APPALACHIA IN SCIENCE FICTION: CORMAC MCCARTHY'S *THE ROAD* AND
SUZANNE COLLINS'S *THE HUNGER GAMES*

A Thesis
by
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Abstract

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In literature, science fiction and Appalachia seem to exist in two separate—even opposing—worlds. Science fiction is a genre typically devoted to technology and an imaginary future. The Appalachian region, on the other hand, is often celebrated for its roots in tradition and history. Yet there are a number of literary works where science fiction and Appalachia not only cross paths, but converge. Using an ecocritical approach, this study focuses on two recent science fiction texts set in southern Appalachia—Cormac McCarthy's 2006 novel *The Road* and Suzanne Collins's 2008 novel *The Hunger Games*—their treatment of place, otherness, and the impact of human modernization and technology on the post-apocalyptic futures envisioned in the works. The emotional power of these novels, similar to other science fiction works set in Appalachia, lies in the startling and often uneasy convergence of tradition and innovation, of past and future—of what was, is, and may be—and all that can be lost along the way.

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Chapter 1: Science Fiction Works Set in Appalachia

In literature, science fiction and Appalachia seem to exist in two separate—even opposing—worlds. Science fiction, as a genre, is typically devoted to technology and an imaginary future. The Appalachia region, on the other hand, is often celebrated for its roots in tradition and history. Yet science fiction and Appalachia are not as opposed as one might imagine. In fact, there are literary works where science fiction and Appalachia not only cross paths, but converge.

This connection between science fiction and Appalachia, though, is a subject matter that has been little explored by scholars. My research has uncovered only one scholarly work that directly addresses the topic: Alessandro Portelli's 1988 essay "Appalachia as Science Fiction." Focusing on the crossroads between Appalachian literature and science fiction, Portelli's article examines the thematic similarities between these two seemingly disparate literary genres and argues that the treatment of "space," "otherness," and the impact of modernization and technology share common and often overlapping features in each genre.

Yet, while Portelli makes a strong case for the literary similarities between Appalachian local color fiction and science fiction, nearly all of the texts he refers to as science fiction should properly be labeled as horror or fantasy, not science fiction. According to the definition of the term "science fiction" that will be used in this study, a definition based on science fiction scholarship, Portelli's textual examples—while under the umbrella of speculative fiction—would not technically fall within the science fiction genre. Moreover, Portelli does not mention any examples of science fiction set in Appalachia. His essay is only

concerned with the concept of Appalachia *as* science fiction, and not the setting of the Appalachian region *in* science fiction. This is the gap in scholarship that my study aims to fill.

This study will examine two recent works of science fiction set in the Appalachian region, Cormac McCarthy's 2006 novel *The Road* and Suzanne Collins's 2008 novel *The Hunger Games*. Both use established science fiction tropes and familiar themes in Appalachian literature and culture to explore imagined—and unsettling—futures for the region. Both works also share a similar focus on the impact of human technology on the environment, detailing post-apocalyptic Appalachian landscapes that emphasize humanity's integral role in the ecological balance of nature—though in intriguingly different ways.

Because there is no single, concise, and agreed upon definition of the term "science fiction," it is important to begin by establishing a working definition of "science fiction" to use in my study. While some authors and critics, most notably Margaret Atwood, prefer the term "speculative fiction" in place of "science fiction," much recent scholarship marks a distinction between the two terms, with speculative fiction viewed as an umbrella category that includes the genre of science fiction. For example, M. Keith Booker and Anne-Marie Thomas's *The Science Fiction Handbook*, in its glossary, defines speculative fiction as a "[b]lanket term for imaginative fiction that involves the construction of worlds different from our own in fundamental ways. This category thus encompasses science fiction, fantasy, horror, and some forms of romance" (331). There is much overlap between science fiction, fantasy, and horror—not to mention their multitude of sub-genres, such as alternate history, post-apocalyptic fiction, and steampunk, to name a few—but the "speculative" approaches in the genres are distinct. According to Booker and Thomas, "science fiction might be defined

as fiction set in an imagined world that is different from our own in ways that are rationally explicable (often because of scientific advances) and that tend to produce cognitive estrangement in the reader" (4). Similarly, while John Clute and Peter Nicholls's *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* concedes that no definition of science fiction has yet emerged that will satisfy everybody, the entry on the term "science fiction" stipulates that to be considered science fiction, a work must place emphasis on science and follow natural laws, or at least be something that the author represents as scientifically plausible (as opposed to fantasy). Clute and Nicholls also note that the work does not have to be intended as science fiction to be considered science fiction.

Adam Roberts's *Science Fiction* establishes a similar definition, concluding that science fiction is a "symbolist genre" that takes place in a "rationalized and materialistic discourse" (181) which explores encounters with what critic Darko Suvin has termed the "novum" (i.e. new scientific things or "point of difference") to shed a fresh perspective on our contemporary world (6). In his *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, Suvin argues that not only is the novum "validated by cognitive logic" in science fiction, it "is hegemonic, that is, so central and significant that it determines the whole narrative logic—or at least the overriding narrative logic—regardless of any impurities that might be present" (63, 70). In other words, the mere presence of a scientific novelty or innovation in a work—case in point, the technological gadgets in the James Bond series—does not automatically qualify it as science fiction. To be considered science fiction, the novum must be the central, dominating logic upon which the imagined world of the narrative is based upon.

The working definition of science fiction that I will use in my study firmly places my primary texts in the category of science fiction. While McCarthy's *The Road* has generally

not been considered science fiction by scholars—unlike Collins's *The Hunger Games*, which was marketed as science fiction upon publication—the text is set in imaginary future that has not yet occurred but is scientifically possible and framed in rationalized discourse.

So while this study will fundamentally differ from Portelli's essay on the definition of science fiction and the types of texts that will be analyzed, it will explore the three, overlapping connections between science fiction and Appalachia that Portelli identifies— space, otherness, and the impact of technology and modernization—because these themes are relevant and helpful to understanding science fiction texts set in the Appalachian Mountains.

A literal, emotional, and metaphorical connection to place or space, as Portelli notes, is a major theme in much Appalachian literature, often centering on the concept of the "homeplace." In Appalachian literature, the term "homeplace" is a common way for characters of the Appalachian region to refer to the family home, typically the cabin or small house where the character grew up. In the fictional world of the texts, it is a literal place, a literal space, one for which the characters feel a deep emotional attachment.

In the past 25 years, Appalachian scholars have expanded the concept of the homeplace beyond the literal to the metaphorical. In the collection of essays *The Poetics of Appalachian Space*, scholars such as Nancy Carol Joyner and Don Johnson, in their analyses of Appalachian works, look to the ideas that French philosopher Gaston Bachelard explored in his celebrated 1958 book *The Poetics of Space*. The book is a philosophical and poetic meditation on the concept of "felicitous spaces," the special places—like a house—where a person feels secure and safe and allowed the chance to daydream. Yet felicitous spaces are more than just physical spaces; they are mental ones as well. A notable "felicitous space," according to Bachelard, is the childhood home, the literal space where a person grew up,

which only exists in memory and imagination once the person has moved away. This "oneiric house" from childhood, or "house of dream-memory," exists in a mental space beyond just the reality of the past. Bachelard refers to it as "poetry of the past," a blend of memory and dream image that holds a power that forever attracts the person (15-16).

In "The Poetics of the House in Appalachian Fiction," Joyner uses Bachelard's aesthetic theories on "space" to examine the imagery of the house, or the homeplace, in Appalachian literature. She argues that while the image of the Appalachian mountain cabin has been stereotyped in popular culture, place and the image of the house are important parts of fiction set in the region. In his essay "The Appalachian Homeplace as Oneiric House," Johnson applies Bachelard's concepts of "felicitous space" and the oneiric house to analyze Appalachian author Jim Wayne Miller's *The Mountains Have Come Closer*. Johnson examines how Miller's poems explore the loss and abandonment of the traditional Appalachian homeplace, leading to a deep sense of loss and dislocation, as well as the "Appalachians' obligation to re-claim their heritage through the recreation of the oneiric cabin" (41). Unlike Joyner, Johnson is concerned not just with the image of the house or homeplace in Appalachian literature, but also with the loss of that felicitous space and the impact that loss has on what Bachelard describes as a person's "dream-memory."

The loss of homeplace and the disruption of the actual felicitous space is one of the focal points of my analyses of science fiction works set in the Appalachian region. As my study will establish, the primary texts that I will examine can be considered post-apocalyptic science fiction novels. Booker and Thomas's *The Science Fiction Handbook* defines apocalyptic fiction as:

A type of science fiction narrative dealing with the approach and arrival of a

cataclysmic event that causes widespread destruction, leading to a dramatic change in

the nature of human civilization on Earth. As opposed to the Biblical narrative of

apocalypse, the science fiction apocalypse generally results from natural and

scientifically explainable causes, such as environmental degradation, a cataclysmic

cosmic event...a catastrophic plague, a devastating nuclear or biological war, or an

alien invasion. Postapocalyptic science fiction deals with the aftermath of such

apocalyptic events. (321-2)

In a dramatic sense, then, post-apocalyptic fiction can be considered the ultimate loss of

place.

Apocalyptic rhetoric and the trope of an imminent environmental catastrophe in

fiction is also a major focus in the theory of ecocriticism. Lawrence Buell, in his study *The

Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American

Culture*, famously argues that "[a]pocalypse is the single most powerful master metaphor that

the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal" (285). Its power lies in the

fact that "the rhetoric of apocalypticism implies that the fate of the world hinges on the

arousal of the imagination to a sense of crisis," with the imagination "being used to anticipate

and, if possible, forestall actual apocalypse" (Buell 285). In Greg Garrard's study

Ecocriticism, he explores the role that apocalypticism plays in literature that deals with the

environment. He notes that "apocalypticism is inevitably bound up with the imagination,

because it has yet to come into being" (94). This common trope appears in some of the most

influential books in the environmental movement, including Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*

and Al Gore's *Earth in the Balance*. Garrard views apocalypticism as a literary device that is

always, in a narratological sense, "proleptic." By this, he seems to mean that it is a type of prophetic flashforwarding. It is a device that produces a crisis to galvanize activists and responds to that crisis by holding out the possibility of another "road" (104). He argues that apocalyptic rhetoric in literature can be problematic because it often sets up an "emotionally charged" framework that reduces complex problems into monocausal crises, as with the "common inflection" of using medical terms to depict Earth in the throes of a terminal illness. He concedes, though, that apocalyptic rhetoric "seems a necessary component of environmental discourse" (113).

Garrard's definition of the apocalyptic trope in literature naturally falls into the genre of science fiction, since it centers on an imagined future world. In his study *New Worlds for Old: The Apocalyptic Imagination, Science Fiction, and American Literature*, David Ketterer examines apocalyptic literature within the context of a variety of American science fiction works. Ketterer details the history of the term "apocalyptic" and its many facets in literature, eventually arriving at a definition for apocalyptic literature and its role in science fiction. He writes, "Apocalyptic literature is concerned with the creation of other worlds which exist, on the literal level, in a credible relationship (whether on the basis of rational exploration and analogy or of religious belief) with the 'real' world, thereby causing a metaphorical destruction of that 'real' world in the reader's head" (13). He further notes that the "apocalyptic imagination...finds its purest outlet in science fiction" (15).

The connections between science fiction and environmental discourse have become an emerging theme in recent ecocriticism. Gerry Canavan, in the preface to *Green Planets: Ecology and Science Fiction*, posits that "Nowhere is the science fictionalization of the present clearer than in contemporary consideration of humanity's interaction with its

environment, which frequently deploys the language and logic of SF to narrativize the dire implications of ecological science for the future" (x). Canavan points out that even early landmark texts in the environmental canon, such as Carson's 1962 book *Silent Spring*, share the language of science fiction. In fact, Carson "famously chose to begin her book not with some detached presentation of the facts at hand but with a science fiction parable" (Canavan, Preface x).

Eric C. Otto, in his study *Green Speculations: Science Fiction and Transformative Environmentalism*, argues that the connections between science fiction and the environmental movement are prevalent enough to warrant a separate subgenre of science fiction, one that he terms "environmental science fiction." He describes this subgenre as one that "share[s] with transformative movements an interest in environmental degradation and its origins. Among these works are future histories, postapocalyptic fiction, utopias, and more" (4). At the same time, Otto is careful to note that viewing certain science fiction works as environmental texts does not devalue the science of environmentalism. "None of this is to suggest that the concerns of environmentalism are feebly grounded in fictional speculation, but instead that science fiction offers valuable representations of and critical commentary on environmental issues. If environmentalism shares rhetorical strategies with science fiction, it is because those strategies facilitated necessary critical perspective, not because the two are equally fabulated" (Otto 17). In this sense, science fiction—especially post-apocalyptic science fiction—can be seen as a powerful, dramatic tool that furthers, not hinders, environmental discourse.

The theme of "otherness" raised in Portelli's article is also prominent in science fiction works set in Appalachia. J W. Williamson's *Hillbillyland: What the Movies Did to the*

Mountains and What the Mountains Did to the Movies examines the quality of "otherness" in the stereotype of the "hillbilly," exploring why images of mountains and mountain people are so popular and pervasive in our culture and the function this stereotype may serve. While the primary focus of Williamson's study is on the representation of Appalachia in film, his study raises some interesting points about the treatment of Appalachian characters as "others," as well as the role of ambiguity and the sublime in Appalachian settings.

"Otherness" and ambiguity—and, in particular, the sublime—are qualities of the Appalachian Mountains that create an ideal setting for apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic science fiction works. The concept of the sublime was a major theme for Romantic writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, both in Europe and America. Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, the 1757 essay that was a foundational text for the concept of the sublime for Romantic writers, generally defines the sublime as "[w]hatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*" (39). The aspect of "obscurity" or ambiguity, along with terror, plays a major role in creating a sublime effect, for "[w]hen we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes" (Burke 58-9). In the Romantic tradition, mountain ranges—most notably the Alps—became an ideal source for images of the sublime in nature.

Marjorie H. Nicolson's study *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* makes a strong link between mountains and the concept of the sublime. Nicolson's study focuses on one central question: Why did

descriptions and feelings for mountains change so dramatically in English poetry from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century? In other words, what caused the shift in attitude in English literature from viewing mountains in a negative, gloomy light to viewing mountains in a positive, sublime light? To answer this, Nicolson explores the various historical attitudes toward mountains in Greek philosophy, Christian religion, and the burgeoning science movement of seventeenth-century Europe, examining the origins of the attitudinal shift. For my analysis, the aspects of the book centered on the origins of the mountain sublime, as well as the connection between the seventeenth-century scientific sublime (e.g., astrology) as a direct prelude to the mountain sublime, help to explain the appeal of the Appalachian setting in science fiction.

The concept of the sublime is also a major focus of ecocriticism. Garrard's aforementioned study *Ecocriticism* juxtaposes the Romantic movement's interest in images of the pastoral—highlighting the stability of nature—with sublime images of "otherness" in wilderness—highlighting nature in its pure, raw, and often terror-inducing state. He argues that an attempt to "return" to either extreme should not be the goal of ecocriticism, but these images raise awareness of the responsibility of humans for their actions concerning the environment.

The third theme that Portelli's article examines, the impact of science or technology, is also an important aspect of science fiction works set in the Appalachian region. According to my working definition of the term "science fiction," science or technology must play a central role in the text to be considered science fiction. My study will establish this central role of science and/or technology in each of my primary texts.

Overall, in light of the thematic connections between Appalachia and science fiction that Portelli makes in his essay, my study will use an ecocritical lens to examine these same themes in McCarthy's *The Road* and Collins's *The Hunger Games*, both of which I will establish as science fiction novels set in Appalachia. I will explore how each text uses science fiction tropes inside an apocalyptic Appalachian setting, as well how the themes of science and technology, the mountain sublime, and the concept of Appalachian "space" interact in the plausible-yet-imaginary worlds the authors have created.

While these themes are developed fully in the primary texts my study examines, a number of other examples of science fiction set in Appalachia have been published since the nineteenth century which contain traces of these themes. Of those, Edgar Allan Poe's 1844 short story "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains" is one of the earliest. "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains" is one of the few works by Poe that involves a clearly marked setting, in this case the Blue Ridge Mountains near Charlottesville, leading Appalachian author and scholar Robert Morgan to note that Poe's short story "may be the first work of classic short fiction set in the Southern Appalachian Mountains" (75). Scholars like Martin Willis also consider it an early work of science fiction, because the tale centers on the then-popular scientific field of mesmerism. Mesmerism, or animal magnetism, was a theory first proposed by Austrian physician Franz Anton Mesmer in the late eighteenth century, based on the belief in an invisible force or fluid that exists between bodies, which could be manipulated to improve mental and physical health (Mills 323). The theory of mesmerism is disregarded as quack science today, along with similar fields like phrenology and alchemy, but in the mid-nineteenth century in the US, mesmerism was viewed by many as a fringe but credible field of science. While never accepted into the scientific orthodoxy of the day, mesmerism was

practiced in hospitals across the country, and was widely discussed in journals and in public discourse as a burgeoning scientific field (Willis 95-6). In fact, many of Poe's mesmeric tales were mistaken as fact when they were published, despite Poe's insistence that they were works of fiction (Faivre 35-6).

By the time Poe was writing his mesmeric tales, the theory of mesmerism had shifted to an interest in the notion of mesmeric, trance-like states, during which mesmerists were believed to be able to interact with patients solely through a "pure communication between minds," a shift which coincided with the scientific invention of the telegraph (Enns 62). With its interest in the unconscious mind, mesmerism is often considered a forerunner to the modern field of psychology, and "the rapport between mesmerists and patients may be more familiar to modern readers as a precursor to hypnotism" (Enns 62). This mesmeric rapport is the central theme in "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains."

Poe's short story details the close—and ultimately deadly—mesmeric bond between a Dr. Templeton and a patient named Bedloe, whom the doctor has been successfully treating for "neuralgic attacks" through the use of mesmeric trances (679). One day, after taking a walk "among the chain of wild and dreary hills that lie westward and southward of Charlottesville" (680)—the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains—Bedloe relates a strange story to Dr. Templeton. He claims that as he was hiking through the mountains, an odd mist suddenly appeared. Once the mist cleared away, he found himself not in the Appalachian Mountains anymore, but in a city in India, dressed as a British officer. As his vision—which he describes as having the "vividness of the real"— continued, Bedloe fights in a losing battle against a native uprising, eventually dying after being wounded by a poisoned spear (685). After Bedloe finishes his story, a horrified Dr. Templeton reveals that, during the exact

time of his patient's strange visions, the doctor had in fact been at his home writing an eyewitness account about a close friend and British soldier who had been killed in the Indian city of Benares years prior, in the same circumstance that Bedloe had just described. The text implies that it was the strong mesmeric rapport between the doctor and his patient that caused Dr. Templeton's memory to be telepathically transferred to Bedloe. The tale ends with the note of Bedloe's death not long after his strange vision, caused by the accidental use of a poisoned leech during a blood letting session administered by Dr. Templeton, leaving the reader to wonder, though, if the true cause of death was the poisoned spear that pierced Bedloe in his mesmeric trance.

Like many of Poe's other works, "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains" is steeped in Gothic and sublime imagery, though here those elements are intimately connected with the "Ragged Mountains." As Robert Morgan remarks, "It is appropriate that [Poe] set this story of mystery, hypnosis, and transmigration of souls in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, in a world of dark coves and ancient, majestic forests" (75). The science fiction quality of mesmerism works equally as well in this setting, exploring scientifically plausible ideas surrounding the power of electricity, hypnosis, and long-distance communication, where the Appalachian Mountains become the catalyst for the novum.

French science fiction author Jules Verne was also attracted to the mysterious and sublime quality of the Southern Appalachians. One of his last novels, *The Master of the World* (*Maître du monde*), published in 1904, is set in part in the Blue Ridge Mountains. In the novel, John Strock, "head inspector in the federal police department at Washington [DC]," is assigned to travel to Morganton, North Carolina, to investigate a series of mysterious events involving a nearby mountain crest called Great Eyrie (4). The townsfolk

living near Great Eyrie had been reporting sightings of mysterious lights and flying creatures emanating from the mountain, causing fear of an impending volcanic eruption, or worse. In the text, the "rocky and grim and inaccessible" crest embodies the sublime (5). Upon seeing it for the first time, Strock relates his awe: "Assuredly the Great Eyrie now took on to my eyes an aspect absolutely fantastic. Its heights seemed peopled by dragons and huge monsters. If chimeras, griffins, and all the creations of mythology had appeared to guard it, I should have been scarcely surprised" (38).

By the end of the novel, Strock is able to solve this seemingly fantastical and sublime mystery. The strange events taking place inside Great Eyrie turn out not to be geographical or supernatural by nature, but entirely scientific. A "crazy inventor" (210) had been using the mountain as headquarters to build a machine so technologically advanced that it could transform into an airplane, automobile, boat, or submarine with the flick of a switch. The scientific wonders of the machine, described in plausible detail in the novel, empower the inventor to cause havoc across the US, until his maniacal romp is eventually stopped by the natural, and deadly, power of a hurricane.

While these early examples of science fiction set in Appalachia focus on the sublime quality of the mountains, later writers begin to place more emphasis on the Appalachian setting itself. North Carolina author Manly Wade Wellman is probably best known for his fantasy fiction short stories featuring the character Silver John, a wandering balladeer who fights supernatural evil with the aid of his silver-stringed guitar and traditional folk songs. But Wellman also dabbled in straight science fiction. In his 1977 novel *The Beyonders*, aliens from a parallel universe/dimension—a hypothetical possibility in science—attempt to invade the small Appalachian town of Sky Notch, part of a grander, more sinister plot to enslave the

entire human population. After discovering the plot, Sky Notch-native Gander Eye Gentry—

a banjo picker, avid hunter, and resident trickster—takes it upon himself to rally the

townsfolk to grab their guns to fend off the alien invaders. In many ways, the novel can be

considered a "first contact story" paralleling Native Americans' first encounters with

European invaders, who possessed superior technology, weaponry and armor. Yet, in *The

Beyonders*, the native Appalachians successfully defend the town and ultimately save the

human species from an apocalyptic future as alien slaves.

While the novel is far from Wellman's best, it is similar to his other work in that it

charmingly captures the Appalachian dialect and customs of his characters. The theme of

homeplace and the celebration of Appalachian culture is central to the novel, and the

majority of the pages are devoted to describing small-town Appalachian life, where

traditional music, religion, and strong familial ties become the very weapons used to fight

back against the superior scientific technology.

A number of other Appalachian authors in the past half-century, most notably Fred

Chappell, have also intertwined the mountain sublime with Appalachian culture, though their

speculative work falls under the genres of fantasy or horror and not science fiction. Famous

North Carolina science fiction author Orson Scott Card, on the other hand, writes clearly in

the genre of science fiction, but none of his works to date are set in Appalachia. Of these

more recent regional writers of speculative fiction, only Pinckney Benedict truly crosses over

into science fiction.

"Zog-19: A Scientific Romance," a short story from Benedict's 2010 collection

Miracle Boy and Other Stories, is a science fiction tale that takes place (mostly) in

Appalachia. The story follows the life of Zog-19, an alien from a faraway planet that has

taken over the body of an Appalachian farmer. The narration jumps between the present time, following Zog-19's coming to terms with life on Earth, and the far-away future, where his native planet is facing complete destruction at the hands of greedy humans who want to deplete the planet's natural resources to use as fuel for their technologically superior spacecraft. It is an Appalachian, apocalyptic, and environmental tale with a twist—the apocalypse is not being done to humans, but by humans.

If there is a trend in the historical progression of science fiction set in Appalachia, it seems to point to this thematic intersection between science fiction and Appalachian literature in the treatment of "space," "otherness" or the mountain sublime, and the impact of technology and modernization on the environment. In fact, Appalachian author Barbara Kingsolver's most recent novel, *Flight Behavior*, examines similar themes. While her 2012 work has not been considered science fiction by scholars and critics, the text—set in present day Appalachia—uses science and apocalyptic fears of global warming to enact an imaginary, future event that has not yet occurred but is scientifically possible. The impact of science, therefore, lies at the heart of the novel, and the Appalachian setting could be considered a pre-apocalyptic landscape where the ecological balance is threatened by climate change, yet one which still holds optimism that the apocalyptic event can be reversed through the appropriate human response. Kingsolver's novel opens the door for further exploration of the intersection between science fiction and Appalachia, which I will examine more closely in the conclusion of my study.

Overall, similar to the primary texts I examine in this study—McCarthy's *The Road* and Collins's *The Hunger Games*—the works mentioned above highlight science fiction texts set in Appalachia, all of which feature the major themes that Portelli raises in his

aforementioned article "Appalachia as Science Fiction." Yet the most recent of these works explore these themes in intriguingly ways, which I will demonstrate in my analysis of *The Road* and *The Hunger Games*.

Chapter 2: "Senseless. Senseless": Post-Apocalyptic Appalachia in *The Road*

Cormac McCarthy's 2006 novel *The Road* follows the harrowing, post-apocalyptic journey of an unnamed father and son—referred to in the text as simply "the man" and "the boy"—through an unnamed region after an unspecified cataclysmic event. Considering all the unknowns, the novel might seem like an unlikely candidate for consideration in this study. Yet, as this chapter will demonstrate, the Appalachian Mountains play a significant role in the novel's setting. At the same time, while scholars and critics are divided over whether to consider *The Road* as science fiction, the scientifically plausible, future world of the novel along with the central role of modern technology clearly position *The Road* within the definition of science fiction as established previously in this study. Overall, through the realm of a post-apocalyptic world on the brink of complete ecological collapse, McCarthy's novel examines the themes of place, the mountain sublime, "otherness," and the ecological impact of human technology, all which lie at the heart of science fiction works set in Appalachia.

While the vague setting of *The Road* led some early reviews of and scholarship on the novel to erroneously pinpoint the novel's setting at places as varied as Georgia, the Southwest, and California (W. Morgan 39), critics and scholars now generally agree that the majority of the story is set in southern Appalachia, as the characters travel south through the Appalachian Mountains on their way to the coast, possibly the Gulf Coast. Wesley G. Morgan's article "The Route and Roots of *The Road*," an intriguing and thorough analysis of

the possible highway routes taken by the man and the boy in the novel, argues that *The Road* begins near Middlesboro, Kentucky, and continues through the Cumberland Gap into Knoxville, Tennessee, across the Newfound Gap on the Tennessee/North Carolina border into Franklin and Highlands, North Carolina, and finally ends along the coast of South Carolina (not the Gulf Coast as others have surmised).

Regardless of where the man and the boy end their journey, the text makes it clear that at the start of the novel they "were moving south" toward the "foothills of the eastern mountains" (McCarthy 27), most likely near McCarthy's former home city of Knoxville (Walsh, "Knoxville" 28). In fact, early on, the man and the boy pass by a log cabin with a large, faded advertisement painted across the roof that reads: "See Rock City" (McCarthy 21). Rock City is a famous tourist attraction in Chattanooga, Tennessee, known for its unusual advertising campaign that became a familiar sight in the Southern Appalachian region (Hardwig 46).

The man's objective is to cross over the snow and ash-choked mountains (the Smoky Mountains, located between Tennessee and North Carolina) for the warmer and safer climate of the southern coast. It is a perilous and possibly deadly journey into the unknown, but it is a risk the man reasons he has no choice but to take. "He thought they had enough food to get through the mountains but there was no way to tell...everything depended on reaching the coast, yet…[t]here was a good chance they would die in the mountain and that would be that" (McCarthy 29). The man's uncertainty regarding the mountains establishes the ambiguous and obscure quality of the Appalachians in the text. In *…of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Burke designates an entire section to the idea of obscurity and its integral role in the sublime, reasoning that not being able to "know the full extent of any danger" creates

feelings of dread and terror where "all is dark, uncertain, confused, terrible, and sublime to the last degree" (58-9). The man and boy's journey into the obscure and unknown—into the mountain sublime—establishes the underlying tension and apprehension that propels much of the plot.

Yet, while the man's stated goal is to reach the coast, the text points to another, much more personal reason for the particular route he chooses through Appalachia. Near the beginning of the novel, while the man and the boy are scavenging for supplies inside an abandoned gas station, the man "picked up the phone and dialed the number of his father's house in that long ago" (7). At first, it seems like an odd textual detail—considering that in the post-apocalyptic wasteland where the man and the boy are among the few remaining survivors, the man surely cannot be expecting anyone to answer. But it becomes clearer days later when the man stops in front of a house a "few miles south of the city" (as mentioned above, most likely Knoxville). When his son asks him what it is, the man replies, "It's the house where I grew up" (25). Here, the man reveals his true motivation for a route that Wesley G. Morgan claims would "hardly be the most direct way to the southern coast" (46): the return to his boyhood home, a space many Appalachian writers refer to simply as the "homeplace." As Chris Walsh notes, this strong pull the man feels to return to his Appalachian roots is "another motivating factor for the father to take his son in a southward direction," even if the journey kills them ("Post-Southern" 12).

The man leads his son inside his childhood home and is pleasantly surprised to find it "[a]ll much as he'd remembered it." The years of abandonment have taken their toll on the "old frame house," and trash has piled up on the porch, but inside the man finds the same "empty" rooms and scarce furniture he remembers from growing up:

He felt with his thumb in the painted wood of the mantle the pinholes from tacks that

had held stockings forty years ago. This is where we used to have Christmas when I

was a boy. On cold winter nights we...would sit at the fire here, me and my sisters,

doing our homework. The boy watched him. Watched shapes claiming him he could

not see. (McCarthy 26)

Lost in his reverie, the man's emotional response highlights what Bachelard calls the "oneiric

house." Often the house we were born in, the oneiric house is "a house of dream-memory,

that is lost in the shadow of a beyond of the real past" (Bachelard 15). For the man,

struggling to survive in a post-apocalyptic world, Bachelard's definition is almost too fitting.

The man's childhood home is not just a bitter-sweet reminder of the "real past." It is

"beyond" the past, part of a world irrevocably lost forever, and one that will never be

regained.

Yet at one time, the house was the man's "felicitous space," a safe place that had

allowed him a sanctuary in which to dream. Standing in the doorway of his old bedroom, the

man recalls: "This is where I used to sleep. My cot was against this wall. In the nights in their

thousands to dream the dreams of a child's imaginings, worlds rich or fearful such as might

offer themselves but never the one to be" (27). The imagined worlds that he dreamed as a

child may have been "rich or fearful," but sheltered within the walls of his homeplace, he is

safe to dream such sublime dreams. In his boyhood, he could never imagine the true horror of

the world "to be," the post-apocalyptic nightmare of the only world the man knows now.

The man's son, though, has a much different reaction in the presence of the man's

memorialized homeplace. The boy—born after the cataclysmic event that left the planet in

ruins—knows *only* a world destroyed. Unlike the man, the boy has no memories of a pre-

apocalyptic world. The boy's childhood years have been filled with deserted roads, charred forests, and the constant fear of being raped or eaten by rag-tag armies of "bloodcults" or the gangs of marauding "roadagents." The boy has never known the safety and comfort of a homeplace, and has "no concept of a bedroom or a living room...because all the sleeping and living that he has ever known has been outdoors" (Noetzel 122). This creates a fascinating cognitive dichotomy between the man and his son, highlighted at the start of the scene quoted above. Just before they enter the man's abandoned homeplace, the boy reluctantly asks:

Are we going in?

Why not?

I'm scared.

Dont you want to see where I used to live?

No.

It'll be okay.

There could be somebody here. (25)

For the boy, interior spaces are equated with danger. Because he has never known an oneiric house, he has no frame of reference in which to relate interiority with felicitous space. In his post-apocalyptic upbringing, houses are not places of shelter that provide "dream-memory" and safety, but abandoned, walled-in traps full of possibly horrific surprises. While the "father retains his spatial identity and remembers his life before the apocalypse, the past when interiority was associated with comfort and security" and "clings with all his might to the memories of his childhood home and other relics of history...the son possesses a profoundly different life experience and sees his father's house as just another building that might hide evil men" (Noetzel 123-4). In the post-apocalyptic setting of *The Road*, the

traditional idea of "homeplace" becomes not an idealized "oneiric house," but an obscure and understandably terrifying source of danger.

The ways the man and the boy respond to the Appalachian landscape reveal a similarly striking contrast. Days or weeks after the visit to the man's homeplace (time is difficult to measure in *The Road*), the man and the boy come upon a waterfall in the woods not far from the highway. The text describes the waterfall—which Wesley G. Morgan concludes is likely Dry Falls between Franklin and Highlands, North Carolina—as "dropping off a high shelf of rock and falling eighty feet through a gray shroud of mist into the pool below" (37). The boy is in awe at the sight. "Wow, the boy said. He couldnt take his eyes off it" (37). For Walsh, this scene is the most "sublime moment in the whole novel" ("Post-Southern" 53), and one of the few—if not only—instances where the boy experiences a delightful combination of pleasure and terror:

> They walked out along the rocks to where the river seemed to end in space and he held the boy while he ventured out to the last ledge of the rock. The river went sucking over the rim and fell straight down into the pool below. The entire river. He clung to the man's arm.
>
> It's really far, he said.
>
> It's pretty far.
>
> Would you die if you fell?
>
> You'd get hurt. It's a long way.
>
> It's really scary. (39)

Curious and excited by the power and novelty of the waterfall, the boy "venture[s] out to the last ledge" to stare down into the pool far below, clinging to the arm of his father for comfort.

While the boy is frightened of the drop, there is a palpable thrill in his fear as he flirts with disaster while at the same time knowing that in the safety of his father's arm he is not in any true danger. In *...of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Burke states that "[w]hen danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful" (40). This feeling of safety in the face of danger, which the man once felt while dreaming "fearful" images in the comforts of his homeplace, is a new and all-too-rare emotion for the boy. As Dianne C. Luce notes, "The boy's thrill of the Sublime is far different from the pure terror he experiences so often in the novel in the actual or anticipated presence of cannibals and rapists from whom his father may not be able to protect him" (80). In this sense, the waterfall scene is one of the few moments in the young boy's life where he can distance himself from the terror he feels over the nearly constant—and very real—threat of pain and death.

Again, though, similar to the contrary emotions that the man and the boy experience in the presence of the man's homeplace, the waterfall scene reveals another cognitive disparity in how the characters respond to their environment. While the boy is thrilled by the sight of this natural phenomenon, for the man, the waterfall is not a sight of awe and wonder, but simply another painful reminder of what the world once was. According to Luce, "the father does not perceive the same sublimity. Here in this good place, he recalls the better place it was, a wild *locus amoenus* [pleasant place] that exists only in the past...a scene of profound aftermath" (80). Moments after they leave the waterfall, the man and the boy walk through the charred remains of woods. The man imagines that this landscape was—pre-apocalypse—a "rich southern wood that once held mayapple and pipsissewa. Ginseng." Now, all that remains are "huge dead trees" and "raw dead limbs of the rhododendron twisted

and knotted and black" (McCarthy 39-40). As Laura Gruber Godfrey notes, the fauna mentioned here are all native to the southern Appalachians, with ginseng and rhododendron holding iconic and "enormous cultural and historical significance" as some of "this landscape's most cherished and revered symbols" (170). Yet, like everything else in *The Road*'s imagined future, "the landscape here is almost entirely removed of its former beauty or cultural significance: these things exist only in the father's mind" (Godfrey 170). These native Appalachian plants are now mere memories, and for the man, "the naming of plants serves as role [sic] call for the dead" (Honeycutt 7). The former beauty of this ecologically ruined landscape is a bitter dream-memory of the past, making it impossible for the man to derive any sublime pleasure from nature.

The man's and the boy's conflicting interpretations of the wasteland around them reveal a fascinating difference between the mindsets of those born pre-apocalypse and those born post-apocalypse. Because the man remembers a time before the cataclysmic event, the man can look out at the blackened landscape and conjure in his mind images of the former beauty and tranquility of the pre-apocalyptic environment. Because he can remember his homeplace, his oneiric "house of dream-memory," he is able to connect now-abandoned structures with pleasant memories and experiences. But the boy has no such pre-apocalyptic well of knowledge to draw from and therefore has an entirely separate understanding of the world.

This cognitive disparity creates a disturbing picture of "otherness" in the text. Halfway through the novel, the man stares at his sleeping son and comes to a realization: "Maybe he understood for the first time that to the boy he himself was an alien. A being from a planet that no longer existed. The tales of which were suspect" (154). Here, the man

intimately understands that not only are his and his son's interpretations of the world irrevocably different, but also in this new, post-apocalyptic landscape, it is the man, not the boy, who is out-of-place. Connected to a past that no longer exists, the man is an "alien," a stranger in a strange world. He has become, in fact, the "other."

While this thought of being the "other" is disconcerting for the man, it is equally disconcerting for the reader. According to Suvin, science fiction is a "literature of cognitive estrangement," and "the essential tension of SF is one between the readers...and the encompassing and at least equipollent Unknown or Other introduced by the novum" (3, 64). As readers living in a non-apocalypse world, we readily identify with the man's interpretation of the world. Like him, we can picture the images he conjures during his frequent ecological roll calls "of the dead," and we can relate to the "dream-memories" of his homeplace because we are familiar with oneiric places of our own. The text implies, then, that we too are "others" in the novel's novum, post-apocalyptic world. Like the man, we are aliens looking in, trying to make sense of a world that is not our own. Canavan notes that "[t]he alienated view-from-outside offered by cognitive estrangement allows us to examine ourselves and our institutions in new (and rarely flattering) light; SF distances us from the contemporary world-system only to return us to it, as aliens, so that we can see it with fresh eyes" (xi). *The Road*, then, seems to imply that it is not the future world of the novel that is out-of-place, strange, or "other"; it is we who are out of place in our future.

The boy, though, is a native of the post-apocalyptic world. It is the only world he has known, and therefore the only world he can see. Walsh, applying Martyn Bone's terminology, refers to the setting of *The Road* as having a "post-Southern" sense of place, "where it is virtually impossible to return to or imagine a sense of the foundational South"

("Post-Southern" 50). This idea can be fittingly applied to the man's and boy's

interpretations of their post-apocalyptic world. While the man intimately and intensely

experiences this "post-Southern" loss of place, the boy—who has no concept of homeplace

nor any memory of the iconic Appalachian ecology—has no sense of place to lose. He, in

fact, is the epitome of "post-Southern," without any images, memories, or concept of a

Southern landscape to which to return.

Ironically, in the chilling world of *The Road*, the boy's complete lack of sense of

place is not a tragedy—it is an asset. As the text suggests throughout the novel, memories

and colorful daydreams of the pre-apocalypse are, in fact, dangerous. Early in the novel, the

man laments the fact that he still dreams in the colors of the pre-apocalypse. "And the dreams

so rich in color. How else would death call you? Waking in the cold dawn it all turned to ash

instantly. Like certain ancient frescoes entombed for centuries suddenly exposed to the day"

(21). Dreaming offers few benefits in a post-apocalyptic world, since all the memories and

colors are cruel reminders of a world that has ceased to exist. Instead, dreams offer only the

coldly alluring temptation of death. As the man tells the boy after the boy wakes up from a

bad dream, "when your dreams are of some world that never was or of some world that never

will be and you are happy again then you will have given up" (189). Dreams of the past, or

dreams of another life or a better future, are to be regarded with wariness. In *The Road*,

dreams are not products of Bachelard's "felicitous spaces," but are the siren calls of death.

At the end of the novel, as the man lies dying, he wakes up in the darkness and listens

to the sounds around him as he looks at the boy in the fading daylight. But now, even with

his eyes open, "[o]ld dreams encroached upon the waking world" (280). A paragraph later,

he is dead. The boy, though, remains alive at the end of the novel. Without any pre-

apocalyptic memories of a homeplace or a colorful world, death cannot call him through dreams. The text suggests, then, that the boy—born post-Southern, post-homeplace, and post-color—may be the ultimate survivor in this post-apocalyptic world.

This relationship between memory, ecology, and death also plays a central role in the science fiction and technological aspect of *The Road*, and is key to an ecological and "proleptic"—to use Garrard's term—understanding of the novel's place in environmental fiction. Garrard defines *prolepsis* as the narratological "anticipation of future events" (208), a predictive literary device clearly seen in the future worlds created in science fiction, especially science fiction texts set in post-apocalyptic landscapes. As Buell's aforementioned quotation states, "Apocalypse is the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal" (285). Post-apocalypse texts like *The Road*, therefore, are often a fascinating crossroads of environmental and science fiction imaginations and a proleptic warning about human's ecological responsibilities.

Ever since *The Road* was published in 2006, consideration of the novel as science fiction has been in constant debate. Some scholars and critics, maybe most famously author Michael Chabon, dismiss the idea that a literary work such as *The Road* can or even should be labeled as science fiction, preferring more literary genre tags such as "Gothic horror" and "epic adventure" (Chabon). Others, like Carl James Grindley, argue that the novel needs to be viewed through a Biblical lens, in which the apocalyptic setting of the novel is a dramatic representation of the Apocalypse as prophesied in the New Testament.

There are a number of scholars and critics, such as Bill Hardwig and Christopher Pizzino, that find the science fiction elements of *The Road* not only clearly displayed, but inherent to an understanding of the text. Popular culture tends to agree. Reviews of the novel

in media outlets such as *The Guardian* and *NPR*—not to mention the numerous science fiction publications like *Amazing Stories* and *SF Site*—have no qualms about referring to *The Road* as science fiction. In fact, *The Road* was included in the recent volume *Science Fiction: The 101 Best Novels 1985-2010.*

This genre debate is understandable, considering the ambiguity of McCarthy's novel. Yet the textual evidence, in light of the definition of science fiction established in the first chapter of this study, firmly places *The Road* in the realm of science fiction. In fact, there is little disagreement between scholars that the novel is set in an imaginary future—post-apocalypse America—that has not yet occurred but is scientifically possible and framed in a rationalized discourse. The central consideration, then, is the role that science—more specifically technology—plays in the novel. This might seem like a moot point, since in the post-apocalyptic setting of the road, any last semblance of technology has been all but wiped out (e.g., many of the novel's characters are reduced to fighting and/or defending themselves with such antiquated weapons as spears and bows and arrows). Yet, as Suvin argues, "anti-scientific SF is just as much within the scientific horizon" as science fiction that champions technology (67). So it is reasonable to consider *The Road* as science fiction, despite its being set in a blasted and barren landscape devoid of any modern technology in which all humans, animals and vegetation are on the verge of extinction.

A determining factor of whether or not the novel can be considered science fiction hinges on the origin of the cataclysmic event that caused the initial destruction. Again, the text's lack of specific details regarding the cataclysmic event makes this determination difficult. In fact, there is only one passage in the novel that directly touches on the cause of the disaster:

The clocks stopped at 1:17. A long shear of light and then a series of low concussions.

He got up and went to the window. What is it? she said. He didn't answer. He went

into the bathroom and threw the lightswitch but the power was already gone. A dull

rose glow in the windowglass. (McCarthy 45)

Critics and scholars have gleaned from this passage a variety of hypotheses. The prevailing

conclusion is that the cataclysmic event is a nuclear bomb attack, and that the "unnamed

disaster—in all probability a nuclear holocaust—has created a nuclear winter on earth"

(Greenwood 77). As Gabriella Blasi notes, this hypothesis is also the one that ecocritical

readings of the novel tend to favor (91). So even though the "novel details neither nuclear

weapons nor radiation, [...] the physical landscape, with its thick blanket of ash; the father's

mystery illness; and the changes in the weather patterns of the southern United States all

suggest that the world is gripped by something similar to a nuclear winter" (Grindley 11). A

nuclear winter, as hypothesized by several studies and scientific conferences since the

1970s—such as the famous TTAPS study that coined the term—would result in massive,

uncontrolled fires, dust storms of ash and soot, and widespread radiation sickness. This

would wipe out much of earth's plant and wildlife, though a small fraction of the human

population would likely survive ("nuclear winter"). These are the exact conditions that take

place in *The Road*.

Other scholars and critics, though, argue that a number of other causes could have

induced a similar scenario, including a meteor strike, a volcanic explosion, human-caused

climate change, or the Biblical Apocalypse, to name a few. McCarthy himself, in interviews,

has been notoriously ambiguous about the exact cause of the event, sometimes hinting

toward the meteor theory (Kushner), other times suggesting nuclear war, volcanic activity, or

"anything" (Jurgensen). Josiane Smith suggests that it is this very lack of specificity

regarding the cataclysmic event that emphasizes the novel's central, ecological issue:

> It is the genius of McCarthy to have written a futuristic tale devoid of futuristic tropes
>
> by constructing a hypothetical image of our present that allows for a broad scope of
>
> interpretations about his take on the way humans inhabit Earth, and about the future
>
> consequences of this inhabitancy. (101)

Hardwig, even while speculating that the event was most likely caused by "either a nuclear

war or a meteor impact," agrees with Smith, arguing that McCarthy "keeps the exact cause of

the event ambiguous, as he is more interested in the science fiction theme of a new world in

the future than he is about the scientific and historical explanation of the causes that initiate

the change" (42). While there is no doubt that the novel's narrative focuses more on post-

apocalyptic aftermath than initial causes, the text does seem to point to—if not an exact cause

of the cataclysmic event—a likely suspect on which to rest the blame: humans.

   Near the end of the novel, the man and the boy have reached the coast. The man

stands on the shore line of the dead sea, staring at the ecological disaster before him:

> They stood, their clothes flapping softly. Glass floats covered with a gray crust. The
>
> bones of seabirds. At the tide line a woven mat of weeds and the ribs of fishes in their
>
> millions stretching along the shore as far as eye could see like an isocline of death.
>
> One vast sepulchre. Senseless. Senseless. (222)

The key word lies at the end of this passage: "Senseless." In fact, it is so important that the

text repeats it twice, a rhetorical device not used often in the novel. The word suggests that,

rather than the cause of the cataclysm being a random event, someone—not something—is to

blame. For an event to be regarded as senseless, the suggestion precludes that sense, i.e.,

some sort of human or animal faculty, must have directed the action. This passage, then, seems to refute many of the aforementioned possible reasons for the event. It would be illogical for the man to accuse a natural disaster caused by a meteor strike or volcanic eruption of being "senseless."

Using the same line of thought, the argument that the cataclysmic event was caused by the Apocalypse as prophesied in the Bible also becomes doubtful. While the novel is filled with Biblical references and allusions, the text retains what some might call a frustrating ambiguity in its depiction of God. In fact, throughout the novel, multiple characters, most notably the man, are constantly invoking God's name and questioning, cursing, or dismissing that there is a God at all, sometimes all in the same scene. To read this passage above with the Biblical Apocalypse in mind, however, we would have to assume that the man is describing such a divine and prophesied act as "senseless" or without reason, which is the opposite of how the Apocalypse is portrayed in the Book of Revelation. While it is possible that the man truly believes that the cataclysmic event was God's doing, and that the man is experiencing a crisis of faith, other passages in *The Road* reveal that the man's belief is more atheistic. At the opening of the novel, the man describes the surrounding landscape as "[b]arren, silent, godless" (4). Near the end of the novel, the man uses strikingly similar language while describing not the end of the world, but its beginnings: "Perhaps in the world's destruction it would be possible at last to see how it was made….The sweeping waste, hydroptic and coldly secular. The silence" (274). As Allen Josephs surmises about the setting of *The Road*, "If there is a god out there somewhere, he is not very evident" (134). Yet, the text suggests that there is not just a silence from God, but no presence of a deity at all in the "godless" and "secular" world of the novel.

The man's accusation of senselessness, then, seems to point to the only other likely scenario, that the cataclysmic event was caused by humans, either through technological warfare or human-caused climate change brought on as a by-product of modernization. Referring to the same passage, Scott Honeycutt comes to a similar conclusion: "The senselessness of the landscape comments on the senselessness of humans who knowing [,] devalued nature, knowing [,] destroyed it and then, ultimately, unknowing [,] forgot the natural world's very appellations" (7). It is human senselessness, not nature or God, that has ultimately destroyed the world.

It is no surprise, then, that *The Road* has found a firm place in environmental literature. In the introduction to *Cormac McCarthy*, editor Sara L. Spurgeon notes that "*The Road* is increasingly being talked of as one of the most important environmental novels of the last 50 years" (19). George Monbiot, in a 2007 article for *The Guardian*, has gone a step farther, crowning *The Road* as "the most important environmental book ever written" (Monbiot). Hyperbole or not, since its publication, McCarthy's novel has quickly established itself in the environmental canon, alongside eco-classics like Carson's *Silent Spring* and Gore's *Earth in the Balance*. Using the proleptic trope of apocalypticism, a common device in both science fiction and the environmental movement, *The Road* imagines a future environmental crisis for rhetorical effect in order to spur an ecological call for action. As Hannah Stark concludes, "In the tradition of dystopian fiction having a strong didactic function, *The Road* can be read as a warning about impending environmental catastrophe…[and] has been positioned as part of the emerging sub-genre of dystopian literature called climate fiction" (71). With its harrowing vision of a world destroyed by climate change, caused by the "senseless" actions of humans upon the environment, the

novel dramatically depicts a future in which the world we know will become a distant memory unless something is done now to prevent it.

This proleptic vision is made chillingly clear in the novel's concluding paragraph. At this point in the narrative, the father is dead, and the boy has found safe refuge with a family of survivors. The ending coda, though, concerns neither the man nor the boy, but instead the environment. Echoing the father's memory of trout fishing as a boy from earlier in the novel, the coda concludes:

> Once there were brook trout in the stream in the mountains. You could see them standing in the amber current where the white edges of their fins whimpled softly in the flow. They smelled of moss in your hands. Polished and muscular and torsional. On their backs were vermiculate patterns that were maps of the world becoming. Maps and mazes. Of a thing which could not be put back. Not be made right again. In the deep glens where they lived all things were older than man and they hummed of mystery. (286-7)

This final paragraph is both poetically soaring, emotionally devastating, and hauntingly sublime. Avril Horner remarks that the "final paragraph that, both mystical and elegiac, presents nature as a sublimely ancient and transcendent force" and "reviv[es] a sense of the Gothic sublime in [its] combination of the terrible and the beautiful" (44, 46). Luce, in a similar sentiment, finds that "the transcendental leap of McCarthy's language moves into the realm of Sublime, elevating what begins as a pleasant retreat in the father's first memory of the trout stream to a kind of psychotopia for the narrator and for the reader" (84). In other words, the man in this passage so fully experiences this natural place in his mind that the understanding of place transcends into a richer, sublime connection between place and

psyche, a "realm of being" (Luce 84). The coda, then, is not just a memory of the world that once was, but becomes a powerfully sublime awareness of the interconnectedness of humans and the environment and the interconnection between the novel and the reader.

Thomas Weiskel, in his influential study *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence*, divides sublime experiences into two categories: the negative sublime and the positive sublime. The negative sublime, as critic Zackary Vernon succinctly summarizes Weiskel's complex concept, is when "individuals confront something greater than themselves, often within the natural world" and "[a]s a result, they are reduced to feelings of insignificance" (65). Negative sublime is the overwhelming type of sublime experience found in *The Road*, exemplified in the boy's terrified thrill in the presence of the waterfall as described earlier, but even more so by the harrowing, post-apocalyptic setting of the novel as a whole. In his essay "Toward an Ecological Sublime," Christopher Hitt argues that:

> ...ecological catastrophe (as the result of technology) becomes a new source of the sublime. That is, the sublime in this case is evoked not by natural objects but by their devastation. Human beings still experience a humbling sense of fear and awe before nature, but in this case—in contradistinction to conventional accounts of the sublime—the threat is of their own making. (619)

The horrifying, human guilt at the *lack* of nature, as Hitt suggests, can be just as—or more—of a negative sublime experience than the terrifying awe of being in the *presence* of nature. In essence, it is not the overwhelming realization of the "destructive" power of nature, but the devastating, destructive power that we as humans can unwittingly unleash on nature that causes the negative sublime.

The positive sublime, on the other hand, is when "individuals confront the magnitude of the sublime object, and instead of feeling insignificant, they transcend current conceptions of self and discern the unity of the environment, of which the individual is a part" (Vernon 66). This is the sublime experience that Horner and Luce suggest is present in *The Road*'s final passage: a unifying connection between human and environment, created not by a terrifying awe of the power of nature, but by a transcendental and empowering understanding of that ecological connection.

It is difficult, then, to read the novel's final paragraph as anything but proleptic. Though the novel may be regarded as "far from a programmatic 'ecological' novel," Kenneth K. Brandt argues that the "concluding passage spotlights a web of environmental interrelationships and presents a contrapuntal arrangement of images that implicitly conveys the totality of humanity's dependence on ecological stability" (65). What the coda means for the future world of the novel has been read differently by scholars. As Brandt notes, "[m]uch extant criticism on *The Road*...tends to read the novel's closing as a revival of hope or as an affirmation of renewal" (64). He and others argue, though, that the concluding passage "does not portend environmental regeneration or the reestablishment of human civilization. The biosphere has been too severely scalded for such renewal" (Brandt 65). In light of the relationship between memory, ecology, and death explored earlier in this chapter, the text seems to strongly suggest no environmental renewal, but a final and complete extinction of all life on the planet.

The coda is clearly a memory. Opening with the words "Once there were…," it in fact reads like a dramatic representation of Bachelard's idea of "dream-memory," "something lost in the shadow of a beyond of the real past" (15). Yet, the question is, whose memory is

this? Luce and other scholars surmise that it is the man's, since the narration up until this point has been almost solely from his point of view. This assumption, though, is complicated by the fact that the man dies a few pages before this coda. To reconcile this textual dilemma, Ben De Bruyn ascribes the memory to a posthumous recollection of the father, surmising that "[p]erhaps this impossible memory indicates that the father has been able to instill a sense of awe and responsibility towards nature in his son" (788). This is an optimistic and seemingly satisfying reading, but besides the mention of trout in the coda, there is no other indication in the text that this is in fact the man's narrative voice.

On top of this, this passage marks the first and only instance of the use of second person in the novel. The use of this intriguing rhetorical device is equally perplexing. Scholars have read the coda as a direct address to the reader, thereby intimately connecting the narrative and the environment with the reader. Stark suggests that "[i]n this concluding vision the human is projected into pristine nature in the address to a 'you', presumably the reader, who can not only 'see' the trout but can also hold them in their hands. Here, nature is literally in the hands of humanity" (81). In a way similar to much proleptic environmental literature, the coda can be seen as guiding the reader to become intimately engaged with the ecological memory, forcing readers to reflect on their own impact on the environment.

In light of these interpretations of the coda, I would argue that *The Road*'s final words indicate a darker, more devastating conclusion. The use of second person in the coda suggests that this final memory is not a posthumous recollection of the man, but, in fact, a projection of a colorful "dream-memory" provided for reader. While readers may not have actual memories of Appalachia or of trout that "smelled of moss" swimming "in the amber current," natural images like these remind readers of their own pre-apocalyptic world,

evoking recollections of similar intimate experiences with the environment. Memories, though, are fatal in the world of *The Road*. Remembering life as it once was, full of rich hues like "amber" and "white," is the calling card of Death. By positioning readers to imagine their pre-apocalyptic world, then, the final passage of the novel aligns them with the man's dying thoughts, when "[o]ld dreams encroached upon the waking world" in a welcome embrace of death. This seems to be the final, devastating realization of the novel: We, the readers in the pre-apocalypse, after imagining our future devastated by human-caused ecological destruction, now effectively dream the world out of existence. In essence, we dream death, and Death is us.

In the end, this ominous, proleptic vision of the future reveals the fascinating and powerful connection between Appalachia and science fiction. *The Road*'s "post-Southern" depiction of Appalachia reveals a region devoid of sense of place, devoid of the security of homeplace, devoid of the native, natural beauty. It is a world where Appalachia exists only in the memories of the man, memories which prove to be both immaterial and, ultimately, fatal. At the same time, reading *The Road* as science fiction—rather than as a Gothic horror story or a Biblical parable—underscores the message that we, as humans, are in control of our future. Our action—or inaction—to the threats inherent in our technologies and modern advancements will determine what our world will one day look like. Will we heed the environmental warnings and embrace the positive sublime, transcending our human-centered worldview for a deeper understanding and connection between our human psyche and nature? Or will we, instead, continue on our current path until we become, both literally and figuratively, Death?

These are the diametrically opposed future paths that *The Road* lays before the reader. The final passage of McCarthy's novel suggests that, chillingly, we humans may already be too far down the "senseless" road to be able to decide our fate.

Chapter 3: "Out of the Ashes": Appalachian Ecodystopia in *The Hunger Games*

Published two years after Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games*—the first book of her best-selling Hunger Games trilogy—also imagines a future, post-apocalyptic Appalachia devastated by social and ecological disaster. Yet unlike *The Road*, the science fiction labeling of Collins's popular young adult (YA) novel is not questioned by literary scholars, since *The Hunger Games* is set in a scientifically plausible, technologically advanced world decades—possibly centuries—from now. In fact, as this chapter will examine, the science fiction tropes and Appalachian setting are central to the underlying environmental message of the novel, as revealed through the novel's exploration of the themes of place, otherness, and the uneasy juxtaposition of technology and nature.

The Hunger Games begins more than 75 years after a series of cataclysmic events destroyed the ecology and social fabric of our present world. The novel tells the story of Katniss Everdeen, a 16-year-old girl struggling to survive in one of the poorest districts of the nation of Panem, the "country that rose out of the ashes of a place that was once called North America" (Collins 18). In this dystopian future, Panem is ruled by the iron-fisted law of the Capitol, a brutal, totalitarian government that controls its citizens through technological superiority and psychological warfare. The Capitol's cruelest and most powerful tool of oppression is the Hunger Games, an annual, televised competition during which two children from each of the twelve districts are chosen by lottery and forced to fight to the death in bloody, hand-to-hand combat, until only one victor is left standing. After Katniss's younger

sister is chosen at random to compete in the 74th Hunger Games, Katniss volunteers to take her place, and quickly finds herself thrust into a brutal battle against not just her fellow "tributes," but against the seemingly all-powerful Capitol as well.

The Hunger Games trilogy was first published by Scholastic Press, one of the world's largest publishers of children's books and educational material ("About Us"). Yet, as the brief plot summary above reveals, *The Hunger Games* contains more literary complexity and psychological depth than most critics often associate with YA novels. Though often ignored or maligned by critics and scholars, YA literature offers a rich field for scholarly study, and *The Hunger Games* has become a prime example. As Sean P. Connors argues:

> Young adult literature's status as popular culture, coupled with the knowledge that it is ostensibly written for adolescents, may lead some critics to dismiss the genre as low culture…[Yet] Read through the lens of critical theory, it is possible to appreciate young adult dystopian fiction as a potentially complex, multilayered form of literature that, to borrow from Aristotle, is capable of instructing at the same time that it delights. (163)

YA literature's power as an educational tool to teach young readers through entertainment is arguably the most important feature of dystopian YA fiction. This is especially true from an environmental standpoint, as suggested by ecocritics like Carissa Ann Baker. Baker argues that "it is a theoretical imperative to study the literature that the future generations, who must claim responsibility for repairing the earth, are actually reading" (Baker 199). In fact, "such examinations demonstrate ecological criticism's relevance to the culture of young adults who are in a position to effect change in the ways we read literary texts, in the ways we treat our environment, and in the ways literature can call its readers to action" (200). For critics and

scholars to ignore YA literature—especially a wildly popular work like *The Hunger Games*—then, is both shortsighted and detrimental to cultural criticism, most notably to ecocriticism.

So while the novel is ostensibly a teenage love story, environmental ethics lie at the heart of *The Hunger Games*. "Like *The Road*," writes Tom Henthorne, "one of the Hunger Games trilogy's primary messages involves the environment, which has been severely damaged by pollution and war" (112). Also similar to *The Road*, the cause of environmental collapse is mentioned only briefly in Collins's novel. *The Hunger Games*, in fact, devotes just a single line early in the novel about the cataclysmic events that led to the post-apocalyptic landscape of the novel, when the narrator, Katniss, listens to a speech by a government official that recalls how the former North American continent was irrevocably transformed by "the disasters, the droughts, the storms, the fires, the encroaching seas that swallowed up so much of the land, the brutal war for what little sustenance remained" (18). It is clear that colossal, environmental disruptions led to the post-apocalyptic landscape, yet there is no mention in the text of what initially caused those series of ecological disasters. As Henthorne notes, Collins "only hints at what happened in North America over the course of hundreds of years, never being specific. Although we eventually learn that civilization as we know it ended because [of] environmental damage...we are never provided with specific detail" (112). Narratively, the text's vagueness about the cause of apocalypse makes sense, considering that the novel is told from the point of view of Katniss, a character born several decades after the events in question. Yet Henthorne and other critics surmise through this passage, as well as through the novel's overall focus on the devastating effects of human hubris and mistreatment of the natural environment, that the initial cause was most likely due

to global warming. "To Katniss, who lives hundreds of years in the future, the consequences of global warming are part of her everyday life: she and others suffer in the future because of decisions we are making now" (Henthorne 112). In fact, according to the EPA, a dramatic increase in the "frequency and intensity" of wildfires, storms, and droughts, along with rising sea levels and increased costs for food and water due to shortages, are all anticipated future impacts of climate change ("Climate").

This logical assumption makes the dystopian science fiction setting of *The Hunger Games* all the more relevant. In *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, Suvin places the literary technique of extrapolation as a cornerstone of science fiction. Extrapolation is also one of the main intersections between science fiction and environmental literature, as Otto demonstrates through his use of the term "ecodystopia," which he defines as environmental science fiction texts that "imagine future consequences of present-day activities, provoking reflection on these activities" (10). Otto goes on to note that

> Ecodystopian science fiction stages dystopian presents and futures, frightening worlds not disengaged from the now but instead very much extrapolated out of some current and real, anti-ecological trend—whether that trend is social, scientific, economic, religious, or a combination of these and others rehearsed daily in the contemporary order of things. (50)

The post-apocalyptic setting of *The Hunger Games*, then, can be seen as an extrapolation of the recent and frightening rise in global warming due to increased greenhouse gasses caused by human activity, a trend that will only continue without serious and immediate societal changes. Bruce Martin comes to a similar conclusion, arguing that *The Hunger Games* "creates an imaginary future in which science and technology transform society and nature

into exaggerated images of the present" (220). So while the dystopian world of the novel is imaginary, it is based upon current, ecological trends that offer a chilling reflection on our future.

The southern Appalachian setting of *The Hunger Games* is also a vital aspect in the novel's use of extrapolation. The text is unambiguous about naming the region in which the novel opens, making it clear early on that District 12, Katniss's home district, "was in a region known as Appalachia" (41). The explicitness in naming Appalachia as a central location in the text is intriguing. As Tina L. Hanlon notes in her article "Coal Dust and Ballads: Appalachia and District 12," the entire Hunger Games trilogy "has few specific references to the places and history of America as we know it…[so] the distancing of this futuristic nation makes it all the more significant that Appalachia is named as the location of District 12" (59). Much of that significance, she points out, lies in the direct connection between the novel's future vision of Appalachia known as District 12 and one of the most prominent historical and current features of Appalachia today—coal mining.

While other connections between Southern Appalachia and District 12 are made in the novel, such as a similarity in traditional music and folk medicine, the coal mining culture and its environmental and cultural impacts on the region are the most striking and emphasized links between the two regions. The first part of the novel is filled with Katniss's reflections on District 12's coal-mining tradition, as well as its connection to the past. "Even hundreds of years ago, they mined coal here. Which is why our miners have to dig so deep" (41). Coal mining is the main industry in District 12. Katniss's father, like the majority of people in District 12, worked the mines for a living, until he was killed in a mine explosion some years before the novel begins. Yet coal mining dominates not just the labor market, but

every feature of life in District 12, even down to children's education. "Somehow it all comes back to coal at school. Besides basic reading and math most of our instruction is coal-related" (41-2). Connors notes, "In District 12, nearly every aspect of a person's existence is tied to the business of extracting coal from the earth" (152). The novel makes it clear, though, that this is far from a positive development:

> Our Part of District 12, nicknamed the Seam, is usually crawling with coal miners heading out to the morning shift at this hour. Men and women with hunched shoulders, swollen knuckles, many who have long since stopped trying to scrub the coal dust out of their broken nails, the lines of their sunken faces. (4)

As this passage suggests, the spiritual, physical, and environmental degradation caused by the coal-mining industry is one of the important underlying themes of the text, and a somber reflection on the real-world Appalachia of past and present.

The only entity that truly benefits from the "swollen knuckles" and "sunken faces" of the miners of District 12 is the dystopian government of Panem. All the coal extracted from the Appalachian Mountains is shipped by train directly to the Capitol in order to power the city's advanced electrical grid and other technological wonders, while District 12 is fortunate to receive electricity for a few hours each night. This literal and figurative power imbalance emphasizes the Capitol's hubris and profit-centered exploitation of its people. Insert the term "mining company" in place of "the Capitol" in the previous sentence, and the novel's use of Appalachian coal mining as an extrapolation technique becomes strikingly clear. As Hanlon points out:

> The focus on coal mining and the exploitation of miners and mountain families obviously link[s] District 12 with Appalachian history. Katniss's accounts of the

injustices and deprivations suffered by miners' families resemble countless stories, real and fictional, from Appalachia and other mining regions, illustrating the human cost of industrialization. (59)

The Appalachian setting of the novel, then, is not just an interesting side note; it establishes a clear parallel between our current world and the imagined future of the text. To Hanlon, "the Appalachian coalfields provide one of the best historical backdrops for a dystopian view of exploited workers, especially since the exploitation continues today" (61). If this current exploitation of workers—and the environment—continues, the novel suggests, our future may not be so different from the post-apocalyptic vision of *The Hunger Games*.

Environmentally, the novel contrasts the Capitol's exploitation of nature with Katniss's intimate connection with nature. While much of the landscape of Panem has been decimated by environmental disasters, industrialization, and advanced technology, District 12 is surrounded by some of the last remaining woodlands and is the only district in Panem with any direct contact to wilderness. As Katniss describes, "District 12 is pretty much the end of the line. Beyond us, there's only wilderness. If you don't count the ruins of District 13 that still smolder from the toxic bombs" (83). Actual contact between District 12 and the wilderness, though, is strictly forbidden by the Capitol. An electrified, "high chain-link fence topped with barbed-wire loops" surrounds the borders of the District 12, built nominally to keep out the wild predators that roam the forests, but with the additional benefit to the Capitol of separating its residents from nature (4).

For the Capitol, nature not under humankind's control is an unknown, and therefore a potential source of danger to its totalitarian hold on it people. In this sense, the Capitol experiences nature as a "negative sublime," where "the distribution of power is always

grossly unequal: either humans dominate nature through the use of intellect, or nature renders humans impotent by impressing upon them feelings of utter insignificance" (Vernon 66). In order to maintain its control of the residents of Panem, the Capitol is careful to never show even a hint of weakness. Nature, thus, must be flaunted as being under the complete domination of the Capitol; otherwise, the Capitol may reveal signs of "impotence" which could foster hope for rebellion in its citizens. The Capitol's severe, human-versus-nature mentality also reveals its inherent "ecophobia," a term Simon C. Estok defines as "an irrational and groundless hatred of the natural world, as present and subtle in our daily lives and literature as homophobia and racism and sexism...it is about power and control; it is what makes looting and plundering of animal and nonanimal resources possible" (208). The Capitol's exploitation of the environment through coal mining, as well as its attempts to dominate, restrict, and control nature—as the electrified manmade border between District 12 and the wilderness exemplifies—suggests a latent ecophobia that underlies much of the Capitol's actions throughout the novel.

Katniss, on the other hand, is intimately tied to nature throughout the novel. Although the wilderness is viewed by the residents of District 12 as "the scary, forbidden place beyond the fences" (314), the premature death of Katniss's father and the sudden loss of the family's sole income forces Katniss to venture beyond the district's borders in search of food to keep her family alive. Because the Capitol only supplies her district with electricity a few hours each day, these fences are rarely electrified, and Katniss takes advantage of the few weak spots that exist. While she knows that punishment for such a transgression could be death— the Capitol has ruled that "trespassing in the woods is illegal and poaching carries the severest of penalties" (5)—her fear of the Capitol and her fear of the wilderness's "scary"

unknowns are trumped by her more immediate fear of starvation. What Katniss discovers behind the fences is an area "teeming with summer life, greens to gather, roots to dig, fish iridescent in the sunlight," not to mention an edible tuber called katniss, the plant which Katniss is named after (9). Katniss's experience with nature, unlike the Capitol's or her fellow citizens', can be described in the text as a "positive sublime." As Vernon points out, the experience is one in which "individuals confront the magnitude of the sublime object, and instead of feelings insignificant, they transcend current conceptions of self and discern the unity of the environment, of which the individual is a part" (66). Through foraging and hunting, Katniss becomes part of the ecology of the wilderness, transcending the ecophobic path forced upon her by the Capitol.

In fact, the wilderness outside her district becomes more of a home for Katniss than her actual homeplace. While the text rarely mentions Katniss's familial house, her childhood home, scenes and memories of Katniss in the woods take up a significant portion of the novel. The wilderness beyond the fences, which she calls "my home woods," is Katniss's "savior" both physically and mentally, providing food as well as a "calm[ing]" sanctuary from the bleak reality of District 12 and the ever-watchful eye of the Capitol (196, 51, 87). As Baker notes, "When she is in the woods, she feels at home; when she is anywhere else, she longs for the comfort of home. Even *visions* of nature sustain her in dangerous situations and they establish her continual link with the wild" (211). In essence, the woods for Katniss are what Bachelard refers to as an "oneiric" or "felicitous" space, a place that "shelters daydreaming...protects the dreamer…[and] allows one to dream in peace" (6). Unlike her actual homeplace, the woods offer her a safe place where she can finally be herself, regardless of the restrictions of her totalitarian society.

Early in the novel, Katniss reflects on how as a child "I learned to hold my tongue and to turn my features into an indifferent mask so that no one could ever read my thoughts...Even at home...I avoid discussing tricky topics. Like the reaping, or food shortages, or the Hunger Games" (6). Yet the protection of the woods allows her and her hunting partner, Gale, a place to speak their minds about the Capitol's oppression. "In addition to its other advantageous aspects, the wilderness, the woods outside of District 12 in particular, represents safety, where Katniss and Gale can rant against the Capitol and where the Capitol cannot control the thoughts, expressions, or identities of Katniss and Gale" (Baker 202). Similarly, Alice Curry argues that "[t]his illegal transgression of city boundaries posits the woods as a forbidden space with counter-hegemonic potential" (150). In this way, nature in the novel is linked not only to safety, but also to freedom, power, and rebellion. Throughout the novel, as Baker notes, "Katniss uses the wilderness, its space and sustenance, and its proximity to her District, to subvert the Capitol both before and after the Games...The wilderness is thus not only a physical space but a symbolic one conducive to independence" (Baker 201-2). Nature becomes the very tool that Katniss uses to subvert the authority of the Capitol by the end of the novel, inadvertently sparking the rebellion that will ultimately bring down the Capitol's totalitarian regime in the final book of the trilogy.

Katniss's close connection with nature, along with her Appalachian roots, also plays a major role in the theme of "otherness" in the novel. After Katniss volunteers as tribute in place of her younger sister for the annual Hunger Games, the novel quickly moves from the impoverished, natural, and somber setting of District 12 into the wealthy, artificial, and technologically advanced city of the Capitol. Katniss, traveling outside her district for the very first time, arrives in the Capitol and is awed to find it "glistening" with "shiny cars" and

"oddly dressed people with bizarre hair and painted faces who have never missed a meal"

(59). She soon meets with her stylists in the Remake Center, who are assigned to make

Katniss over in preparation for her appearance on national TV. In keeping with the fashion

trends of the Capitol, her stylists wear their hair colored in bright, artificial hues like "aqua,"

as well as decorate their bodies with metallic-colored tattoos and copious amounts of

makeup. Perhaps most bizarrely, it is also a mark of Capitol high fashion to dye one's skin in

unnatural colors, as seen in one of Katniss's stylists whose skin is "dyed a pale shade of pea

green" (62). To Katniss, her stylists "are so dyed, stenciled, and surgically altered they're

grotesque" (63). The Capitol to an outsider like Katniss—not to mention the reader—seems

like "a garish, alien landscape" (Baker 203). Full of bizarre "others," this "alien landscape" is

a clear example of what Suvin refers to as the "cognitive estrangement" of science fiction (4).

To the people of the Capitol, though, it is Katniss and her naturalness and

Appalachian identity that are viewed as alien and "other." In his study, Williamson explores

the pervasive image of people from Appalachia as the hillbilly "other" in popular culture,

most notoriously in the 1972 film *Deliverance*. Katniss holds a similar sublime mix of horror

and fascination for her stylists in the Capitol. Before her trip to the Capitol, Katniss had

"never been in a car before. Rarely ever ridden in wagons. In the Seam, we travel on foot"

(48). Similarly, she had never seen—let alone used—a modern shower before, having bathed

only in tubs of cold water "unless we boil it" (42). To her stylists, Katniss is the stereotypical

hillbilly, an "other" less akin to a civilized human than a wild—and hairy—animal.

Katniss's makeover in the hands of her stylists is a daylong ordeal, one that includes a

complete skin scrub, manicure, and "primarily, ridding [her] body of hair" with wax strips

and tweezers until she feels like a "plucked bird, ready for roasting" (61). As one of her

stylists exclaims, "You're just so hairy!" (61). At the end of the grueling session, "The three [stylists] step back and admire their work. 'Excellent! You almost look like a human being now!' says Flavius, and they all laugh" (62). As Flavius's "joke" reveals, it is only by removing the features of the natural body and adding artificial elements that a "hillbilly" animal can be transformed into a human, another example of the underlying ecophobia inherent in the culture of the Capitol.

While controlling and removing nature in favor of the artificial is a mark of sophistication for the citizens in the Capitol, in the bloody arena of the Hunger Games, the totalitarian government's use of environmental control and artificiality takes a much darker, more diabolical twist. To begin the 74th annual Hunger Games, Katniss and the other tributes are individually elevated from the "catacombs that lie beneath the arena" to find themselves in bright, open air surrounded by beautiful pine forests, bubbling streams, sandy beaches, and a large, calm lake (144). Yet, as Connors notes, "Despite their seeming authenticity, these landscapes are characterized by a sense of artificiality" (150). This pastoral countryside of the Games might appear to be a completely natural setting, but it is an artificially constructed environment inside the invisible walls of an arena. The natural elements are—for the most part—real, but everything in the arena has been intentionally planned and artificially arranged to add both drama to the plight of the tributes and to heighten the sublime enjoyment for Panem viewers at home. The fact that viewers are experiencing the Games via television contributes to the artificiality of the event, in which the residents of Panem are watching the convergence of nature and technology through a medium of technology, further separating them from the real.

The Gamemakers in the Capitol are able to exert complete control over the arena's constructed environment. The anticipation and mystery of how, what, or when the Gamemakers will employ this environmental control is all part of the Games. Temperatures might rise or fall dramatically, streams drain dry overnight, fireballs propel from the ground—all at the touch of a few controls. The effect on the tributes is both physically and mentally disorienting, as exemplified by Katniss's questioning of even the moon in the arena:

> A full, beautiful moon emerges...I can't decide if the moon is real or merely a
>
> projection of the Gamemakers...I badly want it to be my moon, the same one I see
>
> from the woods around District 12. That would give me something to cling to in the
>
> surreal world of the arena where the authenticity of everything is to be doubted. (310)

In the "surreal world of the arena," nothing in the environment is certain and what might initially appear as something natural might likely turn out to be artificial—and dangerously so. One of Katniss's first experiences with this is when, during the early days of the Games, Katniss is forced out of the safety of her hiding spot in the high branches of a tree by the sudden appearance of a raging wildfire. She quickly realizes, though, that it "was no tribute's campfire gone out of control, no accidental occurrence. The flames that bear down on me have an unnatural height, a uniformity that marks them as human-made, machine-made, Gamemaker-made" (173). Controlled by the Gamemakers, this fire, as well as the ensuing fireballs exploding out of launchers hidden in the surrounding trees and rocks, specifically target Katniss in order to flush her out into the open areas of the arena, where there will be a better chance for her to run into an armed tribute. Since the Games are a televised competition, lulls in the action are seen as detrimental to the enjoyment of the viewers; therefore, drama at times must be created artificially by the Gamemakers. As Baker notes, "It

is apparent that nature, or the appearance of nature, or sometimes the manipulation of real nature, is indeed the greatest weapon the Capitol uses" (207). While experiences like these are terrifying for Katniss, for Panem viewers at home—especially the ecophobic residents in the Capitol—the excitement and anticipation behind the Gamemakers' manipulation of natural elements only adds to the sublime, cinematic "thrill" of the Games.

This awe inspired by the Gamemakers' technological mastery over the environment of the arena, as well as the mystery and anticipation behind what scientific trickery the Gamemakers might pull next, is a fascinating example of what David Nye has referred to as the "technological sublime." In his study *American Technological Sublime*, Nye builds upon earlier ideas of the technological sublime explored by Perry Miller and Leo Marx to explore the ways in which technology, and not just nature, can be a major source for the sublime. Nye's study examines how the concept of the sublime in early twentieth-century America shifted away from the Romantic, eighteenth-century idea of awe at the power of God or Nature, and toward a more modern awe at the sight of human-made creations such as "the New York skyline, the Golden Gate Bridge, or the earth-shaking launch of a space shuttle" (Nye xiii). Much of the source of the sublime in these technological wonders is due to the fact that they "manifest a split between those who understand and control machines and those who do not," and this "sublime based on mechanical improvements is made possible by the superior imagination of an engineer or technician, who creates an object that overwhelms the imagination of ordinary men" (Nye 60). In *The Hunger Games*, the Gamemakers—the engineers behind the Hunger Games—hold a celebrity status in Panem, and they make a name for themselves by the technological creativity and innovation they bring to each Game in order to "overwhelm the imagination[s]" of viewers. There is no line that cannot be

crossed in their attempt at technological sublimity. As Connors notes, "Collins imagines a world in which any sort of ethical code that might hold scientists accountable for their work has been stripped away, leaving them free to enact whatever monstrous visions their minds are capable of producing" (158). And the Gamemakers, naturally, keep their most monstrous creations for the finale of the Games.

During the last days of the Games, after nineteen of the young tributes have been horribly murdered by either the Gamekeeper-controlled environment or each other, the surviving three—Katniss, her friend/lover and fellow District 12 tribute Peeta, and their blood-thirsty arch-nemesis Cato—prepare for a final battle to the death. The Gamemakers, though, have different plans. Before the last three tributes can square off, the Gamemakers unleash one of their most terrifying and psychologically-twisted manipulations of nature: monstrous, wolf-like chimeras that blend human and animal through genetic mutations. Technologically engineered chimeras like these, referred to in the text as "muttations," are one of the favorite and well-known tools of oppression for the Capitol, and include a variety of "genetically modified organisms that distort and disfigure nature into weapons of domination" (Martin 221). Yet even Katniss could never imagine the wolf-human hybrids that suddenly descend upon the last surviving tributes:

> I've never seen these mutts, but they're no natural-born animals. They resemble huge
> wolves, but what wolf lands and then balances easily on its hind legs? What wolf
> waves the rest of the pack forward with its front paw as though it had a wrist?...As
> they join together, they raise up again to stand easily on their back legs giving them an
> eerily human quality. (331-2)

Highly intelligent and terrifyingly vicious, the three tributes manage to escape to temporary safety upon the giant, metal Cornucopia that is the centerpiece of the arena. It is then that Katniss comes to an even more horrifying realization—the human parts of the wolf-like chimeras are made from the bodies of the recently killed tributes:

> Their [human] eyes are the least of my worries. What about their brains? Have they been given any of the real tributes memories? Have they been programmed to hate our faces particularly because we have survived and they were so callously murdered? And the ones we actually killed...do they believe they're avenging their own deaths?
>
> (334)

Physically, these muttations are only one of the range of deadly, technological inventions the Capitol has unleashed on the tributes, but mentally, they are perhaps the most devastating. Sharon D. King has found that "[s]tudies of monstrosity note that these chimeric entities generate terror by creating confusion" (113), and Katniss's series of horrified mental questions in the passage above are a testament to that. Who, or what, would she be killing by defending herself again these muttations, especially considering that some of her former tributes were close allies? For the Capitol, this psychological turmoil created through their manipulation of nature is the exact outcome desired, since the purpose of these wolf-human muttations is "to mock, unhinge, and terrorize the survivors, and ultimately to create carnage for the viewers" (Baker 207). By using natural elements, the Capitol is also able to further its goal of separating its citizens mentally and emotionally from nature, converting the ecophobic, negative sublime into a powerful, totalitarian weapon. As Curry argues,

> This dislocated perspective...further dislocates the tributes from their environments so that their experience of the natural world becomes not one of mutual interaction but of

defence against attack. By turning environmental suffering into spectacle, the

Gamemakers render the earth both threatened—manipulated at will—and threat: the

same position as that of the young tributes who must defend themselves by learning

how to kill. (105)

Similar to the exploitative coal-mining culture discussed earlier in this chapter, the Capitol is

able to use nature as a tool for oppressing its citizens, while at the same time manipulating its

citizens to oppress nature.

In the final scene of the 74th Hunger Games, though, Katniss is able to use nature to

fight back against the Capitol. Throughout the Games, her intimate familiarity with the

natural world and her ability to live off the land have helped her survive, even in the face of

the Capitol's environmental manipulations, much to the Capitol's growing discomfort. As

Baker notes, "Someone like Katniss, who appreciates the survival inherent in the natural

world and who is aware of the consequences of dissociating from or tampering with nature, is

a perpetual threat to the Capitol's peace" (207). That "peace" of the Capitol is forever

shattered when Katniss—who, along with Peeta, is the last of the two remaining tributes still

living after Cato is mauled by the muttations—comes up with a plan that just might ensure

that they both can live. Earlier in the Games, she collected a handful of poisonous berries,

ones she recognized by the fact that they grow in her own "home woods." Nature, now—true

nature—becomes her own devastating weapon:

Yes, they have to have a victor. Without a victor, the whole thing would blow up in

the Gamemakers' faces...I loosen the top of the pouch and pour a few spoonfuls of

berries into [Peets'a] palm. Then I fill my own. "On the count of three?"

...I spread out my fingers, and the dark berries glisten in the sun….I lift my hand to

my mouth, taking one last look at the world. The berries have just passed my lips

when the trumpeters begin to blare. (344-5)

Katniss's ruse (or was it?) works. The Gamemakers immediately intervene to prevent their

double suicide and crown both her and Peeta as joint victors of the Games.

For the Capitol, though, this defiant and thrilling act of rebellion reveals a chink in

the meticulously crafted image of the Capitol, and signals a crack in the government's

heretofore omniscient power for every TV viewer across Panem. For the first time, nature

ceases to be a forbidden or feared sublime force for many of Panem's residents, and instead

becomes a symbol of power. As Baker notes:

[Katniss's] familiarity with berries, enabling one of [her] more important gestures of

rebellion at the end of the first novel, demonstrates her identification with wilderness

as transgressive, rather than cultivated, nature. Countering the Capitol's perception of

the supremacy of cultivated nature, Katniss proves that understanding the forest and

what lies within can lead to subversion and power. (200-1)

After all the horrific and oppressive manipulations of nature by the Capitol through its

knowledge of advanced technology, the fact that the opening blow of the rebellion—the one

that will eventually topple the totalitarian government—all lies in a few wild, nature-grown

berries, is one of the most powerful environmental messages of the novel. As Martin argues,

the novel "offers lessons for its readers about the limits of control and domination, revealing

how even the strongest powers attempting to control nature and human nature can be resisted

and overthrown" (220). The tool to overthrow this ecophobic oppression, the novel suggests,

may be nature itself.

So overall, while *The Hunger Games* is nominally a post-apocalyptic love story about and for young adults, it is clear that, as Baker asserts, "society's relationship to earth is the primary, rather than secondary, theme for the trilogy" (198). This environmental message is fascinatingly explored in the novel through the science fiction tropes of advanced technology and estrangement, as well as extrapolation based on current environmental concerns in Appalachia and the world today. The message is both proleptic and inspiring for readers. "The implied warning of the *Hunger Games* trilogy is two-fold: 1) the current environmental and technological path is leading to catastrophe, and 2) the politics underpinning this path are inadequate to address the problem" (Martin 227)—all of which makes the YA aspect of the novel that much more important.

As Baker argues, *The Hunger Games* is "especially timely and call[s] on the young people of the present and future to think critically about the environmental destruction that is happening all over the world, and to connect their interests in 'green' reading practices to 'green' action" (198). While these young people may have never read—nor even heard of—previous proleptic environmental literature like Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, *The Hunger Games* can fill a similar role:

> Because of these frightening images of what can happen when humans disconnect from nature, *The Hunger Games* trilogy is an important work of fiction that young adults should read and that scholars need to scrutinize from an ecocritical standpoint, in order that we all might understand the trilogy's profound (and prophetic) commentary on humanity's current and future place in the natural world. (Baker 198)

At the intersection of science fiction and Appalachia, the novel presents a chilling call-to-action for its readers young and old. If humans continue on our current ecophobic path, if we

disconnect from the warning signs of global warming, what might the Appalachia of the future look like? The answer, as *The Hunger Games* teaches, is entirely up to us.

Chapter 4: "A New Earth": Envisioning Ecological Catastrophe in Appalachia

Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games*, like other science fiction texts set in Appalachia, reveal the fascinating convergence of what—on the surface—may seem like an unexpected and counterintuitive literary connection. Science fiction is a genre often devoted to technology and tomorrow; Appalachia is a region celebrated for its deep-felt heritage and strong link to yesterday. Yet, at their intersection, we find literary works in which technology and the future are not separate from Appalachia, but intimately blended with it. The emotional power of these fictions is due to the startling and often uneasy relationship between past and future—of what was, is, and may be—and all that can be lost along the way.

In the post-apocalyptic landscapes of *The Road* and *The Hunger Games*, the connection between past, present, and future is both chilling and proleptic. The novels envision harrowing futures in which Appalachian culture and the mountain environment have been destroyed by current human technology and modernization—futures that have not yet occurred, but are all too possible. As Portelli has explained, science fiction and Appalachian literature share common thematic similarities in their treatment of space or place, otherness, and the impact of human modernization and technology, themes which are present in *The Road* and *The Hunger Games* through the science fiction elements and Appalachian settings, though these elements appear in intriguingly different ways.

In *The Road*, the hellish, post-apocalyptic setting and complete social and ecological collapse, most likely caused by nuclear warfare a decade or so before, unveils an Appalachia that could be described as post-place. With the world on the brink of complete annihilation, with few signs of life in the blackened, ash-covered landscape, sense of place has lost almost all connection with literal space and survives only in the realm of dreams and memories. As the man's return to his Appalachian roots at the beginning of the novel reveals, any positive sense of place has been utterly transformed by the cataclysmic event's ecological destruction. His Appalachian homeplace—the "oneiric house" in which as a child he once safely dreamed—has become an abandoned enclosure that might be hiding murderous marauders; the once thriving Appalachian flora among which he once walked as a child is now only dead trees and the charred remains of nature.

Yet these post-places are more than simply painful reminders of a world that now exists only in the man's mind. The alluring memories and dreams they spawn are also deadly in a post-apocalyptic world where the only hope for survival is to focus on the harsh reality of the moment. At the end of the novel, the man dies wrapped in his memories of place, while his son—born after the cataclysmic event and without any memory of the pre-apocalypse—lives on, suggesting that to survive in a post-place world one must have no sense of place.

This cognitive disparity in the ways the man and the boy interpret the post-place landscape creates a disturbing picture of "otherness" in the novel. The theme of otherness, or what Suvin describes in science fiction texts as the "novum" that causes "estrangement" (4), is most apparent in the horrific, future world the novel envisions. For the man, and for the reader, the post-apocalyptic, post-place world is a novum, a "strange newness" that places the

setting and its inhabitants into the category of "other" (Suvin 4). Yet, as both the man and readers come to realize through the text, it is not in fact the vision of the future that is the novum that causes estrangement, but the disconcerting awareness that it is us—those born pre-apocalypse—that are the alien "others" in this new world. Because we remember the place in the post-place future, we can never be a part of it and would suffer a similar experience as the man in the post-apocalyptic future. This realization is most sobering in the final coda of the novel, in which the sublime image of swimming brook trout in the pre-apocalyptic present—an image that the text positions as a dream-memory of the reader—portends the imminent, final death of the planet, a death caused by us. While devastating and pessimistic, the novel's conclusion highlights the cost of human's technological hubris in terms of its effects on the environment, and is a dramatic and proleptic vision of the future that forces readers to critically reflect on the environmental road our society is now travelling upon towards ecological destruction.

While *The Hunger Games* envisions a similarly dark and bleak image of the future, Collins's novel—set in an extrapolated, post-apocalyptic Appalachia decades after anthropogenic climate change and technological warfare destroyed the world's ecological fabric—offers a slightly more hopeful prediction for the fate of humankind. In the novel, sense of place and feelings of otherness are not harbingers of death, as they are in *The Road*, but powerful tools of survival, identity, and resistance. For Katniss, living in an Appalachia in which the social and environmental past have been decimated by the exploitation of the Capitol, her "oneiric" or "felicitous" space is the only place still left untouched by human technology—the forests near her home. These isolated woods, and the food the forest provides, help her survive in a district teetering on the edge of starvation. Her "home woods"

also provide a protected space where she can be herself and speak her mind despite the Capitol's oppression (196). Her intimate connection to these woods emphasizes what Weiskel has termed the "positive sublime," in which she experiences the natural "sublime" as an ecological union with her environment. In fact, it is her memories of the woods and her close relationship with nature that allow Katniss to not only survive in the brutal arena of the Games, but also to persevere, and ultimately to foment the rebellion that will eventually topple the totalitarian government of the Capitol.

While the Capitol's advanced technology and culture of artificiality create a cognitive estrangement that positions it and its residents as the "other" to both the reader and Katniss, to the people of the Capitol, it is Katniss and her connection with Appalachia and nature which seem alien and other. Katniss is viewed as the "hillbilly" in an advanced society, yet this othering only heightens her self-identity, encouraging her to draw strength from her Appalachian roots as a powerful resistance to the ultimate artificiality of the Games. Similar to *The Road*, in *The Hunger Games* readers become aligned to the otherness of the protagonist through their connection with a pre-apocalyptic world, and in the us-versus-them mentality of the novel, Katniss and nature become positive forces against the ecophobic society created by the Capitol. Unlike *The Road*, though, sense of place and otherness become positive forces to regain ecological balance in a post-apocalyptic, ecodystopian future.

While *The Road* and *The Hunger Games* both explore the themes of place and otherness in a future Appalachia adversely impacted by technology, the proleptic visions they offer differ dramatically. The ecological crisis anticipated in *The Road* is both "senseless" and hopeless, and one that leads to finality—the tragic death of the world. Yet the novel

provides no alternative road for a different outcome for our future. In fact, the ambiguity of what caused the apocalypse along with the novel's final, chilling coda suggests that our future ecological destruction due to our technological hubris may be unavoidable and inevitable. In the proleptic vision of *The Hunger Games*, on the other hand, while human disregard for nature has destroyed the social and environmental ecology of the envisioned future, the novel suggests that reconnecting with nature can change that outcome, as it does for Katniss. Through environmental awareness and learning from our mistakes, we can create a different future from the bleak and brutal one envisioned in *The Hunger Games*.

As this study's analysis of these works reveals, ecocriticism opens the door for fascinating opportunities and possibilities for further research into the connections between science fiction and Southern Appalachia. This is especially true for science fiction texts set in Appalachia, which, as the introduction chapter of this study explored, are much less rare than readers might think. In fact, a recent novel written by one of the region's most popular authors—Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior*—lies at this fascinating intersection between science fiction and Appalachia, and similarly explores environmental concerns through the themes of space or place, otherness, and the impact of human modernization and technology.

Kingsolver studied biology before turning to writing fiction, and *Flight Behavior*, like much of her recent work, explores the role of science and ecology in the Appalachian region. *Flight Behavior*, though, with its apocalyptic vision of the impact of anthropogenic climate change, is arguably her most proleptic work of fiction to date, one that centers on the unexpected and foreboding arrival of millions of monarch butterflies into the Tennessee mountains. This arrival signals an alarming and possibly deadly change in the butterfly's usual migration pattern, since "for the first time in recorded history" the butterflies are

aggregating for the winter in southern Appalachia, thousands of miles from their normal wintering roost in the warmer climate of Mexico (121-2). In the novel, this ecological disruption is clear evidence of the far-reaching impact of global warming, leading critics like Engela Evancie to group the novel as part of "an emerging literary genre" called "climate fiction," which Evancie defines as "novels and short stories in worlds, not unlike our own, where the Earth's systems are noticeably off-kilter" (Evancie).

While scientific concerns form the basis for *Flight Behavior*, and Evancie's definition of "cli-fi" sounds akin to science fiction—in that works in both genres are set in worlds "not unlike our own"—Kingsolver's novel has generally not been regarded as science fiction by critics, despite its science fiction elements. Part of this may be due to the seemingly contemporary setting of the novel. Evancie, in fact, marks a clear distinction between "cli-fi" and "sci-fi," noting that "sci-fi usually takes place in a dystopian future, [while] cli-fi happens in a dystopian present" (Evancie). Yet this simple distinction is complicated by the fact that *Flight Behavior* does not depict contemporary events, but uses the literary technique and common science fiction trope of extrapolation to, as Otto describes the term, "imagine future consequences of present-day activities" (10). Kingsolver herself writes in her "Author's Note" at the end of the novel that, while the catalyst for *Flight Behavior* is derived from an actual event—the catastrophic flooding that decimated the Mexican town of Angangueo in 2010—"[t]he sudden relocation of these overwintering [monarch butterfly] colonies to southern Appalachia is a fictional event that has occurred only in the pages of this novel" (435). In other words, like *The Road* and *The Hunger Games*, Kingsolver's novel uses a scientific possibility in a rationalized discourse to envision an imaginary future that has not happened, but *could*—which is the working definition of science fiction in this study. The

novel also hinges on an encounter with the science fiction concept of the "novum" in order to shed fresh perspective on the present. That "novum"—which in the novel is the new and surprising disruption of the monarch's migration pattern—causes cognitive estrangement in both the characters of the novel and readers. Suvin posits that in science fiction works the novum must be "so central and significant that it determines the whole narrative logic" (70), which aptly describes the central and indispensable role that the novum of the butterflies plays in *Flight Behavior*.

Unlike *The Road* and *The Hunger Games*, Kingsolver's novel is not post-apocalyptic science fiction. Instead, the novel could be better described as what I term mid-apocalyptic science fiction. The novel opens in the small, fictional farming community of Feathertown, Tennessee, a region experiencing its "wettest fall on record" (6). Due to this apocalyptic deluge of almost non-stop rain, crops have "melted to a liquid stench on the vine" (21), and flooding and landslides have become increasingly common, and catastrophic, events. As Dellarobia Turnbow—a young mother of two and the protagonist of the novel—describes the strange weather that is wreaking havoc on her local ecosystem, the "time seemed biblical" as if the "world of sensible seasons had come undone" (123, 49). So whereas the settings of *The Road* and *The Hunger Games* drop readers into the aftereffects of cataclysmic climate change, *Flight Behavior* begins in the ecological throes that may one day lead to the post-apocalyptic landscapes depicted in McCarthy's and Collins's novels.

It is Dellarobia who first discovers the sublime novum in the mountains near her homeplace. Feeling trapped in her strained marriage and disappointed with the way her life has turned out, Dellarobia sets out on a path over the mountains for a planned adulterous tryst, but as she comes upon a clearing near the top, a bizarre vision makes her suddenly stop

short. "[S]omething was wrong. Or just strange. The trees above her were draped with more of the brownish clumps, and that was the least of it. The view out across the valley was puzzling and unreal, like a sci-fi movie" (13). What she had stumbled upon was a valley filled with millions of monarch butterflies, a beautiful and awe-inspiring sight, one that no one in the region had ever beheld before. It is the most sublime moment of Dellarobia's life. "She sat on her own here, staring at the glowing trees. Fascination curled itself around fright….It was a lake of fire, something far more fierce and wondrous than either of those elements alone. The impossible" (15-6). Yet that "fire was alive, and incomprehensibly immense, an unbounded, uncountable congregation of flame-colored insects" (53). For Dellarobia, a person who before this moment describes herself as someone who would not know nature "if it bit her," it is a profound experience of the positive sublime, in which for the first time she transcends her anthropocentric, everyday concerns to become intimately aware of her part in a greater ecology (4). This beautiful and frightening experience dramatically changes the way she views her environment, starting her on a new life path to eco-consciousness and environmental activism.

Despite the inspiring effects on Dellarobia, the dramatic roosting of millions of butterflies in the Appalachian Mountains is not a sublime experience for Ovid Byron, a scientist who has come to Feathertown to study the deviation in the monarchs' normal migration pattern. As Ovid tells Dellarobia, "Terrible, beautiful, it's not our call...We are scientists. Our job here is only to describe what exists" (148). What exists in the Tennessee mountains near Dellarobia's home is another sobering example of the effects of global warming, one that reveals an alarming disruption in a millennia of ecological balance. "Monarchs have wintered in Mexico since they originated as a species...We don't know

exactly how long that is, but it is many thousands of years. And this year, instead of the norm, something has put them here" (148). For Ovid, it is apocalyptic "evidence of a disordered system….a biological system falling apart along its seams" (365). Dellarobia, who joins Ovid and his scientific team in their study of the dying monarchs in the mountains, soon learns the truth about her sublime experience, realizing that what she once saw as awe-inspiring is actually the tragic reality of global warming, "a sickness of nature" that portends "the End of Days" (149, 172).

The novum of the butterflies' disrupted flight pattern also exposes the novel's examination of the theme of otherness. While monarchs are a natural occurrence in Appalachia, the fact that their normal wintering behavior has gone haywire—leading them to travel in such numbers to the "alien place" of the Tennessee mountains out-of-season (312)—is a dramatic example of the "other." They become an immediate sensation for the townsfolk of Feathertown, as well as the number of tourists who descend onto the town to view the strange and exotic spectacle, many of whom are environmental activists. Like the butterflies, these out-of-towners spur a number of social and cultural conflicts in Feathertown, leading Dellarobia to feel that she and her Appalachian neighbors have become the "other" in the tourists' eyes, simply mountain "hillbillies" that have no part in the modern world. "Apparently all those tourists ignored her because she and the Dimmits of this world were *you people*" (315), something set apart, the other. At the same time, though, in the political debate over climate change, the townsfolk of Feathertown are similarly viewing the outside world, especially the scientists, as the other. Dellarobia, a character who is striving to find a balance between the values and realities of her Appalachian community and the esoteric rhetoric of science, understands that for Feathertown, "[t]eams had been chosen, and

the scientists were not *us*, they were *them*" (171). In *The Hunger Games*, this us-versus-them mentality becomes a source of power for people in Appalachia, but *Flight Behavior* intriguingly complicates this simple dichotomy by deconstructing the idea of the other to, as critic Linda Wagner-Martin argues, encourage "readers to see that the increasingly precarious state of the global world was—and is—everyone's responsibility—just as it is likely to become everyone's miasma" (xii). In a collapsing ecosystem, there is no other, since we all are affected when that system begins to break down.

Like *The Road*, Kingsolver's novel is not optimistic about the fate of our natural world. The ecological damage cause by human hubris and technology may be too extensive for any hope to change the course of our future. As Ovid repeatedly laments in the novel, "what was the use of saving a world that had no soul left in it. Continents without butterflies, seas without coral reefs...What if all human effort amounted basically to saving a place for ourselves to park?" (317). Even Dellarobia's growing eco-awareness, passed down to her young son in one of the novel's few glimmers of hope, may not be enough to save the world from a post-apocalyptic future. As Patrick Murphy argues in his essay "Pessimism, Optimism, Human Inertia, and Anthropogenic Climate Change," "The monarch nesting in *Flight Behavior* is not a sufficient catalyst, just as no other climatic event up to this point in the fall of 2013 has proven to shift popular awareness for any length of time" (161). So while education about the alarming effects of global warming is key to our environmental future, the odds are likely too overwhelming to overcome.

The end of the novel, in its dramatic depiction of the loss of place, emphasizes this bleak prediction. In the final pages of the text, a flash flood has overwhelmed Dellarobia's farm, forcing her to seek refuge up the hill from her homeplace. As she watches in horror as

her home gets washed away in the deluge, her eyes are drawn to a strange flame above the floodwaters—the last of the remaining monarchs as "they flew out to a new earth" (433). It is, as Murphy notes, "an ominous rather than idyllic statement," one that leaves the fate of the butterflies, as well as Dellarobia's fate, in disconcerting doubt (161). Wagner-Martin, though, reads more finality in the closing scene:

> Dellarobia, like the butterflies, has no more choices. While the reader does not know how much of her family dies in the flooding, it seems clear that Dellarobia does not survive. And in the blending of the natural world with the human, the novel makes its sadly realistic point: extinction is the plotline for the butterflies. (197)

In this sense, it may be more apt to describe *Flight Behavior* not as "climate fiction," but as "extinction fiction," a work that "leaves a shriek of silence in readers' minds as they see how inevitable, how unavoidable, the natural disaster of flooding in the Tennessee farmlands has become" (Wagner-Martin xii). The extrapolated future envisioned in the novel portends the extinction of not just the butterflies, but of the human species along with it. The post-apocalypse, then, as the text chillingly suggests, is just around the corner.

Overall, *Flight Behavior*, along with *The Road* and *The Hunger Games*, reveals the fascinating intersection between science fiction and Appalachia. In these works, science fiction tropes and Appalachian culture are used to explore the uneasy relationship between past and future and to depict proleptic visions of worlds in which ecological systems have been destroyed by human technology and modernization. While their visions of the future may be bleak and the predictions posited as inevitable, they are also powerful and dramatic images of the all-too-possible effects of our current environmental crisis, and works that

force readers to reflect on—and maybe even respond to—our responsibilities in our ecological future. As philosopher Slavoj Žižek suggests:

> We have to accept that, at the level of possibilities, our future is doomed, that the catastrophe will take place, that it is our destiny—and then, against the background of this acceptance, mobilize ourselves to perform the act that will change destiny itself and thereby insert a new possibility into the past. Paradoxically, the only way to prevent the disaster is to accept is as inevitable. (151)

Recent works of science fiction set in Appalachia have done just this by encouraging us to confront the reality of our impending environmental apocalypse, opening the possibility for new—and ecologically balanced—roads into our future.

So while science fiction and Appalachia may seem to be unlikely bedfellows, this study has examined recent examples of science fiction texts set in the region to reveal the unlikely but powerful bridge between past and future. It is this convergence of tradition and innovation, past and future, that make science fiction texts set in southern Appalachia so fascinating and rich for on-going study.

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