929, with the arrival by train of George Pemberton and his new bride, Serena to the local depot. Meeting the train are Pemberton's partners in the Boston Lumber Company: Buchanan and Wilkie.⁸ Neither partner is particularly well-suited for the demanding physical labor required of their crews: Buchanan is a "dandy" and Wilkie's age and economic status are belied by his watch fob and blue silk handkerchief (4-5). Also waiting at the train station are Rachel Harmon and her father, Abraham. In this scene, Rachel,

⁸ An important point that will be discussed later is Rash's use of names. All male characters are referred to consistently by their surname—in the case of many characters, their given names are never mentioned throughout the novel. Serena, though, is referred to consistently by her first name.

pregnant with Pemberton's child and unaware of his marriage to Serena, is prepared to ask Pemberton to support both her and their child. However, Abe Harmon, provoked by Serena's presence and Pemberton's lack of empathy toward Rachel, drunkenly curses and challenges Pemberton: "'God damn the both of you,' Harmon said, taking a step toward the Pembertons" (8). The ensuing grueling scene is reminiscent of a duel, though Harmon gives Pemberton little challenge and Pemberton easily "grabbed Harmon's shoulder with his free hand for leverage and quickly opened a thin smile across the man's stomach" (*Serena* 9). Pemberton's reaction to Rachel and Harmon, and Serena's explicit approval of his reaction, represents their disregard for the local community, culture, and environment that the novel continues to develop. Serena nonchalantly gives the knife that killed Rachel's father to her while stating that "'by all rights it belongs to my husband. It's a fine knife, and you can get a good price for it. . . . That money will help when the child is born. It's all you'll ever get from my husband and me'" (10). This coldness is displayed frequently throughout the work, including Serena's reaction to Pemberton's brutal death—which she orchestrates. This suggests that she is motivated solely by financial gain and will sacrifice not just the surrounding environment, but also those in her life, to achieve it.

Serena, whose family had built wealth in Colorado through timber, is a study of privilege and greed. Though very well educated, she is not content to remain behind in Boston or even spend her days within the confines of the camp. Instead, she directs the logging crews, and Pemberton asserts to his workers, "'She's the equal of any man here, and you'll soon find the truth of it. Her orders are to be

followed the same as you'd follow mine'" (22). Amid derision from the workers, Serena quickly makes a wager with the foreman Bilded and easily wins, costing Bilded two weeks' pay and, eventually, his job. Having won the fearful respect of the local workers, Serena herself runs a crew, riding her Arabian horse into the field daily.

Throughout the novel, Serena and Pemberton resist the significant efforts of Horace Kephart, Webb (local journalist and newspaper editor), Secretary of the Interior Horace Albright, and John D. Rockefeller to establish a national park and instead plot the acquisition of yet more tracts in the southern Appalachian mountains. Buchanan and Wilkie, willing to consider selling land to the park movement, present a significant obstacle to the Pembertons; in return, the Pembertons orchestrate Buchanan's death and buy Wilkie's stake in the Boston Lumber Company, immediately renaming it "Pemberton Lumber Company." A masterful deception by Horace Kephart and Webb distracts Harris, a local investor in the Pembertons' company, robbing them of the opportunity to buy a large tract of land proposed for the park that contains one of the last remaining stands of virgin timber.

Much of the novel is devoted to Rachel's experiences raising Jacob alone and away from the logging camp and the Pembertons' influence. Rachel is self-sufficient, quickly learning to provide for herself and complete the maintenance duties once performed by her father. Rachel serves as a foil to Serena throughout the novel and eventually proves resilient against her. These women, whose lives mirror one another's in many aspects, represent an essentialized colonizer / colonized binary.

Importantly, Rash gives Rachel the power to escape Serena, whose jealousy that Rachel can bear Pemberton's son while she cannot overpowers her. Joyce Brown notes that "Rachel's escape with her child is the single sign of hope that the powerless might at times, with help from others who make strong moral choices, be able to win against the power mongers" ("Ron Rash's *Serena*" 86). As Jacob's sole protector, Rachel evades Serena's wrath when Serena decides to kill both child and mother and eventually raises Jacob in Seattle, Washington—far beyond the boundaries of Appalachia.

Forced to clear only their original tract and a small tract purchased in neighboring Jackson County, the Pemberton Lumber Company eventually strips the land of all its trees, witnesses or causes the demise of many central characters, and moves to South America, leaving in its wake "acres of stumps that, from a distance, resembled grave markers in a recently vacated battlefield" (23). The novel's coda, dated 1975, reveals that Jacob, son of Rachel and Pemberton, found Serena in Brazil and murdered her. This final scene suggests that though Serena's timber empire temporarily stripped the land of a renewable resource and thus affected local communities' abilities to sustain themselves, the Appalachian local community ultimately triumphs over the nonlocal greed represented by Serena.

Steeping this creative text in historical events allows Rash to demonstrate with stark clarity the continuing intricate and nuanced relationship between resources and culture in Appalachia. Here, Rash takes as his platform the decimating effects of deforestation on both the land and its people in the face of widespread demand for timber in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

However, this novel more than mirrors history: While many aspects of it are indeed historically accurate, Rash reimagines the effects and ultimate success of a grandiose and devastating entrepreneurial venture that sought to colonize Appalachia and monopolize its timber resources. Much like an Elizabethan drama, *Serena* provides the venue for Rash's Appalachian characters to triumph, exacting revenge for the loss of their land and culture, thus providing readers with a lesson applicable for their future.

Because much of the novel reflects historical events, to effectively discuss its nuances I must carefully contextualize *Serena*, which takes place during the Great Depression, as a product of the vast changes and resulting deforestation of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Before approximately 1880, southern Appalachia was almost entirely agricultural and self-sufficient, as Ronald Eller notes: "Prior to the 1880s and 1890s, the Appalachian economy was locally oriented and designed to meet the needs of the resident population. Communities were small and, like the family farms, essentially self-sufficient" (227). Appalachian inhabitants in the nineteenth century were farmers; in fact, the success of the self-sufficient family farm in Appalachia during the nineteenth century has led contemporary scholars to view the mountains during this period as "one of the last great strongholds of rural frontier life" (3). The mountain South, limited by rugged terrain and unique in the "relative absence of slavery" (4), preserved the agrarian culture that much of the industrializing nation seemed to be abandoning. By the 1880s, Appalachian farmers, not blind to the timber resources available, had been routinely clearing their land and even profiting from timber for decades during lean

times, enabling local logging outfits to easily lure farmers to ride the creeks on log rafts during the spring rains. This logging was done in small quantities, though, limiting any lasting detrimental cultural and environmental effects (Williams 247). However, this would soon change.

The railroad is a constant presence quietly chugging along in the background of *Serena*, and rightly so. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in southern Appalachia were shaped by the arrival of the Western North Carolina Railroad at Asheville in 1880 (further stretching to Waynesville in 1884 and to Murphy in 1890). This line provided greater ease of access to increasingly valuable timber resources; it is this combination of rail line and access to precious resources that attracted the attention of entrepreneurs from far beyond Appalachia—including the fictionalized Pemberton, Buchanan, and Wilkie. In fact, the period of 1880-1920 is recognized as the “era of industrial railroad logging” (Davis 165). Rash acknowledges the connection between rail lines and logging—as well as inefficient road systems that previously limited industry—when Pemberton informs Serena, upon her arrival to the Waynesville station in the opening chapter, that the “train would get us to camp quicker, even at fifteen miles an hour” (13).

It is important that readers of *Serena* do not underestimate the importance of the rail lines in promoting the logging practices that include reckless clear-cutting: Entrepreneurs in the prosperous northeast had depleted their hardwood resources and with the opening of Appalachia by rail, attention was diverted southward.

Donald Davis writes:

Resources of Appalachia became tantalizingly more accessible and promising. Prior to the 1870s, the nation's lumber barons had shown little interest in purchasing large tracts of land in the region, having adequate supplies in much more accessible areas in the North and Midwest. That quickly changed, however, as more and more railroad lines began to penetrate the mountain interior, and timber shortages elsewhere in America became more imminent. Many of the large timber and railroad companies were even owned by the same stockholders, who strongly believed that the two industries should be mutually supportive. (165)

Although Appalachian residents had been harvesting hardwood timber from their land for at least a century before the start of the timber boom, the sheer amount of resources meant that when the rail line came through in 1880, there remained "enormous tracts of old growth hardwood forests, including vast stands located along isolated stretches of the Cumberland Plateau and in the remoter sections of the Blue Ridge Mountains" yet available (Davis 164). In Swain County North Carolina, an area later targeted by both the Pembertons and the national park supporters, "at least 94 percent of the land was still in forest, and one third of that, reported state forester J. S. Holmes, was 'virgin'" (Davis 164). These virgin hardwoods attracted the attention of northern investors who had depleted their forests of the same resources; in fact, Thomas Edward Maxey, an engineer for Montvale Lumber Company, described the southern mountains in the first decade of

the twentieth century as “a lumberman’s dream. They were a wilderness of virgin timber, the finest stands of hardwoods in the country” (qtd. in M. Brown 50).

Despite keen interest from the northeast, the lumber industry came to southern Appalachia in waves. In the 1880s and 1890s, northern lumber barons would send scouts to walk the mountains, buying precious hardwoods that had been harvested to disappearance in northern forests. These trees would largely be sent by river out of the mountains to industrial centers located outside of Appalachia for sawing and processing (Eller 89), though entrepreneurs quickly began forging their own industry to grow local economies: In 1883, Jackson County, North Carolina had seven sawmills, Haywood County had thirteen, and Ashe County had nineteen (86). However, by the turn of the twentieth century, the timber industry was thriving in the mountain South: “Backed by teams of sawyers, locomotives, railroad lines, and steam-powered sawmills, the industrial loggers soon began removing the biggest and oldest trees from the mountain forests with unparalleled speed and efficiency” (Davis 167).

This industry was almost exclusively bankrolled by investors who had never set foot in Appalachia, a phenomenon that Rash acknowledges in *Serena*. Because the southern mountains were promoted heavily by media, government officials, and capitalistic entrepreneurs who were “encouraging northern capitalists to exploit the mountains’ remaining mineral and timber reserves” (Davis 163), investors frequently had no accurate approximation of how much a particular tract was worth or what it might be used for. Tracts frequently changed hands with dizzying speed without any further investment, harvesting, or alteration to landforms: “For

example, the Southern States Coal, Iron and Land Company, a British firm, purchased all of eastern Tennessee's Bald Mountain and then sold the 25,000-acre tract to the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company without ever mining or timbering the area" (Davis 163). While some of the tracts bought by these distant companies were "tax-delinquent," much of the land was bought from Appalachian inhabitants, believing that the grade was too steep to farm, for shamefully low prices: "As little as a dollar per acre or, in a few cases, a single hog rifle or shotgun" (Davis 163).

While the timber industry gained momentum during these decades, the agricultural economy of Appalachia and natural characteristics remained largely unchanged: "As late as 1900, over 75 percent of the Southern Appalachian region remained in woodland. . . . most of the commercial timber was as yet untouched" (Eller 86). This was soon to change, though. During the timber boom from the mid-1890s until approximately 1910, nearly all the timberland of most counties in Southern Appalachia was owned by outside interests (98). By 1900, land was being bought by the tens of thousands of acres in a parcel; for instance, in 1906, John C. Arbogast purchased 33,000 acres from the Eastern Band of Cherokees for just under \$250,000 (M. Brown 52).

These massive purchases reflected an increased demand for natural resources at the turn of the twentieth century, and subsequently there was measurable economic growth for a brief period in the southern mountains. However, the economic wellbeing of the area depended heavily on the industry and "very little long-range local development occurred. This condition of growth

without development placed the mountains in a highly vulnerable relationship to the larger market system. Slight fluctuations in that system were felt with great intensity throughout the hills” (Eller 229). The poverty and growing lack of employment toward the end of the timber boom is reflected in *Serena* when Snipes notes that “so many folks is perched on them commissary steps now you about have to draw lots for a seat. They’s workers already herding at the new camp and it’s not even open yet” (218). Snipes’ comment connotes both the economic power of the timber industry as well as the impoverished conditions of the communities whose resources were being plundered.

Despite localized periods of economic growth, the timber industry significantly jeopardized the agriculture of the mountains and turned many farmers toward some type of industrial labor. The timber previously used by residents for grazing animals was sold to entrepreneurial ventures, thus precluding this aspect of the mountain farm (Eller 230). As a result, farmers attempted to raise crops or maintain smaller animal populations. Coupled with the lack of viable market is the relatively small acreage of most mountain farms, rendering them less productive than flatland farms and contributing to the general decline in farming (231). Some farmers, for example, in Cataloochee and Cades Cove, sold cattle to the lumber companies, but “they faced increasing competition from lowland farmers who wanted to do the same thing” (M. Brown 69). Not surprisingly, many former farmers gained employment in at least part-time industrial work. This decline in agriculture continued to shrink the size of the typical family farm, “resulting from the absentee corporations’ acquisition of farm and forest properties, and from the

continued division of farms among heirs. Over the period from 1900 to 1930, the amount of land in farms declined almost 25 percent” (Eller 230), thus permanently altering the culture of southern Appalachia.

Further handicapping any positive growth in Appalachia during these decades was the lack of industry attention directed towards the local economic development of a middle class. The nature of the timber industry “did not generate capital for reinvestment in local businesses, and the numbers of middle-level technicians and managers that might have been spawned by local development remained small” (Eller 234). Additionally, recognizing the near-impossibility of the land fully recovering from clear-cutting, the lack of long-term development was quite intentional: Serena, when faced with evidence of the chestnut blight, notes that it is “good that it takes them years to die completely. . . . That gives us all the time we need” (13). Margaret Brown agrees that the “lumber companies always intended to leave” (72). Thus, with declining agriculture, limited growth of a middle class, and no investment in long-range growth, southern Appalachia remained highly vulnerable to changes in the timber market, which soon began to weaken.

The boom declined between 1910 and 1920 as a result of the irresponsible exploitation of resources. Ready to step in as companies realized the exhaustion of resources was the U. S. Forest Service, which purchased over two million acres of timberland by 1930 (Eller 230). Many of the investment companies that altered the landscape of Appalachia moved west to discover “untouched” opportunities on the west coast, abandoning industry but not their land. Davis notes that scholars estimate “industrial organizations” owned 62% of timberland in 1930, restricting

residents from continued use even if it was not logged (176). In the wake of their departure, entire communities collapsed, and local economies that had relied upon the timber boom grew even more impoverished—and some, such as Sunburst, a logging town established by Champion, are eventually demolished in the name of progress, as I discuss in Chapter 2. Davis summarizes the widespread impact of this disparate land ownership:

While corporate logging operations did much to alter the mountain landscape, reducing forest cover and contributing to flooding and soil erosion, industrial logging had an important impact on the subsistence economy of the region, removing much needed farmland from the community land base as well as eliminating from the forest the native plants and animals that mountain families had long depended upon for survival. (175)

Left with no alternative, unemployed former loggers returned to the little land available for farming (Eller 237-39), which was frequently denourished, cutover land. The cultural changes wrought by logging affected more than mere income: Loss of the forest removed the possibility for what had traditionally been a subsistence lifestyle. Families and entire communities lost their forest literacy, forgetting the traditional roles roots and herbs played in their daily lives or how to hunt and trap specific animal populations. By 1936 they occupied what Ronald Lewis refers to as a “life of rural marginality” (qtd. in M. Brown 72-73), and almost half of all mountain families received federal relief aid (Eller 240).

Enter *Serena*. Set in 1929, the novel is placed by Rash at the perfect position to witness and contribute to the actual end of the timber industry in western North Carolina, an end brought about by successful clear-cutting ventures and, eventually, successful campaigns to establish a national park. The Boston Lumber Company and the Pemberton Lumber Company are able to take advantage of the plethora of workers arriving daily to the camp, seeking employment: Indeed, for the Pembertons, the influx of workers only meant that their careless attitude toward the safety of their workers could continue as Doctor Cheney notes in conversation with Serena and Pemberton: “It seems the men are getting killed at a rather prodigious rate these last few weeks. . . . When Wilkie and Buchanan were here, there seemed to be fewer deaths” (187).

The deforestation of the late nineteenth century, which continued to run rampant for decades into the twentieth century, utilized skidders and clear-cutting as its primary method of harvesting timber. Logger Seymour Calhoun recalls the overhead skidder used on Lynn Camp Prong: “It just destroyed everything. They destroyed more timber than they got out with ‘em because it just knocked the trees down and bushes and everything and just leave the destruction of it” (qtd. in M. Brown 60). Jennie Bradshaw Abbott, daughter of a logger employed by the Little River Lumber Company, described the mountains as “skinned” (60). The scale of this industry is hard to fathom. By 1909, production increased to four billion board feet per year (Davis 170); this rate only increased, with individual enterprises averaging 150,000 board feet per day (M. Brown 53). In total, over twenty years, approximately 60% of the southern mountains had been clear-cut (M. Brown 67).

The phenomenal ecological damage done to the southern mountains during these decades cannot be understated. Understandably, the environmental effects of this practice were devastating. Industrial logging cleared entire mountainsides of trees and undergrowth, favoring the regeneration of fast-growing, shade-intolerant species such as white and short leaf pine (Davis 170-71). Clear-cutting crippled the ecology of the bioregion, forcing migration of animal species (“they’ve hightailed on over to Tennessee That’s the direction we’re herding them and they’ve give up fighting about it” (*Serena* 63) and pushing others to near extinction. The impact on the white-tail deer population, for instance, was so significant that North Carolina legislature banned all deer hunting from 1927 to 1932 (M. Brown 63).

Simultaneously, logging increased the frequency and intensity of forest fires, and introduced floods and danger of erosion where none existed previously. Forest fires are widely considered the most harmful consequence of the act of clear-cutting itself; according to Daniel Pierce, sparks from rail lines and skidders ignited in the massive piles of slash almost every major fire in southern Appalachia, including one that raged for two months (29). In 1891, William Ashe estimated that between 800,000 and 1.2 million acres of North Carolina timberland was consumed by forest fire (M. Brown 168). Both clear-cutting and fire resulted in widespread erosion: As early as 1901, James Wilson, the Secretary of Agriculture under Theodore Roosevelt, warned that the soil, affected by the heavy rain common in the region, “is washed away in enormous volume into the streams, to bury such of the fertile lowlands as are not eroded by the floods, to obstruct the rivers, and to fill up the harbors on the coast” (qtd. in Davis 170). Indeed, history demonstrates that, with no roots to

contain soil, it “clogged streams with silt and slash, contributed to the massive flooding problems of this period, and destroyed countless numbers of fish and other aquatic life” (Pierce 28).

With the increased ease of access to the mountains of western North Carolina and Tennessee, wrought by the timber industry, came three other special interests groups: forest utilitarians, park supporters, and tourists. An early proponent of utilizing the resources offered by forests, Gifford Pinchot was the first to establish a successfully managed forest in the nation at the Vanderbilt-owned Biltmore Estate in Asheville. An astute observer of the timber industry, he wrote in 1892 that “if forest management is successful in producing profit off this burned, slashed, and overgrazed forest, it will do so on almost any land in this part of the country” (qtd. in Davis 168). Pinchot quickly gained political capital, becoming the head of the forestry division of the Department of Agriculture in 1898. Significantly, Pinchot’s influence successfully created the U. S. Forest Service within that Department and designated all national forest reserves as national forests. Notably, a national forest is open for use by all citizens; it may be logged, hunted, or fished under careful management.

Pinchot is important to this discussion because he represents a new trend in forestry, that of forest management. Though efforts to preserve the region for aesthetic and tourism purposes faltered in the early 1900s, supporters of utilitarian forest management such as Pinchot influenced his friend and colleague Theodore Roosevelt, leading the latter to claim:

In [the Appalachian] region occur that marvelous variety and richness of plant growth which have led our ablest businessmen and scientists to ask for its preservation by the Government for the advancement of science and for the instruction and pleasure of the people of our own and future generations. And it is the concentration here of so many valuable species and such favorable conditions of growth which has led forest experts and lumbermen alike to assert that of all the continent this region is best suited to the purpose and plans of a national forest reserve in the hardwood region. (qtd. in Davis 161)

Roosevelt's attitude was shared by future officials and continued to influence politics greatly. With pressure mounting from the forest service, the public, and park promoters, President Taft signed into law the Weeks Act in March of 1911. The Weeks Act, first proposed by forestry proponents, permitted the government to purchase lands for a "forest reserve" and also grant the power of condemnation. With this law originally ruled unconstitutional by the House Judiciary Committee because of unjustified use of eminent domain, supporters of forest utilization shifted the emphasis of the act to protection of watersheds. This piece of legislature officially authorized the purchase of "forested, cut-over, or denuded lands within the watersheds of navigable streams . . . necessary to the regulation of the flow of navigable streams" (qtd. in Davis 171) and established a National Forest Reservation Commission. In order to purchase the headwaters of these navigable rivers, the National Forest Reservation Commission was appropriated ten million dollars to put toward the purchase of eighteen land tracts in Appalachia. This law is

part of a movement to “remake the Appalachians, transform the unfortunate social and industrial conditions which have long prevailed there, and set the region to performing the function for which it was clearly intended” (Hall 323). Significantly, Rash’s family later lost land to the creation of the Blue Ridge Parkway, a government-sponsored project begun during the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. This loss of land, over which families such as Rash’s had no control, began with the Weeks Act and continued through the twentieth century in various forms.

Though this law didn’t stop—or even slow—timber production in the Smokies, it did provide a precedent for the claims of eminent domain that accompanied the creation of the park. As William Hall wrote in 1914, because titles and surveys were not regulated in these states “title is now being taken through condemnation the owner generally agreeing to accept the same price by condemnation as he would through purchase” (332). However, even as a supporter to the Weeks Act, Hall admitted that this land acquisition was merely the start of a government improvement program: “When the Government acquires lands in any locality, it at once begins certain steps of development” (332). The forest movement, supported by the Weeks Act, will “place the forest in prime growing condition with the stand composed of desirable trees,” carve trails for the “mass of recreation-seeking Americans [who] will not regard the region as accessible until they can go through it in an automobile,” and “remake the people of the mountains” (338).

While Pinchot, the leaders of the National Forest Reservation Commission, and other foresters were advocating for scientific management and use of the forests, the National Park Service and preservationists such as Horace Kephart were vociferous in their desire for a national park in this area, though there was no federally owned land available in the region. Kephart is recognized as a significant force who propelled the national park toward creation, though our contemporary vantage point on his portrayal of Appalachian inhabitants is not flattering—a perspective that Serena shares when she asks Pemberton with cynicism: “What’s the bard of Appalachia like, in person?” (117). Pemberton’s reply that he is “overly fond of the bottle, not nearly the saint the newspapers and politicians make of him” (117) rings true outside the novel. Kephart struggled with alcoholism and poor health, both of which divided his family: His wife and children moved from St. Louis to New York, while Kephart moved to western North Carolina. Upon his arrival there, Granville Calhoun aided his recuperation, and when he was able, he began writing of his adventures in the mountains. His writer’s authorial persona is largely fictional, though: “Nothing of his puny condition or alcohol problem appears in the robust, even swaggering articles” (M. Brown 82). Kephart’s romantic depiction of the mountains, exotic and barely inhabited, appeased an audience that had already been influenced by Mary Noailles Murfree’s fictional mountaineers.

Kephart worked steadily for the establishment of the park from the 1920s until his death in 1931, and he appears frequently as a “Harvard man turned Natty Bumpo” in *Serena* (35). Though he believed the park would benefit the very Appalachian communities he lived within, he drew upon the common notion of a

“contemporary ancestor” incapable of surviving in the early twentieth century. According to Kephart, residents within the proposed park boundaries were subject “to a law of nature that dooms an isolated and impoverished people to deterioration” (qtd. in Pierce 156).

In addition to the foresters and park supporters, a third noteworthy variety of “development” had begun to flourish from the same distant attention that brought the timber industry. Tourist accommodations abounded, from luxury resorts such as Ekaneetlee Lodge in Cades Cove to John Oliver’s lodge that advertised “good clean moral people; drunks and immoral people strictly prohibited” (qtd. in M. Brown 84). However, the momentum of the national park movement was not extinguished, and the press soon took up the battle cry, conjuring familiar images of ancient forests and exotic mountaineers “descended from pre-revolutionary backwoodsmen [who] still lie in the eighteenth century” (qtd. in M. Brown 91) as attractions in order to draw yet more tourists to the proposed park.

The original failure of the Weeks Act demonstrated Congress’s refusal to institute eminent domain on behalf of the federal government unless they felt it was justified, posing significant challenges to the establishment of the park. It was upon the suggestion of Arno Cammerer that the park supporters began soliciting the individual states to seek land and then donate it to the federal government in the form of a park. Despite outcry against forcing people off their lands, and repeated promises by Governor Peay that the state would not grab land, the state of Tennessee sought the power of eminent domain. A compromise was eventually

reached: The “taking” line was adjusted from Cammerer’s proposed original boundary that would displace up to 15,000 individuals and would instead exclude developed areas around Gatlinburg (M. Brown 93). Serena explains the inherent socioeconomic discrepancies of agreement to Davis and Albright: ““This is part of the bill passed by the Tennessee legislature. In it are provisions stating that a number of wealthy landowners will be exempt from eminent domain. They get to keep their land, even though it’s inside your proposed park” (138).

Through individual financial contributions, including a sizeable donation by John D. Rockefeller and a substantial sum donated by the federal government, the governor of Tennessee led the buy-out process. However, the timber companies did not immediately acquiesce and sell their holdings. On the North Carolina side, the North Carolina Park Commission, which was imbued with the power to purchase or condemn land, continued to seek legal action against Suncrest and Ravensford lumber companies as well as Champion Fibre, “all vocal opponents of the park that contested the amount paid for their timberlands” (Starnes 119). The lands owned by these companies, combined with the land of the Morton Butler Lumber Company, totaled over 180,000 acres and “comprised the most scenic and ecologically important land within the proposed park boundaries, including virtually all of the remaining old-growth forest in the Smokies” (Pierce 131). Lumber companies were reluctant to sell, arguing, as George Pemberton does, “When people finally realize it comes down to jobs or a pretty view, they’ll come around” (164). Champion Fibre was unwilling to sell the tract designated for the park for less than \$7 million since its virgin lumber would not be harvested before; they reached an agreement of \$3

million with park officials.⁹ *Serena* offers readers a second fictional parallel: Pemberton notes morosely that Albright, Secretary of the Interior, will start eminent domain proceedings against Pemberton Lumber Company unless he and Serena accept the buyout offer (302).

While local residents protested the sale or condemnation of their lands, they were unsympathetic toward the plight of the corporate landowners, ultimately viewing the buyout as yet another source of profit from the already exploited forests. One example of such profits is the Vanderbilt family, who sold 87,000 acres of land at a \$15 profit per acre (Davis 175).

Acquiring land from private landowners was contentious and inconsistent, and addressing first the largest industrial tracts held advantages for the two commissions. Individual landowners were often surrounded by these tracts, making access and long-range planning nearly impossible. However, that did not automatically mean that all landowners were willing to sell, and frequently they would only negotiate directly with Forest Service agents, who were willing to outlast sellers—often while dropping the offered price (Davis 173). Over a twelve-year period, the parks commissions from North Carolina and Tennessee purchased a total of 1,132 farms and 18 industrial tracts; the North Carolina parks commission condemned at least 65 parcels (M. Brown 97). Some residents elected to sell their land to the park commission and lease it back from them, though they soon found this was not an advantageous position. As tenants, they had few land rights, and

⁹ Champion's destructive environmental practices are not limited to its clear-cutting of virgin hardwoods to support its burgeoning fiber and paper production in nearby Canton, North Carolina. In Chapter 2 I focus on this corporation and discuss Chappell's reaction to the fictionalized "Challenger Paper and Fiber Corporation" in *I Am One of You Forever*, *Look Back*, *All the Green Valley*, and *Midquest*.

were prohibited from “cutting timber, digging for herbs and roots, building new structures, grazing animals, hunting, and manufacturing, selling, or possessing alcohol.” Tenants had to grant Park Service employees immediate access at all times and risk their lives by fighting fires on park land. Failure to observe these regulations would result in immediate and final eviction (Pierce 163).

In *Serena* Rash focuses on the effects of both the timber boom and the establishment of the park on a small geographical area, a practice that adheres to Rash’s paraphrasing of Welty in a radio interview, that “one place understood helps us understand all places better” (Rash, “Nothing Gold”). Here he includes and reimagines these historical and environmental events in order to resist elements of internal colonialism that facilitate environmental exploitation, and in doing so demonstrates to contemporary readers both alternative methods of resolution and the need for social and environmental justice in Appalachia. Despite its foundation in real events, this novel creatively pits mountaineer against entrepreneur and would-be preservationists. *Serena* encourages readers to identify and question the role of myths and stereotypes. From both an ecocritical and a postcolonial perspective, *Serena* is a warning against unchecked forces of greed and capitalism.

Serena both reveals and dispels many of the accepted cultural myths about Appalachia, allowing Rash to recreate a culture that was both more complex and more sophisticated than mainstream America was willing to believe in the early twentieth century. According to Pierce, views shared by “experts” such as Kephart that, with the coming of the park, “the highlander, at last, is to be caught up in the current of human progress” (qtd. in Pierce 156) are now known to be erroneous:

These descriptions “dramatically overstated both the isolation and the lack of change characteristic of Appalachian life and culture” (Pierce 156). The communities described in *Serena* reject the isolation publicized far and wide: For instance, the Harmon homestead, not situated within town, is merely a mile from town and almost within eyesight of their closest neighbor, Widow Jenkins. Rachel has merely to walk to town a mile away for medical attention when she and Jacob are ill. The town itself is a close community; the first home she stops at allows her to stay and calls for Doctor Harbin:

She stopped at the first house to ask where Doctor Harbin lived. The man who answered the door took one look at her and Jacob and helped them inside. The man’s wife took Jacob into her arms while her husband telephoned the doctor. Lay down here on the couch, the woman told her, and Rachel was too weary to do otherwise. (96)

In addition to dispelling myths about Appalachia, Rash rebukes those who promulgated such incorrect information. Wilkie and Buchanan frequently discuss local phrases, questioning their origin and collecting them as seriously as anthropologists might study a foreign tribe. Wilkie and Buchanan discuss the origin of the term “feathered into,” and Buchanan concluded the dialogue when he “placed the pen on the notebook’s rag paper and wrote *feathered into*, behind it a question mark” (35). While Wilkie and Buchanan conclude that the term has its etymology in cockfighting, Serena later has Pemberton correct them:

“I almost forgot, Buchanan. Mrs. Pemberton wanted me to tell you that you are wrong about the origin of ‘feathered into.’”

“How so?” Buchanan asked.

“She says the phrase is indeed from Britain. The feathers referred to are the fletching of an arrow. If you’ve feathered into your opponent, the arrow’s so deep the feather itself has entered the body.”

(147)

Buchanan hardly responded, perhaps noting the violence associated with Serena’s unprovoked description that foreshadows his imminent death.

Rash’s acknowledgment and direct address of these myths surrounding the southern mountaineer is essential to this work, for these untruths and stereotypes contributed significantly to the colonization and exploitation of Appalachian culture and natural resources. Pemberton acknowledges the othering of Appalachia directly when he notes that “a disconcerting *otherness* . . . was part of these mountains and would always be inexplicable to him” (118, author’s emphasis).¹⁰ Lori Robinson explains that the stereotypes of Appalachia as isolated, and the mountaineer as a quaint relic of Elizabethan England with a quick wit and animalistic habits, didn’t threaten mainstream American culture; instead, “Appalachia was made safe through representations that emphasized distance, both distant borders and a distant past” (63). Historically, this Appalachian “otherness” “provides [external] readers with authoritative introduction to new culture; as outsiders, the act of observing implies hierarchy and superiority of voice of the observer over the observed” (Robinson 64). Viewing the Appalachian region and its inhabitants as “others” somehow apart from America dissolved any sense of

¹⁰ Rash’s use of this unusual term could indicate his familiarity with Said’s work and acknowledge the influence of Said on creating the field of postcolonial studies.

connection and allowed the mass exploitation of natural resources such as mass deforestation of the timber boom. Park supporters further utilized the sense of Appalachia as “other”: In fact, the establishment of a national park on the North Carolina- Tennessee border “at the expense of local landowners and forest users was often justified in terms of the ways in which Appalachian people were thought to depart from national cultural norms” (Williams 297). In *Serena*, however, Rash dispels these and other myths, revealing both the misconceptions commonly held in the early twentieth century and similarly inviting readers to question their own misconceptions.

That *Serena* is a novel easily read from an ecocritical perspective can hardly be disputed; Rash himself has noted that the “natural world is the most universal of languages” (Bjerre 224). This novel not only portrays the environment as integral as any character; it can be argued that without attention to the environment of the southern mountains, this novel would not exist. In this work set in the mountains of western North Carolina, nature influences the plot more significantly than merely providing a setting that is “prettier than fall or spring when the dogwood branches swayed and sparkled as if harboring clouds of white butterflies” (*Serena* 42). Instead, the implications of nature here reflect much of DeLoughrey and Handley’s statement that “Place encodes time, suggesting that histories embedded in the land and sea have always provided vital and dynamic methodologies for understanding the transformative impact of empire and the anticolonial epistemologies it tries to suppress.”

Rash's fictional depictions of nature in *Serena* do, indeed, reflect a history deeply embedded in the land of western North Carolina. He uses the land to both reflect and foreshadow events that significantly influence the plot. For example, Serena's arrival at the camp is aligned with a description of the acres of stumps that "from a distance, resembled grave markers in a recently vacated battlefield" (23) and, portending later violence, Pemberton "heard the axes as the lead choppers began notching trees, a sound like rifle shots ricocheting across the valley" (26). Later Rash notes that, within the valley of the camp, no "tree unsmoothed the landscape" (75), and, when Serena rejoins her crew after convalescing from her miscarriage, the "valley's forests appeared not so much cut down as leveled by some vast glacier" (221). When Pemberton decides to help Rachel by giving her money to aid her escape, he stops at the spot where he had originally and proudly shown Serena their vast holdings; rather than compare it to a battlefield, on this occasion Pemberton "stepped to the precipice and looked down at the vast dark gash they'd made on the land. Pemberton stared at the razed landscape a long time" (261). From Serena's arrival at camp to Pemberton's contemplation of the wounded land, each of these descriptions either foreshadows or parallels the death and destruction wrought by the timber industry.

However, nature is not merely presented as a victim here; Rash personifies nature and imbues it with agency to act and react when he writes that the "woods were hushed and attentive, the trees seeming to gather themselves closer together, as if awaiting not just the rain but some story about to be told" (81). The cutting crews themselves personify Peter Barry's tenet of ecocriticism, realizing that

“nature really exists, out there beyond ourselves, not needing to be ironized as a concept by enclosure within knowing inverted commas, but actually present as an entity which affects us, and which we can affect, perhaps fatally, if we mistreat it” (243). The loggers are keenly aware of the death of their habitat, and they give the environment the power to react to their actions. Many workers implicate the Pembertons’ logging empire for more than merely decimating the landscape; they attribute a viciously cold winter to the effects of their clear cutting. Indeed, the workers are accurate in noting the connection between their work and the weather: According to Joshua Lee, “One way nature unintentionally seems to retaliate against its destruction is through the weather” (47). The cold suffered during Serena’s first winter at camp was argued to be worse than in Alaska (*Serena* 101), and several “workers argued that the denuded forests had allowed winter to settle deeper into the valley, so deep it had gotten trapped in the same way as an animal caught in a rabbit gum or dead-fall trap” (102). The winter cold proved lethal to many cutters who died

when they slipped trying to avoid falling trees or limbs. Another tumbled off a cliff edge and one impaled himself on his own axe and still another was beheaded by a snapped cable. A cutting crew lost its way during a snowstorm in January and was found days later, their palms peeling off when searchers pried the axe handles from their frozen hands. (101)

Whether the cold itself can be directly related back to the Pembertons’ clear-cutting, as the cutting crew believed, is debatable; Rash may be suggesting that

environmental violence leads to human violence. This section demonstrates that though the Pembertons may alter the landscape significantly and permanently in some areas, nature itself cannot be controlled in its entirety. Lee reminds us that “Nature, however, is not completely incapable of defending itself against the forces that seek its destruction as already shown with the extended season of winter” (55). However, the future of both human and nonhuman nature is unclear, a point made evident when Ross considers his surroundings and somberly asks “ ‘So what happens when there ain’t nothing left alive at all?’ ” (159). The implication is that issue will be left to the mountaineers to resolve; the timber industry will have moved on.

The environment is further depicted as an entity unto itself when the last tree is cut. At this juncture the local crew notes, “the valley and ridges resembled the skinned hide of some huge animal” (333). When the crew stops to drink from a small creek, readers are made aware of the implications of this loss: Stewart kneeled beside the stream and raised a handful of water to his lips, spit it out.

“Tastes like mud.”

“Used to be this creek held some of the sweetest water in these parts,” Ross said. “The chestnut trees that was up at the spring head give it a taste near sweet as honey.”

“Soon you won’t find one chestnut in these mountains,” Henryson noted, “and there’ll be nary a drop of water that sweet again.” (334)

To further underscore the landscape of death, the photographer who regularly took death pictures arrives at camp one final time after the last tree was cut, and this time “his camera aimed not at any worker living or dead but the decimated valley itself” (351). Sent by Secretary Albright to document the destruction wrought upon the environment by the Pemberton Lumber Company, the photographer is also mimicking the local custom observed at the logging camp: Any loggers killed while working would have their portrait taken for family memories.

Not surprisingly, Serena is frequently described as an intruder to her surroundings; this fact is highlighted by her provenance of Boston and, prior to that, Colorado—indeed, two locations culturally foreign to the Appalachian loggers. Her status as an outsider has two easily discernable functions. First, practically speaking, creating Serena as an outsider traveling to Appalachia might connect more easily with other mainstream readers—who themselves reside outside Appalachia. Such a tactic is one of the oldest in the history of the novel in various countries: Many nineteenth-century Irish novels, for example, similarly featured English protagonists who come to Ireland—and were aimed at a readership much larger in much more populous England than in Ireland. If this was a deliberate tactic of Rash’s, it was successful: The novel was reviewed in the *New York Times Book Review* and has received ample media attention beyond the attention normally garnered by Appalachian “regional” literature. To wit, the forthcoming film *Serena*, starring the *Silver Linings Playbook* and *American Hustle* dynamic duo of Jennifer Lawrence and Bradley Cooper, will surely increase the novel’s popularity. The

adaptation of this novel to the screen indicates a growing national concern over irresponsible use of natural resources mirrored in art; recent counterparts to *Serena* include alarming documentary films such as *The Last Mountain* and *Gasland*.

Rash also goes to great lengths to establish Serena as not just an outsider, but also someone who is inherently juxtaposed against the southern Appalachian environment. What is interesting is the variety of terms that Rash employs to create this contrast. She is cold and unwielding, described as having unblinking eyes, “irises the color of burnished pewter. Hard and dense like pewter too, the gold flecks not so much within the gray as floating motelike on the surface” (20); matching her eyes is Doctor Cheney’s observation of a “certain coldness in the tone,” (37). However, Serena is clearly meant to be seen as more unnatural than merely a woman without emotions. Readers are led to question her mortality when she describes to Doctor Cheney the death of her family in a flu epidemic. Expressing his surprise at her survival when three siblings and both parents died, Cheney queries, “What then did my fellow healer ascribe your survival to?” Serena replies: “He said I simply refused to die” (33). Serena later affirms her lack of warmth in literal terms: “‘I like to feel the cold,’ Serena said. ‘I always have, even as a child. My father used to walk me through the camp on days the loggers claimed it was too cold to work. I shamed them out of their shacks and into the woods’” (75).

As if to highlight her alien presence in Appalachia, Serena orders a Berkute eagle that she tames and hunts with. Lee emphasizes the creature’s origin “from a different habitat, thus causing a disruption in the natural order of nature” (47)—a description that could also be applied to Serena. To tame the eagle enough to return

to her calls Serena did not leave the stall of the stable in which it is housed: Indeed, she lives in the eagle's conditions until the bird shows Serena its neck, making itself vulnerable. Interestingly, after spending two days and nights without leaving the stall, the eagle trusts Serena with its life; similarly, Serena figuratively shows Pemberton her neck when she emerges, confiding in him her past. In doing so, Serena's narrative underscores her presence as something outside human nature, almost supernatural. In conversation with Pemberton she describes walking barefoot on over the embers of her smoldering home in Colorado and then notes her footprints: "They were black at first and then gray and then white, growing lighter, less visible with each step. It looked like something had moved through the snow before slowly rising. For a few seconds, I felt that I wasn't on the horse" (89). With this confession Serena purges her past and fulfills an earlier wish made to Pemberton: "'This is what we want,' she said, her voice deepening, the emotion so often controlled fully unbridled now. 'To be like this. No past or future, pure enough to live totally in the present'" (87).

Whether Rash is aligning Serena with the eagle itself or a more metaphorical power is unclear; however, the workers are acutely aware that, like Serena, the eagle "ain't from this country" (106) and they respect both bird of prey and its handler: "I'd no more strut up and tangle with that eagle than I'd tangle with the one what can tame such a critter," (107). In creating a character that clearly does not belong to the environment and culture of the southern mountains, Rash removes her emotional attachment to place, which contributes to her status as a threat.

Rash conclusively situates Serena outside the societal expectations for women when she becomes pregnant but miscarries the child. Proving the Colorado physician's words true once again, Serena apparently refuses to die in a situation that other women would likely not survive. However, she accepts that she will not fulfill her desire to procreate with Pemberton, acknowledging to him after the miscarriage, "It's like my body knew all along" (210).

While she cannot procreate, Serena is a constant force—one that will outlive her husband, many of her workers, and much of the nature that surrounds her in western North Carolina. Serena reinforces this image of herself at Pemberton's last birthday party. She wears a familiar, shimmering green dress in this scene, and the sole clear thought that pervades Pemberton's drunken consciousness consists of a single word: Evergreen. Interestingly, the trees that Pemberton Lumber Company cuts are primarily deciduous, suggesting that Serena will survive even her own destruction and persist elsewhere, strengthening Pemberton's drunken claim to the gathering of dinner guests that he and Serena will "cut down every tree, not just in Brazil but in the world" (346).

It is fitting that Pemberton sees himself as a conqueror of the wilderness. Mei Mei Evans reminds us that "heterosexual white manhood is construed as the most 'natural' social identity in the United States; the 'true American,' *the* identity most deserving of social privilege" (author's emphasis, 183). It is the elite white male who advances our national narrative of an "errand into the wilderness." As a female, Serena confronts the constructed gender assumptions and quickly deconstructs them, adopting masculine qualities throughout the novel. She

constantly challenges others' social constructs of femininity, from McIntyre's proclamation that the "whore of Babylon will come forth in the last days wearing pants" (31) as Serena does, to beleaguering Doctor Cheney's attempt to commend her intelligence:

"I toast you as well, Mrs. Pemberton," Doctor Cheney said.

"The nature of the fairer sex is to lack the male's analytical skills, but, at least in this instance, you have somehow compensated for that weakness."

Serena's features tightened, but the irritation vanished as quickly as it had appeared, swept clear from her face like a lock of unruly hair.

"My husband tells me that you are from these very mountains, a place called Wild Hog Gap," Serena said to Cheney. "Obviously, your views on my sex were formed by the slatterns you grew up with, but I assure you the natures of women are more various than your limited experience allows." (34)

Interestingly, this deconstruction is effective and the crews soon become comfortable about working without their shirts on while she is present. Serena's possession of "masculine" personal attributes, coupled with her inability to bear children, render impossible any fulfillment of her role as matriarch. Instead, she adopts the position of patriarch, a position threatened only by Pemberton's sole progenitor, Jacob Harmon. Later in the novel, Pemberton effectively signs his own

death warrant by assisting Rachel and Jacob's escape, thus guaranteeing that his own patrimony would continue away from Serena's clutches.

As the Pembertons' empire thrives, Jacob becomes the only variable that could threaten Serena's dominance. Though his patrimony is indisputable, his heritage is firmly Appalachian. Jacob is born of the mountains and tied to them: As Widow Jenkins states to Rachel, "If you're born here they're a part of you. No other place will ever feel right" (197). The southern mountains are bred into Jacob's very eyes: Rachel notices soon after his birth that "the eyes that had been blue at birth [are] now brown as chestnuts" (39). Her choice of tree is significant and poignant: The American chestnut, like pre-1880 Appalachian culture, was unique and strong, but would soon fall prey to blight and become extinct. Williams heralds this extinction as "perhaps the most notorious ecological disaster to occur in the United States, [that] destroyed one of the mainstays of the Appalachian forest, a tree whose role in human, animal, and plant ecology was irreplaceable" (298). Seen figuratively, then, Rachel views Jacob as a precious mainstay of the Appalachia culture and ecosystem that she strives to protect from his own non-native threat: Serena. In contrast, Pemberton, Jacob's father, sees in his son's eyes his own empire, noting the "eyes dark as mahogany" (171)—for Pemberton, Jacob's eyes are the color of future profit. Though Pemberton would not live to harvest mahogany himself, this eye color also foreshadows the demise of the Pemberton empire during its investment in mahogany, in later centuries and on another continent.

Whether chestnut or mahogany, Jacob evidences to the reader the regenerative process that even the mountains of western North Carolina experience.

However, this regrowth is problematic, as DeLoughrey and Handy observe:

“Engaging nonhuman agency creates an additional challenge because nature’s own processes of regeneration and change often contribute to the burial of postcolonial histories.” And thus we come full circle back to the role of fiction. Rash’s task within *Serena* is to mark history, to uncover some of the regeneration that masks past colonization, and to demonstrate that the ultimate outcome of the Pembertons’ empire was Serena’s own death at the hands of Jacob, her husband’s son.

Given the widespread environmental effects, it’s an undeniable truth that the timber industry affected the entirety of southern Appalachian culture. Seen through a postcolonial lens, such widespread clear-cutting and mass deforestation enabled the social hierarchy of the wealthy entrepreneurial class to claim dominance over the land and resources over the rights of the local residents, thus benefitting from the stereotypes and myths that rendered the status of Appalachian residents as non-inhabitants. Because all of the profit earned by the timber industry was sent to urban centers around the country (and notably outside Appalachia), the southern Appalachian region remained impoverished. Eller notes that “such economic ‘underdevelopment’ is similar to the exploitation experienced by many Third World Countries that provide raw materials to larger, more advanced industrial nations” (229). Further cementing the position of Appalachia as an internal colony in the early twentieth century are the increasing and eventually successful calls to create a national park in the southern region. The creation of this national park provides a looming context for *Serena*, and park boosters place direct pressure on the Pembertons to buy and harvest land targeted for inclusion in the proposed park

boundaries. Implied throughout the work and directly addressed several times is the widespread displacement that took place both within the novel and historically.

Estimates of the number of inhabitants removed from their land varies from around four to almost six thousand, though the practice of park promoters depicting the land as uninhabited wilderness stayed true. According to Richard Starnes, “Although designated parkland was portrayed by boosters as uninhabited wilderness, approximately four thousand people lived inside the park boundary, 40 percent of those from North Carolina” (121). In addition to thousands of residents, Pierce supports this depiction of the practice of promoters and further claims that “although boosters spoke of the region as virtually vacant, the area inside the proposed park boundary contained an estimated twelve hundred farms, [and] five thousand lots and summer homes” (155). Far from the pristine and untouched wilderness that park promoters were advocating for, the region was clearly home to both thriving communities and precious views.

Park promoters also took advantage of the deleterious myths about Appalachia, touting their plan as bringing progress to Appalachian residents. Williams corroborates this scheme, noting that the “expansion [of the national parks] at the expense of local landowners and forest users was often justified in terms of the ways in which Appalachian people were thought to depart from national cultural norms” (297). This promotion was so successful that current scholars are working to correct the misconception:

Until recently, most historians of the park believed that such displacements benefited affected populations, arguing that the park

took residents from isolated mountain coves and brought them into closer contact with mainstream American life. These writers argued that the park purchasers gave displaced mountaineers greater mobility and improved economic opportunities. Certainly, some families shared these sentiments, but others resisted removal, sometimes resorting to violence. (Starnes 121)

Rash addresses the practice of removing families from their land several times in *Serena*, offering different characters' perspectives on the removal. Loggers in *Serena* do not have much empathy for the park promoters, defining the imposition of eminent domain as being "shit out of luck" (63). This sentiment is echoed in Pierce's description of the displaced peoples: "They did not leave to find new opportunities or because they desired a change in life; rather, they were forced to go" (155), just as Dunbar's uncle was "run . . . off his place last week" (*Serena* 63). What Rash recreates with his fiction and Pierce describes historically aligns with Rob Nixon's definition of an uninhabitant as "an invisible inhabitant of an area targeted for 'progress'" (154). Even *Serena* unwittingly advocates on behalf of the displaced residents, arguing to the newsman Webb that "'We know what's going on with these land grabs. You've already run two thousand farmers off their land—that's according to your own census. We can't make people work for us and we can't buy their land unless they want to sell it, yet you force them from their livelihood and their homes'" (138).

Nixon's notion of forced progress is an essential component of our national narrative of development, which uses it to justify the "production of ghosted

communities who haunt the visible nation” (151). This is true of the timber industry, who logged the mountains in the name of progress and profit, as well as the national park boosters who sought to preserve a “pristine” wilderness for future generations of tourists. According to Ramachandra Guha, the preservation of virgin (read: nonhuman) wilderness areas benefits elite tourists rather than local people and positions “the enjoyment of nature [as] an integral part of the consumer society” (qtd. in DeLoughrey and Handley). In protecting the wilderness from both logging and the subsistence farming that had sustained the Appalachian culture for centuries, the park essentially commodified aesthetics, privileging those with the economic foundation to vacation and play the role of tourist while punishing locals who remain impoverished. T. V. Reed explains the consequences: “Aesthetic appreciation of nature has not only been a class-coded activity, but the insulation of the middle and upper classes from the most brutal effects of industrialization has played a crucial role in environmental devastation. Aesthetic appreciation of nature has masked the effects of environmental degradation” (151).

Until recently, national parks have historically mandated a loss of resource availability to local residents, whose rights were nullified (Adams and Mulligan 37). The loss of resources meant more than the inability to sustain themselves in the manner they were accustomed to: To the four to six thousand former residents of the park region, the “loss of family ground was a devastating social and economic blow” (Starnes 121). Sadly, that blow is inconsequential to those orchestrating the takeover.

In addition to the significant displacement that is a sub-plot, *Serena* presents readers with a number of dichotomies that complicate the at-times oversimplified colonizer= bad, colonized= good relationship. Harmon, Rachel's father, aligns with Pemberton; Galloway is paired with Sheriff McDowell; Rachel matches Serena. On a grander scale, the Pembertons can be contrasted with the various crews of sawyers; however, the intrusion of the national park scheme complicates this clear industry-versus-culture clash. Rash incorporates yet another juxtaposition through his use of nomenclature throughout the novel: Male characters are commonly (and most frequently) referred to solely by their surnames. This is true to the extent that the first name of many major male characters is not provided anywhere in the novel. In contrast, Rash refers to Rachel and Serena consistently by their first names; indeed, *other* characters refer to Serena as "Mrs. Pemberton." While this pattern can easily be dismissed since both Serena and Rachel are orphaned either before or during the course of events depicted by the novel, it offers another, more important, significance. This nomenclature suggests that while male characters are important to the environmental events of novel, the true conflict occurs between Serena and Rachel, and all that they culturally represent.

The opening gruesome scene of the novel quickly establishes these dichotomies, and Pemberton's murder of Rachel's father at the train station is easily metaphorical. In dashing Harmon's expectations and denying Rachel's in utero infant patrimony, Pemberton disgraces the Harmon name and repudiates mountain culture. However, Pemberton is not content to merely deny Rachel's child his name:

His disemboweling of Harmon, a coldly yet casual act, announces Pemberton's intent to establish himself as a dominant force in the region.

This act resonates with Rachel as she resolves not to "love anything that can be taken away" (*Serena* 51), surely the consequence of her mother's abandonment and father's murder. Her father, who she acknowledges as "a hard man to live with, awkward in his affection, never saying much" (49), taught her "about crops and plants and animals, how to mend a fence and chink a chain" (50). After his death, she maintains their cabin, provides food and shelter for herself and Jacob, and passes skills on to Jacob when he was merely a toddler, telling him "There may come a time you need to know how to do this So watch me" (193). Her connection to place is not merely a lesson learned from her deceased father and absent mother, but a connection to a longer heritage; Jimmy Dean Smith states that Rachel "shows her respect for spirit country and for the father who taught her to hear its voice" (115). When she leaves, fleeing Serena and Galloway, she "took the child's hand and pressed it to the dirt. Her father had told Rachel that the Harmons had been on this land since before the Revolutionary War," then admonishes Jacob to "don't ever forget what it feels like" (272). This simple act situates Rachel among the many people displaced by outside interest in the mountains.

However, Rachel's education in the natural world is a sharp juxtaposition against her limited academic education, though both aid her survival. Once it became clear that Rachel could give birth and Serena could not, Jacob serves as a visual reminder that Rachel's mountain blood has joined with Pemberton's—a fact that drives Serena's murderous envy. Rachel and Jacob threaten Serena's ability to

dominate and become progenitor of a bloodline that would continue to dominate the people and the landscape; Rash confirms this, telling Stephen Fox in an interview that “*Serena* is very much a story about who has the birthright.”

When Rachel left the mountains, she was forced to abandon her own native literacy—that of the mountains—and rely upon her formal education. Nixon addresses the effects of this experience: “When refugees are severed from environments that have provided ancestral sustenance they find themselves stranded not just in place but in time as well” (162). Though she is removed from her home place, readers have reason to hope that Rachel will not remain stranded in time but has rather found grounding with another displaced Appalachian: Joel Vaughn, Rachel’s constant champion and friend, who fled Galloway’s wrath immediately after he warned Sheriff McDowell that Galloway and Serena were planning to murder Rachel. Though Rash does not explicitly draw Rachel and Joel together, he provides enough circumstantial evidence for readers to surmise that they reconnected in Seattle.

The novel’s coda reveals much about Rash’s intentions for the novel. Completely italicized—as is Fred Chappell’s opening chapter of *I Am One of You Forever*, “The Overspill,” to create a heightened tone, as addressed here in Chapter 2—this final chapter reads as if viewed from a distance. An adult Jacob reads a magazine article that chronicles and celebrates Serena’s continued success as a South American lumber magnate. The scene mirrors the grisly opening scene neatly: When Serena is murdered by Jacob, who her guard describes as eerily similar in stature and appearance to Pemberton’s photo taken with Serena, the coda

suggests that Serena did indeed refuse to die and proceeded to struggle against her assailant before “*taking slow but unwavering steps across the verandah,*” while attempting to free the “*huge pearl-handled knife planted hilt-deep in her stomach*” (370-71). Astute readers will recognize the knife as the bloody gift from Serena to Rachel in the first chapter.

Readers are led to assume that though Rachel never returned to her home in Appalachia, Jacob achieves a small measure of retribution with Serena’s death. Rash continues his portrayal of Serena as unnatural in the coda: The guard claims that he saw “*a garland of white fire flamed around her head*” as she died, and later testified that “*Serena had been still standing but the guard swore that she was already dead*” (371). Within this chapter Serena’s character fully assumes the role of allegory implied throughout and, as such, becomes a warning to readers. Left unchecked, unscrupulous forces of greed, Rash seems to be telling us, won’t extinguish themselves, but will rather spread, leaving a swath of destruction in their wake. Rash himself confirms Serena’s motives, stating that “Serena has no accountability; she is outside the pale of humanity” (Fox). It is the responsibility of those affected, such as Rachel and Jacob, to halt the drive of such individuals and reclaim a measure of their past autonomy.

CHAPTER 2

“YOU CAN’T GODDAMMIT SHOOT / A RIVER”:

FRED CHAPPELL TAKES ON CHAMPION INTERNATIONAL PAPER

Fred Chappell, hailed by Lee Smith as “our resident genius, our shining light, the one truly great writer we have among us” (qtd. in “Fred Chappell”), has labored to create a rich oeuvre of poetry and fiction commonly referred to as his octave. In essence and theme, his collection of poems *Midquest* (1981)—which includes the books *River*, *Bloodfire*, *Wind Mountain*, and *Earthsleep*—is mirrored by the later Kirkman tetralogy (comprised of the novels *I Am One of You Forever* [1987], *Brighten the Corner Where You Are* [1989], *Farewell, I Am Bound to Leave You* [1996], and *Look Back, All the Green Valley* [1999]). This body of work has entertained scholars and readers alike, providing a veritable mine of literary wealth that is hardly exhausted, even over a decade after its completion.

Before I undertake any focused discussion of Chappell’s works, it is worth mentioning the textual relationship that exists between his writing and that of Ron Rash. As discussed in Chapter 1, Rash’s *Serena* is clearly a novel that reflects not only its geographic but also its historical setting, a quality that is shared by many works by Fred Chappell. Chappell goes about re-creating the world of each novel in a different way for readers, though, and it is probable that his works (the ones discussed in this dissertation were published between 1981 and 1999) carried some influence on Rash’s writing, though neither author has commented in writing about

a friendship or working relationship. It is likely that, given the limited number of acclaimed Appalachian writers working today, they are, at the least, supportive peers, as evidenced in Rash's positioning of Chappell (along with Robert Morgan and Kathryn Stripling Byer) as part of the "great wealth of Appalachian writing that he sees today" (Higgins 53-54).

As Appalachian literature, Chappell's texts share with Rash's a common geography. Indeed, all are set in southern Appalachia: Chappell's Kirkman tetralogy is based in Tipton, North Carolina, a fictionalization of Canton that is in the same county as Waynesville, nearest town to the Pembertons' logging empire. Interestingly, Chappell's *I Am One of You Forever* follows *Serena* in a neat chronology: *I Am One of You Forever* is set in the early 1940s while *Serena* is set in 1929. And lastly, Rash mentioned periodically the landholdings of Champion Fiber and Paper Company related to land acquisition for the proposed national park, and Chappell's works would not be complete without his descriptions of and experiences with Challenger Fiber and Paper Company—his fictionalization of the real-world business goliath that dictated environmental and economic conditions in western North Carolina for decades. From Rash's *Serena* to Chappell's "Dead Soldiers" and *I Am One of You Forever*, the curious reader can trace the environmental events from the forest to the rivers: The deforestation of the timber boom leads to Champion's increasing success with producing first fiber, then paper—and its irresponsible and destructive use of the Pigeon River as its primary resource.

Despite the basic elements that connect them, though, there are many nuances that distinguish Chappell's style from Rash's. While *Serena* uses a narrator with limited omniscience, Chappell employs a semi-autobiographical first-person narrator throughout the Kirkman tetralogy and *Midquest*. Similar to Chappell's early life, Jess lives with his parents on his grandmother's farm, completing chores while his parents taught school, all the while reading voraciously and writing tentatively—which Chappell teasingly implies as bad habits that culminate in *Look Back, All the Green Valley* when Cora reveals that Jess's pen name is Fred Chappell. The effect of this first person is a stronger sense of intimacy with Chappell's characters, an intimacy that serves what Chappell claims is his main theme: family ("Too Many Freds" 270). Also unlike *Serena*, Chappell's works are narrated from the perspective of the colonized farmer and his family, thus providing readers with a strong sense of emotional loyalty and sympathy for their situation. Chappell, however, strays from the historical fiction that Rash utilizes in much of his work; instead, he incorporates magical realism and grand imaginative acts of revenge throughout the Kirkman tetralogy and provides readers with an varied sampling of Appalachian reactions to colonizing and the subsequent exploitation of resources.

Chappell's writing largely stems from his childhood on a farm very similar to the one Jess lives on. Growing up on his grandmother's farm with parents who were schoolteachers, Chappell was raised largely by his grandmother and shaped by her agrarian lifestyle (Lang 1). As a child, Chappell read voraciously the "encyclopedias and the middle-class editions of writers you could get in the thirties" (Broughton 100)—until he became interested in science fiction as a teenager, a passion that is

embodied in Joe Robert's creation of the Floriloge, revealed in *Look Back, All the Green Valley*. Chappell recalls that his family "discouraged [his writing] very thoroughly. They did all kinds of things to discourage me every now and then" (qtd. in Crane and Kirkland 12); as a result, it wasn't until his enrollment at Duke University in 1954 that Chappell considered himself to have been "writing seriously" (qtd. in Lang 2), though he'd been writing poetry since age twelve or thirteen.

Chappell earned both a B. A. and an M. A. during his time at Duke, inspired as his first two years were by both beer and the library (Crane and Kirkland 13). During that time he forged friendships with William Blackburn, Reynolds Price, Anne Tyler, and James Applewhite—friendships that would continue to influence his writing. Chappell was credited by George Hovis as an "extremely cultivated scholar" (391), and his writing is most strongly influenced by his youth in the mountains and his formal education. As John Lang writes, "Chappell employs the folk materials of the agrarian world and the wide-ranging allusions of the scholarly world with equal facility" (4).

Connections between his upbringing and his later fiction are undeniable, though Chappell claims in the Preface to *Midquest* that the speaker of the poem is "no more myself than any character in any novel I might choose to write" (x). However, the "I" of both poem ("Ole Fred") and tetralogy (Jess) was, like Chappell, "reared on a farm but has moved to the city; he has deserted manual for intellectual labor, is 'upwardly mobile'; he is cut off from his disappearing cultural traditions but finds them, in remembering, his real values" (*Midquest* x). Chappell also shares with

his fictional family the dichotomy between the agrarian and industrial lifestyles—a dichotomy similar to that represented by various generations of Rash’s family: “In my hometown, everybody worked for the paper mill and the farm; before they got to the mill and after they got off, they farmed. And that’s what supported the farm” (qtd. in Crane and Kirkland 19). Regardless, Chappell maintains in “Too Many Freds” that the octave, “much as it sometimes relies upon personal observation and experience, is not really an autobiographical work” (257).

It is important to note here that though Chappell’s parents “took it for granted that we would probably go to college” (qtd. in Crane and Kirkland 12), his decision to leave the agrarian lifestyle as a vocation was intentional. However, as George Hovis writes, the “themes of exile from his Appalachian past and his struggle to reforge, through poetry, a unity with that past are most clearly presented in . . . *Midquest*” (389). Clearly, though not a farmer, Chappell did not leave the agrarian lifestyle far behind.

While not commonly considered an environmental writer, Chappell’s attention to the agrarian tradition permeates these works. John Lang reminds us that Chappell “does find in farming a meaningful—though not financially rewarding—lifestyle, one that heightens recognition of humanity’s dependence on nature and that encourages both humility and a sense of stewardship” (74). That dependence on nature is underscored by his adoption in these works of the basic motif of the four Pythagorean elements; Warren Rochelle describes this literary plan when he references an email from Chappell in which Chappell confirmed that this “correspondence with the four mythic elements holds true for all the works in the

Kirkman tetralogy” (196). To that end, *I Am One of You Forever* and *River* focus on water; *Brighten the Corner Where You Are* and *Bloodfire*, on fire; *Farewell, I Am Bound to Leave You* and *Wind Mountain*, on air, and *Look Back, All the Green Valley* and *Earthsleep*, on the “connective tropes of garden and graves, intimate engagements with dirt” (Chappell, *Look Back* 20). It is worth emphasizing here that the works of primary relevance to this argument—“Dead Soldiers” from *River*, *I Am One of You Forever*, and *Look Back, All the Green Valley*—revolve around two of the elements of greatest concern to Appalachian residents and ecocritics alike: water and earth.

In a reflective and rare essay in which an author engages in criticism of his own works, Chappell writes that his themes in the octave are “obvious enough: the strength and resilience of family, the disappearance or diminishment of a former way of Appalachian life, the sense of community, the grandeur of place, the coming of age of young people and grownups alike, the responsibility of the individual toward communal history, and so forth” (“Too Many Freds” 270). While these themes are easily present in each of the books that make up the octave, the exclusion of overtly environmental issues or concerns, however, does not deny their presence in these texts. Of interest to this study is Chappell’s treatment of Champion International (here fictionalized as Challenger Paper and Fiber Corporation), a corporate body that is directly or indirectly present throughout the Kirkman tetralogy and *Midquest*. Lang confirms that Challenger’s presence is no accident; indeed, “sociopolitical issues are raised in each volume of *Midquest* Chappell protests economic injustice, from the paper mill’s role in augmenting the

flood's destruction in "Dead Soldiers" (77). Chappell himself confirms Lang's statement, claiming that Appalachian writers are "concerned with . . . the impact of technology and industrialization on the ecology—the nuclear industry in Oak Ridge, the Champion International Mill in Canton, canneries—that kind of thing" (Palmer 406).

"Dead Soldiers" is Chappell's poetic record of the floods created by Challenger. Aptly included in *Midquest's River*, the narrator recalls the worst of seven floods that raged down "Pigeon River below Smathers Hill, / Clanging culvert pipes and headfirst fast / Into Fiberville Bridge" (lines 4-6). The narrator neither confirms nor denies that this flood is the one that brought down Jess and Joe Robert's bridge in "The Overspill," but rather draws implicit connections in also highlighting a bridge: Fiberville Bridge. In contrast to the "*sparkling white bridge*" (*I Am One* 5) of "The Overspill," Fiberville Bridge is aged, and the narrator predicts that it "wouldn't last, / Old lattice-work of peeling paint and rust" ("Dead Soldiers" lines 6-7). Far from the naïve and hopeful tones of his prose account, Chappell centers Virgil Campbell, whose home and store are situated on the banks of the Pigeon River, squarely at the center of this poem, which is narrated by a character readers find elsewhere named Fred. Chappell acknowledges that Virgil is based upon the very real Homer Campbell who, "because he *was* so colorful, and eccentric, and so forth, and *very* straightforward, . . . seemed to me a kind of good 'guide,' a good pivot for the Appalachian experience, to center" (qtd. in Crane and Kirkland 15). Importantly, Virgil Campbell is the only character shared by *I Am One* and *Midquest*, who Chappell describes as a "garrulous old gentleman . . . , who is supposed to give

to the whole its specifically regional, its Appalachian, context" (*Midquest* x). As the main character of "Dead Soldiers," Campbell provides an important contrast to Jess as narrator of "The Overspill." Whereas Jess is hopeful and young enough to only sense the futility of battling these damaging forces, Virgil Campbell, aged and bitter with experience, decries the mill in musing, " 'You'd think / The goddam Mill would've thought—'" (lines 35-36) while swigging whisky from his pint jar.

Campbell's response to the flood is to take action: He decides to "fight back" and, armed with a .22 rifle, "started pumping / Slug after slug at the water rising and thumping / His house like a big bass drum" (lines 63-65). Soon his basement doors are forced open and "out floated tons, / Or what seemed tons, of emptied whiskey jars" (lines 66-67). Calling that flood day the "goddam Day of Resurrection" (line 72) Campbell begins shooting the "dead / Soldiers" (lines 70-71) before turning his aggression to the falling Fiberville Bridge. Fatally weakened by the flood, onlookers witnessed the death of the bridge:

. . . . Dropping in curlicues
 Like licorice, and shrugging up torn spews
 Of shouting metal, and widening outward like a mouth
 Slowly grinning to show each snagged-off tooth,

It plunged the water with a noise like the fall of Rome. (lines 94-98)

The "silence solemn and deep / As church" (lines 103-04) that followed sobered the crowd, which dispersed. The narrator, who, like Jess, sees things and understands them in ways that older observers do not, informs readers that he saw Virgil

Campbell deliver the final fatal shot to the bridge, ultimately “bringing down a bridge” (line 116).

The collapse of the Fiberville Bridge echoes throughout “The Overspill,” the first chapter of *I Am One of You Forever*. This novel, which reflects Chappell’s achievement of “almost exactly what I wanted to do” (Broughten 120-21), is a series of semi-autobiographical vignettes set in western North Carolina during the early 1940s. It is told from an adult Jess’s perspective, and main characters include his father, Joe Robert; mother Cora; grandmother Annie Barbara Sorrells; and orphan-turned-family member, Johnson Gibbs. Patrick Bizzaro discusses its narrative structure, noting the significant distance between the age of the narrator and Jess’s age during the events and comparing the “recollections of mature Jess, the implied author, [which] stand out as such because they are juxtaposed with judgments made in the voice of young Jess, who is closer in time and place” (“Growth” 86). Jess’s age when the stories are taking place, and his youthful idolization of his father—which, readers would come to recognize, lasts his whole life—enables Chappell to integrate elements of magical realism (a technique that Chappell has broadly denied using and which in this chapter I directly address). The result is an imaginative, whimsical, and spirited portrayal of life on a farm in western North Carolina, visited frequently by quirky and idiosyncratic family members, and not immune from the greater tragedy and hardship wrought by World War II.

“The Overspill” is one of three italicized chapters within the novel, an important element that will be discussed later. This chapter opens with a description of geography, detailing the house and land farmed by the Kirkman

family and focusing on the town of Tipton, where the Challenger Paper and Fiber Corporation “*smoked eternally, smudging the Carolina mountain landscape for miles*” (1), and goes on to chronicle Joe Robert’s attempt to build a garden for his absent wife and a bridge across what readers learn in *Brighten* is called Trivet Creek. “The Overspill” chronicles Jess and Joe Roberts’ struggles to clear a “*half-acre of fallow ground considered unusable because of marshiness and the impenetrable clot of blackberry vines in the south corner*” (2). The shape of the bridge became clear, and Chappell invokes religious symbolism when Jess notes that the “*arch above the stream, though not high, was unmistakably a rainbow*” (3). The promise of peace and implication of spiritual paradise is heightened when Jess alludes subtly to the Garden of Eden; he tells us that the strength and shape of the bridge “*made me feel that in crossing the bridge I was entering a different world, not simply going into the garden*” (3). These memories are formative, and the event that immediately follows the completion of the bridge haunts not only Jess and Joe Robert, but also the entirety of the Kirkman tetralogy and much of *Midquest*.

Forewarned by the sound of gurgling water, Jess and Joe Robert retreat to higher ground, only to see the bridge washed away by an unscheduled opening of the floodgates of an upstream reservoir controlled by Challenger. This violent flood, a third religious symbol, violently destroys their handiwork. Jess and Joe Robert stand helpless, watching the “*hateful battering of our work, our hands in our pockets*” (5) while Joe Robert repeats, “*Bastards bastards bastards. It’s against the law for them to do that*” (5): Both are unaware that Cora, Jess’s mother, has returned at that moment from an extended trip to California. Chappell’s emphasis on “law” here

prompts readers to ask what law it was against: human or natural? I will return to this point in later pages.

The Pythagorean element of water is not only represented by the “hateful” flood, but culminates in a single tear on Cora’s face. The tear expands to encapsulate Cora and Joe Robert, and finally Jess. Its meaning is debated by scholars: John Lang writes that it symbolizes “both the love that unites the family and the sorrow and loss to which human beings are subject and against which love and compassion and laughter are the most effective antidotes” (213), while Shelby Stephenson argues that Cora’s tear brings Jess “into the world of the Kirkmans, the world he writes about” (53), akin to being reborn into or initiated, much as the title of the novel suggests.

Chappell strays from the destruction of the bridge in the second and third novel of the Kirkman tetralogy, only to return to it repeatedly in the fourth, *Look Back, All the Green Valley*. In this novel, Jess is an adult, returning to Asheville and Tipton to take care of his father’s effects in a mysterious workshop a decade after his death and, after a regrettable error on the part of the “old management” of Mountain View Cemetery, find a burial place for his mother and father together (*Look Back* 23). *Look Back* focuses in great part on the character of Joe Robert, an elusive figure frequently connected with the fox and directly described by Jess as a “classic folklore trickster” (26), terminology that reveals Jess as an academic. Indeed, the novel itself is summarized by Jess when he observes, “my father was too many for me, the elusive fox I had pursued all my life with no real hope of bringing to earth” (73).

The workshop that Jess seeks is in the bottom of a building owned by the Kirkmans and rented by Times Past Antique Clocks. This is a fitting location, as Jess is acutely aware of the passage of time throughout the work—as reflected in this novel’s title. While sifting through the miscellaneous clutter of the basement, Jess discovers a mysterious machine, a multitude of notebooks (one entitled “The Thoughts of Fugio,” yet another reference to Joe Robert’s obscure nature), and an enigmatic map of nearby Hardison County labeled with women’s names paired with specific locations. These discoveries, and Jess and Mitzi’s quest to find a suitable location for their parents’ graves, fuel the remainder of the novel.

The flood of “The Overspill” is referenced repeatedly in *Look Back*: Jess recounts the event of decades previous when he states that the “bridge had been swept ruinously away when person or persons unknown opened the floodgates of a reservoir on the hill above our little holler. The overspill from the Challenger Paper and Fiber Company destroyed our visionary gift in a single violent moment” (64), and describes the mill as “dark” and “satanic” (65). That the story of the event has spread beyond the family is both evident and important: Aunt Ora and Uncle Gray recount the story to Jess, affirming the event’s influence on his father’s life. Readers come to discover that Joe Robert’s hatred of Challenger was not limited to the lone engineer who caused the floodgates to open on that fateful day chronicled in *I Am One*; he kept a lengthy list of complaints (98) and dedicated much of his life to crafting the ultimate revenge.

Here the line between fiction and reality blurs as Chappell continues what Lang refers to as a sociopolitical concern in addressing the widespread

environmental damage caused by Challenger, including “smokestacks, gushing oceans of chemical smokes white and gray. This smoke was laden with particles of deadly, smelly grit, which it deposited upon trees, houses, cars, livestock, and human lung tissue” (97). Though Chappell’s account is ostensibly fictional, it is eerily similar to Richard Bartlett’s description of the Champion plant of Canton, North Carolina. Of particular importance to this dissertation is Chappell’s incorporation of Champion International as an entity influencing narrative events. Given that Chappell is rarely included among the ranks of environmental writers, why does he elect to fictionalize Champion International as Challenger International throughout the Kirkman tetralogy and make repeated references to the “dark satanic paper mill” (*Look Back* 65), alluding to William Blake’s Satanic mill (Lang 2)? The events of “The Overspill” (which again appear in *Look Back, All the Green Valley*), combined with the flood of “Dead Soldiers”—all of which are directly related to Champion’s presence and questionable practices—reveal Chappell’s bioregional concerns and provides readers with a literary representation of the determination to colonize southern Appalachia, as well as Chappell’s literary efforts to resist this colonization, which I will specifically discuss later.

Though the bulk of Chappell’s literary wrath is directed at the reservoir and spillway located miles upstream from the main plant in Canton (thinly disguised as Tipton for the Kirkmans), the scope of the Champion enterprise and resulting damage caused by this corporate venture is unavoidable and indicative of the continued exploitation of resources in Appalachia after the demise of the timber boom chronicled in *Serena*. The environmental impact of Champion International is

vast and destructive; for the better part of the twentieth century, the corporation polluted the Pigeon River, greatly affecting both the livelihood and quality of life of communities downstream in both North Carolina and Tennessee.

The entity that would become Champion International, owner of more than six billion acres of timberland in the United States and Canada by 1992 (Bartlett 53), has its roots in the late-nineteenth-century timber boom. In 1893 Peter Thomson founded Ohio-based Champion Coated Paper Company and, soon thereafter while visiting western North Carolina, became aware of the region's profusion of timber and water ("Lake Logan"). Spotting an opportunity for an entrepreneurial venture, he purchased land on the three forks of the Pigeon River headwaters and began scouting and harvesting timber. Soon after this purchase, the logging community of Sunburst was established by Thomson; Sunburst was a community of up to 1,500 residents that included segregated schools, a "commissary, a clubhouse, boarding houses, and a church which doubled as a school, a dance hall, and a skating rink" (Eller 122). Interestingly, Sunburst also became home to the first school of forestry, the Biltmore Forest School, in 1910 ("Lake Logan").

Thomson's entrepreneurial tendencies were supported by his earlier business success in Ohio and bolstered by the 1901 North Carolina "act to encourage the building of pulp mills and paper mills and tanneries in the counties of Haywood and Swain." This legislation states:

Every corporation, company or firm who may expend one hundred thousand dollars in establishing a factory to convert wood into wood pulp for making paper and other products of pulp shall not be subject

to any criminal prosecution for the pollution of any watercourses upon which such factory or factories are located, and the measure of damages to the owner or owners of lands over which water flows from such factory or factories shall be confined to actual damages, to be ascertained as provided by law. (*Public Laws* Chapter 660, Section 1)

Interestingly, the same act goes on to limit the geographical potential of such factories, dictating, for example, that protection of such factories shall only be on the Pigeon River below the mouth of Jonathan's Creek. The act was amended in 1907, according to Thomson's attorney and land broker George Smathers, upon his request to D. L. Boyd, member of the House of Haywood County. This amendment effectively removed the specification of

waters below the mouth of Jonathan Creek with the Pigeon, substituting the following: "this act shall only apply to factories or plants, erected, in course of erection, or maintained for the purposes aforesaid, in the county of Haywood, and only on Pigeon River below the forks of the river, near the Plott Mill at the J. A. Blaylock place, and not elsewhere in said county, or State of North Carolina." (qtd. in Bartlett 39)

This broadening of geographical areas in which industrial factories could be built increased the economic contribution of these pulp and paper mills to the county, at the expense of the health and availability of its natural resources.

Successful logging at Sunburst, coupled with inviting legislation and an abundance of resources, would support the opening of a new plant: the Champion Fibre Company of Canton, which would eventually open in 1905 (“Lake Logan”). Though Thomson turned his attention to brown paper production, the company did not abandon its logging enterprise, and established Champion Lumber Company in 1911.¹¹ This company absorbed existing landholdings, and, “after purchasing an additional 100,000 acres, expended his logging operations throughout Haywood County and into Swain County and eastern Tennessee” (Eller 108-09). Not adverse to the profit that drives Rash’s Pemberton lumber empire, Champion would go on to possess one of the largest landholdings that would impede the creation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and it is believed that “once the sale was made, the company clear-cut much of the land as fast as it could, with no thought of sustained yield or damage to what had been a virgin forest” (Bartlett 49).

The company was widely considered a boon for the region’s economy and quickly grew, causing many changes in internal structure and nomenclature. Intended to serve as a processing plant for pulp from southern Appalachia that would then be transformed into paper at the Ohio facility, the founding of Champion Fibre caused the population of small-town Canton to explode from less than 300 residents to over 6,000 by 1931 (Bartlett 44).¹² Champion is widely recognized as

¹¹ Though Bartlett asserts that no connection exists between Champion Lumber Company and Champion Fibre [sic] Company, Pierce claims that Champion Lumber was “a subsidiary of Champion Fibre” (25) and Eller credits Thompson with “organizing the Champion Lumber Company in 1911” (108).

¹² Importantly, communities suffered pollution silently for decades after the company’s success became evident: better to endure toxic conditions than lose economic viability (Bartlett 27-28). This environmental sacrifice reflects Fred Waage’s claim that until recently, “‘natural’ attributes of Appalachia lagged behind other subjects of concern, such as religion, economy, community life, and ‘folk arts’” (146).

contributing to the economic status of Haywood County in the first half of the twentieth century, and it is largely because of its benefits to the community and the state that its polluting of the Pigeon River was ignored for decades. Despite its economic successes, Champion became known in the later part of the twentieth century for its unrelenting polluting of the Pigeon River. Bartlett describes the damage:

Smoke belching from smokestacks, water leaving mills carrying putrid, toxic wastes, workers breathing, touching, and being exposed to what we now know to be dangerous carcinogens—these were the accepted criteria of a dynamic nation on the move. The milieu of the time, the climate of opinion, accepted spoliation and environmental damage without a twinge of conscience or a backward look at what had been and what industrialism had done. The mountain folk accepted, encouraged, and participated in this exploitation. (15-16)

The phenomenal success of the company and accompanying unwillingness to protest its environmental damage following World War I meant that within two decades of its establishment, the fiber and paper plant (renamed Champion Paper and Fibre Company in 1935) required a more significant and constant flow of water. Under the direction of then-president Reuben Robertson, Thomson's son-in-law, Champion dammed the West Fork of the Pigeon River in 1932, flooding Sunburst and providing the plant with sufficient water to continue production. The resulting 87-acre "lake," Lake Logan, was named for Thomson's son and quickly became a

recreation haven known for its aesthetic charm and natural resources (“Lake Logan”).

However, those directly affected by the river that would come to be known as the “Dirty Bird” were not willing to accept the continued destruction to the river. Poisoned by the illegally high presence of dioxins in its effluents, downstream residents of North Carolina and Tennessee were unable to use the river in any way for decades and Champion, at times at odds with and at times in collusion with both the EPA and North Carolina state government, eventually dissolved after significant investments in clean-up technologies. In 1999, Champion was sold to employees and renamed Blue Ridge Paper Products; today that company has been bought by Rank Products and merged with Evergreen Packaging. The most recent class action lawsuit against Blue Ridge Paper Products for contaminating downstream waters was filed in 2012 on the behalf of 300 residents of Cocke County, Tennessee (“Company Overview”).

Though today the Champion name conjures images of its extreme poisoning of the Pigeon River below the plant—Chappell refers to the pollution of the “Pigeon River with ebony acids” (*Look Back* 98)—it is likely the spillway at Lake Logan that Chappell references in “The Overspill.” There he writes that the “*volume of the creek flow was controlled by Challenger; they had placed a reservoir up there, and the creek water was regulated by means of the spillway*” (*I Am One* 1). This focus on local events in the 1940s allows Chappell to distance himself from the larger controversy surrounding Champion in the late twentieth century—a controversy that involved national media coverage, multiple class action lawsuits, permit-wrangling and

political posturing from senators and Presidential candidates alike. Instead, Chappell demonstrates the immediacy of environmental events by writing about them as part of the Kirkmans' bioregion—a region defined not by arbitrary governmental boundaries, but by mountains, hills, rivers, creeks, and other geographical features of the natural world. Michael McGinnis defines a bioregion as the representation of the “intersection of vernacular culture, place-based behavior, and community” (3). Put another way, a bioregion “centralizes place more than any other” ecocritical concept; “bioregion is alternatively termed, ‘life place’” (Selvamony xviii). This approach, which combines physical geography with specifically local culture, benefits the author, subject, and reader alike: Chappell’s focus on the local bioregion of Trivett Creek and its confluence with the Pigeon River, to borrow the terminology of Michael Kowalewski, allows him to “rescue [his] work from overpopularized regional identities” (8) and provides the “optimal scale at which ecological consciousness and healthy human communities can be developed” (16). This ecological consciousness is evident over the span of the tetralogy. The flooding of “The Overspill” remains an essential event in the lore of the Kirkman family; Joe Robert cannot forgive or forget the destruction of his symbolic gift to his wife, Cora, and readers discover in *Look Back, All the Green Valley* that the event has become family legend, recounted back to an adult Jess by family friends Aunt Ora and Uncle Buddy. The impact of the flooding downstream is also reflected in “Dead Soldiers,” and the bridge that is taken down is not a decorative footbridge, but the iron bridge known as Fiberville Bridge.

Focusing on these floods, whose effects are relatively small compared against the decades of toxicity dumped into the river downstream, allows Chappell to address the exploitation of the Pigeon River and underscore the effect that the neo-colonialism imposed by Champion and facilitated by North Carolina legislature has on individual characters. It is important to note here that the specific situation chronicled by Chappell is not a dearth of water, but rather a series of destructive floods. Considered in combination with the toxicity of water created down stream from the Champion plant, these floods signal the attitude of colonization toward local residents. Devon Peña emphasizes the importance of analyzing the role that water plays in internal colonization, stating that the “question of water and of indigenous access, equitable access to water is one of the most pivotal political ecological struggles of contemporary times” (Adamson and Stein 22).

In creating Joe Robert and Virgil Campbell, Chappell’s works are innocent of T. V. Reed’s criticism that “much contemporary literature is superficial because it does not treat seriously human connectedness to nature,” but rather “remains deeply embedded in a romanticist notion of nature as the non-human, and the relatively pristine”; indeed, in fictionalizing these events Chappell demonstrates “human beings as connected to nature, not only as appreciators but destroyers” (150). Are readers to view Joe Robert and Virgil Campbell as appreciators or destroyers? The painful physical effects of these events on these characters are clearly seen in these novels, and both Joe Robert and Campbell react vehemently to the unannounced spill gate release: Joe Robert’s repeated curse of “*Bastards*” and declaration that the unscheduled release was against the *law* (*I Am One* 5) signals an

indignation at being relegated to Rob Nixon's status of uninhabitants (152) and encourages readers to question whether Joe Robert is referring to North Carolina litigation or some form of natural law.¹³ The law that Joe Robert accuses Challenger of ignoring relates to Virgil Campbell's accusation that the "goddamn Mill" ("Dead Soldiers" line 36) did not think (presumably, did not think of the impact of the release on those residents downstream, line 36).

It is quite possible that the law invoked by Joe Robert is his interpretation of a naturalized "law" that privileges white, heterosexual men as purveyors of nature—here, the tributary of the Pigeon River. Mei Mei Evens describes a frequent occurrence in literature of "strategic deployment[s] of representations of Nature or the 'wild' [that] have been 'naturalizing' and thus privileging straight white men in U. S. society since 'discovery' (183). In the traditional American narrative, according to Evans,

Nature is encountered (and subsequently conquered) by a (white) male figure, who then wrests from the confrontation an instatement or reinstatement of his hegemonic identity. Nature is proffered in these representations as an unproblematic reality, when in fact it is a cultural product designed to serve an ideological function: having conferred upon him his hegemony, Nature is reified as that thing which has the power to do so. (182)

¹³ Notably, the sudden flood does remove Champion's actions from what Nixon might deem "slow violence," defined as a "violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (2).

The floods of “The Overspill” and “Dead Soldiers” reflect Joe Robert’s and Virgil Campbell’s utter lack of control over the Nature that is quite literally in their own backyard. Their indignation at the spillway release, then, is due to the flagrant disregard for their assumption of control; unfortunately, the ultimate exercise of control in releasing the spill gates does not reflect a correction of the gender-biased “natural” law, but rather the exploitation of resources that results from the (also patriarchal) dominance of capitalism, in which to succeed is to exploit and abuse both human and non-human natural resources. Because of this exploitation, Joe Robert and Virgil are denied what they might expect to see as their “natural” right to control Nature and move from a position of affirmed hegemony to colonized uninhabitants.¹⁴

And so Joe Robert and Virgil’s outrage reflects their initial emotional response to the floods. This initial response reflects Chappell’s opening point of resistance; however, the author does not limit his treatment of the colonization and exploitation of southern Appalachia to these characters’ mere decrying of destructive events. Chappell both addresses and mocks the caricatures and stereotypes that both facilitated and justified the treatment of Appalachia as an internal colony when Jess, who, as I mentioned earlier, is revealed to have become an author who writes under the nom de plume “Fred Chappell” in *Look Back*, decides to eat at Hillbilly Heaven, a new tourist-focused restaurant in Asheville. In

¹⁴ While this attitude might also suggest the relevance of ecofeminism—which Nixon describes as the view that “colonized, especially women, have been repeatedly naturalized as objects of heritage to be owned, preserved, or patronized rather than as the subjects of their own land and legacies” (237)—Chappell focuses almost exclusively on male relationships in these specific works. *Farewell, I’m Bound to Leave You*, the third of the tetralogy, offers potential for further application of ecofeminism not necessarily germane to this discussion.

doing so, Jess's commentary easily blurs the distinction between his fictional world and contemporary Asheville and, as J. Spencer Edmunds notes of the novel, "[S]uddenly, the fictional character of Jess seems to have crossed into the *real* world—having taken Chappell's wife and job along the way" (109). In many ways, *Look Back* differs from the preceding three Kirkman novels. Because this commentary is not distanced by time or person—as, for example, Jess's recollection of Joe Robert's reaction to the flood is—it gives *Look Back* a stronger connection to realism than the other novels enjoy.

Jess is taken aback by the "cultural pollution" (94) of the restaurant, which is clearly capitalizing on an inaccurate, quaint, and altogether ridiculous caricature of Appalachia. He notes the "oddness" (93) of his waitress's dress and read "with growing horror" (94) the drinks menu, disbelieving "unearthly jargon": "I rubbed my eyes and blinked them repeatedly, but the words still didn't go away" (94). Jess describes the profitable impetus behind the outlandish menu and "commercial effrontery" (95) when he infers that "meats and vegetables, breads and desserts were set out in terms that some well-paid assassin of language had slung together while nibbling bagels in a Madison Avenue deli and thumbing through precious antique issues of *L'il Abner* comics" (94). By addressing the commercialization of Appalachian stereotypes that devolved into such caricatures, Chappell recognizes the capitalist forces that continue to render Appalachian residents as unrecognizable Others.

Jess is in a unique position to observe the unabashed exploitation of Hillbilly Heaven: He calls himself "Appalachian by heritage" (21), yet he left the region to

attend college, and then live his adult life, downstate in central North Carolina, well outside Appalachia's geographical and cultural borders. He acknowledges his liminal position when he admits to his waitress during a conversation about locals and tourists, "I don't quite know which I am myself" (95). As a former Appalachian resident, he is aware of the façade created and perpetuated by the restaurant, yet his university training allows him to understand with some objectivity that these damaging stereotypes are widely accepted, even in an era of growing political correctness: "Even my supersensitive politically correct grad students were not roused to indignation by Jed Clampett and Elly Mae and Jethro and the see-mint pond. Hillbillies were not a fashionable minority group" (96). Life mirrors art when Lang supports Jess's claim, observing that the "less said of Appalachia, it would seem, in many parts of even the Southern literary establishment, the better" (8). This relegation of "hillbillies" to the status of an unimportant or irrelevant minority group reflects both the cultural acceptance of damaging stereotypes surrounding the region since the nineteenth century and the fact that while they might be considered a cultural minority, many Appalachian residents identify as white, and are therefore an easily dismissed portion of the white demographic as opposed to a highly visible and vocal ethnic minority.

Jess demonstrates amusement at the exaggerations propagated by Hillbilly Heaven: "All this silly façade was no more than harmless hokum, bait for a quantified tourist trap" (96). With that reflection, Jess himself accurately demonstrates Lang's claim that Chappell's "fiction and poetry thus subvert stereotypes of the Appalachian region by emphasizing the full humanity of the

people that stereotypes caricature" (204). Though Appalachian by heritage, Jess is neither a "cliché we all recognize" (*Look Back* 93) nor entirely divorced from his Tipton roots. Instead, Jess's amusement at stereotypes also allows him to clearly articulate his loyalty to his Appalachian roots (first made clear through title to *I Am One of You Forever*) while pursuing his own flawed translation of Dante's *Inferno*.

Chappell does not limit his literary response to these demonstrations of exploitative colonization to characters' enraged (yet fictional) reactions to floods or, decades later, adult characters' acknowledgement of the prevalence of denigrating Appalachian caricatures. Indeed, Chappell resists the environmental and colonizing damage wrought by Challenger through various methods. On a most basic level, Chappell renames the monolithic *Champion* and gives it an equally imposing name: *Challenger*. Is there significance to this selection of nomenclature? Clearly the company challenges at least three unavoidable elements of life in Tipton. First, though the works of the Kirkman tetralogy are set well before the litigation between Tennessee and North Carolina began in 1982, Chappell's nomenclature will subtly remind readers that Challenger has a history of disregarding established state and federal laws protecting the environment. Next, in flooding Trivett Creek and threatening Joe Robert's and Virgil Campbell's homes and livelihoods, the corporation challenged naturalized "law" which might lead white, heterosexual men to assume hegemonic power over Nature. In addition, the corporation's environmental abuses threaten and eventually damage the agrarian culture of Tipton. Lastly, it may be argued that Joe Robert viewed the act of opening the spill gates as a personal challenge that he dedicated his life to requiring.

Though his choice of nomenclature for the imposing corporation is obviously significant, Chappell toys with literary technique and characters' creativity to provide his strongest resistance against Champion's exploitation and reimagining of events that had a harmful impact. In "Dead Soldiers," *I Am One of You Forever*, and *Look Back, All the Green Valley* Chappell uses the characters of young Jess, Joe Robert, and Virgil Campbell to resist very real colonizing attempts. Each of these characters reacts to the encroaching colonizing of their resources and culture differently, and readers can easily examine the varying degrees of reality with which they respond to Challenger's flooding of Trivett Creek.

In "The Overspill," through the character of young Jess, Chappell incorporates qualities of magical realism and elevates the events of that memorable and fateful day to the level of family myth; this technique allows Chappell to imagine an alternative reality, thus resisting the dominant, damaging narrative of events. It is important here to recall that Chappell does not himself acknowledge the incorporation of fantasy within *I Am One of You Forever* as magical realism—in fact, he has denied its inclusion, telling Tersh Palmer in 1992 that he doesn't "see magical realism as an influence on my most recent fiction," but rather "was trying to get away from it, as a matter of fact" (408). Chappell's confession to Ira Broughton that he likes the "transition or almost a lack of transition between the supernatural and the realistic elements of the play" and is interested in "getting rid of the division between what is wished for, what is imagined, and what is generally thought to be realistic or recognized as factual" (101) belies his later claim that what might be

considered magical realism is instead “folk stories” used literally—a technique that he likens to that used by Mark Twain (116).

Despite Chappell’s protestations, critical assertions that his works, particularly the Kirkman tetralogy, reflect techniques of magical realism abound,¹⁵ and textual evidence supports these claims. In this chapter—and, indeed, throughout much of the Kirkman tetralogy—Chappell uses Jess’s youthful character to creatively place an overlay of sorts on the “real” (according to the world of the novel) flood. Because of Jess’s youth, his reaction to the flood is based in emotions rather than action, and the tear becomes a physical manifestation of the family’s grief. Jess’s age is significant: He does not have the agency to act, whereas Joe Robert is not only capable of action but plots revenge that is never realized, a fact revealed in *Look Back, All the Green Valley*.

A grasp of Chappell’s chosen form is essential to fully appreciating the role of magical realism: Readers understand immediately that the narrator is an adult recalling pivotal events from his childhood, creating distance and perspective. This technique is addressed by Bizzaro: “[W]hen Chappell distances the implied author from the narrator, . . . he allows the implied author to speak with authority and to guide our judgments as readers” (“Growth” 85). Such detachment is important because it builds the credibility of the adult narrator looking back on his youth. This adult narrator recalls, with some perspective, how, as a youth, he envisioned the tear that would envelop him and his parents: “*The tear on my mother’s cheek got larger and larger. It detached from her face and became a shiny globe, widening*

¹⁵ See Hal McDonald, “Fred Chappell as Magic Realist” and Robert Morgan’s foreword to Bizzaro, *More Lights Than One: On the Fiction of Fred Chappell*.

outward like an inflating balloon" (*I Am One* 6). As an adult, the narrator recalls it as a real event, not the whimsical product of a childhood imagination.

Chappell's decision to italicize the chapter contributes to this distance, but also complicates the credibility of the narrator. The effect of italics is a dream-like tone, an result heightened by Chappell's use of *media res* to begin not only the chapter, but the novel: "*Then there was one brief time when we didn't live in the big brick house with my grandmother but in a neat two-storey [sic] green-shingled white house in the holler below*" (1). While readers are led to trust the objectivity of the adult Jess, they are also thrown into a liminal area between dream and reality before reading a single word, thus becoming alert to the potential for magic.¹⁶ Thus, with the form and structure of the opening chapter of *I Am One of You Forever*, Chappell establishes the presence of magical realism.¹⁷

But what role does magical realism play in literature? Magical realism, as explained by Wendy Faris, "combines realism and the fantastic in such a way that magical elements grow organically out of the reality portrayed" (163), and allows

¹⁶ Any discussion of magical realism must include mention of Gabriel Garcia Marquez. His work *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is considered a landmark text in the genre, and is labyrinthine in its maze of details. While Chappell's individual novels are more focused, taken as a cohesive tetralogy they are reminiscent of Marquez's novel.

¹⁷ Such use of italics is fairly common in modern and postmodern literature, and places Chappell squarely within those traditions. A relevant example would be William Faulkner's use of italics in "The Bear" of *Go Down, Moses*. In that section, italics also create distance and a sense of surreality: each of the journal entries between brothers Buck and Buddy is italicized, as are the interjected episodes from the past. Each of the novels of the Kirkman tetralogy includes three italicized chapters, falling at the beginning, middle, and end; these chapters tend to address more serious, important topics than his often light-hearted narrative normally does. In this way, italics elevate his prose. A second element that identifies this as a modern work is the function of the title, which is the answer to the final question of the novel and provides readers with a momentary epiphany and lasting sense of Jess's familial bonds.

authors the agency to question hegemonic paradigms. Theo D'haen argues that magical realism

create[s] an alternative world *correcting* so-called existing reality, and thus to right the wrongs this 'reality' depends upon. Magical realism thus reveals itself as a *ruse* to invade and take over dominant discourses. It is a way of access to the main body of 'Western' literature for authors not sharing in, or not writing from the perspective of, the privileged centers of this literature for reasons of language, class, race, or gender, and yet avoiding epigonism by avoiding the adoption of views of the hegemonic forces together with their discourse. (195)

Chappell's use of the tear in "The Overspill" clearly emphasizes the emotional reaction of the Kirkmans to the flood and challenges the dominant discourse that the flood demonstrates: Challenger has the right and means to exercise control over all resources available without regard to local impact.

Faris goes on to identify several key functions of magical realism that all contribute to this authorial ability. First, there is present in the text an "irreducible element' of magic" (167) that cannot be explained logically. Because it is inexplicable, this magic can, when juxtaposed with "ordinary logic of cause and effect" (168), make logic and rationality appear absurd. Hence, as this element of magical realism acknowledges, "magic also serves the cause of satire and political commentary" (169). The flooding of Trivett Creek and subsequent reaction cannot be deemed satire; however, it can be seen as political commentary, harkening back

to the successful “Act to encourage the building of pulp mills and paper mills and tanneries in the counties of Haywood and Swain” passed in 1901. The tear highlights not only the grief of the family and the bonding of Jess with his parents—a bond reminiscent of the text’s title—but also the ineffectiveness inherent in the plight of the politically invisible farmer against corporate interests.

Faris articulates another characteristic of magical-realist fiction when she notes that frequently, in such works, the author provides an eccentric reproduction of historical events, often including “alternate versions of officially sanctioned accounts” that, when combined with accepted historical accounts, “implies that eternal mythic truths and historical events are both essential components of our collective memory” (169-70). While the role of history is undeniable in the otherwise fictional Kirkman tetralogy, Faris’ subsequent observations that magical realism is positioned at the “closeness or near-merging of two realms, two worlds,” noting that these texts exist at the “intersection of two worlds, at an imaginary point inside a double-sided mirror that reflects in both directions,” thus also blurs the line between fact and fiction (172-73). Chappell combines these binary oppositions by selecting historical events carefully. The localized impact of the flood of “The Overspill” or any of the seven floods referenced in “Dead Soldiers” was isolated so much so that records do not exist, leading readers to question whether these floods occurred anywhere but in the pages of Chappell’s works. However, the presence of Champion as a looming entity that positively impacted the local economy and proved destructive to the environment of both western North Carolina and eastern

Tennessee cannot be disputed. Against this factual backdrop, Cora's tear is a response that Jess has elevated to a family myth.

A final quality of magical realism identified by Faris that is especially interesting in light of "The Overspill" is her distinction of sacred spaces. She writes that these texts

question received ideas about time, space, and identity. . . . Many magical realist fictions carefully delineate sacred enclosures . . . and then allow these sacred spaces to leak their magical narrative waters over the rest of the text and the world it describes. Magical realism reorients not only our habits of time and space, but our sense of identity as well. (173-74)

What is intriguing about this identification of sacred spaces is its application to "The Overspill." The sacred space that is built exists within the tear itself: Recalling that Chappell identified the "strength and primacy of family" first among his themes ("Too Many Freds" 270), the sacred place built by magical realism is indeed the safe enclosure that bonds Jess with Cora and Joe Robert.

And so, magical realism provides an alternative "reading" of events, allowing readers to see the impact of events apart from an established narrative. As such, "The Overspill" provides readers with a "real" account of the flood (largely through Joe Robert's lamentations and the description provided by the narrator) as well as a fantastical account with the inclusion of the tear. Importantly, adult Jess does not try to explain this tear: Like Joe Robert's reaction, it, too, has become fact and is extraordinary not in its existence, but in its function. This reading is supported by

Hal McDonald's assertion that Chappell's fiction demonstrates what William Spindler terms "ontological magical realism, in which a supernatural element is present, but no attempt is made to explain its origin" (qtd. in McDonald 128). In the last sentences of "The Overspill" adult Jess is nonchalant and matter-of-fact in his description. He does not attempt to refute the presence of the tear: "*The tear enlarged until at last it took me in too. It was warm and salt. As soon as I got used to the strange light inside the tear, I began to swim clumsily toward my parents*" (6). Though the tear defies any logical explanation, the Kirkman family has accepted it and embraced its purpose; occurring, as it does, subsequent to Joe Robert's outbursts, it also replaces that realistic reaction to the flood itself.

Magical realism suggests multiple plans of reality, frequently depicted as co-existing binaries. Stephen Slemon writes that the term itself is

an oxymoron, one that suggests a binary opposition between the representational code of realism and that, roughly, of fantasy. In the language of narration in a magic realist text, *a battle between two oppositional systems takes place, each working toward the creation of a different kind of fictional world from the other*. Since the ground rules of these two worlds are incompatible, neither can fully come into being, and each remains suspended, locked in a continuous dialectic with the 'other,' a situation which creates disjunction within each of the separate discursive systems, rending them with gaps, absences, and silences. ("Magic Realism" 409, my italics)

In “The Overspill,” the conflict created is between reality and fantasy: The power wielded by Challenger and Joe Robert’s ineffectual fight against the flood is met with Jess’s creation of family myth. Jess successfully creates a separate world, apart from the flood and devastated bridge, with the tear (though it is important to note here that the element of water comprises both flood and tear). To borrow Slemon’s phrasing, the family and Joe Robert’s plans are clearly incompatible with Challenger’s capitalist interests. However, while the family cannot undo the damage wrought by the flood, they can make themselves immune, sheltered in the sacred space created by the tear, thus allowing Chappell as author to resist forces of environmental colonialism using magical realism.

While Chappell fashions Jess’s youthful and adult responses to the flood in the magical realist tradition, he offers readers a second reaction to the flood: Joe Robert actively seeks a very specific flavor of revenge against colonizing and exploitative forces throughout the narrative arc of the tetralogy, culminating in Jess’s discovery of the extent of Joe Robert’s plans in *Look Back, All the Green Valley*. In this novel, set a decade after Joe Robert’s death, Jess recalls a conversation relayed by his father, who contacted Challenger following the flood. Joe Robert was told to “get a lawyer and take them to court—as if I had money to contribute to the fat wallets of lawyers, as if any judge or jury in this county would find against Challenger. ‘Get a lawyer’: They actually sniggered when they said the words” (*Look Back* 98). In lieu of costly (and, as Joe Robert notes, likely futile) attorney fees, he elects to seek revenge of a specific type: “It has to be something that won’t hurt anybody physically or financially and will make Challenger look dumb. Something

they wouldn't expect in a million years. And it has to be perfect justice" (98). The idea of justice is absent from Jess's remembrance of either the event or the tear, and forcefully awakens readers' attention from the dream-like state conjured by Jess's recollection of the flood in "The Overspill." However, being the trickster that he is (or, at least that Jess believes he is), Joe Robert's idea of justice is a bit preposterous. Readers are given clues when Jess revives another conversation, this one between himself and his parents:

"Why on earth would you paint a picture of a pie?" my mother asked. "That is the most outlandish thing I ever heard of."

"It is to remind me of a little task I want to accomplish, a little something I have in mind concerning a bridge, a work of architectural genius of the first magnitude, destroyed by the barbarian forces of the most devilish form of contemporary commercial industrialism."

"Joe Robert," she said, "we have no idea what you're talking about." (230)

At the picnic hosted by Jess and Mitzi, Jess identifies the engineer responsible for the flood to the crowd gathered in his speech:

"One of my father's peculiarities concerned a fellow named T. J. Wesson, who, when he still inhabited a mortal body upon this planet, was known in Tipton as the man whose irresponsible actions with a sluice gate of the water reservoir at the Challenger mill caused a flood that destroyed property belonging to a number of people, none of whom was angrier and sadder about it than my father." (263)

And finally, Joe Robert's plan for justice is revealed when Jess reads Joe Robert's self-penned Last Will and Testament, announcing, "My father bequeathed to T. J. Wesson a pie in the face" (263).

Joe Robert's unique reaction prompts readers to ask wonder why he focuses on an individual, and not on Challenger as a whole. Joe Robert has identified with clarity the belittling treatment of the corporation towards the population of Tipton, and by approaching Challenger initially he signals his willingness to seek not only justice, but change. However, Joe Robert is limited by his socioeconomic status: While he has the maturity and experience to act—unlike his son Jess, who can only respond emotionally to the event of the flood—he does not have the agency to act effectively. Lang argues that Joe Robert's "failure to gain revenge also demonstrates, albeit in comic terms, the ongoing need to work for justice" (270). His response, then, reveals his trickster nature as well as the extent to which the Challenger flood affected him. Similar to the effect of revenge he wished to extoll, he wasn't hurt physically (though the flood likely had financial costs for the Kirkmans), he was taken by surprise, and he may have believed he was made to look a fool for building the bridge over a creek whose "*volume of the creek flow was controlled by Challenger*" (*I Am One* 1).

In addition to having the power to exact revenge but not justice, Joe Robert is also significantly sympathetic toward the Cherokees who are native to western North Carolina. Jess recalls that he "admired the Cherokee nation immensely; in fact, he was a little daft on the subject of Indians" (*Look Back* 61) and even believed that the "people of the nation held the keys to the secrets of life, that they were

immersed in a wisdom taken directly from nature, imbibed through the pores, as it were" (62). This intense desire to connect with Cherokee people can be read as Joe Robert's understanding that the Cherokee were also colonized—ironically, by white settlers who may be the ancestors of the Kirkmans.

Lastly, in "Dead Soldiers," Virgil Campbell provides what might be the most atavistic and realistic (and certainly the most aggressive) reaction to the events that drive much of the octave's narrative. This reaction, while the briefest, may also be the most telling since Jess admits in *Look Back* that Virgil Campbell "had come to represent for me one whole indigenous strain of Appalachian custom" (82). Readers can easily ascertain, then, given the intensity of Virgil's response, the rage and belligerence rippling through the entire community.

While Jess's reaction takes readers into the realm of magical realism and Joe Robert's follows a more realistic (though not necessarily feasible) response, Virgil Campbell demonstrates an active response to the floods that inundate "Dead Soldiers." Campbell's response is real—to the narrator, at least, who is recalling the scene twenty-five years later. Virgil is, not surprisingly, drunk (as he is frequently in Chappell's writing); this intoxication is notable when one considers that it takes him to another state of existence—much as magical realism does. When the rising water overflows the Pigeon River, Virgil's first reaction is to drink and curse the invisible Challenger at its source; following that ineffective reaction, he "gained respect" (line 54) of those who had gathered at his store to watch the rising waters when he seized his rifle and shells and claimed "'I aint' going to stand / Here and not fight back what's taking my land / And house'" (lines 57-59). His subsequent actions are

aggressive, forceful, and ultimately futile: Shooting the river, he “loaded, and started pumping / Slug after slug at the water rising and thumping / His house like a big bass drum” (lines 63-65). Notably, the water seems to fight back: In the next line, his “basement doors burst open and out floated tons, / Or what seemed tons, of emptied whiskey jars” (lines 66-67), thus providing Virgil with a target that offered visible and audible satisfaction when shot. The appearance of these jars, the dead soldiers of the title, is intriguing: While Campbell is intent upon blaming the flood for his plight, the river itself seems to answer back that it is his own alcohol problem. Campbell’s reaction in “Dead Soldiers” provides Ole Fred’s recollection of the disenfranchised fighting back with whatever means they have at their disposal.

The episode captured in “Dead Soldiers” mirrors the flood of “The Overspill” in interesting ways, creating yet more connections between the works that comprise the octave. In addition to the event of the flood itself (indeed, the narrators of each do not conclusively discount the possibility that it is even the same flood), there are the two bridges that fall. The bridge of “Dead Soldiers” isn’t the picturesque white footbridge but rather an industrial iron bridge known as “Fiberville Bridge” named for the workers’ lodgings that lay across the river. Each bridge is symbolic: The bridge of “The Overspill” represents Joe Robert’s naïve trust that the creek would not spill its banks, a trust that was dashed to his astonishment and livid protests, while the Fiberville Bridge represents the imposition of the Challenger corporation over the river itself. Readers are aware, despite the narrator’s vision of Virgil Campbell as a “crazed Minuteman at river edge / With a .22 Marlin bringing down a bridge” (lines 115-16), that the industrial bridge could not stand against the

destructive nature of the river—which had been harnessed by Challenger itself. To continue that reading, then, becomes an exercise in irony: Challenger becomes the entity that takes itself down and is ultimately unable to control the surrounding environment.

A third connection between “Dead Soldiers” and “The Overspill” is the perspective of these texts. Like the distance created between adult Jess the narrator and young Jess who experienced the flood and subsequent tear, “Dead Soldiers” inserts the distance of time. While the majority of “Dead Soldiers” is Ole Fred’s recounting of the event of this particular flood, the poem includes, almost as an epilogue, two italicized stanzas relating the narrator’s interaction with his father those many years ago.

Italicizing this stanza has the dream-like effect that “The Overspill” does; it also emphasizes the conversation’s importance relative to the event. It’s in this stanza that the narrator articulates what he saw, a ten-year old child’s interpretation of traumatic events: “*‘Virgil Campbell took a .22 / And shot the iron bridge down,’ I said* (lines 127-28).

Ole Fred recalls that at the time of the flood, his perception of his father was “*awesome as a God to a child of ten*” (line 123), and thus much value rests in his reaction to his son’s statement. The father lends meaning to the event and validates this interpretation: “*‘That’s true,’ / He said presently, ‘if you think it so. I can / Swear to it he’s an independent man’*” (lines 129-30).

Though “Dead Soldiers” does not include the various elements that would categorize it as magical realism, this unlikely depiction of events is creative. More

importantly, here Chappell grants Virgil Campbell the agency that neither Jess nor Joe Robert enjoy. The significance of this bridge falling cannot be underemphasized: To the adult observers within the poem and the poem's readers, nature—here, the Pigeon River—has triumphed over the interests of Challenger by bringing down the bridge. In addition, to young Fred, Virgil Campbell succeeds in retaliating against the forces of corporate colonialism that wreak destruction upon the inhabitants of Tipton.

How do Chappell's works challenge the environmental colonization imposed by Champion Paper and Fiber, International during most of the twentieth century? D'haen addresses literature's ability to challenge dominant discourses, noting that to "write ex-centrally, then, or from the margin, implies dis-placing this discourse" (195). Chappell, a masterful and multi-talented writer, can be thought of as writing from the margins of "regional" literature, perhaps because his works on Appalachia are primarily focused on established small communities—he doesn't offer readers a protagonist like Serena who hails from the metropolitan north (and, notably, Chappell's works have not received the national acclaim that Rash's *Serena* has). Despite a more localized audience, Chappell does not succumb to sentimentalism in his works: As Lang reminds us,

Despite Chappell's allegiance to Appalachia, he does not romanticize either the region or agrarian life. Refusing to ignore the flaws of mountain people and their culture, he also celebrates their many strengths. His fiction and poetry thus subvert stereotypes of the

Appalachian region by emphasizing the full humanity of the people that stereotypes caricature. (204)

Chappell writes of the frequently marginalized Appalachia not as an “other,” but incorporates it into his works as the primary cultural influence and geographical setting. The works discussed here—indeed, most of the works that comprise his body of writing—do not directly address environmental history or colonialism by corporate interests; however, that Chappell *does* allow these themes into his works and offers readers subtle statements on their impact is undeniable. His use of magical realism in offering imagined reactions and alternatives has significant effects that cannot be understated: Chappell uses his fiction and poetry to offer readers an alternative reading of the environmental colonialism imposed upon his fictional counterpart to Canton, North Carolina. Through Jess, Joe Robert, and Virgil Campbell, Chappell uses various approaches, including magical realism, imagined revenge, and aggressive acts of retribution to demonstrate the various ways in which Appalachian residents resist colonization and subsequent environmental destruction.

CHAPTER 3

“LIVES SLIP AWAY LIKE WATERS”:

DROWNED COMMUNITIES IN RASH’S *ONE FOOT IN EDEN* AND *RAISING THE DEAD*

In a 2003 interview with Joyce Compton Brown, Ron Rash quoted Francis Bacon when he claimed that an “important value of art . . . is ‘to deepen the mystery’” (“Power” 29). Rash could have considered himself a successful artist at that point in his career according to this criterion, given his (then) recent publication of *One Foot in Eden* and *Raising the Dead*: Each of these works explores the complex relationship between land and people, tradition and progress, and the volatile role water often plays in shaping events. Published in 2002, *One Foot in Eden* is Rash’s first novel; well received, it won the *ForeWord Magazine Literary Book of the Year*, the *Novello Literary Award*, and *Appalachian Book of the Year*, an honor bestowed by the *Appalachian Writers Association*. Set a decade after Chappell’s *I Am One of You Forever*, *One Foot in Eden* is a multi-narrator work that details a fictional murder and its aftermath in an upstate South Carolina valley that, in both novel and reality, would be flooded to become the *Jocassee Reservoir*. It thus continues to narrate the history of environmental colonialism in southern Appalachia.¹⁸ One might consider, as *Silas House* does, Rash’s Pulitzer-nominated

¹⁸ Though Rash’s personal experience is isolated to the dislocation of family due to the creation of the *Blue Ridge Parkway*, he noted in an interview that his first position as a teacher was “actually teaching at a high school about five miles from *Jocassee*, and I was teaching students whose families had been displaced” (qtd. in *Bjerre* 226).

collection of poems *Raising the Dead* an accompaniment to *One Foot in Eden* (21); while this collection is largely autobiographical, in it Rash also plumbs the depths of history and bioregionalism.¹⁹

The common bond between *One Foot in Eden* and *Raising the Dead* is the actual flooding of the Jocassee Valley to create “Lake” Jocassee. In *One Foot in Eden* Rash refers to the actual Jocassee Valley and the Horsepasture River, which is one of four rivers that now run into Lake Jocassee, though he does create quite fictional characters and renames Duke Power as Carolina Power.²⁰ In the novel Rash uses the river as physical boundary or contact zone between neo-colonizing forces and those treated as “uninhabitants,” and his chosen multi-narrator format allows for a variety of perspectives. *Raising the Dead* serves as the poet’s autobiographical record of the flooding by Duke Power,²¹ documenting the cultural and personal changes wrought by the watershed event. In both works, Rash uses his platform as writer to preserve Appalachian culture, highlight the lasting environmental damage (most prominently through the loss of the Oconee Bell flower), and question the dominant narrative of progress as beneficial to all.

¹⁹ Fred Chappell’s *Midquest* and Kirkman tetralogy and Ron Rash’s *One Foot in Eden* and *Raising the Dead* are connected by more than geography: While the common theme to all four works, the destructive nature of water (made only more devastating and perilous under human direction) is evident, both authors work within an intricate structure to create works of poetry and fiction that complement each other.

²⁰ In order to avoid confusion between Duke Power and Carolina Power, and because Carolina Power is clearly a thinly veiled fictionalization of Duke Power, I will refer to both entities as Duke Power, whether citing nonfictional history or *One Foot in Eden*.

²¹ Rash’s decision to focus on Duke Power is well-established within the tradition of Appalachian Studies: The 1976 Academy Award-winning documentary *Harlan County USA* is a stark examination of the conflict between coal miners in a small Kentucky town and the Eastover Coal Company—a subsidiary of Duke Power.

Rash is not unique or even remarkable in his inclusion of rivers in these early works. From the epic Biblical flood of *Genesis* to singer-songwriter Daniel Lanois' haunting call for the river to "rise from your sleep" in his 1989 song "The Maker" (later sung by Willie Nelson on his 1998 release, *Teatro*), images of rising rivers and surging waters dominate our cultural consciousness. It is not surprising, then, that the Appalachian region, which is defined by its mountainous terrain, is rife with stories of destructive floods, from the intentional flooding of the fictional Cahulawassee River of James Dickey's *Deliverance* to Chappell's flooding of the Pigeon River to the accidental and devastating Johnstown floods. The often unpredictable action of water is reflected in a common idiom of the region: "If the good Lord's willing and the creek don't rise" is routinely heard throughout Appalachia as a cautionary positive response to any query. In this tradition, then, fall these early works by Ron Rash.

In this chapter I will examine the relationship between Rash's overarching theme of life versus death as tied to rivers that both shapes and complicates Rash's *One Foot in Eden* and *Raising the Dead*. Following an overview of each work, I will provide a brief history of Duke Power's collaboration with the state government of South Carolina, demonstrating the neo-colonizing tendencies that worked to promote their own agenda. I will then examine the role of rivers in each work from an ecocritical perspective and, in close readings of each section of *One Foot in Eden* accompanied by relevant poems from *Raising the Dead*, discuss how Rash uses the narrators' perspectives to challenge the hegemony of "progress." I conclude with a discussion of the function of Rash's role as author in advancing these critiques.

One Foot in Eden is a novel in five sections that grew from Rash's image of a "farmer standing in his field, crops dying around him. He had a look of desperation of [sic] his face that transcended the drought" (Kingsbury). In a feature unique among Rash's works, each section of *One Foot* utilizes a different narrator who depicts the events of one hot, dry summer and its long-reaching aftermath. This technique easily situates *One Foot* among other southern novels: William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* is the quintessential multi-narrator work, and Chappell's *I Am One of You Forever* borrows from this style, with almost every chapter about a different character. Set against the backdrop of the actual damming of the confluence of the Toxaway, Horsepasture, Thompson, and Whitewater Rivers in South Carolina, *One Foot in Eden* details the fictional story of Billy and Amy Holcombe, the murder of Holland Winchester, and the actual impending flooding of the Jocassee Valley to create Lake Jocassee. As the characters navigate the precarious ground of marriage and sexual relationships, the presence of Duke Power looms in the background. This faceless entity bought land on the other side of the river from the Winchesters, Holcombes, and Alexanders; indeed, each of these families is aware of the eventual flooding of their valley by this corporation. The constant threat that their valley will one day be entirely submerged adds an element of urgency at various points of the novel; they are all aware of the coming deluge, like being aware of some type of deadline, though they are not aware of precisely when it will occur. While water is a physical presence in the novel and its imagery permeates much of Rash's language, the work as a whole might be thought of as a river that is being dammed: It begins by assessing the surface, or known features, then plunges readers to deeper and

deeper depths, sounding and articulating events that would come to first define and then obliterate the lives of these characters. Finally, the novel simultaneously serves as a metaphorical warning against the dangers of losing something that cannot be replaced and, according to Mindy Beth Miller, allows Rash to “prevent Jocassee from vanishing by writing about it” (201).

The novel opens with High Sheriff Will Alexander’s narration, a section in which readers are made aware of what might be thought of as the surface of the body of water that comprises the rest of the novel. Alexander journeys from urban, down-state Seneca back to his birthplace, Jocassee, to investigate the disappearance of Holland Winchester. Holland, a Korean War veteran, is known as a miscreant; in fact, Sheriff Alexander had just broken up a bar fight featuring Winchester two weeks prior. On the day of his disappearance, his mother, Mrs. Winchester, heard the crack of a rifle’s shot and sensed her son’s demise, calling Alexander immediately. Alexander puts her mind at ease, claiming at least another day to let Holland wander home, then travels to the adjacent Holcombe farm at Mrs. Winchester’s insistence to inquire whether they’d seen Holland. When he visits Billy and Amy Holcombe, however, he intuits that his visit is not unexpected and that they are complicit in Holland’s disappearance. Alexander continues to describe his current life in the town of Seneca and damaged relationship with his wife Janice; readers also learn of his life growing up in Jocassee and adult relationship with his father and brother. The chapter concludes with a chronicle of the continued (and ultimately unsuccessful) search for Holland Winchester’s corpse, ending with Alexander’s statement to Billy: “ ‘You got away with it’ ” (57).

In the next section, Rash begins to sound the depths of these defining events, providing the backstory of the couple's courtship and early marriage in the section narrated by Amy. At the time of her exposition, the Holcombes are a young married couple whose poverty forces them to live close to the land. Their eventual attempts to start a family lead to the knowledge that Billy's impotence is caused by his life-threatening bout of polio as a young boy. Desperate to save what is quickly becoming a broken marriage, Amy seeks the advice of Widow Glendower, an elderly woman isolated in the distant woods who many assume is a witch. Glendower assesses the situation, noting that Amy "got a man who can't give you a baby, so you got to lay down with a man who can, and the man who can give you that baby ain't no farther from you than the next farm" (77). Initially repulsed by the idea, Amy quickly seduces Holland. Unexpectedly, however, Holland becomes enthralled with Amy and, once her pregnancy becomes physically evident, he beseeches Amy to leave Billy and become his wife. Billy interrupts this plea and, upon Amy's clear decision to remain with Billy, murders Holland. Amy's narration concludes with Isaac's birth, an event that occurs while Billy is ill; indeed, Isaac's growth and increasing strength are juxtaposed to Billy's flagging health until Amy returns to Widow Glendower to seek a traditional herbal remedy, which ultimately restores Billy to robust health.

Billy continues the narrative of events in the novel's third section, first detailing his struggle with infertility and deteriorating marriage, and then his discovery of Amy's pregnancy, noting that by that point in the hot, dry summer "that baby was about the only thing growing" (116). Despite Amy's infidelity, knowledge

of Amy's pregnancy and Amy's signaled loyalty to Billy revitalizes their relationship and leads to a confrontation between Billy and Holland—a confrontation that ends in Billy's fatal shooting of Holland. He then describes in detail the painstaking and ingenious disposal of Holland's body and subsequent investigation led by Sheriff Alexander. Billy's guilt over Holland's death remains in the background of this chapter, which concludes with Isaac's birth and Billy's severe illness, and then his slow recovery.

Isaac's narration moves quickly through the early years of his life and features Mrs. Winchester prominently. While he only knows her as his neighbor for much of the section, he is aware that she has a keen interest in his upbringing and would frequently engage Isaac in conversation. Throughout his life Isaac is aware of the impending damming of the rivers that would flood his valley home; the main action of this section occurs after the dam's completion, a month after the Holcombes left their farm for life in a mill town, and one mere day before the family's forced permanent exile. Left by his parents to retrieve the remaining cabbage crop from increasingly soggy fields, Isaac is summoned by Sheriff Alexander to speak with Mrs. Winchester one last time. Mrs. Winchester, who refused to leave her home until she spoke with Isaac, revealed to him his patrimony before setting her house on fire, engulfing herself in flames. Her revelation leads Isaac, Billy, and Amy to return one the following day to their low-lying land; accompanied by Alexander, the foursome must cross the rising, surging waters of Horsepasture River to retrieve Holland's remains. Billy is finally relieved of the burden of guilt as he tries to surrender to Alexander; the sheriff, however, tells him

that the statute of limitations has passed and advises him to surrender Holland's earthy remains to the rising river. In returning to their truck to flee the valley one last time, both Amy and Billy (who cannot swim) drown in the deadly water. Isaac and Alexander survive to leave Jocassee forever.

The concluding narration is provided by Deputy Bobby Murphree, who has been summoned by Duke Power to claim a coffin that has risen from the floor of the former valley. He is immediately aware of whose coffin it is upon viewing the wood: When Widow Glendower died, she was buried in a cedar coffin that would not rot in water, thus ensuring her remains would never escape. Bobby empties the contents of the coffin into the lake and permanently seals the coffin. While floating above what he describes as an excellent fishing place, he looks down on what had been the Holcombe's farm and, hauntingly, imagines someone walking off the porch and looking up. The novel ends with his vow to never return to Lake Jocassee, noting that this "wasn't no place for people who had a home. This was a place for the lost" (214).

Mirroring the sectioned structure of *One Foot in Eden*, *Raising the Dead* is a collection, also in five sections, that reflects Rash's stated goal that the "poems, stories, and novels . . . inform and enrich one another" (Shurbutt and Hoffman). Unlike *One Foot*, in *Raising the Dead* Rash does not mask the identity of Duke Power, but instead refers to it by its actual name. This decision may be due in part to the resonance of the real name: A "Duke" is an aristocrat, a powerful social figure. This collection itself realizes its own title, evoking the memory of the dead throughout, while individual poems work through a literal movement of graves to symbolically

represent the deceased. As Rash does with the “Coda” of *Serena* and the first chapters of Parts 1 and 2 of *Saints at the River*—and as Chappell does with the opening and concluding chapters of *I Am One of You Forever*—the title and content of the last poem of each section is italicized. This emphasis creates an otherworldly and surreal effect, almost as if the reader is reading the poems underwater.²²

Raising the Dead is marked by a somber, elegiac tone. Sections I and V, which are especially relevant to this discussion, focus on the creation of Lake Jocassee by Duke Power in 1974. The collection opens, tellingly, with “Last Service,” in which a congregation gathers at its church while the waters that would be Lake Jocassee rise. Here Rash describes the powerful action of cranes and bulldozers that would unearth graves, relocating deceased parishioners while their still-alive counterparts

lit
 the church with candles and sang
 from memory deep as water
 old hymns of resurrection. (lines 17-19)

This poem mirrors “*The Men Who Raise the Dead*,” the final poem of Section V, which echoes Billy Holcombe’s thoughts as he watches the bulldozers dig up graves on the valley floor in *One Foot*. Encased between these poems is Section II, in which Rash dives into his family history of generations past, exploring, for example, nineteenth century floods in Watauga County and the tragic Shelton Laurel massacre of the Civil War: In subsequent poems of Sections III and IV Rash depicts his childhood in and around water with his cousin (Jeffrey Charles Critcher, to whom the collection is

²² This technique is common throughout modern and postmodern literature, and has been adopted by such prominent writers as Yeats and Faulkner.

dedicated), then focuses with on the painful and untimely passing of the same cousin.

The title and subject matter of the collection are made more evident when paired with the stunningly beautiful (and deceptively peaceful) cover photo of a lone fisherman silhouetted against the sunset on Lake Jocassee, taken by Bill Barley. The tranquility of the cover is immediately challenged by a stark black and white photo of the Jocassee Dam on the cover page—provided courtesy of Duke Power. Like *One Foot*, this collection is reminiscent of diving below the surface to explore and chart aqueous depths. The poems, then, serve as an account of what such a dive discovered, a reading encouraged by the lines from Shakespeare’s *Henry IV, Part One* that serve as a prologue:

Glendower:

I can call spirits from the vasty deep.

Hotspur:

Why, so can I, so can any man.

But will they come when you do call for them?

Read “more like a quilt than mere pieces of different-angled cloth on completely different designs” (Shurbutt and Hoffman), *One Foot in Eden* and *Raising the Dead* blur the distinction between past and present, dead and alive, submerged and surface. Read in coordination with the other, each work demonstrates Silas House’s claim that regardless of genre, the writing of Ron Rash “takes us to a place where the living and the dead coexist, a place where there is a thin line between the past and

the present. Not only that, but he also creates a world in which times overlap and occasionally interrupt one another” (21).

Rash is keenly aware of the importance of history, writing that when “novelists write historical fiction, they aspire to give the chaos of history coherence, for the nature of stories is to make events understandable” (“The Facts of Historical Fiction”). As such, the history of the Jocassee Valley is a significant subject within both *One Foot in Eden* and *Raising the Dead*. Mindy Beth Miller agrees that the “pages of the book act as a historical record, a kind of storehouse that can be revisited time and again” (205). The long history of the once-verdant valley begins with the Cherokee legend of the Princess Jocassee, in love with Nagoochee, a hunter from a neighboring warring faction; when Jocassee’s brother slayed Nagoochee, Jocassee, in her grief, walked across the waters of the Whitewater River to meet her lover’s ghost. Because of this lore, Jocassee means, as Rash stated, a “place for the lost” (*One Foot* 214). This legend predates the Cherokee War of 1760-61, a series of violent expeditions by British forces into southern Cherokee lands, after which the Cherokee people successfully negotiated a “permanent boundary line separating Indian lands from white settlers” (Williams 58). Of course, history tells us that this “permanent” line was very much temporary, and the Revolutionary War would see successful military campaigns against the Cherokees of southern Appalachia, eventually resulting in their inhumane removal in 1840.

Though its original inhabitants were removed, in the nineteenth century the valley itself supported settlers and attracted attention for its charming appeal.

Thomas Addison Richards wrote in 1853 that “in South Carolina, . . . there is the fair

valley of Jocassee, dissected by the babbling waters of the sparkling Keowee; the very spot to ream in on a summer-morn: or, in moonlight-hours to dance with the woodland elf and the merry fay!" (728). Ironically, this very source also lamented the dearth of lakes in the region, stating that the natural valleys "take the place of the lakes in the North, and go far to compensate for the absence of that charming feature; the want of which, however, the tourist will sometimes feel in his Southern rambles" (727).

The area's remote location led to its inhabitants of European descent to continue the agricultural tradition well into the twentieth century: Importantly, in *Saints* Rash details the day before the Holcomb family is to leave permanently. Jacob Holcomb is at the family farm, harvesting the remaining cabbage crop before the field becomes lake floor. Perhaps it is this lack of urban development in addition to the geography that attracted the attention of energy giant Duke Power.

Duke Power's inception is credited to three "visionaries" who "founded the company to spur economic revival of the Carolina countryside" ("Our History"). Significantly, their first plant, the Catawba Hydro Station, provided energy to Victoria Cotton Mills; there is some irony in the electricity magnate's later building dams, dislocating Appalachian inhabitants from their land, to provide energy to the very mills where they would find employment. The years following World War II were profitable ones, and this "era was a true boom time for energy-related industries" ("Our History"). Duke Power became "one of the earliest adopters of nuclear power technology in the United States" (Murray) with the Keowee-Toxaway Project, which was begun in 1965, despite heavy competition from the Federal

government's proposed dams. According to Robert F. Durden, Duke Power had been planning for a project of this magnitude, having formed the South Carolina Land and Timber Company in 1963, a subsidiary that quickly bought a parcel of 31,113 acres before the public announcement of the proposed dams and power stations (131).²³ The name of this company may have inspired Rash's fictionalized name for Duke Power in *Saints*. The Project enjoyed strong political support in South Carolina: Durden quotes Congressman William Jennings Bryan Dorn as celebrating the Keowee-Toxaway Project as the "greatest single industrial announcement in the history of South Carolina . . . and industry the magnitude of which is fantastic and almost incomprehensible" (134).

The proposed project included what many would call environmental benefits to the surrounding communities. Duke Power purchased more than 100,000 acres in the surrounding area to protect the watersheds that flow into the proposed reservoirs. The need to safeguard these watersheds prompted Duke Power to maintain "scientific forest management" that would "continue to provide timber for local mills and jobs for people working in forest industries" (Durden 135). It also allowed the South Carolina Wildlife Resources Department to create the Horsepasture Game Management Area by leasing 68,000 acres, and master plans included free public access areas on Lake Keowee and Lake Jocassee (Durden 136).

The result of the Jocassee Dam and Hydro Station is what is known today as Lake Jocassee, completed and dedicated in 1973. The dam is "385 feet high and

²³ Interestingly, Durden notes that the "average cost was \$166.44 per acre. In 1965, Duke found it necessary to publicly announce the project, and the additional 21,526 acres that had to be purchased cost an average of \$449.10 per acre. In other words, after the public announcement the price of the land almost tripled" (131).

1750 feet long.” Known as one of the deepest lakes in the system of lakes created by Duke Power, when full it reaches a depth of 1,110 feet (“Lake Jocassee”). As the company’s first nuclear facility, it was heralded for coming in under budget and earning the company its first of three Edison Awards for

its outstanding engineering accomplishments in the integrated hydro-thermal development of the Keowee-Toxaway Project, fully utilizing the area and its natural resources for electric generation and at the same time protecting and enhancing the environment of the Keowee Valley. (qtd. in Durden 141)

The American Society of Civil Engineers named the Project the nation’s outstanding achievement in civil engineering.

The narrative of capitalist progress and advancement contrasts sharply with the interests of valley residents; indeed, the building of Jocassee Dam to create Lake Jocassee easily supports a depiction of Duke Power as a neo-colonizing force within the Carolinas. The end result of providing reliable energy to the region may be altruistic, but the company’s methods had environmentally destructive and culturally subordinating effects. In a discussion of megadams especially pertinent to any conversation regarding reservoir building in the Southeast, Rob Nixon notes that the “production of ghosted communities who haunt the visible nation has been essential for maintaining the dominant narratives of national development, a process that has intensified during the era of neoliberal globalization” (151). Sheriff Alexander marks the similarity when he observes, “Reservoir, reservation, the two words sounded so alike. In a dictionary they would be on the same page” (Rash, *One*

Foot 23). Indeed, according to Alexia Jones Helsley, the “dominant narrative of national development” argues poetically, albeit patriarchally, that

Man dammed the rivers of the Carolinas to produce electricity, reduce flooding, and create reservoirs. The lakes that flooded ancient burial grounds, Revolutionary battle sites, colonial homestead, villages, mills, and churches bring recreation, waterfront living and tourism to the land-bound reaches of the Carolinas. In exercising his dominion over the earth, man forever changed the landscape of the Carolinas.

Damming the rivers has effects that extend beyond the loss of historical sites—though that loss alone is immeasurable. The dominant narrative—represented here by the historical narratives of Duke Power, Durden, and Helsley—does not acknowledge the impact these dams had on local communities. Tellingly, Durden’s history of Duke Power does not include any mention of the relocation of Jocassee Valley inhabitants.

Rash rarely allows his narrators to mention “Carolina” Power by name in *One Foot*. Early in his section Sheriff Alexander identifies land holdings of the energy giant and notes that residents “up here wouldn’t like it worth a damn to be run off their land, but when the time came there would be nothing they could do about it” (11). Billy later recalls the “the power company didn’t allow hunting or logging so there wouldn’t be many folks poking around these woods” (132), and Isaac later recalls a conversation between his father and a Duke Power employee (167). Despite this general lack of physical presence, the coming inundation looms on every page of the novel, starting with Alexander’s musings that the

Descendants of settlers from Scotland and Wales and Ireland and England—people poor and desperate enough to risk their lives to take that land, as the Cherokees had once taken it from other tribes—would soon vanish from Jocassee as well. Fifteen years, twenty at most, and it'll be all water, at least that was what the people who would know had told me. Reservoir, reservation, the two words sounded so alike. In a dictionary they would be on the same page.

(23)

Alexander's musings reflect Rash's awareness of settler colonies within Appalachia, and the close connection between "reservoir" and "reservation" draws the plight of these settler colonies into alignment with the displaced Cherokee people who originally inhabited the area.

In succinct "Notes" that follow the final section of *Raising the Dead*, Rash provides a brief history of the Jocassee Valley that contrasts sharply with the narrative provided by Duke Power, Durden, and Helsley. He writes:

Despite fervent opposition by the valley's inhabitants, Duke Power Company built a dam to create Jocassee Reservoir. Both the living and the dead were evicted, for hundreds of graves were dug up and their contents reburied in cemeteries outside the valley. The reservoir reached full water capacity in 1974. In Cherokee *Jocassee* means 'place of the lost.' (75)

Rash's words demonstrate the loss of both place and history that Nixon addresses:

When refugees are severed from environments that have provided ancestral sustenance they find themselves stranded not just in place but in time as well. Their improvised lives in makeshift camps are lives of temporal impoverishment. When a megadam obliterates a flood plain whose ebb and flow has shaped the agricultural fishing, fruit, and nut harvesting—and hence nutritional—rhythms of a community, it also drowns the past. (162)

While a postcolonial approach to *One Foot in Eden* and *Raising the Dead* demonstrates the culturally destructive effect of Jocassee Dam, an ecocritical reading highlights the role that water plays in shaping each work. Rivers frequently dominate the writing of Appalachia, often assuming a destructive, dominating, and at times conflicting role. Because rivers and other elements of the greater Appalachian bioregion are regularly reflected in its literature, the majority of this genre can also be comfortably situated under the heading of “environmental writing.” This critique holds that the natural world exists outside of humanity and independent of texts, positioning ecocriticism as an explicitly activist form of critique. In its early days, ecocriticism concerned itself primarily with unmistakably environmental writing—which Lawrence Buell identifies in *The Environmental Imagination* as writing that ties human history to natural history, that represents nature as a legitimate interest, that addresses humans’ accountability to the environment, and that views the environment as changing process rather than static product (1995). *One Foot in Eden* and *Raising the Dead* exemplify these qualities, as I discuss later in this chapter.

Though Ron Rash's novels are not typically included in the canon of works that are conventionally called "environmental literature," *One Foot in Eden* and *Raising the Dead*, both accounts of historic environmental events, easily fall into this category. Rash addresses the role that the environment plays in his works, telling Richard Birnbaum that he is "certainly concerned with environmental issues" and, in a roundtable discussion at Emory and Henry College, elaborated on that idea: "I'm very interested in how landscape affects the way we perceive reality and perceive ourselves" ("Nature, Place" 21). *One Foot* and *Raising the Dead*, which so eloquently reflect both the natural world of Appalachia and its people with authenticity and compassion, provide depictions of water ripe for ecocritical analysis. An ecocritical reading of these works proves that they function well on at least two levels: They depict arguments for and against environmental activism and offer rich natural metaphors for readers' consideration. More specifically, readers are well served to acknowledge the significant role that water plays on both of these levels. *One Foot* and *Raising* reflect Rash's acknowledgement to Joyce Compton Brown that water is significant in his life in an article titled "The Power of Blood-Memory: A Conversation":

Just being a southern Baptist, being immersed in water literally when I was baptized, that religious symbolism of water represents for Christians both death and resurrection. For me it's a very potent symbol, one I almost don't want to analyze too much, but I do know that water is something I'm obviously obsessed with, particularly in reservoirs, how that water can annihilate any human presence. (27)

The rivers of both works influence characters and communities differently, and, through these characters and communities, Rash invites readers to question not only the ecological significance of rivers, but the ethical and moral dilemmas that they embody.²⁴

The idea of rivers as a boundary invites Mary Louise Pratt's definition of contact zones, which is significant to this discussion of *One Foot in Eden* and *Raising the Dead*. Pratt defines contact zones as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (34). The significant role of the river in the lives of the inhabitants of the Jocassee Valley justify its consideration as one such contact zone, understanding that by manipulating its flow, Duke Power is exerting its considerable power against local citizens.

As a contact zone, then, the Horsepasture River of *One Foot in Eden* functions metaphorically as a boundary that characters must explore and navigate, pitting local farmers against the faceless corporation that will dam the downstream confluence of the Horsepasture, Toxaway, Thompson, and Whitewater Rivers and flood their valley in the name of progress. These characters know that the flooding of the valley will obliterate their way of life, their physical legacy, and many irreplaceable elements of the natural world (such as the rare Oconee Bell flower). But Rash is not content to write about the rising waters from a strictly environmental perspective. Perhaps more significantly, this river also represents a

²⁴ On a more capricious note, Rash joked in an interview that "one friend has said every time one of my characters gets near the water, he's a goner" (Fox).

metaphorical boundary. Geographically speaking, the river provides a stark physical boundary between life and death. On one side of the Horsepasture River, an Appalachian River Styx, live the Holcombes and their farm, site of procreation and birth. On the other side is the land owned by Duke Power, a symbolic entity that will facilitate the death of the valley. The hiding place for Holland Winchester's body is also on Duke Power's side of the river. Though murdered on the Holcombes' land, his body could not rest there; rather than leave Holland's body on the same side of the river as the new life represented by Isaac's birth, Billy Holcombe instead uses the river almost as a protective barrier and moves Holland's body to the side of the river where all life is doomed. Indeed, almost everyone who visits the far side of the river is doomed as well: Sam, Billy's horse, does not return from carrying Holland's body across the river; the Widow Glendower (whom Billy sees on the banks of the river as he hikes to conceal Holland's remains) dies alone; and Billy himself eventually drowns in the swelling and powerful water. The only characters who survive are Isaac and Sheriff Alexander, who is conversely given a second chance at fatherhood, having barely survived his own encounter with the flooding river.

The river also provides a demarcation between farmers who rely on nature to support their existence and the impersonal corporations that destroy nature in the name of profit. These farmers must maintain a balance between supporting themselves and exploiting their resources. Implicit in any comparison of the farmer with the vast corporation is a stark distinction of social classes, what can be characterized as an often-impoverished lifestyle versus a progressive,

technologically aggressive way of life. In this way, the threat of the rising water functions as a weapon wielded by the powerful against the marginalized farmer. Rash highlights this contrast as social stratification, emphasized when Sheriff Alexander notes that the Holcombes didn't have electricity:

I smelled the wood smoke as I stepped inside and remembered I hadn't seen a gap in the trees for a power line. . . . That was enough to know they were poor in a way none of my people had been since the Depression. They got water from a well, and they still used an outhouse. (*One Foot* 27)

The poverty of the Holcombes is made clear through the divisive boundary of the river, which separates their land and social station, ironically enough, from the property and wealth of Duke Power. The Holcombes cannot afford to bring the services of this corporation to their side of the river.

The idea that these characters exist in a contact zone is clearly reinforced by the novel's title.²⁵ As the Biblical reference insinuates, Billy and Amy exist in a state of looming exile, spending the majority of the text preparing to leave their home and land. The novel's prologue by Scottish poet Edwin Muir, from which the title is taken, reinforces the intensity of the boundary that Billy and Amy negotiate:

*One foot in Eden still, I stand
And look across the other land.
The world's great day is growing late,
Yet strange these fields that we have planted,*

²⁵ The title is also a nod to the twentieth-century novelist perhaps best known for writing about the poor: John Steinbeck situated *East of Eden* in the Salinas Valley, California.

So long with crops of love and hate.

For the entirety of the novel the Holcombs live with the knowledge that they will be removed from what they consider paradise, the land they know.

The idea of the river as a strict boundary does not hold up throughout the novel, however, and so readers are reminded of the folly of relying upon consistency from the natural world. Various key characters react differently to the slowly rising waters: Billy and Amy eventually move to town and struggle to acclimate themselves to their new life, while a teenage Isaac explains that “I’d grown up knowing there was no future here, that Jocassee would sooner or later be covered in water, so I’d never let myself get attached to it the way Momma and Daddy had” (*One Foot* 168-69). In the final day before the valley is entirely submerged by Duke Power, the banks of the river swell and its borders blur: It is no longer a natural boundary, but as the water is increasingly manipulated from its original course, it becomes a symbol of death. An elderly Mrs. Winchester refuses to leave her homestead, and by extension, her son Holland; as a result, the arson and suicide that she commits are ironically quelled by the rising waters as the river completes its metamorphosis into a lake.

Mrs. Winchester, like Holland before her, and Billy and Amy Holcombe to follow, cannot leave the land, and so the flood sets off a sequence of events that, like the irreversible destruction of the river itself, is inevitable. Isaac discovers his true patrimony, and upon realizing the extent of Isaac’s discovery, Billy and Amy concede to gather Holland’s remains before the valley is entirely flooded. The rising power of the river, though, swelling its banks and claiming the valley floor with unnatural

strength, causes the drowning of Billy and Amy. Their deaths in the river suggest that though they moved to town and Billy procured a job at the local mill, they could never survive away from their land; indeed, they could never live anywhere but on the floor of the valley, on the side of the river reserved for life and growth. As the river grows into a lake, it also becomes the final resting place of the Widow Glendower. Finally, the water provides a window for Bobby, the deputy, to peer into the past as it is preserved on the lake floor. Bobby floats above the Holcombes' farm, now their eternal resting place, and notes:

The front door of the house was open and I couldn't shake the feeling that someone might step onto the porch at any second and look up at me the same way that I might look up at a plane—someone who didn't even know they was dead and buried under a lake. (*One Foot* 213-14)

Raising the Dead reflects Rash's belief that "landscape is destiny" (Zacharias), a simple, definite statement that echoes DeLoughrey and Handley's explanation of place as having

infinite meaning and morphologies: It might be defined geographically, in terms of the expansion of empire; environmentally, in terms of wilderness or urban settings; genealogically, in linking communal ancestry to land; as well as phenomenologically, connecting body to place.

Indeed, this collection of poetry reflects each of these four potential definitions. The changing landscape of Jocassee represented within this collection, combined with the voices that Rash includes, demonstrates the implicit interconnectivity of this

culture and the surrounding geography. *Raising* simultaneously supports Buell's claim that the "subject of a text's representation of its environmental ground *matters*—matters aesthetically, conceptually, ideologically. Language never replicates extratextual landscapes, but it can be bent toward or away from them" (*Future* 33).

Read as a cohesive work, *Raising the Dead* reinforces the connection between environmental events and neo-colonizing efforts. While nature would return to the reservoir, readers must be aware that it is a manipulation of nature—and its return is markedly more anthropocentric than biocentric. Val Plumwood notes that an

anthropocentric culture rarely sees nature and animals as individual centres of striving or needs, doing their best in their conditions of life. Instead, nature is conceived in terms of interchangeable and replaceable units (as "resources"), rather than as infinitely diverse and always in excess of knowledge and classification. ("Feminism" 55)

To best understand the ramifications of this manipulation, we must consider Buell's three-part definition of place: The "concept of place gestures in at least three directions at once: toward environmental materiality, toward social perception or construction, and toward individual affect or bond" (*Future* 63). By stripping Jocassee Valley of its wealth of resources and inhabitants and planning to submerge it permanently under water, Duke Power has divorced the place from its history, thus reinforcing its status as neo-colonizing force. As DeLoughrey and Handley note, the "decoupling of nature and history has helped to mystify colonialism's histories of forced migration, suffering, and human violence." *Raising the Dead*

subtly identifies the presence of neo-colonizing entities behind the drowning of the valley and, through a focus on nature, strives to preserve the valley and record the effects of its demise.

Silas House notes that in “Rash’s writing the dead represent the past while the living represent the present—or even the future. Appalachia is a place where these two forces—the past and the present—are constantly colliding” (21). These representations of past and present, dead and alive, are a constant theme in *Raising*. As Newt Smith notes, this collection is a “highly structured book with an underlying story of loss, premature death, submerged memory, and the burial by water of a valley of homesteads and graves” (19). In a similar fashion to *One Foot*, much of Section I of *Raising the Dead* invokes an image of a river or water as a boundary that clearly delineates a distinction between life and death. The opening poem of both section and collection, “Last Service,” describes the final worship services at a church quickly being submerged in the growing Lake Jocassee. The congregation had already lost their farms to the deepening water, and by the final Sunday

nothing but that brief island
left of their world as they lit
the church with candles and sang
from memory deep as water
old hymns of resurrection
before leaving that high ground
where the dead had once risen. (lines 15-21)

That the congregants chose to sing “old hymns of resurrection” is significant to Rash’s work; *Raising the Dead* itself may be considered one such hymn, reviving a culture that thrived in a valley that is now the floor of a lake. Within the poem, though, water physically separates the farmers’ present from their past lives and divides the inhabitants into those living—those who “still congregated there, / wading then crossing in boats” (lines 11-12)—and those deceased, whose corpses were exhumed and moved to another graveyard. Importantly, Rash identifies with sharp insight both the environmental and cultural impact of the dam, noting the “quick-dying streams” and “soon obsolete bridges” (lines 9, 10).

“Under Jocassee” continues the theme of water separating life and death with a narrator who speaks directly to readers, intimately involving them in the fictional drama of *One Foot* and the historical spectacle of the creation of Lake Jocassee.

Directing readers to rent a boat and

shadow

Jocassee’s western shoreline

until you reach the cove

that was Horsepasture River (lines 4-7),

the narrator commands them to “cut the motor and drift / back sixty years and remember / a woman who lived in that house,” (lines 17-19) before invoking the now-familiar image of the same woman, looking up. House writes that in this poem,

we see the collision of two times: the image of a woman of Old

Appalachia going through her hard working day in a natural setting is

paralleled to a more leisurely day spent fishing on a man-made lake in

New Appalachia. We also feel the sense of death always being present, floating above us. (21)

Rash imbues nature with a prophetic power in “Shee-Show.” This brief poem provides a concise history of the scientific naming by Michaux of the Oconee Bell flower, a flower whose loss of habitat he laments in *One Foot*. In “Shee-Show” Rash alludes to the role that binomial taxonomy has played historically in contributing to colonizing efforts. As DeLoughrey and Handley note, “new taxonomies of flora and fauna instituted a hierarchy of human species through this episteme of difference, contributing biologically determinist discourses of race, gender, and nature.” Without dwelling on the colonial implications that this name represents, Rash continues to state that the Latin given name is rarely used by the white settlers who generally preferred to “let place and shape / inspire a prettier name” (lines 4-5). He continues to invoke the colonizing experience in writing that the Cherokee name is “a rich feel of syllables / run off the tongue, merging two / cultures for once without blood” (lines 6-8). Perhaps the poet transfers knowledge of the “coming water” (line 14) to the plant because of the violent etymology inherent in both Latin and Cherokee names.

The concluding section of *Raising the Dead* presents readers with diverse depictions of nature; however, the theme behind each of them is the manipulation of nature for personal gain. Also, Rash uses nature to lament the passage of time as well as the deleterious effects that human nature has imposed on its environment. “Carolina Parakeets” recalls the species of bird that were “once plentiful enough / to pulse an acre field, green / a blue sky” (lines 1-3). The poet does not divulge what

might have hunted these birds, though the implication is that their extinction is not due to natural prey but rather to the growing human population of the region. This poem harkens back to 1860, to the presumed last sighting of the birds. However, the theme of the poem revolves around the mountains as a safe harbor for such exotic fowl. Before the birds were “forever lost” (line 5), they were last seen in the mountains, when a farmer might “look up from new-broken land / and glimpse that bright vanishing” (lines 9-10). Rash suggests here that the white settlers who populated the area after the removal of the Cherokee witnessed (and likely caused) the demise of natural species.

The majority of poems in this section, though, focus on the rising water. In a scene reminiscent of Mrs. Winchester’s conflagration, a farmer in “A Homestead on the Horsepasture” watches helplessly the rising water (a scene that echoes “The Overspill” of Chappell’s *I Am One of You Forever* and “Dead Soldiers” in *Midquest*). He then “soaked / house and barn with kerosene” (lines 8-9) and bitterly stands by as his house burns in order to leave only what he’d chiseled from river rock “for the water to reclaim” (line 15). “Bottomland” presents the image of scarecrows in cropless, abandoned fields; the water rises to meet them, giving the impression that they “stalked / those vanished fields, raised arms spread / like arms of the forsaken” under the autumn moon (lines 10-12). In “Tremor” the pragmatic outsider (Duke Power) is positioned against the intuitive local when “cups . . . shiver in the cupboards / cows . . . pause” (lines 2-3).

One of the final poems in the collection is “The Day the Gates Closed,” in which Rash depicts the absence of human and nonhuman nature from the valley:

We lose so much in this life.
Shouldn't some things stay, she said,
 but it was already gone,
 no human sound, the poplars
 and oaks cut down so even
 the wind had nothing to rub
 a whisper from, just silence
 rising over the valley
 deep and wide as a glacier. (lines 1-9)

Though the female speaker is not identified, the woman has suffered loss beyond the destruction she is surveying in the valley. Rash incorporates elements of deep ecology, which addresses almost exclusively nonhuman nature and attempts to place it at the center of concern, when he references the prehistoric glaciers that defined such geography and would eventually become a lake. This short poem represents a vacuum: The valley is vacant of all inhabitants, all forms of nature, and all sounds. In preparing the valley for the imminent flood, Duke Power has effectively annihilated each of the three elements of Buell's definition of place: "The Day the Gates Closed" represents a dearth of "environmental materiality," a destruction of "social perception or construction," and loss of "individual affect or bond."

One Foot in Eden presents readers with a fictional account of these events that expounds upon and complicates the flooding of the valley. That Rash chose to divide *One Foot* into five distinct sections is significant: In doing so, he gives equal

weight to each of the narrators represented here. Additionally, the five sections offer readers a subtle approximation of the five-act tragedy: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and dénouement. The order of voices is significant, as are the characters he designates as narrators. Equally important are the voices that Rash allows other narrators to portray: Widow Glendower, Mrs. Winchester, and Holland himself. A careful examination of both the order of and narrators within each section reveals much about Rash's intentions for *One Foot* as well as intricate connections with relevant poems from *Raising the Dead*.

In beginning his novel with Sheriff Alexander's narration, Rash elected to open with a voice that offers his audience a measure of objectivity. Because he knows the geography intimately yet hadn't returned to Jocassee recently, Alexander is keenly observant of his route as he returns to Jocassee to investigate Holland's disappearance; as such, readers journey with him as with a tour guide, noticing items of importance along the winding blacktop of the mountain road much as he does. An observation that Rash "speaks in terms of following not maps but the land" (Higgins) might directly apply to Alexander during this journey. His is a trusted voice that informs readers that "like almost everything else up here, the road was little different than it had been in the 1860s" (11). Alexander's objectivity and careful description benefit both Appalachian and non-Appalachian readers: A "reader unfamiliar with the region—a region that boasts a culture outside the mainstream culture—often needs some clarification or a little extra information about details specific to Appalachia" (M. Miller 203). Having established himself as an observant and relatively impartial narrator lends credence and ominousness to

his next statement: “But change was coming, a change big enough to swallow this whole valley” (11); this statement, and others like it, “let the reader truly feel a sense of loss and change” (M. Miller 203).

Rash echoes Alexander’s journey to Jocassee in “Coke Box” from *Raising the Dead*. This poem provides readers with directions, instructing them to

follow a road
rarely traveled anymore,
the blacktop pocked with pot holes,
scrub oak gnawing the shoulders,
left like a dry riverbed
after the four-lane was built. (lines 1-6)

As a former inhabitant of Jocassee, Alexander is quite familiar with the culture of the community; for readers, he appears to straddle the chasm between mountaineer and town dweller successfully. However, as his section continues, Alexander reveals himself as something of an outsider to both his past in Jocassee and his present life in Seneca, and readers are soon aware that Alexander is conflicted between these diverse periods in his life. In this way, Sheriff Alexander embodies Pratt’s definition of a contact zone. As children, Will and his brother Travis shared “something deep inside us—the way we knew what each other was feeling or thinking, the way we didn’t argue and fight like most brothers” (19). However, Will’s decisions to leave the community of Jocassee to play football at Clemson University, eventually marry Janice Griffen (daughter of Seneca’s prominent physician) and then enlist in the Marines for a tour in Guadalcanal leads

to his refutation of the family's traditional agrarian lifestyle and strikes a lasting blow to his relationship with his brother. Though his father does not directly confront Will as Travis did, Will's relationship with both father and brother suffers.

Will's marriage to Janice is also rife with failed expectations. Having suffered a debilitating miscarriage early in their relationship, Janice was rendered unable to bear children, a condition that weakened their marriage. Alexander indicates to readers that he had enlisted in the Marines in 1941, telling his wife that he'd "end up getting drafted anyhow," in an effort to "get away from her, away from a life that had been something so different from what had seemed promised, away from my dead-end job in a cotton mill, away from that miscarriage and a marriage that we both knew was a failure" (49). He returned to Seneca and Janice out of obligation and a belief that "our lost child had bonded us in ways that outlasted even love" (50)—a belief also held by Rash's Serena of her bond with Pemberton following her miscarriage. The gulf between Janice and Will is clearly evident, not only in their terse communication but in a myriad of clues provided by Rash. Geography is not the only difference in their choice of reading materials, for example: While Janice is reading *History of Charleston*, a town known historically for its genteel and proper Southern code of conduct, Will is reading "a good book on the Cherokee Indians" (3) and later relishes the copy of *Bartram's Travels* procured for him from Seneca's library.²⁶ That text, published in 1791, details William Bartram's journey through the Cherokee-inhabited southern Appalachia of the late eighteenth century—a culture inarguably distinct from the codified proper South on display in Charleston.

²⁶ Bartram, a Quaker, is noteworthy not only for his travels, but also for his peaceful interactions with the Cherokee people—a feat that stands in stark contrast with their later devastation by Andrew Jackson.

House confirms that this gulf between individuals is indicative of a cultural schism, and Alexander's marriage to Janice has suffered because of "her insistence that he leave behind the heritage of his rearing in the mountains" (22).

This contrast in reading material represents a cultural dichotomy within their marriage—as Zackary Vernon notes, their choices reflect "not only their interest in southern history but also their different conceptions of the South and southern culture" (20). Will's and Janice's very different backgrounds are evident during their first date, when, during high school, Janice invited Will to her family's home for dinner. Their first recorded exchange of dialogue demonstrates not only Janice's tutelage of Will, but also her inclination to obliterate evidence of what she would call his "hillbilly" heritage. As Will recalls, "I picked up my knife, but two forks lay to the left of my plate. I hesitated. 'This one,' Janice had said, handing me the larger fork of the two" (20).

While a simple recollection, this memory supports Janice's spurning of Will's dialect, an attitude evident during a conversation between Will and Deputy Bobby Murphree: "Janice sat at the kitchen table, and she flinched when I said 'look-see.' Hillbilly talk, Janice called such words, but it was the way most folks still spoke in Oconee County" (7). Rash addressed the issue of language and vocabulary in his writing during an interview with Jeff Biggers. He stated that he

emphasized distinctly Appalachian words, and most of all a cadence true to the Appalachian speech I heard while growing up. I wanted to give my reader the sense of 'otherness' of Appalachian speech without

allowing readers to lapse into stereotyped assumptions about the language of the characters who spoke it. (15)

Both Janice and Will appear immobile: Janice, a slave to society, wears a hat and hose to luncheons despite the smothering heat of what other characters call the “dog days” and repeatedly refuses Alexander’s physical attempts at intimacy—even responding to his proffered parting kiss with a curt “ ‘Don’t,’ she said. ‘You’ll smear my lipstick’ ” (8). Despite this coldness and lack of personal connection with Will, who readers come to know and trust, Janice is a character who garners sympathy. When, at a Christmas party, a town councilman claimed “ ‘Thank God she and the sheriff don’t have any children. Can you imagine what kind of mother she’d be?’ ” (41), Will refrains from “grabbing the councilman by the collar” (41) but mentally defends his wife, inherently understanding that neither of them is to blame for the loveless marriage they are in.

Though he left Jocassee to attend Clemson University on a football scholarship, Alexander never attained his diploma: Injured beyond salvation during an otherwise ordinary practice session, he lost his football scholarship and was unable to continue his coursework. That he did not complete his degree is important: While he is clearly educated, the fact of his education does not alienate him from the residents of Jocassee—most of whom would not be able to pursue higher education. Indeed, his work experience in the cotton mill after the military did not require a college degree, but provided him with the knowledge that when the Holcombes moved to Seneca following the flooding of their land, Billy’s “work would be the same thing day after day, week after week, the mill hot and humid as

dog days all year round. He'd breathe an unending drizzle of lint he'd spend half his nights coughing back up" (56). This unappealing consequence of working in the mill is balanced by the potential to take the buyout option from Duke Power and "buy a house with an indoor toilet and electricity" (56), while acknowledging tasks that would make him "miss being behind a horse and plow" (56).

Despite his incomplete tenure at Clemson University, though, Alexander provides an intelligent commentary for readers, perceptively interpreting events and noteworthy reactions; he even acts as a prophet at times. It is during his narrative that readers are not only aware of the impending flooding of the valley, but the impact that event will have on the Jocassee community—because Alexander notes that "People up here wouldn't like it worth a damn to be run off their land, but when the time came there would be nothing they could do about it" (11), the "descendants of settlers from Scotland and Wales and Ireland and England . . . would soon vanish from Jocassee as well" (23), that there would be a "kind of a justice in what would happen" (23) and "*water can keep things covered up*" (43). Alexander also documents both distant history of the land—evident in his reading list—and family history, as when he recalls that his father had maintained possession of "land that had been in his family for one hundred and eighty years" (39). For Alexander this is important, and he vows to return to his father's farm and "farm this land until Carolina Power ran us all out and drowned these fields and creeks and the river itself" (40), evidencing Rash's belief that "landscape is destiny" (Zacharias).

While Alexander is keen enough to note, upon seeing Amy for the first time, "I wondered right then and there whose child it was" (27), Alexander does not

deduce how Billy disposed of Holland Winchester's body and eventually closes the investigation. This suggests that Alexander, while committed to serving justice to the full extent of the law, had empathized with Billy and was satisfied with the lack of resolution, thinking "*I wish you well, Billy*" before telling him "You got away with it" (57). Perhaps Alexander identifies with Billy's polio-induced impotence based upon his own childless marriage, and understands that, similar to his relationship with Janice, "*sometimes what goes wrong between two people is nobody's fault*" (41). Indeed, Alexander's wisdom is evident in Isaac's narrative when the Holcombe family returns to their quickly flooding farm, determined to retrieve whatever remained of Holland's corpse. Though Billy acknowledges his guilt at that point, eighteen years following Holland's murder, Alexander gently advises Billy to move on. "Let's get out of here, Billy. Whatever's been done has been done. We're too old to change it now. Let the water cover it up" (193). Later, after Alexander, Isaac, Amy, and Billy crossed the raging river and successfully retrieved Holland's remains, he advises Isaac to let the water carry away Holland's bones, saying: "Let the dead bury the dead" (198). Ultimately Alexander's wishes are fulfilled and Isaac relinquishes Holland's remains to the rising waters, though not without losing both Amy and Billy in the flood.

Alexander and Isaac, innocent of the crimes of adultery and murder, survive the flooding of the valley. It is symbolic and not a little ironic that Isaac lives with Alexander and Janice for the duration of the summer, biding his time until he begins college at Clemson. Readers learn in the final section of the text, narrated by Deputy Murphree, that Sheriff Alexander spent much time writing futile petitions and filing

unsuccessful lawsuits to halt the exhumation of the churchyard. Alexander refused to return to Jocassee following Amy's and Billy's deaths.

Amy's narration is second in the novel, and through her voice Rash carefully develops the lone female narration of *One Foot*. In an interview with Joyce Compton Brown, Rash discussed his approach to writing female characters:

I've been surrounded by strong women all my life, so I'm sure that a good bit of what I've seen in the women in my family is reflected in my writing. But ultimately I hope that my female characters are individuals, not types, each with her own complex strengths and weaknesses. ("Power" 31)

Amy's complex strengths and weaknesses are tested and proven throughout her section, which begins in media res by discussing her presumed infertility; she does not directly address her meeting Billy or the growth of their marriage, but rather begins a year into their marriage with their attempts to become pregnant.

Amy's early depictions of her relationship with Billy are loving and affectionate. She refers to their first year of marriage as a learning period and alludes to their struggle to eek out their existence; however, though Sheriff Alexander notes their poverty, she does not directly mention their hardscrabble existence as farmers in the Jocassee Valley, suggesting to readers that the material conveniences of electricity or indoor plumbing are inconsequential to their larger goals of successfully starting and maintaining both a farm and a family.

Amy is eager to get pregnant largely because the small Appalachian community the Holcombs belonged to expected it; indeed, her narrative opens with

the observation that “at first it was just a kind of joke between me and the older women. They’d lay a hand on my belly and say something silly like ‘is there a biscuit in the oven’ or ‘I don’t feel nothing blossoming yet.’ Then we’d all have a laugh” (61). Amy justifies their use of contraceptives for the first year by noting, “we settled in and got easy and comfortable in our marriage, the way a good team of horses learns to work together and help each other out” (61). Her observations of nature begin to parallel her emotional state, and Amy’s statement that they “had a good harvest that fall and got ourselves a little ahead” (61) corresponds to their decision to start a family. Immediately, she is increasingly aware of their unsuccessful attempts to procreate and notes that the “older women still made their comments but they wasn’t as funny now and I suspicioned they wasn’t meant to be” (62). Upon discovering that the infertility was a result of Billy’s polio, the “world seemed dead. The mountains was bald-looking and brown, the trees shucked of their leaves, nothing more than skeletons of what they’d been in the summer” (63).

Amy’s decision to consult the Widow Glendower is born of Ginny’s belief that she has a “learning you don’t get out of books, a knowledge no man has the least notion of” (65). Amy first visited the Widow in January when the natural world was dormant: “snow laid on the path that followed the river upstream, the river getting faster and skinny, beech trees and rocks looming on each side of the trail as the gorge got narrower like a giant book that’s slow getting shut” (67). Interestingly and not surprisingly, the Widow Glendower first directed Amy toward the homeopathic and nature-based recommendation that she brew Billy tea of mandrake root and procreate with him in a fertile field under the full moon. When

following those suggestions proved unsuccessful, Widow Glendower subtly advised Amy to begin an adulterous relationship with Holland Winchester, whose property abuts the Holcombs. This very practical suggestion could only have come from Widow Glendower, who lives outside society's strict structure and expectations.

Before Amy successfully seduces Holland, she absolves herself of future guilt by telling his sleeping form, "Whatever I do is for the both of us, Billy, If there was another way, if there just was. But there ain't" (81). She discovers Holland to be a gentle lover, and does not anticipate his emotional response to their physical congress. On the day of what would become their last sexual encounter, Holland brought Amy his Gold Star and claimed, "I want to marry you I can be a good man. I'll quit my roughhousing. I'll treat you in an everloving way. You got my word on that" (89). Amy initially refuses the token, telling him that "We'll never do this again So don't come round no more" (88). Not surprisingly, her pregnancy mirrors the rebirth and period of growth in nature and becomes evident just as the "last blossoms fell off the dogwoods and cicadas started singing in the trees" (89).

When Holland is made aware of Amy's pregnancy from his mother, he returns to the Holcomb's farm once again, telling Amy "I'm part of you now and you're part of me, There ain't no other way about it and that baby will forever make it so" (90). He again attempts to give Amy his Gold Star, as if her acceptance of the gift will mark her baby's paternity. Amy refuses it once more and "slapped at Holland's hand and the Gold Star clattered against the porch wood" (91). Billy, who had been suspicious of Amy's pregnancy, discovers Holland on the porch and fires a warning shot from the field: "A gunshot came from the field, no louder than the

sound of Holland's hammer that first afternoon but enough to stop Holland, make him step off the porch to meet Billy under the white oak" (91). The ensuing conflict between Billy and Holland ended with Holland's murder, killed with a single bullet by Billy. Importantly, Amy and Billy reconfirm their commitment to one another that night, and Billy signaled his presumed paternity of Amy's infant by making the child a crib.

Amy's pregnancy continues unremarkably, though as the baby gains strength in the womb, Billy becomes more afflicted with pneumonia. By the time of the birth, Billy is confined to another room and Amy does not consult him when she names the infant Isaac. This name is appropriate in consideration of the Biblical Isaac, the only son of Sarah and Abraham. The name means "he laughs," though it is believed the pronoun refers to Abraham's laughing with glee upon discovering his presumed-infertile wife's pregnancy. Indeed, Billy shares this glee, and as he regains his strength in his own parallel to the rebirth of spring in the natural world, he delights in Isaac and raises him as his own biological son.

Notably, Amy's narration is peppered with direct references to the coming deluge and indirect references to water. These references are often in conjunction with sexual encounters. She foreshadows both the flood and their drowning when she and Billy were procreating in the field, noting that they clung to one another like "we was caught in a flood and holding on each other to keep from getting swept away" (74). When she and Billy rejoined after Holland's murder, she describes her body as "nothing but water spreading out into the dark, each ripple taking me farther and farther away from all the burdened me" (96). Lastly, when spring

returned following Isaac's birth as Billy was convalescing, Amy compares her thoughts to deep, hidden river currents: "they would rise to the surface ever so often just to let me know they was still there" (111).

Billy's narrative is the third of *One Foot*; as the novel's midpoint and centerpiece, it encapsulates the moral and physical depths sounded by the novel. Billy's vocation as a farmer is clearly evident throughout his tale; from his opening observation that "when deep summer comes and the Dog Star raises with the morning sun, the land can scab up and a man watch his spring crop wrinkle brown like something on fire" (115) to his claim that "polio had gelded me" (122), Billy's language and thoughts are dominated by agricultural images. Though Billy walks with a limp and considers himself handicapped, he is an intelligent narrator, and his quick wit in hiding Holland's body was possible in part due to his vast knowledge of the natural world. Despite this knowledge, though, Billy believes in superstitious signs from the natural world, and believed after Holland's death that if he'd been observant, "I could have found plenty of signs telling me trouble was coming. Those signs would of proved real as a rock or tree or anything else in the world" (123).

Billy is determined to sculpt his own identity in defiance of societal expectations. Having overcome childhood polio, Billy remained sensitive about his limp as an adult and labored to overcome both the physical and economic hardship he endured. He is the first Holcomb in memory to own land, recalling that the "only land Daddy and my Uncle Joel could claim was what dirt they carried under their fingernails" (121). Notably, Billy bought his parcel of twenty acres from Joshua Winchester, thus beginning to correct some of the economic disparity existing

between the two families. The purchase and clearing of that land is symbolic to Billy; he admits to readers that it

had been a man's work. You couldn't call no one a cripple who'd done it and it was like it hadn't been till then I'd truly got out of that bed I'd laid in so many years ago with my neck stiff as a hoe handle, my legs useless to walk on as two sticks of kindling. (121)

By this point in the novel, though, readers are aware that this purchase does not mark the final triumph of Billy Holcomb over either the physical handicap that continued to plague him or the Winchester family.

The majority of Billy's narrative is consumed by his clear concealment of Holland's body and Billy's interactions with Sheriff Alexander during the police search. The two men's lifestyles are juxtaposed in Billy's musings as he wonders whether Alexander

recollected what it was like not to have a steady paycheck, to work months and not know if you'd make money that year or not. I wondered if he recollected how it's a different sun in August, a sun that lays heavier on a man's shoulders, like maybe the Dog Star's mashing its weight down on you as well. (149)

Notably, Isaac shares years later that Billy finally achieved the steady paycheck when he left the farm; however, Billy's vocation as a farmer became part of his identity, evident when he muses on that night's frost. Isaac knows that "it was a natural thing for him to take notice of, natural as smelling rain coming or spotting

blue mold on a tobacco leaf. He'd been a mill worker for months but a farmer for decades" (187).

It is during Billy's narrative that the complex relationships among Billy, Amy, and Holland form; these relationships are demonstrative of conflicting power structures. Billy is handicapped with a limp and is rejected by the military; unbeknownst to him at that point, he was also left infertile. Amy cannot get pregnant with Billy due to his childhood infirmity with polio; rather, she has to seduce Holland, the virile young man just returned from war. These physical imperfections render Billy outside the expected hegemony of white males—the hegemony enjoyed by Holland, who has just returned home from war and confirms to Alexander that he had taken life in the Korean War. There is an irony in the fact that Holland can both take and create life; Billy cannot create life, though he is able to claim Holland's progeny as his own when he takes Holland's life. Billy claims his position as part of the patriarchy when he murders Holland, thus situating himself as father to the son he could not create.

With his brandishing of his earned Gold Star, Holland becomes a synecdoche for the federal government and military, while Amy and Billy's heritage and lack of mobility render them representative of many Jocassee Valley residents. Billy is unable to procreate with Amy because he has been left crippled by an affliction that could have happened to anyone; he was lucky to survive, though he is rendered ineffective in his duties as a husband. Holland, however, both gives and takes life. He impregnates Amy, giving her what Billy could not; he also fought where Billy

could not and presumably took lives, as evidenced by the collection of withered ears he displays to Sheriff Alexander.

Amy's choice of Billy over Holland indicates Billy's first triumph, a triumph that comes full circle when, through cunning and quick wit, he avoids detection by Sheriff Alexander. However, Billy's conscience does not allow him to see it this way: He ends his narrative by claiming, "I hadn't got away with nothing" (159).

Isaac's narrative reflects a markedly different tone; as he grows into a young man, he is aware of the attention showered on him by Mrs. Winchester, Holland's mother, but ignorant of his paternity. Perhaps because of the passage of time, Isaac is keenly cognizant of the looming flooding of the valley. It has guided both his academic choices and sentimental attachments unknowingly yet symbolically toward both Holland and Sheriff Alexander and away from Billy's heritage. He states, "I'd always known someday I'd have to leave. That's why I'd been in ROTC in high school instead of FFA and why I was headed to Clemson next fall on an ROTC scholarship" (169). Billy continues to demonstrate an intuitive knowledge, evident when he attempts to coax Mrs. Winchester out of her house before the valley flooded. Upon telling him of his true paternity, he states "it was like my mind was trying to beat her to it, because I was bringing up things from the past that connected me to that soldier above the fireplace" (173).

Isaac's intuition is also evident when he encounters Sherman Jameson, an engineer from Duke Power following Mrs. Winchester's death.²⁷ In warning Isaac off the land, Jameson asserts that

It doesn't matter how many Indian mounds are here or what flowers or bugs or birds. If you found chunks of gold big as baseballs it wouldn't matter now. That dam's built, and the gates are closed. It doesn't matter if you're living or dead. You don't belong here anymore. Every last one of you hillbillies is going to be flushed out of this valley like shit down a commode. (184)

Isaac stubbornly refuses to accept this assessment, however, recalling the various graves he'd encountered in the woods, including the grave of Widow Glendower. Perhaps Isaac has a premonition of Billy's and Amy's drownings when he "could feel the dam looming behind me as if it cast a shadow over the whole valley" (185). Isaac eventually accepts his paternity and uses the rising water to "let the dead bury the dead," as Alexander urged him (198). However, the same water that would cover Holland's remains would cause Billy's and Amy's demise. It is appropriate that neither Holcomb would escape the flood; tied inextricably to Holland, the current "bent [Billy] like it would a reed and he went under," and moments later Amy "raised her arms above her head like she was surrendering" (199-200). Rash confirmed in an interview with Mindy Beth Miller that "Billy and Amy had to stay in that place, because they are part of it" (208). Though the drownings were

²⁷ Given Rash's academic training and affiliation, it is possible that he selected this name as a buried allusion to Fredric Jameson, the United States' best known literary Marxist theoretician—especially since the character makes a Marxist-style class critique in the quotation selected here.

accidental, neither Billy nor Amy survive the move away from their land; the relocation to a life as mill workers does not just take their past—it also claims their future.

Deputy Bobby Murphree's section concludes the novel and summarizes the course of events in hindsight. At the time of this narration, Isaac is living with Sheriff Alexander, awaiting the start of his first year at Clemson. Murphree provides readers with the poignant last line of the novel: "This was a place for the lost" (214). At this point readers are invited to ponder the meaning and judgment of being lost. The land that sustained communities was lost, as was their culture; Amy, Billy, and Holland are physically lost, but could also be considered morally lost due to their roles in the adultery that led to murder.

What is Rash's role, then, as author of *One Foot in Eden* and *Raising the Dead*? Clues abound in scholarship on Rash, interviews with the author, and within the works themselves. For example, Rash "depicts a distinct Appalachian culture, one that is marginalized, living, and fierce; he sets it up as existing in opposition to the mainstream" (M. Miller 198-99). Striking a similar note, Jesse Graves writes that Rash

represents a generation of Appalachian writers who witnessed the shift away from a primarily agricultural livelihood first-hand, so [he] record[s] not only the work and ways of living, [he] also record[s] the change itself, and its attendant losses. One could call [his] work commemorative, and as memory is mother of the muses, that would be an accurate claim, but in another sense, these writers, and so many

others in the region, give history a second life. . . . Ron Rash take[s] Eliot's claim about 'the historical sense' seriously, and . . . [he] invoke[s] the past as a deeper layer, a substrata, of life in the continuously evolving present moment. (85)

Rash himself claims that the explosion of Appalachian literature "has happened in part because Appalachian writers are seeing much of their culture disappear" (Biggers 14). Presumably Rash includes himself among the ranks of these writers, chronicling the demise of this beloved culture. As he stated in an interview, "I think that's part of an Appalachian writer's role—to remember that there's something here worth . . . remembering . . . : and if you honor and respect it, then it has a better chance of continuing" (M. Miller 209).

In addition to serving as records of a culture that is at best rapidly changing and at worst merely a memory, *One Foot in Eden* and *Raising the Dead* are aggressive attempts to reclaim both the land of the Jocassee Valley and the culture of the settler communities that thrived there. The presence of Duke Power's dam that would "cork this whole valley up and make them a lake" (*One Foot* 135) is an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control. For the native, the history of colonial servitude is inaugurated by the loss of locality to the outsider; its geographical identity must thereafter be searched for and somehow restored. (DeLoughrey and Handley)

One Foot and *Raising the Dead*, then, preserve this locality and its geographical identity. Rash's inclusion of both the culture and the natural world within these works defiantly rebuke Duke Power's claim upon the physical valley.

"At Boone Creek Landing," included in the first section of *Raising the Dead*, offers readers a final glimpse into his reaction to the flooding of the valley. This poem, set on the banks of Lake Keowee, depicts a first-person speaker's attempt to envision the current location of the fort deep below the lake's surface. The speaker, seemingly Rash himself, traces his ancestry to "a captain named Candler" who "wed / Mary Boone" at the fort (lines 8-9) before striking out for North Carolina. Rash depicts himself as a "long-delayed / wedding guest to this shore" (lines 13-14). This image alludes to the Wedding-Guest of Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," a man who "cannot choose but hear" the tale spun before him (line 18). Like the wedding guest held in a thrall by the Ancient Mariner, readers are invited to envision the weight of Jocassee's loss on Rash

like one that hath been stunned,
 And is of sense forlorn:
 A sadder and a wiser man,
 He rose the morrow morn. (lines 622-25)

CHAPTER 4

“LOST IN THE RIVER’S VAST AND GENEROUS UNREMEMBERING”:
EXAMINING THE WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS ACT IN RASH’S *SAINTS AT THE*
RIVER

The presence of the river is foundational to *Saints at the River*, Ron Rash’s second published novel. This novel presents a final step in this study of how particular writings by Rash and Chappell treat the evolution of environmental events and resource use in southern Appalachia. Whereas *Serena* reflects the greedy lumber and land grab of the early decades of the twentieth century, Chappell’s *I Am One of You Forever* incorporates the mid-century success of Champion International, and *One Foot in Eden* revolves around Duke Power’s building of the Keowee-Toxaway Project in 1965 and subsequent flooding of the Jocassee Valley, *Saints at the River* is a more contemporary fictionalization of events occurring on a river protected by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. This work is based loosely upon the 1999 drowning of a nonlocal hiker who waded into the undammed Chattooga River, depicted here as the Tamassee River. Rash presents this as the contact zone for the struggle between environmental activists, whose strict adherence to the Act prohibits any changes to the river, and those who would alter the riverbed for personal use or profit. Through *Saints at the River*, Rash demonstrates that the controversy over resource use, while polarizing, is not clean or without various complications. Rash acknowledged the inherent challenges in

writing such a novel: He “wanted to write a novel about environmental issues, but one that refused simplifications. I picked a situation where I was essentially in conflict with myself, the part of me who is an environmentalist and the part of me who is a parent” (Kingsbury).

In order to highlight these complications, in this chapter I will first provide an overview of *Saints at the River* and provide background about the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and the specific drowning that inspired the novel. I will then examine relationships among characters and utilize elements of deep ecology, ecofeminism, and postcolonial criticism to discuss the conundrum presented in the novel, ultimately arguing that the issue at hand—whether human nature can be privileged over nonhuman nature—cannot be reduced to a clear binary opposition.

Saints at the River, which Rash claims “started with an image of a child looking up through water” (Birnbaum), focuses on repercussions of the drowning of Ruth Kowalsky, a twelve-year-old girl on vacation in South Carolina with her family. The novel opens with a paragraph of exposition, and then describes Ruth’s decision to wade into the river that straddles the boundary between South Carolina and Georgia. Rash’s prose accelerates into one lengthy sentence as Ruth loses her footing and is pulled by a quickening current into the rapid. Borrowing elements of a stream of consciousness, the narrative ends quietly when “*her arms and legs she did not even know were flailing cease and she becomes part of the river*” (5).

The remainder of the novel is narrated by Maggie Glenn, a downstate photojournalist who grew up in the fictional town of Tamassee, South Carolina. Maggie’s past hangs over her as she returns to the town of Tamassee on assignment

to cover the battle over retrieving Ruth's remains from the Wild And Scenic Tamasee River. Traveling with Maggie is famed reporter (and widower) Alan Hemphill, a Pulitzer-prize-winning journalist recently returned to South Carolina from a stint in Washington, D. C. Maggie introduces Alan to childhood friends and family alike, serving as his cultural ambassador as he negotiates the sensitive terrain among the parties involved.

Through Maggie's visits home and attendance at public meetings, Rash incorporates a plethora of characters who each represent a diverse interest in the situation. Herb and Ellen Kowalsky are Ruth's parents, mourning their daughter and aggressively seeking any means to claim her remains. Herb Kowalsky enlists the aid of Peter Brennon, inventor of the portable dam that would divert the Tamasee's flow temporarily. Randy and Ronnie Moseley, twins who Maggie's known since birth, are prominent as Search and Rescue Divers; Randy becomes a casualty of the attempt to raise one such dam. Luke Miller, Maggie's ex-lover, is a staunch environmentalist who protests securing a portable dam in the river's bedrock, arguing passionately that the protected river is the "closest thing to Eden we've got left" (53).²⁸ Walter Phillips is the new district Forest Service ranger whose youth and inexperience leave him vulnerable to persuasion, and Harley Winchester and Tony Bryan are capitalists who represent logging and land development interests, respectively.

²⁸ In a nod to *One Foot in Eden*, Luke also laments the flooding of the Jocassee Valley, telling a young Maggie that the reservoir " 'destroyed two-thirds of the Oconee Bells in the world. Think about that. In the world'" (162-63).

In addition to the challenging events and the multitude of characters involved, Maggie's past complicates the novel. As children, Maggie and her brother Ben were severely burned by a scalding pot of beans. In her adult narrative, Maggie rightly attributes much blame for this incident to her father, who left them to go to the store for cigarettes. Despite his father's role in the situation, Ben forgives him; the event erodes Maggie relationship with her father, though, until as a young adult she wields her relationship with Luke as a weapon against him. When Maggie returns to cover the events surrounding the retrieval of Ruth's remains, her interactions with her father, dying of cancer, are brief and painful, though he attempts to reconcile with her and tells her that "there ain't a day goes by I don't think about me leaving you and Ben alone. I forgot all about those beans on the stove. I'd have never went to the store if I hadn't" (175). Maggie meets his apology by bitterly thinking, "[Y]ou wait till you're dying and make this dramatic confession and everything's set straight, everything's forgiven, a perfect Hollywood ending" (176).

Against this undercurrent of turmoil, the recovery process continues. Kowalsky and Brennon receive permission to construct a temporary dam, despite Miller's vociferous protestations that the process violates the language of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Despite rising river levels from rain upstream, Randy ventures into the water below Wolf Creek Falls just before the dam collapses; his body, like Ruth's, is not recovered on the day of his drowning. A congregation of mourners gathers on the banks of the river the following day, and the recovery culminates with Ronny Moseley's blasting of dynamite just below the falls; both

bodies float to the surface. Following this dénouement, Maggie's narrative turns personal: It is fall of the same year, and she has reconciled with her father, revealing her role as a nurse in his final weeks. She sorts through her father's belongings following his death before leaving Jocassee.

Saints at the River, like Rash's other novels that I have discussed in previous chapters, is divided into sections. The neat halving of *Saints* into Parts I and II invites an analysis of dichotomies presented in the novels, perhaps more clearly than *Serena* or *One Foot in Eden* do. Both parts open with an italicized flashback that provides a limited-omniscient narrative summary of significant events in the lives of Ruth Kowalsky and Maggie Glen: respectively, Ruth's drowning and the scalding of Maggie and Ben that left Ben scarred physically and strained Maggie's relationship with her father. Within this structure, Ruth and Maggie are mirror images of one another, inviting readers to analyze both their similarities and differences. Ruth is an outsider who foolishly waded into the river, unaware of the strength of the current hidden under a misleadingly calm surface. As a result of her ignorance and foolhardy actions, she becomes a captive of the river, and her death initiates a firestorm of emotion and conflict. Maggie, despite having grown up on the shores of the Tamassee and possessing strong skills with which to read and safely navigate the river, is the insider who left the small town, shirking its familiar society and expectations for the city of Columbia. However, Ruth and Maggie share their youth at the time of these events—both of which are undeniably accidents, and both, perhaps, the result of parental inattention. Despite the roles that Ruth and Maggie

play in creating conflict, both did so innocently, leaving other characters to navigate personal and public tension.

These chapters offer readers a further connection between novels previously discussed: Like *Serena's* "Coda" and "The Overspill" of *I Am One of You Forever*, these chapters are italicized, integrating a surreal quality to the events described therein. Italicizing these particular chapters further emphasizes to readers that these events drive the novel: Everything else in the novel is a consequence of either Ruth's drowning or Maggie's resentment towards her father for his negligence in leaving her and Ben unattended.

Pairing Ruth and Maggie in this way allows Rash to draw together the personal and the public spheres. Rash uses the unavoidable tension of the recovery process to bring personal relevance to the universal issue of water rights versus human rights, demonstrating the role of literature as advocated by Richard Kerridge, who writes that "literature, often narrative, is regarded as the cultural space reserved for the 'personal' viewpoint, as opposed to an impersonal or highly informed one" (6). Through the struggles of the fictional Tamassee community to reconcile the conflict over control of the river, Rash provides a model of how to "dramatize the occurrence of large events in individual lives. Make contact between the public and the personal" (Kerridge 6). As I have delineated, While Rash connects similar environmentally important events to individual lives also in both *Serena* and *One Foot in Eden*, but *Saints at the River* is more overtly political—and, simultaneously, his work most easily tied to a specific drowning on the Wild and Scenic Chattooga river.

A clear understanding of what Rash accomplishes in *Saints at the River* starts with at least a cursory knowledge of both the protective legislature of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and the terrible events that inspire the novel. Widespread demands on rivers as natural resources for hydropower and irrigation spurred the creation of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson in October of 1968, the Act “established a process for building a legacy of protected rivers” (“National Wild And Scenic Rivers System”) in an effort to preserve free-flowing rivers from being exhausted of their resources. Luke reads the introduction to the Act during the first community meeting to discuss the Portadam:

It is hereby declared to be the policy of the United States that certain selected rivers of the Nation which, with their immediate environments, possess outstanding remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, or other similar values, shall be preserved in free-flowing condition, and that they and their immediate environments shall be protected for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations. The Congress declares that the established national policy of dams and other construction at appropriate sections of the rivers of the United States needs to be complemented by a policy that would preserve other selected rivers or sections thereof in their free-flowing condition to protect the water quality of such rivers and to fulfill other vital national conservation purposes. (Wild and Scenic Rivers Act)

The Act was heralded by President Johnson, who commented on the strong vein of conservation that accompanied the signing of the Act into law:

An unspoiled river is a very rare thing in this Nation today. Their [sic] flow and vitality have been harnessed by dams and too often they have been turned into open sewers by communities and by industries. It makes us all very fearful that all rivers will go this way unless somebody acts now to try to balance our river development.

Originally intended to provide protection for eight rivers (with another twenty-seven identified for further investigation), the Act now protects more than two hundred bodies of water. Maggie explains the tension of the events and meaning of the Act to Allen:

It's against federal law to disturb the river's natural state. A lot of what this is going to come down to is how much change, if any, in the river's environment can be made. That includes temporary trails, portable dams, and anything else that's not already there. (*Saints* 33)

Rivers included in the protection provided by the Act are designated Wild, Scenic, or Recreational (or any combination of those terms). The three classifications largely indicate the level of public access to the river: A river designated as Wild is "free of impoundments" and can only be reached by trail, whereas a Scenic River, whose "shorelines or watersheds [are] still largely primitive and shorelines [are] largely undeveloped," is accessible by roadways, and a Recreational river is "readily accessible by road or railroad, . . . may have some development along [its] shorelines, and . . . may have undergone some

impoundment or diversion in the past” (Wild and Scenic River Act). The Chattooga River is largely designated Wild, with just over seventeen of its almost sixty-mile stretch designated as either Scenic or Recreational. What Johnson deems a “ribbon of land along each river bank” (“Remarks Upon Signing”) is included in the protection: Because the section of the Chattooga on which Rachel Trois drowns is designated as Wild, altering the trail access also impinges upon the protection of the law. Rash confirms this for readers when Maggie recalls that

There had been a well-maintained cutback trail leading to Wolf Cliff Falls, but it no longer existed. The bulldozer we’d passed on the logging road had gouged a new trail—a road-wide, hundred-yard mudslide. Foot traffic made it worse, as people slipped and slid down the ridge, grabbing onto scrub oaks and mountain laurel to keep from tumbling into the river. (189)

She further emphasizes the violation of the Act when Allen wonders out loud how else the dam could have been transported to the river, telling him, “They could have gotten it in without using a bulldozer. It’s another violation of federal law” (190). Her emphasis on using a bulldozer reinforces the unnecessary destruction of a protected watershed zone, highlighting the vast chasm between Luke’s staunch deep ecology and Kowalsky’s utter disregard for preservation.

Important to a discussion of Rash’s *Saints* is Section 7 of the Act, which “specifically prohibits federally assisted or sponsored water resources projects that would impede a wild and scenic river’s free flow, or cause direct and adverse effects on its outstanding remarkable values” (“National Wild And Scenic Rivers System”).

It is the language of Section 7 that Luke and his cadre of environmental activists use to protest the installation of a temporary dam in *Saints*.

While the Act is foundational to *Saints*, it is also important to remember that the turmoil of the novel was inspired by a tragedy that occurred in the Chattooga's waters. Drownings on the Chattooga are, sadly, not uncommon: A Forest Service document records 39 deaths on the river between 1970 and 2003 ("Chattooga River Fatalities"). Fifteen-year-old Rachel Trois's death, however, ranks among the most divisive. Rachel Trois and two friends were hiking in Oconee County in late May 1999 along the Chattooga, when Rachel and one of her companions decided to wade from the South Carolina banks to the Georgia shore above Raven Rock Rapid. Both hikers lost their footing, though Charles Yoder "grabbed a rock in the river with one hand and had Rachel in the other" ("Chattooga River Fatalities"). Both were swept over the rapid, and only Charles surfaced.

Sadly, the act of recovering Rachel's body from Raven Rock Rapid did not occur that day: Neither her companions nor a Swift Water Rescue Team were able to recover her body—or even soon thereafter. Subsequent unsuccessful recovery attempts included stretching a cable "between two trees, and a Forest Service River Ranger was lowered close to where they thought the body was trapped" (Lane 164). Within a week rescue dogs and an underwater video camera located Rachel's body at the base of the rapid, under eight feet of turbulent whitewater. Given the heavy spring flow and location of her body, spokesperson for the Forest Service Stephanie Neal Johnson asserted that the "rescue team has safety as its priority" and told media that "We're not going to do anything until we're assured all safety

precautions are taken” (qtd. in “Crew Returns”). Despite her statements, Trois’s parents contacted “Portadam” of New Jersey to set up a portable dam long enough for divers to extract Rachel’s body: With the support of Pennsylvania Congressman Tim Holden and South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond, the Forest Service issued a permit for the dam’s installation—despite vociferous protestations by those who pointed out that this violated the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Under surging river levels, the first temporary dam failed, threatening the lives of rescue divers. This failure prompted the Forest Service District Ranger to later assert at a public meeting that “there should be no further attempts at recovery until the water dropped” (Lane 165). Veteran Chattooga river guide Dave Perrin seconded this decision, claiming in a *Los Angeles Times* article (which demonstrates the widespread interest in the tragic situation), “The river will let us know when we can get her out. The river has always given up its dead” (qtd. in Moehringer).

At the same meeting, a letter from Senator Thurmond was read; the threat that Thurmond’s words carries would not have been lost on local residents present at the meeting. The letter reads, in part, “[I]f in fact we determine that this river is such a threat, I would be willing to introduce legislation to restrict access, particularly commercial rafting, thereby preventing additional tragedies” (qtd. in Lane 165).

This public meeting, and the outspoken political support to reclaim Rachel’s body, drew national media attention. Joe Trois’s steadfast determination to remove his daughter’s body from the river drove the rescue effort; Moehringer succinctly summarized his own position when he wrote that if “getting her out means moving

heaven and Earth, and stopping one of the Earth's oldest rivers, and parting a sea of red tape, so be it." In the weeks that followed the meeting, the Forest Service diligently and unsuccessfully searched the rapids below Raven Chute for Rachel's remains. Tellingly, the Forest Service soon granted a second permit to Portadam to divert the flow of the Chattooga. On the day of recovery, accompanying Joe Trois on the banks of the Chattooga was "Congressman Tim Holden of Pennsylvania, three Navy divers and congressional members from South Carolina and Georgia, Forest Service workers, local divers and rescue crews from both states, and a representative of Portadam" ("Crew returns"). This second dam, according to Buzz Williams, Executive Director of the Chattooga Conservancy, was secured with "back brace poles . . . anchored in the small potholes behind the frames" (qtd. in Lane 165). Divers were able to gather Rachel's remains without further incident.

At the heart of this incident lies a conflict in interest that is both public and personal and will create ramifications for future generations to confront. As Moehringer noted, after Rachel's body was recovered, "should a bigger dam be built, requiring more holes drilled into the bedrock, some in this river town say the rights of future generations and the needs of nature will have been set aside for the sake of one family." It is this struggle between compassion for the grieving family and a desire to firmly protect the state of the river that fuels *Saints at the River*.

While weighing the present against the future is a constant theme of the political arguments in Rash's novel, individual characters must also come to terms with their past. Maggie's personal history is carefully unraveled throughout the novel; this first-person narrator slowly reveals herself as she traverses the

geography of Oconee County and the Tamassee River as an adult. Maggie's opening thought sets the tone of both her narration and the events of the novel itself: "Ghosts" (7). Thinking of her work environs, Maggie ponders what ghosts of reporters past would think of the quiet, focused newsroom of her present—and this contrast of past and present soon becomes a familiar theme that persists in Maggie's narration.

Though Maggie left Tamassee to attend college at Clemson and returned to her childhood home infrequently, she remains loyal to her mountain heritage in the face of frequent derision of outsiders. Early in the work, Rash introduces Lee, Maggie's managing editor, who "came from a wealthy family, and part of his softness was the result of never using his muscles for lifting anything heavier than a tennis racket or pitching wedge. The rest came from lifting too many gin and tonics" (8). When Charleston-bred Lee claims that Maggie is assigned to cover the conflict over recovering drowned hiker Ruth Kowalsky's remains because she "can translate mountain speech into standard English," keeping in mind that Appalachia "used to be called Dark Corner" (9), Maggie rebukes him, firmly asserting that Lee's "ancestors down in Charleston were ticked off because mountain people wouldn't help fight to keep slaves" (10). It is important to note here that though Lee is not directly connected to what would be considered colonizing forces, his provenance is the South Carolina low country—far beyond the borders of Appalachia. As such, his comments reinforce the concept of Appalachian residents as colonized: As Val Plumwood notes, the "colonized are described as 'stone age', 'primitive' or as 'beasts

of the forest', and this is contrasted with the qualities of civilization and reason that are attributed to the colonizer" ("Decolonizing" 54).

This excerpt from the brief introductory exchange between Maggie and Lee introduces the importance of dialect; though Lee attempts to mock the distinctive Appalachian accent, Maggie takes pride in it. Her connection to her Appalachian lineage appears again during the first public meeting in Tamassee, when she notes the "flat Midwestern inflection of news anchors" of Peter Brennon's voice. Recalling that that tone "was the inflection taught in Charlotte and Atlanta—even in Colombia—to Southerners ashamed of talking like their parents and grandparents," she then subtly invokes a strong sense in the local dialect, noting "such classes weren't taught in Oconee County" (49).

Despite this lingering connection to Appalachia in general, and to Tamassee specifically, Maggie's unconventional personal history allows her to maintain multiple (and often conflicting) perspectives throughout the novel. As a narrator, Maggie reveals herself in public and personal spheres: She has inhabited the roles of an Appalachian native as well as a cultural outsider, sympathized with both the environmentalist cause and, in the novel's present time, scrapes by a living as a photojournalist whose still images of Kowalsky and the Tamassee further her career. During a summer break from university classes, she joined environmentalist Luke Miller in campaigning to designate the Tamassee a Wild And Scenic River, and the ensuing romantic relationship between Maggie and Luke further damaged her relationship with her father. Luke proceeded to educate Maggie by inundating her with natural history and naturalist writers such as William Bartram and Horace

Kephart; this knowledge, and her relationship with Luke, provided her with an environmental sensibility. Maggie states that “seven generations of Glenn eyes had opened and closed in this place, but it took writers such as William Bartram and Horace Kephart, men from other parts of the country, to reveal what had surrounded me all my life” (91). While she emphasizes the provenance of these non-Appalachian writers, Maggie’s observation that it was literature that educated her about her home alludes to one function of Rash’s novel: The distance created by fiction not only helps introduce distant readers to this controversy, but also allows Rash to use *Saints* as a mirror, recreating the event for southern Appalachian readers.

Despite understanding these various perspectives on the issue at hand, Maggie herself remains fairly objective about the controversy. She is a reliable narrator, though she is emotionally affected by her memories of her childhood. Through her narration readers witness the polarizing controversy over altering the stream bed, Ronnie’s blasting of the river, and the retrieval of both Ruth’s and Randy’s remains. That Rash chose to use a female narrator is noteworthy, especially in an ecofeminist reading of the novel.

Ecofeminists reject the Western concept that the “masculine sphere is one where human freedom and control are exercised over affairs and over nature, especially via science and in active struggle against nature and over circumstances,” and that it is “allegedly nature, not contingent and changeable social arrangements, which determines the lot of women and which justifies inequality” (Plumwood, “Feminism” 8). These traditionally accepted gender associations are complicated

within *Saints*, and a careful examination of these characters demonstrates how Rash complicates not only accepted gender roles, but also the complexity inherent in creating realistic characters.

At first glance, Maggie and Luke defy many gender and cultural expectations, and their differences are frequently expressed through their educations. Luke is far more emotionally and spiritually connected to the Tamasee than she is, even though he is male and hails from Florida, far from the southern Appalachian mountains, while Maggie's "family had lived in Oconee County for over two hundred years" (*Saints* 91). However, while they do in this way complicate the Western gender paradigm, they both reinforce it as well: It is Luke who facilitates Maggie's education of nature, telling Maggie that he "could educate me better than a university could" (91), and does so by "assigning" to her texts by male writers of their own experiences in nature. Maggie does not feel the intuitive connection with nature that women are assumed to enjoy; instead, she comes to understand "what had surrounded me all my life" under Luke's tutorage, admitting that "Luke brought it into the world I knew" (92) and, later, "at least in spirit still one of Luke's followers" (182). Under his guidance, she reads "writers such as William Bartram and Horace Kephart, men from other parts of the country." This selection of writers implies that Luke is guilty of what Cara Cilano and Elizabeth DeLoughry refer to as the "worst charge [to be made] against ecocritical models": That its "proponents are blind to its naturalization of a western white male subject in his claims to a new environmental and epistemological territory" (73). Luke himself educated Maggie about the river, demonstrating his own literacy in the language of the natural world

while “explaining not just about eddy lines and hydraulics but also the watershed’s plant and wildlife” (91), including how “to sight on the surface what lay beneath water—the snags and undercuts. He showed me the Tamassee was not one river but many, depending on the time of year, the amount of rain, the amount of visibility” (94).

However, Maggie returns to Clemson University, and eschews Luke’s knowledge of the river and her own growing connection with her home geography. Her decision to privilege the humanistic knowledge and reason associated with higher education acts as a wedge that allows Maggie to challenge Luke’s education of the natural world. However, it is important to note here that in returning to college, Maggie is not breaking out of the patriarchal paradigm: She merely moves from Luke’s understanding of nature (informed by his role within the patriarchal hegemony) and deep ecology tendencies to what Plumwood deems the “masculine rational sphere of public life, production, social and culture life and rational justice” (“Feminism” 8) represented by her university studies. In other words, instead of abjuring the patriarchal approach represented by Luke and authoring her own education by unconventional means, Maggie seeks to “join men in participation in areas such as science and technology”—represented here by Maggie’s education at Clemson—“from which they [women] have been especially strongly excluded” (11).

Interestingly, while at Clemson Maggie studied not photography, but writing. She describes her initial professional ventures as “too florid . . . I’d spend three paragraphs describing the inside of the Moose Lodge when he wanted two-hundred words on their latest membership drive” (157). This implies that Maggie’s first

professional tasks were viewed as too subjective. She then moved to photography, noting that snapping and developing photographs was “what I did best” (*Saints* 95). Photography is a skill taught to her by Luke, who educated her about “how to manipulate shutter speed and light, how balance and perspective were as important in photography as painting Luke believed you saw the essentials in black and white, that color was nothing more than decoration and distraction” (94-95). Luke’s emphasis on “essentials,” on a strict differentiation between black and white, implies an adherence to logic and rationality—again, traits valued in a masculine approach to knowledge. Plumwood asserts that a calculating, scientific approach to knowledge (reminiscent of Luke’s insistence on black-and-white photography) involves “not only the highly valued masculine traits of objectivity, abstractness, rationality and suppression of emotionality, but also strongly exhibit the masculine virtues of transcendence of, control of and struggle with nature” (“Feminism” 11)—thus furthering both Maggie’s and Luke’s positions within the hegemonic patriarchal society that they in some ways refute.

In these ways, Luke is a complex character who throws off the mantle of the public patriarchal paradigm by living his life according to tenets of deep ecology; in contrast, he also demonstrates evidence of having lived within the boundaries of this paradigm by selecting for Maggie’s education primarily white men who explored “wilderness.” This complexity mirrors the very real inconsistencies that form our reality. Luke’s loyalty to deep ecology completely excludes consideration of the needs of human nature, and this lack of consideration leaves Luke blind to the significant loss that underscores the retrieval efforts.

While this ecofeminist approach to *Saints* provides interesting and insightful points, it cannot be the sole lens through which to read the novel because it, too, is limited. Maggie herself can hardly be considered an ecofeminist; indeed, through much of the novel Maggie is unsure of and seems to be testing identity, both her gender identity (as evidenced by the discussion above) and her role within the current conflict. Taken as a whole, the narrative of the novel itself does not convey a strong ecofeminist position. A young girl is swept away by nature and drowned. Her body is forcefully confined under the current of a river, and the retrieval process is debated and ultimately directed by men. Maggie is on hand to observe and record, not intervene.

As photojournalist and writer respectively, Maggie's and Alan's respective roles within the novel—to record the controversy—do provide the lenses through which readers approach the conflict. However, just as Maggie's understanding of her place expands under Luke's guidance, her understanding of artistic interpretations of truth also evolves—and in the process, readers discover that Allen's and Luke's understanding also changes. Allen's claim that there is always "something more that lies outside the camera's framed, mechanical truth" (implying that journalism provides a broader brush with which to paint a picture) is a statement that he refers to as a "youthful indiscretion" (133), yet encapsulates a theme that Rash explores throughout *Saints*. Allen's bold claim about the objectivity of photography, which he later refutes, aligns with Luke's prior insistence on black-

and-white photography as well as Maggie's early claim to Luke that "I didn't know photographers took sides. Cameras record reality" (88).²⁹

However, each of these characters comes to recognize that, as Luke states, "there is always more than one reality" (88). The subjective nature of knowledge is evident in the crowd gathered at the second community meeting: "Cameramen from Charlotte and Columbia and Atlanta TV stations staked out the far corners. Three dozen journalists held note pads and tape recorders in their laps and hands, almost as many photographers interspersed among them" (159).

Maggie comes to understand the subjectivity of print and photography and their ability to manipulate and broadcast the situation; indeed, she dutifully photographs Herb Kowalsky on the river as he "stepped through shallows and onto the slab of stone his daughter lay beneath" (97). Though she justifies her choice to snap the scene when conveniently urged by Allen, that "You're about to get a chance at a really good photograph" (97) by thinking that "whatever these photos do for me or anyone else is not a motive" and, soon thereafter, that "gnats circled Kowalsky's head," she continues to photograph him as he "raised his index finger to brush one of the insects from his eye" (98). Despite her allegiance to Tamassee and the environmental cause, she submits this final photograph as part of her assignment. Lee heralds the photograph, and Maggie admits, "you could make out that Kowalsky

²⁹ One example of a photographer selectively recording an image that intentionally disregards what lies outside the frame is Earl Palmer, who created a body of "several thousand photographs, a distinctive body of work that affirms a traditional image of America" (Speer). Palmer disregarded any images that reflect any modernity in southern Appalachia. Throughout his career Palmer has "preferred the metaphorical view of the region that is not unlike the [. . .] local color writings of John Fox, Jr. and Mary Murfree" (Wilson 87), and thus his images reflect the traditional stereotypes associated with the region. Jean Haskell Speer's *The Appalachian Photographs of Earl Palmer* addresses this discrepancy.

was staring into the water, and you could see the index finger raised to brush away a tear that had not existed until this moment” (132). Luke blames the photograph for raising awareness of the situation and creating the sympathy for Herb Kowalsky that subsequently swells into political support. Though she intentionally submits the misleading photograph for publication, Maggie naively protests Alan’s use of “we” in gathering support for the Kowalskys.

Allen Hemphill is an intriguing character, and one with whom readers may identify. Born in the “Carolina midlands” (20), he spent a decade in Washington, D. C. as a journalist before his wife and daughter were killed in a car crash; he then returned to the South Carolina Piedmont with a Pulitzer-nominated book on Rwanda to his credit and began writing for the same unnamed Columbia, South Carolina newspaper that employs Maggie with her photography skills. Being Southern, Allen is not completely alien to many of the small community of Tamasee’s quirks. However, his provenance is quickly read as other than Appalachian when he orders sweet tea at Mama Tilson’s: As Maggie informs him, “She’s got you nailed as a downstate sand lapper. . . . That adjective doesn’t exist at Mama Tilson’s. It’s not tea unless it’s sweetened. Saying sweet tea here is like asking for pork barbecue” (32). Rash’s creation of Hemphill as a key character is deliberate: Like readers, Allen works to educate himself about not only the small Tamasee community, but also about the conflict from an unbiased position. Maggie also serves a similar function: She is a local, but has removed herself from Tamasee, and thus must also work to reacquaint herself with the land, culture, and community of her upbringing.

Billy Watson is similar to Maggie in his departure from Tamassee and eventual return, though he did so under different conditions. Billy left Tamassee to pursue a “degree in agriculture from Clemson University, and his family owned the biggest apple orchard in the valley, but he’d decided after college that his true calling was playing Snuffy Smith to fleece tourists” (21). To that end, Billy ran a service station and general store that remained largely the same as it had when Lou Henson owned it; however, he chose to capitalize upon stereotypes of Appalachia when he “hung a hornet’s nest and a tanned timber rattlesnake skin on the wall. In the back corner he’d installed a potbelly stove many tourists believed was a moonshine still.” Billy further catered to the community of outdoor enthusiasts who are attracted to rivers such as the Tamassee, selling “Texas and Patagonia shirts, plastic dry bags for cigarettes, even a few paddles in the back” (22). This awareness of the stereotypes of Appalachia and knowledge of consumers—largely tourists or outdoor enthusiasts—accurately displays the clever marketing tactics often taken by Appalachian entrepreneurs.

As Rash stated in a panel discussion at Emory and Henry College that was subsequently published under the apt title “Nature, Place, and the Appalachian Writer,” “one of the greatest things about the attentiveness to nature in Appalachian writing, one of the trademarks of our literature, is that it’s a constant reminder that we are connected to the natural world and that we must not break that bond” (21). That connection, and the extent to which human nature can test and attempt to control it, is at the heart of this novel. The tension created between those who wish to profit from the river, and those who wish to see it flow unimpeded by any human

alteration, drives *Saints*. Use of a portable dam requires drilling anchors into the rock of the riverbed; however, this action is forbidden by the river's designation as a Wild and Scenic River, which asserts that the riverbed and its surrounding watershed cannot be manipulated or altered in any way.

To underscore this tension, Rash offers several dichotomies that illustrate the complexity of the river and its role in this community: First, environmental activist Luke Miller acts as a foil against loggers who traditionally earned their livelihood by depending on river access. The parents of hiker Ruth Kowalsky want to violate the protective language of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, while Tony Bryan, land developer, is eager to benefit from the Kowalsky's precedent of altering the riverbed. Raft guide Earl Wilkinson and search-and-rescue divers Randy and Ronnie Moseley are locals who profit from their working knowledge of the river, and Allen Hemphill is the journalist sent from Colombia to cover the controversy—also for profit. The greatest dichotomy in this novel, though, includes Ruth Kowalsky and Maggie herself. Ruth is an outsider who foolishly waded into the river, unaware of the strength of the current hidden under a misleadingly calm surface. As a result of her ignorance and foolhardy actions, she becomes a captive of the river. Maggie, despite having grown up on the shores of the Tamassee and possessing strong skills with which to read and safely navigate the river, is the insider who left the small town, shirking its familiar society and expectations for the city of Columbia. These many dichotomies are representative of the tensions created by conflicting views of the river, tensions that characters must reconcile.

The Tamassee serves several purposes in *Saints*. Like the Toxaway River in *One Foot in Eden*, the Tamassee acts as a boundary line. The water itself is primarily the obstacle separating Ruth from her parents; as in *Eden*, it is a metaphorical boundary that separates the living from the dead. However, this river also divides the community of Tamassee, and in allowing it to function as such, Rash demonstrates the core conflict of environmental activism: How much protection is too much? Rash does not offer a clear cut answer to this conundrum, but allows his characters to voice a multitude of opinions.

With *Saints*, Rash adds a much-needed personal dimension to this conflict over land use by creating various characters who each represent different approaches to this polarizing debate. The voices of these diverse characters are represented at the two community meetings, which demonstrate the passionate beliefs held by what might be seen as a polarizing debate; however, the dialogue is not limited to the community center. Evidence of how that passion might play out in the community is demonstrated when Maggie first returns to Tamassee with Allen: As they drive through the small community, Maggie notes “We passed Luke’s log cabin, the TAMASSEE RIVER PHOTOGRAPHY sign out front punctuated with a couple of new bullet holes that hadn’t been there in December” (28). The community of Tamassee has experienced tension due to the river since Luke began to solicit for its inclusion in the Act, resulting in numerous “times he’d been beaten up by loggers. The number of times his home and business got shot up. . . . Once he got beat up so bad he was in the hospital four days but wouldn’t give names when Sheriff Cantrell interviewed him” (108). This violence and the threatening bullet

holes represent the potential violence inherent in this conflict, and reveal clearly the vast chasm between Luke's strict deep ecology philosophy, the rescue efforts that would violate the language of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, and the interests of those who would use the resources of the river and its watershed, both responsibly and irresponsibly.

Ursula Heise explains that deep ecology "foregrounds the value of nature in and of itself, the equal rights of other species, and the importance of small communities" and is "associated often with a valuation of wild and rural spaces, self-sufficiency, a sense of place, and local knowledge and sometimes with an alternative spirituality" ("Hitchhiker's Guide" 17). Luke's vehement argument against altering the riverbed at the first community meeting, and his conclusion that the river is "pure and good and unchanging, the closest thing to Eden that we've got left" (*Saints* 53), reflect this strict belief. Deep ecology privileges the environment and nonhuman nature over human nature, and as such it conflicts with postcolonial ecocriticism—which "refuses the nostalgia of pure landscape even while it grapples with the best ways of addressing the representation of the nonhuman environment" (Cilano and DeLoughry 78). Luke's austere position, however, is similar to what DeLoughry and Handley describe as a singularly American "desire for a primordial natural purity in the wilderness, a retreat from the social and environmental pollution of modernity." His singular focus on nature relegates the concerns of human nature to a secondary position, thus creating the opportunity for future violence to occur. As DeLoughry and Handley explain,

colonial violence was mystified by invoking a model of conserving an untouched (and often feminized) Edenic landscape. Thus the nostalgia for a lost Eden, an idealized space outside of human time, is closely connected to displacing the ways that colonial violence disrupted human ecologies.

The resulting tension between Luke's position and that of local peoples whose lifestyles are sustained by local natural resources is not surprising. Williams explains that to a conservative community such as Tamasee,

environmentalism appeared to be an attack on property rights, but its main thrust was to assert, in law and in public opinion, a higher order of rights possessed by communities in protecting their quality of life against industrial spoliation and by other species and nature generally against destruction in the name of profitable enterprise. (352)

A suggestion of attack is evident when Maggie recalls the first meeting between Luke and her father a decade before Kowalsky's drowning. The teenage Maggie's father accuses Luke of not respecting either the clearcutting or the "responsible timber harvesting" that carried them through "lean times when pulpwood money as all that got the bills paid," claiming that if Luke did, he "wouldn't be trying to put people like Harley out of work" (*Saints* 41).

Luke's tactics expand beyond sharing with Maggie books such as *The Clearcutting of Paradise*: During the decade leading up to the novel's contemporary conflict, Luke influenced his followers to engage in what Edward Abbey referred to as "whatever means necessary" ("Forward!"). Readers are made aware of one result

when Harley Winchester (whose name is yet another nod to Rash's *One Foot in Eden*) stands to speak at the first community meeting. Harley

. . . looked the room over, his dead right eye milky blue, unfocused. He'd lost that eye ten years ago while logging just outside the Tamassee's Wild and Scenic boundary. Someone had hammered a nail into a big oak, and Harley's chain saw hit it and sent a piece deep enough to plunge his right eye into darkness forever. Harley held Luke responsible for that nail being in the tree. Not that Luke had necessarily done it himself but that whoever did had been one of Luke's followers. (59)³⁰

Here readers are made aware that the division over the environmental protection of the river is not only aesthetic or tied to ecocentric altruism, but also an economic issue. Harley, a logger whose livelihood has suffered from the complete protection of the Tamassee River and its watershed awarded by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, suffers the effects both physically and financially.

"I know how they done it twenty years ago," Harley said, his eye sweeping across the room. "They'd throw some dynamite in that pool and let the concussion free her. But things have changed on the river, changed a lot. Twenty years ago I could cut timber anywhere on the Tamassee I wanted. I could cut a new logging road or float timber

³⁰ Perhaps Rash took his inspiration from Abbey, who endorsed such acts in the Foreword (titled "Forward!") to *Ecodefense* (Dave Foreman, ed.): "Spike a few trees now and then whenever you enter an area condemned to chainsaw massacre [. . .]. You won't hurt the trees; they'll be grateful for the protection; and you may save the forest."

downstream if I needed. Now I can't log within a quarter mile of it. If I was to throw a rock in that river I'd probably get arrested." (59)

Harley's statements shed light on one of the many effects of the Wild And Scenic designation of rivers like the Tamassee. A representative of the blue-collar working class with his "steel toed brogans and overalls. Sweat and dirt and grease stained his V-neck T-shirt" (59), Harley is prevented from using the resources of the riverbed and immediate watershed to support himself. While it is naïve to think that the protection afforded by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act would *not* adversely affect the incomes and lifestyles of those who used the resources of formerly unprotected rivers, Harley's appearance and vociferous protests help readers sympathize with his, and others', plights.

The language of the Act does not prevent tourism from flourishing on some sections of the river, specifically through guided rafting trips. It is interesting to note that this type of ecotourism is informed by interests in both conservation and capitalism. As Harley bitterly states in that first community meeting, "it's different for rafting people and photographers. They can use that river to make money and then tell everybody else not to touch it, even to get a body out" (60). However, as Luke defends the rafting community, a "camera or a raft accepts the river and its corridor as is, Harley. Nothing is altered" (60). The protection of the Act precludes the fictional Tamassee from any tourist establishment on the scale of the actual Nantahala Outdoor Center, whose primary base of operations is on the Nantahala

River in Wesser, North Carolina.³¹ However, entrepreneurs—who, like Billy Watson, capitalize on the influx of tourists—can still find financial success. Earl Wilkinson is one such example in *Saints*: “He’d started off with one raft and himself the only guide. Now he had a flotilla of rafts and, during the peak season, several dozen employees” (33). The scope of tourism and ecotourism should not be discounted, though in *Saints* it is limited due to restricted access to the Tamassee because of its designation as Wild. Williams notes:

“The colonial nature of a tourism economy is less obvious than was the case with the extractive industries whose exploitative character [Helen] Lewis and others documented during the 1970s, but development of this sort still represents the loss of local control over a community’s resources and future. (391)

The tourism industry, though not as immediately damaging to natural resources as the construction envisioned by developers, still locates the source of economic wealth and stability outside the local community. Businesses such as Wilkinson’s whitewater rafting company are dependent upon the influx of outsiders to the region. Ironically, more outsiders will generate more income for Wilkinson (and any supporting hospitality industry such as hotels and restaurants), but because of increased access, will also incur proportionately more damage to the natural resources.

³¹ The NOC website boasts that “Since NOC began rafting back in 1972, NOC has led the industry in guest experience. Today, we’re the largest rafting company in the U.S.” This claim is substantiated by its outposts on the Chattooga, Nantahala, French Broad, Ocoee, Pigeon, Nolichucky, and Cheoah Rivers (“Whitewater Rafting with NOC”).

The complete protection of the Act limits the financial gain of developers such as capitalist Tony Ryan. Referred to by Billy as a carpetbagger, Ryan had built Laurel Mist “two years ago and already sold all forth houses” (60-61). Not surprisingly, Ryan sides with Harley, suggesting that the river “should be allowed to serve all the people in this community” (61) and questioning the morals of the environmental cause: “Maybe we are worried a little too much about the river and not enough about people” (60). Knowing that he is viewed as the “greedy developer come to destroy Eden,” he innocently protests Luke’s assumption that he would damage the watershed by telling him that he’s “got just as much of an investment in keeping the Tamassee pristine as you do. That river’s natural beauty is the best selling card I’ve got. Why would I hurt my own investment?” (61). Despite his protestations, though, Ryan’s presence at the river is unwanted later, when the Kowalskys are successful in their campaign to install the dam in the river. When Billy notices Ryan’s presence, he reacts strongly: “ ‘Please, Lord,’ he said, raising his eyes skyward, ‘let that son of a bitch fall and bust his ass. Let him roll all the way into the river.’” Ryan’s presence was indeed for selfish purposes: He was “photographing the trail and the men installing the dam” (192)—in other words, documenting the precedent of violating the Act presented by the retrieval process for future personal gain.

Yet another perspective on the controversial recovery effort is a more moderate position espoused by Maggie’s cousin Joel Lusk, Randy and Ronnie Moseley, Billy Watson, and Maggie’s father, Mr. Glenn. Importantly, these characters are all Tamassee natives, having grown up on the banks of the river and

contributing as valued members of the small community. Joel Lusk offers one local voice when he participates in the first community meeting after Luke and Kowalsky have both presented their positions. This interaction is charged enough to preclude any participation by Joel in the second community meeting. Playing into the stereotypes of Appalachian residents as slow and dim-witted, Joel questions Brennon on his former success with using his Portadam in whitewater. His questioning is deliberate, and Maggie notes that Joel “wasn’t dumb, and whatever was on his mind was something he’d thought out or he wouldn’t have spoken in the first place” (55-56). Joel’s knowledge is based upon his experience with whitewater search-and-rescue efforts, and he questions the safety of the Portadam when he informs Kowalsky that “things that work on a flatland river won’t work on the Tamasee,” and that Brennon doesn’t know the Tamasee the “way those of us who’ve lived here all our lives know it.” Kowalsky lashes out at the search and rescue team, insulting them in telling Joel that “you hillbillies don’t know nearly as much about that river as you think. . . . I sure as hell haven’t seen any indication you do” (56). Joel’s response echoes his knowledge of the river, and he is clearly aggravated enough to reply “soft but loud enough. ‘We know enough not to let a twelve-year-old girl wade out into the middle of it during spring flooding’” (57).

Harley Winchester and Mr. Glenn, whose experiences on the Tamasee prior to its protection demonstrate their literacy of the river, both advise action that is certainly against the prohibitions of the Act: “What they ought to do is what they done in the old days. . . . Throw a stick of dynamite in there and be done with it” (76). While Randy and Ronny Moseley are not as vocal as either Joel or Harvey

Winchester at the first meeting, they are stoic as Mr. Glenn argued logically against the placement of the dam:

If this is a matter of drilling a few holes in the riverbed, that's the thing that ought to be done. But this is a safety issue as well. I've lived on this river sixty-six years. I know the river and Joel knows it and the rest of that search-and-rescue squad knows it. . . . Those boys know what they're doing, and they've done all they could to get that body out. Anybody who says otherwise is wrong. (168)

The imminent danger and risk to Randy's and Ronny's lives are inconsequential to Kowalsky and Brennon, as evident when Brennon can not contact them to dive because he does not remember their last name (189). Brennon is impatient with Ranger Phillips when it begins to rain upstream, telling him that "this is what I do for a living. I make them and I test them. Do I have to give you a sworn affidavit to be believed?" (198-99). Brennon's knowledge of the dam does not trump his ignorance of the river, though, and soon after Randy entered the river below the dam, it collapsed.

Ronny's reaction to his brother's death—using dynamite to blast the bodies free—is a locally-known method that is considered illegal according to the Act. However, it is the method that is ultimately successful: Maggie witnesses, after the percussion, "Randy's and Ruth's bodies rising from the pool's depths into the light" (230). In returning the successful retrieval of remains back to a local resident, Rash acknowledges the importance of local knowledge over Brennon's more empirical understanding of the river.

Spirituality is a secondary theme woven throughout the novel, from Luke's proclamation of the river as a "holy place" (53) to the gathering of believers on the banks the day after Randy's drowning. While the entire conflict is a conflict of morals, the gathering connects those morals to holiness. Mourning the death of Randy Moseley, who drowned while diving to recover Ruth's remains, the community sings together of its pilgrimage ending when it reaches the sacred river: "*Soon we'll reach the shining river/ Soon our pilgrimage will cease*" (221). The moment of song encapsulates all the players in this natural tragedy, insiders and outsiders alike. The lyrical emphasis on gathering combines onlookers and participants in the conflict with saints:

*Yes, we'll gather at the river,
The beautiful, the beautiful river;
Gather with the saints at the river
That flows by the throne of God. (220)*

These lyrics, and the title of the novel taken from them, implies that everyone, those who want to preserve the river and those who want to alter its flow, is alike in being true to his or her needs and completing his or her own spiritual pilgrimage. This particular collection of characters make imperfect saints—but, Rash seems to be telling us, they are saints nonetheless. The passion of previous sins and misdeeds seems to be forgiven by the water itself, a concept that originates with river baptisms. Rash notes the religious symbolism that water has played in his own life, telling Joyce Compton Brown that "just being a Southern Baptist, being immersed in

water literally when I was baptized, that religious symbolism of water represents for Christians both death and resurrection” (“Power” 27).

Soon after the vigil, Ronny Moseley’s blasting the riverbed to free his brother’s body (and, incidentally, the body of Ruth Kowalsky) removes the conflict from legal jurisdiction; unable to discuss any more, he acts, and suddenly all the other characters are left to come to terms with his action. At this point, judgment of right and wrong becomes superfluous, and the characters must find a way to navigate the figurative waters beyond their tumultuous conflict. The bodies in the water are reminiscent of a baptism, and it is not difficult to conceive of Ruth and Randy as being born again as the river surrenders their bodies.

Following these events, what is ultimately important in this novel are not the boundaries that the river represents; as the conclusion of the novel suggests, the essence of the river itself will endure this and future conflicts. Despite the tumultuous events which did, in fact, alter not only the river bed and other features protected in this watershed but also characters’ lives, the power of the Tamassee River is yet unchanged. We see this through Maggie’s eyes when she observes the river as she leaves town following her father’s death: “

From this bridge I cannot see the pool below Wolf Cliff, but I know the water is low and clear, the shallows thickened by red and yellow and purple leaves. Perhaps trout spawn in those shallows, their fins stirring the leaves as they follow old urgings. (237)

The specific imagery elicited through these observations recalls autumns past, and both readers and Maggie are aware that the undammed Tamassee will follow its “old urgings” as naturally as the trout, despite the recent alterations to the riverbed.

This emphasis on autumn suggests to readers not just the end of the tourist season, but also a sense of the novel’s events coming to a close. Just as passions run high over the issue, the conflict takes place in early summer, when the Tamassee’s waters are historically high. They have run their course by the concluding chapter, though, and while they did so, Maggie and her father resolved their personal conflict. Mr. Glenn’s death parallels the end of summer.

This brings us to the final function of the Tamassee River of *Saints at the River*: It is ultimately cathartic, cleansing the emotions of the past for better or worse. In fact, Maggie’s own rumination on the river when she leaves Tamassee imbues the water with the gift of forgetting: “In the boulder-domed dark below the falls, no current slows or curves in acknowledgement of Ruth Kowalsky and Randy Moseley’s once-presence, for they are now and forever lost in the river’s vast and generous unremembering” (237).

While this decoupling of history and nature is attractive to the deep ecologist, it is a point of conflict within postcolonial theory, and yet another opportunity for Rash to complicate our understanding of the river. For Maggie to consider the river an entity without a memory removes any history from it, and changes its function as a place, according to DeLoughry and Handley’s definition:

Place has infinite meaning and morphologies: it might be defined geographically, in terms of the expansion of empire; environmentally,

in terms of wilderness or urban settings; genealogically, in linking communal ancestry to land; as well as phenomenologically, connecting body to place.

In Maggie's consideration of the river, the absence of Ruth's and Randy's presence removes any genealogical or phenomenological significance from the place, and thus perpetuates the potential of the river to continue.

And so what are readers to conclude about this situation? Ecocritical perspectives support the language of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act in treating the river and its watershed as a separate character. Surprisingly, an approach from postcolonial theory suggests the same. As a part of the natural world, the river innately contains evidence of its history; nature is the past's "only true guardian," which "makes the process of conservation and sustainability all the more ontologically powerful, because a gesture of destruction against the land and sea, then, simultaneously becomes an act of violence against collective memory" (DeLoughry and Handley). In Maggie's concluding passage, Rash suggests that nature, here in the form of the Tamassee River, will prevail over human intervention.

Overall, *Saints* clearly demonstrates the altruistic intentions as well as cultural limitations of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The desire to protect natural resources in as pristine a state as possible is noble and necessary; however, Johnson could not have foreseen the complications that such legal protection would initiate. With *Saints at the River* Rash prompts readers to question which of three scenarios is ultimately better: For humans to strive to protect nature in a pristine, Edenic

state, which inherently necessitates obliterating any past history or evidence of human presence; for humans to preserve nature as it is, replete with markers of past use and alterations; or for humans to impose their will upon nature as they see fit, regardless of current sustainability or future implications. Each of these three positions represents, to varying degrees, theoretical relationships between human and nonhuman nature: Deep ecology, preservation and responsible use, and total colonization of the natural world by humanity. Given these choices, the perfect position very likely does not exist; instead, it must be accepted that it will include characteristics of all three. Despite his loyal allegiance to a deep-ecology position, Luke's words are perhaps most true: "... there is always more than one reality" (88).

CONCLUSION

The idea of writers using their medium to resist the oppressive power of political or corporate force is hardly new: Looking throughout the literary canon, writers from Geoffrey Chaucer and Jonathan Swift, from William Shakespeare to Ralph Waldo Emerson, come to mind. Rash and Chappell share the specific quality of writing from a place of disenfranchisement with other canonized writers, including Aphra Behn, James Joyce, Jamaica Kincaid, Alice Walker, Salman Rushdie, and Chinua Achebe, among others. As Appalachian writers, they have the unlucky task of battling stereotypes and prejudices from their readership as well as challenging the forces of capitalism and government intervention. It is my hope that this dissertation demonstrates just a few of the creative ways that Appalachian writers are responding to the changes to their environment and culture, and answers this critical query of Ursula Heise: “[H]ow accurately [do texts] portray the realities of colonial exploitation and environmental devastation, and to what extent [can] authors be credited with attempting to resist these processes or with imagining alternatives to them?” (“Postcolonial” 225). In the case of Ron Rash and Fred Chappell, their texts examined here are indeed accurate representations of the “realities of colonial exploitation and environmental devastation,” and each author resists or reimagines through a variety of methods.

I have referred to both Rash and Chappell as archivists and activists at different points in this dissertation. I have argued that Ron Rash’s primary strategy

of resistance, his *modus operandi* as an activist, is to preserve or archive, in his writing, the devastating environmental events wrought upon the southern Appalachian region and their effects on various individuals. Through his writing, he makes prominent these (often historical) environmental events that continue to affect the lives of Appalachian peoples—and in doing so, and in garnering success in doing so, he is making sure that these events remain part of his readers' cultural consciousness so there is less chance of repetition. Rash is also unwilling to let these controversial issues be simplified and easily dismissed; his writing reminds us that ideas such as *progress* and *conservation* are neither good nor bad, but are endlessly subjective and dependent on those in power.

Whereas Ron Rash's works tend to offer a broad picture of environmental events, Fred Chappell's writings often focus readers on very localized effects that are consequences of large-scale events. Instead of chronicling the massive devastation wrought on the Pigeon River by Champion International, for example, Chappell focuses us on one fictional family who suffers emotional and financial strife at the hands of one engineer. Rather than archive the entire situation, Chappell compels his readers to become activists. His incorporation of imaginative literary elements—such as magical realism—demonstrates his willingness to both play with his readers and offer creative perspectives. Chappell allows his young narrators to comment on environmental events, often with a combination of exaggeration and a child-like perspective that underscores the true impact of these events.

I do not mean to suggest anywhere in this dissertation that inhabitants of the Appalachian region are mere helpless victims—and I do not believe that either Rash

or Chappell would claim victimization, either. In fact, Chappell addressed the idea directly when he criticized the “attitude about Appalachia as a sort of third-world country, . . . I don’t like that element of self-pity” (Palmer 406). Rather, I want to emphasize here that people of Appalachia are known for their resilience and creativity, and these literary works are testimony to the continuation of that tradition.

Appalachian writers are hardly alone in working to preserve and protect their land and communities, and many of the efforts to prevent environmental events are ongoing. The Western North Carolina Alliance is a grassroots organization that has worked to “unleash the power of citizens’ voices to protect the natural heritage of our region so that people *and* the environment can thrive” (“History and Impact”). The WNCA’s focus on both communities and land reinforces the combination of ecocriticism and postcolonialism applied within this dissertation. This particular multi-focused organization has run several successful campaigns, including preventing the creation of a nuclear waste facility in Buncombe County, stopping the practice of clear-cutting in Pisgah and Nantahala National Forests, and established the Jocassee Gorges State Park—which includes the fictional site of Amy and Billy Holcombe’s farm in Ron Rash’s *One Foot in Eden*. Not to be outdone, the Dead Pigeon River Council, founded in 1985, focused solely on water use and rights. This organization’s self-stated purpose is “achieving the cleaning and restoration of the Big Pigeon River which had been used for the industrial waste of Champion International since 1906” (“Dead Pigeon River Council”).

Despite this success, controversy around land use is still very much present. Boaters have historically been prohibited on the upper Chattooga due to an initial decision to permit fishing on the upper half and boating on the lower half of the river when it earned its Wild and Scenic status. After years of contentious communication between the U. S. Forest Service and organizations such as American Whitewater, American Canoe Association, Georgia Forest Watch, Georgia Sierra Club, and Wilderness Watch, the Forest Service has permitted boating on the upper river under limited circumstances—a decision immediately appealed legally by the Greenfire Law Firm of San Francisco, which represents what Rash calls “a real movement toward conserving these rivers. There are several groups, and on some level I’m involved with these groups that are trying to protect these rivers and protect these streams” (Birnbaum). While still under review, this situation demonstrates that coming to an agreement over fair and sustainable land use practices is imperative to any conservation effort (Hare).

Coming full circle, one such way to communicate the need for and initiation of environmental conservation is through literature. These works, rooted firmly in Appalachian soil, demonstrate the power that regional literature has. Rash has reiterated in several interviews his adoption of Eudora Welty’s claim to represent the universal through the particular, or regional. He explained to Joyce Compton Brown:

I truly believe that the more we know of one place, the more we’re going to make that place universal, because if you go far enough and deep enough into it, you’re going to realize what its essence is, and

this essence is going to be human, to involve what it means to be a human being, what defines us. (“Power” 31)

Rash also commented directly on his success in making the regional universal in his interview with Robert Birnbaum when he noted, “That’s what we all hope, as writers, that our work transcends the region. If it’s significant at all, it has to.” Rash states about *One Foot in Eden’s* review in the *Los Angeles Times*: “To me that was a good sign that as ‘regional’ as the book was, ultimately there was something in it that transcended the region” (qtd. in Birnbaum). An indication of Rash’s success in communicating the very geographically-focused story of *Serena* is its conversion to the silver screen: With international releases starting in late 2013, the film stars Jennifer Lawrence and Bradley Cooper as Serena and George Pemberton. The continuing recognition of Rash’s achievement, including the international acclaim that accompanies his winning the Frank O’Connor International Short Story Award for *Burning Bright* in 2010, will further promote the idea of Appalachia as a rich wellspring of literature and creativity—further challenging accepted stereotypes.

Fred Chappell’s works have also raised the profile of Appalachia; while *Dagon* (1968) won the Prix de Melleur des Lettres Etrangers from the French Academy, it is *The Fred Chappell Reader* that was hailed for displaying Chappell’s “masterful versatility” in *Los Angeles Times* (Levering). Despite Chappell’s diverse texts (some of them decidedly *not* Appalachian), Levering agrees that though Chappell “writes of love and sexual desire, of Rimbaud and the death of W. H. Auden, Chappell the poet seems most at home in his native Appalachia, his marriage of

meter to mountain idiom recalling Frost's monologues of laconic New Englanders," thus demonstrating the literary attention that Chappell brings to the region.

While the application of both ecocriticism and postcolonialism to these particular works may be new, I believe it reflects the growing recognition for a firm marriage between these schools of criticism. The combination of ecocriticism and postcolonial criticism will gain strength as scholars and theorists continue to understand the complexity of the relationship between culture and environment. In truth, while not all literature can be considered postcolonial, all literature provides at least a nuance of this relationship and plays a role in our pursuit of justice. Rash and Chappell are representative of what many Appalachian writers are doing. Indeed, application of ecocritical postcolonialism to other Appalachian texts would yield rich results. Let me mention just three examples; there are others. Denise Giardina's novel *Storming Heaven*, which chronicles the 1921 Battle of Blair Mountain, is one such text wherein natural resources, social preconceptions about Appalachia, and degradation of local residents all collide. Jim Wayne Miller's Brier persona (as in *The Mountains Have Come Closer*), like Chappell's adult Jess Kirkman, reacts to the idea of "progress" and over-commercialization in Appalachia with a biting and at times bitter tone—noting issues with caricatures of Appalachian peoples and harmful preconceived ideas. Lastly, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life* by Barbara Kingsolver is a third text that would respond well to an ecocritical and postcolonial reading: It promotes the self-sustainability and responsible resource use that would allow Appalachian communities to flourish.

The idea of justice weighed heavily on me when I returned to the scene with which I began this dissertation, the Road to Nowhere, in March of 2013, ready for a brisk hike. The drive into the park was stunning: Trees were barren at that time of year, yielding panoramic views of Fontana Lake nestled between the mountains at nearly every turn. As I parked and began my hike, I was keenly aware that what existed as a sore reminder of a broken promise has also yielded endless recreation to the residents of Bryson City and Swain County visitors: Through the tunnel is a vast network of hiking trails, forever to remain as foot trails due to the presence of Anakeesta rock.

The future of the Road to Nowhere has, finally (and disappointingly, to some local residents) been determined, and the situation is resolved. In 2010, the federal government agreed to pay Swain County a total of \$52 million in lieu of building Lakeview Drive: The Road to Nowhere will remain a road without a destination ("Story Behind"). This resolution is hardly ideal. The Parks Service will continue to ferry visitors across Fontana Lake to deteriorating cemeteries on Decoration (Memorial) Days, though local lore claims that when the last of the aging family members dies, the ferries will cease. The conclusion to the saga does, though, place both agency and financial control where it belongs: back in Swain County.

The Road to Nowhere falls into the same category as the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the Pigeon River, Lake Jocassee, and the Chattooga River: All are Appalachian places whose geography displays the intersection of history, tradition, culture, government intervention, and environmental concerns. The details of the land tell their own story to the few visitors who hike its trails. Perhaps

a writer will come along and, in recording and recreating the story of the Road to Nowhere, continue to respond—as Ron Rash and Fred Chappell have done—to Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin’s call for “no social justice without environmental justice; and without social justice—for *all* ecological beings—no justice at all” (10).

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