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# Colonialism and Globalism in Two Contemporary Southern Appalachian Novels – *Serena* (2008) by Ron Rash, and *Flight Behavior* (2012) by Barbara Kingsolver

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**Abstract:**

In this essay, I investigate how the historic and current economic structures operating in Appalachia from the 1920s to the 2010s are represented in two contemporary Southern Appalachian novels – *Serena* (2008) by Ron Rash and *Flight Behavior* (2012) by Barbara Kingsolver. Through the lens of postcolonial theory, I show how *Serena* represents Appalachia as functioning under the colonial model outlined by Robert Blauner and Helen Mathews Lewis in 1978. Then, still under the theory of postcolonialism, I explore how Kingsolver's work depicts regional identity in response to a post-colonial environment and the ever-expanding global economy.

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# Contents

## I. Introduction

In this essay, I explore two contemporary Southern Appalachian novels through the lens of postcolonialism, a branch of criticism concerned with literature written by colonial powers or groups of individuals who have been or are currently colonized. Half of my analysis examines Ron Rash's *Serena* in the historical context of a colonial society based on natural-resource extraction, while the second portion of this essay analyzes Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior*, and its portrayal of a modern Appalachia riddled with the same issues found in traditional postcolonial nations – only now the culprit is globalism. When read side-by-side, these two works narrate the transformation of the region's identity over the course of a century, beginning with the locals of Waynesville, NC in 1929 and ending with the residents of fictional Feathertown, upper East Tennessee, in the early 2010's. Overall, I argue that *Serena* and *Flight Behavior* feature characters and settings riddled with post-colonial themes despite the differences in the local and global economies. The two literary works together thus represent the complex relationship between colonialism and regional identity, similar to what we might see in African or Caribbean Literature.

## II. A Colonial Appalachia

Definitions explaining the borders of the Appalachian region vary. The region I focus on here in my analysis is identified as the Southern Appalachian Mountains. This region includes east Tennessee, southern West Virginia, Southwestern Virginia, western North Carolina, and portions of north Alabama, north Georgia, and northern South Carolina. Moreover, *Serena* and *Flight Behavior* are both set in what is known as the Blue Ridge province (Morrone 54).

To explore the social and economic structure of Appalachia in *Serena*, I relied on the explanation of colonialism found in a collection of essays edited by a founding leader in Appalachian Studies, Helen Matthews Lewis. In *Colonialism in Modern America: The Appalachian Case* (1978), Lewis explains how Appalachia in the 1970s could be considered a colony because it met the four criteria originally outlined by Robert Blauner, the developer of the Internal Colonialism Model. Before those four components can be analyzed, the following relationship must be established: Those in power (the colonizers) have a technological advantage over the subordinate group (colonized). The colonized group is only taken advantage of because it has either human or natural resources. The cause and effect relationship here is clear; those with the technology and money can easily gain the control of those who have the materials that bring them their profit. According to Blauner and Lewis, "the resources of the colonized perpetuate the process of colonization (Lewis 17)."

Here are the four necessary criteria to consider when identifying examples of a colonial system.

1. The colonizers are uninvited into the region.
2. The impact on the culture and social organization of the colonized people is more significant than the impact one would expect from other forms of cultural contact or acculturation, such as the case with migration.
3. Colonization involves a relationship by which members of the colonized group tend to be administered by representatives of the dominant power. (Blauner 5)
4. The colonizers view the colonized as inferior in terms of alleged biological, geographical, or cultural differences. (Typically such views are based on perceived biological differences and therefore a product of racism.)

1) To begin with the ***first*** component, those in the dominant position are not invited into the region before their arrival. Typically, those in power have no connection to the region other than financial investments. 2) The ***second*** component of colonialism dictates that the impact on culture and social organization is greater than we would expect through cultural contact and acculturation. The uninvited people in power are capable of completely altering a region's personal, cultural, and economical ways of life. This can cause agricultural societies to lose the ability to sustain themselves while creating a disconnect with the land. 3) ***Thirdly***, the colonialism model involves a relationship by which members of the colonized group tend to be administered by representatives of the dominant group. Political and governmental decisions represent the needs of the colonizers (the minority) instead of the colonized (the majority). ***4)*** There exists a principle of social domination by which a group seen as inferior or different in terms of biological, geographical, or cultural characteristics. The group deemed inferior is exploited, controlled, and oppressed socially and physically by the superordinate group.

It is easier to understand how these conditions were true in Appalachia by briefly considering its history of extensive environmental resource extraction in the region. Not long after initial European contact, prospectors from all over began to take notice of the profitable plant and animal resources scattered throughout the diverse mountain range. Drew Swanson identifies what he calls a “repeated phenomenon” in Appalachian history in his recent work *Beyond the Mountains: Commodifying Appalachian Environments.* In the late 1600’s, the Appalachian region officially attached itself to the global economy beginning with the White-Tailed Deerskin trade. Leather became a prized commodity in both Europe and English colonies. More significantly, the trade permanently connected the Native American populations to Europe, as they soon became dependent on European goods.

Following the rise and fall of the deerskin population, botanical collectors across the globe began to take notice of the "undiscovered" plant diversity in the region. Written accounts from popular collectors like Andre Michaux and William Bartram helped to create the idea that Appalachia was exotic and therefore *must* be valuable. In 1810 Michaux writes, "There being various accidents by which one may perish," leaving the collector alone in "woods impenetrable to a European" (Swanson 41). These botanists' writings also perpetuated negative stereotypes by describing the mountaineer as a barbaric simpleton isolated into ignorance by his foreboding geographical border. Francois Michaux, referring to European-descended mountain inhabitants, wrote in his journal that "I do not believe that there are ten in a hundred who could resist the temptation of drinking as long as the liquor lasted" and once claimed that nowhere else in his travels in the U.S. did he encounter such squalor and filth (Swanson 44). These stereotypes quickly attached themselves to the nation's perception of Appalachians, further enabling the extractive industry's ability to impact so much about the Appalachian environment and ways of life for the people who lived there.

Through the 18th and 19th centuries, Appalachia continues to play a crucial role in supplying American and international consumers with resources. The first American gold rush began when the mineral was discovered in North Georgia during 1828. An influx of outside prospectors came storming in and made the final push towards decimating the native Cherokee population. In 1831 Andrew Jackson forced the Cherokee to move west on the Trail of Tears. With the Cherokee forced out of the region, a new type of Appalachian man and woman began to evolve in response to the pivotal changes to the economic and social structure of Appalachia (Swanson 73).

However, the colonialism model does not adequately apply to Appalachia until timber and coal were consistently discovered in the region. In the part of Appalachia featured in the novels I will be discussing, timber was predominant. As explained by Susan Yarnell, author of "The Southern Appalachians: A History of the Landscape," during the late 1800's and early 1900's, the timber industry easily established control over the the cultural, economic, and social ways of life for many Southern Appalachians. Between 1880 and 1900, investors from the northeast attempted to buy up the mineral and timber rights along the railroads. Many landowners had no idea what the real value of their land was and gave it away for a fraction of the true value. The first phases of lumbering did not disrupt the Appalachian economy but laid the foundation for a later disruption. As a result, many farmers eventually lost their livelihoods and became dependent on wage labor in the sawmills (Yarnell 18). At the turn of the 20th century, the trend of large holdings in the hands of outsiders continued to climb, with several companies holding both timber and mineral rights. From 1900 until the 1920's seventy-five percent of the southern Appalachian forests were reduced by extensive clear cutting and the spread of railroads designed to transport hardwoods located even at the highest peaks (Yarnell 20).

## III. Colonialism in *Serena*

*Serena* draws readers into the year of 1929 in the region of Appalachia known as the Blue Ridge Valley, where profit came from the region's remaining stands of old-growth hardwoods found within the dense forests concentrated in the Blue Ridge region on the border of North Carolina and Tennessee, in Haywood County, North Carolina. The novel has elements of mystical realism, yet also accurately and meticulously represents the time period and history of timbering in the region. It tells the story of the conflict between the laissez-faire capitalists who

ran the logging industry, and the proponents of the creation of The Great Smoky Mountain National Park. The fictional Boston Lumber Company, led by newlyweds George and Serena Pemberton, rush to clear cut as much timber as they can before turning their land over to the ever-imposing National Park Service. This conflict is further dramatized through the relationships established between the Pembertons and the locals of Waynesville, NC. Serena, the ultimate Shakespearean villain, stops at nothing to create her timber empire, resulting in an epic tale of passion, greed, and death.

Rash, born in South Carolina and raised in North Carolina, brilliantly demonstrates a deep understanding of Appalachian history, culture, and environment in his New York Time's best-selling novel. *Serena* is rich with depictions of important historical realities the region faced during the early 20th century. When analyzed through the lens of postcolonialism, *Serena* portrays an early Appalachia transitioning into a colonial system. In fact, every one of Blauner's components of colonialism are skillfully positioned throughout the novel.

The ***first component*** dictates that the person(s) in power is (are) uninvited to the region. In *Serena*, The Pembertons, and Boston Lumber Company as a whole, had no real connections to Appalachia before their arrival. Their only interest in the land can be represented with just one symbol, a dollar sign. George Pemberton, similar to a 'carpetbagger' traveling down south to benefit from Reconstruction, half a century earlier, represents one of the many northeastern timber companies looking to make a quick profit. Neither George nor Serena are forthcoming with their pasts and intentions throughout the novel. Boston Lumber Company's background is mysterious and the workers have no agency in any sector of the company. The Pembertons themselves represent a complete disconnect with and disregard of the land. Their identities are so

entangled with their desire for wealth and status that they view the environment around them as something to manipulate and exploit for profit, including both human and natural resources.

The ***second component*** of the colonial model requires that the social, cultural, and economic organization of the colonized group is drastically impacted – more so than would otherwise happen through non-colonial cultural contact or acculturation. In *Serena*, the effects of an early, but strong, colonial structure are apparent throughout the novel. Due to the United States' general *laissez-faire* approach to whatever happens in the Southern Appalachian region post-reconstruction era, the Boston Lumber Company is able to influence every aspect of the locals' lives. The Pembertons have what seems like absolute power over all of the local residents. Following the stock market crash of 1929, agricultural Appalachians began to see the end of their ways of life. Many northern industrial capitalists fled to the region in search of cheap, profitable land. Lucky for them, the owners of these rich and dense hardwood forests did not know the economic value of their own land, as I mentioned above (Yarnell 18). After the Pembertons establish themselves in the Western North Carolina Mountain region, they quickly become the only employer in the surrounding area. Laborers joke grimly in the book that, "If this camp shuts down we will be in the worst kind of fix. We will be riding the boxcars sure enough" (Rash 116).

The laborers' lives are tied to the company personally, culturally, and economically. Most of them live on-site at the sawmill. Similar to a coal company town, the laborers could live, shop, worship, and receive medical services on site. However, the lumber camps were almost always more primitive in the accommodations, as the laborers were expected to quickly work one site and more on the next.

The ***third component*** of colonialism (That members of the colonized group tend to be administered by representatives of the dominant group) is well established in the relationships between the locals and the Pembertons. The Pembertons own most of the surrounding land and make all decisions about what happens to it, despite who lives there. The Pembertons go out of their way to maintain control over most aspects of the locals' lives – even if that means having the high Sheriff of Asheville on their payroll each month (Rash 217). Quite frankly, if anyone goes against Serena's decisions, they regret it almost instantaneously. If Serena were the Shakespearean queen, the locals would be the peasants always going out of their way so as not to offend the queen.

***Fourthly***, there exists a principle of social domination by which a group seen as inferior or different in terms of biological, geographical, or cultural characteristics is exploited, controlled, and oppressed socially and physically by the superordinate group. The Pembertons and other investors in the Boston Lumber Company demonstrate their sense of social, geographical, and cultural superiority over the locals in several circumstances. Their perspective of the Appalachian people is rooted in prejudices stemming from socially accepted stereotypes held by many Americans at the time. In fact, that stereotype has roots in the botanical history discussed in the section II on extraction above. The Pembertons used these stereotypes to justify their behaviors and actions towards the locals several times throughout the novel. Serena demonstrates her belief of stereotypes with easily missed side remarks such as "These Highlanders, I've read they've been so isolated that their speech harks back to Elizabethan times" (Rash 13). Serena views the mountaineers' way of speaking as a detrimental effect from geographical isolation.

Despite the common belief that Appalachians spoke like Shakespeare did during Elizabethan times – something that many still believe today – the work of linguists Joseph S. Hall (1906-1992) and Michael Montgomery invalidates the misconception. In "The Mountains Were Alive, with the Sounds of English" (2004) by Montgomery, he explains the history of the stereotype as well as the origins of the Smoky Mountain dialect. While the dialect does have ties to the languages spoken in England, Ulster, and Scotland, the mountain speech is more new than old. "Mountaineers have been coiners par excellence of new words and expressions… There's little doubts that mountain folks like to play with language and they're good at it" (Montgomery 2). The "mountain speak" is innovative and, considering Appalachia's long-standing role in the global market, does not originate from isolation.

Serena tends to use the stereotype of an isolated, uneducated brute to support her dehumanizing treatment of the laborers. When discussing the men's primitive working and living conditions she remarks, "They'll work harder if they live like Spartans" (Rash 17). Furthermore, she is more than pleased with the fact that she can pay laborers significantly less since the market crashed in '29. Upon first meeting the workers, Serena fires one of the foremen to quickly establish her control over the men. She treats the men as if they're even more disposable than the forest around her. Serena certainly does not think the laborers are nearly as valuable as the hardwoods and is quick to point out that there's a hundred other men willing to take the place of the countless others who regularly die from unsafe working conditions (Rash 22).

## IV. Transforming Regional Identity in *Serena*

Whenever I say regional identity, I am referring to the anthropological concept of regionalism. This is a consciousness of distinguishing conditions and traits that characterize a region and its inhabitants, as well as identification of self with regional particularities

(Encyclopedia of Nationalism 2: 438). How do groups of individuals within a border perceive themselves and each other as related to the region they coexist in? An individual may ask themselves: Who am I as an Appalachian? How am I connected to the environment around me?

The effects of colonialism on regional identity are clear in *Serena*. The tense historical period and surplus of complex characters allows for regional identity to be represented in various ways and at different stages throughout the story. Widow Jenkins and Rachel maintain several attributes of the original Appalachian identity (of European descent). Rachel, a young single woman raising the illegitimate child of George Pemberton, greatly relies on Widow Jenkins' generosity and knowledge of childbearing. Rash does not give readers much information about Widow Jenkins. However, she is depicted as having a more traditional connection with the land and sustains herself to a certain extent. She appears to represent an idealized sense of a past Appalachia – before the extractive industry began to dominate the cultural and economic structures. Upon finishing the scene depicting Widow Jenkins' downfall, readers get the sense that the past Appalachian identity is officially corrupted by the extractive industries' colonial-like control over the locals.

Like the Widow, Rachel possesses traditional attributes of a pre-colonial Appalachian identity. Rachel demonstrates her connection to the land through her many encounters with it, as so much of her existence is dependent on the environment around her. This connection derives from passed-down knowledge given to her by her father and Widow Jenkins. On page 78, Rachel ventures into the woods to find some ginseng in order to make a few desperate dollars. Rash writes, "Rachel stepped carefully across the boggy ground. An orange salamander scuttled out from beneath a matting of soggy oak leaves. She remembered how her father once told her never to bother salamanders in spring because they kept the water pure." Unlike the Pembertons, she

understands how all aspects of the environment work together to maintain the health of the land, plants, and animals. This relationship with the land is further represented whenever she separates the berries from the ginseng plants and places them under some broken soil to replace the plant she wants to sell. She was taught to coexist with the land for the survival of both the environment and humans. Unfortunately, like Widow Jenkins, Rachel too symbolizes the transformation of Appalachian identity. Rachel, like other single mothers of the region, does not have as many options for survival as men do. She faces two undesirable choices -- flee Appalachia and take up a new life in a far-away city, or struggle to survive in a place she isn't wanted in. Instead of staying in Appalachia to pass her connection with the land to her son, she is forced to flee to Seattle, Washington and create an entirely new life.

The Colonial Model can be used to help understand the reality behind the opportunities for survival among the camp's laborer population. Having no other options but the sawmill or the mines, local men are forced to contribute to the destruction of their own homes. The laborers are constantly surrounded by death – be that the death of their co-workers or that of the actual mountain environment around them. Rash writes, "As the crews moved forward, they left behind an ever-widening wasteland of stumps and slash, brown clogged creeks awash with dead trout" (115). As the trees continue to be uprooted and the mountainsides burned, the health of the ecosystem deteriorates. The mountaineers' once bountiful and prosperous home is no longer able to sustain the animals it once could. Therefore, the mountaineer can no longer sustain himself from the land. This disconnect with the land is evident in the laborers' discussions. At the beginning of chapter 35, Snipes' crew reflects after cutting the very last tree for the Boston Lumber Company. The men observe the transformation of the landscape around them and question whether it will ever return to its original state. Comparing the land to the warzones of

France in WWI, Snipes describes his current feeling towards the land: “Like there’s been so much killed and destroyed it can’t ever be alive again. Even for them that wasn’t around when it happened, it’d lay heavy on them too. It’d be like trying to live in a graveyard” (335). This is the last time Rash includes a scene including Snipes and his crew. The chapter begins and ends with a solemn tone. It feels almost elegiac as it is mourning the loss of Appalachian identity – specifically that disconnect with the environment. Writing about the same scene in “Rootedness and Mobility: Southern Sacrifice Zones in Ron Rash’s Serena,” Michael Beilfuss states, “The irony is that the men are nostalgic, homesick, for the very place they inhabit; they have not left home, but it has left them, or rather they participated in its destruction” (390). This ironic fact becomes more unsettling whenever Snipe’s entire quote is taken into context. He basically foretells a future still grieving with actions of their present.

## V. Then and Now

While *Serena* dramatizes an Appalachia of the past, Barbara Kingsolver’s *Flight Behavior* is more relevant than ever. Kingsolver's novel was published only 4 years after Rash's book was published. But around 78 years have passed between the settings of *Serena* and *Flight Behavior*. However, the general personal, cultural, and economic realities facing Kingsolver’s Appalachia resemble those of Rash’s. For instance, both novels take place during a time of economic struggle – Rash's during the Great Depression, Kingsolver's during the Recession of 2008. Secondly, each work dramatizes the conflict between the survival of Appalachian culture and extractive industry. With its actions set a few years before the year of its publication, in 2012, *Flight Behavior* captures the transformation of identity in response to a past colonial regime. The Appalachia in *Flight Behavior* feels more like a post-colonial society – one that is attempting to regain independence after a long period of outside control. As of 2010, much of the

region is still owned by outsiders. However, as more time has passed, fewer raw natural resources are available for industries to plunder. More significantly, though, is the shift from the internationalist economy represented in *Serena* to the Globalist economy found in *Flight Behavior*.

The United States' economy has shifted several times throughout its history, but the transition from an international economy to a globalist economy has had a major effect on the Appalachian region. These effects are scattered throughout Kingsolver's work – which is unsurprising since many of her novels, such as *The Lacuna* (2009) or *The Poisonwood Bible* (1998), incorporate similar globalist themes. Ronald Glossop, author of "Meaning of the Twenty-First Century: From Internationalism to Globalism," writes that, "globalization applies to the domination of the global economy by transnational corporations, and that shift certainly is a major factor in the way that global society is changing. It is these corporations more than any other institutions that are operating in a world where national borders are more irrelevant" (133). As I will soon address, *Flight Behavior* includes many scenes that starkly depict globalization's negative effect on Appalachian society and regional identity. In response to this impending reality, Kingsolver creates the possibility of regional revival within her novel. Particularly, what we see in *Flight Behavior* is simultaneously the long-term effects of colonialism's degradation of the Blue Ridge Mountain region, the overall transition to globalism, and a hopeful solution to the years of cultural and environmental degradation.

Like *Serena*, *Flight Behavior* too begins *in medias res*. Only, this time the story begins in the midst of Dellarobia Turnbow, a dissatisfied housewife and mother, sneaking off into the mountains to meet a younger man. There she witnesses something that will forever change her life – what at first seems like a blazing forest fire turns out to be millions of butterflies resting on

the mountainside. Monarch butterflies, which normally migrate to the mountains of Mexico for the winter, have, in the fictional premise of this novel, instead come to Appalachia for the winter. Dellarobia's father and mother-in-law plan to sell the land off to be clear cut out of financial desperation. However, with the help of biologist Ovid Byron, Dellarobia becomes an agent of environmental activism in Kingsolver's insightful commentary on globalization and Appalachian regionalism.

## VI. A Post-Colonial Appalachia in *Flight Behavior*

The multitude of outside powers controlling Appalachia in an effort to obtain control of the minerals, flora, and fauna has left its lasting mark on contemporary Appalachia. While much of Appalachia is still owned by outside corporations, it is difficult to specify how much. The last land-owner survey of the region was conducted in 1981 and discovered that in 80 counties, 51% of the land was owned by absentee corporations (Appalachian Land Ownership Task Force 21). Dellarobia, protagonist of *Flight Behavior*, lives in the fictional setting of Feathertown, Tennessee – which exists somewhere in between the border of North Carolina (the setting of *Serena*) and Johnson City, Tennessee. Because of the long history of environmental extraction and outside control, Dellarobia's home is economically and socially deprived. For too long the area considered the extractive industry as the only viable option for economic growth – Appalachia was full of resources, so should not that in turn have made the people who live there wealthy? Cub, Dellarobia's husband, works on his parents' farm, which is facing foreclosure, and occasionally works for a company that delivers gravel. Jobs that pay above the poverty level are few and far between. Therefore, since the farm is facing foreclosure, Cub's father, nick-named Bear, admits he is thinking about selling the timber rights of a hollow situated behind

their farm. The long history of a colonial society has left Kingsolver's Appalachia unprepared and lacking all infrastructure to economically grow and diversify.

## VII. Globalism in *Flight Behavior*

The entire premise of the monarch butterflies migrating to northeastern Tennessee instead of Mexico represents the global extent of climate change. While arguing with Dellarobia about clear cutting the mountainside, Cub states, "That's Mexico, this is here." He struggles to understand how climate disasters occurring in Mexico could have anything to do with his own backyard. Cub, and several other residents of Feathertown, often demonstrate a sense of patriotism that also acts as climate-change denial. They are so caught up with the promise of a short lived moment of debt relief that it is difficult to acknowledge the importance of the environment they have been using to economically survive off of for so long. Whereas Dellarobia promotes her understanding of globalism by educating her community on the science behind the arrival of the monarchs and global warming.

However, the most poignant commentary on globalism is unironically located in a chapter titled "Global Exchange." This lengthy chapter features Dellarobia and Cub shopping for Christmas presents in a cheap  second-hand store – one of the only stores available in Feathertown. While browsing the cheaply made goods, Dellarobia bitterly reflects on how her highly skilled seamstress mother became an alcoholic after her textile-factory job was outsourced to a cheaper labor source in China. "Dellarobia grabbed a horribly made plush raccoon that didn't even look like a raccoon and threw it in her cart because it only cost a dollar. She wanted to punch somebody out. The world that made you do this" (168). Dellarobia and most of everybody else in her town are practically forced to survive on cheaply made goods that offer no real value to one's sense of regional identity. She hates it but feels as though she has no other

choice since it only cost a dollar – reflecting the consumption patterns of many other individuals in the economically deprived town. By the end of the chapter the sheer amount of her relentless comments convinces the reader she has a personal vendetta against all products made in China. Dellarobia yearns for something "real" although she cannot quite figure out what "real" means. Above all, she feels like something was taken from her family. On the surface, Dellarobia curses the practice of outsourcing jobs, but it also seems like that one instance permanently changed the way her life turned out. She mistakenly got pregnant at 17 and proceeded to marry someone she could hardly love after several years and several more children. From Dellarobia's point of view, her and her family's inability to succeed under the economic structure of globalism destroyed her opportunities for pursuing a meaningful life.

## VIII. Regional Identity in a 21st Century *Flight Behavior*

Kingsolver depicts the effects of Globalism on regional identity – especially as it relates to gender – through the personal thoughts of Dellarobia and the words and actions of the surrounding characters. Unlike Rachel, Dellarobia admits that she would not know nature if it bit her (4). Her life revolves around the caretaking of her two children and husband. However, Kingsolver does not use Dellarobia's motherly characteristics to portray a care for or closeness to the earth like writers have canonically done. Instead, domesticity kills Dellarobia's sense of agency. She is trapped in a lifestyle that leaves her unsatisfied. Dellarobia compares motherhood to environmental extraction when she thinks to herself, "she felt permanently caved in from those years she'd spent with one child keening to draw milk out of her and another one fully monopolizing her surface. Effectively deep-mined and strip-mined simultaneously" (26). Dellarobia holds the same contempt towards agricultural work as she does towards parenting. Unlike Appalachians of the past, Kingsolver's characters struggle to find meaning in farming. In

Dellarobia's case, it appears that her discontent with farming and motherhood comes from a lack of knowledge regarding the natural environment around her. Hence why readers do not see any change in her attitude until she discovers her passion for knowledge – specifically for biology and climate science. Unlike Rachel and Widow Jenkins, Dellarobia did not have anyone to pass down the environmental and cultural knowledge of her ancestors. Without this knowledge, she is unable to find purpose and thrive – just like the town she lives in.

Heather Houser, author of "Knowledge Work and the Commons in Barbara Kingsolver's and Anne Pancake's Appalachia," continues this discussion of identity with her analysis of gender in *Flight Behavior.* She brilliantly states, "The mobilization of women in forms of knowledge work on the commons is predicated on men's declining position as workers in twenty-first century Appalachia. As the earth shifts due to mining and logging, so too do gender roles, and as fossil fuels come out of the earth, masculinity drains from these men." Because of mechanization and diminishing resources, men can no longer find a place as workers. Nor can they find solace in the company of other workers, such as the case was in *Serena*. Dellarobia takes notice of Cub's emasculation several times throughout the novel, suggesting that it is one of the reasons their marriage leaves her unsatisfied. While reflecting on the irony of her husband's name she states, "A Cub should grow up, but at 28 years of age, this one stood long-faced and slump-shouldered at the door of the family den, flipping a sheaf of blonde bangs out of his face" (8). It is as if the rise and fall of the extractive industry has made Appalachian men obsolete. After all, Cub and Dellarobia have the same opportunities for work despite how limited they may be.

## IX. Making a Place, Making a Regional Identity

As stated above, Kingsolver does not just leave the audience with a fictionalized portrayal of all that is wrong with Appalachia. *Flight Behavior* ends with a sense of triumph for the Appalachian people. What brings the Feathertown community together while simultaneously empowering Dellarobia is a combination of knowledge work and the revival of the commons. In other words, Dellarobia finds purpose in trying to recreate the process of knowledge work. In *Serena*, knowledge work can be understood as the process of learning from the land and passing that knowledge down to each generation. That knowledge process becomes a part of the regional identity. The arrival of the monarch butterflies and Dr. Ovid initiates a domino-like effect on Dellarobia's character. She transforms from an idle and unsatisfied protagonist to an empowered individual with direction and purpose. Houser writes that Kingsolver, "Accepts that a pre capitalist commons is irretrievable in the twenty-first century. What they offer instead are avenues for recovering common space out of alienation. In short, instead of production leading to loss, as under extraction, loss generates shared space and experiential knowledge that serve environmentalists goals." We can apply this theory to several pieces of Kingsolver's work. Towards the end of the novel, Dellarobia attempts to lead her community through the process of knowledge work. She guides a group of elementary students through a tour of the lab and the mountainside where the butterflies reside. She teaches the students about their environment as it relates to them and their community (351). Dellarobia uses the shared space, the commons, to transfer ecological and regional knowledge to younger generations. Through shared experience and knowledge, that portion of land becomes a part of localized and regional identity.

Kingsolver's promotion of knowledge-work and commons mobilization may seem idealistic, but environmental history gives logic to her notion. The idea of using the commons to

unite people and to urge them to protect the environment is not a new concept. In fact, there have been several recorded cases of environmental success under the precept of commons ideology. One example is elaborated upon in Michele Morrone's *Mountains of Injustice* regarding clearcutting in Western North Carolina. In order to successfully unite North Carolinians to protest against the practice of clearcutting in national forests, The Western Northern Carolina Alliance (WNCA) began to emphasize a type of environmentalism that appealed to citizen's rights: Commons Environmentalism. Instead of promoting the idea that nature should be cordoned off as a "pristine wilderness alternative to so-called civilization," they appealed to the mountaineers whose families had historically sustained themselves from the common land (Morrone 100). Like Dellarobia, WNCA found success in bonding Appalachians together through a shared, experiential space that promotes the process of knowledge-work, and ultimately the transformation of regional identity.

## X. Conclusion

When combined, *Serena* and *Flight Behavior* work together to portray a seemingly logical representation of a colonial and postcolonial Appalachian region. *Serena* provides a contemporary look at a past Appalachia being invaded by outside industries in search of valuable resources. *Serena* almost works as a flashback for *Flight Behavior*, as it sets the stage for economic and social disaster. Rash's novel helps readers understand the stagnant, helplessness plaguing Dellarobia's hometown. The economic and cultural stagnation is definitely a product of a past colonial structure, but now it is more of an issue related to economic globalism that East Tennesseans are unequipped to deal with. The characters in both fictionalized Appalachian towns are faced with grim opportunities for meaning and they lack the comforts of economic stability. Appalachians are often described by the mountainous region they were born in, but

what happens to them when the land is privatized by absentee owners and environment is routinely attacked? As Snipes reflected at the end of Rash's novel, "…Even for them that wasn't around when it happened, it'd lay heavy on them too. It'd be like trying to live in a graveyard" (335). The historical treatment of Appalachians by the extractive industry has completely altered the economic, social, and cultural characteristics of the region. It continues to affect those who are born into the region today, even if they may never have stepped foot into a coal mine or sawmill. However, Kingsolver's work makes a statement about what it will take to restore the region and its people. The transfer of knowledge relating to a shared space or region must be experiential – that is, it must be experienced by those who participate in the transaction of knowledge. When knowledge regarding the environment and ecology of place are passed down throughout generations, it becomes attached to the identity of those inhabiting the region. The extractive industry interrupted that process, so it must be reestablished by those in the position to do so.

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