

CULTURE AND CATASTROPHE: AN ECOCRITICAL READING OF SOUTHERN
APPALACHIAN LITERATURE

A Thesis
by
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Abstract

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This thesis focuses on Gurney Norman's *Divine Right's Trip* (1972), Ron Rash's *One Foot in Eden* (2002), and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) using an ecocritical reading to highlight the intersections between the environment and culture of Southern Appalachia. This analysis attempts to reveal possibilities for the restoration of the region's landscape after being marred by extractive industries including coal mining and hydroelectric damming. It will utilize the impact that these industries have had on well-known cultural traditions to promote the growth of, and intermingling with, new cultures. This thesis creates a space for an open discussion about the generational divides in Appalachia, migration out of the region, and the overall "Othering" of the region not only from the mainstream United States but also from the U.S. South. Ultimately, it strives to look at this unique geo-cultural region and how its literature can provide both a physical home for its residents and a place for cultural foundations in the form of generational knowledge, shared values, and practices concerning agriculture and spirituality.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to Southern Appalachia.

“This was a place for the lost.”- Ron Rash

“All I know is that I’m on my way to the University again, that I’m still trying, and that I believe if one perseveres in a righteous cause, he must eventually succeed.”- Gurney Norman

“I’m just on the road the same as you. No different.”- Cormac McCarthy

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Introduction

A recognizable and valued feature of Appalachian literature is that authors often create a sense of place that makes the natural environment almost like a character who plays a crucial role in the narrative. In her influential essay “Place in Fiction” Eudora Welty declares,

Place in fiction is the named, identified, concrete, exact and exacting, and therefore credible, gathering spot of all that has been felt, is about to be experienced, in the novel's progress. Location pertains to feeling; feeling profoundly pertains to place; place in history partakes of feeling, as feeling about history partakes of place. Every story would be another story, and unrecognizable as art, if it took up its characters and plot and happened somewhere else. (122)

This active agency of the natural landscape is developed in Appalachian texts, such as James Still's *River of Earth* (1940), Harriette Simpson Arnow's *The Dollmaker* (1954), Sheila Kay Adams' *My Old True Love* (2004), and Robert Gipe's *Trampoline* (2015) which show how the mountains, hills, streams, creeks, trees, caves, and landscapes of Appalachia contribute to the plot and act centrally as any other character might. As a result of the importance of natural environments in the region, and the literature concerning it, many Appalachian fiction writers have created stories that illustrate tensions within communities where people work with the land and live among the resources being utilized for industry, exploring cultural and ecological changes across generations. This attention to the relationship has culminated in a large collection of literature that can be viewed through an ecocritical lens that directly charts the interactions between the landscape around characters and the culture of these characters interacting with the landscape.

Ecocritical theory was put into practice in the 1970s with the term being coined by William Rueckert in his 1978 article “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” which formed the first wave of ecocriticism that highlighted the value of land and resources in literature. Ecocriticism examines the inherent struggle between the human and the natural. It contemplates where those lines fall and if there is even a divide between them. This first wave was pioneered by the likes of Leo Marx and Lynn White Jr. They looked to Thoreau, Emerson, and Whitman to determine that “wilderness” was pure and humans could never tread into it fully without harming it. Nature and this idea of “wildness” was seen as something completely untouched by humanity and unachievable. This viewpoint was prompted heavily by the counterculture of the 1960s¹ (as will be discussed in Chapter 1) and specifically the publication of Rachel Carson’s 1962 *Silent Spring*. This work describes the detrimental relationship between pollution and the environment. As a result, many critics at the time concluded that humans could only truly harm the landscape even when only as a byproduct of interaction. Proponents of this first wave thinking argued that technology and the expansion of the species into untouched places was disruptive if not outright destructive. This was marked with the extinction of other species, poisoned water, acid rain, landfills, the destruction seen in the Second World War, the Vietnam Conflict, the Korean War, and the looming threat of nuclear annihilation.

The teachings of using literature (especially in American writing) to examine the relationship between humanity and nature remained small and clustered among environmentalists and did not find widespread attraction until the early 1990s when the journal *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* was founded in 1993. This journal alongside Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm’s 1996 *The Ecocriticism Reader*, helped spark

¹ There is also a clear charting between the rise of feminism at this time intertwined with the idea of the landscape as a “female object” that can be and has been further examined.

massive expansion and established the second (and most discussed) wave of ecocriticism which highlighted discussions surrounding gender, race, politics, and colonization in nature-focused writing. Lawrence Buell and Robert Bullard pointed out that during the second wave of the late 1990s to the early 2000s humanity is distinctly part of an overall whole and that “wildness” and “nature” should be decentralized. This era of ecocriticism evolved into the current third wave which emphasizes a global approach to literature and deemphasizes an exclusively Anglo-American approach.

As defined by Ken Hiltner’s 2015 *Ecocriticism: The Essential Reader*, ecocriticism is

The study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. [...]

Despite the broad scope of inquiry and separate levels of sophistication, all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically, the cultural artifacts of language and literature.

As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and nonhuman. (122, 123)

More specifically, for the purpose of this thesis ecocriticism is an effective tool for exploring the idea that physical locations are in direct connection with broader culture. It allows readers to examine the nonhuman aspect of land usage and resource harvesting and help readers understand cultural changes in Southern Appalachia. It also will allow for this thesis to focus on literature set in the region while still considering the broader implications of these texts and how the lessons learned can be applied to the future.

I have chosen three books for close reading—*Divine Right’s Trip* (1972), *One Foot in Eden* (2002), and *The Road* (2006)—that can be explored through the lens of ecocriticism to

show how nature, humanity, production, and literature come together. This thesis aims to reveal the ability of authors and books to be dialogues on cultural dynamics and even impact their environments.

This powerful use of literature and for texts to speak on culture can be found when Michael Niblett points out in his 2015 essay “Oil on Sugar: Commodity Frontiers and Peripheral Aesthetics” that as oil and sugar become so ingrained into the region’s identity they are extracted from they become part of the culture and social systems therefore changing the general culture to include them. A region can become so unaware of its dependence on singular resources that the exploitative nature becomes commonplace. He says,

The ecological coordinates of literary forms become most obvious in situations where the production of a single commodity dominates economic life. [...] I would suggest that in those peripheral locations that have indeed become reliant on the production of a single commodity, especially where this has occurred in the context of imperialist incursion and the nakedly violent reorganization of social relations and everyday practices, literary texts are more likely to rise to the challenge of expressing the real of oil, or of whatever regnant commodity is. (270, 271)

If Niblett were to replace oil and sugar with coal and hydropower (not to mention the destructive process of oil and natural gas extraction that falls outside of the scope of this thesis) then he could be describing Southern Appalachia. Appalachia exists as a form of Niblett’s “peripheral location” to the rest of the nation and has a long history of being overly reliant upon a single commodity (coal, timber, and even ecotourism).²

²As the Appalachian Regional Commission point out in their report, *Industrial Make-Up of The Appalachian Region Employment and Earnings, 2002–2017*, “In 9 of the 12 states in the Region with both Appalachian and non-Appalachian portions (West Virginia is entirely within Appalachia), the Appalachian portions lagged behind the non-Appalachian portions in terms of employment growth from 2012 to 2017” (21).

Thus, the idea of literature making cultural production more visible is valuable because literature can expose how the land influences culture and culture influences the land. Richard Kerridge describes the value of a similar approach in the introduction of his book co-edited with Neil Sammells *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature* (1998), when he says that “The ecocritic wants to track environmental ideas and representations wherever they appear, to see more clearly a debate which seems to be taking place, often part-concealed, in a great many cultural spaces. Most of all, ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis” (5). Ultimately, this thesis examines the how and why of cultural change by utilizing literature to look at the transformation of “sense of place” in the Appalachian Mountains. The foundation of ecocriticism supports how the natural environment is an active participant in the genre and its texts.

An ecocritical analysis of three novels in three chapters illustrates the way each book is a product of different ways of environmental thinking. *Divine Right's Trip* focuses on the region's past and the potential for hope as the characters navigate the aftermath of environmental destruction and utilize the remnants to build a lasting home and community. Chapter 1 focuses on the migration and forced displacement out of the region at the hands of coal mining. It follows David Ray Davenport (D.R.) as he travels home to Kentucky, finding it destroyed, and his journey of restoration. There is a various cast of characters as D.R. travels whom all come to voice their opinions on the environment and culture with different approaches to the devastation around them. This chapter utilizes the fusion and mixture of 1960s hippie culture to provide a potential path for revitalization of the region. It also discusses the “Othering” of the region and how those on the margins of mainstream American culture can come to help each other.

Ultimately, this chapter emphasizes that that old can still provide a foundation for the new and that the new can still strengthen the old.

One Foot in Eden (while set in the 1950s) focuses on the region's present as the characters are faced with the destruction that is occurring and the slow transition of Appalachian cultural traditions. It goes on to discuss the divide between generations in Appalachia and the refusal to abandon the region at the hands of flooding from a manmade dam. This is exemplified through a variety of characters such as Sheriff Alexander and Isaac who must decide whether to continue to be a part of their home and community. Through this examination Rash looks at the complexity of the economic opportunities and obstacles at hand. This chapter then concludes with a discussion of the future of Appalachia and how the future could unfold with the potential for complete environmental destruction.

The Road then takes these future possibilities of ecocide, the death of the earth's biosphere, and with-it humans' cultural traditions to an extreme. The characters in this novel must navigate a world devoid of culture, independent of greater humanity. Chapter 3 furthers the conversation describing generational divide while touching on the potential of human connection. This chapter also discusses the natural beauty of the region as a means of culture and of hope. It then concludes with an examination of possibility in the face of destruction expanding this thesis' premise that restoration can always be found, and that culture can always be preserved and utilized.

These novels were chosen as they fit into a framework concerning cultural and community response to the destruction of Southern Appalachia's landscape. They are also ordered to be a look at the past, present, and future respectively. Norman's work is deeply ingrained with the time while Rash allows for the work to speak to modern audiences despite a

setting in the past. McCarthy finally settles on the future and the possibility of destruction as a means of cautionary tale.

This thesis concludes with a brief discussion of potential ways forward and attempts to bring together all the lessons from these texts. This navigation forward is solidified in a Coda that promotes an examination of new literature, different authors, and organizations in the region. These examples provide the possibility to examine how our relationship to nature in the field of literature and ecocriticism has changed. It also can provide different paths forward for the field to advance with.

At length, this thesis attempts to show how generational connection, migration and displacement, and the evolution of culture through different settings can provide the region with a sense of revival or change that could further propel older cultural practices in return.

Chapter 1: Hippies and Homesteads

Gurney Norman contributed to the Spring-Summer 1970 edition of the famous *Foxfire* publication which promoted Appalachian tradition, folklore, practical skills, and oral tradition.

He wrote a review in *Foxfire* on behalf of *The Last Whole Earth Catalogue* which claimed,

FOXFIRE is a quarterly publication concerned with researching, recording, and preserving Appalachian folk art, crafts, and traditions. A typical issue contained articles on quilting, chairmaking, soapmaking, home remedies, mountain recipes, feather beds, and homemade hominy, plus poetry and book reviews. One issue was devoted entirely to log cabin building. These are not superficial “features” articles, but definitive, detailed treatments of traditional skills and crafts that have come close to dying out of our culture.

[...] In their own way, these people are as hip and sophisticated as any young people putting out a magazine on either coast. More so, even. They’re cooler, more adult. (113)

As a result, the edition featured more hippie-influenced poetry. Yet, Mrs. Louise M. Fonda from Atlanta, Georgia responded in the Fall issue,

Although I was enchanted with FOXFIRE and still am dedicated to the idea of preserving priceless mountain lore, I am actually offended by the so-called poetry offerings. Several people with whom I have discussed the magazine agree that they are interested in the SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS. We are not fascinated by the hippie influence and couldn't care less who has a thing going with some kook at a wild and dreamy affair in some field one night. It's EITHER-OR. And if I have to take the indoctrination of a culture I find offensive then I suppose I'll just skip the one I love deeply. (178)

Another reader, E.D. Smith of Marietta, Georgia also claimed, “Yet, I find thirteen pages of this issue wasted (in my judgment) on offerings of today’s poetry. Perhaps there is a budding poet or

literary genius among the authors and their efforts are to be encouraged, but what in Heaven's name is their work doing in FOXFIRE? There is no place for it in a magazine with the stated purpose of capturing, before it is too late, the folklore of the Southern Highlands" (265). *Foxfire* responded by returning largely to crafts, homemaking, "folk" wisdom, and interviews with older residents of the region about cultural experiences from the past.

Similarly, Stewart Brand was working on the *Whole Earth Catalogue*, a publication from 1968 to 1972 dedicated to crafts, homemaking, "folk" wisdom, and interviews with older residents of Southern California. It acted as a directory and vendor list of different survival, spiritual, and decorative tools that were deemed necessary to live the bohemian lifestyle of late the 1960s and early 1970s such as gardening implements, plastic domes for dwellings, incense, and everything else in between. Brand called upon Gurney Norman to work on the magazine and write a novel in the margins to entertain readers. This novel goes on to follow David Ray Davenport as he looks for his own sense of belonging and connects with a variety of people throughout. He returns home to Trace Fork, Kentucky, to take care of his Uncle Emmitt as he reaches the end of his life. Upon his passing D.R. takes up the mantle to restore his generational home and redevelop the land despite the effects of coal mining. Brand also wanted this novel to be used to highlight what could be new and exciting to those who wanted to start families and build new culture. As Gurney Norman claimed in a personal interview,

It is simplistic to say, but true enough: hippies we're the children of the American middle class which, by 1960, was losing its way. The Vietnam War [was] drafting the young men as their brothers and sisters discovered psychedelic drugs and "free" love. The Sixties. Significantly, in California, psychedelic drugs, being sparingly used in Veteran's hospitals to treat depression, found their way into use by young people. Ken Kesey's

career started thusly. *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* starts there. Palo Alto. Menlo Park. 1960.

It becomes evident that two different magazines on different coasts of the continental United States of America were both concerned with culture and the idea of alternative lifestyles. These conversations opened the similarities and built bridges between the two. They both investigate crafts, homemaking, and the means in which to preserve specific ways of life. Both magazines wanted to deeply build something new out of the destruction, both physical and metaphorical, around them. It made it clear that ideas concerning the junction between culture, youth, tradition, and Southern Appalachia were swirling in Norman's mind and in the minds of several readers. This exploration of cultural motivations also brought forth an examination of "Othering" for both Appalachian communities' and hippie communities' similar goals and lifestyles such as sustainability and tight-knit communal living. This common ground comes to extenuate how these two groups could grow and learn from each other. Ultimately, this chapter demonstrates how the shifting cultural practices of Eastern Kentucky had to be molded and adapted to fit the needs of changing communities in the region. This intersection between cultural and physical change invites an ecocritical reading of this novel. Where the novel is split between hippie and homestead so too is it split between the human characters experiencing change from the land and the land experiencing change from the human characters.

Gurney Norman's 1972 *Divine Right's Trip* is a tale full of psychedelics and metaphysical journeys. Like the readers of *Foxfire*, the novel was met with a variety of responses and reviews. John Updike in the *New Yorker* claimed,

When, midway through, 'Divine Right's Trip' hits Kentucky, the book sheds its shimmering snakeskin of fantasy and becomes a stout celebration of the clan, of native

soil and hard work and pastoral goodness. Yet it rings less true than in the first, weirder half. Not that the Kentucky voices are not lovingly and amusingly rendered; not that the blasted coal land isn't a cunningly appropriate territory for D. R.'s Dark Passage and Recovery of the Grail. The trouble is the marriage that Mr. Norman makes occur, between the rural proletariat of Trace Fork and the young would-be gods of the dome communes. The idyll becomes cute. [...] A doubt remains whether D. R.'s love affair with rabbit dung and the blisters that come with digging fence-post holes amount to much more than another 'trip.' Agriculture, after all, is not an intrinsically virtuous enterprise.

(118)

He goes on to claim that the novel is well written but not wholly worth the time of readers who were looking for a counterculture novel. This review laid the foundation for Othering that will be discussed later and discounted the novel at the expense of its setting. It highlighted how Appalachia was viewed and further accentuates the need for connection between the two groups.

Jerry Griswold on the other hand complimented the book in his 1972 review for *The Nation*³ and claimed,

D.R. is a folk hero and Gurney Norman's novel is a folk tale since it mythologically, sums up the history of the counter-culture in the seventies: set upon by Dixon; enticed by the prospect- of obliteration-the Greek's Nirvana; bottoming out when the head turns hood, mixing up drugs with crime; finding Doyle's Jesus may be the answer for some but not all; and finally coming to the position that it is only through hard work that the land of America is going to be reclaimed from the disasters of physical and spiritual strip mining. This is a fine story, our story.

³ He would go on to republish this (and other publications) on Medium.com as a contributing author before his death in 2022.

This difference in opinion comes to represent the cultural divide that the United States experienced during the time of the counterculture and how different communities, such as Southern Appalachia, came to shape and mold the culture of the time. Yet, there is a prologue by a VW bus, Norman himself as the narrator, a chase between two split personalities in the Kentucky backwoods, and countless sections that entail the fantastical. Many readers would not be faulted for assuming the entirety of the novel was quite unserious and unconcerned with the physical destruction of the largely ill-forgotten region of Southern Appalachia. These interactions all seem to be under the countercultural themes of wildness, otherworldly experiences, and a general resistance to conformity that was common at the time. Timothy Leary, one of the founding fathers of the movement, goes on to say,

Counterculture blooms wherever and whenever a few members of society choose lifestyles, artistic expressions, and ways of thinking and being that wholeheartedly embrace the ancient axiom that the only true constant is change itself. The mark of counterculture is not a particular social form or structure, but rather the evanescence of forms and structures, the dazzling rapidity and flexibility with which they appear, mutate, and morph into one another and disappear. Counterculture is the moving crest of a wave, a zone of uncertainty where culture goes quantum. [...] Counterculture may be found in (sometimes uneasy) alliances with radical, even revolutionary political groups and insurrectionary forces, and the memberships of countercultures and such groups often overlap. But the focus of counterculture is the power of ideas, images, and artistic expression, not the acquisition of personal and political power. (ix-x)

However, buried underneath the whimsical aspects of the narrative are discussions of family, loss, generational changes, and utilizing the tools and culture of the past to create something

new. This novel certainly toes the line between a countercultural road novel and a grounded environmental novel as seen even in the acknowledgments with writers such as Ken Kesey and Stewart Brand on the side of counterculture with Wendell Berry and Ed “Captain Kentucky” McClanahan on the side of regionally based writing. Much like the main character David Ray (D.R.) Davenport the approach to this writing is bifurcated between a countercultural examination of the world and a call to return home and build community which falls in with an ecocritical reading of how to contend with the loss of land. It is through this bifurcation that the wave of change from the counterculture can come to help preserve, protect, and even promote old Appalachian customs.

The entire second half of the novel is dedicated to the community in Eastern Kentucky and the environmental destruction of the region because of coal mining. As such, scholarship has contended that the novel is more in line with the genre of serious Appalachian literature than countercultural literature (Accardo 1984, Miller 1977, Shannon 1978.) The novel deals with cultural traditions and the deep rooting of the residents in the region. It discusses the ecological damage and the destruction of coal mining (mainly in the form of overburden and mountain top removal) that has prompted mass migration out of the region as seen in the continued conversations among residents; but it also examines the change of culture and identity because of this mono-exploitative-industry. Norman used the opportunity to discuss the counterculture with willing readers to further explore how the movement could be used to highlight lesser-known regions such as Southern Appalachia. In the words of Gurney Norman himself in a 1978 interview for the *Appalachian Journal*,

It’s commonly assumed that the oral tradition is a dying art, in the same way, that folk culture itself is frequently viewed as something that’s dying. A lot of anthropologists and

folklorists are busy collecting the remnants of old lost and dying cultures. That's one thing to do, I guess, but it proceeds from an idea that the vitality of the tradition is dying out. I feel the opposite about that. I take my view from the fact that I spent the first thirty years of my life in a region, the Southern Appalachians, where the oral tradition is alive and well, and where the young generation of thoughtful people is providing an incredible transfusion of new life and vitality into all the folk arts. This carries them through a change. The assumption is that change is part of life. I think one of America's main cultural assets is the pockets of folk life that continue to exist, in spite of great odds, among people who have not chosen to live according to the rules of the consumer society. I think that among black people, native American people, mountain people, there survives a rich and powerful spirit that is very tenacious and refuses to die. It's a great source of spiritual renewal for this whole American culture that is in great spiritual jeopardy. I think that when the Appalachian people nourish their local arts, they do this first on behalf of themselves, but ultimately, it's on behalf of the entire country. (23)

These "pockets of folk life" and the view that younger generations are reviving and supporting changing cultural assets will form the backbone of this chapter. It is through this renewed hope and rejection of a narrative of "old lost and dying cultures" that this novel flourishes and provides an alternative to the complete ecological and biospherical destruction the other novels discuss. This sense of culture and renewal is reflected in characters such as David Ray Davenport and Leonard, who were originally born in the region, and are trying to revive the physical land so that lifeblood can once again be brought to the region. Leonard, D.R.'s neighbor, helps D.R. restore his land and relies upon D.R. to help develop his own land in the form of a hog pen. It is also seen in characters such as the Anaheim Flash and Estelle who while not originally from the

region are still willing to invest in and support the community. As close friends of D.R. they try to understand the region and its residents outside of stereotypes and shallow depictions. This chapter must first establish what is being wrought in the region that is so dire to the community. There are two major factors in the shifting of regional culture: mass migration and ecological destruction. It is their intersection that prompts discussions of cultural divides and frames one within the other.

First, there is a mass migration out of the Appalachian region starting in the post-war 1940s and continuing even today by younger generations to large industrial centers like Cincinnati, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, and St. Louis because of a lack of opportunity, wealth, and the ability to control land. The region became stripped of resources and there was a shift from agriculture, which had been cultivated for generations, to destructive industry practices that were not planned with any longevity in mind. When D.R. arrives in Trace Fork there is a distinct lack of younger residents and even multiple discussions of how sons and daughters were leaving. This is seen in mail from far away asking for money or providing news to the isolated community. As fictional *Blaine Harold* reporter Barry Berry, a resident of D.R.'s Trace Fork and the continued voice of the community with updates, states in his column,

We need good nurses and doctors. We need all of our young people to come back home to live. But it seems like there's just not enough opportunity here for young people anymore. I'd hate to know the figures on just how many of our fine young people have moved away in the last few years. (199)

Where Berry did not have access to this information the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare report entitled “Vital Statistics”⁴ found that, “During the period from April 1, 1960, to July 1, 1965, for example, the region had a net loss through migration of some 257,000 persons. This, however, is a tremendous decrease? From the 1950s when about 1,118,000 more people left than entered the area (an annual rate of loss through migration of 1.9 percent as compared with 0.8 percent in the 1960-65 period)” (32). This exodus even culminated in neighborhoods outside the region that were predominantly lived in by Appalachian families such as Chicago’s “hillbilly ghetto” or “Hillbilly Heaven.” There cannot be such a large migration of people from a region without some form of cultural shifting and abandonment of tradition. Younger generations moving to different regions defined by economics, social structures, and politics are bound to pick up and leave behind different cultural traits. This is best signified by the Native, a mourner at Eddie’s funeral. He is a member of Eddie’s community who wants to use the funeral to build cultural traditions and for different drugs to represent different aspects of Eddie’s life and the counterculture at large. He claims that it is because no one is ever settled or part of a community and by using different drugs all of those present will partake in something larger than themselves. The Native’s hope is that everyone can be bonded after the death of a close friend. It is explained,

The Native got his name because he was always talking about how nobody’s a native anymore. Nobody lives where he was born, nobody’s got any real roots anymore, and that’s why people are so unhappy. The Native grew up in the Ozark Mountains of Missouri. He was so homesick most of the time, all he ever talked about was his family

⁴ This information is taken from James S. ’s, “Population and Migration Changes in Appalachia” in the larger essay collection, *Change in Rural Appalachia: Implications for Action Programs* by John D. Photiadis and Harry K. Schwarzweller.

and his old home place back in the Ozarks. People at home have got identity, said the Native. They've got a history, and their lives are full of the most beautiful rituals. The Native loved rituals, and he wanted Eddie's funeral to be one, an elaborate ceremony where everybody would take a different kind of dope and then do communal things like chant and sing and mourn poor Eddie's passing. (73)

The Native is a prime example of a youth who has lost footing in his homeplace and is trying to build culture from his surroundings. While it is never specified why he left the region or if he will ever return it can be implied that heavy tourism, industrial pollution into the Lake of the Ozarks, and lead and zinc mining could be proposed as a possibility for his abandonment. Regardless, he is one of many youths who felt that their homeplace was a place with an identity and that they became void of cultural traditions when they left. As such, The Native's main concern is trying to build community and bring forth a sense of belonging that he can no longer find in his home.⁵

But, without the proper scaffolding of already established culture (such as the traditions found in Appalachia) his ploys seem to fail. Paul Shepard points out the extremely dangerous nature of living outside of a culture and being forced into isolation within "Ecology and Man." He asserts,

Such a being may be called an ecosystem or simply a forest or landscape. Its members are engaged in a kind of choreography of materials and energy and information, the creation of order and organization. [...] The elegance of such systems and delicacy of equilibrium are the outcome of a long evolution of interdependence. Even society, mind

⁵ While it is problematic to call a non-indigenous resident of the region, a "Native" he still stands as a representation of displacement at the hand of environmental destruction during the 1960s. Further, the indigenous tribes of Southern Appalachia, specifically the Cherokee, are a large part of Chapter 2 and their displacement certainly shouldn't go unnoticed.

and culture are parts of that evolution. There is an essential relationship between them and the natural habitat: that is, between the emergence of higher primates and flowering plants, pollinating insects, seeds, humus, and arboreal life. (64)

Within this lens of ecocriticism, the act of residents being disconnected from the landscape lets this equilibrium fall out of balance, thus, creating the opportunity for those who are not aware of the complexity of this interdependence or as intimately aware of the region's needs to move in and plunder its natural resources, further enabling environmental destruction. Just as with the Native there is no connection to the surroundings or previous culture, creating a void that alienates people from the region. As such, residents leave the interrelation between cultural, societal, and even life-sustaining roots that Appalachia has provided which then creates an opportunity for the region to sink further into environmental destruction. The families that have migrated out of Appalachia have left the symbiotic relationship, and many, such as D.R., struggle to re-establish it. It is through the continued experiences and cultural practices that interact with the environment that the environment itself can be protected from destruction.

Consequently, without proper immersion within the culture of the previous generation, there is little incentive for youth to return especially to land that is barren and polluted. Therefore, taking the scaffolding out from underneath youth to revive the region. Thus, leading to even less incentive to return and furthering destruction of the region at the hands of those who do not appreciate the complex cultural artifacts of the region. It is a vicious cycle that keeps turning. As Rebecca J. Bailey explains in "I Never Thought of My Life as History: A Story of the "Hillbilly" Exodus and the Price of Assimilation", an essay on her experience as a migrant and of the experiences of different migrant families, "It hurt her (Bailey's mother) to see the coal

camps of her youth abandoned and the once-vibrant and busy Welch⁶ with boarded-up storefronts. Resentful of the shame they felt they had been made to feel, the Baileys denied their children firsthand knowledge of their heritage. For generations their families had believed in the upward mobility of the American dream; therefore to the Baileys, not looking back was an acceptable cost in the upward journey of their own family” (35). It has been demonstrated across literature that migration is a large part of Appalachian’s identity (Alexander 2006, Ludke 2012, Obermiller 2000, etc.) and has come to both help and hurt the residents of the region. Movement provides families with greater opportunities but also can act as a deterrent from preserving cultural practices.

Even the Davenports are no different as their father moved the entire family to Ohio in search of better opportunities. D.R.’s sister, Marcella, comments on this when she says, “...although the Lord only knows why Trace Fork would have a post office, they ain’t over three families lives on that creek anymore. They’ve stripped that whole holler and then auger-mined it and most of the people that lived there when me and you did moved away” (113). It is clear that their abandonment of Kentucky came to deeply change them as D.R. turned toward more alternative lifestyles and Marcella settled into her community and family in Ohio as it came to change many other families in the real world. Just as with the Native and other families, people are trying to find a similar interdependent relationship between the landscape and their own culture that is promoted in Southern Appalachia.

However, where the Davenports (and D.R. especially) differ from the cultural erasure of some migrations, they continuously returned to their roots and enjoy their time in Kentucky rather than being ashamed. D.R. could have easily fallen into being a character more akin to the

⁶ A coalmining town in West Virginia that has since disappeared.

Native but his continued presence helped ground some of his ideas of culture and tradition. D.R. points out,

That car of Daddy's was an old Pontiac he bought with the first wages he ever earned in Cincinnati. It had over a hundred thousand miles on it when he got it, but he never hesitated to take off in it for Kentucky. The first year we lived there we never missed a weekend going home. Fifty-two round trips a year, over two hundred miles each way, six, seven, sometimes eight, and nine people in it every run. Every Friday as soon as Daddy'd get home from work we'd load up and head out, and drive six straight hours [...] On Fridays, you wouldn't mind being uncomfortable because you knew you were on your way to someplace you really wanted to be a lot, but on Sundays, you'd feel so blue about having to leave the homeplace to go back to Cincinnati there wasn't any way in the world to get comfortable and Daddy would have to stop every hour or so and let people out to stretch. We hated it, coming back, but then it was only five more days 'til we'd go down home again, and we cheered ourselves up with that thought. (143)

This continued love for the region and desire to return is what separates the Davenports from a lot of other migrant families. Norman's medium of fiction further provides a greater chance to return without the worry of stripped mountains, medical issues related to coal mining, and changing landscapes. Kentucky takes on a mythical nature that is complete with tall tales about Daniel Boone and fond memories of his larger-than-life father that benefit from not needing to include more realistic stories of destruction. Just as Gurney Norman continued to love his homeplace despite moving there is a distinct flavor of nostalgia from D.R. for Kentucky that is unrecognized throughout other younger characters and is what prompts D.R.'s willingness to recover what has been lost. D.R. still feels the interconnectedness between the landscape and his

own personal culture and views on life. It is this relationship between culture and the mountains that prompts D.R. to return and begin anew.

When Gurney Norman wrote *Divine Right's Trip* in 1972 it was a time of environmental movements, green revolutions, optimism rooted in nature, and a push toward becoming more connected to the land. The official website for Earth Day claims,

Groups that had been fighting individually against oil spills, polluting factories and power plants, raw sewage, toxic dumps, pesticides, freeways, the loss of wilderness and the extinction of wildlife united on Earth Day around these shared common values. [...]

By the end of 1970, the first Earth Day led to the creation of the United States Environmental Protection Agency and the passage of other first of their kind environmental laws, including the National Environmental Education Act, the Occupational Safety and Health Act, and the Clean Air Act.

However, there was also the real threat of the incoming energy crisis, the looming fear of atomic annihilation, the shifting of the countercultural movement to hard drugs, and the threat of reinforcement of mainstream ideas in a post-war world, such as an aversion to communal living and socialism, a continued dedication to industrialization and corporate jobs, and the promotion of using non-renewable resources for technological and ease of convenience in everyday life.

This rather grim approach to environmentalism, or lack thereof, highlights a culturally rooted indifference to destruction that was not entirely unheard of in literature. The first opening page of *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, even points out, “Lynn White Jr.’s controversial question from 1967 fed into a growing realization that one of the distinctive features of western thought has been the depth and destructiveness of its assumptions about the human relationship to the natural world. [...] This crucial, exciting but sometimes bewildering

intersection of issues is the space of ecocriticism, or the study of literature and the environment”

(1). As such, other characters found within the novel are also grappling with this relationship between place and identity which further reflects the obstacles and culture of the time. They (more than likely) want to celebrate the wins in the fight for environmental sustainability but must also reckon with the destruction that led to their original installation. Not having a home or culture to rely upon only shows the environmental destruction without the possibility to rebuild what has been lost. What separates D.R. from the rest is that he has a place to return to in a communal sense and to a physical place that has not been entirely devastated.

Conversely, Estelle throughout the novel is always trying to organize her life by moving forward as she does not have anything to return to in California. As D.R.’s girlfriend she continually centers him throughout the novel and ensures that he does not become lost in his thoughts by having both of them constantly moving and organizing. In place of community before he rediscovers Trace Fork, D.R. must rely upon her to direct him and guide him to what is next whether that be a rest stop in a forest or a diversion into a gas station for the night. As Urge claims,

That was the thing about Estelle. She understood cruising, she understood roads, and traffic, she knew how to flow with things in motion. I never did understand what she saw in D.R., but it wasn’t my place to have opinions about people. My job was to carry them around from place while they acted out their story, and although I resented it most of the time, I did my best. (5)

While Estelle wants a place to settle and thrive, she also knows that the places she has been before are not enough to sustain her and that only through movement can she find that place, very much akin to migratory families out of Appalachia. But she has no Appalachia to consider

because she has no cultural basis in the region. As a result, when D.R. cannot provide a home complete with culture on the road or in various settings, Estelle abandons him. This decision is also propelled by the opportunity to visit friends in the mountains of California. However, when she does not feel fulfilled there either she moves on.

She wishes to move onward to a greater foundation (as seen in her tendencies to clean Urge, organize their possessions, and nurture D.R.), rather than build upon something that will fall apart. As the Anaheim Flash says to D.R. when trying to relay the message, “She said Estelle had split. She said Estelle stayed with them two weeks, and day before yesterday took off, hitch-hiking south” (230). It is this lack of connection or nostalgia for places that separates Estelle from D.R. or Angel’s community. Estelle’s view of the landscape is also continuously separated by a literal sheet of glass in the form of a windshield. This separation can be argued as promoting a first-wave approach that suggests that “wildness” can never be touched. If Estelle can never directly interact with her surroundings, then there is a clear divide between herself and the world, supporting a greater separation between humanity and the environment. This would also build Estelle’s characterization of being skeptical towards a sustainable relationship between landscape and culture mirroring a first-wave approach.

Working in the opposite direction, The Greek, a self-proclaimed philosopher, and embodiment of the far-out nature of countercultural theories of identity and place wants to erase his previous identity and the last traces of his name. He wishes to exist outside of time, space, and being named; with no solid ground underneath him. The Greek wishes to move forward on the “Ultimate Way” thus losing all earthly identity. He proceeds to do this by erasing his Master’s Thesis; the last piece of physical writing with his name on it. As he explains,

It's painful, laborious work to lose your attachment to identity, but I believe that once I destroy the manuscript telling my early history, I will have gone past the last serious obstacle to becoming infinitely Nameless. I don't want to say that categorically. To say it categorically would be a speculation upon the future, and the future is of no concern to one who is truly nameless. (67)

This idea of self-destruction leads again to the possibility of a non-sustainable future. The Greek does not wish to exist on Earth and instead wants to transcend to a larger sense of the universe leading to a disconnect between himself and his physical surroundings. If everyone were to follow him, as D.R., and to an extent, Estelle tries to do, then there would be no purpose to saving the environment as it does not factor into the "ultimate way." This path highlights that there is a distinct possibility in which humanity could exist separately from nature which leads to the possibility of a lack of culture at all. The Greek's thinking, in extreme, could lead to environmental destruction in the name of separating oneself from what defines oneself such as the landscape. Just as with Estelle, The Greek is a foil to D.R.'s plans and thus acts as a source of critique to D.R.'s approach of cultural and environmental restoration.

Where D.R. can see himself in the future of Kentucky and as a part of the community others cannot. D.R. is called back to Kentucky to help his great uncle in his last few days. He helps him on his farm and eventually takes him to the hospital. D.R. even helps shave and bathe Emmet when he is unable to do it himself. D.R. finds a sense of purpose in the land and wants to pursue his interest in rebuilding the generational farm at the insistence of his uncle. However, others are not given that intimacy and fond memories of the land. Even D.R.'s niece and nephew's first time in Kentucky is at Emmet's funeral which surely will lead to a warped sense of death and life in Kentucky. It is only when Estelle can see the possibility of a sustainable

future that she returns to D.R. This makes D.R.'s mission of restoring the land that much more important as he is the embodiment of hope that Norman (and prominent ecocritics) actively saw and wanted to nurture through writing at the time. This hope builds the timeliness of the book's narrative but also shows where the foundations of ecocriticism arose and how they can be applied again in the face of environmental and cultural dismantling.

Secondly, this cultural shifting is a direct result of the physical destruction of mountain top removal, deforestation, and related symptoms of coal mining. This destruction is best embodied by the coal miner, Virgil, who leads D.R. through the winding backroads of the country and presents D.R. (and the reader) with updated information about the coal mining industry and Kentucky. He declares,

It was like a time of war nearly. People hungry, out of work, losing their hospital cards, getting their pensions cut, little old younguns going around with worms in their bellies, some of 'em half naked in the wintertime, I mean they wasn't nothing else *to* do but go to war. Big gangs of men roving up and down the highways, stopping cars, shooting, getting shot at. They was a tippie burnt every day for two straight weeks up in your county, two or three railroad bridges went up, people's cars and houses dynamited. [...] Whole mountain ranges chewed up and spit right out in the river. They've done destroyed your county, Collier. Finley County's bad hit, you won't recognize that place. They say they's a strip-mine bench through the Rockhouse drainage over eighty miles long, and getting longer every day. What's worse, it's a-coming right my way. Man has a house and a barn, some pasture in the valley, they come right over it, the law says that's just fine. [...] My wife's people got sixty acres on Lower Elk. Lived there thirty years. Got cows, good garden and a spring, man can live good there if he's willing to work. But this

outfit owns the coal rights underneath, and they're on their way to get it. Eighty miles long, that bench is. Reminds me of a big serpent sneaking through the hills, big old eighty miles long snake killing everything in its path. It that way everywhere around here. Some folks call it the end of time but me, I just call it a bunch of goodman criminals out tearing up the world (153).

This is where the novel shifts from a countercultural introspective narrative (with a focus on broader American culture) to a novel that begins to question the ideas of corporate greed and the all-consuming nature of extractive resources. It is not only D.R.'s first exposure to the region after many years away but it also acts as the reader's first introduction in the novel to the realities of Eastern Kentucky. Coal underlines the rest of the novel and looms always in the background. This constant reminder of the physical landscape which is scarred, and barren translates to a grounding and deeper connection with the obstacles of living in Southern Appalachia.

It also reinforces that the physical destruction of the land has translated to the destruction and reconfiguration of the cultural landscape. Homesteads have been bulldozed; woods, where hunting would take place, have been steamrolled; streams, where fishing would take place, have been poisoned with runoff. The places where neighbors would connect, where families would bond, and where culture would be shared have all been destroyed. Even The Greek points out, "The problem, of course, is that young people have grown up oriented to a twentieth-century Einsteinian concept of unitive time while their elders remain stuck in nineteenth-century industrial time, which is fragmented" (61). This connection between geography-based culture and time only deepens the divide between older residents who have seen a pre-coal mining world and younger residents who must live with the consequences of mining. As such, this comes full circle to reinforce migration out of the area and lays the foundation for the direct result of

cultural destruction in connection to environmental destruction. This destruction of older culture, that is dependent on oral tradition and generational knowledge, as a result of environmental destruction is shown best in the cemetery where D.R.'s father, grandfather, great-uncle, uncle, and various ancestors are buried. Their physical last resting place is covered with overburden and their memories are replaced with the memories of strip mining. As the narrator explains,

There in the family graveyard, one corner of it buried by overburden from the mining on the slope above, rocks as big as people's heads scattered among the graves. One headstone, D.R.'s great-uncle Daniel who had died in 1952, had been knocked over and broken straight across the middle by a rock from the mining up above. The graveyard was at the edge of the pasture, when there had been a pasture. D.R. used to pass it all the time, going to get the cow, out walking with his grandfather on Sunday afternoons, or just in the pasture by himself at any odd time, for no reason. D.R. had been visiting that graveyard of his ancestors as long as he could remember, and now here he was again, helping to dig this time. How strange that was. How swiftly it moved along. (188)

Later in the scene, he thinks to himself, "What if it does? What difference does it make?" when considering if the entire cemetery will be buried via landslides. This demonstrates that while there is still hope to be had and there can still be something made out of the old it remains important to remember what has been lost and that the mines have still taken a toll on the region.

As such, practical knowledge of land use and stewardship has been diminished and more "life-based" advice and values are not shared. This culture of Southern Appalachia is thus replaced by bloodshed, unemployment, and fear. The new cultural image of Appalachia shifted within only a few short years (within a lifetime or two) from being focused on familial connections and agrarian values to a culture of greed and mining. This highlights the first-wave

approach where humanity eventually destroys the land around themselves but also highlights a second-wave approach of the environment “as a source of virtue or vice.”⁷ As Norman noted in a 1990 interview about the state of Southern Appalachian literature,

Well, it was part of the turbulence of American life in the late 60's and early 70's. It was part of the political ferment that the entire nation experienced even though issues might be different in region to region. The issues in Appalachia were the Vietnam War but also strip mining. The whole thing of welfare rights, the abuses of the Tennessee Valley Authority, the anti-poverty programs which went corrupt and became a point of focus. [...] So you had people demonstrating, poor people were sitting in the state capital in all these places. There were strikes, there were demonstrations, and, this is a very important point, the real ferment was among the people in the communities, the average ordinary working people of the mountain region were in an uproar over all of these questions. And the literary expression came from that. [...] So in the ferment of these times people were very intense, very into the politics of the moment. And writers were coming right out of these issues. (13)

Norman demonstrates that he had to first concede that times could be seen as dire, and that the environment might not survive in order to promote restoration. It also grounds the novel in a time and a place with a distinct cultural flavor that was shifted at the hands of environmental destruction. Lastly, it strengthens an ecocritical reading that literature as a form of cultural production is directly and deeply concerned with the environment.

In the face of all of turmoil Norman discussed he still wished to share a story of hope and reconstruction. The original subtitle for the novel was “A Folktale.” Like D.R. Norman uses

⁷ Kate Soper, “The Discourses of Nature” 272

tools to create new folktales out of old. Annalucia Accardo recognized this in “Divine Right’s Trip: A Folk Tale or a Postmodern Novel?” when she asserts, “From this standpoint, *Divine Right’s Trip* seems to join myths, legends, history, and themes of the Appalachian tradition with the contemporary American culture, just as its hero and its author do” (43). This analysis suggests that Norman was aware of the implications of his work and wished to fill the gap in cultural understanding. Through an ecocritical lens he wanted to use literature as a means to create culture and bring together more members of Appalachia with a new story to tell in this region where his family had lived, worked, and connected for generation. This is also reinforced by the presence of his self-insertion as the narrator toward the end of the novel as he has agency both inside the novel over the character’s fate as a friend and outside as the author. It is through this interaction within the text that he shows that he wanted to influence both the culture of the fictional Trace Fork and the real culture surrounding Southern Appalachia.

Not only does this information present the devastation of Eastern Kentucky coal mining but it also offers an alternative. This reading adds merit to The Greek declaring that, “Death as a kind of cleansing agent, to make way for true illumination. [...] But what those people fail to understand is that after death comes the resurrection” (52). This form of resurrection offers hope for a different life away from the mountains being chewed up and spit out and for building community and culture. The novel posits that there is hope and a chance at cultural reconstruction but only after the destruction has occurred.

It is here within this commentary and drawing from the cultural surroundings where *Divine Right’s Trip* steps into its own right as an environmentally oriented text. A proto-second-wave approach from D.R. emphasizes values of rectifying societal issues and thinking on a larger scale. Norman is utilizing literature to directly address the environment, politics, and counter

movements of the time. Consequently, Virgil, D.R. The Greek, Leonard, The Lone Outdoorsman, and every other character in the novel become mouthpieces to express some form of commentary on the intersection between humans and the landscape. Mr. McClanahan, who is a resident living on a multigenerational farm and who has very close ties to the region, declares, “I knew this boy’s grandfather. Me and him use to log together. Hard worker. Knew his father, too. That was a good family of people. Trace Fork used to be full of people. But they ain’t nobody lives up there now that Emmit’s dead” (206). Even this comment from a generally small character represents how closely the region is positioned within its use of resources. It also highlights the importance of family ties and human connection in terms of cultures. As families lose farms and homesteads, so too do they lose their cultural connection to the community.

Subsequently, D.R. becomes a tool to express how cultures shift in the face of environmental destruction as he leaves behind his nomadic lifestyle to become a part of the Trace Fork community once again. As seen in D.R.’s plan of restoration Norman establishes that humanity and nature do not exist in separate spheres or in different realms as The Greek or Estelle represent but find themselves in a relationship in which they need to interact. Where before the environment, nature, and the landscape (sometimes seen as interchangeable terms) have been viewed as something to be admired and protected from afar this latter expression of ecocriticism views the environment as something intrinsically always surrounding us. As Lawrence Buell notes in *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, “The emergence of contemporary environmental criticism is in part the story of an evolution from imaging life-in-place as a difference to the claims of (natural) environment toward an understanding of place-making as a culturally inflected process in which nature and culture must be seen as a mutuality

rather than as separable domains” (67). Norman uses this social-ecological framework⁸ to dissect the intersection between the destructive exploitation of resources and the community it comes to effect.

Specifically, Emmet, an elder of the community and D.R.’s great uncle, provides a plan of building out the barn, restoring the soil, and raising rabbits. This plan directly interacts with the effects of environmental destruction on culture. Berry explains to D.R.

I use to know about everybody that lived on Trace Fork. I watched `em move out one by one, `til they wasn’t a soul living up there except Emmet. Of course, it’s all ruined up in there now. But seemed like as long as Emmet stayed on, the place wasn’t plum dead yet.
(205)

Emmet was a pillar of the community and a resource on farming, folk traditions, and how to interact with the landscape in a symbiotic relationship. This novel offers the alternative to the complete and total destruction of McCarthy’s *The Road* and of the need for abandonment in Rash’s *One Foot in Eden*. Emmet comes to be a symbol of culture still existing in the region and of a community that while weak can still recover. Even in death Emmet acts as a conduit for connection. Where Virgil sees roving bands of marauders and destruction as a result of a coal seam, Emmet sees the ability to pick up the pieces and start anew. It is explained that all of the mourners, including residents of the region and D.R.’s sister and her family, were, “Eating and laughing, and talking, the whole thing suddenly a social occasion, a big party that in spite of all was a very happy time. Marcella and her family stayed all night with D.R. there in the old house,

⁸ Timothy Clarke defines this (with the foundation of Murray Bookchin’s work) in *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* as, “A broad historical overview of human development since prehistory, tracing the loss of small organic communities without hierarchies of power, the gradual change of communal relationships into market relationships, effectively converting people into commodities. The loss of conditions of wholeness and freedom in society led simultaneously to people regarding all natural entities in the same acquisitive and instrumentalizing way”. (88)

where they'd both lived at different times as children. Doyle and the kids went to bed fairly early that evening, but D.R. and Marcella stayed up far into the night, talking about their family, and the old days" (196). Even in death Emmet still provides one last opportunity for the community to come together and build a sense of purpose that the coal companies took away.

This marks the shift where D.R. begins to take on the role of a community member who is trying to physically put the pieces back together. It is through this physical restoration that so too does the community begin to heal. This is seen in small acts such as Roxie offering D.R. meals and clothes and D.R. teaching Mrs. Godsey phrases like 'far out' to large and more prominent signs of the community like the cumulative wedding bringing people together. Even the building of Leonard's hog pen is an example of knowledge being shared furthering the culture of self-sufficiency.

The residents of Trace Fork are older with grown children who seem to have left their homeplace and through D.R.'s return there is hope offered to them that their own kin might also resettle the land. In the case of the hog pen D.R. feels his sense of purpose and focuses sharpen and Leonard received help from a member of the community in return. Both of these allow for a larger cultural foundation to be built. D.R. can now work more on reclaiming the land and Leonard can now come to rely on D.R. as D.R. has relied on Leonard. This mutual trust begins to build a culture between the two. It is with D.R.'s return that Norman shines a light on the impact of coal mining outside of destruction and provides hope for the ideas of restoration.

This mutual control of culture between hippies and homesteaders highlights the tenet of ecocriticism that it is those who interact with the environment that define the culture surrounding it. Those who hold the closest relationship with the environment are those who know it intimately and thus can help maintain the balance between growth and overextending the

landscape further creating a space for cultural traditions and practices that include the environment. Christopher Schliepcke, in “Literary Place and Memory”, goes on to say,

Cultural memory studies can become a central ingredient in activating cultural concern by showing how we become bonded with the environment and how the relationship we have with a place is mediated with by the larger cultural frameworks in which we are situated. [...] ecocriticism likewise can influence the way we think about our memory cultures and about the sign systems that help us to make sense of our individual and collective pasts. (575)

In Norman’s novel the cultural memories of auger mining, mountain top removal, polluted streams, and abandoned shafts that lives in the minds of the younger generation is now replaced with the memories of rabbit farms, a bustling country store, and joyful weddings.

This leads to the discussion of “Othering” for both the younger hippies of the novel and the older Appalachian residents. Within this novel it is the hippies and those who live alternative lifestyles that are interacting most directly within the land. As seen in reader’s *Foxfire* letters from earlier some older generations of Appalachia did not appreciate the “far out” approach of the hippies. They viewed it as an encroachment on traditional values and lifestyles. Hippies love disregarding the law and wish to collectivize. They wish to distance themselves from the ideas of “civilization” and want to become self-sufficient. As seen in the *Last Whole Earth Catalogue*’s purpose statement, they wanted the “power of the individual to conduct his own education, find his own inspiration, shape his own environment, and share his adventure with whomever is interested” (1). However, when looked at closer, there are striking similarities between the members of the Trace Fork community and the participants in D.R. and Estelle’s wedding. They

all come together to help decorate the front porch, build a communal table, cook, make music, and dance. As it is described,

An entire rock band, the Anonymous Artists of America, had just arrived by school bus from Colorado, and J.D. and Steamboat had joined in with autoharp and drums. Two chicks that no one knew came in with another banjo and flute, and at the last minute before the music got really going Elmer and the leather and denim freak took places at the edge of the group, playing spoons and combs. There were at least two dozen musicians by now and their exotic sound, which Adrienne had already dubbed Hillbilly Hindu Rock. (237)

It is here where traditional instruments of Appalachian culture like the banjo and the autoharp mix the unique instruments and vocals of hippie culture; building a new cultural experience that benefits greatly from both. It is only through the sharedness of being “Other” that such fringe and distinct tastes could mingle.

Moreover, both groups exist as “Others” in the collective imagination of mainstream American society. There are stereotypical and degrading terms for both groups, such as “hillbillies,” hicks,” “bumpkins,” and “yokels” to describe Appalachian folks, and “burnouts,” “long hairs,” and “freaks” to describe hippies that threatened their existence through caricature and even cartoonish depictions. Mindy Beth Miller claims in “Long Remember, Long Recall: The Preservation of Appalachian Regional Heritage in Ron Rash’s *One Foot in Eden*,”

Appalachia has been isolated, geographically and historically for over two-hundred years. The Appalachian Mountains create a natural barrier, thus determining the region’s fate as an American backwoods almost from its initial settlement by the first pioneers. Due to its isolation, Appalachia has remained largely underdeveloped, despite the national interest

in the region's wealth of coal. In the last few decades, a drastic change in economy and technology has opened up the region, and with this opening up comes a threat to heritage and culture, a threat that can be seen in our decapitated mountains and the disappearance of traditional ways of life. (199)

It is here in this isolation where ecocriticism plays a role and could create culture and connection between the two threatened groups just as with Hillbilly Hindu Rock. Bruno Latour asks in "What is to be done? Political Ecology!"

What if fraternity resides not in a front of civilization that would send the others back to barbarity but in the obligation to work with all the others to build a single common world? What if equality asks us to take responsibility for nonhumans without knowing in advance what belongs to the category of simple means and belongs to the kingdom of ends? (235)

This view of othering of both groups could help bridge the gap between mainstream culture and the role of humanity in environmental stewardship. Fraternity (as presented in Chapter 3) will guide us through as we work to restore and rebuild both culture and landscapes. All of these novels ultimately conclude that fraternity and goodwill among communities will carry them through. This response also touches on the idea of self-sustainability and reliance on the community rather than large institutions. Norman even responded in an interview, "But the counterculture represented a longing for family, community, human connection. And hippies undertook to create their version of it." This spirit of anti-consumerism and moving away from monopolies to closer communities is also what led to large coal unions and strikes (such as the Battle of Blair Mountain). When one character in the novel mentions that she is against the nuclear family, is trying to learn how to quilt, and is canning her own vegetables, she is met with

an invitation from an older community member of Appalachia to visit her on her inter-generational farm to learn how to do all those things. As Mrs. Godsey, the postmistress, and owner of the country store, points out, “If I get down sick just prop me up in bed, give me some sassafras tea, and let the Lord take care of the rest” (171). There is documentation across Southern Appalachia (as will be touched on in my analysis of *One Foot in Eden*) to use herbs and native plants to combat illness and disease. When a friend of D.R.’s is discussing growing ginseng in California as natural medicine one of the residents adds, “My daddy picked ‘sang for a living, when I was a boy. It’s as native to these hills as it is to over yonder in China” (236). Further, the culture of medicine and physical healing in Appalachia is surrounded by frost dates, harvest times, and natural landscapes. Likewise, the production of marijuana, LSD, and psychedelic mushrooms (a stereotypical staple of the hippie community and avidly used by D.R.) is also based on agricultural practices. As with agrarian practices in Appalachia the agriculture and use of crops is combined with superstitions and myths to build culture. Even Lawrence S. Thompson pointed out in his 1972 essay “Cannabis Sativa and Traditions Associated with It”, as part of the larger collection, *Kentucky Folklore Record 1972-1974*,

The superstitions of the modern junkies who live in the slums of our cities are difficult to ascertain, mainly because the pathetic people are in constant fear of police action. There is an abundant source of modern superstition, folk language, even song, dance, and a confused sort of ritual here. But to identify it in specific terms and to be able to cite it are beyond the capabilities of most folklorists today. (3)

Not only does this display the counterculture as a deeply complex group with cultural practices akin to Appalachia, but it also further leads to a connection between the physical landscape and culture.

Yet again, the environmental devastation of Appalachia and the cultural destruction of the countercultural movement led to a loss of culture that paradoxically created opportunities for new cultures to meld together and become stronger. Geof Hewitt even responded in a letter to *Foxfire* that,

I would also mention that I have met several of the poets whose work is printed in FOXFIRE, and precious few of them are “hippies” in any sense of the word. Most of them, rather, are decent, hard-working people whose lives are just as dedicated to making this a better world [...] I think it’s time we stopped drawing these lines in our society so that coal miner and hippie alike can love each other and strive to improve the world together. Fortunately, most of us do not represent such seemingly irreconcilable extremes and FOXFIRE makes that clear to the careful reader. (267)

This warming response ends with such a finality that the connection between Othered groups is solidified in culture and there is a possibility of connection between the two.

Ultimately, *Divine Right’s Trip* is a study in mid-century American environmental literature that had to stare down a post-WWII world and is a representation of first wave ecocriticism that highlights the look at culture in the face of disappearing and deconstructed landscapes. D.R. is an embodiment of the interaction between culture and the physical landscape of Southern Appalachia. Despite the destruction of the mountains and through his loss of connection to the land D.R. can restore his roots and even provide a stage for others to grasp a sense of community.

Chapter 2: Floods and Family

If D.R. can bring culture, hope, and younger people back to Southern Appalachia and build a community through slow and consistent growth then what happens if the youth leave the region at the hands of slow and consistent destruction? It is here where Ron Rash's 2002 novel *One Foot in Eden* intervenes. This novel sees a valley become flooded as a by-product of industrialization during the early 1950s. The region has become entirely cut off from its past and devoid of a future outside of tourism and energy production. The final climax of the novel is when the waters rush into the valley and sweep away all sense of the past or future leaving nothing but a few residents to pick up the pieces of their lives.

This novel stands both as a "prequel" to the environment that D.R. provided in *Divine Right's Trip* as a means of creating space for new culture through migration and as a "sequel" within the lens of destruction that is still ongoing in the region. While not directly a sequel or prequel it is a metaphorical staging of the destruction in Appalachia and comes to fall within the cannon of Appalachian literature as applicable to all time periods. Where *Divine Right's Trip* grapples with the past loss of landscapes and how to rebuild them, *One Foot in Eden* grapples with both the past and future loss of the environment and how to best navigate the potential of never being able to rebuild. Rash sees Southern Appalachia as a timeless place with a far-reaching tradition of storytelling and culture. As a result of this interlacing between time and place the younger characters of *One Foot in Eden* act as a direct mirror to the youth of today's Appalachia. This novel, like the majority of Rash's writings, is set at a point when a choice must be made concerning a cultural division. Some characters must struggle with the rise of opiates, others with logging and the development of the region's infrastructure, and some with the opportunity to expand their own wealth at the expense of others. As such, Rash's (and this

thesis') goal within this novel is to highlight and accentuate past events such as migration and damming as a warning to future readers about the possibility of environmental destruction.

This potential of devastation is highlighted in the clear divide between the utopian, mythic, and unretrievable past of Jocassee Valley, and the industrial and displacing production of the valley's future. While D.R. exists in a world where he is provided a landscape that can be restored, *One Foot in Eden* does not offer that chance. This chapter dissects and argues three main points: the use of divides, generationally and physically, as a means of warning to readers, the value of cultural traditions and generational ties, and the consequences of severance from the land. This generational divide will be mainly looked at through the character of Sheriff Alexander and Isaac as the face of change and difference in the valley as well as Mrs. Winchester, Sheriff Alexander's father, and Ms. Glendower as the face of tradition and familiarity. In the middle stand Isaac's parents who love their home deeply and are forced to adapt because of its loss.

However, it first must be established that this novel exists outside of the constraints of time before the lessons of the novels can be applied. As Silas House, prominent Appalachian writer, said of Rash in 2004,

In both his fiction and his poetry Ron Rash takes us to a place where the living and the dead coexist, a place where there is a thin line between the past and the present. Not only that, but he also creates a world in which times overlap and occasionally interrupt one another. [...] While Rash is obviously commenting on the way superstitions and the supernatural inform Appalachian life, it also seems that he is making a statement on life in Appalachia as a whole. In Rash's writing the dead represent the past while the living represents the present- or even the future. Appalachia is a place where these two forces-

the past and the present- are constantly colliding. This region is always trying to find that fine balance where we can embrace and celebrate our pasts while also accepting the present, namely progress. [...] Obviously, this is a place of the past, a place where most of the inhabitants go by the old ways, whether it be hanging dead blacksnakes over fences to draw rain or refusing to give up on their tobacco crops in a time of drought. (21)

This intersection between time periods presents a unique opportunity for Rash's novel to transcend temporality and allows the novel to create a space where the lessons of the past can pointedly inform the future and the present. Where the dead and living coincide allows for those who may belong to the past to still have a deep impact on the future. It also reminds the reader that the future carries just as much importance and can reinforce the need for lessons in cultural wealth, familial values, and land stewardship. Further, it allows for the culture across all Southern Appalachia in all forms to become equally important to each other. This provides an opportunity for lesser seen voices such as Indigenous, Black, and Women (among a diverse many others) to be heard. While seemingly boundless in perspective this timelessness creates space for Rash to become a pseudo-documentarian as the older traditions begin to fade without the need to be physically present during certain time periods.

Rash himself commented in a 2020 interview with the Southern Review of Books, "That's one of the sad things about what happens when the lessons of history go unlearned: you can see similar tragedies happening again and again, as in Kosovo, in Rwanda, in Cambodia. But one of the great gifts of literature is the capacity to remind us of these lessons of our past in new ways, in the hopes that we might yet see the weight of our actions and alter our course." Rash rather pessimistically is known for writing stories that focus on the environmental and cultural destruction of Southern Appalachia throughout several different time periods ranging from the

American Civil War and earlier to modern day. Yet, every single story offers a new perspective on similar problems. Through an ecocritical reading Rash might be the most comprehensive in examining the relationship between culture and landscape. He goes on to say, "What has happened with deregulations in the last few years is something that hasn't been talked about enough. The EPA has been pretty much destroyed, and I wanted to tell a cautionary story that would remind people just how quickly our natural world can be lost to us." While set in the 1950s it becomes clear through Rash's other writings and interviews that the time period is not as important as the setting of Appalachia. Rash wishes for the core interactions and lessons concerning the environment to shine through more than the time period. As Zackary Vernon argues in "Commemorating vs. Commodifying: Ron Rash and the Search for an Appalachian Literary Identity,"

Rash's desire to be a writer was catalyzed by what he considers his role as "witness" to the rapid changes in the landscape and culture of his native region. Spending many of his formative years in and around Madison, Watauga, and Buncombe counties in western North Carolina, Rash witnessed the displacement of native people, the deterioration or complete annihilation of native cultures and folkways, and the destruction of the lands and ecosystems out of which these cultures were given life. (105)

The lessons that the novel provides are largely the same provided through his other writings: as culture fades and geographies shift it is still important to remember the past and use the mistakes to better the future, despite the time period when the narrative is set. This witnessing also allows Rash to rise above these concerns to see them from multiple perspectives rather than providing a sole interpretation as seen in this novel's division among multiple narrators.

One prominent example of this use of time and history is found within Sheriff Alexander's fascination with the Cherokee tribes of the region. Sheriff Alexander, the only main character who does not live in Jocassee Valley (though his deep familial connection to the land will be discussed later) is reading a nonfiction account of native Cherokee tribes by Chapman J. Milling called *Red Carolinians* that had been forcefully removed from the land. This book was published in 1940 and the preface reads, "At one time or another, as many as thirty tribes or bands lived within the borders of the present state, yet this number does not include half the Red Men who came under the influence of the Charles Town government. Through contacts made by such early explorers as Woodward and Hughes, trade agreements were entered into with Creek, Choctaw, and Chickasaw, as well as with the Cherokee and other tribes native to the province itself" (xi). While not entirely or exactly the same there is still a lingering similarity between the dissolvment of thirty tribes as a result of trade agreements and the contracts between the residents of Jocassee Valley and the Carolina Power Company which led to their eventual eviction from the region. Alexander goes on to explain that in Cherokee Jocassee means "valley of the lost" and that even though the Cherokee no longer live on the land their culture still marks the land in names like Oconee. This is yet another example of the interaction between culture and the landscape that could not be possible without a multi-faceted approach.

Yet, rather depressingly, Alexander explains that even though they exist in names and language they will disappear the same as all traces of himself and others will. He says,

I thought of how the descendants of settlers from Scotland and Wales and Ireland and England- people poor and desperate enough to risk their lives to take that land, as the Cherokees had once taken it from other tribes- would soon vanish from Jocassee as well. Fifteen, twenty years at most, and it'll all be water, at least that was what the people who

would know had told me. Reservoir, reservation, the two words sounded so alike. In a dictionary they would be on the same page. There was a kind of justice in what would happen. But this time the disappearance would be total. There would be no names left, because Alexander Springs and Boone Creek and Robertson's Ford and re's Bridge would all disappear. Every tombstone with Holcombe or Lusk or Alexander or Nicholson chiseled into it would vanish as well. (23)

It is here where the novel becomes a cautionary tale about the interaction of culture and the environment. Where the culture (and people) of indigenous tribes is still present in Southern Appalachia this destruction presents the possibility of complete erasure if the environment is completely destroyed. Thus, this can be translated across time and space to show that interaction between culture and the environment is symbiotic. It is also a prime example of the novel's contradictory nature to yearn for the land and established community while still having to grapple with its destruction. Finally, this broad approach to the intersection between the landscape and culture further informs Rash's view of the region and yet again builds credibility of this novel to speak to the problems of modern Appalachia that can still be seen in migration, housing crises, and lack of opportunities in education and healthcare.

This lack of hope is closer in line with the first wave ecocritics who argued that nothing can ever be simply natural again after humans touch it. It is inevitable that the disappearance of natural and Edenic land was a result of human development and the critics of the time wanted to both promote preservation while also coming to terms with the destruction of extractive industries. Arne Naess's work from the early 1970s explored this idea more fully and in *The Deep Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects*, he declares,

Landscapes, ecosystems, rivers, and other wholes of nature are cut into fragments; larger units and gestalts are disregarded. These fragments are regarded as the property and resources of individuals, organizations, or states. Conservation is argued in terms of “multiple use” and “cost-benefit analysis.” Social costs and long-term ecological costs are not included. Wildlife management conserves nature for “future generations of human beings.” The erosion of soils or of groundwater quality is noted as a human loss, but a strong belief in future technological progress makes deep changes seem unnecessary. (54)

Jocassee Valley has become the property of the Carolina Power company and the bottom line does not account for social or long-term ecological costs. This social cost is the culture that is being taken from older generations and being lost to younger generations. The direct result between environmental destruction and human habitation is the loss of culture which can never fully be restored.

One such prominent cultural touchstone that could be erased is linguistics, dialects, and regional slang, such as “look-see” and “reckon,” which appear in the novel. Alexander embodies this disconnect as he is no longer an extremely entrenched member of the community because he left for college and moved out of the valley for an easier living that was not agriculturally focused. This is further reflected in his wife Janice who calls the local linguistics “hillbilly talk” (7) and who refuses to eat staple foods in the culture of Appalachia (and the South at large), such as cornbread, venison, and collards. She rudely labels it as “country food” (38). As Brian Railsback comments in his essay “The Single Effect of Ron Rash’s Environmental Vision,” “The separation from the land, signified by language in some of Rash’s fiction, is more often underscored by physical or psychological distance. The degradation of the landscape, like the degradation of language, creates the danger of a decaying soul for many of Rash’s characters”

(43). It becomes clear that the evolution of Appalachian vernacular and dialect in the region is tied closely to the geography. This ties the pockets of culture in Jocassee Valley to larger cultural pillars throughout the entirety of Appalachia further solidifying this novel's adaptability. Local language, vernacular, and dialect are marks of culture in connection with the land as they have evolved from certain plants, cultural practices, or landmarks⁹. When these dialects and accents, which are closely tied with the environment as a result of the region's isolation and close connection to the environment as a source of similes and metaphors, become "Othered" as "hillbilly talk," it devalues the cultural values of the region and further promotes the accessibility of environmental destruction to those who are coming from outside of the region. The residents and locals are presented in the light of needing to be helped to realize their capital. As a symbiotic relationship between culture and environment when one is devalued both are. This is reflected in modern Appalachia by a shifting of wealth and power away from residents of the region to those who are "transplants" from other regions and could lead to the danger of a version of Railsback's "decaying soul" for not only the region's residents but also its natural landscape.

These cultural traces are also reflected in beliefs and objects, that while small, are still deeply meaningful. There are several mentions of dead blacksnakes hanging across fences, a symbol of superstition for rain that was even noted as far back as in *The Frank C. Brown Collection of NC Folklore* from 1913. There are also lots of religious teachings scattered throughout the novel and discussions of haints, an expression uniquely traced to the Carolinas. There are older men who are sitting on Cheerwine and Double Cola crates which are both produced and enjoyed in the regional Southern Appalachia. These brands are seen as cultural

⁹ See regional phrases such as: "that dog won't hunt," "knee high to a grasshopper," "full as a tick," "yellow-bellied" (in reference to a bird), among others that interact with the environment.

staples. Further, the idea of older residents hanging around a center of culture like a post office, country store, or fishing spot is well documented across Appalachia. As John Lozier and Ronald Althouse claim in “Retirement to the Porch in Rural Appalachia,” “What is required for successful old age is the continuing existence of community or neighborhood systems which can recognize and store credit for the performance of an individual over a whole lifetime and which can enforce the obligation of juniors to provide reciprocity. Without such a system, the help that is provided to an elder robs him of his dignity, for there is no recognition that this is his due, and not a form of charity” (137). This idea of gossip, rumor, and communion at the country store is also heavily touched on within *Divine Right’s Trip*. Railsback notes a different set of old men at a different country store in a different Rash short story, “These good old boys are connected to something much bigger than the warden, for all his learning at a university half a continent away” (43). The trope of the old men on the bench outside of the country store becomes both timeless as it has appeared throughout literature and timed as the younger generations will not take up the mantle. This is a further cultural divide between the older generation who have “earned the right” to be so vested in the community in culture and the younger generation who can see a future that lacks retirement or days of porch sitting.

Cultural division is seen between the generations of residents in that the older generation can rely upon the land to provide comfort. However, the younger generations know that the land will not last forever and that the valley will be swallowed by water as the novel warns the rest of Appalachia. This novel, ultimately, toes the line between wishing for the landscape to remain unchanged, forever nurturing families, communities, and cultural foundations and the truth that the land is being used for industry and wealth. As Mindy Beth Miller points out in “Long Remember, Long Recall: The Preservation of Appalachian Regional Heritage,” “Because of this

[the awareness of disappearance], Modern Appalachian literature's major theme is preservation—a theme shared among all Appalachian writers due to their awareness of cultural change—and this is nowhere better exemplified than in Ron Rash's *One Foot in Eden*. Rash achieves preservation via a series of intelligent thematic choices and adept literary techniques. The novel parallels the destruction of the Jocassee Valley with the modern-day threat of the erasure of the Appalachian culture" (199). This idea of preservation is sometimes at odds with the cultural changes taking place and becomes the central question of this novel. On the one hand the valley still belongs to nature even as the culture within it changes. The younger generation still loves their home and the region. But, on the other hand, they know that the culture they grew up in has begun to change as industrialization enters the region. Alexander then goes on to explain that "I doubted there was anyone left up here who didn't know what Carolina Power was going to do to this valley" (11). Just as with the coal mining in Kentucky and the community of Trace Fork, Jocassee Valley has become a place where culture is fleeting. The landscape has become home to many superstitions, dialects, and cultural practices, but they need to adapt with the movement toward more extractive industry practices. This novel cleverly uses the slow flooding of the valley as a metaphor to the slow change to the region that is inevitable but not always immediately visible.

It is within this framework of needing to change but wishing not to that Mrs. Winchester, Sheriff Alexander's father, and Widow Glendower inhabit. They see the world through connections to the land and community. Without familiarity they cannot adapt, and all perish before the valley is filled in. Widow Glendower is the local "woman who is thought to be a witch- probably the strongest symbol of Old Appalachia in her ability to midwife children and cure ailments with plants and roots" (House 22). As Amy, one of the novel's central characters,

explains, “Widow Glendower was a harmless old soul who’d learned to doctor with roots and leaves and tree bark back when folks what to tend to their own selves when they got sick” (68). Her physical description is even heavily compared to the permanence of the land. Amy says, “I studied over her as well, her eyes gray and hard-seeming as granite tombstones, her skin paled white as a mushroom stem, white as the fish I once saw in a cave, fish that had swam in the dark so long they’d lost all their color and even their eyes” (70). She lives in an abandoned and secluded holler in the woods and as Amy passes through it even the physical landscape comes up to meet her. As Amy explains, “All around me the land smelled bright and newborn. Dogwood blossoms brightened up the woods and beard tongue and trout lilies made the path like the prettiest necklace. Red birds and robins sang from the branches next to their nests” (76). Further, Widow Glendower at all points in the story is either foraging for native plants or creating something from them. Even when Isaac’s father is hiding a body at the most tense and pivotal part of the story, he is met with Glendower collecting wild mint and yellowroot. It is no coincidence that within the description of her holler and creek are primarily native flora and fauna, images of not only elements of the environment, but also an element of the relationship between the landscape and culture. If there is a character across all three novels discussed in this thesis who is the physical embodiment of the landscape or is so closely connected it would be Glendower. Her connection to the landscape is the ultimate symbol of older cultural practices concerning the land’s use as a means of healing. Glendower is the symbol of nature and the natural and how well it can pair to the needs of the community. While she is the perfect metaphor for the ancient mountains around her, she is also a symbol of the idea of community and support that is being slowly lost. The residents of the valley quietly, though surely, begin to reject her, thus showing the rejection of the landscape for more modern conveniences. Yet,

whenever someone cannot figure out their health issues or needs something that a doctor cannot provide, they go to Glendower. This provides a lesson in the continued need for the landscape and knowledge that is passed down despite the progress of humanity toward a more individualistic and self-contained existence.

This deep connection to the land is continued by Sheriff Alexander's father. His relationship with the landscape, however, is much more structured and revolves around the more agrarian use of land. Yet, his connection is no less deep and is what keeps him alive. Alex even claims of his own father,

He had held onto it (the homestead) not only for those who'd come before him but for his grandchildren. I knew his greatest satisfaction was being able to look in the fields and see his son and grandsons working the same land he'd worked all his life. He'd heard the talk about Carolina Power flooding the valley, but I knew he couldn't have believed there'd be a time when Alexanders didn't farm this land. I hoped he was dead before Carolina Power had the chance to take that belief from him. [...] Now he was an old man with a bad heart and a farm that would day vanish completely as a dream. A man whose oldest son had become little more than a stranger. I stared through the windshield at his lean, craggy face like I'd watch something about to swept away by a current, for I realized this could well be the last time I saw him alive. (39-40)

Fortunately, when Alexander's father is presented with a future that does not include his family working the land, he passes, as Alexander wishes. This works at two levels. First, it shows the deeply ingrained feelings of sentiment and pride toward farming, family, and the ability to claim heritage that is present in the region. This also reveals the difficulty of change that the reality of destruction provides to those who know and love the land. Secondly, it can be read as a

metaphorical response to environmental devastation in Southern Appalachia that entails the migration out of the region or the refusal to stand witness to what is being done to the environment. Just as with the discussion of migration in Chapter 1 some simply choose to “move on” and leave the region when change becomes evident. While migration is not perfectly equivalent to dying the severance from the land becomes evident when considered under the lens of being disconnected from the community and culture permanently.

Finally, Mrs. Winchester is more of the cultural side of the coin. She is described as “an old woman who’d outlived two, maybe three of her children” (26) and a husband. The Winchesters have farmed the valley for at least three generations if not more. She makes her own quilts and is seen at church every Sunday. This longevity and connection to the community is akin to Glendower’s connection to the land. She is the embodiment of the “old ways” of community missing modern appliances such as the internet, cellphones, and social media that would come to change the region in the future. Yet, she still plays a vital role when interacting with Isaac. She provides him the information he needs to find his own identity and make his way in the world. This reveals that the cultural traditions, practices, and knowledge of the past can still be a jumping off point for the new generation even if it is a means to leave the region and start anew elsewhere. She provides the ability to carry culture to new places and continue with their usage.

Just like Alexander’s father she ultimately dies before the flooding is complete. But she is much more certain than he is of the results. Where Alexander’s father cannot quite believe the environmental impact, she sees them firsthand and decides to burn herself alive. While horribly scarring to Isaac it certainly will be an image that will stay with him just as the culture and

knowledge she provided will stay with him. Morbidly, she is a flaming beacon of tradition and of sentiment that will be remembered even in the collapse of her home and environment.

The fact remains that these older character's worlds are ultimately going to be flooded. This novel becomes grimmer as the residents are not given the option to stay. Where hope exists in *Divine Right's Trip* for rebuilding and using the remnants of the old to build new this possibility is taken from the younger generations. Where D.R. is able to bury Emmitt despite the overburden no longer are generations bound to the land through literal placement within the ground. Yet, this does not stop the past from haunting the region. When they are moving graves in the valley the undertaker even explains, "I don't like it any more than you, but there's no choice. It's a federal law. Besides, if we don't move these coffins they'll come up on their own. There's oxygen trapped in them. They'll come bobbing up like fishing corks soon as the ground gets saturated. Is that what you want?" (182). It is an eerie image but reminds readers of Faulkner's view that "The past is never dead. It's not even past." Yet again, this novel works in two ways by denying the ability to bury the dead in line with proper cultural respects but also reinforces the idea that the environment itself, while working against culture at times, can still dredge up the memories of the past to create lessons for those in the present. This is seen when the last resident (more than likely Widow Glendower, though it is never confirmed) is "buried" in the region. The body is dumped over the side of a Jon boat at the end of the novel and the narrator explains, "I drove out of Jocassee, for the last time if I had any say in the matter. I wouldn't be coming back here to fish or water ski or swim or anything else like that. This wasn't no place for people who had a home. This was a place for the lost" (214). Not only did the Deputy, who must be an active participant in the abandonment of region, respect Glendower (and

the environment as a whole) by returning her to her home he also respects the cultural traditions and views of the residents by not allowing “a witch” to be buried with his kin.

It is within this framework of dammed rivers, death, and impending doom that Isaac, the novel’s ultimate protagonist (if something like that can be claimed for a novel like this), grows up. He is constantly reminded that agricultural harvests are fickle, longevity is fleeting, and land is not as eternal as previously imagined. Alexander also notes that Isaac’s father, Billy, does not have the same connection to the land as other farmers do. He claims, “I wondered what would happen when Carolina Power ran him off his land. Billy’s parents had been sharecroppers. This land didn’t connect Billy to his family the way Daddy’s land connected him to ours. Billy’s land signaled a break from his past, from what his family had been. Maybe land to Billy was just something to be used, like a truck or a plow horse” (55). Isaac, while connected to the land innately, does not share the same history that others do. His home from the beginning of his life, through his adolescence, and into his early adulthood is being consumed slowly by water and he does not have many older residents to look to other than Winchester, whom he is ultimately barred from seeing. He even claims, “I’d grown up knowing there was no future here, that Jocassee would sooner or later be covered in water, so I’d never let myself get attached to it the way Momma and Daddy had” (168). He further thinks to himself, “I didn’t look back but I could feel the dam looming behind me as if it cast a shadow over the whole valley” (185). Isaac goes to Clemson in the fall and presumably adapts to a life without the constant presence of the mountains and Appalachian culture. Just as where the culture of D.R.’s Kentucky is replaced with overburden and runoff the culture of the valley is replaced by tourism and

commercialization.¹⁰ The looming of Licklog Mountain which is always present in the narrative's background as a witness is seen as comforting and a point of stability. At the flooding it is replaced with the looming of the dam which is threatening and something which is "new" to the region. As such, the culture of the region shifts as a direct result of environmental destruction.

As with the youth of *Divine Right's Trip* there is no culture for him to latch onto that is not influenced by environmental destruction. The farms where generational knowledge would be passed on (in the case of the Alexander farm) are being bought up and flooded. The country store where talk and community building could happen is now at the bottom of the lake. Isaac cannot find culture to learn because there is nothing left. Even in his interaction with Mrs. Winchester he notices that the calendar is still displaying August 1952 years earlier when her son was killed and that the clock has "hands frozen at five minutes until eleven" (165). Not only does this create a further divide in generations but it also shows the older generation's "frozen" approach to the region that is unable to accept change even in the face of positive changes such as the restoration of culture at the hands of hippies or of different environmental activism. With the temporal nature of this novel, it returns to a cautionary tale. This is echoed by Miller who claims,

Today, Appalachia faces many of the same challenges. Industrial giants tear down whole mountains, clear out miles of natural forest, and lay claim to huge tracts of land they care nothing about (other than for monetary gain), while encouraging those who need it for their very survival, who love it and belong to it, to get out. In the name of economic progress, big business also subjects the region to influences from the rest of America; the

¹⁰ Certainly, a culture in its own right, but for the purposes of the residents, they do not necessarily see it that way. Tourism enables the culture to shift and could even lead to economic resurgence, but it also usually comes at the price of inauthentic stereotypes or portrayals.

message most Appalachians receive from the greater culture is that they will never fit in unless they alter just about everything about themselves. This all-out attack on the Appalachian culture from the outside and within the region (within, because of the internalization of negative views) threatens a unique place and people. (200)

This has been highlighted across Rash's other works set in modern times but with the same flavors of displacement and erasure. Miller even declares that "This sense of a waning connection to the land and pride in one's regional heritage signal a potential future loss of Appalachian culture. Rash's *One Foot in Eden* reminds young Appalachian readers that they live in a place worth holding onto and that once that place vanishes, the memory of it will be all they have to cherish" (201). This novel acts as a forewarning to the overall destruction of Appalachia and Isaac's loss of his family, community, and identity is a distinct cautionary tale of what can come to be.

This disconnect and loss is also mirrored through Sheriff Alexander. He left for Clemson, went into the Marines to escape his life, lives in the town of Seneca, and while he is deeply concerned about the destruction of the valley and the changes wrought ultimately, he never returns when he leaves with Isaac. He struggles throughout the novel with keeping in touch with his family and even attacks his own brother. When visiting his father, he even comments, "I could hear the cicadas singing in the trees as we tried to think of something else to say. Though we sat five feet apart, it seemed a lake had spread out between us, but it was something wider and harder to get across" (18). This works as a two-edged comment by using natural elements and metaphors to build Alex's further connection between himself and the region but also leads to a disconnect between himself and the culture of his family. He still loves the land and wishes

that it were not flooded but still must fight to be a part of the environment again. Isaac comments,

He stared across the river at Licklog Mountain. The mountain had been scalped, mainly just stumps and rocks now. He looked up toward Crossroads Mountain and saw the same thing. It was easy enough to guess what he was thinking, for like Daddy he'd grown up here. Though he'd left years ago I supposed it still bothered him to see it all changed.

(168)

Alexander highlights the pride and heritage that is seen within Appalachia and the sense of helplessness that can become rampant though all these novels discourage it. Even *The Road* still carries a message of hope and perseverance in the face of absolute destruction. Miller continues, "Such sharp illustrations of the land reflect the soul-kinship that Appalachians feel toward the place of their birth. By depicting this juxtaposition of whole mountain with scalped mountain, Rash lets the reader truly feel a sense of loss and change" (203). Alexander acts as a conduit between the older character's love for the land such as his father and the younger generation's expectation to leave and expand beyond Appalachia such as Isaac's leaving for Clemson or Holland's leaving for Korea. Alexander acts as a conduit to the culture of the past and as a witness to the future. They are both products and active members in Southern Appalachia. Where Alexander and Rash may not be able to enact real change and come to feel the loss deeply, they also try to use their lessons and words to teach the younger generations in the hopes of instilling a love of the region's environment and culture.

In the middle ground stands Isaac's parents and Billy and Amy Holcombe. It has been established that Billy comes from lesser means and did not grow up farming. His connection to the land begins and ends with his rows of tobacco and the road to the market. He narrates, "By

then that baby was about the only thing growing. Corn stalks stood dead in the fields, the beans half-buried in gray dust. The only crop that looked to make it was tobacco I'd planted beside the river, that and some cabbage, if the groundhogs didn't get it" (116). Even when faced with the claim by the power company not to plant anything, Isaac narrates that "But Daddy had told the Carolina Power man it was our land for a few more months yet, and he'd damn well do what he pleased" (167). It becomes clear that Billy puts his family first before the land and uses it to an end to sustain them. His tobacco and cabbages are not out of a deeper sense of purpose or connection to the land but instead out of monetary value.

However, that does not stop him from loving the land and keeping it preserved as long as possible. The land is where he can start a family, teach his son a way of life, and can build cultural foundations. As such, he protects and monitors the land closely for bugs, worms, and diseases. He also becomes in tune with the groundhogs around his field and the fish in the river next to his home. He is more akin to Sheriff Alexander's father in that he has determined that the land is his way to prosperity except that he does not have the pre-established deep roots. Billy is a proponent of the middle ground between utilizing the land for personal wealth but trying to safeguard it against profiteering. While not strongly leaning one way or another in the fight for environmentalism he is still an active advocate of the continuation of culture and is unafraid of utilizing the ancient valley to create a young family.

Isaac's mother, Amy, stands on the shakiest ground between all of the characters. She is caught between two different men, two different families, and a lie that leads to the death of the Holcombe's' neighbor. Amy stands at the precipice between a world that includes her mistakes

of the past and a future that, while bleak, could lead to redemption.¹¹ Amy is the representation of shifting cultural values as she must decide to reveal and trot out the past or keep quiet and hope that the flooding might provide her with a better future.

It is here where Amy (and Billy to an extent) must choose to continue living on the land or move out of the valley and abandon their past. They must choose between the agrarian culture of the valley and work to build their home and family or risk fracturing their culture when they move. Frédérique Spill asserts in “Amy’s Men, or Wounded Masculinity in Ron Rash’s *One Foot in Eden*,” “While the novel’s characters bear witness to the significant changes experienced by the Appalachian South from the 1950s on, their trajectories suggest that such progressions profoundly changed the traditional definitions of both masculinity and femininity at the time. The interplay of multiple visions in *One Foot in Eden* therefore evokes a complex depiction of southern masculinity, which is shown as being in flux, probably in transition—undoubtedly having a hard time redefining itself” (106). Amy, while being depicted as desperate, is still a mirror of the culture of the time and how environmental devastation could lead to different possibilities. As with D.R.’s plan Amy could come to benefit from the destruction and lead a life that can provide a sense of peace. As Vernon claims,

The lake in *One Foot in Eden* symbolizes the displacement of an agrarian culture in order to facilitate an industrial culture, and it demonstrates the ways in which this shift can have tremendous homogenizing effects on societies that had been relatively autochthonous. Therefore, Rash's use of a manmade lake fittingly encapsulates the

¹¹ While this thesis is not focused on ecofeminism, there is still a deep connection between the objectification of women and the reference of landscape as a feminine presence. As Amy becomes “the villain” of the novel, this becomes reflected in the physical destruction of the land and building pressure of the water.

process in which alterations to the natural world lead to vast cultural and ontological repercussions. (118)

Out of the direct interaction with environmental destruction comes the deconstruction of traditional cultural norms and the possibility for a more just world.

Amy and Billy stand as the difference between the ancient valley and modernity.

Returning to the idea of lessons spanning time and space this can be translated into a modern decision that young people like Isaac and D.R. must face. Silas House declares,

It is a dying world made up of living, many of whom can't accept that the place they have known and loved all their lives is slowly fading away, soon to be covered by water. We know throughout the book that Jocassee is a place of the past, one that will never see the future. The same might be said about Appalachia, a place that is changing rapidly with the influx of satellite dishes, snowbirds, and changing values and mores. At the same time, Appalachia is a place that is trying desperately to hold on to its heritage. Its people strive to preserve the old ways while also moving forward. Naturally, many things die in the name of progress. [...] They (Billy and Amy) are not only people from the past but also a couple who are trying to overcome their pasts and go forward into the future. (22, 23)

As such, many modern residents must decide whether to remain in Southern Appalachia and try to sustain its landscape or bring the culture with them to other places.

With the flooding of the valley, many residents finally leave and never return just as Sheriff Alexander never returns. The culture of the valley is displaced. Even one of Carolina Power's engineer yells at Isaac,

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

This two-pronged attack both seals the fate of the region and further perpetuates its distancing through Othering. As discussed in Chapter 1 there is a clear disconnect between residents of Southern Appalachia and elsewhere. The use of "hillbilly" (which appears throughout the novel as a term of disparagement) further erases the people of the land and disconnects them from their homes, which in turn disconnects them further from the environment that is being destroyed by those who are perpetrating the Othering. This comment shows how the nuances and complexity of Appalachia can largely be ignored. However, it also shows how lessons and narratives like this novel become even more important as certain aspects of the region become more and more distanced from today.

In conclusion, this novel highlights the generational cultural divides between residents of Southern Appalachia at the hands of environmental destruction, the adaptability of history to teach lessons for the foreseeable future, and the possibility of destruction across the whole region with ways to defend it. It balances the need to understand how the valley's history came to be with the knowledge of how it could end in order to provide context to current and future readers. A trademark of Rash's work is the ability to apply different narratives across time and space and *One Foot in Eden* is no different. This novel is an unflinching look at the consequences of industrial dam projects, eminent domain, forced evictions out of the area and deep cultural changes to go along with it. However, it also provides a look into how residents can carry the

region's beauty and cultural values even when leaving. It is a fine line between wishing for a past that was idyllic and coping with a reality that is rife with environmental destruction, but this novel could provide a framework of how to approach such drastic changes. Ultimately, it is a modern example of how hope and culture are tied closely to the region with a distinct look to the past, to serve the future.

Chapter 3: Apocalypse and Appalachia

Where *Divine Right's Trip* offers hope of the region's restoration and *One Foot in Eden* offers an explanation as to how to move forward in a world that is being changed, *The Road* offers neither and instead challenges both novel's messages. It is not an inherently hopeful novel at first glance. There is no real opportunity at building a life. There is nothing but ash, fire, blood, and starvation. Eventually, the world is too cold to sustain life as the smoke and clouds of probably poisonous rain blot out the sun. Crops fail. Hunting is impossible. Eventually, cannibalism becomes the main food source. The only change is a steep and slow descent into hell that cannot even be noticed as every single day is a blur. All culture will vanish as it cannot exist independent of humanity. The narrator points out,

The world shrinking down about a raw core of parsible entities. The names of things slowly following those things into oblivion. Colors. The names of birds. Things to eat. Finally, the names of things one believed to be true. More fragile than he would have thought. How much was gone already? The sacred idiom shorn of its referents and so of its reality. Drawing down like something trying to preserve heat. In time to wink out forever. (88)

What was once held as sacred cultural knowledge is now fading and nothing remains. There is seemingly nothing left to do but to fade into the darkness and let the cold consume all life.

However, after a closer examination not only is this novel filled with life it even promotes it. There are cultural traditions, common phrases, and even a little bit of humanity left within the characters. As Erik Hage explains in *Cormac McCarthy: A Literary Companion*, "Nevertheless, while it is easy to become mesmerized by McCarthy's vivid rendering of unthinkable horror and the phantasmagoria of corpses frozen in all kinds of poses of antic death,

The Road also takes up some of McCarthy's most compelling questions yet, such as, what wills one to live when every shred of humanity, culture, and society has been obliterated?" (142). This chapter works at two objectives to try to answer this question and highlight that even amid a grey-toned and ash-covered world Southern Appalachia can still be quite breathtaking. Furthermore, among a world devoid of most cultural touchstones there is still the ability to create and sustain culture. The purpose is to emphasize that while coal mining and hydroelectric damming are still enacted in Southern Appalachia there remains the possibility to create something new out of a lost sense of place. In conjunction with Welty's ideas Appalachia still stands as a concrete place to be experienced and learned from, even with destruction present. It can still be renewed and act upon the characters just as a pre-fall world can.

While it is not typically viewed within the classification of McCarthy's "southern novels" or even the narrower "Appalachian novels," *The Road* is set within and around the Appalachian region (Guillemin 2004, Monk 2016, Luce 2009). There are hints such as road markings, a mention of "eastern mountains" (27), descriptions of "A rich southern wood that once held may-apple and pipsissewa. Ginseng. The raw dead limbs of the rhododendron twisted and knotted and black" (39), a plantation-style home, the mention of "the gap" (33) which could be the Cumberland Gap, and most prominently a "See Rock City" (21) sign (in reference to a rather famous marketing campaign from Chattanooga, Tennessee, on the border of Tennessee and Georgia). Moreover, McCarthy also grew up and has lived throughout his life in Tennessee and several of his novels have been set there. It becomes clear throughout reading that, much like Rash, McCarthy can point out the possible shortcomings of the region while still accentuating its natural beauty.

To begin, the inherent violence and devastation of the novel must be addressed. But rather than condemn it as senseless and without reason the use of violence will be argued in this chapter as a form of culture at the hands of environmental change. There are bands of raiders and pillagers who roam together. This form of tribalism is inherent to humanity and thus leads to the potential for culture. Surely these marauders must communicate with specialized language and have a community to return to with the spoils of war. There are even mentions of blood cults and communes that have forms of spirituality and behavior that while not perfectly equivalent are akin to cultural practices of today. Some examples include the dead appearing impaled on spikes in the mountains or heads displayed in a row with markings and runes carved into the bone with signature gold earrings. These grotesque displays are seen as ritualistic and not serving any distinct purpose other than as a cultural practice. One gang even wears all red scarves and bandanas as a tribal marking, has ribbons hanging off homemade spears, and a clear caste system of slaves and catamites that are divided by weight. As Nicholas Monk explains in *True and Living: Prophet of Destruction*, “In McCarthy, violence is deeply woven into what it is to be human, operating at multiple levels and signifying a range of ideas and phenomena. As readers, we are forced to confront the truth of this violence and engage in honest ways with how we feel when faced with one of the less palatable truths about what it means to be human” (97). Culture, broadly defined, is the result of human connectedness to each other and the products of those connections. This can manifest in art, film, literature, music, sacred places, or in the case of *The Road*, a giant diesel truck painted in the blood of passers-by. Moreover, one of the “roadrats” (68) (a nickname further creating a form of culture) even has a tattoo of a bird on his neck that is implied to be non-electronic and given after the fall of the modern world.

Further, this culture of desperate killing and brutalism is in direct relation to the environment. The exact cause of the end of the modern world is never directly examined but Monk says,

A combination of climate change, environmental pollution, the collapse of food supplies, habitat loss, economic meltdown, and the consequent eruption of multiple highly technologized wars on various scales, all of which become greater than the sum of their parts, seems a likely explanation given what has before in the fiction. Slow violence and the more immediate kind join in apocalyptic catalysis. The land continues to burn because no emergency services are left to respond. (92)

The culture of humanity pre-fall is in direct relation to the pre-fall environment resulting in the destruction of both. Humanity pushed too far in terms of expansion and wars leading to the environment inadvertently pushing back and killing a vast majority of humans.

Similarly, the post-fall environment comes to influence the culture and customs of post-fall humans. Cannibalism, the imprisonment of humans, looting for canned goods, trying to trap a dog that normally would be a household pet to cook, and the robbing of others as a form of sustainable “farming” is only common practice when the environment directly stops growing food. The idea of eating a freshly born baby or infant as a means of sustenance would be completely inconceivable in today’s world because the landscape is still able to sustain farming and fruit production. Yet, it appears twice in the novel with an unceremonious tone. When environmental stability is gone so too is the stability of the existing culture. Lastly, the acceptance of suicide as a form of escape is (broadly) not seen as a viable strategy until the environment gives out. The boy’s mother even claims, “As for me my only hope is for eternal

nothingness and I hope it with all my heart” (57). Only when the environment changes then do commonly accepted cultural practices drastically change.

Outside of violent and rather grotesque depictions of culture smaller cultural changes are influenced by the environment. There is a discussion between the father and the son about the phrase, “as the crow flies” (156). McCarthy implies that the son is not aware of what a crow is because of bio-spheric destruction and needs the phrase explained to him. The father explains that crows only exist in books now. He also must be taught what a neighborhood and a beachcomber is. Further, the son and the father share a soda and the boy is educated on what soda is as he never has had such a common item. There are distinct cultural markings that the boy does not understand and that the father must explain as a direct result of environmental devastation and the cultural loss from it. The father and son must navigate this new world together and the father must teach the son about the past to help his future just as Rash attempts a similar feat in *One Foot in Eden*.

One such example of old cultural practices¹² informing new culture are survival essentials such as canning jars (that provide food at a crucial moment), preserved food, clothing repair, and knowledge such as water filtration, the ability to make a lamp out of a beer bottle and a rag, and how to gauge the viability of gasoline. There is also communication among travelers and vagrants through cairns. As the narrator claims, “They began to come upon from time to time small cairns of rock by the roadside. They were signs in gypsy language, lost patterns. The first he'd seen in some while, common in the north, leading out of the looted and exhausted cities, hopeless messages to loved ones lost and dead” (180). Language and messaging to others is still a mark of culture and humanity no matter how primitive. This use of cairns also illustrates how

¹² While not uniquely Appalachian, these practices still create a sense of Appalachian cultural fabric.

something ancient can still be repurposed for a modern world. Further, when the two stumble across a survival bunker from the old world (a product of culture at the hands of environmental and political concerns), they find, “Crate upon crate of canned goods. Tomatoes, peaches, beans, apricots. Canned hams. Corned beef. [...] He held the boy by the hand and they went along the rows of stenciled cartons. Chili, corn, stew, soup, spaghetti sauce. The richness of a vanished world” (138,139). It is this richness of the vanished world and the ability to utilize it that propels them forward out of the jaws of death and into more cultural experiences. This scene and others showcase the man’s ability to perform mechanical maintenance and build makeshift tools as dismantles a gas stove. The previously mentioned gang with spears even showcases the ability to blacksmith which requires prior knowledge of metallurgy. This continuance of skills and culture from the old world further allows them to live and build culture.

These glimpses of the old world are seen in cultural moments that are still inherent to childhood due to the father’s efforts to keep the boy happy and “normal” in terms of development. McCarthy’s narrator explains that “The boy had found some crayons and painted his facemask with fangs and he trudged on uncomplaining” (14). Even through the torrent of greyness there is still a prime example of art being displayed. Further, the boy and the father play cards. The narrator claims,

He'd a deck of cards he found in a bureau drawer in a house and the cards were worn and spindled and the two of clubs was missing but still they played sometimes by firelight wrapped in their blankets. He tried to remember the rules of childhood games. Old Maid. Some version of Whist. He was sure he had them mostly wrong and he made up new games and gave them made up names. Abnormal Fescue or Catbarf. (53)

The narrator declares, “They used to play quoits in the road with four big steel washers they'd found in a hardware store, but these were gone with everything else” (76). These games, while maybe not rooted in deep cultural values, are still a form of cultural expression and even building of new cultural traditions. The father has reimagined old cultural practices to promote new ones. These bring joy and distraction in a mad world allowing for survival. It becomes essential for the boy to be introduced to old cultural artifacts to understand them more fully. There is even music in the otherwise silent world. The narrator explains,

He'd carved the boy a flute from a piece of roadside cane and he took it from his coat and gave it to him. The boy took it wordlessly. After a while he fell back and after a while the man could hear him playing. A formless music for the age to come. Or perhaps the last music on earth called up from out of the ashes of its ruin. (78)

It is this direct creation of culture out the environment (a piece of wood) that further reinforces this novel’s ecocritical reading and reinforces that hope can be created even out of the direst circumstances.

Yet, just as with the other novels, this chasm between old and new (despite the man’s best efforts) leads to a disconnect between the older generation and the younger. Where Emmit and Sheriff Alexander can remember a pre-devastated world, so too does the father just on a grander scale. Within the first pages of the novel the narrator mentions that the father never consults a calendar anymore or can even tell with certainty what month it is. The boy then asks shortly after what a landline is. The obsession with time and keeping dates is a totally foreign practice to the boy just as the idea of a phone call is. The father reads newspapers simply to distract himself, recites litanies, and contemplates the nature of religion and God, none of which he ever seems to share with the boy. He also has extremely vivid dreams of the past full of color

and light. This remembrance and yearning for the old world is physical embodied in his wallet which he eventually gives up as it does not hold anything left of value for him. The narrator explains,

He'd carried his billfold about till it wore a cornershaped hole in his trousers. Then one day he sat by the roadside and took it out and went through the contents. Some money, credit cards. His driver's license. A picture of his wife. He spread everything out on the blacktop. Like gaming cards. He pitched the sweatblackened piece of leather into the woods and sat holding the photograph. Then he laid it down in the road also and then he stood and they went on. (51)

He keeps these moments and memories of the old world to himself because he knows that the son could never come to comprehend them in the same ways he does. Hage explains, "Born after the devastation, he has no sense of pop culture and structures that preceded this life" (143). Trying to explain and conceptualize these things would simply create a greater void between them and possibly create anger in the son at the loss. The narrator even comments upon this when he states,

Maybe he understood for the first time that to the boy he was himself an alien. A being from a planet that no longer existed. The tales of which were suspect. He could not construct for the child's pleasure the world he'd lost without constructing the loss as well and he thought perhaps the child had known this better than he. (154)

The father can explain in detail what it was like to live in the pre-fall world with stories and pictures and descriptions, but the boy will never come to understand them. Just as how the younger residents of Trace Fork or Jocassee Valley can never fully return to pre-destruction days the boy can never return to pre-fall world.

This generational divide comes to a head when the two cross an old man named Ely on the road. He claims that he is ninety and is described as “tapping his way, dwindling slowly on the road behind them like some storybook peddler from an antique time, dark and bent and spider thin and soon to vanish forever” (174). Ely is the embodiment of the old world and cannot seem to cope with this new way of life and claims he is waiting for death. He is not particularly concerned with the workings of the world anymore and even declares that in the old world he saw this coming. Ely claims,

I'm past all that now. Have been for years. Where I can't live gods fare no better. You'll see. It's better to be alone. So I hope that's not true what you said because to be on the road with the last god would be a terrible thing so I hope it's not true. (174)

This revelation leads Ely and the man to discuss the old world and religion in depth, specifically Christianity. The boy remains quiet during this conversation seemingly trying to keep up without the inherent knowledge of the old world. The man then asks Ely to leave, and they continue. McCarthy uses Ely to highlight the utterly depressing nature of the world and emphasize the crushing loss that the world felt at the fall.

It is in this section where the son and the father come to an argument concerning helping others and where the divide is most apparent. The boy wants to continue talking and journeying with Ely, but the father will not allow it. The boy wants to leave Ely with food, but the father will not allow it. The boy wants to hold Ely's hand, but the father will not allow it. This apparent rejection from the man could be seen a reaction to his own feelings of loss or from knowledge of old-world excess he will never experience again. The boy on the other hand has never known abundance (as we do) and thus can live to part with some food or compassion. This behavior culminates in the passive aggressive argument that bisects their world view:

The boy didnt answer. They ate. He looked back up the road. After a while he said: I know. But I wont remember it the way you do.

Probably not.

I didnt say you were wrong.

Even if you thought it.

It's okay. Yeah, the man said. Well. There's not a lot of good news on the road. In times like these.

You shouldnt make fun of him.

Okay.

He's going to die.

I know.

Can we go now?

Yeah, the man said. We can go. (175)

As with the first look at this novel this interaction and argument appears to be quite grim. The man has possibly become jaded as a result of his age and has concluded that humanity should not interact any further with each other or the environment. As Petra Mundik explains in *A Bloody and Barbarous God*, “The man seems keenly aware that everything we hold dear is ultimately a source of pain, because we are doomed to lose it in the end” (292).

Nonetheless, this conversation highlights the hope of the novel and the humanity of the boy. In the face of the world, he still wants to help others and be kind. This is emphasized in the phrase “carrying the fire” (first appearing on pg. 83). The man explains that some people are good and carrying the fire, described by Mundik as “symbolizing the aforementioned hope, goodness, and the promise of spiritual illumination” (287), while others are bad and are trying to

extinguish it. This example of deep cultural value is in relation to others, and it is here that McCarthy reinforces a view of community. The boy constantly looks for connection in encounters with a dog, a (possibly imaginary) little boy, in certain toys, in Ely and his father, among other survivors they encounter. He even cries and keeps looking back at a man who was struck by lightning that they are forced to abandon. The boy repeatedly shows forgiveness as well and is a glimmer of hope. Mundik claims, “Despite the fact that the child seems to have come to terms with death, he has not become desensitized to the suffering of others, often weeping for their plight as though it were his own. [...] Buddhism also teaches that compassion reduces “the boundary lines between oneself and other people (Conze, Buddhism 102). The child seems to be the very embodiment of such compassion; while the father is fixated on their own survival, the boy continually tries to help others, even if such aid proves detrimental to his own well-being. [...] The child’s moral integrity is all the more striking given the fact that he has only ever known the post-apocalyptic world of dog-eat-dog survivalism” (295, 296). This need of connection could lead to the changing of culture in the future to be less individualistic (as demonstrated in Ely and the man) and instead be replaced by a rebuilding of community and society. The boy joins another family at the end of the novel and presumably goes on to be more trusting than his predecessors.

This divide in thinking is also marked in the boy and father’s interaction with the environment. The boy is distinctly more comfortable in the woods and fields, fearing buildings and homes. The man on the other hand looks for homes and buildings to pillage. He also visits his own childhood home, his uncle’s farm, and looks for various family members in phonebooks. Growing up with the culture of buildings, cars, people, highways, and every other populated aspect of civilization, the man has a healthy amount of fear for buildings but also knows their

value. McCarthy shows that the boy was born on the road or in a secluded rural cabin with only his parents as companions. This culture of isolation is very different in comparison to the culture the man grew up in, further dividing them and creating in the boy a fear of non-rural areas. The boy's cultural values are in direct connection with his environment. This perspective on the environment is demonstrated in their interactions with other humans. The boy is more trusting and willing to interact with others he finds on the road and outdoors because he believes they are "carrying the fire" while he is afraid of those who are indoors and in large groups because they are not. This approach can be interpreted as a further byproduct of the boy's view on the environment and the possibility of hope for the younger generation. The environment equals solitude and safety while buildings and those who inhabit them breed a culture of danger.

This idea of the environment being more welcoming to the boy thus leads to the conversation regarding beauty in the novel. With this setting there is still natural beauty found in the mountains and in the broader Southern Appalachian landscape as the characters travel through the grey world. While this novel is not solely concerned with Southern Appalachia it is the world that the man was born into and is most familiar with. When they reach the piedmont and flatlands the man becomes more unsure. His knowledge of Appalachia and its beauty fuels them to keep moving forward until they are sure enough of themselves to venture into the larger ruins of the world. The first example is found in a waterfall that the boy and the father see through the eyes of "tourists" as they dive in the water and look for souvenirs in the form of rocks. The narrator claims,

He stood and watched the boy. Wow, the boy said. He couldn't take his eyes off it. He squatted and scooped up a handful of stones and smelled them and let them fall clattering. Polished round and smooth as marbles or lozenges of stone veined and striped. Black

disclets and bits of polished quartz all bright from the mist off the river. The boy walked out and squatted and laved up the dark water. (37-38)

This waterfall is among one of the few moments in the novel that highlights the natural beauty of the region and could be seen as joyous. It is certainly the most momentous example of natural beauty on a grand scale. Similarly, the second instance of beauty found in the world takes place at a river. The narrator explains, “They camped at a river and he sat by the fire listening to the water running in the dark. It wasn't a safe place because the sound of the river masked any other but he thought it would cheer the boy up” (199). Despite being dangerously exposed to others and not providing much value in terms of essentials, the father still decides to camp by the river because of its inherent value as beautiful and different. Water plays a large role in this novel not only as a tool for survival or natural landmarks but also as a sense of change in the otherwise unchanging world.

Conversely, there are two distinct moments that highlight the importance of agriculture and reliability. An apple orchard is a form of salvation for the character and a tilled field becomes a vault of cultural items that are old even in the “pre-fall sense.” Where the water provides change agriculture and schedules are equally important and can provide sustenance. The earth's regeneration is dependent upon the previous actions of pre-fall humanity. As the narrator explains,

By the time he got to the bottom of the orchard he had four more apples and he put them in his pocket and came back. He went row by row till he'd trod a puzzle in the grass. He'd more apples than he could carry. He felt out the spaces about the trunks and filled his pockets full and he piled apples in the hood of his parka behind his head and carried

apples stacked along his forearm against his chest. He dumped them in a pile at the door of the barn and sat there and wrapped up his numb feet. (121)

While not a grand and breathtaking location filled with vistas and orange sunsets this location as a product of the landscape is nonetheless seen as equally, if not more, beautiful. It is here where the characters finally benefit from the environment rather than being punished by it. Later, they come to encounter a field and the narrator claims,

It had rained recently and the earth was soft underfoot and he kept his eye on the ground and before long he stopped and picked up an arrowhead. He spat on it and wiped away the dirt on the seam of his trousers and gave it to the boy. It was white quartz, perfect as the day it was made. There are more, he said. Watch the ground, you'll see. He found two more. Gray flint. Then he found a coin. Or a button. Deep crust of verdigris. He chipped at it with the nail of his thumb. It was a coin. He took out his knife and chiseled at it with care. The lettering was in Spanish. He started to call to the boy where he trudged ahead and then he looked about at the gray country and the gray sky and he dropped the coin and hurried on to catch up. (203, 204)

This moment is one of the few in the novel where the man and the boy acquire items that are not being used solely for survival purposes, but rather, to build out their views on the culture of the old world. The arrowheads could be used as potential weapons, but they never come up again or are ever used. The coin on the other hand serves no value as money is worthless. Yet, this interaction is a distinct example of culture coming from the environment. Had it not rained the items would have remained buried and the characters would never be used as a teaching moment of culture. Few other moments in the novel compare to these in the overall dynamic between beauty and nature on such a scale while also providing a basis of cultural foundations.

Yet, sprinkled throughout the novel are examples of products of the environment that bring some form of beauty and joy no matter how small. The boy catching a snowflake on his tongue, finding edible seeds in a hay bale, finding flower seeds in a gardening shed, among other small and tender moments. This creation of new culture out of the ruins thus comes full circle to Norman's thinking that new ideas and culture can be built out of the old. If the pair in *The Road* can demonstrate culture and some hope under such dire circumstances, then the other characters can create new culture even as the landscape around them changes. As Jay Watson comments upon in his essay "Afterwor(l)d: The Future in the Present,"

Thoughts, they remain, however, and such resources, opportunities for human thinking, being, surviving—dare we say flourishing? It may not be enough, then, simply to eat the morels and soldier on into another futureless day, one more chapter in the story of the end. The point may instead lie in noticing them, really noticing them—harvesting them for thinking. [...] Like the morels, he has emerged and is emerging from the ash and duff of a radically disrupted earthscape. As such, he may serve as a living reminder that *Homo sapiens* is another species that, like matsutake and other forest fungi, thrives in disturbed environments—indeed thrives by disturbing them. (261)

The boy does not know of the world of *One Foot in Eden* or *Divine Right's Trip*. He does not know of the coal companies. He knows of dams, but they are only old relics. He must forge ahead to survive. There is no other way for him to live other than to find hope wherever he can. In the morels hope is offered as a product of the environment and presents the landscape as a nurturing figure rather than harsh as it has been throughout other writings.

The final moment of beauty and nature that could be overlooked is the repeated dreams and thoughts of trout in dreams. They are always sparkling and multicolored, offering artistic

expression through nature. This becomes deeply poignant within the last lines of the novel. The narrator declares,

Once there were brook trout in the streams in the mountains. You could see them standing in the amber current where the white edges of their fins wimpled softly in the flow. They smelled of moss in your hand. Polished and muscular and torsional. On their backs were vermiculate patterns that were maps of the world in its 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.

(287)

With this declaration the overall extremely depressing novel offers a morsel of hope that brings the possibility of reclamation. Throughout the novel there is no hope provided that humanity will flourish or repopulate again. There are moments of individual hope and happiness, but it is claimed time and again that humanity will die out and a population will never return. There is no long-term sustainability.

But McCarthy posits in the final passage that nature can still be recovered, maybe not perfectly restored, but evolved into. McCarthy seems to be suggesting a deeper form of mysticism or magic that lives in Appalachia and will be utilized to revitalize the region. Just as with the mushrooms, the trout acts as a symbol of the eternalness and deep ancient roots of nature that will be restored without humanity. It becomes clear throughout the novel that nature existed long before humanity and thus will survive long after humanity dies out. However, this thesis disagrees with McCarthy, or rather, wishes to expand upon his point by including humanity into the ancient roots of Appalachia as humanity has always come to interact with

nature. The boy is equally a part of nature and can utilize this ancient source of power to help propel himself into the future. As Frye explains in *Understanding Cormac McCarthy*,

They (the experiences associated with living in such a world) involve the interrelationship of life and land, the force of imagination, as well as the redemptive power of community and human intimacy- all in a world that yields its heart only in fleeting moments- of horror yes, and metaphysical dread, but blended and imbued with inexpressible beauty. (179)

This novel becomes a lesson in reclamation that can be applied to modern and future Appalachia. The hope of the boy, the use of old cultural practices to build new ones, and the inherent beauty of the region all contribute to a picture of hope and the ability to find it even in the face of environmental devastation that should be remembered and carried into modern Southern Appalachia.

While coal mining and damming will never compare to the abject horror that is *The Road*, it is worth noting that through community and kindness, paired with a healthy respect of the environment can lead to a rebuilding and reimaging of old culture to produce a world worth living in. The father uses the old to build new and the boy takes those new cultural practices with him into the future. Just as with modern Appalachia it must be remembered that through generational knowledge and reliance upon the land, without extraction, communities and pockets of life may survive.

Coda: The Past and the Future

After an initial reading of these three novels the audience could be left with despair. There is a feeling that Southern Appalachia is slipping away and that nothing can recover it. The old ways and practices of culture are being let go and not being replaced by anything meaningful. Emmet and Widow Glendower are dead and gone. Where gardens once flourished now overburden sits heavily. Where communities gathered there is nothing but silent and still water. Where there is a possibility of generational knowledge and passing of cultural values there is only coal mining and migration. Younger characters are forced to leave and older generations either refuse to leave or must face death.

Yet, this thesis tries to counter this line of thinking and provide a glimpse at different perspectives into how culture can evolve and change to incorporate older cultures to address new issues. *One Foot in Eden* presented the obstacles of devastation and the foundations of the ability for *Divine Right's Trip* and *The Road* to tackle change in the region. *Divine Right's Trip* provides an intermingling and exchange of ideas that could be considered unorthodox to face environmental destruction. *The Road*, while not solely concerned with Southern Appalachia provides a baseline for characters to move throughout devastated worlds. This thesis attempted to use these specific novels as a timeline of extractive industries in Appalachia and their development in terms of displacement and destruction. These readings, specifically *Divine Right's Trip*, were utilized to highlight the changes enacted in the mid-20th century that led to the rise of ecocriticism in the 1970s. This then opened a discussion for a progressive framework for the future.

Nonetheless, this thesis could have been taken in many different directions and could examine many different aspects of the novels themselves such as gender roles, the impact of

infrastructure in the region, and tourism as an expression of culture. Given the time and resources in the future, the field could come to open many different conversations such as:

- The production of literature through an ecocritical lens. The content of the literature would become irrelevant within this reading, but instead the author's life, the context of the setting, and the period would take precedent. The artifact of the literature itself would be the main investigation rather than the characters or images. This thesis was split between a historical approach (seen mostly in Chapter 1) and a reading of the content, which could benefit from being separated into two different approaches. This would allow for a deeper look into the waves of ecocriticism as they interact with texts.
- Different books by these author's such as Rash's other extractive resource novels (*Serena*, *Saints at the River*, *Something Rich and Strange*) and McCarthy's more Appalachian-focused novels (*Suttree*, *Child of God*, *The Orchard Keeper*.) A narrowing to other or additional specific novels could allow for a more focused reading and with the groundwork laid in this thesis and could create space for different ecocritical responses to Southern Appalachia.
- Novels and literature that concern themselves with a modern Appalachia such as Joseph Bathanti's *Light at the Seam* (2022), Mark Powell's *Lioness: A Novel* (2022), *Mountains Piled upon Mountains* (2019), Robert Gipe's *Trampoline* (2015), *Weedeater* (2020), and *Pop* (2021), or even Jennifer Haigh's *Heat and Light* (2017). These could further build a look into modern Appalachia's issues outside of a historical setting and provide an interpretation ripe for contemporary audiences.

- An examination of organizations working in the region such as Appalachian Mountain Patrol, Appalachian Voices, Higher Ground in Harlan County, Southern Appalachian Highland Conservancy, and Appalshop (focused on film preservation.) There are also local festivals such as Merlefest that keep oral tradition and folkways thriving.

Ultimately, this thesis tried to tackle these three novels but as with all aspects of literature there is always more to be said and complexity to be addressed. Similarly, Appalachia is a region marked with deep complexity. Literature and culture twists and turns with every holler and community. As a result, the field needs to adapt with the changes and promote open discussions of the region's isolation, othering, and relationship with extractive resources. This thesis attempted to navigate obstacles in the region with a specific focus on the interaction between environment and culture and the displacement of residents. It focused on generational divides and different approaches to the restoration of Southern Appalachia through connection. Ecocriticism and the field of literary studies more broadly, should follow suit.

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Vita

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