Spring 2024

Appalachia in the Anthropocene: An Approach to Understanding Neo Appalachian Narratives as an Affective Ecology

Rachel Michel Bates
Old Dominion University, rmbates423@gmail.com

APPALACHIA IN THE ANTHROPOCENE: AN APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING NEO APPALACHIAN NARRATIVES AS AN AFFECTIVE ECOLOGY

by

Rachel Michel Bates
B.A. May 2012, East Tennessee State University
M.A. June 2015, Dartmouth College

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ENGLISH

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY
May 2024

Approved by:

Margaret Kilcline/Konkol (Director)

Andrew Lopenzina (Member)

Kevin Moberly (Member)

Kevin O'Donnell (Member)

ABSTRACT

APPALACHIA IN THE ANTHROPOCENE: AN APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING NEO APPALACHIAN NARRATIVES AS AN AFFECTIVE ECOLOGY

Rachel Michel Bates
Old Dominion University, 2025
Director: Dr. Margaret Kilcline/Konkol

Appalachia is all too often a commodified and mythologized place in the American consciousness. Yet the lived experience of Appalachia is one complicated by widescale ecological devastation, high poverty rates, and most recently, a devastating opioid crisis. Though much of Appalachian literature continues to dwell in an old vision of Appalachia, an endeavor Zackary Vernon terms post-Appalachian, I argue that a subset of texts published around the turn of the millennium, a time when many of the labor-dependent, exploitative industries such as logging, hydro damming, and coal mining were no longer at work in the region, reveal a shift in Appalachian literary production. I term these texts Neo Appalachian because they resist the typical declension narratives that often preoccupy Appalachian writers. Writers such as Marilou Awiakta, Madeline ffitch, Robert Gipe, and Crystal Wilkinson address the ecological and social issues Appalachians face today and consider Appalachia's role in the Anthropocene. Their literary narratives can be understood as a dense interactive ecology rather than as an isolated category of texts grouped by author or genre. To illustrate this ecological reading, each chapter identifies an Appalachian sacrifice zone, an area where neoliberal companies entered the region with ephemeral promises of jobs and wealth for Appalachians but ultimately wrought environmental devastation in the area. The first chapter examines Appalachians' affective connections to generational homeplaces and kin communities. The second chapter identifies what I term geographic assemblages. Drawing on Jane Bennett's formulation of vibrant

materialism, I argue that Appalachia's extensive flooding due to mining-related issues and hydro damming generates geographic assemblages where an entanglement of Appalachian humans and nonhumans coalesce into an affective and agential entity. The third chapter positions Appalachia as a hyperobject to reveal Neo Appalachian literary narratives' ability to frame Appalachia as a hyperobject through their recognition of its deep time. The fourth and final chapter acknowledges Neo Appalachian literary narratives' engagement with "Quare" Appalachia. A colloquial term, quare is being reclaimed by Queer Appalachian scholars, and in Neo Appalachian literary narratives, ecological safe spaces for Appalachians emerge. These Neo Appalachian literary narratives engender a better understanding of Appalachia in the Anthropocene.

This dissertation is dedicated to my Johnson City, Tennessee home, where so many people raised me.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I cannot express enough gratitude to Dr. Margaret Kilcline/Konkol. Without her this project would not exist. She supported every idea, edited multitudes of writing drafts, and shaped my thinking throughout this process. I am also grateful to the rest of my committee members, Dr. Drew Lopenzina, Dr. Kevin Moberly, and Dr. Kevin O'Donnell, who took immense time to read this work in its various stages. Thank you also to Dr. Marc Ouellette for reading early versions of this work. My family and friends in Appalachia also contributed greatly. Thank you to Dr. Jesse Graves for introducing me to Appalachian literature in 2011 in his Introduction to Poetry course at East Tennessee State University and for building my novice understanding between the creative and the theoretical. His continued mentorship is invaluable to me and my work. I also want to extend thanks to my SSSL writing group who helped guide my writing and offered reading suggestions throughout the spring of 2023. Aíne Norris' unending support, comradery, and mentorship in this program was also imperative. To my Appalachian community generally, thank you for understanding me, this work, and assuring me it has a place in the world.

Beyond my research though, this project was arduous, and there were many times I struggled to continue. My best friend Rachel Goodman never let me quit. Her infinite FaceTimes, encouragement, and belief in me kept me going. My mother, Tena Bates, as she always has, believed in me from the start of this project and program and offered endless support. Titus Chalk listened to my ideas and served as a sounding board throughout the various phases of this work. Also, Max, thank you for beginning this process and program with me. I'm infinitely grateful to my siblings and other friends as well who asked about this work, believed in me, listened to me vent, and promised me it was worth it. My faculty, staffs, and students at the

four institutions I taught at prior to and during this work assured me this was possible. To my Cinco Ranch High School, East Harlem Scholars Academy, University of Tennessee, and Northside Charter High School families, thank you. My Manhattan crew who reminded me to have fun along the way, I owe you much. Bruce Hayes, you believed in every bit of this work and me. I wish more than anything you were here to read it in its final stage. I know you'd read every word, even the "boring" bits. Thank you for helping me take the first steps of this journey. I also could not have completed this without my loyal feline, Sneaker. It feels that at this point, he too has a PhD, and, in the spirit of this work, I owe him, my nonhuman companion, just as much as others. He has now seen me through two graduate programs.

There are so many other unnamed people who walked with me and coached me on this journey. Thank you to everyone unnamed directly here.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> "[Appalachians are] more connected with each other, culturally and geographically, than we are with the far ends of our own states. It's a place, and it's a mind-set. We are connected by our mountains, our economies, and the fact that, for a couple of centuries, we have been treated almost like an internal colony of the U.S. We have suffered the exploitation of extractive industries, managed by and profited from outside companies that come in and take what they can and leave a mess."
>
> -Barbara Kingsolver

I grew up in Southern Appalachia, in a town called Johnson City, TN, a town nestled in the Appalachian foothills. I grew up hiking the Appalachian Mountains, swimming in their rivers and lakes, enjoying the four robust seasons they promised. I grew up playing outside, spending late summer evenings catching lightning bugs and short autumn ones prying chestnuts out of their spikey casings. But I also grew up, especially as I grew older, aware of the confining and dated Appalachian tropes that would haunt me long after I left the region.

When I found myself outside Appalachia, I often heard comments like "you don't sound like you're from there," "you're too smart to be from there," as if "there" were a less-than place, a place masked in stereotypes and external expectations about how an Appalachian should be. Appalachia is often mythologized and commodified, and I've experienced how these assigned attributes morph into public assumptions about Appalachia. As John Williams, a Weatherford

Award[1] winner and Appalachian historian[2] explains, "there are 'two defining [Appalachian] stereotypes lodged in the American mind: the Appalachian mountaineer, noble and stalwart, rugged and independent, master or mistress of the highlands environment; and the profligate hillbilly, amusing but often also threatening, defined by a deviance and aberration, a victim of cultural and economic deprivation attributable to mountain geography'" (qtd. in Reed 414). Williams' statement highlights several important features often associated with Appalachia: poverty, its effects, and Appalachia's mountainous geography. Appalachian tropes persist in the American imagination, and in these tropes, Appalachians are portrayed as poor White people living in the mountains. These two descriptors are enduring.

Appalachia may always economically lag behind other American economic-agricultural-industrial regions, and perhaps West Virginia's youth exodus, the largest in the country, offers the most alarming testimony of this. The region never recovered from expansive mining endeavors and even then, there was little other industry (Towers 74). In August 2022, the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) launched a new initiative, Appalachian Regional Initiative for Stronger Economies (ARISE), with funding from President Biden's Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 ("ARC Launches 73.5 Million Dollar ARISE Grant"). This regional push to develop Appalachian economies suggests ongoing economic stagnation in the region. Additionally, the mountain association often produces assumptive tropes about Appalachia that portray Appalachians living in isolated areas within dense mountain forests. Though there are

---

[1] The Weatherford Award is an annual award "given by Berea College and the Appalachian Studies Association…to honor books that 'best illuminate the challenges, personalities, and unique qualities of the Appalachian South.'" Genres for the award include fiction, nonfiction, and poetry ("Weatherford Award").

[2] Williams received the 2002 Weatherford Award for his book *Appalachia: A History*. He is a professor of history at Appalachian State University ("John Williams Alexander").

still many sparsely populated Appalachian spaces, there are also large cities, such as Knoxville and Charlottesville, with sprawling suburbs and thriving businesses, ones that counter these narratives. Additionally, demographic shifting in-migrations into Appalachia, including an ever-growing Latinx population (Margolies 248), are quickly changing old, incorrect, homogenizing, and lingering narratives about Appalachia.

It can be difficult to separate the two though, especially given Appalachia's historic economic and environmental exploitation and persistent American impressions linked to projects such as John Dominis' harmful yet influential 1964 photo essay in *Life* magazine which framed Appalachia as a focal point for Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty (Cosgrove). Dominis' photos captured severe and poor economic conditions. A mother aged beyond her years, barefoot children around a pipe stove, a shabby wood cabin surrounded by wide expanses of land and trees peppered with outdoor clotheslines. The single experience framed in these few photos not only mischaracterized the region, it fueled American endeavors to "save" Appalachia. Such egregious poverty certainly existed (and exists today) in the region, but those few shots dominated what Appalachia was and is in Americans' minds. Dominis' project and the War on Poverty emerged on the tail of several 1960s poverty initiatives. Other acts such as The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 are also responsible for the contemporary perceptions of Appalachia as an isolated, poor, and underdeveloped region (Werner). During the 1960s, "the 'Appalachian problem' was the focus of national media attention and political debate. A significant amount of attention focused on mountain White poverty, a phenomenon that provided a stark contrast to national prosperity" (313). Unlike other mountainous American regions, Appalachia's association with poverty and tropic caricatures portraying Appalachians as

uneducated, lawless, poor, White people leave it not only negatively stigmatized, but complicates the economic, social, and racial issues within the region.

Furthermore, Appalachia's environmental exploitation is comprehensive and perhaps largely responsible for the persistence of the hillbilly trope. The Great Smoky Mountain National Park was once a booming timber industry, the Tennessee Valley Authority's (TVA) extensive damming damaged natural waterways and ecosystems as well as initiated forced migrations for both Appalachians and Indigenous peoples, and coal's devastating legacy haunt through visibly desecrated mountains. The rugged mountaineer tropes might persist, but they overlook the past, current, and future violence with which Appalachia must reckon. Appalachia is changing, growing, but many areas are still poor, with an environment still damaged, and its role in the Anthropocene's ecologies and economies is quite uncertain.

In my childhood, the lines between "natural" spaces blurred with human-made constructions. I grew up playing in the woods and fields near my home, hiking trails on the AT (Appalachian Trail), swimming in TVA reservoirs, and roadtripping past abandoned mines and mountains that looked as if they'd been flipped inside out. Now, there is virtually no coal mining, the TVA dams have all been built, and suburbs sprawl into the rural spaces that were once readily accessible via short drives from town. But, the legacy of these industries is far from gone. Industries' consequences linger in the daily lives of Appalachians, scar the landscape, and ripple through Appalachia's ecosystems. It is these consequences, these effects on both human and nonhuman entities that need reevaluating, that need to be understood in ways that do not privilege economy over biological life, over the long history of forests and waterways, over the mountains themselves. What are new ways of understanding these spaces? What will these spaces become in the future? What does post-coal Kentucky look like? How many more

reservoirs will be drained for dam maintenance projects that take many years? How will Appalachia face its pervasive opioid crisis? What was Appalachia before capitalistic industries invested in and exploited it? What will it be in the future? And most pressingly, what is Appalachia in our current environmental conditions? These questions quickly roll into each other, presenting an intricate entanglement of responsible forces and potentially devastating, widespread consequences.

The mesh of forces at work in Appalachia that produce human-made spaces, mar its landscapes, and damage its humans and nonhumans, especially biologic life, reveal an underlying current linking these events and this destruction together. Long-standing and devastating social systems still strangle many people and have immediate and extreme effects on their lives. Humans and nonhumans become bound up together. The growing opioid crisis in Appalachia, rural education challenges, extensive poverty, slavery's and segregation's systemic legacies, a dark colonial history, including the horrific Trail of Tears, and other structures do leave large populations of Appalachian people struggling to live, and the practicality of privileging these over nonhuman issues might seem obvious. But, the systems that generate these consequences for humans also affect Appalachia's ecosystems. The land stolen from Indigenous peoples was then exploited for profit. The TVA's promised jobs all but disappeared once its dams were built, leaving maimed rivers and streams, flooded archaeological history, and death in its wake. Coal's profitable promise evaporated and with it, so too did a region's economy that left its people with the choice to move or stay and suffer the ghastly landscapes, polluted waterways, and increasing floods caused by mining's aggressive soil erosion. In this illustration, the cyclical and pervasive effects of exploitative practices in the region on both humans and nonhumans is apparent, and understanding how these Appalachian entities are bound up in each other becomes

imperative, especially in our current Anthropocene epoch, one promising continued and increasingly consequential outcomes. Paul J. Crutzen, the scientist who coined the term Anthropocene describes it as follows: "'for the past three centuries, the effects of humans on the global environment have escalated. Because of these anthropogenic emissions of carbon dioxide, global climate may depart significantly from natural behaviour for many millennia to come'" (qtd. in Chakrabarty 209). This departure is now clear. This digressive impact is human-caused, and according to Dipesh Chakrabarty, humans have become geologic agents. Charkrabarty's inclusion of Crutzen's definition points to an interdisciplinary approach that understands the consequential impact of this disruption and departure. Collectively, the human impact on the Earth is disrupting its geologic timelines and trajectories. Every part of the world is experiencing the consequences of this, even Appalachia. Appalachia's humans and nonhumans are facing unprecedented challenges in the Anthropocene and its ongoing climate catastrophe.

Tackling these issues seems impossible. How can one even begin to approach these through a single discipline? Furthermore, what import can such research promise? It is these cultural and regional changes and effects that preoccupy this dissertation, and a keen interest in how these changes manifest in what I term Neo Appalachian literary narratives serves as the foundation for this research. Narratives are powerful and lasting, and Appalachian literature's long history of engaging with social and ecological issues provides a methodology for not only considering these historical grievances, but for recognizing their current effects as well as transferring fictional narrative into real social action, something Appalachian authors[3] collectively generate.

[3] This research understands Appalachian authors as anyone who claims a connection with the region. This may be someone who is living in Appalachia now, has lived in the region in the past,

When I first encountered Contemporary Appalachian literature, I felt gripped by a kind of regional nostalgia. Breece D'J Pancake's, James Still's, Robert Morgan's, and Ron Rash's stories were preoccupied with an older Appalachia, one I, admittedly, barely recognized, though I know my extended family on my father's side, did. Their characters were poor farmers, desolate coal miners, vagrants, people disconnected from larger society. This was not my Appalachian experience. But what this literature did (and still does) is frame how the current state of Appalachia came to be. It portrays families held captive by coal mining, deforestation, and dam construction. It glimpses into the lives of generations of Appalachians living and working the same land. It reveals a long held Appalachian protest spirit, one that openly criticizes corporations, and Appalachians' responsible attitudes toward ecological spaces. Though these were of course writers of their times, there is a tendency for even Contemporary Appalachian authors' narratives to find themselves preoccupied with Appalachia's past.

One trend in this Appalachian literature, as Zackary Vernon illustrates is "[fetishization] of rural, agricultural spaces that may be the result of lingering fantasies about Appalachia's agrarian past and anxieties about Appalachia's largely post agrarian present" ("Toward a Post-Appalachian Sense of Place" 639), and he suggests this creates a post-Appalachia. He aligns his post-Appalachian theory with postsouthern theory, which claims southern literature and southern studies rely on outdated notions of the South because of the "'homogenizing force of Americanization'" (640) and the "conflation of…sense of [southern] place with Agrarianism" (643), a conflation Vernon argues is anachronistic. These outdated notions become a way to retain regionality and Appalachian culture amongst growing Americanization, globalization, and

---

or shares any form of kinship or relationship with Appalachians. These authors are invested in the region and its future.

other homogenizing pressures. Although Vernon is more broadly considered a Southern Studies scholar, his Appalachian-specific scholarship, particularly on Ron Rash, is pivotal to Appalachian literary studies, and his post-Appalachian theories inform new approaches to Appalachian literary studies. This research, however, argues Neo Appalachian literary narratives are trending on a different trajectory to the one Vernon identifies. These narrative productions engage with Appalachia's past, but they are not preoccupied with it. Many of the texts Vernon discusses recall Appalachia's past and do not move forward from it; they are set entirely in the past. Neo Appalachian narratives address Appalachia's past; however, their narratives move forward from it, and, sometimes, speculate Appalachian futures.

I define Neo Appalachian literary narratives as post-2000 (or slightly before 2000) Appalachian narratives that find themselves concerned with Appalachia today. Instead of isolating Contemporary Appalachian literature as objects of the past, it is important to understand such literature as not only relevant but reflective of a New Appalachia. Though "Neo Appalachian" is an undertheorized term within the critical discourse, it is nonetheless being adopted and finding increased circulation among Appalachian artists. The term is difficult to trace. Most scholarly research favors "New Appalachia," but Neo Appalachia connotes artistic productions occurring in the region now.

These productions diverge from traditional Appalachian art and instead appeal to inclusivity and capture a variety of Appalachian experiences. In an interview with Monica Hoel about his new art store venture in Bristol Tennessee, artist and owner Brian Serway describes the Neo Appalachian art his store curates. "'The art may not look like the sort of thing [Appalachians are] used to seeing in Appalachian art galleries, but every one of [the artists featured in his store] is Appalachian – and the art has been inspired by Appalachia,'" he says. Hoel describes Serway's

store as [challenging] old perceptions of Appalachian art," and Serway "'[wants] to give a more modern holistic sense of what Appalachia is.'" Serway's store is one example of increasingly common Neo Appalachian artistic productions and art galleries that are becoming more common in the region (Hoel). Though this is a more recent example of Neo Appalachian art, Neo Appalachian literary productions, ones written around the year 2000, indicate a new kind of Appalachian literary trend emerged. Instead of the post agrarian past preoccupation Vernon identified, Neo Appalachian literary narratives materialized that grapple with Appalachia's present instead of its past in the same way Neo Appalachian art foregrounds Appalachia today. Though these texts recognize the past, they break the pattern of remaining focused on Appalachia's past by narrating beyond it and moving into narratives about Appalachia today. In fact, not only does this literature depict past atrocities committed in Appalachian sacrifice zones, it protests this by investigating and revealing shared life experiences concurrent with Appalachians' lives today, life experiences ongoing with the age of the Anthropocene, which is upon Appalachia, as it is the rest of the world. Vernon defines sacrifice zones as "internal resource colonies [of the United States], many of which are found in the South and Appalachia. In these locations, environments tend to be treated as extractable and exploitable commodities, generally offering the rewards to more economically and politically powerful people outside these bioregions" ("Introduction" 8).

American sacrifice zones, as Vernon highlights, are often but not exclusively found in the Southern United States and the Appalachian region, and these spaces mirror many other sacrifice zones in the Global South. Recognizing spaces and places suffering from environmental exploitation in Southern literature and applying the term "sacrifice zones" to areas where the definition is applicable provides an anti-globalist and anti-neoliberal way of thinking about

regional capitalistic exploitation. This avoids capitulating to homogenizing and universalist ways that consider environmental devastation existing in the Global South instead of the American South and Appalachia. They also concurrently reveal specific ecological and cultural consequences that retain both place-based and transnational similarities and consequences to other Global South spaces. Although not entirely in what is understood as the region of the American South, much of Appalachia, especially Southern Appalachia, geographically overlaps with the American South. The American South is also seen as a less than place by much of America. As Vernon explains, "While we must be careful not to reinscribe outdated notions of southern exceptionalism based on the region's environmental histories, [he] believe[s] it is permissible to note that the South has been and continues to be a place of quantifiable environmental degradation and loss." Appalachia shares these similarities. Furthermore, Vernon explicitly includes MTR (mountaintop removal) in the deficits he describes. Sacrifice zones in Appalachia are ubiquitous, as they are in the South, and in both regions it is non-Southerners and non-Appalachians who reap the monetary gains from these exploitative practices (5). Appalachia's sacrifice zones are ecologically entangled and share responsibility for the state of the Anthropocene, and it is via Neo Appalachian literary narratives that not only this responsibility, but action toward addressing and reconciling this emerges. Recognizing these local, Appalachian sacrifice zones opens up ways for combatting neoliberal systems and better understanding their local and global ecological effects.

Furthermore, many Neo Appalachian literary narratives not only engage with the past, but they frame a current Appalachia, one that looks less and less like the rural, mountain farmers and coal miners who frequented the pages of non-Neo Appalachian narratives. Though there are instances of recent Appalachian literature that remain preoccupied with Appalachia's past and are

easily categorized as declension narratives, there is a significant and clear shift toward literature that engages with Appalachia today. Instead of a post-Appalachia preoccupation with an agrarian past, as Zackary Vernon argues ("Toward a Post-Appalachian Sense of Place"), these narratives focus on a current and even future Appalachia, a New/Neo Appalachia. These narratives consider the effects of toxic chemical spills in waterways, mine closure and climate catastrophe induced flooding, and even grapple with what has largely become a post-coal Appalachia. They engage head on with Appalachia's ongoing opioid crisis, and some characters even embody post humanness. However, these texts still contend with Appalachian sacrifice zones, revealing not only the connection between historic ecological damage and Appalachians' lives, but trajectories and trends in Appalachian narratives. Their recognition of this ecological damage speaks to their simultaneous recognition of the nonhuman. In this way, these narratives engender New Materialist approaches to understanding humans and nonhumans in Appalachia. By doing this, they pave the way for not only combating negative Appalachian stereotypes, but reveal a literary shift, a more ecologically active and aware shift, a shift toward what I describe as an eco-Appalachian literary body. Most importantly perhaps, they also reveal a concurrency between writers, narratives, and social action.

These narratives are affective. They stimulate and affect the reader emotionally, but they also speak to the complicated entanglements between human and nonhuman within the narratives themselves. This affective mesh generates greater effects beyond the text. By considering these narratives and authors together, tangled in Appalachia's complex ecologies, the power of these narratives to affect humans and nonhumans is revealed. Instead of isolated or single author-produced texts, Neo Appalachian literary narratives work together to create new narratives focused on endurance and protest instead of more solely on hopeless regional depletion, and in

this way, these narratives become an affective ecology. It is not unusual for writers to preoccupy themselves with their contemporary surroundings, but Appalachian writers today are unified by their clear activism, regional connection, ecological awareness, and their attempts to foreground Appalachia and its issues today. Their literary endeavors no longer solely outline an ecologically and socially devastated region, rather, their narratives self-consciously protest homogenizing regional tropes and reposition Appalachia as a region determined to endure.

Additionally, because of the interconnectedness of text and author activism common across Appalachian literature, the case for understanding these narratives as an ecology is furthered. To best recognize this ecology, this dissertation approaches each chapter by analyzing a collection of literary narratives that are sometimes repeated or which emerge in other chapters. Because this dissertation is concerned with an ecology more than a constellation of Appalachian literary narratives, instead of presenting isolated formal arguments, it encompasses, alludes, and directly circles back to texts and authors throughout. This ecology is a body of mutually supportive narratives, taken as a group, which create protest and generate shared Appalachian experience in the Anthropocene. Furthermore, instead of limiting this research to a more specific genre such as poems or novels, I identify and track a shared aesthetics which are a mix of shared tropes, narrative forms, and mimetic strategies. This Neo Appalachian aesthetic is constituted by and recognizes a vitality and rambunctious dynamic space of production within this ecology. In fact, Appalachian writers are often multigenre writers. By reaping and grouping cross-genre and across genre, I bring into focus a mesh of Appalachian literary narratives.

Marco Caracciolo argues that:

> as a flexible macroform, narrative has an important role to play as humanity comes to terms with the devastating impact of large-scale industrialization on the planet. In

> fiction—and particularly in contemporary fiction that…engages with the ecological crisis—form and pattern are employed to undermine dualistic thinking and bring the human back into the fold of the nonhuman world. (3)

Caracciolo agrees with Timothy Morton's description of the "enmeshment" of humanity in greater spheres of affect in the Anthropocene. This formal means of investigation is created by approaching both the form (narratives) and their authors' formal and direct engagement as an "enmeshment," and within this enmeshment, this ecology, a better understanding of humanity in these crises emerges. Andrew Nanson describes the science of ecology as a "synthesizing discipline that brings together the various natural sciences to seek understanding of the complex web of connections among the biosphere's multiplicity of living and non-living components" (2). From a literary standpoint, approaching narratives as an interconnected web not only generates an ecology *of* texts but foregrounds the importance of ecology *in* texts. In relying on an ecology of texts, an ecology where narratives and authors resurface throughout this research, the current ecologies existing in Appalachia are revealed. This approach exposes the dedication and commitment of not only literary endeavors but real world activism by Appalachian writers in Appalachia, and therefore the Anthropocene, today. For most contemporary Appalachian writers, these do not live apart.

Ultimately, these narrative ecologies are stories, and storytelling retains a unique and important place in Appalachian heritage and culture. Efforts to preserve local stories by organizations such as Appalshop prevail throughout the region (*Appalshop*)[4]. These stories are

[4] Appalshop is an organization in Eastern Kentucky that promotes and advocates for Appalachian arts and preservation. It began in 1969 as a community film and vocational center, but it has since expanded to become a foundation that works diligently to preserve and improve Appalachian life and culture.

emotional and retain affective power and influence. Caracciolo explains, “the form of narrative is the configuration of emotionally charged circumstances created by the telling,” “hence the link between narrative form and affect” (5). Neo Appalachian narratives are affective, and they reveal a pressing need for climate catastrophe action. Though some people recognize this need, there is a larger tendency to shift this to the side, to think about it later. Amitov Ghosh calls this disconnected, cognitive dissonance “the Great Derangement” (11). He begins his eponymous book by revealing his family’s status as ecological refugees (3), displaced by climate catastrophe’s effects, and he urges that they are not and will not be the only ones to suffer such catastrophe and displacement. He explains, “the Anthropocene has reversed the temporal order of modernity: those at the margins are now the first to experience the future that awaits all of us” (62-63). When we think about the margins, it is easy to overlook or discount people in stigmatized and poor regions, such as many parts of Appalachia, a place in the United States where such marginalizing thinking abounds. Neo Appalachian narratives are also emotionally charged, purposeful, and directly reveal the high and precarious stakes climate catastrophe has and continues exercising in Appalachia.

This research aims to rethink human and nonhuman interaction in an ecology of Appalachian narratives in order to reveal how Neo Appalachian literary narratives illustrate a new Appalachian literary shift, a shift in literary production away from victimization/exploitation narratives preoccupied with Appalachia’s past and instead works toward exploring and protesting ecological and capitalistic exploitative practices in the region today. This turn indicates a shift toward endurance narratives, ones that dismantle human/nonhuman hierarchies and concern themselves with Appalachia’s ecological futures.

The Neo Appalachian literary narratives referred to are published at the turn of the new millennium. This era was significant for Appalachia because at that time many of the traditional, labor-dependent Appalachian exploitative industries were no longer at work in the region. Even coal production in Appalachia, a staple in much of the region's economy, drastically declined beginning around 2000. This was largely due to a shift toward natural gas because of its cheaper production cost and the strict environmental regulations that rendered many older coal production plants and mines no longer usable (Bowen et al. 6-10). However, even with a sedation in these exploitative industries, Appalachia began entering one of its most deadly sacrifice zones yet: the opioid crisis. A 2019 Appalachian Regional Commission study found, "At the turn of the millennium, the opioid overdose death rate for Appalachian counties was roughly equal to that of the rest of the country. By 2017, however, the death rate for opioid overdoses in Appalachian counties was 72 percent higher than that of non-Appalachian counties" ("Opioids in Appalachia"). The opioid crisis is more devastating in Appalachia than any other American region, and its reckoning is swift. In the aftermath of so many ecological sacrifice zones, what does it mean when Appalachian bodies continue breaking down, especially if these bodies are understood as metonyms for the region's ecological consequences? What can an Appalachian future promise? This is the question Neo Appalachian writers and activists are tackling in their literary narratives.

To answer this and other questions, each of this dissertation's chapters explores Neo Appalachian literary narratives preoccupied with an Appalachian sacrifice zone associated with one of the four elements: air, water, fire, and earth. The origins of these epistemological categories of matter are difficult to trace, and I turn toward Aristotle's attempt to decipher and explain these elements through his "apparent simple bodies" (66). These simple bodies reflected

his interests in not only what entities exist at the smallest immaterial levels, but how those entities interact with each other on greater scales, suggesting a kind of interdependence, one that mirrors ecologies. He organizes his simple bodies into the four, traditional elemental categories we've become so familiar with: earth, wind, fire and air. These exist at maximum levels (they makeup everything) and smaller levels, what Emily Katz calls "'everyday' earth, air, fire, and water – e.g., garden soil, atmospheric air, hearth fire, and lake water" (67). Not only are these elemental bodies present, they exchange energy and depend on each other. They are vital, intricately linked in an interdependency. Variations of these elements exist across cultures as well, and though Aristotle's ideas might read as dated, and even categorizing suggests separating these elements, they are helpful in thinking beyond human hierarchies and systems in Appalachian literary narratives. These elements retain cosmological, astrological, religious, and even magical associations and are widely used in colloquial conversations today. People attribute our fates and behaviors to the elements ruling our Zodiac signs, practice harnessing this power, and so on.

These knownness of these elements provides a gateway for framing Appalachian ecologies in Appalachian narratives because featuring texts that directly engage with sacrifice zones attached to each element reveals a general capitalist mindset to monetize even the tiniest of entities. Commodification and exploitation at every level, human and nonhuman, are endeavors capitalism's exploitive industries have wreaked on Appalachian sacrifice zones for decades. Aristotle's attempt to discover the smallest bits of matter speaks to the need for nonhuman recognition. The vitality and interconnectivity of these elements as well as the exploitation of them are foregrounded in Neo Appalachian literary narratives. A single resource is not just a single resource, rather, it is a complex mixture of deep time and slow violence that generates

affects and effects far beyond it. The texts in each chapter reflect an elemental vitality and direct engagement with elements critical to the resources and sacrifice zone creations the authors of these narratives protest.

The repetition of texts and authors throughout the dissertation reveals the interconnectivity of Appalachian experience as it hinges on a shared exploitative experience. The texts in each chapter reflect a concern with the element that titles the chapter. Although the texts and authors resurface in chapters, thus emphasizing the importance of considering them as an ecology of texts, they do find themselves preoccupied with the element titling each chapter. This preoccupation manifests in both form and content.

Each chapter opens with my own narrative telling of an experience related to the sacrifice zones identified in each chapter. This follows in the vein of creative practice as research, but also indicates the immediate and individual effects of these sacrifice zones on the lives of myself and other Appalachians today. Though narratives are the literary production this research works toward understanding, this approach foregrounds how narrative inspires activism at an individual level. This activism is present in Neo Appalachian literary narratives that, unlike older Appalachian literature that hyper focuses on the past and do not progress from it, address Appalachia today. Because these texts narratologically engage with contemporary protest in the region and are written by Appalachians who play the roles of witnesses and/or activists, they contribute to an Appalachian spirit of protest. “The creative sharing of stories has long been a key plank in the activist repertoire” (57), Chris Brown writes, and story-telling is often a methodological approach to “highlight the complexities and contradictions of the lived experiences of environmental (in)justices” (Kohl 34). The acts of story-telling present in these

narratives become methods for transforming Neo Appalachian literature into social action that recognizes the lived experiences of Appalachians in the region's past and present.

Having established a narrative introduction that contextualizes the sacrifice zone issues, I will establish preliminary arguments regarding narrative and affect in each chapter. These rely on the narratives and theoretical frameworks I've selected. Lauren Berlant's cruel optimism, rooted in affect theory, and Jane Bennett's vital materialism, a theory building on both Object-Oriented Ontology and affect theory, contributions live throughout this dissertation, but particularly in the first and second chapters. Timothy Morton's arguments about hyperobjects and how such "objects" complicate temporality and supersede human understanding anchor the arguments I make for considering Appalachia's deep time in chapter three. In the fourth chapter ——"kin-making" and "worlding with"—— terms Donna Haraway suggests show people how to live more concurrently with nonhumans in ecological harmony, serve as the gateway for thinking about ecological spaces and inclusion in Appalachia. Appalachian and regional studies also significantly inform this work and aid in explaining the larger effects of these experiences as well as how they retain Appalachianness[5].

In 1978, William Rueckert established a shift in environmental literary studies when he coined the term "ecocriticism" (Bird 129). In his initial discussion of the term, he argues, reading ecologically, a poem can be considered "stored energy…a living thing" that "unlike fossil fuels, cannot be used up" (Rueckert74). Narrative practice as action and product generates this energy, too. It translates stories into thoughts and thoughts can become tangible and useful practices. The narrative affect each chapter focuses on reveals this energy and practice. Instead of privileging

[5] Appalachianness here refers to how these texts identify, associate, and engage with Appalachian culture.

authors, genre, etc., this research considers how understanding Neo Appalachian literary narratives as a coalescence, an ecology that generates affects and produces action, creates a mentality of endurance in Appalachia. By framing chapters with personal narratives, I move from individual to local to global experiences through a multi-genre narrative ecology. And the theoretical frameworks explain how this narrative ecology becomes affective. Additionally, by engaging in this narrative practice, the narrative sections in this research also enter into this ecology. Thus revealing the interdependency and exchange in Neo Appalachian literary ecologies when considered through this methodology.

The first chapter, "Air," explores Appalachia as a region, a homeplace, and an affective ecology. Lisa Hinrichsen's arguments about "grandma places" and multi-generational inhabited Appalachian land that generates affect help frame this chapter. Additionally, Lauren Berlant's notion of cruel optimism provides a promising yet devastating method for understanding how and why many Appalachians in literary narratives, historically, and in their contemporary actions and priorities continue to support exploitative systems. This chapter explores the concept of sacrifice zones and Appalachia's geographic dependence on its topographic location for not only shaping it as a region and culture, but establishing it as an affective homeplace where Appalachians feel ecologically tethered, and its responsibility for inspiring many Appalachian writers. Robert Gipe's triptych of illustrated novels (*Trampoline, Weedeater,* and *Pop*), Crystal Wilkinson's novel *The Birds of Opulence*, and Ann Pancake's novel *Strange as this Weather Has Been* feature generational Appalachian families who are affected by Appalachia and its sacrifice zones. Gipe, Wilkinson, and Pancake are teachers and activists in Appalachia as well, and their works reveal not only their own generational connection to Appalachia, but their drive to change how Appalachia is seen by non-Appalachians today. These narratives are all told from multiple

perspectives within Appalachian families. This attention to form reflects a specific affect, a *feeling*, an inherited way of being and living with/among Appalachia. Although "air" might immediately imply a literal, breathable element (oxygen), it is often used to refer to how things feel, especially when they are about to change. "There's something in the air," so to speak. These multiperspective narratives reveal intricate generational connections to not only Appalachia, but the *affects* of the sacrifice zones these families find themselves living in.

In the second chapter, "Water," Ron Rash's novel *One Foot in Eden*, a chapter from Marilou Awiakta's *Selu: Seeking the Corn Mother's Wisdom*, and a photo-journalism article, "Lord Willing and the Creek Don't Rise" by Jared Hamilton and Caitlin Myers from *Mergoat Magazine's* inaugural issue, "Hillbilly Ecologies After the Apocalypse," serve as the foundational texts for exploring what I term "geographic assemblages" that emerge in Appalachian literary narratives. These texts are flood narratives, and this chapter is indebted to Jane Bennett's vibrant materialism and cultural geographic approaches to argue how nonhuman, regionally dependent sacrifice zones become geographic assemblages which retain affective power when human exploitation reroutes, changes, and initiates Appalachian waterway sacrifice zones. This affective power is particularly important in memory. Rash, Awiakta, and Hamilton and Myers play the role of witness through their flood narratives, and their texts' preoccupation with watery memory foregrounds the collision of Appalachia's past and present.

"Fire," the third chapter, concerns itself with one of the most strongly associated entities and sacrifice zones in Appalachia: coal. This chapter explores Appalachia's deep time, geologic time, geologic agents, and engages with Timothy Morton's hyperobject theory to explore the impact of Appalachian literary narratives at both the local and global levels through Jesse Graves' and William Wright's poems "Prologue" and "Cthonic" and by revisiting Robert Gipe's

novel *Weedeater*. These texts play with form and reveal temporal collisions, ones with serious consequences both in Appalachia and globally. Temporality is significant in not only Appalachia's past, but its future(s), and understanding how these temporalities clash and emerge in these narratives leads toward not only a better understanding of coal's consequences in both Appalachia and the global spaces it was exported to, but what a more ecologically aware Appalachian future might be.

In the final chapter, "Earth," Madeline ffitch's *Stay and Fight* and Barbara Kingsolver's *Demon Copperhead* reveal a kind of posthuman Appalachia where queerness and the nonhuman occupy and thrive in ecological safe spaces in Appalachian narratives. In these spaces, queer folx and allies "world with," a term Donna Haraway uses to explain how to live more peacefully with nonhumans rather than against them. By doing this, queer Appalachians in these narratives breakdown human/nonhuman binaries in these removed spaces, which protests rampant stigmatizing and anti-queer associations with Appalachia. ffitch and Kingsolver are well-known Appalachian activists for equality, queer acceptance, and ecological restoration. Their novels reveal a literary trend toward recognizing and celebrating what Silas House calls a "Quare Appalachia." These texts illustrate a New Appalachia that works toward inclusion instead of isolation, or at least what was/is understood as isolation by non-Appalachians. ffitch's multi-perspective narration and Kingsolver's first-person driven epic reveal both the solitude and kinship across Appalachians today, and they recognize the importance for collective communities in Appalachia, ones that emphasize resilience and hope for Appalachian futures.

By structuring each chapter around Neo Appalachian literary narratives that sometimes resurface in multiple chapters, an ecological approach to an Appalachian literary mesh, an Appalachian literary ecology, emerges. Instead of limiting this narrative study as a work of genre

studies, single-authored, biographical, and other common approaches, I propose that we understand these texts as a contemporary literary ecology. Lawrence Buell claims environmental criticism at the turn of the twenty-first century will be "looked back upon as a moment that did produce a cluster of challenging intellectual work, a constellation rather than a single titanic book or figure" (133). Like Buell's analysis, my approach works toward clustering, constellating, and congregating texts rather than privileging one work, author, etc. over another and hopes to be a moment that contributes to both literary ecocriticism and Appalachian studies. This narrative ecology mirrors Appalachia's current ecologies such as an ecology of texts read as a body of work. When we think in terms of ecology instead of genre, literary hierarchies are destabilized. This in turn, destabilizes other human-perceived hierarchies. Because both humans and nonhumans are bound up in the Anthropocene's fate, it is important to utilize a methodology that disrupts genre, authorial, etc. hierarchies and instead considers narratives that collectively work toward protesting neoliberal systems through their form.

These systems are responsible for the Anthropocene, and by understanding these narratives as ecologies, their collective action in protesting these systems is recognized. Afterall, Dana Phillips argues, "our understanding of the environment has come about through the disruption of nature by agriculture and industrialism and the concomitant rise of science" (598). These disruptors point to a need to collectively theorize Appalachian literature in ways that consider multiple environmental factors and facets. This collective recognition then allows us to speculate about how the human and nonhuman in Appalachian literary ecologies work toward a collective endurance. This project seeks to intervene in outdated Appalachian literary discourse to reclaim the study of Neo Appalachian literary narratives as collective ecologies. In doing so,

Appalachia in the Anthropocene reveals a literary trend toward endurance, a trend that promotes better futures for a historically marginalized and ecologically exploited American region.

CHAPTER II

AIR

> "Leaving your family's land would be like moving out of your own body. That land is alive, a body itself, with its own talents, and, I guess you could say, addictions."
>
> -from *Demon Copperhead* by Barbara Kingsolver

AIR ABSTRACT

This chapter examines Appalachia not only as a region where Appalachians share similar cultural experiences, but also as an affective region for Appalachians, one tethering generations of Appalachians to it. This chapter expands on Lisa Hinrichsen's literary research about affect in Appalachia by including "kin community," which refers to communities created from multiple generations of people living on the same land and in the same region, to her affect of homeplace theory. This idea becomes particularly important since Appalachia faces extensive ecological sacrifice zones, zones multiple generations of Appalachians find themselves living in. The Neo Appalachian literature in this chapter, Robert Gipe's triptych of illustrated novels, Crystal Wilkinson's *The Birds of Opulence,* and Ann Pancake's *Strange as this Weather Has Been*, frames not only kin community and affect in Appalachia, but how Appalachians today grapple with the cruel optimism of job opportunities that leave them and their communities ecologically and physically damaged, the ongoing opioid crisis, and how Appalachians confront these crises. Though the devastation is great, these narratives not only foreground protest and reaction to these systems, they also reveal a protest enmeshment between narrative and author in which a plethora of forces work together to reframe and garner awareness about Appalachia today.

APPALACHIA AND AFFECT

When I think about Appalachia, I think about home. As a child, the Appalachian Mountains were synonymous with my existence. In fact, they were so much a part of my childhood, I didn't realize my attachment to them until I left. I spent nearly my entire childhood and early adult life in East Tennessee, but in 2016, I moved to Houston, Texas. And it was here that I first recognized my attachment not only to East Tennessee, but to its landscape as well. When I merged onto Houston's Grand Parkway for the first time as a 25 year old East-Tennessean transplant, I gazed out my driver's side window. The onramp was several hundred feet high, and my car engine's strain to make the incline sounded much as it did when I drove up my Tennessee mountain roads. But when I looked out the window, I saw what felt like nothing: a red and brown endless landscape that merged with the sunrise horizon, a vast flatness, void of any verticality, an unelevated, endless expanse of sameness. I'd suddenly found myself living on a burning pancake. Panic constricted my chest. It was then that I knew something felt different. It wasn't quite homesickness, that didn't seem strong enough. It was something else, something I couldn't quite articulate, but it was something that certainly *felt* off.

Configuring Appalachia as a place is difficult. The Appalachian Mountains span a colossal 2,000 miles along the East Coast of Southern Canada and the United States. But to me, and for many "Appalachians," Appalachia means what the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) refers to as Appalachia. ARC divides Appalachia into five subregions: Northern, North Central, Central, South Central, and Southern. They define these Appalachian subregions as "contiguous regions of relatively homogenous characteristics (topography, demographics, and economics) within Appalachia" ("Subregions in Appalachia"). These regions do not include Maine, New Hampshire, or for that matter, spaces north of New York state. Though the

topographies across the Appalachian Mountains are similar, shared experiences, exploitative capitalistic endeavors, and American association with Appalachia, as defined by ARC, are different from an Appalachia inclusive of the entire mountain range. Understanding Appalachia as a unified, topographic space, as the latter suggests, is important; however, before this, Appalachia as an affective place with geographic experiences singular to spaces within the Appalachian Mountains is critical to understanding its historic and ongoing exploitation, Appalachian experiences and culture, and, ultimately, Appalachian geography.

I have always felt connected to Appalachia. There is a relief that floods me when I find myself back in East Tennessee. I proudly claim it as home and I'm not alone in these feelings. Barbara Kingsolver leans into Nichols County Kentuckians definition of "place as a verb," a construct where "[people] 'place' [themselves], others, actions, and ideas differently according to the social context" (5), indicating place is changeable, transferable even. This is especially interesting when she discusses ARC remapping Appalachia and including Nichols County, Kentucky in its 2008 revised map, an action that took much lobbying, and of which many Nichols County residents remained unaware (10). This suggests place is dynamic, ephemeral, even, rather than a static entity. Kevin Hetherington argues place is mobile, that "places are diasporic, they travel with us and with the materials through which they are articulated. They move through representations (spaces) and they move through memories" (197-198). The latter statement, the ability of place to move through memories is particularly important to an Appalachian collective consciousness, one that exists in many shared cultural experiences within and beyond Appalachia.

While Hetherington focuses on what constitutes place, Paul Reed relies on John Agnew's definition of place to define Appalachia[6] in a place-based, regional context. He argues, "A region such as Appalachia possesses all three [of Agnew's] components…: it is a geographic region (although its boundaries are elusive); it is both connected to and separate from broader networks; and there is a definite sense of place" (410). Reed calls this connection to place, largely stimulated by geography, "rootedness." Lawrence Buell relies on a simpler definition: "place is 'space to which meaning has been ascribed'" (63). Meaning for Appalachia depends on both its people and its geographic, mountainous location, making it a place inseparable from its topography. This topographic connection is taken up by Wilson et al. when they attempt to understand first-generation Appalachian college students' struggles when they suddenly find themselves outside Appalachia. They argue Appalachian students suffer from ecological tethering, which they define as "missing the physical aspects of home, such as lakes, mountains, or cityscapes," and they argue, "Residents of Appalachia are frequently characterized as having attachment to their physical home place" (147). Lisa Hinrichsen concerns herself with Appalachian homeplace in her affective analysis of Ann Pancake's novel *Strange as this Weather Has Been*. Hinrichsen's affective approach argues Pancake's novel engages with "*feeling*," and "acknowledges the central role affect plays in understanding the ecological" (26). Pancake's narrator, Lace, faces a post-strip-mining Appalachian "world made up of sediment ponds, blast

[6] John Agnew claims: "Place has three necessary components…[First] LOCALE, the 'setting in which everyday life is most concentrated for a group of people.' Second… LOCATION, which is the 'node that links the place to both wider networks and the territorial ambit it is embedded in.' Thus, place requires not only a connection to larger units of both people and geography, but also a separateness from these larger units….Finally, place requires…a sense of place, defined as 'symbolic identification with a place as distinctive and constitutive of a personal identity and set of personal interests'" (qtd. in Reed 410).

damage, blackwater impoundments, and fill," places that juxtapose "'Grandma places[7],' or environments associated with the lived knowledge from multigenerational inhabitation" (28). Because many Appalachians have lived in the same Appalachian geographic spaces and engaged with the same Appalachian ecologies, ones often exploited by capitalistic endeavors rendering them "'kill' places of industrial capitalism" (28), for multiple generations, Hinrichsen suggests there is an intergenerational connection to Appalachian place that emerges in affective ways. This reflects Allison Blunt's cultural geographic definition of home as a place in which she claims, ultimately, "the home is a material and an affective space, shaped by everyday practices, lived experiences, social relations, memories, and emotions" (506). Hers and Hinrichsen's approaches and discussions of home's affect and memory is significant in categorizing Appalachia as a place because it begins to explore the intricacies between Appalachian people, Appalachian geography, and Appalachian ecologies, subtly suggesting affective materialities emerge within these, ones affecting Appalachian bodies.

Understanding Appalachia as a place is critical to understanding its literary productions. Doreen Massey makes an important connection between place and space. She argues, "If space is rather a simultaneity of stories-so-far, then places are collections of those stories" (130). Neo Appalachian literary narratives are collections of stories, ones often told through multiple perspective narrative styles. Beyond grandma places, which are significant to Neo Appalachian literary narratives, these narratives produce what I term "kin community," which emphasizes the intergenerational connection that creates grandma places. This "kin community" emerges in Neo Appalachian literary narratives. Because these narratives are told through multiple perspectives that span generations within the same family, the grandma places that emerge in these are

[7] The term "grandma places" is used by Pancake's narrator, Lace See (Pancake 157).

dependent on this multi-perspective form. Without this narrative effect, the full meaning of grandma places is overlooked. Kin can live on the land, but it is these intergenerational relationships and narration, again kin communities, that create grandma places. In *Strange as this Weather Has Been*, Bant, short for Bantella, recollects moments in West Virginia with her grandmother. Bant is in the third generation of the Ricker See family, the family that collectively narrates this novel. She explains how the "Rickers [have] been on [their] piece of ground…for more than 200 years" (34), and how "[She'd] get a belonging feeling [she] didn't often have with people" (37) when she found herself at her Uncle Mogey's and in the woods near her grandmother's house. She remembers her grandmother whispering, "*this is just between you and me, Bant. You and me's special place*" (35). Her kin and their connection with place sustain her connection too. She describes her grandma place "like the heart of the rhododendron thicket, the limbs bendy and matty and strong." Existing in this place "was like being inside some kind of body there. It felt animal alive" (35). Human and nonhuman converge here. The place is affective, "animal alive." It ecologically tethers Bant to it. Similarly, in the chapter before, Lace, Bant's mother, returns home after a semester at West Virginia University in Morgantown. She conflictingly reflects on why she cannot easily disconnect her attachment from home. "There are hills in Morgantown, but not backhome hills, and not the same feel backhome hills wrap you in. I'd never understood that before, had never even known the feel was there. Until I left out and knew it by its absence" (4), she explains. She too is tethered to place. It is an ecological and kin tethering, a connection equally dependent on her homeplace's ecology as well as the people who live there. The back to back chapters circumvent linear temporality and instead foreground family and place. Lace and Bant narrate these chapters from their teenage years. Both *feel* this connection to home, a connection sustained across time.

Later in the novel, Lace attributes this connected feeling to her kin and their homeplace. "How could only me and my thirty-three years on that land make me feel for it what I did?" (199), she asks. Her contemplation leads her to believe, "[She] had to be drawing [her desire to return home] down out of blood and from memories that belonged to more than [her]…[her desire] must have come from those that bore [her], and from those that bore them. From those who looked on it, ate off it, gathered, hunted, dug, planted, loved, and bled on it, who finally died on it and are now buried in it. Somehow a body knows" (199). Throughout the novel Lace tries over and over again to understand why she is so connected to her Appalachian home. Each time she does, she attributes this to the generations of her kin that lived there before. Lace outlines a generational cycle of living and thriving and suffering and dying in the same homeplace. Her kin community affectively tethers her to her homeplace as well. It is through this narrative structure and these kin communities that Appalachian place, grandma places as discussed by generations of families, become affective.

But these places are at risk. Hinrichsen juxtaposes Grandma Places and kill places, and Blunt emphasizes the importance of social relations between home and elsewhere, just as Lace experiences "elsewhere" when she leaves home to attend university. "You had your quiet places, Grandma places, your places where peace would settle in your chest – then you had [these other] places, places with a sharpness, a hardness, so utterly opposite all the rumbled deep green, you'd have to slow down and refocus your eyes," Lace reveals. Someone might be "moving along, feeling woods, hills, wild – then, sudden-smack, that crazy concrete zigzagging all over the mountain" (157). In this passage, the concrete refers to the snake ditches dug and paved by Mountain Top Removal (MTR) companies. They loom and inherently oppose the generational and green Grandma places Lace identifies as home. Hinrichsen's term "kill" suggests violence,

and Rob Nixon's slow violence is pervasive in Appalachian spaces. Nixon complicates "the static connotations of structural violence," and argues that conceptualizing such violence as "slow," "foreground[s] questions of time, movement, and change, however gradual" (11). Appalachian literary narratives reveal slow violence and its toxic temporalities across generations. This literary engagement often transcends genre and culminates in robust Appalachian narrative ecologies that address these slow violences via multi perspective narrative form. As Marco Caracciolo asserts, these narratives are enmeshed in the vitality of ecological crisis (3). Neo Appalachian literary narratives not only engage with climatological disaster at the regional level, but they also generate resistance and sustainability narratives that foretell Appalachia's current and future roles in the Anthropocene. They often feature families that occupy Appalachia across generations, and they expose Appalachia's violent ecohistories while not only projecting, but also teaching and speculating about Appalachian futures.

For example, the final installment in Robert Gipe's illustrated novel triptych, *Pop*, exposes slow violence's continuity in Appalachia, while actively working toward more positive futures for Appalachia's future generations. The triptych features the Jewell family, a family living between Canard County, Kentucky and Kingsport, Tennessee. Nicolette Jewell, a young teenager navigating her sexuality, complicated family relationships, and an Appalachia on the verge of political change in 2016, represents the third generation, like Bant, in this series and in the Jewell family. She faces a post-coal Kentucky (a place her grandmother and mother advocated for) and a chemically polluted East Tennessee, but in the aftermath of industry and coal, the opioid crisis and lack of jobs in the region foregrounds the necessity for Appalachian entrepreneurialism and job creation to create sustainable Appalachian futures. Nicolette's mother, Dawn, and Dawn's grandmother, Cora Redding (lovingly referred to as "Mamaw" throughout

the novels), actively protested strip mining in Canard County, KY years before Nicolette was born in *Trampoline*, the first novel in the series. Though Cora and Dawn find some success in preventing continued mining in Canard County, mining continues throughout Dawn's generation and her narration, and though coal is gone from Canard County by Nicolette's time, its effects linger. For three generations, the Jewell family's presence in Appalachia is inseparable from coal and coal-related industry. The Jewell family and coal are geographically tied together and co-exist in a sacrifice zone. The triptychs are narrated through multiple perspectives of the Jewell family across several generations, indicating a deep familial connection and the generational affects kin communities in their homeplaces produce as well.

For example, Nicolette finds herself bound up in her mother's protest spirit a few years after the 2014 Elk River Chemical spill, which Gipe narratively references in his novel. Dawn reveals the chemical spill's devastation when she instructs readers about the effects, using the second person pronoun "you," which centers the reader as a participant in this novel:

> Fourteen thousand gallons of a chemical called MC50 spilled into the Elk River in Kanawha County, West Virginia, at the beginning of 2014. MC50 is used in the processing of coal, and when it got into the water supply it made people sick. You couldn't use the water to drink, bath in, or wash your clothes. Hundreds of thousands of people lost their water. Thousands had to move out of their homes. (29)

Despite strip mining's near nonexistence in Southern Appalachia in 2014, the longevity of its violence persists, in this case through MC50's production at Kingsport, TN's chemical plant. Though Eastman Chemical Plant is not named in Gipe's novel, it is clear this is the real production plant to which Gipe evasively refers. Residents in Charleston, West Virginia were deeply affected in all aspects of their lives, and so too was the Kanawha River environment

generally. Charleston, West Virginia and Kingsport, TN are a three and a half hour drive apart, but they are both in Appalachia. This incident represents the ongoing slow violence coal brought to Appalachia as well as shows the perpetuation of and creation of new Appalachian sacrifice zones, and though a particular natural resource may initially create these sacrifice zones, they rarely exist in isolation and without subsequent harmful effects that create other sacrifice zones and affect Appalachian ecologies. But the Jewell family continues to stay, and throughout the novels, the family devises new economic ways for themselves and others to navigate these sacrifice zones and create better futures for themselves, the environment, and Appalachia as a whole. The youngest Jewell member, Nicolette, creates a local Appalachian business, and Dawn makes a firm decision to become an activist and fight the opioid crisis and other detrimental Appalachian issues. This mirrors the Gipe's community activist work that combats the ongoing opioid crisis through his multiple narrative projects (McCarroll and Harkins 316).

The affect of homeplace and a persistence to stay materializes in this multi-generational narration style, and, as mentioned, it often keeps Appalachians rooted, despite regional physical and social threats, thus outlining the geographic interconnectivity of people and place, even if place exists within sacrifice zones. Hinrichsen proposes that it is "the ethos of Appalachian belonging that ties identity to the materiality of homeplace" (30). This materiality of homeplace extends to Appalachians' ecological and environmental rootedness. Appalachian topography, geography, and shared inter-generational experiences creates homeplaces. Homeplace or "Home'...is more than a relationship to a mere physical landscape: transcending space, 'home' encompasses the sticky temporality of shared experiences and memories, fusing the landscape with psychic life" (Hinrichsen 30). These shared experiences and memories complicate Appalachians' relationships to Appalachian ecologies and suggest a deeper layer of connection, a

kin community, within Appalachian homeplaces. Appalachian literary narratives are unified by their tendency to fixate and focus on family and homeplaces in Appalachia. Several of Silas House's novels follow different generations of the same family through an industrializing Appalachia. As mentioned above, Robert Gipe's and Ann Pancake's novels follow a single family and its lineage across generations, and so too does Crystal Wilkinson's *The Birds of Opulence*. These texts are narrated by different family members during different generations. This is not exclusive to Appalachian literature, of course, but it is a significant feature in Neo Appalachian literary narratives, and families in these narratives endure.

Appalachian homeplace, kin community, and the affective significance of these are especially poignant in Crystal Wilkinson's novel *The Birds of Opulence*. The Goode-Brown family featured in her novel provides a robust model for examining not only the affect of homeplace, but the significance of kin community and Appalachian attachment to place as well. Wilkinson's novel traces the challenges several generations of the Goode-Brown family face. The Goode-Browns are a Black family living in Opulence, Kentucky, a town founded by a freed slave, Old Man Hezekiah, in 1898, "just 100 years after Daniel Boone blazed a bloody trail though [the city], killing every Indian he saw" (Wilkinson 112). Colonial violence's history permeates Appalachia, and Wilkinson's narrative addressment here recognizes Appalachia's long racial and environmental violences, thus emphasizing violence's lasting effects in a way that mirrors Nixon's arguments. Wilkinson's narrative addresses race throughout the novel as well. Harmful Appalachian narratives and stereotypes often focus on White poverty in Appalachia, thus erasing what bell hooks calls Black ecohistories in Appalachia, critical ecohistories for Appalachian people, geography, and place.

The Birds of Opulence engenders Black Appalachian ecohistories which are dependent on kin communities in Appalachian homeplaces. The Goode-Brown family's homeplace retains affective power, but so too do their familial and intergenerational relationships. Wilkinson's novel begins with a birth. Three generations witness this sudden birth, which commences outdoors and on land the family has owned and lived on for several generations. Lucy, a mother and daughter, births her third child. During this birth, her son Kee Kee, daughter Yolanda, mother, Mama Minnie, and grandmother, who they call Granny, witness her delivery. During this moment, Yolanda, who narrates this chapter, realizes, "each of [them]...[was] enveloped in [their] own separate haunt. Yet [they] were one, sharing past and future" (14). This moment is not separate from the family's past nor future, revealing the importance of place, especially since Lucy gives birth not only outdoors, but on the family homeplace, a homeplace that becomes a "Granny place" because of the many Goode-Brown generations that have lived there. During the drive back to the physical house on the homeplace, "the water in the creek curled and rolled toward the car as if to greet [them], like a hundred tongues whispering *home, home, home*" (15). The creek's, a topographic feature, personification signifies how it becomes an actant, a symbol of home, a beacon, a nonhuman entity beckoning them home. Additionally, the dissolution of past/present/future binaries present emphasize generational attachment to place. The Goode-Brown family's homeplace is an "environment associated with the lived knowledge gained from multigenerational inhabitation" (Hinrichsen 28). This multigenerational inhabitation is a kin community.

Even in death, the homeplace becomes affective. At the end of the novel, when Lucy dies, she leaves her husband, Joe, the last of a multi-generational family, alone on the homeplace, and suddenly, "the house feels three-legged to [him]" (191). The homeplace *feels* off, unbalanced

when Lucy passes. The loss of Goode-Brown ancestry affects the homeplace and Joe. Joe sells the homeplace to a White man who begins developing land the family did not. The erosion of homeplace, especially due to its development, reveals the Goode-Brown family's ecoconsciousness, attachment to place, and how these grandma places become sacrificial. In one moment, Joe drives toward "the center of the property," where two men are building a new pond, men to whom Joe sold the homeplace. Joe peers over the edge of the hole, "Stands while the hole in the earth widens, sees the land devoured by the machine and the shovels. He is sure that if he lays his head on the ground he will hear the voices of the Goode clan bringing in the day with a dirge" (197). Though physically alone, Joe is not spiritually alone at the homeplace. He, and the other Goode-Browns exist within it, remain connected to it and to their lingering kin community. The family and their connection to their Appalachian homeplace persists, and this affect is evident in Joe. Family members frequent, live on, reunite, leave and return to, and narrate the homeplace throughout the novel. It is a critical factor in the family's identity.

The connection between Appalachians and Appalachian topography is ecohistorical, and bell hooks and William Turner also emphasize the relationships between Appalachian ecologies, homeplace, and Appalachian people, especially for Appalachians of color. William Turner explains, "[Black folx] connections to [their] land attached [them] to it like chocolate-colored railroad crossties atop crushed white gravel. [They] were spiked down and anchored in place there" (2). There is an indivisible connection between Black folx and Appalachian land. Similarly, in the introduction to her poetry collection *Appalachian Elegy*, hooks recounts:

> all [her] people came from the hills, from the backwoods…No one wanted to talk about the black farmers who lost land to white supremacist violence. No one wanted to talk about the extent to which that racialized terrorism created a turning point in the lives of

> black folks wherein nature, once seen as a freeing place, became a fearful place. That silence has kept us from knowing the ecohistories of black folks. (5)

hooks also emphasizes connection to homeplace and the inseparability between Appalachian experience and Appalachian place with particular attention to race. She writes, "To be raised in a world where crops are grown by the hands of loved ones is to experience an intimacy with earth and home that is lost when everything is out there, somewhere away from home, waiting to be purchased" and "[deems] it an act of counterhegemonic resistance for black folks to talk openly of [their] experiences growing up in a southern world where [they] felt [themselves] living in harmony with the natural world" (5). This resistant act suggests Appalachian resistance to dominant narratives, ones often perpetuated by non-Appalachians. In this way, hooks and Turner highlight the resilience and resistance they and other Affrilachian[8] and Appalachian writers maintain, which reveals an Appalachian future where historic racism and exclusion is acknowledged and redressed. hooks' honest and explicit telling of her own ecohistory represents a greater literary shift in hers, Wilkinson's, and other Neo Appalachian literary narratives, a shift toward a future where regional atrocities are recognized, and one where hope prevails through an accurate and contemporary portrayal of the region.

These narrative tellings emphasize the collective storytelling nature Appalachian literary narratives provide as well as their engagement with Appalachian homeplaces, kin communities, and sacrifice zones. This connection to homeplace is important, and recognizing the region's atrocities does not necessarily eradicate what might be more hopeful futures. Afterall, Douglas Reichert Powell suggests, "[Appalachian Studies scholars] need to use [their] growing body of

[8] Frank X. Walker coined this term with his eponymous poem. He describes the group as "a grassroots group of poets of color living in the Appalachian region" ("The Affrilachian Poets").

knowledge about Appalachia past and present to envision Appalachia's future. Practitioners of Appalachian studies should renew [their] emphasis on arguing for what the region ought to be, constructing new ideas about what Appalachia can become" (211), but in order to speculate about New Appalachia, scholars cannot overlook the coal extraction, water pollution, and other disasters that devastated Appalachian geographic spaces, ecologies, and Appalachian bodies, and the geographic-specific, sacrifice zones these sites occupy. Jacequline Yahn explains, "Within these sacrifice zones, corporations pillage natural resources at low cost to the state but high cost to the place. Natural resource extraction is a place-based business, which means corporations must engage in a coy form of place-making in order to maximize their profits, all the while endearing their companies to the nation-state" (141). Geography and place-based exploitation must be recognized.

Place-based exploitations play immense roles in Appalachia as well as the Anthropocene generally. Kathryn Yusoff complicates exploitation in the Anthropocene, and her research argues the term "Anthropocene" and Anthropocene studies generally overlook race. She contends that the term Anthropocene "neatly erases histories of racism that were incubated through the regulatory structure of geologic relations. The racial categorization of Blackness shares its natality with mining in the New World, as does the material impetus for colonialism in the first instance" (2). Though Wilkinson's novel begins much later than the initial mining practices in Appalachia and Wilkinson's Goode-Brown family is not a mining family, hooks' ecohistories, Turner's descriptions of Black folx connection to land in Harlan County, Kentucky, and Yusoff's Anthropocene arguments outline a tendency to overlook people of color in Appalachia. This is particularly egregious given the contributions of Black folx in Appalachia.

Furthermore, Black labor exploitation in mining practices is no stranger to Appalachia. Mine worker strikes were often interrupted when companies hired Black workers from the South but paid them significantly less than their White colleagues, and in general, the Great Migration led many Black folx to the Appalachian region (Turner 5). As Turner enlightens, "Harlan County was to Kentucky Black coal-mining families in the 1920s through the 1940s what Harlem was to Black New Yorkers in the same period" (4). Even in the West Virginia Gauley Bridge disaster that left thousands dead or dying of silicosis, Black workers were discriminated against more than White workers, and when their bodies succumbed to silicosis, they were buried in mass graves. "Three-quarters of the [Hawk's Nest Tunnel] workers were migratory blacks from the South who lived in temporary work camps, with no local connections or advocates," Moore writes (6). Because many Black workers were migrant workers who lacked kin communities in the region, they were more susceptible to exploitation. Despite this horrific exploitation though, many Black and White workers joined forces to protest these systems. The Harlan County, KY strikes, some of the most famous and brutal mine strikes in the country's history, are evidence of this. These strikes, however, did not mean the end of mining for Appalachians. Though pay and conditions were improved, Appalachian bodies continued to be sacrificed for external profits. Appalachians fought for better conditions, but returning to mining reveals the cyclicality and brutality of regions where livelihoods and economies depend on systems that exploit and destroy workers. A disturbing and consequential irony materializes in this system, one Gipe and Pancake present in their novels.

Many Appalachians themselves insisted and insist these practices persist, further complicating Appalachian relation to homeplace. When a geographic region is dependent on exploitative practices, it becomes difficult to imagine life without them because of the economic

disparities that often ensue once these practices are exhausted. Hinrichsen discusses this complicated perspective in Pancake's novel. She explains Appalachians are "both made by coal and destroyed by it, needing the income it brings while aware also of the damage it creates. Pancake's characters, like all of us intimately indebted to an inherently ecologically destructive capitalism, can only disavow what they see and feel as 'obscene,' trying to preserve identity in the face of a deeply traumatic reality that they can neither ignore nor fully admit" (31). This horrific irony affects characters across Pancake's novel. That the novel is narrated by multiple members of the Ricker/See family across the family's history is significant. This intergenerational, nonlinear narrative style mimics the vicious capitalist cycles and their entrapment. When families are rooted to place, they are also rooted to the systems that interrupt and violate that place. In an argument between Lace and her husband, Jimmy Make, she accuses his best friend of "scabbing." "Well what the hell else [is] he supposed to do?...He's gotta wife with a kidney problem. He's gotta have a hospital card" (121), Jimmy retorts. His friend risks his own health as a miner to gain insurance for his sick wife. Lace also recognizes the horrific paradox of participating in destructive work to "save" oneself when she thinks about her father's participation in this system and his connection to place as he dies from Black Lung. She contends, "His lungs are being buried by it, coal, which is earth, which is this place, and, still, he wants nothing but to be out in it. On the land, like [her], like [their family], despite the burying it does, and what the hell, what the hell is it? Why do we have to love it like we do?" (151). Her father, just as her husband once was, just as her children might be, is caught in coal's vicious cycle. In Pancake's novel MTR may promise jobs, but the cost is severe and affects families throughout future generations.

In a 2019 ethnographic study, researcher Phillip Lewin investigated Shale County[9] Kentuckians pro-coal perceptions and sentiments. “Almost all scholars within the social sciences agree that the coal-driven monetization brought a host of social, political, economic, and ecological problems to Central Appalachia,” and “while coal fueled development in the Northeast and Midwest, it left mountain communities poorer and broke” (53), Lewin explains. Despite this, many Kentuckians buy into the mythology of coal, and they believe it asserts their place as valuable in an American society where Appalachians are often negatively portrayed, provides good jobs, and is a respectable and brave profession (56-59), exhibiting an example of what Lauren Berlant calls “cruel optimism.” Though Appalachians are and were optimistic about the jobs and opportunities coal promised, they, in fact, retained a kind of “unreliable agency” (9) because they “[found] themselves developing skills for adjusting to newly proliferating pressures to scramble for modes of living on” (8). When coal arrived in Appalachia, it was often the only industry. Coal employed large swaths of Appalachians, offered investment opportunities, and some job security, that was until Black Lung wreaked its final havoc or a cave in crushed bodies. Illnesses/physical injuries such as these revoked Appalachians’ ability to work, and as David Harvey points out, “under capitalism sickness is defined as the inability to work” (qtd. in Berlant 96), which, as Berlant further argues, “[emphasizes] the phenomenon of collective physical and psychic attenuation from the effects of global/national regimes of capitalist structural subordination and governmentality.” Pervasive illness from poor working conditions and illnesses derived from these choke Appalachians’ physically and financially, and the neoliberal structures at play in Appalachia are responsible for this. Coal, in many areas of Appalachia,

[9] Shale County collectively refers to areas in Kentucky where shale is present. It is not a proper noun for a county name.

including places where it is no longer mined, still exercises power and affects Appalachians living in these areas. In Appalachia, this culminates in both what Berlant calls slow death, a disturbing schema that slowly kills people who find themselves in poverty due to capitalism's exclusive and fatal nature, and a slow violence, violence both people and environmental ecologies experience in areas where natural resources are mined and removed by capitalist corporations. Even in Gipe's novel *Pop*, set in 2016, coal, its legacy, and its industry haunts his characters' lives and nearly every page.

Like the Goode-Brown and Ricker/See families, the Jewell family is tethered to place, in this case Canard County, KY, where Gipe largely sets his novel. The Jewell family homeplace is also affective, though the sacrifice zones it exists within complicate this relationship. *Trampoline*, the first novel in the series, is a kind of Appalachian bildungsroman featuring Dawn, the granddaughter of an anti-coal activist. Blue Bear Mountain, which has "the state's highest peak on it" (10) and Drop Creek are two important ecological and geographical sites for the Jewell family and their homeplace. When Dawn's grandmother vocalizes her concerns about strip-mining and the damage this practice causes in waterways, mountain fissures, and the mountain itself, Dawn is left to question how she feels about coal, her home, and her role in Canard County. At the beginning of the novel, Dawn and her grandmother attend a meeting where contrasting "painted signs reading 'SAVE BLUE BEAR' and 'COAL KEEPS THE LIGHTS ON'" (11) line the community center walls. Several people speak in this meeting and discuss the ecological and cyclical consequences of coal. These discussions outline Appalachian sacrifice zones. One woman "said they used to eat fish out of the creek" (6), another "said the coal dust from the coal trucks was so bad she couldn't let her grandbabies play outside" (7), and a man "talked about the ozone layer, how there was holes in it and how we couldn't go on

burning coal forever, that we needed to think about the future" (12). There are pro-coal statements at this meeting, of course, but the anti-coal exigencies reveal the detrimental effects coal causes in Appalachia and to Appalachians and resistance to this capitalistic exploitation. Dawn's own father was killed in a mining accident, and her mother took to opioid use to cope with his death. In these examples, sacrifice zones dependent on air (and bodies), water, earth, and fire emerge. Canard County's topographies, ecologies, and people are "long-term casualties" of slow violence (Nixon 2). *Trampoline* explores Dawn's rise to anti-coal activist, but also the misery coal inflicts on her family and Canard Countians. However, *Pop*, Gipe's last novel, features a different Dawn.

In *Pop*, Dawn is now a reclusive mother who downs bottles of pop, potato chips, and anything with sugar. Her daughter, Nicolette, finds herself in a similar situation to Dawn, wondering what her role is in Canard County, KY, a now coal-abandoned and opioid ridden county. Though coal is long gone, its sacrifice zones persist and new ones emerge. Mary Anglin addresses this when she explains:

> we have nearly reached a "post-coal" moment: even the banks and corporations that once were mainstays are beginning to dis-mantle their investments in coal, since it is no longer a profitable or practical source of energy. The American public has likewise begun to recognize the immensity of global climate change, and the host of environmental crises of which this epochal shift is comprised. The oft-viewed bumper sticker "Coal keeps the lights on" now has the ring of conservatism: nostalgia for earlier times with higher rates of employment and union wage packets that supported working-class households and communities, as well as the aspirations of younger generations for a college degree. (52)

What is a post-coal Appalachia then? Nixon reminds us that "place is a temporal attainment that must be constantly renegotiated in the face of changes that arrive from without and within, some benign, others potentially ruinous" (18), and though coal mining ends in Canard County, Appalachia as a place continues. "I'm writing about the whole coal mining territory. What comes after the coal mining is done" (53), one character in *Pop* says. "You think coal is done?" Hubert, a Jewell family member asks. This brief exchange highlights lingering coal sentiments but also broaches contemporary issues in Appalachia. Coal in Canard County is finished, but what is Canard County, and Eastern Kentucky for that matter, post-coal? Unfortunately, for many, like some Jewell family members, coal mining closures not only meant lost jobs, but a segue into one of the most devastating current issues in Appalachia: the opioid crisis. The Jewell family does not abandon Canard County, KY, but they do face yet another sacrifice zone, this one created by different but still capitalistically driven companies.

A recurring theme in Gipe's novels is opioid addiction. Dawn's mother dies from an overdose, Dawn's best friend succumbs to her addiction, and many family members and friends transition in and out of jail because of their drug involvement. The current Appalachian opioid crisis is the most devastating in the United States. There are more overdose deaths in Central Appalachia than anywhere else, and this is largely attributed to the region's historic sacrifice zones (Marberry and Werner). Furthermore, this new kind of sacrifice zone and crisis, one dependent on Appalachian bodies, contributes to and exacerbates not only what are referred to as "diseases of despair," but general desperation and hopelessness in Appalachia. However, despite this persistent and affective feeling, especially in Appalachian communities today, there is still hope and active resistance and acts of endurance emerging to combat this epidemic, as evidenced in Neo Appalachian literary narratives like Gipe's.

In a 2020 study, researchers found that there is a direct correlation between MTR practices and opioid use in Central Appalachia. Katie Marberry and Danilea Werner found that areas suffering MTR also have higher rates of cancer, drug and alcohol abuse, and overdoses (303). They argue Central Appalachia's high rates of diseases of despair[10] are due to MTR. Even though coal mining is less practiced in these regions, its slow violence not only persists, but has manifested into new violences. They define violence as not only bodily harm but also "acts that restrict an entity's potential." Gipe's characters' potentials are restricted. Jobs are difficult to come by, and characters are left floundering in the wake of coal mining while facing this new crisis. Marberry and Werner explain, "Environmental degradation caused by invasive coal mining measures such as open cut mining and MTR causes significant emotional distress to those who live in nearby communities, which is evident in the statistics on mental health and diseases of despair, including substance abuse, in those areas." This emotional distress and substance abuse coping method began as a response to drug overprescriptions to combat cancer-related health issues in Central Appalachia. Cancer rates in MTR communities are much higher than other areas, as is susceptibility to depression and depression related illnesses. MTR's affective power persists in these communities left to face the visible, violent aftermaths that linger even when MTR is finished.

Despair and depression saturate the kin communities and homeplaces in Gipe's novels, but so too do persistence and hope. In *Pop*, a film crew arrives in Canard County to begin shooting for an Appalachian-inspired film replete with coal companies, Big Pharma drugs, and even aliens. The film's plot is bizarre, and Gipe satirizes not only Appalachian stereotypes, but

[10] Diseases of despair are behavior-related diseases such as alcoholic liver disease, cirrhosis of the liver, and suicide (Marberry and Werner 303).

the region's capitalistic and environmental exploitation as well. Instead of mining trucks swarming local roads, film vans and crew buses flock to the region. Hubert Jewell has capitulated his bootlegging and instead bought several cabins that he rents out to the film crew via Airbnb. The film is extravagant, as is its plot:

> We are calling it *The Hunted*. It's set in the mountains, in these times. The story starts with a wildlife biologist trying to make sense of all these weird critters getting killed. Humongous cat-like creatures with green hair, bearish things with wings and candy-apple fur: Powerful huge fish walking the land. Glow-in-the-dark squirrels the size of ten-year-old children. Turns out, there's a new street drug being sold by space alien gangsters literally turning hillbillies into wild animals. People come to hunt these humans gone wild because they are exotic creatures. The hero is a young woman scientist from the mountain who moved away. She and the wildlife biologist foil the scheme. Return people to their original form. They fall in love. It ends happy. (76-77).

The dramatization here is undeniable and lavish. Gipe creates an overdone caricatural film to satirize long term health consequences resulting from regional sacrifice zones as well as general Appalachian exploitation by others in this passage. Both humans and nonhumans suffer. However, local Kentuckians challenge this plot. They say, "Big Pharma would be selling that dope. They'd be in cahoots with the real estate developers [who] wanted to develop hunting lodges and safari trips. These pudwhacks loaning the coal industry money, sitting on their yachts and silver goblets, paying flunks bookoos to set up their companies, sticking the cold steel pipe of exploitation up our collective two-holes - they'd have a hand in it" (77). This explicit recognition of "Big Pharma" and "coal industry money" reveal the interconnectivity of these sacrifice zones as well as their continued effects on Appalachian life. The ambiguous "they"

employed throughout this passage references the non-local people who, as Nixon explains, exploit local communities and ecologies for profit. Again, here Neo Appalachian narratives emerge, ones that combat historic and environmental exploitation and sacrifice zones, presenting instead a future where Appalachians tell their own experiences.

Furthermore, a spirit of endurance emerges when Dawn and Louisa Fizdale, a local Canard Countian and Dawn's friend, venture to Charleston, West Virginia for the Elk River chemical spill lawsuit. At the beginning of the chapter, Dawn identifies an important moment "almost one week before the Trump v. Hillary election" (185). On the way, one of their travel companions comments, "Nothing's really changed. West Virginia USA still runs our water plant. The same spill could happen tomorrow." When they arrive, they sit on a rooftop that also has a bathroom. After a moment, "a clunk from behind that bathroom door" beckons them, so "Louisa [gets] up to see what it [is]." Dawn explains, the noise belonged to a "a man [who] fell off the commode, needle in his arm." She calls 911 and reveals, "that was the first time [she] ever saw Narcan" (186). At the hospital, an activist tells Dawn, "[they] got offered a job for a year documenting grandparents raising kids who lost their parents to drugs. It also involves advocacy for harm reduction - needle exchanges and Narcan distribution - and building a lawsuit against the pharmaceutical companies." The political and social implications Gipe addresses render real Appalachian issues in narrative form. Dawn, a woman who lived through coal, chemical spills, and now the opioid crisis is the narrator here. Her perspective is multigenerational and connected to her homeplace. Yet she is determined to continue fighting. Her narration illustrates New Appalachian futures that endure among the slow violence and sacrifice zones in the region. And, despite the violence persistent in Appalachia, narrative imaginings about its future prevail in *Pop*

– not only in a film that recharacterizes the region, but also in local-based startups inspired by desires to stay near home.

Nicolette is determined to build something worthy and provide jobs and better futures for Appalachians. She turns toward soda and traditional Appalachian foodways in order to do this. Additionally, Louisa is an activist and believer in brighter Appalachian futures. She "talk[s] about the bullshit in the schools around teacher pay and useless standardized tests. She [has] thoughts about abortion rights getting eroded, and subsidies on solar panels getting rolled back, thoughts about what ought to be done, and a whole big concrete plan that wadn't just hers, but belonged to a bunch of [Canard Countians]" (121). Even Hubert recognizes that "Down through [Canard's] history the stories people away from Canard told about Canard were about mine strikes and poverty programs and everybody being hooked on pills. [When the film crew arrives though] they was other kind of stories to tell" (137). These new narratives (solar panel subsidies, tourism industries, foodway revivals) reveal what New Appalachia might be. When *Sugar Pill*, what the film *The Hunted* is eventually retitled to, is in its nascency, Dawn asks, "Why their stories? Why can't we tell our stories? Why can't we tell our own stories?" (69). Gipe's, Wilkinson's, and Pancake's multi-generational narratives allow Appalachians to tell their own stories.

Narratives are powerful. As Vaccaro et al. reveal, "[Narratives] are collaboratively produced in social interaction and their contents are drawn from cultural tales and mimesis. They provide arcs, plots, and motives…and use characters, storylines and genre to persuade or entertain….They imbue events and institutions with meaningful overarching constructs and integrate experiences from pleasurable moments to those of suffering" (750). They garner not only emotional responses, but truly affective ones. Caracciolo claims "storytelling is affective,"

and highlights "the link between narrative form and affect: the form of narrative is the configuration of emotionally charged circumstances created by the telling" (5). These narratives, these tellings evoke emotion but also indicate culture. However, in Appalachia, as in other regions, the culture, like the geographic configuration, can be seen as porous—that is, the boundaries are constantly changing" (Ledford et al. xix). The boundaries between writer and activist, Appalachian and witness, story and truth blur in Neo Appalachian literary narratives.

Ann Pancake spent enormous amounts of time in MTR communities before writing her novel, and she thanks her parents for "[making her] aware of the environmental costs of strip mining by the time [she] was six years old" (Pancake 360). As a West Virginian and through her work, Pancake protests MTR sacrifice zones in Appalachia. She also writes with an understanding that "much writing about Appalachia over the past 150 years, especially writing that has gotten wide distribution[11]…perpetuates the usual stereotypes. [She's] come to believe that the general reading public expects those stereotypes, so publishers expect them too. But [she] also understands the political ramifications of stereotypes – they demean [Appalachians], make it easier to justify their exploitation, easier to see them as worthless. So [she has] always been very sensitive about complicating or overturning the usual caricatures and stereotypes" (West). Pancake's awareness of and her own experience with negative implications about Appalachian stereotypes steers her writing in ways that rewrite Appalachians and public understanding about the region and their relationship with it today.

Crystal Wilkinson engenders awareness for Appalachians of color in Appalachia as a member of the Affrilachian poets and as the first Black woman Poet Laureate of Kentucky. She combats White poverty and homogenizing Appalachian stigmas through her multigenre literary

[11] Pancake also recognizes that some of this literature was published by non-Appalachians.

productions ("Crystal Wilkinson"). Ellen Kohl emphasizes, "Storytelling has been used by Black women, in particular, since the time of slavery as a form of resistance and remains an important political tool to connect individuals' experiences to systemic oppression….Through storytelling, Black women ensure their experiences cannot be erased" (35). Though this chapter focuses Wilkinson's novel, her poetry and most recent publication, *Praisesong for the Kitchen Ghosts: Stories and Recipes from Five Generations of Black Country Cooks*, a collection of stories and recipes passed down from the women in her family, actively work to rewrite Black erasure in Appalachia. As Kohl points out, "in this way, by (re)claiming their narratives, Black women (re)claim and (re)define place" (316). Wilkinson's work to recognize Black Appalachians in Appalachia is activism.

Robert Gipe not only wrote the *Trampoline* trilogy but he also actively works to confront and combat Appalachian sacrifice zones, especially the opioid crisis. In an essay in *Appalachian Reckoning*, a multigenre response to J. D. Vance's *Hillbilly Elegy*,[12] Gipe writes about "coordinat[ing] a community process that resulted in a $150,000 grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to use arts to respond to the prescription painkiller crisis in Harlan, [Kentucky]" (316). This project interviewed "community members about the prescription opioid OxyCotin, the other drugs being misprescribed and abused, and everything else." These interviews and this project culminated in "working with playwright Jo Carson" who "wrote a play called *Higher Ground*." Gipe's own arts activism and teaching (he has taught at several institutions across Southern Appalachia) mirror the activist and protest spirits in the characters in his novels. These narratives and his own activism, in the same way of Pancake's and Wilkinson's, do not live apart;

[12] Many Appalachians criticized Vance's memoir because it myopically portrayed, homogenized, and dramatized Appalachia in negative ways that perpetuates ongoing Appalachian stereotypes.

instead, they exemplify a complex Appalachian ecology that works toward imagining better Appalachian futures and fighting Appalachian exploitation and ongoing sacrifice zones. As Dawn remarks in *Trampoline*, "These mountains are what we got…they are what hold us together" (*Trampoline* 40).

Kin communities are held together by Appalachian homeplaces, but these homeplaces are in sacrifice zones. Coal mining regions were created at the cost of mountain ecologies, waterways are poisoned by coal supplemented chemicals, and opioid addiction became rampant after the coal industry left the mountains. It is important to recognize coal mining is not the only catalyst for the opioid epidemic in Appalachia, but it is influential. Though these resources may seem natural or derived from "natural" spaces, they are far from it. Their carcinogenic emissions, extractive methods, and bodily breakdowns (black lung, diseases of despair, etc.) reveal the complexities coal-associated sacrifice zones engender not only in the region, but in kin communities, on homeplaces, and in Appalachian bodies. Through narrative work such as Gipe's, Wilkinson's, and Pancake's though, such affects are revealed and protested.

When Uncle Mogey recounts his time away from home when he was drafted into the military, he reflects on his attachment to Appalachia. He remembers, "leaving [home] and [seeing] other mountains, and [how he knows] people not from [Appalachia] probably don't understand [Appalachians'] feeling for [their] hills…[Their] mountains are not like Western ones…In the West, the mountains are mostly horizon. [Appalachians] *live* in [their] mountains. It's not just the tops, but the sides that hold [them]" (Pancake 173). The mountains do hold Appalachians together, and they connect them to place even when they find themselves living elsewhere, as I did in Houston, Texas, and as I do now in Brooklyn, New York. The ecological tragedies in Appalachia are severe, and establish vicious and exploitative cycles, but within these

cycles, protests and activism emerge, both in Neo Appalachian literary narratives and in the activism exhibited by the authors of these narratives. The two do not live apart in Appalachian literature, and this is a developing trend in the most recent literature in the region. Though other authors and genres certainly produce activist literature, Neo Appalachian literature written by Appalachian authors abundantly shares in literary and real life activism. Perhaps the ecological tethering, the way the air feels, the generational persistence in the region assist in creating this literary ecology where narratives retain power to not only illustrate a contemporary Appalachia, but also incite change in readers and tell more hopeful stories about Appalachia's futures.

CHAPTER III

WATER

"I hoped I would be in that grave before they built the reservoir."

-*One Foot in Eden* by Ron Rash

WATER ABSTRACT

Appalachia contains robust waterways and waterway ecologies, but these ecologies become complicated when large sections of these waterways are human-made. This chapter investigates the work of Ron Rash, Marilou Awiakta, and a recent publication from a new Southern Appalachian, ecological literary magazine, *Mergoat Magazine*, with an eye toward understanding how these waterways, their watery memories, and their messy entanglements function in Appalachia. These entanglements emerge in what Jane Bennet calls assemblages, but the geographic dependent nature of Appalachia reveals these assemblages are, in fact, geographic assemblages. This terminology privileges the geographic importance of not only Appalachia, but the waterways within it. TVA damming events, irresponsible coal mine closures, and other human-induced flooding reveal complicated ecologies in this region, and this chapter understands these ecologies as affective ones that provide a way to rethink nonhuman agency in Appalachia.

APPALACHIA'S VITAL MATERIALITY AND GEOGRAPHIC ASSEMBLAGES

There's a lake in my hometown called Boone Lake. It is a pivotal place in the local county and in my memories. It boasts a shabby "beach front" where my family often picnicked, a lake park where my friends and I spent many an angsty teenage evening, and a small, barely used dock where my college roommates and I often launched our canoe. But among these memories, one stands out more than the rest. One day, I was on a boat with friends, and we encountered a

narrow inlet arbored with trees. We navigated through it slowly, nearly stalling in the shallow water. A friend advised me to look down into the water as we passed. Beneath the dark water's surface, lucid as the memory is in my mind now, were train tracks. My mouth gaped.

This was my first encounter with Tennessee's underwater towns, towns existing beneath many Tennessee lakes, towns submerged in water. They're all still there, drowned, uninhabited, except by leftover architecture, human built constructions, and bones. Though I wouldn't have language for flood control, eminent domain, reservoirs, and the Tennessee Valley Authority until much later, I knew there was something disturbing about seeing those train tracks, their incongruence, near anachronistic existence, and they've haunted me since, obscuring the Appalachia I understood as a child and complicating my reconciliation with the one I know as an adult, one where ecological destruction is pervasive in not only East Tennessee, but in Southern Appalachia too.

There was a strange conglomeration of feelings about those train tracks that complicated how I understood "nature." The human constructed tracks obviously interrupted what was once natural space, but what did the eventual tracks' submersion mean? And what did it mean that I literally floated above them? Though the tracks were just things, constructed and "destroyed" (or at least rendered unusable), they very much affected me and live powerfully in my memory, and it is this exact affect that Jane Bennett explores in her thing-power theory.

Bennett's thing-power works toward dismantling human/nonhuman hierarchies, agency, and affective power. It also "[induces] a stronger ecological sense" ("The Force of Things" 348), which is critical in understanding Appalachian water-dependent sacrifice zones, like the ones beneath the Boone Dam Reservoir and other TVA (Tennessee Valley Authority) "lakes," spaces where "human being and thinghood overlap," spaces "in ordinary life when the us and it slipslide

into each other" (349). Before diving into Bennett's materialist approach though, it is important to understand the political actions and reverberating social effects behind Appalachia's water-dependent sacrifice zones, ones reliant on Appalachia's geography, and ones many Appalachian narratives feature.

Karen Bakker and Gavin Bridge point out, "recent invocations of the non-human reflect a growing unease with the way contemporary human geography has tended to discount the non-human worlds of nature and objects" (5), and a similar critique can be applied to Appalachian literary studies. These critiques outline the importance of renegotiating boundaries between human and nonhuman life, especially when considering the ecological devastation Appalachia has and continues suffering. Bakker's and Bridge's approach readily extends to Appalachia because of its significant geographies, ones that, for many years, isolated Appalachian humans and nonhumans, and it provides a geography-based way to consider flood narratives and water-dependent sacrifice zones in Appalachia because these zones rely on nonhuman entities such as waterways, nonhuman biological species, etc. When Appalachia's waterways are disrupted, changed in some way either by human or nonhuman causes, they retain affective power, and it is important to recognize such power is often, in the case of manipulated waterways, geographically bound. Bakker and Bridge focus on resource geography in their approach to materiality, but they recognize three problematic areas present in Appalachia and the sacrifice zones that arise in Appalachian literary narratives. They offer a general critique when "nature" is seen as separate from the human and criticize how easily "nature is transformed into resources, commodities, and conditions of production," the "mutual production, transformation, and regulation of biophysical and socio-economic processes…, and the productive and generative capacities of the non-human" (5-7). In Appalachian sacrifice zones, nature, or at least spaces

seen as such, becomes a commodity. Companies generate profit from it, often at the expense of Appalachians who physically generate said commodification. Appalachian labor exploitation is just one example of such wrongdoing. Appalachian ecologies suffer too, and thinking about material geographies and Bennett's vibrant materialism within Appalachia deconstructs human-centered efforts and effects. In water-dependent sacrifice zones, this is imperative, especially because waterway temporalities and materialities are complex, as are those of other Appalachian nonhuman beings and entities. Kevin Hetherington explains, "place has been, and remains, fundamentally defined by humanist discourses. It is assumed that place is about agency, and that agency is invariably defined as human agency…but what [if scholars] let objects speak of place?" (184). Hetherington, like Bennett, considers the nonhuman, though he does so in relation to place, a pertinent concept in Appalachia. His emphasis acknowledges a geographic importance Bennett overlooks, a grave oversight when thinking about thing power in Appalachia. In Neo Appalachian literary narratives, authors engage with human/nonhuman complexities in Appalachian sacrifice zones, yet also offer hope by also narrating Appalachian futures of resistance. In this way, these authors not only participate in the role of witness for these events, they consider materialities and their vibrancies in these sacrifice zones in Appalachian literature while simultaneously de-centering humancentric approaches.

Flooding is not singular to Appalachia, of course, but it is significant in the region, especially given its relevance in the greater American South. In fact Christopher Lloyd argues, "flooding saturates southern history and the regional imagination" and claims, "southern literature has consistently responded to the watery locales of the region" (161). Though Lloyd frames his argument by focusing on Southern literature, the bounds of Appalachian literature often not only geographically overlap with parts of the South, but the wider field of Appalachian

Studies is often considered a subset of Southern Studies. Furthermore, Lloyd specifically identifies Cormac McCarthy's *Child of God*, which is set in Sevier County, TN, as one such text. Though Hurricane Katrina, Mississippi Delta flooding, and other coastal areas might come to mind more readily than Appalachian spaces when thinking about flooding in the American South, climate catastrophe and other flood exacerbating occurrences, such as mountaintop removal erosion, have resulted in more devastating and frequent flooding in Appalachia, as seen in the recent July 2022 Southeastern Kentucky floods.

Appalachia is clearly no stranger to flooding, but, again, the causes for this are vast. In more recent years, human engendered water catastrophes have magnified. TVA damming, coal mining induced water catastrophes, and general global warming exacerbate Appalachian flooding. Flood-narratives, unsurprisingly, frequently emerge in Appalachian literature. Ron Rash's *One Foot in Eden*, Marilou Awiakta's *Selu: Seeking the Corn Mother's Wisdom*, and Jared Hamilton's and Caitlin Myers' photo essay "Lord Willing and the Creek Don't Rise" thematically address Appalachian flooding across narrative genres. These texts reveal not only human consequences and suffering when floods occur, but also outline human and nonhuman causes and effects, thus providing ample evidence for the emergence of thing-power, vibrant materialism, and material geographies in Appalachian narratives and their featured sacrifice zones. Additionally, each text is preoccupied with memory, and it is through this preoccupation that the ongoingness of the role of witness emerges. Rash's novel is set in 1952 during the height of waterway damming for hydroelectric power. Awiakta narratively retells the devastating 1967-1979 Tellico Dam events. Hamilton and Myers' essay relies on first hand accounts about memory and the past. Though devastating ecological and social effects exist in these narratives, so too do endurance and sustainability themes that reveal a New Appalachia as well as Neo Appalachian

approaches to ecological preservation both within and beyond Neo Appalachian narratives. Though Rash's novel and Awiakta's chapter largely, unlike the other narratives in this research, focus on the past, they do so through specific attention to memory surrounding events that shaped the region's history. As Carolina Diaz writes, "We are constituted by water and exposed to it globally, and we are exposed to and constituted by cultural and regional waters and memories" (1339). The attention to watery memory Rash, Awiakta, and Hamilton and Myers provide in their flood narratives constitute "cultural and regional waters and memories" in Appalachia, ones specific to Neo Appalachian literary narratives preoccupied with memory and remembering. This is especially important given the ecological exploitation associated with flooding in Appalachia. Though these texts consider memory, it does not relegate them objects of the past, nor does it evoke their simultaneous ability to speak to Appalachian futures.

Perhaps the most significant and well known flooding in Southern Appalachia resulted from Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal program: the Tennessee Valley Authority. "On May 18, 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Tennessee Valley Authority Act," an act that aimed to temper regional flooding, agriculturally and industrially develop the legislation's regional jurisdiction, provide jobs, and create cheaper, reusable power. But the ecological consequences of this act were swift and severe. Thousands of acres of land were flooded in the TVA's arguably catastrophic endeavors. Although the TVA created jobs where there previously was little in the way of work, it simultaneously materially and ecologically disrupted the lives of Appalachian humans and nonhumans, once again revealing the cruel optimism in Appalachian sacrifice zones. The Tellico Dam construction is the most infamous TVA dam. Its creation caused local and global upset, and Marilou Awiakta's multigenre, nonfiction narrative explores these disruptions, their geographical impact, and the role of memory in these lasting effects.

Awiakta's book recounts her life in Southern Appalachia, a life that also shared a close timeline with nuclear development at Oak Ridge as well as other advancements at the cost of human and nonhuman lives. Awiakta identifies as a Cherokee-Appalachian writer, and according to Katherine Ledford et al., she "was raised with an awareness of social and environmental responsibility" (299). This social and environmental responsibility is evident in her chapter about the Tellico Dam construction, what it meant for nonhumans and humans (both in the present and past), as well as the dam's lasting material and ecological effects and how endurance manifests in these. Though the Tellico Dam story in Awiakta's book exists merely in one chapter of her much longer narrative, the chapter is critical narrative scholarship about the damage of TVA flooding. It is also important to acknowledge Awiakta's book was published in 1994, several years before the millennium. However, I have included it in this project because Awiakta's Indigenous approach to retelling this story from her own Cherokee and Appalachian perspective and memory places this chapter as a crucial component in Contemporary Appalachian literature about the TVA's consequences and effects, and how Appalachians are confronting such ecological destructiveness. Additionally, her book's greater engagement with Appalachian Indigenous pasts and futures positions it as a Neo Appalachian text. Afterall, at its core, the book recounts Oak Ridge, Tennessee's role in developing nuclear weapons and how this scientific future impacts Appalachian and Indigenous ones.

At the beginning of the book, Awiakta asks if recent scholarship and general understanding about Indigenous people and their beliefs "indicate[s] a shift to accept the traditional teaching - one still very much alive among Native people…that lives are imbued with spirit and that a reciprocal relationship is crucial to survival?" (20). She also asks if "the concept of dominance over nature, so entrenched in Western thought, [will] also shift enough to make

this change possible?" Awiakta's questions foreground important ideas about de-anthropocentricizing approaches to understanding nonhumans, ones that exhibit Bennett's ideas about nonhuman entities, things, as well. Both the humans and nonhumans generate affects, and these affects include memory triggers.

Awiakta's chapter specifically highlights the two political cases that brought the Tellico Dam construction to multiple, temporary halts: a thousand year old Cherokee archaeological and religious site and discovery of an endangered species: the snail darter fish. Awiakta titles this section "Arrow of Warning and Hope," cleverly outlining two significant factors Neo Appalachian literary narratives, such as hers, identify: danger/destruction and hope/endurance. Awiakta retells her own story and protest efforts to prevent the Tellico Dam's construction as well as provides historical context not only surrounding the dam delaying-events, but Indigenous temporalities and histories as well. The archaeological sites hold not only material items, but spiritual associations too, ones that pre-date the centuries colonists invaded Cherokee land.

When Awiakta learns about the Tellico controversy, she initially thinks it "was about the snail darter" (43). She learns, however, that Tellico is "the heartland of Cherokee history." Upon this discovery, her memory is jogged. The looming dam construction triggers an involuntary memory, and she realizes, "Tellico was a story [she'd] heard before by a different name." A recollection of the Cherokee Nation's encounters with and removal by White Europeans follows. Her past tense narration reveals the involuntary trigger the dam's construction causes. Russell Smith attributes responsibility to the involuntary memory system for "creat[ing] and preserv[ing] emotional memories in relation to threatening or otherwise emotionally significant situations," and "because it is relatively resistant to the revisions introduced by conscious recollection, is far more robust, perhaps even indelible" (104). Awiakta begins this chapter with a phone call she

receives and narrates in the present, but when her memory is triggered and she realizes it is the Cherokee Nation's history at stake in the Tellico controversy, her narration switches to past tense; she narrates from memory. The looming flood's threat to this history floods her memory with the Cherokee Nation's ongoing battle with exploitative industries and practices in the region. This trigger clearly affects the chapter's narration because it shifts from present to past tense. Her involuntary memory, triggered by a potential flooding event, shifts the tense.

Awiakta recounts the Trail of Tears and Indigenous removal in Appalachia, an event that transcends temporal boundaries and continuously affects Appalachia's past and present. These temporal effects exist in memory and in the waterways affected by the dam's construction as well. Not only do the waterways entangle temporalities, so too do the nonhumans existing within them. Although efforts to relocate the snail darter commenced, "more than 20 aquatic species no longer exist in Little Tennessee due to the impoundment of Tellico Reservoir" ("Telling the Story"). Awiakta reveals Tellico Lake "became a Lake of Tears. Tears from 'the folk,' from preservationists, historians, archaeologists, scholars, lawmakers. Tears from farm families, poets, writers, and musicians. Tears from everyone who loved the beautiful valley of the Little Tennessee and had tried in vain to save Cherokee ancestors. We are all part of the web. What affects one strand affects us all. In time, even the fish of Tellico Lake would have cause to weep" (61). A collective memory is affected by this flooding, and though the beginning of this passage identifies humans, the latter transitions into recognition of nonhumans as well. Awiakta uses the term "web" to indicate connectivity and immediately follows this with "affect." Her description of Tellico neatly surmises the ecologies that exist in this event, and she complicates this by emphasizing their affectiveness. This affect exemplifies Bennett's vibrant materialities and thing-power. First, the dam construction is made up of literal things but also reverberates lasting

effects: dislocation, extinction, endangerment, and destruction on both human and nonhuman life, not to mention the waterways dammed and rerouted from their natural flows. These combine to create what Awiakta calls a web, and what Bennett calls an assemblage, a conglomerate of "vibrant materialities of all sorts" (*Vibrant Matter* 23). These materialities are geographic in nature as well because hydropower's lasting consequences in Appalachia depend on its topography, in this case, its waterways. They are also physical and therefore retain the power to trigger memory, memories that arise, in this case, in Awiakta's narrative retelling.

In an article analyzing Patricio Guzmán's *The Pearl Button*, Carolina A. Díaz makes compelling and relevant arguments about water and memory. As Díaz explains, "memory waters constitute a form of outward-looking, elemental place-based attachment capable of giving an account of local histories and knowledges while opening them up to more-than-human, even cosmic, forces" (1337). She goes on to emphasize that "by elemental place, [she] means an attachment that encompasses the more-than-human world, including the elements and their vitality, which suggests the open and creative possibility of connecting different local histories athwart the vastness of the elemental world." Though Díaz's work focuses on Chilean waters, it reveals the deep connection between water, memory, and vitality. The place-based importance of these emerges in Awiakta's chapter. Tellico's flooding is vital. Humans and nonhumans are affected. The damming and flooding engender a geographic assemblage, local and watery, that continues affecting memory through Awiakta's Neo Appalachian literary narrative.

Awiakta's narrative reveals the devastating effects of the Tellico Dam construction on Appalachians and the Cherokee Nation. In a section titled "Our Courage is Our Memory," Awiakta recognizes human effects on nonhumans in Appalachia. She writes:

> In Appalachia, as elsewhere around the world, the effects of humanity's "major malfunction" are evident. Through lack of reverence for the web of life, humans have upset the balance of nature on a global scale. Poison is invading the ozone layer, the forests, the waters, the food chain – perhaps even the very heart of Mother Earth….we are reaching the point of no return. We must stop the rending of our web and begin to reweave it…. Survival. It *is* possible. (181)

Her emphasis on survival is important. Unlike Westerners who frequently conquer and kill natural spaces for profit, the Cherokee understand these nonhuman beings and spaces as sacred and entangled in human futures. Preserving them is a necessity for ensuring human endurance. "Remembering the past, we look to the future," she advises in a later section of her book "Selu, Spirit of Survival." Awiakta witnesses past atrocities like Tellico, but she also addresses Appalachia today. Her narrative is forward-thinking and Neo Appalachian. She plays the role of witness *and* activist.

Awiakta is far from the only author to incorporate flood narratives and watery memory into her regional writing. Ron Rash, one of Appalachia's most famous Contemporary writers, frequently incorporates this style of narrative into his fiction and narrative poetry. His novel *One Foot in Eden* explores Carolina Power Company's historic flooding in South Carolina's Jocassee Valley. Rash's simple character makeup in this novel reveals the localized devastation and havoc hydroelectric power causes through eminent domain, forced removal, and examines what happens when people refuse to leave. Like Awiakta's self-proclaimed activist approach, Rash identifies himself as a "witness" to Appalachian events and casts himself in the "role of witness" ("Commemorating vs. Commodifying" 105) as well, also suggesting his commitment to documenting misdeeds executed in Appalachia and against Appalachians. In fact, Rash believes

his purpose as a writer is to execute his "role as witness to the rapid changes in the landscape and culture of his native region." Rash remembers, "when [Boone, North Carolina] was a one-stoplight town, and…being on a road five miles from Boone ... being kin to ninety percent of the people on that road. Now [he] look[s] at the mailboxes and [he doesn't] know any of those names. It's just changed; [the] community's changed" (qtd. in "Commemorating vs. Commodifying" 105). Rash's writing is clearly motivated by his desire to protest harmful systems in Appalachia that have forced Appalachians to migrate out of the region, but he also expresses a kind of dated nostalgia for a past Appalachia, which is different from embracing a New Appalachia. This is also reflected in Rash's tendency to engage, overly rely on, even, Appalachia's past. There is still protest, but because his narratives are frequently historically dependent, it prevents him from engaging with what Appalachia is now, what it became, and what it continues becoming. However, this does not revoke Rash's commitment to telling Appalachian stories amidst corporate capitalism's, and he does this in *One Foot in Eden*. Though he over relies on Appalachia's past, because he storytells with clear awareness and witness attention, his flood narratives foreground watery memory and become Neo Appalachian. Like Awiakta's narrative, Rash's reveals complex interdependencies between humans and nonhumans in Appalachian sacrifice zones bound by Appalachian geography.

This witness and these sacrifice zones are particularly present in his novel *One Foot in Eden*. Set in 1950s Appalachian South Carolina, the novel features locals in the town of Jocassee who face auspicious events that culminate in a devastating flood engendered by a local power company. Holland Winchester, a war veteran and general troublemaker, disappears, which drives the High Sheriff, Will Alexander, to interrogate a local farmer, Billy Holcombe, about Holland's disappearance and possible murder. Alexander is sure Billy killed Holland, but he cannot prove it

or find a body. Billy's wife, Amy, refuses to disclose any helpful information, but she has her own secrets to hide. Meanwhile, Carolina Power plans to flood not only Billy's land but the entire Jocassee Valley, and it is only a matter of time before Holland's disappearance, and everyone else's secrets are drowned. Like Gipe, Wilkinson, and Pancake, Rash's novel is also written in multiperspective narrative form. Kin communities and grandma places as well as geographic assemblages generated by damming are present in this narrative too.

Waterways and memory play significant roles in this novel. In the beginning of the novel, Sheriff Alexander remembers a waterfall on Stumphouse Mountain, "a white rope of water…that had claimed two lives in the last twenty years" (8), that "[Jocassee] meant 'valley of the lost' to the Cherokee, for a princess named Jocassee had once drowned herself [there] and her body had never been found" (10), and how "The power company already had holdings on the other side of [Horsepasture River]" (11). He knows "change [is] coming, change big enough to swallow [the] whole valley" (11). From the beginning of the novel, Rash expresses an awareness of cyclicality and interconnectivity. Alexander even recalls the Horsepasture River as "the river [he'd] been baptized in" (54). This memory is triggered by the river which affects Alexander's memories but also collective memories that affect the entire valley. The Cherokee namesake is acknowledged, as is the power of a waterfall and the looming consequences the Horsepasture River promises. Additionally, regard to temporality and impermanence arises when Alexander muses about:

> 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 years, twenty at most, and it'll be all water, at least that was what the people who would

> know had told [him]. Reservoir, reservation, the two words sounded so alike. In a dictionary, they would be on the same page. (23)

Though the human endeavors of Carolina Power prevail, the power of water returns. Appalachia, before the Alleghenian Orogeny, was submerged in water, and here, Jocassee too is eventually resubmerged. Water's affective and destructive power manifests in this passage through involuntary memory, and, to complicate this, so too does a water-dependent assemblage, one that connects temporality, memory, humans, and nonhumans, though recognizing human forces and their impact in this is critical.

Carolina Power acknowledges water's resource capability and is the driving force behind the novel's plot and the actual Jocassee Valley flooding. It understands water as an exploitable commodity, one that must be "extracted," or in this case, violently redirected. Himley et al. explain the process behind resource extraction and the ramifications underlying such processes:

> Removing something from its existing relations in order to incorporate it as a resource into a new set of relations requires thought and action, all based on architectures of valuation through which some things and relations are rationalized as more valuable than others. This, in turn, raises questions about who is making these value judgments, in what context these valuations make sense and become dominant, and how systems of resource-making affect different constituencies in varied and uneven ways. (1)

Carolina Power exercises a value judgment and possesses the capital and labor to harness river power, but Jocassee Valley Appalachians are vehemently opposed to Carolina Power's methods. Himley et al. reveal the "varied and uneven ways" Carolina Power executes resource extraction. "[Carolina Power] can't never run us out if we don't sell" (Rash 135), one character challenges two Carolina Power employees. But this verbal challenge is no match for the company's plans

because, “Carolina Power owns every politician in South Carolina…They’ll do what they damn well please” (135). Despite local efforts to hold out and not sell, they remain powerless against eminent domain laws, just as Tellico Valley residents, Cherokee people, activists, and even Tellico’s nonhumans were to the TVA. Helene Ahlborg and Andrea Joslyn Nightingale provide helpful terminology for describing what happens when society’s power enacts forces on nature. They term this “socionature,” which they explain, “signals a theorization of nature and society as inseparable, contingent, and dynamic: in short, as co-emergent. From this stance, resources are never unproblematically separated from the social-political relations through which they are isolated, extracted, and used” (23). This socionature explanation assists in not only understanding the complexity within Jocassee Valley’s and Tellico Dam’s water-dependent sacrifice zones, but also the relationship between humans and nonhumans. Though Ahlborg and Nightingale collectively refer to the latter as “nature” here, which homogenizes various entities and their ecological effects within what might be greater conceptualized as nature, they begin to approach the idea that boundaries between humans and nonhumans are permeable, which, again, Bennett describes as when “the us and it slipslide into each other.”

This slipslide, when systems, resources, humans collide is best understood as an assemblage, which Bennett defines as “ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts…living, throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within” (*Vibrant Matter* 23-24). These assemblages exercise a particular kind of affective agency, thus generating “an agency of assemblages” (23-24). She relies on this idea, that different entities combine to create particular affects and effects, for her greater vital materialism when “bodies enhance their power *in* or *as a heterogenous assemblage*.” Bennett argues, “what this suggests for the concept of *agency* is that

the efficacy or effectivity to which that term has been traditionally referred becomes distributed across an ontologically heterogeneous field, rather than being a capacity localized in a human body or in a collective produced (only) by human efforts" (23). Hydropower flooding produces assemblages that emerge in the sacrifice zone's wake, but what Bennett does not discuss here is the significance of geography, place-bound assemblages and their effects.

To explore this idea more, understanding place-bound/dependent sacrifice zone entities as geographic assemblages is necessary. As previously mentioned, Appalachia's interdependency on its topography and the relationship between human and nonhuman entities relies on this intricacy. Bennett explains the "agency of assemblages" in a discussion about the 2003 Blackout in Northeastern America and Southern Canada. She argues anthropomorphizing proves useful in thinking about the power assemblages demand when they exercise agency. In the context of the power grid failure that left 50 million people without power ("August 2003 Blackout"), anthropomorphizing "works to gesture toward the inadequacy of understanding the grid simply as a machine or a tool, as, that is, a series of fixed parts organized from without that serves an external purpose" (*Vibrant Matter* 25). Like the power grid, hydroelectric dams become actants, but during their creation processes, and sometimes even during their "lifespans," assemblages exist that reveal actants, sometimes with inverse or unexpected consequences, mimicking the power grid's failure. Though the dams themselves retain the potential to become these agential assemblages, what about actants that become involved during their construction?

Bennett identifies a series of actants in agential assemblages. Using the power grid as an example, Bennett outlines how "to the vital materialist, the electrical grid is better understood as a volatile mix of coal, sweat, electromagnetic fields, computer programs, electron streams, profit motives, heat, lifestyles, nuclear fuel, plastic, fantasies of mastery, static, legislation, water,

economic theory, wire, and wood" among others (25). The actants in dams mirror (and literally overlap) with the ones identified here in a power grid. But what about other nonhuman objects? Appalachian homeplaces are also actants in flood events, thus memory is as well. These actants existed before the dam's construction too, and though dam failure, seepage, etc. might be more obvious examples of agential assemblages, the making of dams serves as one too, specifically when rivers and smaller waterways are redirected and land is flooded, when memory is disrupted and interrupted. These floods are agential assemblages.

In *One Foot in Eden* the river is revered, but when it swells with other, redirected water, cataclysmic flooding ensues. Billy and Amy's secret-keeping expires simultaneously with the flood. Their son, Isaac, now a young man who grew up farming with Billy, learns Holland Winchester, not Billy Holcombe, is his father. He demands Billy reveal where he buried Holland's body, and in a frenzied, final act, Billy, Amy, Sheriff Alexander, and Isaac disobey Carolina Power's orders to vacate the land and, instead, attempt to excavate Holland's body so he might receive a proper burial. Earlier, Sheriff Alexander regarded Licklog and Crossroad Mountains, and witnesses Carolina Power's devastation because "the mountains had been scalped, mainly just stumps and rocks now" (Rash 168), and though Alexander traverses dangerously-close-to-being-flooded land with the Holcombe family, he knows the "water's not waiting for anyone." And it does not wait. It claims Billy and Amy's lives, just as, at the beginning of the novel, a waterfall "claimed" the lives of two people. In this description, the river is, as Bennett suggests, helpfully anthropomorphized, insinuating the agential capacities of the water. These lost lives affect memory. In this case, Alexander's and Isaac's.

At the end of the novel, Isaac observes the flooded landscape. He reveals:

> what had once been a meadow with a river running through it now looked like a low-country swamp. Scrub pines and blackjack oaks the loggers hadn't bothered with rose out of the water. The stumps of the big hardwoods jutted out like tombstones. But the farther out you went the less you saw. Water deepened and hid more. At the end of the valley where the mountains again came close together, a white wall of concrete cut off the river like a tourniquet cuts off a vein. (180)

Jocassee's entire topography is changed by the flooding, an action set in motion by Carolina Power, but one reliant on waterways' power. Humans and nonhumans are affected. Carolina Power renders the trees to stumps, and the Holcombe's lose their livelihood. The comparison to tombstones reveals the destructive effects of not only the dam itself, but the water's damage too, rendering it an affective actant. The valley flooding, this initial step in the dam construction, becomes a geographic assemblage in both Rash's fictional and Awiakta's nonfiction narratives, thus revealing not only the hydropolitical nature of Appalachia's complex and exploited waterways, but the agential assemblages that emerge from them. The deracinating power of Isaac's description here foregrounds the idea that Carolina Power's actions destroy topographies but also create new ones. An Appalachian forest is drowned, so too is Billy's agricultural way of life. Instead of forests and fields, a seemingly infinite lake reclaims Jocassee, returning the mountainous region to its pre-orogenic watery state. The "white wall of concrete" symbolizes humans' clear role in this doing, but it also visually represents the dam's materiality, which, again, consists of actants quite similar to the ones Bennett identifies in the power grid. The flooding triggers an assemblage, and so too does the final dam construction. The dam's affect on Isaac is confounding. Suddenly, he loses his family's land, land he worked with his father, land

near where his father's extended family lived. He loses affective land where his kin community and homeplace formerly existed. Furthermore, the land is not only lost but geographically altered. The significance of place is critical here. These things work together in this place to generate this geographic assemblage. His role of witness to both his parent's death and the new landscape suggests the vital materialism at play in the final dam construction, as well as memory. The concrete wall not only stops the river, it interrupts its watery memory. For Isaac, it will always affect him thus, and, like Rash and Awiakta, he bears the burden of witness, the burden of remembering.

Perhaps it is no surprise Rash and Awiakta were both featured in a Fall 2018 special edition of the *Appalachian Review*. In fact, their poems exist side by side in the journal. Rash and Awiakta, across genres, engage with Appalachian flooding and ecological spaces. A textual ecology emerges, one in which authors actively engage with Appalachian eco-sites and act in roles of witness and protest in their writing. Both authors identify as Appalachian and emphasize the regional and place-bound connection they share in their writing. This is a methodology of endurance and commemoration of place, of homeplace.

Commemoration is an act of remembrance, and remembrance and retelling, as these authors retell in their narratives, is an act of protest and resistance to dominant non-Appalachian narratives that often haunt the region. Christopher Lloyd "explores the relation between place and memory, especially as they intersect with conceptions of watery environments" (162), and his theories about water and memory, reveal not only commemoration's importance, but why it is imperative current Appalachian literature take up contemporary Appalachian events in its subject matter. He relies on Toni Morrison's explanation that, "'the act of imagination is bound up with

memory…. 'Floods' is the word they use, but in fact it is not flooding; it is remembering. Remembering where it used to be. All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was. Writers are like that: remembering where [they are] …. [A] rush of imagination is [their] flooding'" (qtd.in Lloyd). Here, the creative and the created merge. One is not separate from the other, and the witness Appalachian authors like Rash and Awiakta bear is their memory of the region's history. Lloyd suggests when the southern writer "recalls the past affectively through writing…they are doubly recollecting in both form and content: the river is overflowing" (162-163). The action of both memory and literal water overflowing suggests an affective assemblage, a geographic one at that, at work. Remembering reinfuses the action of flooding, thus revealing the affective power of writing that engages with flooding. Rash and Awiakta remember and rewrite flooding into their place narratives, which are also places they live in or near (imagined or real). Lloyd writes:

> [The] movable, shifting, *flooding* of memory…is not simply a way of responding to past events, but a form of engaging with how this past affects and lingers in the present, and how we might look toward a future. Memory is as much forward-rather than merely backward-looking. In the era of the Anthropocene, when climate change is ever more visible, the dominance of US writing that remembers landscapes and ecologies (especially as it was, is, and might be) is fitting. (163)

Neo Appalachian literature falls into this category of memory writing, of remembering flooding and the water-dependent sacrifice zones it created and continues creating. The 2018 *Appalachian Review* reveals this remembering effort, and it is also fitting that it is an issue dedicated to Appalachian writers known for their ecological writing. Water and its affectively agential power

becomes memory, and the geographic significance of socio-natural spaces affected by it emphasizes the geographic assemblages that emerge in these zones. These assemblages blur together, just as the narratives' and authors' activism goals blur. This blurring produces compelling effects, and the experiences and memories these narratives feature reveal New Appalachia as a resilient region, one where memory and effort to carve a better future persist. Memory suggests past time, and Rash's and Awiakta's recollection of the Tellico Dam events engage with Appalachia's past, but what happens when Appalachian writers engage with Appalachian water-dependent sacrifice zones, particularly flood-induced ones, occurring in the region more recently?

In July 2022, southeastern Kentucky experienced its worst flooding to date. A series of rain-heavy storms rolled through the region, quickly filling creek beds and rivers with its rainfall. Thousands of people were displaced, lost their homes, and some died. An already stressed economic infrastructure was left reeling in the flood's wake, and since then, flood narratives about the catastrophic event have continued to emerge. These narratives directly combat the horrific and vehemently prejudiced national opinions about Appalachians and the Appalachian region the floods destroyed (Horn).

Several newspapers, including the *Lexington Herald Leader* reported on the polemic and brutal blame many people living outside of the region placed on Kentucky as responsible for its own cataclysmic flooding. The painfully slow response efforts that fell short of swiftly responding to this already impoverished place were seen by non-Appalachians as Kentuckians' own fault. Pseudo-logic abounded on X (formerly known as Twitter). Posts like "this is what they (Kentuckians) voted for," "This is heartbreaking, but at the same time, this is what they

voted for... The sad thing, is I think they will continue to vote for the same people over and over," and "now blue states will be be [sic] bailing them out -- yet they elect (Senators) Mitch (McConnell) and Rand (Paul)" peppered national social media platforms (Horn). The accusatory remarks not only center the intricacies of politics and climate change catastrophes that continue worsening but perpetuate non-Appalachians' homogenizing tendencies when discussing the region. Social media users who espoused these beliefs assume the region's political affiliations are conservative and Republican, but this erases all nuance and the actual heterogeneity of Appalachian politics and voters. Writing to a liberal Appalachian audience, contemporary Appalachian author Silas House encourages Kentuckians not to move away from Southern Appalachia. House acknowledges climate events may only exacerbate in coming years, but in an article for *The Washington Post*, House writes:

> Often when I am on book tours, people will ask me why I choose to live in Kentucky. They find it hard to fathom why anyone would want to live in a place that films, TV shows and other media have taught them is a cesspool populated only by slack-jawed yokels. This question reveals classism and ignorance of what it means to be poor or working class, or to have an allegiance to place. Eastern Kentuckians stay for the same reasons people went back to their homes after Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy or the California infernos.

House's response addresses several important issues about Appalachian homeplace, its affectiveness, but its poverty and continued tropeish portrayals in media as well. He also identifies other American and global spaces where climate catastrophe's effects are swift and only promise future devastation, thus revealing the local but also global implications of climate

change. Out of the 2022 Kentucky floods a geographic assemblage emerges which is composed of politicians who voted against climate change legislation and the humans and nonhumans who dwell in Appalachia and who suffer in these flood events.

One particular post-coal Kentucky multigenre flood narrative, "Lord Willing and the Creek Don't Rise," reveals the geographic assemblage at work through narrative form similar to Rash's and Awiakta's narratives. A collaboration text, Jared Hamilton and Caitlyn Myers center the political and neoliberal forces at work around and within the assemblage. In 2022, Myers was a resident at Kentucky's Hindman Settlement School. The Hindman Settlement School is a multi-use venue for creative retreats, a regional archive, and a public education center. It aims to preserve Appalachian heritage and imagine new Appalachian ways of living (*Hindman Settlement School*). Myers found herself at Hindman the night before the flooding began. That night, she and other writers spoke clever phrases about the potential flooding. "The floods are in the language people speak, and writers recognize that and [they] love it, sometimes to a fault" (72). Myers explains. She remembers how "[they] made wry jokes with one another that [they] could no longer say [they] were 'in deep water' or 'up the creek without a paddle' or 'come what may, hell and high water.'" The next morning, "on the very first day [at the school] [she] woke up on a hill in the town of Hindman surrounded by water." Myers' description echoes Morrison's and though Myers centers language, she reveals the linguistic affect of flooding. It is language, and it is a language Appalachians speak. A language Appalachian authors rely on in their flood narratives. It saturates Appalachians' ways of life, and, unfortunately, the political and capitalistic factors behind the July 2022 floods evaded responsibility. Myers writes, "In Millstone, the people cannot prove it, but they are certain the mine waste retention ponds busted

and gushed water six - and eight - feet high across their property…They say that the water was black, that there is no other reasonable explanation for the sudden gush that left them rushing to the roof, dogs in hand, to wait out the night" (82). Furthermore, "60 plaintiffs in the Lost Creek area are suing Blackhawk Mining for their strip-mining practices. They say the dam that keeps the mine's silt ponds burst and knocked their homes from their foundations. The plaintiffs say they knew because strange, massive orange carp live in the silt ponds, and the day after the flood, they saw dozens of carp wiggling and gasping under their single-wides." Myers relies on first hand accounts to craft her narrative, and in this way, local Appalachian voices are heard. Appalachians who lost their homes, pets, even family members to these floods do not sit back and hope for help; instead, they pursue it, actively filing lawsuits against corporations in defiant acts of protest and justice.

In several instances in this narrative, Myers describes the visual nature of the flood sites and flood waters. "Gospel records by enormous talents that probably no one outside of eastern Kentucky had ever heard of bobbed beneath bridges [and] [b]roken banjos lay across stones in the river" (67), she writes. These objects - things - take on a new affect, one generated by the geographic assemblage that emerged during the flood. Bennett's thing-power is at play here, but beyond this, it is significant that the artifacts Myers describes retain Appalachian connotations, thus centering the geographic nature of their impact. These are not just any items, they are items that insinuate place, items attached to memories, items that become actants when they literally enter the flood waters, combining with other political, ecological, environmental actants, to create a geographic assemblage and contemporary Appalachian sacrifice zone. Kevin Hetherington outlines a geographical tradition that "place, as opposed to space, is something

subjective and meaningful" (183). Appalachia's meaningfulness to Appalachians, many of whom work to preserve Appalachian culture and creative production, surfaces in both Neo Appalachian narratives and in preservation endeavors in the region. This is the narrative thread pulsing in these eco Appalachian literary ecologies. These regional, geographically bound endeavors create lasting effects in the region on humans and nonhumans. In flooding events, these effects emerge in geographic assemblages. These assemblages appear in narrative renderings across Appalachia, largely due to vast flooding in the area, flooding increased by and existing in Appalachian waterway sacrifice zones.

In an interview about the 2022 Kentucky floods, author and activist Silas House said the following:

> I have a deep pride in being from Appalachia despite an utter frustration at the way the region votes. You can love a place to your bones and still not completely understand it. We are people who have fought for labor rights and the environment for decades. I'm the grandchild of a coal miner who lost his leg to the mines and years later gave his breath to them as well when he died of black lung, like so many others. We've fueled this nation with our timber, coal, gas, soldiers, music, literature and more for two centuries. Some of us stay here because we have no other choice; my family didn't live in the flood plain because we wanted to but because we were poor.

House recognizes Appalachia's political complexity and outlines the region's role in both the United States and beyond. He and his family remain in the same region, and this intergenerational trauma from flooding, the suffering of his kin community, and Appalachian sacrifice zones is present. House is a writer and poet. Currently, he is the poet laureate of

Kentucky. His writing and community work represent active protest in Appalachia and provide pathways for hope to emerge in the region. House's discussion of the floods and their impact on him, his homeplace, and his memory reveal their affective power.

Neo Appalachian narratives provide pathways for recognizing environmental atrocities in the region. These flood narratives function as protest to the exploitative systems often responsible for Appalachian flooding. Furthermore, according to Ron Rash, art, in part, "keeps things from being forgotten," and these narratives are a creative testament. They work toward commemorating, remembering, but also speculating on unknown futures for Appalachia. Appalachian floods, unfortunately, are here to stay, and, due to climate catastrophe, will probably increase in frequency and fatality. However, Appalachian authors who engage with both old and new floods shed light on how the region continuously rebuilds after each of these floods. These narratives protest wrongdoings of corporations and government entities responsible for many of these floods and their human/nonhuman consequences. Indeed, instead of passive acceptance, these narratives reveal active Appalachian protest.

At the end of *One Foot in Eden*, Sheriff Alexander's deputy conjures disturbing images of what was once the Jocassee River Valley. He recalls a church in the valley, and he "imagine[s] divers swimming around inside, moving above the pews and pulpit like angels, morning sun streaming through the water and church-window glass making pretty colors all about them" (209). But this cheerful image is quickly supplanted by a dark reality. "It was a nice enough picture I painted in my head," he says, "But it was a damn lie. Those divers in their black wet suits would be like buzzards if they was like anything as they made slow circles above the pulpit and pews, their eyes looking down to spot something dead." Jocassee is now "no place for people who had a home" (214). Though this may be, the memory of Jocassee and the actual

events are secured in Rash's flood narrative, just as the Cherokee history and land beneath the Tellico Dam is in Awiakta's work. I never knew the town beneath Boone Lake, but I do know the "lake" above it, and I know it well. Its post-damming assemblage affected me long beyond the years I spent in and around it. The memories buried beneath live and surface in my memories of Boone Lake today. The tracks, submerged in the water and my watery memory are ever affective, reminding me of a complex geographic assemblage lingering well beyond my childhood and adolescent years.

CHAPTER IV

FIRE

"Do you not feel pain from how men have craved and carved you?

I have felt a pain beyond your reckoning."

- "Questions for the Mountain" by Jesse Graves and William Wright

FIRE ABSTRACT

Appalachia is inseparable from its mountainous topography. The mountains are perhaps most closely associated with the region, but these mountains complicate not only Appalachia as a place, but as a cultural concept. To better understand Appalachia on a global scale, it is necessary to examine Appalachia's complex and wide reaching temporalities. Conceptualizing Appalachia as a hyperobject works toward this endeavor; however, the physical, material presence of the Appalachian Mountains in the region emphasizes the need for understanding the importance of materiality in what Timothy Morton calls hyperobjects. Jesse Graves' and William Wright's co-authored poetry collection, *Specter Mountain*, engages with not only the physical presence of the mountains, but their geologic temporalities as well. By considering deep time and thick time in Appalachia via these narrative poems, Graves and Wright reframe generalized and temporally localized understandings about Appalachia, thus emphasizing Appalachia's global importance. Additionally, Robert Gipe's illustrated novel *Weedeater* foregrounds one of the most globally significant, temporally complex productions in Appalachia: coal.

APPALACHIA AS A HYPEROBJECT

The Southern Appalachian Mountains are colloquially known as "The Smokies." On most days, especially in the early morning and after any rainstorm, clouds settle over the mountains, enveloping them in white, misty swaths. The visual continuity of both the foggy

clouds and extensive mountain peaks blur them into a single entity that seems to ripple on forever. Driving the Blue Ridge Parkway on a particularly foggy day with someone who has yet to witness this sight is a treat. In March 2023, I made the drive from Knoxville, Tennessee to Asheville, North Carolina with a close friend. The 1-40 interstate stretch between the two cities snakes along windy curves, climbs impossible concrete zeniths, and veers down steep inclines. As I drove along, I watched my friend frantically reach for his phone, attempting to capture the astounding sight between passing semi trucks and around steep curves. This was the highlight of the trip for him. He is originally from England, so the Appalachian Mountains and our drive through them was entirely unique to him. That I-40 span submerges drivers and passengers in the mountains. They literally drive through the mountains on roads made by blasting bits of them away. The Smokies reign on either side, passing in and out of view like shadows. This is a defining feature of the Southern Appalachian Mountain range. Perhaps this mysterious and captivating spectacle is responsible for the less than kind portrayal of what exists within the mountains, but Appalachia is no stranger to tropeish regional portrayals, as mentioned in other chapters, and fear about what aberrations, such as the Boojum (Appalachian Bigfoot), Skinwalkers, or even the Tailypo, might exist in the mountains themselves is entertained in many media outlets and the American consciousness.

During a living room horror movie fest in October of 2022, a few months before that Knoxville to Asheville trip, I watched the 2015 British film *The Descent* with the same friend. “It’s set in Appalachia,” he told me. I rolled my eyes, already assuming the film’s interpretation of Appalachia would be quite different from my own. The film features six women embarking on a spelunking adventure somewhere in Appalachia. In fact, to contextualize where the women are, directors provide B-roll footage of a single aerial shot spanning a mountain range and its

protruding forest canopy. During this, a caption reading “Appalachia” appears on the screen. I couldn’t contain my laughter.

“What?” my friend asked.

“That’s not Appalachia,” I said.

“What? How can you tell?”

“It’s the wrong kind of trees.”

What surprised me most about the film was not the deviant, inbred, Appalachian cave people who evolved, or maybe devolved, into horrific, cannibalistic beings who never see the light of day (though, of course, I could go on about the harmful stereotypes, some international perceptions of Appalachian people, etc.), but rather, the generalizing place reference to “Appalachia.” Now, I would refer to Appalachia thusly, and I have in this research, but I, and most Americans, would use more specific geographic markers such as “North Carolina,” “East Tennessee,” or even “Southwest Virginia.” What does it mean that British filmmakers collectively referred to “Appalachia” in such a general way when they meant a much more specific place? What would non-Appalachian viewers think of Appalachia after seeing that film?

Until this chapter, I have presented a clear distinction between Appalachia as a great entity versus a local place. However, I want to pause this and open up Appalachia as a concept to think about it both locally and non locally as well as consider what its geologic and geographic makeups might reveal about Appalachia’s role in the Anthropocene. Additionally, this approach investigates questions about temporality and how humans and nonhumans understand and experience time differently. In arguing Neo Appalachian literary narratives as ones of resistance and sustainability, it is imperative to outline how these narratives, in their approach, also feature

nonhumans and provide pathways for comparison across and beyond Appalachian sacrifice zones.

The way Appalachia is often perceived is relevant to Timothy Morton's hyperobject theory. Morton defines hyperobjects as "things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans" (1), and assigns them several important properties: "They are *viscous*," "they are *nonlocal*," "they involve profoundly different temporalities than the human-scale ones we are used to," "[they] occupy a high-dimensional phase space that results in their being invisible to humans for stretches of time," "and they exhibit their effects *interobjectively*." Reconsidering Appalachia as a hyperobject, one with deep time, complex temporalities, and pre and (potentially) post human existence unveils an Appalachian entity that supersedes not only assumptions about it as a place, but positions it as a hyperobject that also "poses numerous threats to individualism, nationalism, anti-intellectualism, racism, speciesism, anthropocentrism,...possibly even capitalism itself" (21). Though not all of these will be explored in depth in this chapter, Appalachia as a hyperobject is a new way to think about Appalachia's geography and its pre-human conceptualization as "Appalachia," as a way to combat the neoliberalism that creates sacrifice zones in the region. It also reveals New Materialist ideas about assemblages and affect that prevent the anthropocentric thinking Morton highlights above and speculates about what Appalachia might become.

Additionally, Morton's appeals to OOO are helpful in considering Appalachia as momentarily suspended from the subjectivities humans often attribute to the region. Although Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) is criticized by other theoretical frameworks and may appear a contradictory methodology for considering endurance narratives due to its emphasis on the nonhuman, it is helpful in considering Appalachia as more than a humancentric entity (Harman

592-593). By momentarily privileging Appalachia's nonhumans, especially the ones responsible for comprising its mountains, we gain a better understanding of Appalachia's materialities. However, this does not revoke Neo Appalachian literary narratives' endurance trends. Neo Appalachian literary narratives consider Appalachia as a hyperobject through their recognition of Appalachia's deep time and geologic processes, especially in the way these narratives simultaneously mesh, clash, and recognize multiple temporalities.

Although analysis of Appalachian humans and nonhuman entities has been explored thus far in this research, particular attention needs to be paid to Appalachia's geologies and temporalities. Critics such as Rob Nixon, Tom Bristow, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and David Farrier outline the importance of recognizing and understanding the multiple temporalities that run parallel, around, even within the linear temporality we understand as time. Additionally, both Nixon and Bristow focus on the local then extend local, place-based effects into a more widespread effect, an effect generated by persistent and ongoing temporalities. Chakrabarty reflects on history and historians' roles in the Anthropocene. He explains, "History exists on the assumption that our past, present, and future are connected by a certain continuity of human experience" (197). This is largely because, as Naomi Oreskes argues, "For centuries…scientists thought that earth processes were so large and powerful that nothing we could do could change them. This was a basic tenet of geological science: that human chronologies were insignificant compared with the vastness of geological time; that human activities were insignificant compared with the force of geological processes. And once they were. But no more" (qtd. in Chakrabarty 206). Geological time and human time have overlapped and deeply interfered with each other, forcing scholars to consider the two in new ways. These new approaches recognize humans' limited time and, in comparison with geologic time, insignificant and myopic ideas

about temporality and human histories. Because "the crisis of climate change is here with us and may exist as part of this planet for much longer than capitalism or long after capitalism has undergone many more historic mutations" (212), it becomes imperative to understand humans as what Chakrabarty calls us: geologic agents. In this, both humans and nonhumans become geologic agents and create real and lasting effects on global scales. Humans do this under the guise of profit, largely motivated by capital and comfort, and in Appalachia, this emerges in coal mining practices where humans physically alter the geologic nature of the mountains and convert extracted geologic entities/agents, in this case coal, into fuel. Coal's time is accelerated, and its burning promises lasting consequences far after its depletion. The amalgamation of geologic, environmental, and temporal factors begins to illuminate the cohesive effects of Appalachia and the results of its exploitative practices. These exploitations not only generate affective geographic assemblages but render Appalachia a hyperobject, one bound up in greater temporal intricacies, social practices, and fates.

It is not unusual for writers to engage with these complexities, and ecocriticism is one way to better understand this engagement. In fact, Bristow argues there is a relationship between ecocriticism and geopoetics and that "the discipline of geography can learn from the way poetry implicitly articulates the significance of the experience of place to human emotions" (5). As previously revealed, Appalachians share deep ties with place, with Appalachian geography, and with Appalachian homeplace. It is a defining feature of the genre, and it too articulates a connection between place and human emotion. This connection to place and the affective emotions place generates in Appalachian material homeplaces in Appalachian literature illustrates Bristow's point. Though Bristow proposes a geopoetics approach, his approach is readily applied to literary narratives generally, including poetry. Furthermore, because of the

evocative emotions many Contemporary authors of the literary narratives I have focused on thus far are well known for being multigenre writers, especially in the genres of fiction and poetry, their narratives, generally, represent the importance of place to human emotions. This emotion is generated by and depends not only on Appalachia's geography, but its geology as well, a feature largely responsible for its geography, for the mountains themselves. These place-specific narratives reveal human emotions but also concurrent nonhuman existence and affect within a greater Appalachian geography. Jesse Graves' and William Wright's 2018 poetry collection *Specter Mountain* exemplifies Bristow's arguments. Their poems directly address place as well as the geologies within Appalachia, and their poetic form structures lines so that temporalities clash, mountains talk, and speculative Appalachian futures emerge.

A collective effort, their co-authored collection neatly reflects the importance of considering Neo Appalachian literature as an ecology. This multi author style generates an ecology of thought, work, memory, and recognition. Graves and Wright created this work together, a collective effort to poetically imagine Appalachia, its temporalities, and its future. The first poem in Graves' and Wright's collection, "Prologue," directly acknowledges Appalachia's deep time by narrating its geologic creation. The speaker's tone oscillates between holy recitation and didactic instruction. The first line, "And it was said unto gravity," complicates traditional biblical rhetoric but still echoes its reverent tone. The first stanza (subtitled "A") is a kind of creation story, though it centers Earth's natural processes rather than any supreme being, revealing a non-anthropocentric entry into Earth's existence. The second stanza ("B"), somewhat pedantically describes each orogeny and geologic epoch that preceded the Appalachian Mountains. The speaker reveals:

One-half billion years ago, center of all

broken land masses
and in Paleozoic,
it sank and surfaced, sank and surfaced
as if in some ablution -
god of sediment and carbonate
then
Taconic orogeny
when the mass quickened and smashed
beneath its neighbor - North American craton
    then
subduction, and Appalachia rose
enfolded in a volcanic gown
    stippled in sandstone
and the valley's limestone (19-33)

Several important geologic factors and histories emerge in these lines. The poem discloses Appalachia's geologic origins, and though readers may have knowledge about these origins, this knowledge is far from contemporary associations with the Appalachian region. "[Sinking] and [surfacing]," "broken land masses," and "volcanic gown" exist conversely to the mountainous forms now so well known. Although their collection contains other poems in more narrative styles that reflect on Contemporary Appalachian homeplaces and lives, several of their poems mesh present, human temporalities with past and ongoing geologic ones. Ultimately, "To be in place, we learn, is to be in dialogue with the space one inhabits and to be sensitive to time past and time future. This is to be engaged in the fullest of senses" (21), Bristow reminds us.

"Prologue" is sensitive to time's pasts and futures and addresses Appalachia's "[massive distribution] in time and space" (Morton 1). And the repetition of the clause "sank and surfaced, sank and surfaced" enacts the sense of cyclic upheaval. The concentration on several orogenies mentioned in sequence also speeds up time. Lines plummet into each other quickly. Instead of slow time, the poem's form amalgamates several eras. Just as humans have affected geology's temporality, sped it up, so too do the succession of orogenies in this poem. And these orogenies were not unconstructive. They produced the Appalachian Mountains whose geology is responsible for place-based identities as well as represents geologic time. It is also significant that theirs is a physical, material distribution, something Morton fails to fully emphasize when he defines hyperobjects. The mountains' materiality renders them a hyperobject. Though Appalachia is also a hyperobject conceptually, the physical, material nature of the Appalachian Mountains is ever present, something Morton overlooks. Something Wright and Graves reveal. Considering the materiality of the mountains does not limit the wider idea of Appalachia as a hyperobject, rather, it foregrounds the mountains as the core, the very base of the hyperobject.

Additionally, when Neo Appalachian authors recognize geologic time, they often do so through the mountains. And the mountains represent a clear place-based attachment. The recognition is done through narrative form, and because the mountains are inseparable from Appalachia, these narratives highlight geologic time, in non-anthropocentric methods, while simultaneously foregrounding human/nonhuman relationships in more ecological ways. Farrier points out many scholars believe "that life, and what it means to be human, has always had a geologic aspect" (10). Even Jane Bennett relies on Vladimir Ivanovich Vernadsky's approach to "living matter," one where he "refuse[s] any sharp distinction between life and matter." Instead, Vernadsky defines organisms as "special, distributed forms of the common mineral,

water…[and] emphasizes the continuity of watery life and rocks, such as that evident in coal or fossil limestone reefs" (qtd. in Bennett 8). Farrier complicates this and the idea of humans as geologic agents by acknowledging we affect geology but are affected by it too. He describes body stones such as kidney or gall bladder stones that form within our bodies, thus "blurring the boundary between the biological and geological" (18). When these boundaries blur, so do temporalities, revealing a de-centered human consideration of time. The cyclical nature of bodies and bodily decay echoes fossil fuel life too. Though bodies/fuel may be depleted, their energy continues. Appalachian natural resources such as water and coal do not disappear when used up, they continue affecting Appalachian ecosystems, and, especially with the burning of coal, ecosystems well beyond Appalachia's borders. Coal-polluted air and water is inhaled, absorbed, and consumed by both humans and nonhumans in and beyond Appalachia. When we consider these long term and global effects, understanding Appalachia as a hyperobject is crucial.

In order to view duration, Morton investigates hyperobjects' temporalities through a quality he calls "temporal undulation." Temporal undulation is the massive distribution of time and space within hyperobjects (55-60). As one approaches a hyperobject, "more and more objects emerge…[they] envelop us, yet they are so massively distributed in time that they seem to taper off.…Time bends and flattens them" (55), literally. However, in Appalachia, capitalistic exploitations have regularly altered Appalachia's mountainous geographies, thus leaving both their shape and temporalities changed. When this occurs, temporalities clash. Strip mining and mountaintop removal eliminate large sections of the mountains, exposing hidden mountainous layers, destroying peaks, and preventing a natural temporality and existence for these mountaintops. Rob Nixon supplies a parallel example using petroleum. He explains, "In the background, we have the slow time of hydrocarbon's geological accretions and in the

foreground, the accelerated time of petro-modernity's primitive accumulation" (80). Coal too undergoes similar processes that reveal deep time in Appalachia. Furthermore, other physical remnants of geologic time exist and persist in Appalachian literature. "Chthonic," another of Graves' and Wright's poems, neatly illustrates this parallel. The poem's speaker is an Appalachian who reflects on both local and temporal effects that shape their life. They:

> sometimes fall into visions where the Earth
> opens, and far underground, beneath the shallow dead
> and the waterline, beneath any trace of life,
> the world is undone, aortal and blistering,
> glowing and darkening, the Hadean palpitant
> center. Then, quickly, like human utterance
> played backwards to clipped silence,
> the world sews its wound, and all the valleys
> and rivers lean again into their time-worn complexities,
> flourish and die, flourish and die (1-10).

The Earth is an agential entity here, one capable of "open[ing]" and revealing what exists below "the shallow dead." The biologic life referenced here, which readers later understand includes the speaker's grandfather and dog, reveals how much shorter and insignificant human/biologic life is when compared to Earth's, as does the phrase "human utterance." Graves and Wright equate human speech with "clipped silence," suggesting the brevity of human utterance within greater geologic temporalities. Later in the poem, the speaker remembers when their dog "bloodied his paws / and ripped roots asunder," that "[The dog] found what he'd been / after: a conch shell in perfect shape, a white spiral / with pink filigree," though "[They] were hundreds of miles from

any sea" (37-40). The dog finds a long-lasting relic from a much older geologic epoch, one where the Appalachian Mountains were still submerged in a briny cradle. The conch shell's discovery exposes Appalachia's complex temporalities and deep time. From the sea, the mountains emerged. Then, the swampy forests sank, biologic life died, and was compressed into layers of Earth. These processes do not stop or exist within or outside of human time. Instead, they explore what Farrier investigates and Astrida Neimanis and Rachel Loewen Walker "call 'thick time,' 'a transcorporeal stretching of past, present, and future'" (19). In this "thick time," our *familiarity* with deep time is recovered in the uncanny temporalities of the 'uneven and multivalent' present…a point of confluence between deep pasts and deep futures." When the speaker's dog unearths the conch shell, thick time possesses the speaker. A conch shell in the Appalachians is uncanny - it is familiar, but it does not belong. The somewhat deracinating discovery of the conch shell clearly exposes Appalachia's deep past, and, when considering Appalachia's future, perhaps it reveals a deep future too, one where, if climate catastrophe continues exacerbating coastline erosions and regional flooding, might rescape the land into a watery ecology where conch shelled sea snails thrive. Although finding a conch shell in an Appalachian forest might be a less ubiquitous experience, there is another geologic rock that no one would be surprised to find in Appalachia that reveals thick time: coal.

Coal is formed through decomposition and compression. The layers that compress coal into sedimentary rock consist of both geologic and biologic temporalities. This not only illustrates the nonhuman ecologies at work to create coal, but the collision of temporalities, yet another example of thick time. Additionally, coal is not visible from a mountain's surface, and coal mining practices physically and materially alter the mountains. Hence, the creation of the Appalachian Mountains themselves, what forms within them and what changes them, takes time.

Additionally, because only parts of the mountains are visible at any given moment, especially if thinking about internal and geologic visibility, their complicated temporalities exemplify what Morton terms "phasing." He explains, "Hyperobjects are *phased*: they occupy a high-dimensional phase space that makes them impossible to see as a whole on a regular three-dimensional human-scale basis." Although the Appalachian Mountain range is visible to humans, the actual mountain geologic constitution is not. We only see part of the expansive geologic constructions below them. The mountain geology exists well out of human sight, even when humans make every attempt to not only see, but extract what lies within it. In this way, the Appalachian Mountains are phased.

To explain phasing further, Morton discusses the weather as a hyperobject. The weather exists as a concept, but we only see phases of it: droughts, hurricanes, Kentucky's 2022 flash flooding (71-72). Appalachia's climate catastrophe inspired events are phases, as are its mountains. He even examines Percy Shelley's poem "Mont Blanc" where a mountain comes in and out of the speaker's view, just as the Southern Appalachians rise among and are hidden by mist and low clouds. Even coal is phased. Humans view its extracted form as final, but there is much more geological power at work within the mountains, as well as the temporalities these coal geologies depend upon, and burning coal exemplifies an interobjective purpose, also a defining hyperobject feature. Coal exists within other "abysses," and its geologic processes are not singular and free from generating affective effects, and it is this interobjectivity that exists in Appalachia. Appalachia is full of "entities" that "are interconnected in an interobjective system [Morton calls] the *mesh*" (81). Although Morton explicitly states this is not the same as an assemblage, one important facet of hyperobjects is "the existence of contradictory entities" (78) within them. Despite Morton's every attempt to prevent this conflation, it very much exists and is

relevant to his argument. Appalachian geographic assemblages (assemblages created by sacrifice zones) exist within Appalachia's geography, but when we consider Appalachia as a hyperobject, we better understand Appalachia's overall large-scale effects and consequences, especially what became and what came out of its sacrifice zones, while still recognizing its materiality (mountains, coal, other "objects") generate this. By overlooking the relationship between assemblages, especially geographically dependent ones, and hyperobjects, that one composes the other, Morton dismisses a significant relationship between humans and nonhumans. He even argues, "There is thus no top object that gives all objects value and meaning, and no bottom object to which they can be reduced," nearly mirroring Deleuze and Guatarri's rhizome definition[13]. Though they are material, their temporalities and geologies become rhizomatic.

For example, Appalachian generations are connected through kin communities and affective homeplaces in Appalachia's mountains, and the multigenerational narration style of many Neo Appalachian literary narratives creates this. These multigenerational stories are not neatly, linearly narrated. Instead, they move across and among generations, but they always rely on their mountain homeplaces. This represents a rhizomatic, affective mesh in Appalachia, one dependent on the mountains' materialities. Grandma places and the kin communities in them exist in these mountain spaces. Pancake's grandma places, the Goode-Brown homeplace, the Jewell family's beloved Canard County cannot be separated from the materiality of the mountains. Neither can homeplace be removed from these characters' experiences. Afterall, hyperobjects are "*viscous*" (1), they are "sticky," and Appalachia "sticks" to Appalachians; it

[13] Deleuze and Guatarri define a rhizome as "an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or central automation, defined solely by a circulation of states" (21).

tethers them to their homeplaces, to the mountains themselves, and "it never stops sticking to [them], no matter where [they] move on Earth" (48).

This viscosity reflects hyperobjects' nonlocality. To define this nonlocality, Morton relies on Einstein's "spooky action at a distance" theory, or the idea that "two entangled electrons can indeed appear to influence one another at a distance" (44). In this, a simultaneous and inexplicable reliant relationship emerges (45). The stickiness of homeplace does not abandon an Appalachian, nor do Appalachian occurrences remain inert to the Appalachian experience. Lace cannot shake strip mining's affect on her and her family's land when she leaves for college in the same way Dawn moves to Kingsport, TN, but cannot shake the ongoing troubles in her Eastern Kentucky home. An experience her daughter Nicolette shares. In a similar vein, Appalachian authors writing about and advocating for Appalachia from within the region and afar experience this and also exemplify this "spooky action at a distance." Their narrative protest for the region is ongoing, even when they are writing or advocating from outside Appalachia. They still generate and incite protest and action both within and outside the region. Even from a distance, their ecological tethering to their Appalachian homeplace affects them. Thus, considering these narratives as ecological and affective becomes critical. Morton claims not all hyperobjects succumb to Einstein's more granular theory, but his theory is a roadmap for understanding homeplace's affect, even when an Appalachian may no longer live in their generational homeplace. An affect between Appalachians and homeplace is generated, even from afar.

Furthermore, the viscosity of the Appalachian Mountains reveals they retain a different temporality to human time. The mountains become an object from which "time emanates…rather than being a continuum in which they float" (31). As Graves' and Wright's poems recognize, Appalachia's time is much different from human time. Morton aligns his theory of the

hyperobject through an appeal to OOO. The vitalities Appalachian geographies contain combine to create this greater hyperobject entity, as does Appalachia as a concept. Morton offers the Florida Everglades as an example of a hyperobject. He explains, "The Florida Everglades have lasted for about five thousand years. Some call them *Nature* because that is what they are used to. But beyond this, they are a hyperobject, massively distributed in time and space in ways that baffle humans and make interacting with them fascinating, disturbing, problematic, and wondrous" (58). Like the everglades, the Appalachian Mountains are often referred to as Nature, or if one is in the mountains, as one being "in Nature," but, to Morton's point, if one were to stop and consider the mountains, it's difficult to truly understand their scale, their temporalities, and their ecologies. Sure someone can glance at a photograph of the Smokies and think they're seeing something collective, but it's difficult to actually fathom the Appalachian Mountains. Most mainstream photographs of the Appalachian Mountains, especially the Smokies, attempt to portray a kind of "pristine" Nature, but, as Morton reminds, "There is no 'pristine,' no Nature, only history." In his example, he cites Joe Trexler, an ecologist, who "argues that it's impossible to restore the Everglades to a condition they had fifty, one hundred, or one thousand years ago," and it is impossible to restore the Appalachian Mountains as well. Though tourists descend on the Appalachian Mountains during tourism seasons, especially during the fall when the foliage boasts captivating, changing colors, these tourists are far removed from the ecological devastation of the region. Instead, high frequented tourist areas mask opioid addicts, rerouted waterways, flooded lands beneath TVA dams, and ghost town coal mine sites where former mountain tops sit lacerated, exposed.

Though this visibility may be lacking, there still remains a strong association with Appalachia and coal, and though coal mines and surrounding areas are not Appalachia's only

sacrifice zones, they are largely responsible for other sacrifice zones. To use previous examples, many victims of the 2022 Kentucky floods blame poor coal mine closures and silt ponds for the consequential flooding, and Ann Pancake's characters fear yet another sediment-pond induced flood throughout her novel. Coal and its temporalities exist in the Appalachian Mountains, and though not all of the mountains in the range consist of coal, it is largely present in some. That said, Appalachia's coal production is dwindling, but, again, its long-term effects are not.

Robert Gipe's trilogy, as previously mentioned, exposes coal's ongoing consequences, subsequent sacrifice zones, and illustrates Appalachia as a hyperobject. His second book, *Weedeater*, closely engages with coal mining. An eponymous title, Weedeater, one of the main character's, is not blood kin to the Jewell family, a diversion from the familial, narrative arc the three illustrated novels produce. His narration interrupts the Jewell family's narrative, just as coal interrupts and influences their lives long after the family ceases to mine it. For three generations, the Jewell family and their Eastern Kentucky home are haunted by and affected by coal production. In *Trampoline*, Dawn and her Mamaw fight coal companies, and protest scenes actively drive the novel. In the beginning of the book, one man at a town meeting tries to convince people to believe what coal will do to the Earth. He "[talks] about the ozone layer, how there was holes in it and how [they] couldn't go on burning coal forever, that [they] needed to think about the future, about what [they are] leaving behind for our children" (12). This character expresses anxieties about not only Appalachia's future, but a global future, situating Appalachian industry as both local and nonlocal. Morton leans into Nixon's slow violence theory when he thinks about global futures, ones the character here fixates on as well. He contends:

> the ethical and political choices become much clearer and less diverse when we begin to think of pollution and global warming and radiation as effects of hyperobjects instead of

> flows or processes that can be managed. These flows are often shunted to some less powerful group's backyard…. Rob Nixon calls this the *slow violence* of ecological oppression. It is helpful to think of global warming as something like an ultra slow motion nuclear bomb. The incremental effects are almost invisible, until an island disappears underwater. Poor people…perceive the ecological emergency not as degrading an aesthetic picture such as *world* but as an accumulation of violence that nibbles at them directly. (125)

Coal mining's slow violence directly affects the local characters in Gipe's novels, but they remain aware of its nonlocal, global effects too, and, as Morton mentions, this violence nibbles, it haunts, it affects. When Dawn and her Mamaw leave the town meeting, Dawn describes seeing a "road [that] wound past brokedown coal camp houses pressed against the blacktop, past the pipes and belts and rows of lights of the processing plant, past wide spots puddled in gray water, places that weren't anything anymore, weren't nature, weren't human, just places left behind" (39) on their drive home, just before they begin ascending the mountain. This human/nonhuman conundrum Dawn does not quite articulate mirrors the uncanniness of Graves' and Wright's speaker finding a conch shell. However, instead of past temporalities, Dawn's statement exhibits future ones. Her former home and surrounding areas have become, "places that weren't anything anymore, weren't nature, weren't human." Dawn struggles to find the words to describe the near posthuman landscape she finds herself in, a landscape far from the smoky visage of the mountains on a cloudy day. For Morton, hyperobjects present something new. He writes, "as we enter the time of hyperobjects, Nature disappears and all the modern certainties that seemed to accompany it. What remains is a vastly more complex situation that is uncanny and intimate at the same time" (130). Dawn's description of the left behind coal mine is intimate yet uncanny. A

quick overview of the Appalachians' picturesque landscapes would not adequately frame this discarded mining camp, many of which exist today. The human constructions blend into "Nature," creating something else entirely, something that meshes and fuses human and nonhuman temporalities. As Caracciolo suggests:

> Our species is deeply intertwined with the nonhuman realities of geology, the climate, and the biological history of life on Earth. We are reliant on them—for instance, by burning fuels created by the decomposition of organisms millions of years before our evolutionary ancestors took their first, hesitant steps on this planet. But we (and certainly some of us more than others) have also developed technologies that are capable of changing these nonhuman realities fundamentally, typically in ways that bring about widespread harm and devastation. (11)

Coal mining is one such technology. It devastates the local and the nonlocal, creates Appalachian sacrifice zones, and permanently disrupts geologic temporalities. In Dawn's description, she inadvertently, "realize[s] that nonhuman entities exist that are incomparably more vast and powerful than we are, and that our reality is caught in them" (130).

Weedeater, in Gipe's *Weedeater*, moves from job to job. He is impoverished, and his desperation for a job leads him toward coal mining. His intrusive narration in the Jewell family's narration complicates time, their generational continuity, and their relationship with coal. His narration represents coal's ongoing interruption and devastation on the Jewell family and other humans and nonhumans who live in and around their homeplace. One of Weedeater's jobs requires him to shovel coal that's fallen off a coal belt back onto the belt. When he first enters the mine, his descriptions of it exemplify the human/nonhuman collisions that arise in a coal mine:

> We stepped out into the hot damp of the July morning and into the cool dark of the mine, like stepping into the mouth of a giant fish just come out of the water. There were fans big as Granny's dinner table pushing air in one tunnel, pushing it out another. Cables snaked in and out of there, cable thick as a child's arm, carrying juice to run the equipment. The walls of the mine, called ribs, were solid coal. Cutting machines ran loud as locomotives, steel toothbrushes with drill-bit bristles scrubbing the coal from the wall onto a belt. The belts rumbled and rattled on their supports, carrying coal out of the mine. The coal seam would rise and fall in height and so then would the top, which was rock, not coal. (98-99)

The human constructions deep in the mine are incongruent yet somehow concurrent. Weedeater relies on human centered similes and metaphors to even begin describing the scene. He attributes human qualities to both the human constructions as well as the natural ones, and in this way, exemplifies what Marco Caracciolo calls, "metaphorical expression [that] capture[s] the interconnectedness of things" (1). This interconnectivity is revealed "through the mediation of abstract form," in which "human and nonhuman realities converge" (1). Coal mining's human and nonhuman realities are grim, yet even the terminology for the mine walls, "ribs," and describing the cables as "thick as a child's arm," reveals the anthropocentric nature of coal mining. This attempt at description reveals the uncanniness of this scene. Furthermore, the visible physical alteration of the coal seam reveals the conflated temporalities that occur within the mine. Human temporality disrupts geologic temporality, thus revealing humans' role in the Anthropocene, a toxic one, as well as Appalachia's contributions to geologic and temporal disruptions. Weedeater's narration, though not quite deracinating, does introduce a kind of interlocutor. Though the Jewell family no longer partakes in the physical act of mining,

Weedeater and other locals do. They cannot escape the messy temporalities of coal. Dawn sees these as she drives up the mountains; Weedeater describes them from within the mountain itself. This narrative halt mirrors the secondary temporality running against the Jewell family: the mountain's. When these clash in moments like Dawn's description of the mine's exterior and Weedeater's description of its interior, the mountains become less recognizable, more uncanny.

Amitav Ghosh provides a way to understand the uncanny's role in climate catastrophe within the Anthropocene. He explains "that the environmental uncanny is not the same as the uncanniness of the supernatural: it is different precisely because it pertains to nonhuman forces and beings" (32). His definition of the nonhuman includes literary characters and fiction. "The ghosts of literary fiction are not human…, of course, but they are certainly represented as projections of humans who were once alive" (32), he explains. These literary ghosts and projections provide pathways for humans to better understand and engage with climate catastrophe, and these literary projections readily emerge in Neo Appalachian literary narratives. Caracciolo further emphasizes the importance of narrative form and econarratological texts. He argues:

> Form provides aesthetic distance from humankind's predicament: through metaphor and imagery, the abstraction of literary form appeases, temporarily, the anxiety of living in times marked by radical, human-induced changes to ecosystems. At the same time, form brings out the vast "fabric" of interconnection in which both humans and nonhumans are intrinsically caught up. Cultivating the imagination of form puts us in a position to apprehend…the complexity of humanity's implication in systems—of the climate, of the Earth's oceans and geological history—that culture has taught us to see as external and impervious to human activity. (2)

The fabrication of the truth in fiction does not remove it entirely from the fabric of the greater human story. Rather, it allows for a convergence between humans and nonhumans. In Gipe's trilogy, The Jewell family represents many real Appalachian families who have navigated deadly Kentucky coal mining and who continue to navigate a largely post-coal Kentucky, one now threatening the population with diseases of despair. Additionally, Weedeater's narrative form, narration from a non-Jewell family member, exposes even greater consequences and effects of coal in Appalachia. The human and nonhuman are caught up in a greater mesh, a destructive and calamitous one at that.

And this calamity extends well beyond Appalachia. Again, though Appalachian literature is regional, Neo Appalachian literature contemplates both place and the future of place and the world more generally. Ann Kingsolver considers the ways in which "Appalachians…are often depicted in popular culture as homogeneous and isolated, when the region has been engaged deeply with the global economy for centuries through extractive industries, which in turn brought together very diverse labor forces that have shaped the identity of the region" (2). She argues, "regional or place-based interdisciplinary studies can help us think about both space and time as contingent, socially constructed, and situated within power relations" (4). Despite the locality of Gipe's novels and Graves' and Wright's poetry, the geologic temporalities and neoliberal systems the region finds itself bound up in, extend beyond this regionality. Appalachia is not homogenous, and despite its seeming isolation, the ecologically exploitative systems working within it have large-scale and even global effects. It is these global effects that push Appalachia toward hyperobject status, and if Appalachia is a hyperobject, then what is its "lived conditions," and what is its future?

Perhaps Appalachia is on a trajectory similar to most other places suffering climate catastrophe's temporal effects. Morton puts hyperobjects into a greater temporal conversation, one he calls the Age of Asymmetry, which he defines thusly:

> It's called the Age of Asymmetry because within human understanding humans and nonhumans face one another equally matched. But this equality is not like the Classical phase. There is no Goldilocks feeling in the Great Acceleration era of the Anthropocene. The feeling is rather of the nonhuman out of control, withdrawn from total human access. We have even stopped calling nonhumans "materials." We know very well that they are not just materials-for (human production). We have stopped calling humans Spirit. Sure, humans have infinite inner space. But so do nonhumans. (172)

The human/nonhuman hierarchy is eradicated in the Age of Asymmetry. Nonhumans rule in this scenario. In fact, as hyperobjects suggest, humans cannot actually even fathom their capacity, despite conflicting temporalities and sometimes direct engagement with geologic and nonhuman temporalities. However, art, as Morton suggests, can assist in deconstructing this unfathomability because "art becomes a collaboration between humans and nonhumans" (174), and like Morton, Caracciolo too believes, "as a flexible macroform, narrative has an important role to play as humanity comes to terms with the devastating impact of large-scale industrialization on the planet" (3). The Appalachian creators explored thus far actively work toward utilizing narrative to engage with Appalachian sacrifice zones and reveal the nonhuman entities at work within these. In doing this, they highlight local effects and consequences as well as address Appalachia's lasting and global effects.

In the final poem in Graves' and Wright's collection, "Brother," the speaker once again considers time. The speaker laments:

this is a darkening,

too: the silver peach blossoms

laden by gravity and pesticides,

histories, stone and rust, bone and blood

and well before when these hills formed and stretched

higher than the Alps. The millennia rolled on

and shaped the rock that we now reshape

We choke all-time

for our single hour. (10-17)

The ecological future the speaker outlines here is a dark one. "We" bestows a collective blame for these actions on humanity. For many years, as Chakrabarty points out, "Geological time and the chronology of human histories remained unrelated" (208), but no more. Humans and their histories "choke all-time / for [their] single hour," a minute era against geologic history, and perhaps more significant than this, "all-time" is affected. Human temporality and nonhuman temporality clash in these lines. Wright and Graves collide temporalities at the line break. Again, humans become geologic agents, reshaping the rock that millennia shaped (Graves and Wright 15-16). Humans negatively biologically affect the world, too, Appalachia specifically, in this case. The flora and fauna, the stone and rust are destroyed in humanity's wake as well. Graves and Wright expose human responsibility for destruction in and of the Appalachian Mountains, but the comparison and contextualization against the Alps extends this destruction beyond the local. In the Anthropocene, the destruction of Appalachia's mountains, and therefore Appalachia as a region, is just as at risk as human life as we know it.

Furthermore, Gipe's final novel in his trilogy, *Pop*, provides another kind of uncanny, temporal acknowledgement that supersedes human temporality. This novel focuses on Nicolette, the third generation of the Jewell family the trilogy follows. As a young Appalachian, Nicolette pursues culinary arts, and she develops a soda company that relies on local ingredients for flavoring. She opens a factory and employs local Appalachians. She devises ways to reinvest in a new Appalachia, a post-coal, post-industrial, opioid crisis ridden Appalachia. She works toward sustainable Appalachian futures. Near the end of the novel, Nicolette finds herself in Kentucky. The Jewell family has gathered to celebrate the Christmas holiday, and she is tasked with baking a stack cake, which is a traditional Appalachian cake consisting of thin layers of lightly battered cakes stacked on top of each other and is a well-known regional dessert. Amidst the raucous family chaos, she tries to focus, and in doing so she recalls not only human lessons, but ecological and temporal ones as well. She recalls everything she's been taught, and she:

> [tries] to remember what [she's] been taught, [tries] to summon the power of three hundred and fifty million years, time [her] papaw Houston said it took to form [the Appalachians]. [Tries] to summon the power of days when continent slid over continent. Shallow seas sank ferny forests. Vegetation tumbled into knee-deep oceans. Vegetation settled. Vegetation pressed into layers. Season upon season. Layers compacted, seas dried, new trees, new seas, on and on a thousand times over. Mountains rose into plateau. Stack cake big as America. Rain came, running water cracked the rise, endless creeks split a laurel hell as they rushed down hillsides, etched the cake of stone and coal and dirt into a maze for buffalo, hellbender, trout. [Her] world scathed into being. Forests like icing, leprechaun-green, rose up and covered the cake, thick, verdant, fragrant with pine and pork fat. (318)

This recollection reveals the proximity of her life and her family's life with Appalachia's as well as the interdependence each has on the other. Nicolette is with her kin community on their grandma place in Kentucky, a place they fought to save from MTR, a place that bears the visible desecration of the practice. She specifically acknowledges coal by inadvertently referencing the human-caused destruction in the region, a lingering effect her family continues grappling with, but she also recalls temporalities she cannot actually remember or know. Like the intricate layers in an Appalachian stack cake, the processes in the Appalachian Mountains' formations reveal delicate temporalities that existed long before human ones. Biologic life became geologic life, which then lent itself again to biologic life. Nicolette's recollections present the "mesh" scholars such as Caracciolo identify, especially to combat the scala naturae many scholars put forth for many years (Caracciolo 14-15). In narrative form, Gipe "narrates the mesh" (Caracciolo), and in doing so presents a mesh that decenters human separation from other temporalities and nonhuman beings, even in thought.

The literary narratives discussed here become an ecological mesh. Poetry and fiction move toward a similar end goal: recognition of what Appalachia was, is, and might be. Their engagement with not only the lucrative, final fossil fuel phases but also their preoccupation with coal's past reveals an intricate melee of temporalities, ones intertwining human and nonhuman beings, geologic and material agents rendering Appalachia a hyperobject.

Appalachia's near post coal status does not excuse it from its devastating and global ecological consequences. However, Neo Appalachian literary narratives reveal efforts to not only recognize this damage but provide speculative ideas about Appalachian futures. Nicolette relies on local ingredients to generate local business; Graves' and Wright's speakers recognize deep time and deep pasts with an eye toward long futures. These narratives are narratives about

Appalachian endurance. Though the past cannot be changed, the future might still be, and Appalachia's role in the Anthropocene might be better defined as one where Appalachians work toward regional, ecological, and temporal preservation. An Appalachia that continues as a hyperobject, a material presence that exists hopefully and permanently, for now, as a sight that continues instilling awe and admiration in anyone who drives through or past them, as mountains rising above the clouds. As a hyperobject that affects Appalachians beyond Appalachia, the way I write for and about Appalachia, the way I am affected by my Johnson City, TN homeplace, even now, as I write and research from afar in my Brooklyn apartment. I cannot shake Appalachia's stickiness, uncanniness, nor its hyperobject urgency. In this way, I too contribute to an Appalachian ecological mesh through the narrative writing in this research. And it is my hope this research foregrounds Appalachian sustainability and hope for a brighter future, even in the time of hyperobjects.

CHAPTER V

EARTH

> "Appalachia can be a place of isolation - geographically, economically, linguistically, and culturally; boundaries between insiders and outsiders are clear and felt. For queers in the region, being made to feel like an outsider - suspicious - in the context of insiderness creates a certain kind of alienation and loneliness" (2).
>
> -Hillery Glasby, Sherrie Gradin, and Rachael Ryerson

EARTH ABSTRACT

In Appalachia, associations with "strangeness" are nothing new. In fact, as Silas House points out, there's a dialectic word for things that are a little off, a little unnatural, a little strange: "quare," a derivative of "queer." "Quareness" as a descriptor not only references out of the ordinary or off the beaten path, it also colloquially refers to Queer folx. In Neo Appalachian narratives, "quareness" is becoming more and more common. But it is not simply an inclusion of LGBTQIA+ awareness, characters, etc. This trend addresses queerness within the context of what Donna Haraway calls "worlding with," a way of living that foregrounds nonhuman beings with humans, a methodology for disrupting ecologically destructive narratives and practices in Appalachia and foregrounding ecological "safe spaces" for quare folx. In Neo Appalachian narratives, quareness and worlding with become a protest against these devastating practices, and they represent a shift toward eco-Appalachian literary engagement via ecological safe spaces.

APPALACHIAN ECOLOGICAL SAFE SPACES

In August of 2023, I met a friend at a little bookshop in New York City's East Village. It was nearing one hundred degrees Fahrenheit. Everything sweltered. I entered the store drenched from the rush hour sidewalk push of bodies into bodies and the two-train transfer route from

Brooklyn to Manhattan. My lungs welcomed the air conditioned blast of air when I passed through the front door. After some light conversation, my friend and I began browsing books. I left that evening with a copy of Barbara Kingsolver's Pulitzer Prize winning novel *Demon Copperhead*. The next day, when I began reading, I left my Brooklyn apartment and found myself in all the places I'd known so well throughout my formative years: my uncle's Southwest, Virginia farm, Devil's Bathtub swimming hole, the rural stretches of road outside my Johnson City, Tennessee hometown. But instead of feeling like I had returned to my childhood, I felt as though I had stepped in the present day Appalachia. This is a place haunted by its pasts but also working to navigate complicated futures. Kingsolver's devastating novel highlights Appalachia's most contemporary and pressing issues as well as the simultaneity of its lingering past and the threat it poses to Appalachia's future in the Anthropocene.

Demon Copperhead is very much a Neo Appalachian narrative, and it mirrors issues Madeline ffitch tackles in her novel *Stay and Fight*. These two narratives, both published after 2020, engage more directly with Appalachia now than even pre-2020s publications. Both authors are activists, working to portray not only contemporary Appalachia more accurately, but to fight the systems rendering the region exploited, stereotyped, and stigmatized. They recognize the ecological and social damage extractive industries wreak on the region and acknowledge marginalized Appalachian people, and within this, they create complex characters who struggle under the weight of the past while also working for brighter Appalachian futures in the Anthropocene, characters who feel most at home in rural Appalachian spaces, and characters who are most themselves in these spaces. Furthermore, these novels explicitly confront LGBTQIA+ issues and exclusion in Appalachia.

These narratives take up these issues via their LGBTQIA+ characters, a marginalized group in Appalachian narratives. Because their narratives foreground Appalachian natural spaces, an important regional characteristic of the literature, they reveal ecological safe spaces for Queer Appalachians, spaces where these Appalachians live and thrive, removed from the legal and social discrimination they often face in other spaces. In these instances, when queer characters are forced out of or are compelled to escape society, they find themselves in natural spaces. These spaces are more rural and wooded – areas where the Earth is yet to be entirely maimed by exploitative practices. LGBTQIA+ characters enter ecological "safe spaces" where they subvert and counter societal expectations and dominant narratives about Queer Appalachians and readily engage with Haraway's "worlding with" way of existing. They reveal current authorial engagement in protesting draconian laws and Appalachian stereotypes. Because these spaces are often in wooded locales in these narratives, "worlding with" occurs. In this way, the concept of Earth as a whole entity in Appalachia emerges. The work of these narratives follows in line with ecofeminist theories about Gaia. In this theory, Earth is a massive organism in which all things are connected. According to Rosi Braidotti, "Ecofeminism approaches the earth as Gaia, a self-organizing living organism based on symbiotic connections" (86). Understanding earth in this way "emphasizes the sacredness of life and the integrity of all living organisms and aims at healing the earth from patriarchal violence, instrumental rationality, and capitalist and colonial eco-cide." Humans and nonhuman actants collectively work as a safe harbor against exploitation. These spaces are not always exclusive, but when they are occupied by queer folx escaping an exclusive society, they become ecological safe spaces that cultivate protest and redefine Appalachia.

These ecological safe spaces do not perpetuate the "rugged mountaineer" stereotype, rather, they actively work as safe spaces that foreground queerness and ecological preservation, both often sites for hetero-driven destruction. Catriona Sandilands[14] and Bruce Erickson call for a queer ecology, one tasked with "prob[ing] the intersections of sex and nature with an eye to developing a sexual politics that more clearly includes considerations of the natural world" (5). Many external Appalachian stereotypes and assumptions see Appalachia as queer exclusive, and though there are some who believe this, it is important to consider Appalachia within Sandilands and Erickson's larger question: "What does it mean that ideas, spaces, and practices designated as 'nature' are often so vigorously defended against queers in a society in which that very nature is increasingly degraded and exploited?" (5). This conceptualization of nature and its destruction is deeply persistent in Appalachia, especially given Appalachia's sacrifice zones dependent on Earth collectively (coal, damming, deforestation). These sacrifice zones suffer ecological damage, and the queer folx in them suffer ostracization.

Haraway contests the term "Anthropocene" because it "relies too much on what should be an 'unthinkable' theory of relations, namely the old one of bounded utilitarian individualism – preexisting units in competition relations that take up all the air in the atmosphere" (49). She instead offers the term "Chthulucene" which she claims better describes "ongoing temporality that resists figuration and dating" (51), and, "unlike either the Anthropocene or the Capitalocene, the Chthulucene is made up of ongoing multispecies stories and practices of becoming-with in times that remain at stake, in precarious times" (55). Ultimately, for Haraway, reconceptualizing the Anthropocene as the Chthulucene reminds us "we are at stake to each other…human beings

[14]Catriona Sandilands co-published the collection cited here, *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, under the moniker Catriona Sandilands-Mortimer. The latter is used in the full citation information in this chapter's bibliography.

are not the only important actors in the Chthulucene, with all other beings able simply to react. The order is reknitted: human beings are with and of the earth, and the biotic and abiotic powers of this earth are the main story." Although Haraway's argument naming the current epoch as the Chthulucene is compelling, renaming it thusly does, in fact, lessen the human-caused and human-endured consequences of the Anthropocene. Appalachians suffer in sacrifice zones created by other people, and so too do nonhumans. It is important to place blame where it belongs, and, in this case, it is on humans, thus emphasizing the need for the term Anthropocene, perhaps not only geologically but socially as well. Changing Anthropocene removes responsibility from patriarchal decisions that render queer and ecological spaces as "less than." Humans harm marginalized humans in the Anthropocene too. Her arguments for considering other beings as actants, however, are not only valid, but helpful in thinking about nonhuman hierarchies and, as she mentions, biotic and abiotic beings as actants, ones that very much arise and produce affect in *Stay and Fight* and *Demon Copperhead*.

ffitch's novel *Stay and Fight* features an argumentative and outsider "found" family. The novel begins with a character named Helen retelling how she arrived in Appalachia. She moves from Seattle to Appalachian Ohio at her boyfriend's, who soon becomes an ex, behest. He convinces Helen to use inherited money to buy land in the Southeast because "a person can[not] expect to buy land in the Northwest at [current] prices" and "in the Southeast, you can get land cheap" (4). Helen quickly finds herself alone on several acres "surrounded by coal company land" (5), and in order to survive, she begins a vast homesteading project, supplemented only by the little tree-cutting work a one-man tree removal company, run by a local vagabond named Rudy, provides. Karen and Lily, a couple, check on Helen periodically during her first winter. Karen and Lily live on a Women's Land Trust, but when Lily gives birth to a boy, Perley, they

are forced to move. The Trust mirrors the quickly disappearing "Women's Lands" that were established as "Lesbian utopias" in the 1960s (Raphael). These lands "had complex ecological goals." These goals included "opening rural landscapes to women by transforming heterosexual relations of property ownership, ...withdrawing the land from patriarchal-capitalist agricultural production and reproduction, ...symbolically reinscribing the land with lesbian erotic presence, ... [and] creating a distinct lesbian 'public sphere' founded on both lesbian separatist and overtly ecological concerns" (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 28). These women's lands existed within yet apart from society, in natural spaces that allowed women to express their sexuality, in, ultimately, an ecological safe space. Perley's birth triggers a series of events that bind Helen, Karen, Lily, Rudy, and Perley together in the Appalachian woods, practicing a dying tradition of homesteading, fighting against a pipeline threatening their food and water sources, and creating a unique kind of Appalachian community in present-day Appalachia. ffitch's narrative combats societal expectations about how to exist on and with the Earth, raise a child, and stereotypes about who belongs in Appalachia. Like many other texts in this research, ffitch's novel is narrated through multiple perspectives. But unlike other texts, this family is not genetically related, rather it is found. This indicates a trend in New Appalachia. Homeplaces still exist, but they are becoming more community-created by Appalachians, both Appalachians who have lived in these homeplaces for multiple generations and Appalachian transplants who are new to the region. This is due to population growth in Southern Appalachia from 2010 to now ("Population and Age in Appalachia").

When Karen and Lily move off the Women's Land Trust, the novel engages more directly with a New Appalachia by centering queerness, community, ecological awareness, and protest. Karen and Lily's partnership models a contemporary and changing Queer Appalachia where

queer visibility is growing. Additionally, the group's homesteading methodologies are a way of what Donna Haraway calls "worlding with," a way to live more ecologically friendly, and a stark contrast to technologies and invasiveness in the name of progress. Even though the novel incorporates sacrifice zones, it also represents hope and actively protests exploitative systems in Appalachia. When Helen, Karen, and Lily begin building a home, they encounter countless trials. Their lack of homesteading knowledge leads to a barrage of incidents, including an infestation of wildlife in the home she, Karen, and Lily build, or attempt to build, from scratch. This creates animosity between the trio as well as leads to Perley's removal from the home by Child Protective Services (CPS).

Helen, Karen, and Lily's home sustains alternative living modes, modes that promote "worlding with" via string figures, which Haraway defines as similar to "stories…[that]... propose and enact patterns for participants to inhabit, somehow, on a vulnerable and wounded earth" (10) without disrupting other species' existences. Helen catalogs their homesteading stories in a binder she calls "The Best Practices Binder." This represents the group's attempt to world with. However, their worlding with undergoes lifestyle threats by those who do not live by the same conventions. Helen, Karen, and Lily's new home is not only snake-ridden, but it is surrounded by coal company land and is under a pipeline threat. Black rat snakes live in the home with the women and Perley, but they acknowledge the snakes are harmless and contribute to the local ecosystem by "[eating] mice and copperheads" (59). They live "off the grid," so to speak, and they create an ecological safe haven. Despite this effort to live peacefully with the snakes and other ecological life, removing them from society's judgment, these endeavors change when a snake bites Perley.

This incident is narrated by Karen and Helen, two women who care deeply for Perley but who have no legal rights to him. Despite this, they share in their concern for Perley's wellbeing and illustrate a found kin community. This found kin community is revealed in their overlapping narration. The narration also exposes their worlding with. Karen describes "a slick substance, some kind of rank defensive oil" the snake leaves when she pries it from Perley's face (119). The residue covers Karen, baptizing her in the snake's final retaliation. Human and nonhuman converge. Conversely, Helen's description attributes humanness to the snake. "Perley's wound looked like a human bite," she says. The permanence of the bite in Perley's flesh reveals the impact of the nonhuman on the human as well as the affects one leaves on the other. Perley is marked, and the snake's teeth, as Karen points out, initially remain embedded in his cheek (118). Human and nonhuman blend into each other, blurring the lines between the two and eradicating the human/nonhuman hierarchy. But this event is consequential.

This catalyzes not only a mission to drive out the rat snakes but comes back to haunt the family when (CPS) arrives and places Perley in their custody, citing the snake bite as one of several reasons for Perley's removal. This places the family's way of life at odds with society's modern expectations, and though Karen and Lily's queerness is questioned throughout the novel, it is most investigated when Perley is taken into CPS custody. When Perley is removed, CPS refuses to acknowledge Karen as Perley's mother. When asked about the snake bite, Lily tells the woman from children's services that her partner is a nurse, so they did not take Perley to a doctor or hospital. "Your Partner?" (137), she asks. To which Lily responds, "My partner. My domestic partner…Perley's other mother." After a pause, the woman then asks, "But you are Perley's real mother?" (138). Karen's motherly autonomy is stripped in this interaction. She is not granted visitation rights to see Perley, nor is she acknowledged in any documentation as Perley's mother.

"They're being unfairly targeted for being lesbians," Helen tells an attorney, Aldi, who takes on the case. "Very hard to prove…And also technically legal," he responds. In their ecological safe space, Lilly and Karen are protected from this kind of discrimination, but they find themselves at the mercy of the state when their way of living is disrupted. Immediately after the event, Karen throws the Best Practices Binder in the creek on their homeplace (156). Their ecological safe space, their worlding with, and their stories are destroyed when Perley is removed.

Though this is not an Appalachia-specific occurrence, ffitch identifies Appalachia's general approach to queerness. On their homesteading property, their ecological and Earth-dependent safe space apart from society, Karen and Lily actively live and work against these homophobic actions. Off the property, though, when they are no longer worlding with, they suffer discrimination. Rebecca Eli-M Long discusses Appalachia's relationship and potential relationships with both queerness and disability. She connects Appalachia's perceived deviance to how Appalachians reinstate such ideas on marginalized Appalachian populations, and she outlines how scholars are engaging with this in new ways. "In the national imaginary," she writes, "Appalachia stands out as different, distinctive, even deviant – a trajectory of descriptions that have more recently pushed toward claiming 'queer' or 'quare.' While queer/quare has been used as a colloquialism for some time in Appalachia, scholars of the region are now beginning to connect it with LGBTQ+ politics and queer theory" (73). Similarly to disabilities studies' reclaiming of the word "crip" in "crip theory" (Kafer 13), Appalachian queer theorists and writers are embracing Appalachian "quare studies." This is a new trend, but recent publications such as Z. Zane McNeil's *Y'all Means All*, Hillery Gladsby, Sherrie Gradin, and Rachael Ryerson's *Storytelling in Queer Appalachia*, and Long's call to action reveal this trajectory. In Neo Appalachian literary narratives, this "quareness" is both embraced and dismissed, but in

nature spaces, the latter is lessened. By homesteading in a rural, within but apart from, ecological safe space place, ffitch's characters work against Appalachian narratives that exclude queer people. Queer erasure in Appalachia is nothing new, and many Appalachian states actively fight queer expression, as seen most recently in Tennessee's recent attempt to ban and criminalize drag performances (Helsel). However, in Karen and Lily's case, "the possibilities of queer desire for nature offer not just moments of pleasure, but…moments in which [people] can make the necessary connections between the policing of sexuality and the increasing destruction of nonhuman life" (Mortimer and Erickson 37). Their land is surrounded by coal company land. Both them and the Earth surrounding them face destruction at every turn. But ffitch's narrative provides queer visibility as well as reveals how Queer Appalachians world with in ecological safe spaces.

Kingsolver also addresses "quareness" and the ecological safe spaces it exists in. *Demon Copperhead* retells Dickens' classic novel *David Copperfield* with an Appalachian twist. Though her novel is not narrated via multiple perspectives because of her attempt to reproduce a modern-day Dickensian tale, shared affects and themes such as ecological tethering, homeplaces, and kin communities still emerge. Demon Copperhead, the main character, suffers a slew of Appalachian-specific tragedies, which highlight the contemporary issues in the region: the dope economy, failing farms, overloaded child protective services, post-coal community devastation, unemployment, etc. His childhood best friend, nicknamed Maggot, is one constant throughout the beginning of the novel, and though they grow apart in their teenage years, Demon accepts Maggot fully, and this acceptance and true self emerges when Demon and Maggot are in the woods, their own space separate and apart from their individual homes and communities. Maggot is an openly queer person in Appalachia, and this is not unseen or ignored by many other

characters in the novel, but when Demon and Maggot are in the woods, a small patch of land between Demon's and Maggot's homes, Maggot is his full self, separate and apart from discrimination.

One evening in their childhood, Demon's abusive stepfather, Stoner, forbids him to see Maggot. In an argument, Stoner turns to Demon's mother and denigrates her parenting abilities. "You sit here turning a blind eye while he runs around with that little queer next door" (34), he violently screams. Then he turns to Demon and asks, "Is that your plan, Demon? To grow up and be a f**?" (34). Stoner demands Demon's mother "tell [Demon]…he's not going back over there to play with the queer. Not tomorrow and not ever. Or there will be consequences" (35), and she complies. Demon calls this unforgivable, and the animosity an extreme hetero-male feels about a gay child is revealed. Stoner is tattooed, muscular, drives a motorcycle, and controls even the smallest parts of Demon's and his mother's lives. He stands in as the overtly hetero, Appalachian male, the ones people associate with Trump supporters, gun carriers, and other Appalachian extremist stereotypes. He despises queerness so much that he forbids his stepson to even associate with another child who has yet to come out at this point in the novel.

Stoner symbolizes a particular kind of Appalachian, one often produced by neoliberal systems. Adam Denney writes about his own experiences as a queer person in Appalachia and his encounters with people like Stoner, and he highlights the toxicity of what Stoner stands for. He explains:

> As a region where poverty is rampant, ecological resources are privatized, education is divested, and where White supremacy and xenophobia are rampant, the effects take a toll on the body of Appalachia. As both neoliberal and alt-right players control the remotes, the Appalachian body, both human and nonhuman becomes a toxic reservoir composed of

> waste and neglect orchestrated via the insatiable appetite for reproducing a depressed and dependent Appalachian. (63)

Denny's discussion of the alt-right and neoliberal collision in Appalachia reveals not only the human, but also the nonhuman effects of such systems and thought patterns. Existing in this is crushing for queer Appalachians, but this is subverted by the ecological safe spaces Neo Appalachian literary narratives construct and reveal. Demon's and Maggot's homes become a kind of prison in these structures, but when they are in the wooded areas between the two trailers their families live in, their world is an imaginative playground where Maggot is his most true self and Demon avoids Stoner's homophobia and toxic masculinity. The Earth provides acceptance.

Even as teenagers, Maggot retreats to this space when his grandfather and caregiver, Mr. Peggot, dies. Demon finds Maggot "down by the creek, playground of [their] mighty boyhoods. Squatting in the dark, side-arming rocks towards the water" (356) before Mr. Peggot's funeral. Maggot breaks down in this place, gives himself over to the grief of his devastating loss. In this space, Maggot's vulnerability materializes, mirroring the vulnerability in his childhood that existed freely in the outdoor place between his and Demon's homes. This is not the case in non-ecological spaces, as Maggot is often perceived as deviant, strange, even "quare" by others. In this outdoor place though, Maggot and Demon escape from rigid and exclusionary spaces. Here, they have the chance to world with, exist with other Earth nonhuman entities and express themselves fully.

Appalachia and its relationship with queerness is complicated. In his 2014 keynote address at the Annual Appalachian Studies Conference, Silas House, an openly gay man, poet, and author, addresses Appalachian "quareness." In Appalachia, "quare" is a colloquial term meaning strange or different. House explains, "As a people, Appalachians have always had

'quare' folks amongst them. Always, these people were only accepted with some wariness…Anyone who is different – whether it be by their origins, their actions, their race, or their orientation – has always been accepted only with a fair amount of suspicion" (qtd. in Glasby et al. 4). However, it "is a kind of halfway acceptance, and an acceptance that demands the quare not be too awfully visible…Homophobia lurks in the hollers, and slithers along the ridges of Appalachia." These "hollers" and "ridges" are ecological safe spaces, despite the negative associations they garner from some Appalachians. House emphasizes the existence of Queer Appalachians, and he also addresses other marginalized groups, "anyone who is different." This is changing though, even if slowly, in Appalachia.

Though the ecological safe spaces ffitch's and Kingsolver's characters reside in are not limited to Appalachia, of course, they are significant due to the rural spaces Appalachia retains, even if at one point they were industrially developed, like the abandoned coal mine camps in Demon's and Maggot's Lee County home and the coal company owned land surrounding Helen's. Outside, in these Earth-dependent sacrifice zones, characters in these narratives not only enter into an ecological safe space, they world with. Instead of perpetuating the capitalistically destructive practices, they find ways to exist on the Earth more peacefully. However, as is the case in both narratives, these spaces are always under threat, and retaining them often means buying into and suffering the cruel optimism of these capitalistic systems that suffocate so many Appalachians for the comforts of others.

To earn the money to "modernize" Helen, Karen, and Lily's home enough for Perley's return, Karen joins a pipelining "rat crew" (a non-union crew) to make enough money to install the septic tank CPS lists as a "must" in order for Perley to live with Karen and Lily again. The rat crew conducts various jobs for pipelining companies, and the looming pipeline in the novel

becomes much more real when Karen's livelihood suddenly depends on it because there are no other comparable jobs with high salaries in the region. Just as Jimmy Make's best friend is driven to "scabbing" to afford medical insurance in *Strange as This Weather Has Been*, Karen is also subject to pipelining's cruelly optimistic financial promise. In one scene, Grandma Barlow tells the social worker her daughter took a pipelining job. She sighs and says her daughter is "pipelining up north…Where all [the local] kids seem to end up. This land here is like a funnel. Far from home…" (162). And though Appalachians end up far from home, a helicopter continuously flies over Helen's land, and townspeople whisper it is the pipeline company looking for places to drill. It gets closer and closer. When Lily realizes Karen's choice to leave, she reflects:

> Where [does] anyone in our hills go when they [run] out of options? They [join] one of the crews in the oil fields up north, drilling or pipelining or wherever the jobs were that season. They [call] them rat crews because they [aren't] union and they'd do just about anything to get the job done. They [live] in one of the camps that were all men, the boomtowns that sprang up, and they made money and sometimes they [get] sick or [have] accidents or [do] things they [aren't] proud of, and people [say] it is dangerous to be a woman up there, but woman or man, they always [make] money. They always [come] home with money. (192)

Essentially, in Appalachia, the employment well has run dry. There is still an expectation to maintain and live within certain societal standards, such as the ones CPS mandates for families, but there is little to no help for people who try to subvert government aid or fend for themselves. Though Helen, Karen, and Lily's homesteading act is an extreme example, Karen's eventual forced exodus to find work mirrors the lives of many Appalachians. Though coal and timber

industries were robust and booming at one point, they've long been stripped from the region, just like the forests for timber, just like the mountaintops for coal, yet the environmental and economic exploitation persists. As Vandana Shiva argues, "In the corporate perspective, only that which makes profit is of value" (31), and once profits subside, either because they can be made elsewhere or because of laws, such as the one establishing the Great Smoky Mountains National Park creation, corporations move elsewhere, leaving devastation and destitution in their wake. Shiva surmises Rosa Luxemburg's poignant claim that "colonialism is a constant, necessary condition for capitalist growth: without colonies, capital accumulation would grind to a halt" (71). Though Appalachia is not a "colony" as one might typically understand, it is, again, as Zackary Vernon claims, one of several, "internal resource colonies [of the United States]" which often occupy the American South and Appalachia (8). Though the resource extraction from these is lucrative, the majority of this wealth is earned by people outside of these regions. And once the resources are extracted, these places are abandoned, leaving the locals behind in their wake. Thus Appalachia's exploitation not only engenders sacrifice zones, but leaves them riddled with environmental and economic damage. The timber barons brought promises of riches and jobs. Coal companies came with the fervency of Texas oilers. Their wealthy ventures, generated by environmental and natural resource commodities ripe for exploitation, quickly evaporated. Now, and horrifically ironically so, Appalachians must often seek jobs and wealth elsewhere, and, as seen in Karen's example, these pursuits often lift them out of one American sacrifice zone and into another. "'Development' as capital accumulation and the commercialization of the economy for the generation of 'surplus'and profits thus involved in the reproduction of not only a particular form of wealth creation, but also the associated creation of poverty and dispossession" (71), Shiva reveals. This vicious cycle traps many Appalachians in sacrifice zones, even those

living and working outside of the region. And when Karen leaves, she finds herself not only away from her Appalachian home, but even further from her ecological safe space.

Like the sacrifice zones Karen finds herself navigating, Demon also tragically finds himself enveloped in Appalachia's most devastating sacrifice zone, one that affects the corporeality of Appalachians: the opioid crisis. Appalachia's dope economy is thriving, but it is killing Appalachians. Mary Jewell Allen, a medical doctor, chronicles the deadly epidemic. She argues that "Appalachia…connotes two thoughts: a dying coal industry, and a thriving opioid culture," an ugly culture existing below Appalachia's concealing natural beauty (194). Shortly after the conversation with Stoner, Demon's mother overdoses. He is then placed into CPS which changes the trajectory of his life. These various foster homes engender unspeakable horrors that wreck Demon's childhood, and worse yet, his mother never retrieves him from foster care. When Miss Barks, a social worker, delivers the devastating news that Demon's mother is dead, he "[tells] her [he doesn't] believe her, but if it [is] true, then what did [his mother] die of?" (106). Miss Barks responds, "oxy," and Demon, narrating the story as an adult, writes, "Believe it or not, [he] had to ask. What's oxy?" (106).

Though this is Demon's first interaction with Appalachia's dope economy, it is far from his last. After a football injury in high school, a doctor prescribes Demon oxycontin, and this initiates Demon's downward spiral into addiction, into despair. Instead of earning a football scholarship, Demon remains in Lee County, Virginia and lives in squalor with his girlfriend. He loses everything, even his part time jobs. "Eventually [drug use] becomes your job, staving off the dopesickness for another day" (408), he says. "Then it becomes your God. Nobody ever wanted to join that church," but, like so many other Appalachians in post-coal towns, Demon finds himself a devout member of the diseases of despair congregation. Like Karen who assists

in building a pipeline directly threatening her Appalachian home and ecological safe space, Demon buys and sells oxy in an elaborate network of over prescribed doses and with friends who have also been overlooked in the system. Denney discusses this stay and suffer or go and thrive mentality. He argues, "the iron fists of a new postmodernity clutch [Appalachia] as more mountaintops are removed, more land is fracked, and more people migrate away" (63). What is left in Appalachia when it is left to rot? What can one do but leave? Though these depressing questions and circumstances continue, there is still active resistance to these and efforts to rewrite such narratives endure.

After seeing a pipeline trajectory map foreshadowing the pipeline running directly through her home, Karen abandons the rat crew and proceeds to blow up a pipelining site on her way back to Appalachian Ohio, on her way back home. When she arrives, Lily asks what they will do, and Karen simply says, "stay and fight." Similarly, Demon manages to detox from his drug use. He too stays and fights, but with an Appalachian based comic series that features an Appalachian hero saving Appalachians from coal catastrophes, oxy overdoses, and other harmful practices left in extractive industries' wakes. Karen and Demon become Appalachian protest symbols. They embrace their Appalachian ways of life and fight against the exploitative systems lingering in and actively harming Appalachians and the environment. By protecting the environment, they continue providing an outlet to "world with." The last pages of ffitch's novel feature Karen walking the woods on their property, only to run into Perley who takes long night walks through the woods to avoid his foster home. In their ecological safe space, mother and child are reunited. These ecological safe spaces embrace the strange, the "quare," the outcast and in return are not destroyed or dominated. Instead, a worlding with occurs. Human/nonhuman hierarchies are erased and the Earth as and full of agential beings emerges. An Earth with no

biologic hierarchies full of equal participants in human/nonhuman processes and existences materializes.

Though Haraway's ideas are somewhat speculative, they do provide narrative imaginings about an Earthly future, one where human/nonhuman hierarchies break down. Haraway privileges narrative in her theoretical arguments which is a testament to narrative power and storytelling's ability to engender social transformation. In an interview, ffitch herself expresses conscious concern with her own storytelling and the responsibility that comes with it. She says:

> A friend once talked about making post-apocalyptic art, meaning art that will hold up around a fire or in a gutted building the same way it could hold up in a more refined context. I am interested in making stories that acknowledge vitality, that reject the cultural paradigm of the modern malaise. ("History Doesn't Compartmentalize")

ffitch's novel rejects not only the "modern malaise," but it presents a different story, one more inclusive and ongoing, especially for LGBTQIA+ Appalachians. Similarly, Kingsolver set out to write "the great Appalachian novel" (Klein). She calls *Demon Copperhead* "[her] attempt to speak to people…[she wants] it to be a window and a mirror, as they say books can be." Kingsolver wants her novel "to be a window for [her] people to feel seen…but at the same time, to let people from elsewhere understand the complexity of [Appalachians' lives in Appalachia], the nuance of Appalachian culture, the value of [their] communities, the whole ecosystems of characters that [they] are – the bad and the good – and the ways that [they] take care of [themselves]...to be a conversation about that divide" (Klein), and she emphasizes that "[*Demon Copperhead*] is being read mostly by people who are not from [Appalachia]." Kingsolver's intentionality is obvious, and *Demon Copperhead* is a clear act of protest and a way of telling a more accurate story about the region today. Kingsolver's and ffitch's narratives join the rich

ecology of Neo Appalachian literary narratives and authors actively working as protest to regional stigmas and tropes. Instead of depending on and glorifying a past Appalachia, they feature Appalachia now and what it might become. The region's ecological damage is not separate and apart from their stories, but neither are Appalachians now, Appalachians with rich understanding of the environmental damage corporations wrought on the region. Kingsolver's and ffitch's engagement in social issues, especially Queer Appalachian experiences reveals their ongoing commitment to contributing to a robust ecology of knowledge.

Kingsolver's and ffitch's dedication to more accurately and contemporarily narrate and represent Appalachia mirrors other Neo Appalachian writers' endeavors. In this way, they contribute to the vital protest ecology generated by both their narratives and their commitment to Appalachian activism. In 2012, ffitch was arrested for chaining herself to two barrels to prevent oil and gas drilling waste injection into an Appalachian water site (Phillips), and protested the environmental damage the site would create. Her case generated much controversy, and many accused the local government of levying high fines to use her as an example. ffitch acted on behalf of Appalachia Resist, an Appalachian anti-fracking group (Stine). Despite significant fines from courts, ffitch continues her activism, even in narrative form in *Stay and Fight*. The title itself is a rallying cry for Appalachians, and her use of narrative exemplifies the role Neo Appalachian literature retains in not only protesting inaccurate portrayals of the region, but also reveals the ongoing sacrifice zones in Appalachia and the deeper connections between Appalachia and the greater Anthropocene. It does this via its engagement with corporate entities that exploit not only Appalachian land locally, but globally as well.

In concert with the other works discussed, ffitch's creative and real-world activism is an example of the ongoing Appalachian protest movement. As mentioned previously, President

Johnson's War on Poverty severely mischaracterized much of the region, and "many felt the region's story was being told by the wrong voices" (McCarroll and Harkins 9). As a response to this, Appalachians were encouraged "to tell their own stories and make their own films," thus creating organizations such as Appalshop which "operates a radio station, a theater, a public art gallery, a record label, a reproductive justice program, a community development program, and…an array of other initiatives" ("Who We Are") and works toward telling truer Appalachian stories. Even though The War on Poverty "paved the path for simplistic representations of Appalachia" it "also helped launch an organization dedicated to countering and complicating those narratives and giving voice to more people living in the region – to allow them to tell their own stories" (McCarroll and Harkins 9). ffitch and other Neo Appalachian writers engage in this protest, and by doing so, they not only lift voices often silenced through stereotypes, but they provide pathways for imagining better Appalachian Futures, inclusive, sustainable, and enduring futures.

Appalachia and its trajectory is precarious, but the region's Neo Appalachian literary narratives reveal an Appalachian eco-consciousness that works against external exploitation of the region. These narratives generate a literary ecology embedded within the real-world protests authors such as ffitch conduct in Appalachia. Both a literary and real "worlding with" is present in these Neo Appalachian literary narratives. Ultimately, these narratives recognize Appalachia's historic ecological exploitation and explore its lingering effects, yet actively challenge assumptions about Appalachia.

ffitch's and Kingsolver's narratives are reminders that New Appalachia exists and align more closely with what I identify Appalachia as today. The protest their narratives and they themselves generate affect well beyond the borders of Appalachia. That I can read and write

about their work from my Brooklyn apartment testifies to this. Theirs and others' ongoing efforts imagine brighter Appalachian futures, even among its historic devastation. This attests that the region is changing, that Appalachian humans and nonhumans are persevering, and that there is hope. A hope that persists in the region and beyond, a hope the reconstructs a New Appalachia, a hope engendering endurance and acceptance, and a hope encouraging Neo Appalachian literary productions. Productions I recognize as reminiscent of my own Appalachian experiences.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

> "Whatever happens next for Appalachia, there are people here who deserve…moments of liberation from their pain and shame, to see their lives and history as something other than an incoherent parade of destruction and wretchedness."
>
> -Elizabeth Catte

In 2013, I spent the summer waiting tables in Pigeon Forge, TN, a small town that is an epicenter of tourism. Every year, Exit 407 off I-40, the main way into Pigeon Forge, backs up for hours, and families in bumper to bumper cars begin their vacations by navigating "The Parkway" that runs through Sevier County and passes through the towns of Kodak, Sevierville, Pigeon Forge, and Gatlinburg. The Parkway becomes "The Spur" on the way from Pigeon Forge to Gatlinburg, and The Spur boasts one of several "Welcome to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park" signs surrounding the national park. The Great Smoky Mountain National Park hosts up to ten million visitors annually (Bradley), and when they're not in the park, they're often in one of its neighboring towns.

Ornate dinner theaters, advertisements for authentic moonshine tastings, zip lining adventures, horseback riding escapades, chain restaurant meal deals, a near-to-scale immersive Titanic museum experience, a Hollywood wax museum complete with a raging rendition of King Kong topping its building, every Ripley's venue, and, of course, Dollywood signs pepper the parkway's path. Dollywood alone welcomes over two million annual visitors (*Dollywood*). There is an eerie and evident commodification and fascination with this vibrant area. Dolly Parton is a cultural icon, and the flashy, gaudy, over-the-top tourist attractions promise fun for all ages. Caricatures of overalled, toothless cartoons front many buildings, and "y'all come back nows"

line most exits. But, beyond this commercialized chaos, the Smoky Mountain National Park, brimming with sprawling forests and high peaks, looms, void of most of modern life's conveniences, a stark juxtaposition to the parkway.

On a drive or hike through the Smoky Mountain National Park, it is easy to imagine much of the forests as ancient, pristine, untouched, especially if visitors arrive via exit 407's carnage. The sprawling, tree topped-peaks certainly connote older conceptions of "nature," of a pre-developed Earth, and though the main parkways gridlock with tourist caravans during the summer and fall, a few miles into the park's less popular hiking trails leaves one feeling much like they're in a Thoreauian world. But, many of the trees, like the flashy tourist attractions just outside the park, are relatively new (in forest temporality, at least). These new growth forests sprouted after the timber barons logged most of the mountains, actions halted when Calvin Coolidge signed legislation establishing the Great Smoky Mountain National Park in 1926 (Work). Although officials did not establish it as a national park until 1934, it continued to expand via land acquisition before and long after this date. Today, the park covers 800 square miles across Tennessee and North Carolina and remains the most visited national park in the United States (Bradley VII).

Though the logging industry no longer promises Appalachians in this area lumber jobs, the tourist industry does, but these jobs are often low-paying, entry level jobs without much opportunity for growth. Despite this, many Appalachians choose to stay in the region, though increasing rent prices are pushing more and more out of their generational homes. The historic exploitation of Appalachia continues with the simultaneity of its development. Furthermore, protest efforts to preserve Appalachian landscapes persevere, even among the sometimes stagnant employment opportunities and continued ecological destruction. For example, the

Mountain Valley Pipeline's tumultuous and combatted construction continues in several Southern Appalachian areas, and the dope economy exercises devastating consequences, but so too do protest efforts to prevent both ecological and corporeal damage. The pipeline's precarious track record of breaching "hundreds of clean water violations" (Milman), leaves Appalachians wondering: what comes next? Even after the TVA's damming projects and poorly regulated mine closures that leave their toxic waste in Appalachian waterways. In order to even begin laying pipeline, hundreds of trees must be cut and ground violently dug. Pipeliners from both Appalachia and elsewhere often desecrate the land in these efforts, mirroring the cruel optimism associated with job employment many mining communities faced: you can find a job, but the cost might be your life. Furthermore, the slow violence associated with these occupations (black lung and other diseases of despair often induced by poor labor conditions) position many unemployed workers as fodder for Appalachia's opioid crisis.

This desecration carries irony as well, especially given Appalachia's geographic association with "nature" and "natural" spaces, which calls into question what, ultimately, these words might be understood to mean, especially when thinking about Appalachians themselves and who these spaces are for, especially if they're now host to a slew of tourist traps and kitschy adverts. Appalachian inbred tropes, sightings of mysterious beings, and rampant ghost stories about skinwalkers and the Boojum (the Appalachian version of Big Foot) circulate social media platforms like TikTok, and so too do tellings about hostility to outsiders and people who do not easily fit into assumptive ideas about Appalachians, largely those that perpetuate White poverty narratives. Neo Appalachian narratives, though, tell different stories. The writers discussed throughout this research focus on Appalachia today and its current role in the Anthropocene.

Thinking about Appalachia's future in the Anthropocene without considering its past is impossible. Many of these seeming natural spaces function as imagined gateways into Appalachia's existence before its orogeny, before the ocean gave way to mountain peaks, and well-before the extensive waterway pollution plaguing Appalachia today. It represents a pristine "nature," though, ultimately, we know this type of nature is a myth, albeit a lasting one that persists despite its all but false existence. Nature is not dead, as Bill McKibben might proclaim, neither does it function outside the realm of human experience. Of course McKibben is not suggesting Nature no longer exists, but he somewhat myopically understands Nature as separate from human experience rather than the complicated human/nonhuman meshworks coexisting within it. Maria Mies outlines such distorted dualities of nature in modernity. She argues, "the modern concept of 'nature' since the Enlightenment is a result of…double-faced process[es] of destruction and sentimentalization which has made up the modern era," which, according to her, emerge when "we look at the modern aestheticism of nature and landscapes and at what then became the movement for the protection of nature" (Shiva and Mies 152). This, as Mies argues, became yet another way for humans to intercede on nature's behalf, which simultaneously encourages people to view nature as beautiful (nature being anything not human made). The founding of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park is one such intercession[15]. Nature is romanticized and commodified instead of recognized as a vital entity of humans and nonhumans. It is perceived as passive, not active, un-affective. Rosi Braidotti also warns "appeals to nature and to a naturalized world order are a tactic that the patriarchal, capitalist, neo-colonial system uses to lend legitimacy to the social structures it has created," and argues "Nature is [used as] the

[15] Calvin Coolidge signed legislation into effect that allotted land for the park in 1926. In 1934, the park was officially established, but it was not opened to the public until 1940 when Franklin Delano Roosevelt dedicated it (Work; Bradley).

cover for a hierarchical naturalization of inequalities, which circulates within the sociocultural system of patriarchy as a pretext for discrimination" (71). Braidotti's points speak to resource colonies and sacrifice zones across the globe. There is a tension between these spaces, often viewed as remote or removed from humans, but which are, actually, not only imbued with human existence and practices, but devastated by them. Appalachia's association with a kind of "nature" often prevails in the American consciousness, and it is important to reevaluate what this might indicate at local levels and within the Anthropocene. The prevalent mountain and natural associations mask the ongoing exploitative practices in the region, exploitation and misunderstandings Neo Appalachian writers aim to rectify. These associations juxtapose ecologically destructive practices in the region with outdated ideas about nature, but they also retain a pre and post Appalachia natural space that neatly fits into pre-constructed regional ideals. If this is the case, perhaps these "natural" spaces also play a kind of futuristic role, a beacon of sorts, a way to imagine Appalachia's potential futures for both its humans and nonhumans.

Although Appalachia's geologic existence began hundreds or thousands of meters below sea level in the cold, ancient, watery depths of the prehistoric Atlantic Ocean, I struggle to imagine such an existence now. To me, Appalachia is its mountains. It is a region marked by elevation on an earth space that is jaggedly set apart by its ravines and peaks. But I cannot help wondering what might become of Appalachia in the future if action to rectify exploitative processes does not begin taking root, and even then, what is Appalachia's role in the Anthropocene in the distant future? Worsening floods and exacerbated ecological damage within Appalachian sacrifice zones situate the Appalachian region, especially the mountains, in a precarious cross sight. If these practices continue, accelerated erosion of Appalachian Mountain peaks will continue. Even development in the region threatens not only Appalachian culture, but

the Appalachian environment. Though this development leads toward a New Appalachia, a region much more diverse than the dominant White poverty narratives tell and one that is potentially more ecologically protected, as Neo Appalachian literary narratives reveal, it also raises costs of living, erodes industries that have historically employed Appalachians, and threatens displacing people from their land. How can we reconcile these two ongoing Appalachian narratives?

Jesse Graves' and William Wright's poem "Salt" renders Appalachia as a criss-cross of temporalities that intertwines past and future. The speaker describes a mountain that ascends all the way "up toward the monadnock where no trees / can hold against the wind's pressing knuckles" (5-6) where "root systems [scrabble] over rocky ground, salt of the ancient sea on [the speaker's] tongue" (9-10). It is here the speaker:

> [imagines] the mountain
> underwater, submerged past the tree line,
>
> Fish the size of small canoes touring
> Through the canopy, their wide mouths
> Gaping high above [the speaker's] swiveled head. (11-15)

Suddenly, the mountain peak is gone, submerged in water, but time is unspecified here. Is this a pre-orogenic submersion or post? It is no secret that climate catastrophe-induced flooding is increasing. Global coastlines find themselves lessening, and in the American South, America's first ecological/climate refugees have appeared off Louisiana's coast (Davenport and Robertson). Appalachia houses its own ecological refugees in areas like West Virginia where many people have moved towns because the water is too toxic to drink and high cancer rates are claiming

lives, both attributable to coal mining's lingering devastation (Hendryx et al.). The Kentucky floods revealed a newer and potentially more frequent kind of ecological refugee – the one who must move because of flooding. The speaker in "Salt" visualizes "the mountain / underwater," and this imagining creates a speculative Appalachian future. The speaker's "[swiveling] head" indicates confusion. The mountain is an underwater feature. It now exists in a completely different marine ecology. The effect of the mountain's height is chastened by high water levels and human hierarchies are not only eradicated but reversed. "Fish the size of small canoes" rule this version of Appalachia. Here, industry holds no sway, but neither do the Appalachian inhabitants. Additionally, in the process of inundation, what does Appalachia become? Are Appalachia's mountain peaks rendered islands in this watery submersion? If this is the case, Gilles Deleuze offers interesting insight into not only island formations, but ideas about how these islands exist with or without humans.

Deleuze argues two types of islands exist: continental and oceanic. He defines continental islands as "accidental, derived islands" and oceanic islands as "originary, essential" islands. What becomes interesting about these distinctions is that continental islands "serve as a reminder that the sea is on top of the earth, taking advantage of the slightest sagging in the highest structures" while in the case of oceanic islands "the earth is still there, under the sea, gathering its strength to punch through the surface" (9). The tension described here considers the power of water and earth. Though Appalachia is far from a return to an oceanic state, climate catastrophe's rapidity foregrounds the potential for more and more Appalachian flooding. What if what are so well known as mountaintops take on a new identity as islands in the future? After all, as Deleuze articulately states, "islands are either from before or for after humankind." Appalachia as an island disrupts what humans have understood as "Appalachia" thus far. Its significant geographic

features, the mountains, are relegated to the mercy of water in this future. And in this future, Appalachian identity, ecological tethering to the mountains, and grandma places fall into the watery memories preserved in Appalachian flood narratives.

But before we fully entertain an "after humankind" Appalachia, we must consider Appalachia now, post and potentially pre submersion, and the actions activists, including Neo Appalachian writers, are taking to prevent this possible future. In an August 2023 Instagram post, author Madeline ffitch shared a post by fellow IG account "Appalachians Against Pipelines." Captioned "Doom to the pipeline! Footage from yesterday's walk ons, which stopped Mountain Valley Pipeline construction in Montgomery County, Virginia for multiple hours," the video features a group of protesters invading a pipeline construction site. But what complicates this is the footage that also features exasperated site workers. Though it is unknown if these workers are Appalachians, this video features the tension and dynamic between employment and ecological preservation in sacrifice zones today, an ever and ongoing battle in Appalachia. It is this kind of physical labor and temporary job that exacerbates diseases of despair and further fuels Appalachia's catastrophic opioid crisis. But, there are better Appalachian futures.

In Robert Gipe's last novel, *Pop*, Dawn Jewell, a woman who witnesses the demise of her Kentucky mountains from coal mining, her mother's death from opioid addiction, and toxic chemical spills in rivers, makes a powerful statement. She says:

> It come to [her] there, sitting on the tailgate of [her uncle's] truck before the burnt-down house of the Jewells, that the setting out is why [Appalachians] are given stories in the first place. [They] can't hear stories and just lay around the house pondering them. There are still yet giants to be slain. Witches to be mollified. Prisons to be abolished. Narcan to be distributed. Sex offenders to be called out. Trans rights to be fought for. Racial justice

> to be showed up for. Trauma to be named…. [She wants] to take down Big Pharma, to be a mole in the ground that roots the mountain down…[She wants] to be out. In the fray. [She wants] to fight for what's right because fighting for what's right is the religion [she] was raised on. (331)

Dawn and, ultimately, Gipe leave readers with a clear call to action. Dawn names "stories" specifically as a point of entrance into the fight for Appalachia and Appalachian people. These stories are not separated by genre. They might be oral stories/histories, personal narratives, poems, novels, even Instagram posts. They become an ecology of literary narratives. Gipe's Neo Appalachian literary narrative is a reflection of his own activism as well, and like Gipe, other Neo Appalachian writers grapple with timely issues instead of Appalachian pasts. Though it is, of course, important to recognize the long tradition of Appalachian literature, the Neo Appalachian narratives discussed in this dissertation represent a clear shift toward endurance, activism, and both local and global awareness and engagement. The days of James Still's isolated Appalachian families and Breece D'J Pancake's coal mining families are largely gone. Instead, authors work toward fulfilling more promising New Appalachian futures.

Neo Appalachian literary narratives better represent a brighter ecological future and are inclusive of the growing diverse populations in Appalachia. For example, Appalachia is experiencing the largest in-migration of Latinx people than anywhere else in the United States (Margolies 248), Neema Avashia's *Another Appalachia* speaks to her experience as a queer, American-born Indian woman growing up in Appalachia, and Lisa Kwong's *Becoming AppalAsian* poetry collection explores her Chinese-Appalachian identity. Avashia's Neo Appalachian memoir in particular exposes the fraught political tensions that arise in the region, especially during the 2016 election, ones Robert Gipe also recognizes in his novel *Pop*. The

active engagement with Appalachia's current affairs is critical for beginning conversations about tough issues in the region. Though this is arguably a cross-genre trend, it is significant to Neo Appalachian literary narratives because of these narratives' clear preoccupation with reframing Appalachia's narrative, regional, and social future. The multi-genre exploration of these attests to the importance of considering these Neo Appalachian narratives as an ecology. In *Pop*, Dawn's daughter, Nicolette, creates and opens a soda company that relies on naturally grown Appalachian flavors and ingredients. She emphasizes the importance of employing Appalachians and providing sustainable jobs for Appalachians, a huge shift away from longstanding industries in the region that rely on labor exploitation instead of sustainability. Gipe's and Avashia's narratives stimulate conversations that are difficult but needed, and their recency provides pathways for imagining this New Appalachia.

These pathways are realistically tackled and discussed in the narratives. There are no easy solutions and this is recognized. The region is becoming less and less affordable, and the opioid crisis still devastates Appalachia. More and more Appalachians, many of whom have lived in the region for generations, are finding it difficult to procure affordable housing (Sisk). Even the tourist booming areas surrounding the Great Smoky Mountain National Park, areas generating millions of dollars during tourist seasons, are becoming too expensive for tourist industry workers to reside in. In this area:

> Tourism forces sharp contradictions between the front-stage spaces of touristic consumption, where "Appalachia" is marketed and sold, and back-stage spaces, where low-income workers reside, often in substandard housing. When these contradictions are mapped onto the Gatlinburg landscape, an image of uneven development emerges,

> wherein neighborhoods of poverty exist in tension with sites for the production of capital within the tourism industry. (Amason 9)

Not only is Appalachia changing, but many Appalachians are suffering in its capitalistic sacrifice zones. The narratives I have discussed readily engage with this, and each narrative provides new pathways and outlets for protesting these precarious ecological conditions. This reveals a New Appalachia rather than a post Appalachia. There is no preoccupation with Appalachia's past, past industries, past agrarianism, etc., rather, there is a clear focus on its future, and these narratives and the way stories engage with nonhuman beings works toward this New Appalachia, a less anthropocentric one, as well.

There is always, of course, a tendency for writers to privilege the human. Afterall, the human experience is the only experience writers can ever truly know. As Tang Weisheng writes, "There is an obvious paradox in telling 'de-anthropocentric' stories in any human language, for such stories almost always have human-centered implications" (1,611). This said, writers can work toward less anthropocentric narratives, narratives that portray the nonhuman as equal or even above the human. The authors I focus on in this dissertation do precisely this. Though they recognize and, arguably at times, foreground the human experience, there is a clear effort toward a new ecological understanding of the intertwined and mutually dependent role of humans and nonhumans in Neo Appalachian literary narratives. The ecological awareness with which Dawn describes the mountains and coal mining in Gipe's series, Wilkinson's discussion of a living Appalachian homeplace in *The Birds of Opulence*, and Ann Pancake's kin communities and grandma places serve as examples of this. Rash's extensive personification of waterways, Awiakta's Indigenous emphasis on the Tellico Dam crisis, and Caitlin Myers' understanding of nonhuman and human consequences in the 2022 Kentucky floods honor nonhumans in their

flood narratives. Graves' and Wright's collaborative poetry portrays Appalachia's Deep Time and Thick Time as well as the biologic and geologic entities responsible for creating Appalachia, both pre and post humans. Finally, ffitch's *Stay and Fight* and Kingsolver's *Demon Copperhead* engage with Quare Appalachia, which reveal a human/nonhuman harmony, a worlding with, overlooked in other Appalachian narratives that historically privilege hetero, White, male narrators and experiences. These neo narratives consider non anthropocentric approaches to narrative, and in this way, they work toward more sustainable futures full of activism, protest, and endurance.

In order to endure, both narratologically and physically, though, changes must be made. Climate catastrophe is worsening. More and more nonhumans are becoming ecological martyrs, sacrificed for resource extraction and capitalistic gain. These reverberating effects jeopardize both human and nonhuman life, but there are ways to work around, even with this, to combat it. Donna Haraway uses a series of narratives, narratives she calls "The Camille Stories" (143), to illustrate the precarious state of the environment as well as provide "what if" scenarios that "cry out for collaborative and divergent-story making practices." These narratives speculate multiple futures for humans and nonhumans in the world, and one of these Camille Stories is set in Appalachia.

Haraway narrates a fictitious but realistically accurate account about monarch butterflies in Appalachia. She imagines how "Camile's people [move] to southern West Virginia in the Appalachian Mountains on a site along the Kanawha River near Gauley Mountain, which had been devastated by mountaintop removal coal mining" (141). In this area, "the river and tributary creeks were toxic, the valleys filled with mine debris, the people used and abandoned by coal companies." Once there, the family becomes aware of the massive, annual monarch butterfly

migration that leads thousands of monarch butterflies through the West Virginia mountains. However, the toxic soil threatens a milkweed variety upon which the monarchs rely for sustenance during their journey from Mexico to Canada. Haraway illustrates a complex web of ecological interdependence and fragility. The monarch butterflies pollinate important plants in Appalachia needed to sustain a harmonious ecosystem in the region. If their migration patterns are interrupted because of evaporating habitat and food sources due to toxic chemical spills and runoffs, then this fragile chain in the Appalachian ecosystem would be broken. Instead of a pessimistic future, Haraway emphasizes that instead of fixating on the term "endangered species," imagining the monarch butterfly as a symbiont with Camille is a more effective way to protect the monarch butterflies and thus preserving the complicated ecosystem they help thrive. This ecological restructuring is important because it emphasizes and re-values the role of nonhumans in Appalachia. Haraway's narrative is active. Her narrative challenges people to rethink how they think and understand what is important outside the myopic realm of the human. She too contributes to these Neo Appalachian narratives working toward sustainability in Appalachian futures.

Narrative is powerful and the sheer textual production of literary narratives testify that this work is critical, especially as systems and crises, notably the opioid crisis, continue unleashing consequences in Appalachia. By understanding Neo Appalachian literary narratives as enmeshed in an affective ecology that works toward endurance and sustainability in Appalachia, a better understanding of Appalachia in the Anthropocene, an Appalachia that refuses to capitulate to harmful systems, an Appalachia that works toward preservation, and an Appalachia that breaks down barriers between the fictive and the real via narrative, between the writer and the activist, prevails.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ahlberg, Helene and Andrea Joslyn Nightingale. “Chimeras of Resource Geographies: Unbounding Ontologies and Knowing Nature.” *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Resource Geography*. Taylor and Francis, 2021. pp. 23-33.

Allen, Mary Jewell. “Who Will Leave Harlan Alive?” *From the Front Lines of the Appalachian Addiction Crisis: Healthcare Providers Discuss Opioids, Meth and Recovery*, edited by Wendy Welch, McFarland & Company, Incorporated Publishers, 2020. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/odu/detail.action?docID=6305237.

Aloi, M. “Coal Feeds My Family: Subsistence, Energy, and Industry in Central Appalachia.” *Relations*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2018, pp. 269–286.

Amason, J. Hope. “The Making and Unmaking of an Appalachian ‘Home’: Tensions Between Tourism and Housing Development in Gatlinburg, Tennessee.” *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2020. pp. 8-24.

Anglin, Mary. “Toward a New Politics of Outrage and Transformation: Placing Appalachia within the Global Political Economy.” *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2016, pp. 51–56.

Appalshop. Appalshop Inc., 2023. https://appalshop.org/story. Accessed 15 Oct. 2023.

“ARC Launches 73.5 ARISE grant initiative to spur multistate collaboration to transform Appalachia’s Economy.” *Highland Country Press*. 26 August 2022. https://highlandcountypress.com/Content/In-The-News/Headlines/Article/ARC-launches-73-5M-ARISE-grant-initiative-to-spur-multistate-collaboration-to-transform-Appalachia-s-economy/2/73/82817. Accessed 24 Feb. 2023.

Aristotle: on Generation and Corruption Book II : Introduction, Translation, and Interpretative Essays, edited by Panos Dimas, et al., Cambridge University Press, 2022. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/odu/detail.action?docID=7150804.

Avashia, Neema. *Another Appalachia: Coming Up Queer in a Mountain Place*. Morgantown, West Virginia University Press, 2022.

Awiakta, Marilou. *Selu: Seeking the Corn-Mother's Wisdom*. 1993, Fulcrum Publishing, 1994.

Bakker, Karen, and Gavin Bridge. "Material Worlds? Resource Geographies and the `Matter of Nature." *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2006, pp. 5–27.

Bennett, Jane. "The Force of Things: Steps toward an Ecology of Matter." *Political Theory*, vol. 32, no. 3, 2004, pp. 347–72. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4148158. Accessed 5 Feb. 2023.

Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter*. 2009. Duke University Press, 2010.

Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Duke University Press, 2011.

Bird, John. "Mark Twain and the Conflicted Metaphor of Nature." *The Mark Twain Annual*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2019, pp. 129–39. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.5325/marktwaij.17.1.0129. Accessed 14 Dec. 2023.

Blunt, Alison. "Cultural Geography: Cultural Geographies of Home." *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 29, no. 4, 2005, pp. 505–515.

"Boone Dam Project." *Tennessee Valley Authority*, https://www.tva.com/newsroom/boone-dam-project. Accessed 6 Oct. 2022.

Bowen, Eric, Christiadi, John Deskins, and Brian Lego. "An Overview of Coal and the Economy in Appalachia." Appalachian Regional Commission. 2020. https://www.arc.gov/wp-

content/uploads/2021/04/Coal-and-the-Economy-in-Appalachia_Q4_2020-Update.pdf. 9 Dec. 2023.

Bradley, Michael R. *Death in the Great Smoky Mountains: Stories of Accidents and Foolhardiness in the Most Popular Park*, Lyons Press, 2016. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/odu/detail.action?docID=4406003.

Braidotti, Rosi. *Posthuman Feminism*. Cambridge, UK, Polity Press. 2022.

Branscome, James. "The Federal Government in Appalachia: TVA." *Colonialism in Modern America*, Appalachian State University, 2017, p. 283.

Bristow, Tom. *The Anthropocene Lyric: An Affective Geography of Poetry, Place, and People*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Brown, Chris D. "Resisting the Far-Right: Indigenous Perspectives, Community Arts and Story-Based Strategy." *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2020, pp. 55–73, doi:10.5130/ccs.v11.i2.6765.

Buell, Lawrence. *The Future of Environmental Criticism*. Wiley, 2009.

Caracciolo, Marco. *Narrating the Mesh: Form and Story in the Anthropocene*. E-book, University of Virginia Press, 2021.

Catte, Elizabeth. *What You are Getting Wrong about Appalachia*, Belt Publishing, 2018.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "The Climate of History: Four Theses." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2009, pp. 197–222.

Cosgrove, Ben. "War on Poverty: Portraits from an Appalachian Battleground, 1964." *Life*, Life. https://www.life.com/history/war-on-poverty-appalachia-portraits-1964/. Accessed 1 Aug. 2023.

"Crystal Wilkinson Kentucky Poet Laureate 2021-2022." *Kentucky.gov*. Commonwealth of Kentucky, 2020 http://artscouncil.ky.gov/KAC/Showcasing/Poet-Wilkinson.htm. Accessed 31 Dec. 2023.

Davenport, Coral and Campbell Robertson. "Resettling the First American 'Climate Refugees.'" *The New York Times*, The New York times. 2 May 2016. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/03/us/resettling-the-first-american-climate-refugees.html. Accessed 14 Oct. 2023.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Desert Islands and Other Texts, 1953-1974*. Semiotext(e); Distributed by MIT Press, 2004.

Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. 1980. University of Minnesota Press. 2020.

Denney, Adam. "A Drowning in the Foothills." *Storytelling in Queer Appalachia: Imagining and Writing the Unspeakable Other*, edited by Hillery Glasby, Sherrie Gradin, and Rachael Ryerson, West Virginia University Press, 2020. pp. 61-72.

Díaz, Carolina A. "Ecologies from Below: Politics and the Memory of Water in Patricio Guzmán's The Pearl Button." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol. 28, no. 4, 2021, pp. 1327–1353.

Dollywood. Dollywood, 2023, https://www.dollywood.com/about-us/. Accessed 20 June 2023.

"Embracing the Future While Preserving the Past: The Neo Appalachia Movement." *WNC Times*. WNCTimes. 17 Dec. 2023. https://wnctimes.com/lifestyle/8200-embracing-the-future-while-preserving-the-past-the-neo-appalachia-movement. Accessed 13 Feb. 2024.

Farrier, David. *Anthropocene Poetics: Deep Time, Sacrifice Zones, and Extinction*. University of Minnesota Press, 2019.

Ffitch, Madeline. *Stay and Fight*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019.

Gipe, Robert. *Trampoline*. Ohio University Press, 2015.

---. *Weedeater*. Ohio University Press, 2020.

---. *Pop*. Ohio University Press, 2021.

Glasby, Hillery, Sherrie Gradin, and Rachael Ryerson. Introduction. *Storytelling in Queer Appalachia: Imagining and Writing the Unspeakable Other*, edited by Hillery Glasby, Sherrie Gradin, and Rachael Ryerson, West Virginia University Press, 2020. pp. 1-15.

Glass, Paula. "Participatory Development in Appalachia: Cultural Identity, Community, and Sustainability." *Journal of Cultural Diversity*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2010, pp. 154-156.

Gosetti-Ferencei, Jennifer Anna. "Interstitial Space in Rilke's Short Prose Works." *The German Quarterly*, vol. 80, no. 3, 2007, pp. 302-24, DOI 10.1111/j.1756-1183.2007.tb00077.x, Accessed 20 July, 2021.

Graves, Jesse and William Wright. "Salt." *Specter Mountain*. Mercer University Press, 2018.

Graves, Jesse and William Wright. *Specter Mountain*. Mercer University Press, 2018.

Haraway, Donna. *A Cyborg Manifesto*. *Socialist Review*, 1985.

Haraway, Donna. *Staying with the Trouble*. Duke University Press, 2016.

Harlan County USA. Directed by Barbara Kopple. Cabin Creek Films, 1976.

Harman, Graham. "Editorial Introduction for the Topical Issue "Object-Oriented Ontology and Its Critics"." *Open Philosophy*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2019, pp. 592–98, doi:10.1515/opphil-2019-0043.

Helsel, Phil. "Federal Judge Temporarily Halts Tennessee's 'Drag Ban' Law." *NBC News*, NBC. 31 Mar. 2023. https://www.nbcnews.com/nbc-out/out-news/judge-halts-tennessees-drag-ban-law-rcna77743. Accessed 28 Jun. 2023.

Hendryx M, Wolfe. “Self-Reported Cancer Rates in Two Rural Areas of West Virginia with and without Mountaintop Coal Mining.” *J Community Health*, vol. 37 no. 2, 2012, pp. 320-327, doi: 10.1007/s10900-011-9448-5. *PubMed*.

Hetherington, Kevin. “In Place of Geometry: The Materiality. of Place.” *Ideas of Difference Social Spaces and the Labour of Division*. edited by Kevin Hetherington and Rolland Munro. Blackwell Publishers/The Sociological Review, 1997. pp. 182-189.

Hetherington, Kevin., and Rolland. Munro. *Ideas of Difference: Social Spaces and the Labour of Division*. Blackwell Publishers/The Sociological Review, 1997.

Himley, Matthew, et al. *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Resource Geography*. Taylor and Francis, 2021.

Hindman Settlement School. Hindman Settlement School, 2023. https://hindman.org/. Accessed 23 April. 2023.

Hinrichsen, Lisa. “Affect, Atmosphere, and the Appalachian World of Ann Pancake.” *Ecocriticism and the Future of Southern Studies*, edited by Zackary Vernon, LSU Press, 2019.

“History Doesn’t Compartmentalize: An Interview with Madeline Ffitch.” *The Collagist*, Dzanc Books. 8 Nov. 2014. http://thecollagist.com/collagist-blog/2014/11/8/history-doesnt-compartmentalize-an-interview-with-madeline-f.html. Accessed 28 Jun. 2023.

Hoel, Monica. “Brian Serway: Providing Space for Neo Appalachian Art.” *Emory and Henry College*, Emory and Henry College. https://www.ehc.edu/live/news/2460-brian-serway-providing-space-for-neo-appalachian. Accessed 14 Dec. 2023.

hooks, bell. *Appalachian Elegy: poetry and place,* University of Kentucky Press, 2012.

Horn, Austin. “Some Suggest Flood Victims ‘got what they voted for.’ Kentuckians Aren’t Having Any of That.” *Lexington Herald Leader*. McClatchy Media Network. 2 Aug. 2022. https://www.kentucky.com/article264049201.html. Accessed 23 April. 2023.

House, Silas. "Climate Change Makes Appalachian Life Even Harder. So Why Do We Stay?” *The Washington Post*. 5 Aug. 2022. https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2022/08/05/appalachia-eastern-kentucky-silas-flooding/. Accessed 23 April. 2023.

House, Silas, *Southernmost*. Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2018.

“John Alexander Williams.” *The University of North Carolina Press*. The University of North Carolina Press. https://uncpress.org/author/6407-john-alexander-williams/. Accessed 28 Dec. 2023.

Kafer, Alison. *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. Indiana University Press, 2013.

Kingsolver, Barbara. *Demon Copperhead*. Harper Collins, 2022. p. 102.

Kingsolver, Barbara. Interview with Ezra Klein. *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 21 Jul. 2023. https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/21/podcasts/transcript-ezra-klein-interviews-barbara-kingsolver.html. Accessed 2 Oct. 2023.

Kingsolver, et al. “’Placing Futures’ and Making Sense of Globalization on the Edge of Appalachia.” *Appalachia in Regional Context [Electronic Resource] Place Matters*, University Press of Kentucky, 2018. *Kentucky Scholarship Online*. <https://kentucky-universitypressscholarshipcom.proxy.lib.odu.edu/view/10.5810/kentucky/9780813175324.001.0001/upso-9780813175324-chapter-002>. Accessed 10 November 2021.

Kohl, Ellen Anna. “Making the Invisible Visible: Telling Stories to Animate Environmental Injustices.” *ACME an International e-Journal for Critical Geographies*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2022, p. 33.

Kwong, Lisa. *Becoming AppalAsian*. Glass Lyre Press, 2022.

Ledford, et al. *Writing Appalachia an Anthology*. University Press of Kentucky, 2020.

Ledford, Katherine, Rebecca Stephens, Theresa Lloyd. “Marilou Awiakta.” *Writing Appalachia*, The University Press of Kentucky, 2020, p. 299.

Lewin, Philip G. “‘Coal Is Not Just a Job, It’s a Way of Life’: The Cultural Politics of Coal Production in Central Appalachia.” *Social Problems (Berkeley, Calif.)*, vol. 66, no. 1, 2019, pp. 51–68.

Lloyd, Christopher. “Flooding Mississippi: Memory, Race, and Landscape in Twenty-First-Century-Fiction.” *Ecocriticism and the Future of Southern Studies*, edited by Zackary Vernon, LSU Press, 2019.

Long, Rebecca-Eli M. “Cripistemology of Appalachia: Disability, Quareness, and the Speculative Present.” *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2022, pp. 70–87.

Marberry, M. Katie, and Danilea Werner. “The Role of Mountaintop Removal Mining in the Opioid Crisis.” *Journal of Social Work Practice in the Addictions*, vol. 20, no. 4, 2020, pp. 302–310.

Margolies, Daniel S. “‘Taquerias’ and ‘Tiendas’ in the Blue Ridge: Viewing the Transformation of Space in a Globalized Appalachia.” *Appalachian Journal*, vol. 39, no. 3-4, 2012, pp. 246–268.

Massey, Doreen. *For Space*. Sage Publications, 2005.

McCarroll, Meredith, and Anthony Harkins. *Appalachian Reckoning: A Region Responds to Hillbilly Elegy*. 1st ed., West Virginia University Press, 2019.

Mergoat Magazine. [@Mergoat.mag]. "Transecologies." *Instagram*, 26 July 2023. https://www.instagram.com/p/CvLg8e9xjqm/?img_index=1.

Miller, Issac. "Alumna Madeline ffitch to read from her novel set in Appalachian Ohio." *Ohio News*, Ohio University. 15 Feb. 2022. https://www.ohio.edu/news/2022/02/alumna-madeline-ffitch-read-her-novel-set-appalachian-ohio. Accessed 20 Jul. 2023.

Milman, Oliver. "Protestors to March on White House as Anger Mounts over Appalachia Pipeline." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media Limited, 8 June 2023. https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jun/08/biden-white-house-mountain-valley-pipeline-protesters. Accessed 20 June 2023.

Mortimer-Sandilands, Catriona and Bruce Erickson. *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*. Edited by Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson. Indiana University Press, 2010.

Morton, Timothy. *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. University of Minnesota Press, 2013.

Myers, Caitlin and Jared Hamilton. "Lord Willing and the Creek Won't Rise." *Mergoat Magazine: Hillbilly Ecologies After the Apocalypse*. vol. 1, no. 1, 2023. pp. 42-85.

Nanson, Anthony. *Storytelling and Ecology : Empathy, Enchantment and Emergence in the Use of Oral Narratives*, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2021. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/odu/detail.action?docID=6631416.

Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence*. Harvard University Press, 2011.

"Opioids in Appalachia: The Role of Counties in Reversing a Regional Epidemic." National Association of Counties (NAC) and Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), May 2019. https://www.naco.org/sites/default/files/documents/Opioids-Full.pdf. Accessed 10 Aug. 2023.

Pancake, Ann. *Strange as this Weather Has Been*. Counterpoint, 2007.

Phillips, Dana. "Ecocriticism, Literary Theory, and the Truth of Ecology." *New Literary History*, vol. 30, no. 3, 1999, pp. 577–602. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20057556. Accessed 31 Dec. 2023.

Phillips, Jim. "Well-Site Protestor Claims She's being Overcharged, Made an Example Of." *The Athens News*, The Athens News. 15 Aug. 2012. https://www.athensnews.com/news/local/well-site-protester-claims-shes-being-overcharged-made-an-example-of/article_4defba45-5a8c-5bd7-a29c-0f9cf29935fe.html. Accessed 3 Jul. 2023.

"Population and Age in Appalachia." *Appalachian Regional Commission*. Appalachian Regional Commission, https://www.arc.gov/about-the-appalachian-region/the-chartbook/appalachias-population/. Accessed 31 Dec. 2023.

"Preorder Praisesong for the Kitchen Ghosts." *Crystal Wilkinson*. https://www.crystalewilkinson.net/. Accessed 16 Mar. 2024.

Rash, Ron. *One Foot in Eden*. New York, Picador Henry Holt and Company, 2002.

Reed, Paul E. "The Importance of Appalachian Identity." *American Speech*, vol. 93, no. 3-4, 2018, pp. 409-24. https://read-dukeupress-edu.proxy.lib.odu.edu/american-speech/article/93/3-4/409/136134/The-Importance-of-Appalachian-IdentityA-Case-Study. Accessed 27 Oct. 2022.

Reichert, Douglas Powell. “Response #9: Roundtable: The Future of Appalachian Studies.” *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, vol. 17, no. 1/2, 2011, pp. 211–213.

Rina, Raphael. “Why Doesn’t Anyone Want to Live in This Perfect Place?” *The New York Times*, The New York Times. 28 Aug. 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/24/style/womyns-land-movement-lesbian-communities.html. Accessed 18 Sept. 2023.

Rueckert, William. “Literature and Ecology: Experiment in Ecocriticism.” *The Iowa Review*, vol. 9 no. 1, 1978, pp. 71-87.

Rukeyser, Muriel. *The Book of the Dead*. Forward by Catherine Venable Moore. West Virginia University Press, 2018.

Shiva, Vandana and Maria Mies. *Ecofeminism*. Zed Books, 1993.

Sisk, Taylor. “More Appalachians Getting Squeezed Out of Affordable Housing.” *Charleston Gazette-Mail*, Charleston Gazette-Mail, 25 Feb. 2022. https://www.wvgazettemail.com/dailymailwv/daily_mail_features/more-appalachians-getting-squeezed-out-of-affordable-housing/article_c59d0722-272f-541c-8400-c45e4536b9cd.html. Accessed 10 Aug. 2023.

Smith, Ada. “Appalachian Futurism.” *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2016, pp. 73–75.

Smith, Russell. “‘It Was Things Made Me Weep’: Involuntary Memory in First Love.” *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd’hui*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2017, pp. 104–16. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26552549. Accessed 16 Dec. 2023.

Stine, Alison. “America Dumps Its Fracking Waste in My Ohio Town.” *Other Words*, Institute for Policy Studies, 7 Feb. 2018. https://otherwords.org/america-dumps-fracking-waste-ohio-town/. Accessed 3 Jul. 2023.

“Subregions in Appalachia.” *Appalachian Regional Commission*. 2021. https://www.arc.gov/map/subregions-in-appalachia/. Accessed 5 March 2023.

“Tellico.” *TVA: Tennessee Valley Authority*. TVA, https://www.tva.com/energy/our-power-system/hydroelectric/tellico. Accessed 3 Sept. 2022.

“Telling the Story of Tellico: It’s Complicated.” *TVA*, TVA. https://www.tva.com/about-tva/our-history/built-for-the-people/telling-the-story-of-tellico-it-s-complicated. Accessed 16 April 2023.

Tennessee Valley Authority Act, Pub. L. 108-447. 18 May 1933. Stat. 1 U.S.C. 112.

“The Affrilachian Poets.” *Poets.org*, American Academy of Poets, https://poets.org/listing/affrilachian-poets, Accessed 19 March 2020.

Towers, George. “West Virginia's Lost Youth: Appalachian Stereotypes and Residential Preferences.” *Journal of Geography (Houston)*, vol. 104, no. 2, 2005, pp. 74–84.

Tumin, Remy. “Kentucky Floods Took Appalachian History with Them.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times. 4 Aug. 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/04/us/kentucky-flood-appalshop-archives.html. Accessed 7 Jul. 2023.

Turner, William H.. *The Harlan Renaissance : Stories of Black Life in Appalachian Coal Towns*, West Virginia University Press, 2021. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/odu/detail.action?docID=6706771.

Vaccaro, Christian, et al. "'Only Going to Get Worse': Narrative Magnifications and Emotion Work among Rural Frontline Responders in the Opioid Epidemic." *Symbolic Interaction*, vol. 44, no. 4, 2021, pp. 748–770.

Vernon, Zackary. "Commemorating vs. Commodifying: Ron Rash and the Search for an Appalachian Literary Identity." *Appalachian Journal*, vol. 41, no. 1/2, 2013, pp. 104–124.

Vernon, Zackary. Introduction. *Ecocriticism and the Future of Southern Studies*, edited by Zackary Vernon, LSU Press, 2019.

Vernon, Zackary. "Toward a Post-Appalachian Sense of Place." *Journal of American Studies*, vol. 50, no. 3, 2016, pp. 639–658. Accessed 7 November 2021.

"Weatherford Award." *Berea College*. Berea College, 2023. https://www.berea.edu/centers/loyal-jones-appalachian-center/awards/weatherford-award. Accessed 28 Dec. 2023.

Weisheng, Tang. "Cautious Anthropomorphism, Animal Man, and Rick Bass's Deep Ecology Narratives." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol. 28, no. 4, 2021, pp. 1599–1613.

Werner, Tammy L. "The War on Poverty and the Racialization of 'Hillbilly' Poverty: Implications for Poverty Research." *Journal of Poverty*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2015, pp. 305–323.

West, Jame E. Interview with Ann Pancake. "Closer to the Ground: A Conversation with Ann Pancake." *Southern Spaces*, 30 May 2017. https://southernspaces.org/2017/closer-ground-conversation-ann-pancake/. Accessed 16 Mar. 2024.

"Who We Are." *Appalshop*. Appalshop Inc., 2023. https://appalshop.org/story. Accessed 15 Oct. 2023.

Wilkinson, Crystal. *The Birds of Opulence*. University Press of Kentucky, 2016.

Wilson, Steffen P., Jonathan S. Gore, Amanda Renfro, Marion Blake, Eric Muncie, and Jodi Treadway. "The Tether to Home, University Connectedness, and the Appalachian Student." *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2018, pp. 139-60. https://journals-sagepub-com.proxy.lib.odu.edu/doi/full/10.1177/1521025116652635. Accessed 27 Oct. 2022.

Work, Hubert. “Letter from the Secretary of the Interior.” 14 April 1926. United States Congressional Serial Set: Serial No. 8579 (196), Library of Congress Online Catalog. https://www.loc.gov/item/2022694144/.

Yahn, Jacqueline. "Frackonomics." *Appalachia Revisited: New Perspectives on Place, Tradition, and Progress*, edited by William Schumann, and Rebecca Adkins Fletcher, University Press of Kentucky, 2016. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/odu/detail.action?docID=4532880.

Yusoff, Kathryn. *A Billion Black Anthropocenes*. University of Minnesota Press, 2018.

VITA

Rachel Michel Bates

Old Dominion University English Department

5000 Batten Arts & Letters

Norfolk, VA 23529

Education:

- East Tennessee State University (B.A. in English and History)
- Dartmouth College (M.A. in Liberal Studies with a Creative Writing Concentration)

Publications:

- *Dear River* (2020 Finishing Line Press)