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TRACING APPALACHIAN ARCHETYPES FROM THE NINETIES TO THE 2000s: APPALACHIAN WOMEN, BRILLIANT BOYS, AND MOUNTAIN MONSTERS

Elizabeth C. Hirschman
Hill Richmond Gott Professor of Business
Department of Business and Economics
University of Virginia-Wise
E-mail: Elizabeth524@aol.com, eh9b@uvawise.edu

Abstract:

This research examines the archetypal content of six motion pictures about Appalachia dating from 1994 to 2003: *Nell*, *Fire Down Below*, *Cold Mountain*, *October Sky*, *Songcatcher* and *Wrong Turn*. The films present instructive examples of male and female figures who act as Warriors and positive change agents for the Appalachian Region. There are also contrasts between the natural wildness of Appalachia and the secular disharmony of modern life. And there is a frightening revival of the Mountain Man as Monster archetype.

Keywords: *Nell*, *Fire Down Below*, *Cold Mountain*, *October Sky*, *Songcatcher*, *Wrong Turn*

Introduction

The present research is the fifth installment in a set of six studies on the archetypes and stereotypes associated with Appalachia and the Appalachian people over the past 100 years (Hirschman 2021a,b,c, 2022).

We have now reached the last decade of the Twentieth Century. Remarkably, almost a century has passed since John Fox, jr. began writing his foundational descriptions of Appalachia and its people (Fox 1908).

The period from 1990 to 2000 was a relatively peaceful time in the United States – Americans were prosperous, college campuses were calm, and there were actually signs of global peace (abcnews.go.com). Much of the popular culture news focused on celebrities and politicians whose lives had gone astray or ended tragically – Princess Diana died in Paris, O.J. Simpson was acquitted of murdering his wife and her friend, President Bill Clinton was impeached for lying about his affair with Monica Lewinski (Berman 2009). There were also several positive events: Nelson Mandela was freed from prison in South Africa and then became President of the country, Germany was united; Russia was liberalized (O'Neill 2009, Stiglitz 2004). And there were three films released relevant to Appalachia. The first of these is based on the discovery of a young woman living the life of a recluse in the Appalachian Mountains.

Nell (1994)

Nell is a very disturbing film to watch, despite the strong performance by actress Jodie Foster in the title role (Nell:IMDb). The narrative tells the story of a young woman, Nell Kelty, who has been living with her mother, Violet, in a remote cabin in the Appalachian Mountains. Violet rarely makes the journey to the nearby town of Robbinsville, NC, because years ago she was raped there and became pregnant. To hide her pregnancy, Violet began living as a recluse and gave birth to twin daughters, Nell and Mae. The family sustained itself without electricity, running water or a telephone during this period. About once a month groceries would be delivered from town to the cabin and left in the front yard. No outside person ever entered their house and the children never attended school. (The story does not explain how the groceries were paid for).

As the narrative begins, Violet Kelty has been discovered dead in the cabin by the grocery delivery boy. The sheriff of Robbinsville is contacted and together with the local medical doctor, Jerry Lovell, he goes to the cabin to determine the cause of death. While there, Dr. Lovell discovers that a young woman is also living at the cabin and realizes that she is Violet's daughter. The young woman speaks a very stilted form of English, is completely unaware of the outside world beyond the cabin, woods and lake, and is terrified of strangers, especially men.

She has never attended school, never seen a car, never been in a town, and has no knowledge of modern technology. She is, however, very attune to the natural world and bathes daily in the lake, chops wood for the fireplace, and has invented her own songs and dances.

Jerry is very empathetic and sympathetic toward Nell, seeing in her an innocent soul. The sheriff, however, views her as a primitive beast, an unhuman aberration. When he first hears Nell screaming at them from the cabin, he yells “What the hell is it?!! We don’t know what that thing is!!” Jerry asks the Sheriff to leave Nell in the cabin for the time being, while he goes to talk with specialists at a research center for autistic children in Raleigh, NC.

There he encounters two professionals, Dr. Paula Olson, and her supervisor, Dr. Allan, who are interested in studying Nell for their research. Jerry is skeptical of their motives, sensing that they may view Nell “as a way to get research grants, publish some articles, and make a name for themselves”. They inform Jerry that Nell fits into the category of “wild child”, that is, someone who has grown-up outside of human society, often in forests or jungles. (This actually is scientifically incorrect as a classification for Nell; she grew with her mother and sister, and can read and write Bible passages. Her unusual speech patterns are due to her mother having a stroke and speaking unclearly).

Over Jerry’s objections, Dr.Olson, Dr. Allan and the Sheriff obtain a court order requiring Nell to be institutionalized at the Raleigh, NC autism facility “for treatment and study” (in other words, she will be their ‘wild child’ guinea pig). Jerry, however, counters them by obtaining a court order that Nell must first give her ‘informed consent’, since she is over age 21. Dr. Olson and Dr. Lovell face off in court before a district judge who rules, wisely, that they must first observe Nell’s capacity to care for herself at the cabin for 3 months and then report to him whether she is capable of living independently or not.

To carry-out her part of this agreement, Dr. Paula Olson positions herself on the lake next to Nell’s cabin in an expensive boat filled with high-technology monitoring and recording equipment. In contrast, Dr. Lovell arrives in his usual flannel shirt and denim jeans and quietly talks to Nell, trying to comprehend her speech patterns. As Jerry and Nell engage in ‘conversation’, Paula records it and realizes that Nell is actually speaking biblical English with consonants missing, due to her mother Violet’s stroke-impaired speech patterns. Gradually, she begins to view Nell as fully human.

Over the course of the summer, Paula and Jerry gain Nell’s trust; Nell shows them where her twin sister is buried (the girl, Mae, died at age 6 due to a fall). Convinced that Nell is capable of caring for herself, Dr. Olson advises her supervisor, Dr. Allan, that Nell should remain living in the cabin and not be institutionalized. He resists this, seeming to much prefer having Nell “in the lab for study”. He also warns Paula that “if the outside world discovers her, she will become front page news”.

Soon enough, a reporter shows up and takes photos of Nell.

Jerry and Paula realize that they must acclimate Nell to modern life quickly in order to help her adjust to the people who have now learned about her existence. They drive her to town where she encounters supermarkets, school buses, traffic lights, buildings, motorcycles and the rest of small town life. Things are going well until she wanders into a pool hall and the men there try to get her to undress. Jerry rescues her, and he and Paula take Nell back to the cabin. The next day, newspaper and television crews converge on the cabin trying to get stories on the “wild girl”.



Caption: Jodie Foster as the wild girl in Nell

Realizing Nell now can no longer remain at the cabin, Jerry and Paula transport her to the autism facility in Raleigh. Here the film creates a stark and heart-breaking contrast between the natural, tree-filled world in which Nell has lived her whole life and the sterile hospital environment to which she is now confined: artificial light, filtered air, people wearing hospital gowns and masks, huge medical machines being wheeled through the corridors; there are no birdsongs, no pine scents, no rushing creeks, no sunlight. Nell soon sinks into a deep depression, refusing to eat or talk. In desperation, Jerry kidnaps her from the facility and takes her to a nearby motel in Raleigh where they are joined by Paula. (Their room looks out over an asphalt parking lot and has a huge blinking neon sign – the aesthetics of modernity)

The narrative next shifts to the court hearing on Nell's future. Dr. Allan argues that Nell is unable to live on her own and must be "protected" at his institution. Nell, through Jerry as translator, then speaks on her own behalf, "I want to live a small life; I love small things", meaning she wants to be in her cabin in the forest. The judge rules for Nell to remain independent, noting that she now has friends (Jerry and Paula) to look in on her. Additionally, several townspeople from her mother's old church have befriended her.

The narrative shifts to 5 years hence. We find Nell celebrating her birthday at the cabin with her town friends. The men are fishing on the lake, and the women and Nell are chatting at a picnic table. Jerry and Paula have married and now have a four year old daughter who Nell is teaching to dance and swim in the river.

Now let us interpret this film both as a social science narrative and a commentary on Appalachia. The social science credibility of the film's storyline is flawed in several respects. First, Nell is not an authentic "wild child" in the sense this term is used in the narrative. She was raised in a human family with a sister and mother; she can cook on a stove, use tools, read the Bible in English and speaks a highly accented form of English. She wears a dress, bathes in the river and combs her hair. Thus the assessment of Dr. Allan that Nell is "unable to function as an adult and needs to be institutionalized for her own good" is never credibly justified and the story-line flounders because of this.

However, the film also has a deeper metaphoric level that does relate directly to what we have seen in other narratives about Appalachia. Recall John Fox, jr.'s opening description of June Tolliver in his novel "Trail of the Lonesome Pine": *She was a barefoot feral young woman hunched among the trees and rocks of the mountain as she watched Jack Hale ride up on his horse* (Fox 1908, p. 1). This passage is the origin of our cultural beliefs about Appalachian women; we see this same image repeated continuously across the past 90 years in the figures of Daisy Mae Yokum, Ellie Mae Clampett, Daisy Duke and now in Nell (see Hirschman 2021a, 2021b, 2021c). Indeed, Nell is a return to the sexually innocent version evoked by Fox's novel, removing the sexual-animal overlay found in the characters of Daisy Mae, Ellie Mae and Daisy Duke. What a remarkable narrative journey this archetype has taken.

Fire Down Below (1997)

Our next narrative is an "action-thriller" motion picture with some important content relative to the Appalachian ecological system. The narrative opens with black and white photographs of Appalachian culture accompanied by guitar and banjo music; the images emphasize the centrality of family and religion to the area. The story is set in the towns of Jackson and Jenkins, Kentucky, both of which are real towns in Letcher County, KY. Letcher County and Pike County, Kentucky are the historical epi-center of coal mining in that state and are contiguous to southwestern Virginia and Northeastern, Tennessee where several of the other narratives have been located (see Hirschman 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2022).

A small, single engine aircraft flies low over spectacular mountains carrying federal governmental officials. We learn that an Environmental Protection Agency employee has been killed in a suspicious car accident outside of Jackson, KY. Several additional EPA agents also have been threatened while assessing environmental damage in the area. Fish kills and drinking water problems due to mining are widespread in the community; several area children have contracted skin rashes and respiratory problems. However, their parents are hesitant to report these issues to authorities, fearing retaliation from mining interests.

Letcher County, KY historically was essentially "owned" by the Consolidation Coal Company which operated mines in that county, as well as in Pike County just above it (e-WV: Consolidation Coal Company). Consolidation sold its mines to the Bethlehem Steel Corporation in 1956, and Bethlehem Steel closed the mines in 1988. Since the majority of people in these counties made their living from the coal mines, the area now has the lowest incomes in the state of Kentucky (e-WV: Consolidation Coal Company).

In this film, the coal company is named Hanner Industries and is owned by Mark Hanner. We learn that Hanner is making hundreds of millions of dollars by illegally permitting the now-inactive coal mines to be used as dump sites for toxic wastes. (This charge has validity in reality, there are several instances of illegal dumping by utility and chemical companies in Appalachia (see Hays 1987). In the present story, the toxic waste is flown in secretly by helicopter at night and dumped into the vacant mine shafts. Chemicals then seep into the aquifers running under the mountains and out into streams, lakes and drinking water. Citizens living in the area have been warned not to complain about the pollution to federal agents by town officials who are on Hanner's payroll; these include the sheriff, the deputies and even the local preacher. Those residents who do complain are physically assaulted or killed.

The EPA sends in Jack Taggart to investigate the situation. He arrives in a well-worn, red pick-up truck under the guise of being a carpenter working for the Appalachian Relief Commission and moves into the basement apartment of the local church. While visiting residents to provide free carpentry repair work, he talks to them, finding most of them reticent to tell him anything about the health problems they are experiencing. He meets two people who agree to help him. One is an old-timer, Mr. Cotton, who wears overalls and work boots and lives on a small farm outside of town. The other is a young woman, Sarah Kellogg, who has been shunned by the community because she was accused of killing her father at age 18. (We learn later that she had been molested by both her father and brother since she was a child).

The local "toughs" employed by Hanner hang out at the Jackson pool hall. They include Hanner's son Mike, who is viewed as incompetent by his father, as well as most of the local police officers. Hanner, himself, operates his businesses from a large, modern corporate headquarters in an un-named southern city. From here, he has established gambling casinos in various locations across the Southeast using funds from the toxic waste dumping in his now-closed mines. Hanner is consistently dressed in a suit and surrounded by scantily-clad women, both at the office and in his casinos.



Caption: Jack Taggart and a local Appalachian musician sing a tune.

Taggart is quickly identified by Hanner's men as an "outsider" and troublemaker. They make several attempts to kill him, including running him off the road and putting rattlesnakes in his apartment. However Taggart displays remarkable martial arts and shooting skills and is not deterred.

The residents who help him are also dealt with harshly by the thugs: beaten, homes set afire, etc. Sarah's brother, Earl, warns her not to be friends with Taggart or "you'll be sorry". Even the white clapboard church is burned down when the pastor agrees to help Taggart. But still he persists.

Then, at a Fourth of July celebration, Hanner approaches Taggart and offers to "buy him off". Taggart refuses. A few days later, Taggart is lured into a mine shaft by Sarah's brother, Earl, ostensibly to see evidence of illegal dumping. Earl attempts to kill him, but Taggart escapes. A series of violent gun fights occur, but Taggart emerges victorious and manages to have Hanner taken to court. There we learn that the actual fines imposed by the EPA for toxic waste dumping are miniscule compared to the profits reaped by those engaging in the practice, e.g., \$100,000 in fines for \$10,000,000 in profits. No wonder corporations continue to do this in Appalachia and elsewhere.

Now let's take a closer look at the archetypal elements embedded in this narrative. Mining companies were one of the first "monsters" to enter Appalachia from the outside world, beginning in the late 1800s and continuing to the present day. Although they brought transportation systems into the region, their ecological and economic damage was far greater than their positive contribution. Appalachian residents became essentially enslaved in poor paying, dangerous jobs. Although mining has now subsided, the ecological damage remains and the residents have been left in poor health and with few other economic opportunities.

Jack Taggart and the EPA are presented in the narrative as external potentially heroic forces, yet their failure to effectively remove and/or remedy the continuing sources of environmental damage do little to resuscitate the Appalachian Region. Taggart instead is shown to be one of the many heroic figures who enter a narrative, fix one part of a larger problem, and then leave town. In a sense he is an ultimately failed version of the hero in the television series *The Lone Ranger*. In a given episode, the Lone Ranger -- and his faithful sidekick Tonto -- would ride into town, eliminate the Bad Guy, and then ride out of town, saying, "My job here is done". But in the case of Appalachia, Jack Taggart, and the Federal Environmental Protection Agency, the job here remains undone.

October Sky (1998)

The film *October Sky* is the most moving and accurate depiction of Appalachian culture during the mid-twentieth century yet made. The narrative closely follows actual events in the small town of Coalwood, West Virginia during the fall of 1957. The houses, industrial equipment, living conditions, apparel, attitudes, language patterns, food ways, and even the high school classrooms and cafeteria are "spot on".

Today Coalwood has fewer than 1000 inhabitants, but numbered over 2,000 persons at its peak in the 1960s. The town's economy depended on coal mining, and the large mine there was operated by the Consolidation Coal Company -- the same corporation mentioned in the earlier discussion of *Fire Down Below*. Mining operations in Coalwood ceased in 1986, but the town had declined substantially in population and economic health well before then ([Coalwood, West Virginia Web Site](http://coalwoodwestvirginia.com) coalwoodwestvirginia.com).

What put Coalwood "back on the map" in the late 1990s was the book and motion picture both titled *October Sky*, which are based on the life of Coalwood resident, Homer Hickam ([October Sky:IMDb](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0389988/)) Homer was born in Coalwood, where his father was a mine foreman working for the Consolidation Coal Company. The *deus machina* for the narrative is the launch by the Soviet Union of an unmanned satellite, Sputnik, on October 4, 1957. This remarkable act began the Space Age, altering global geo-politics to the present day.

On that remarkable night, the 2000 residents of Coalwood, looked upward and with their bare eyes were able to see a beeping light in the night sky as Sputnik crossed over the mountains of West Virginia. Concurrent with this technological revolution, a cultural revolution was also making itself felt. Rock 'n roll music was blaring forth from car radios and restaurant jukeboxes in Coalwood. Old norms and ways of life that had gone unquestioned for decades were under assault.



Caption: A father instructs his son in October Sky.

One of those norms was the belief in West Virginia – and throughout Appalachia – that sons would do what their fathers did – belong to the United Mine Workers Union and work for the Consolidation Coal Company as soon as they completed high school. The only exception was for those few sons who had outstanding athletic ability – especially in football -- and would be recruited by nearby colleges and universities. (The task for young women in these settings was to identify a boy who could work well in the mines or, hope-against-hope, to snag an athlete with a college scholarship.) In the Hickam household, the mother was fortunate enough to marry a man who became a mine foreman. And their older son is an outstanding football player who gains an athletic scholarship to the University of West Virginia. However, their younger son, Homer, is not a strong athlete; Homer also dreads becoming a miner.

The appearance of Sputnik flying overhead is an epiphany for Homer. Here is a new, compelling life path. Unfortunately, he is in a West Virginia coal town, hundreds of miles from “the outside world” and modern technology. Fortunately, however, there is a new, female science teacher at their high school who encourages her students to view science and technology as career paths. She recognizes Homer’s intense interest in rockets and provides him with reading materials. Homer also seeks out the “class nerd”, Quint, who is gifted in mathematics and physics. Quint usually sits by himself in the school cafeteria and is amazed when Homer actually joins him for lunch to discuss rocket engines. Homer is soon joined by another two of his male friends and the quartet decide to begin building a rocket in Homer’s basement.

Down in their basement laboratory, the four go about obtaining the resources needed to construct a rocket: gunpowder from fireworks, metal sheeting from the high school shop class, and welding assistance from an immigrant machine repairman, Mr. Kasky. They have been told by the science teacher that they can enter their project in the state science fair. If they win that, they can then compete at the national science fair to be held in Indianapolis. The boys estimate their chances of winning at “about one in a million”, but with the optimism of youth, they forge ahead.

At this point in the narrative, several negative forces emerge which were (and still are) damaging to the intellectual progress of Appalachian students. First, their high school principal is domineering and deeply conservative. He does not like change, and he does not like challenges to his authority. The female science teacher and the ‘rocket boys’ represent both. At every opportunity, he attempts to dampen their hopes and deny them needed resources.

Unfortunately, there are still many educators, town administrators, and politicians in Appalachia who have the same attitude. Much of their stalwart conservatism is driven by a fear of social change which might weaken their power within the community. Even more frightening to them is the possibility that they may be ‘bested’ by the young upstarts who want to do things differently. Their lives and accomplishments could be diminished in importance, and so they fight very hard to prevent change from happening.

Certainly this attitude is expressed by Homer’s father. He continually criticizes his son for ‘wasting time’ on the rocket. Such ‘far-fetched’ activities will never succeed, he assures Homer; Homer will be a miner, as he is. He further warns Homer that his experiments had better not damage his father’s standing at the mine; Homer better not cause him any ‘trouble’. Unfortunately there are still parents such as this in Appalachia, crushing their children’s spirits and aspirations every day.

Homer and his colleagues locate a slag heap (a pile of stone and dirt left over from mining activity) atop a mountain eight miles from town. This will serve as an excellent launch site. (They are forbidden to fire their rockets on coal company property which includes virtually the entire town). Remarkably, the residents of Coalwood have taken a shine to the activities of their ‘rocket boys’ and now support their activities. Families come out to watch the rocket launches and individual townspeople donate time and materials for their efforts.

One very helpful man is a black former Red Tails fighter pilot who now lives in Coalwood; he provides knowledge on appropriate engine heat and thrust. Still, the high school principal remains negative, “You’re going to give these people false hope”, he tells the boys. Homer’s father is also envious of his son’s idolization of rocket scientist Werner von Braun; he senses that Homer is moving ‘beyond him’.

A West Virginia newspaper does a feature story on the “Rocket Boys”, celebrating them for using their “brains not brawn” to succeed. Then a big opportunity arises for the ‘naysayers’. A forest fire in the nearby town of Welch is blamed on the boys’ rockets by the Welch sheriff and their own high school principal. Homer’s father tells him, “I’m ashamed of you”. The four rocket builders destroy their launch site and give up (for the moment).

Their bad luck continues when Homer’s father is hurt in a mine accident; Homer must drop out of high school and become a mine worker to support the family. But Homer continues studying rockets after his shift is over. Once his father returns to work, Homer re-enters high school. After doing the mathematics on their supposed ‘forest fire’ rocket’s trajectory, the boys locate it in a creek and demonstrate to the authorities that they did not cause the fire. (It was actually caused by a flare from the Welch airport).

The principal apologizes and now supports their efforts. Re-energized, the four boys enter the West Virginia state science fair and win. They are now eligible to attend the National Science Fair, but have money for only one boy to travel to Indianapolis. Homer is chosen to go. The other three tell him, “Say hello to the outside world for us”. Once he arrives in Indianapolis, Homer’s rocket display is stolen by a competing team (nasty!), but the townspeople work together and send him a new one in time for the judging. Homer explains the rocket’s operation to the judges (who include Werner von Braun), and the project wins first prize. Homer and his teammates all obtain college scholarships. Brains finally win over brawn in Appalachia!

At the conclusion to the narrative, we learn that all four of the Rocket Boys graduated from college and went on to successful professional careers. Although only Homer worked in rocket science – he became a NASA engineer on the moon flights and space shuttle – their team success remains an inspiration to all of us nerds (male and female) here in the mountains.



Caption: The actual Coalwood High School



Caption: Entry road to the town of Coalwood, West Virginia.

Now let us take a closer look at the archetypal elements embedded in this historical narrative. Coalwood, West Virginia is representative of the many small Appalachian towns dependent on the meager living which coal mining provided. Then several significant external elements entered their social system which altered it. First, a Monster/Omen in the form of the USSR's sputnik appeared in the skies overhead. To all of America this was both a threat and an opportunity: the arrival of a New Day. The Russians were our enemies and now they had a 'super-power' we did not possess.

Fortuitously for Coalwood, a savior with her own scientific super powers had arrived at the same time as Sputnik – a young, enthusiastic, female Warrior in the form of an 'outside' science teacher. She brought with her new knowledge and – perhaps equally important – a belief that the Coalwood residents could change their destiny with this knowledge. Her novice followers, especially Homer, answered her call to adventure and in the process transformed themselves into heroes who could serve as role models for other Appalachian youth.

ON TO THE 2000s

We have now arrived at the next century of Appalachian-focused mass media presentations! There were three motion pictures focused on Appalachia during the first decade of the Twenty-first Century. They included Civil War battles, mountain music, and a forest full of sub-human monsters. As we shall learn, some archetypes evolve forward, while some stereotypes just get grosser and grosser!

Songcatcher (2000)

Songcatcher (IMDb.com) has its origins in American history circa 1900. During that time period, the Victorian ethos stimulated scholarly interest in native peoples across the globe; anthropologists set out from Britain to explore the far-flung reaches of the Empire and learn about peoples and cultures deemed both "primitive" and "authentic". These were to be subjected to scientific scrutiny and assessed as to their levels of 'progress'. Racial theories of genetic superiority and inferiority also were blossoming in the United States and Europe (see e.g., Currell and Cogdell 2006).

Perhaps ironically, the same time period saw a burgeoning of scientific and social interest in the natural environment. Early conservationists (1880 – 1920) feared that the primitive wilderness which had inspired the American pioneers would be lost to urbanization and industrialization (Nash 1982). The foremost champion of preserving America’s natural environment – and its indigenous cultures—was Teddy Roosevelt, who became president in 1901. It was Roosevelt who established our National Park system and first designated protections for the flora and fauna dwelling within them (Bates 1957).

Among educated Americans, a strong preservationist spirit arose, and money and academic support were made available to those who agreed to collect materials relating to America’s past, especially its cultural origins (Hays 1987, Nash 1982). Two of these early preservationists, Cecil Sharp and Maud Karpeles, chose to venture to the Appalachian Mountains to explore the folk culture of the inhabitants; Sharp and Karpeles were especially interested in the music and singing styles which they believed had been preserved there from colonial times (cecilsharpinappalachia.org)

From 1916 – 1918, the pair traveled throughout central Appalachia, hauling their luggage, notebooks and recording machinery on horse-drawn wagons. As Sharp later wrote, what they discovered was not only folk music preserved from the 1600-1700s, but also a welcoming and thriving culture. Sharp and Karpeles’s efforts stimulated a revival and appreciation of Appalachian folkways which has carried through to the present (cecilsharpinappalachia.org/MaudKarpelesBiography.html). The film *Songcatcher* (IMDb,2000) is based on their expeditions through Appalachia, and largely succeeds in communicating the lives and music of the people at that time. And, as we shall see, the film also has a strongly feminist message, as well.

The central character, Lily Penleric is a music professor at (fictitious) Eastern University. Although an excellent scholar and teacher, she has repeatedly been turned down for promotion to Full Professor by the senior members of the Music Department, all of whom are men. Instead, they have offered the position as Full Professor to Cyrus Whittle, a celebrated musical scholar from England. Disgusted and discouraged about her prospects for promotion, Lily quits and travels to central Appalachia to help teach at her sister’s Clover Creek Settlement School – a church-run school for Appalachian children.

After journeying by train to Appalachia, Lily is dropped off in a wooded valley along the train tracks and then picked up by a young man driving a horse-drawn buckboard wagon. They travel over steep, narrow dirt roads and finally arrive at the school – by which time Lily is seriously questioning the wisdom of the entire venture. Her goal is to record the songs found in Appalachian culture because “they are the purest versions of English folk ballads in existence”. She plans to then publish them and make her reputation as a musicologist. Thus her motives are not ‘purely’ scholarly, but rather intended to advance her career.

As Lily makes her way around to the homes of those living nearby, she is amazed by the large role music plays in their family and social lives. She also begins picking up cultural clues as to how to proceed in Appalachia – i.e., be polite, befriend the most influential woman in the community, have her introduce you to others, and stay for dinner, if asked.

After making initial contacts, Lily meets a young dark-skinned, dark-haired woman whom she employs as her assistant. The young woman is a Melungeon (recall the Tollivers in *Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (Hirschman 2021a)) and lives at the school. The most important community contact for Lily proves to be an elderly woman named Vinie Butler, who lives in a cabin on Bear Creek. Vinie is the community’s midwife, herb doctor, counselor, and also an excellent singer. It is with Vinie that Lily begins recording music and also makes the critical contacts she needs to be accepted into the community.

Vinie has a handsome grandson, Tom Bledsoe, who has been to the ‘outside world’; he fought in Cuba during the Spanish-American War and chose to return home. Twice married, both of Tom’s wives died, one in childbirth, the other with scarlet fever. Tom is very intelligent, but cynical about “outlanders” and suspicious of Lily’s motives in recording his grandmother.

He tells her he suspects she will “steal Granny’s music and make money for yourself” (which, of course, is exactly what Lily had planned to do). Lily stays for dinner with Vinie and Tom; Tom does his best to burp, slurp and ‘behave badly’ during dinner, but warms to Lily slightly. He plays songs for her after dinner on the guitar. Although self-taught, Tom is an excellent guitarist. He walks her back to the school after dinner, and they come across a local man making moonshine in the woods, armed with a shotgun. Tom simply introduces Lily to the moonshiner, and they continue on their way.

Days later, Lily helps Vinie deliver the baby of a local woman named Mrs. Kincaid. The woman's husband, Reese Kincaid, has 'taken up' with another woman named Josie, who lives nearby. The Kincaids have six children already, and Reese is doing a very poor job of supporting them. Lily is learning that misogyny is widespread in Appalachian culture, just as it was at the university where she used to work.

While visiting another remote farm, the Gentrys, to record their singing, Lily encounters Earl Giddens. Earl is from the area, but left to attend the University of North Carolina. He has returned to the area in a three piece suit and bowler hat to carry out his new occupation -- buying mountain land cheaply for the coal mining company. Earl now views his former neighbors with disdain, cheating them at every opportunity. Lily is appalled by him, "Did your education teach you to hate your own people?", she asks.

She returns to the Settlement School to find the Missionary Board is meeting to review the school's progress. An outside table has been set with food and a local fiddler brought in "for musical entertainment" according to the minister. Two prominent attendees are the coal company owner and his wife who is very stylishly dressed. The wife comments to Lily, "I use these local crafts for home decoration; my friends think they are so imaginative". Her husband is skeptical of the whole purpose of the school, "Educating these savages is a waste of time; they need to be taught trades, so they can support themselves". Lily, who is now becoming an advocate for Appalachian culture, shows the wife some excellent watercolors done by a local woman. The coal mine owner's wife agrees to take them to a gallery "in the city" for sale.

That evening, Lily gets her first real taste of Appalachian social life when she attends a community dance at the school. The Settlement House is packed with musicians playing guitars, fiddles, banjos, and dulcimers (an instrument she had not seen previously). Everyone is drinking home-made whiskey, singing and clogging; dancers take turns going to the center of the circle to demonstrate various 'mountain clogging' styles. Lily clogs with Vinie Butler and takes liberal swigs from the moonshine jug.

Earl shows up in a suit and hat, quite drunk, and tries to force Lily to dance with him. She refuses and Tom punches Earl. At the end of the party, several men lie drunk on the front porch of the school house. Tom walks Lily toward her home; she comments to Tom, "I have never heard such music; it is like the air you all breathe". Though attracted to Tom, she hesitates to let him walk her all the way home and starts off on her own. Suddenly she hears a panther in the woods and begins screaming. Tom rescues her and they make love in the leaves. They are now a couple.

Knowing she is fascinated by the Appalachian dulcimer (recall the *Daniel Boone* series (Hirschman 2021b)), Tom brings her one the next day and shows her how to play.



Appalachian dulcimer



Caption: A Melungeon girl in Songcatcher. The Melungeons are a mixed race ethnic group in Appalachia. They are descended from Jewish, Native American, African, Arab and South Asian ancestors (Hirschman, Vance and Harris 2018).

Some local boys discover that Lily's sister and the other female school teacher are lesbians. (Lily also learned this shortly after arriving). Since the boys have been taught that such behavior is sinful, they burn down the Settlement School. All of Lily's recordings and transcriptions of music are destroyed, as is her recording machine. She is crushed with sorrow, but Tom encourages her not to abandon her mission to promote Appalachian music. They decide to go "down the mountain" (to the city), taking Lily's Melungeon assistant with them, to record and publicize Appalachian music. Notably, in 1927 the Bristol Sessions (recorded in Bristol, Virginia) introduced the ballads of Appalachia to the world with the Carter Family and Jimmy Rodgers. The dulcimer-descended autoharp was one of Sara Carter's favorite instruments (www.amazon.com/Bristol-Sessions-Historic).

Songcatcher is not a strongly archetypal film. The characters in it do not possess extraordinary virtues or flaws; yet it is in its own quiet way one of the most strongly *feminist* films discussed in this series. It consistently documents the many hurdles women, whether in cities or rural areas, confronted during this time period. Because Lily is denied her well-earned promotion, she sets off on a quest to pursue, somewhat selfishly, another path to fame and riches. Once in Appalachia she meets a whole other set of women who must deal not only with poverty, but also with errant husbands, alcoholism and the lack of professional medical care. She also discovers women such as Vinie who meet these challenges in competent and effective ways. In the end, she gains not only a deeper understanding of the power women can have to change the world for the better, but concurrently gains the professional success she had sought at the outset.

Cold Mountain (2002)

This narrative opens during the Siege of Petersburg, VA in 1864 near the end of the Civil War. Petersburg lies just outside of Richmond, the Confederate capital. If Petersburg falls, the South will lose the war. To defend the city, Confederate soldiers have dug a series of trenches, intending to protect the essential rail lines from the Union army. (Notably, this was the first military use of **trench warfare**, which was next used extensively during World War I, recall *Sergeant York* (Hirschman 2021a)). The rebels are poorly armed, poorly clothed, and poorly fed. When a wild rabbit runs through one of the trenches, the men scatter to catch it. An exhausted young rebel soldier named Inman reads letters from his sweetheart back in Cold Mountain, NC. She begs him to leave the war and come home to her. The Union troops, well-equipped, well-dressed and well-fed, attack the Confederate trenches with dynamite blowing many rebel soldiers to bits. The fire and carnage are horrific. Petersburg is lost.

The narrative then shifts to four years earlier. The Civil War has not yet begun. Young Ada Monroe and her father, a minister, arrive in the town of Cold Mountain, North Carolina from Charleston, SC. Minister Monroe has taken over the position of the leading the local congregation. Both Ada and her father are well-bred, upper class, and accustomed to the genteel southern lifestyle found in Charleston. The Appalachian town they arrive in is rugged, but prosperous; houses are clapboard, town buildings are clapboard and brick. A man named Teague resents the fact that the parsonage the minister and his daughter will be living in used to be his family's homestead – it is a handsome white farmhouse with wide porches, flower gardens and several acres of pasture. (The story does not inform us as to why Teague lost possession of the house).

Ada is beautiful, cultured and utterly out-of-place in Cold Mountain, but she soon catches the eye of a handsome young carpenter, J.P. Inman. Both are very shy, but they slowly fall in love. Ada and Inman intend to marry, but the Civil War arrives, and Inman – as well as all the other young men of the town -- feel obligated to join the Confederate cause. (This despite the fact that there are no slaves in Cold Mountain). Once the soldiers depart, Teague names himself sheriff and organizes a gang of vigilantes as a “home guard”. This gives him free-rein over the old men, women and children remaining in town.



Caption: Ada in Cold Mountain.

Ada's father dies soon after the start of the war, and she is left alone in a house full of china, crystal, linen tablecloths, silver tableware, fine furniture and a piano. She has no money, is unable to cook and completely ignorant of how to care for the house or herself. A bitter winter arrives, and Ada is reduced to digging turnips out of the field for food. (This scene is very reminiscent of Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind* (1939) pulling carrots from a weed-covered field and vowing “As God is my witness, if I have to lie, steal, cheat or kill, I'll never be hungry again!”).

Teague begins pursuing Ada romantically, hoping to get a pretty wife and his family's farmhouse in one fell swoop. Ada rejects his advances but fears she will be unable to make do on her own. Fortunately, a nearby farm family comes to her aid with food and knowledge about how to care for her house and fields. They send a young Appalachian woman, Ruby, to assist Ada in return for letting Ruby live in the house with her. Ruby comes from a broken home with an alcoholic father. But she is a natural survivor, wise to the ‘ways of the world’ and courageous. In Ruby, we will find again the archetypal Appalachian Woman.

Inman, wounded during the battle of Petersburg, decides he must return to Ada, deserting (as do many others) the ragged ranks of the Confederacy. Knowing that deserters will be shot on sight, he carefully makes his way from Virginia down to the North Carolina coast. Inman's journey soon turns into a Civil War version of Odysseus' arduous trek back to Penelope after the Trojan War. Along the way he comes across fellow deserters, outlaws, mentally ill persons, and thieves. In one scene, he tries to buy an egg from a family of now-freed slaves.

They run away from him, because he wears a Confederate uniform, only to be shot down *en mass* a short time later by a gang of marauding rebels. Inman eats rotted corn in a deserted field and raw crayfish from a creek to stay alive.

Back at Cold Mountain, Ruby has taken over running the farm and bosses Ada like a drill sergeant. She teaches Ada how to cook, hoe, saw, plant a winter garden, milk the cows, weed, and replace rotting shingles on the barn roof. Ada also learns to chop wood and fire a rifle. Her hair is loose and unkempt, her skirts are dirty, but she is becoming competent at staying alive.

Inman meets up with another Confederate deserter. Together they find a tree saw and use it to cut up a dead cow for food. They next come across some men who live nearby and are invited to spend the night at their house. There are four attractive women at the house who try to seduce them; Inman and his friend are given moonshine to drink and soon become inebriated. But it is a trap; the women, food and drink are being used to lure rebel deserters to the house. The deserters are then turned over to the Confederate Home Guard and the homeowners are given money.

Inman and his friend are placed in a group of chained deserters. Union troops arrive and shoot their captors and the chained men, as well. (“The only good rebel is a dead rebel...”). But Inman again survives and is rescued by a hermit woman who raises goats in the forest. (Her character represents a composite of female archetypes including Witch, Medicine Woman, and Mother Nature). She provides Inman with food, apparel, shoes and medical care. Thus restored, he continues on his journey inland toward Cold Mountain and Ada.

Concurrently, Ruby’s father and brother, also Confederate deserters, come by to see her at Ada’s house. They sing and play mountain music to her on their banjo and fiddle; but Ruby is still angry with her father, “You beat me and abandoned me...You were an asshole!” Winter is approaching and the weather is changing. Teague and one of his men encounter Ruby’s father and brother in the forest and shoot them as deserters (This, they believe, will also enable them to lay claim to Ada’s farm).

Ruby and Ada, both carrying guns, later arrive in the forest and find Ruby’s brother dead and the father badly wounded. Inman then arrives and walks towards them through the woods; he is almost shot by Ada, who at first does not recognize him. (We now see how complete Ada’s transformation has become; she is able to defend both herself and others capably.) Ada and Inman consummate their love in a small cabin; they plan to marry as soon as peace arrives. In the morning, Ada and Ruby walk back to town, leaving Inman, her father, and a horse hidden at the cabin



Caption: Ruby and Ada as Appalachian Women in Cold Mountain

However, Teague and one of his henchmen have been scouring the woods looking for deserters, many of whom are now returning to Cold Mountain. They discover Inman and Ruby's father at the cabin. Inman shoots and kills Teague and his associate, but is shot dead, as well.

The narrative then shifts to five years hence. We find Ruby, Ruby's father, Ada and her daughter (Inman's child), a Georgia deserter Ruby has married and their baby sitting around an outdoor table enjoying home-made cider and music. It is summer, and the crops are planted; the flower garden is in full bloom. Life goes on...

What does this film and its imagery teach us about Appalachia? First, we learn that even Southern Belles can successfully become Appalachian Women, if they have the right teachers – and the right conditions. It also instructs us about the enormous devastation visited upon Appalachia by the Civil War. Appalachia differed from the Deep South, because slave-holding was not widespread among the population. Indeed, several “border states” in Appalachia either did not secede, e.g., Kentucky, or were highly divided in their loyalties. Sections of both Tennessee and Virginia favored the Union; indeed, the mountainous North West section of Virginia split off to become West Virginia. But the family disintegration, poverty, and social upheaval caused by the war and its aftermath continue to affect Appalachia even today.

Wrong Turn (2003)

Wrong Turn is the first in a series of six “slasher films” belonging to the same genre as *Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Halloween*, and *Friday the 13th* (see e.g., diMarie 2011, Kerswell 2012, Nowell 2011). It was created by Alan McElroy and the initial film, along with its 5 spin-offs have become cult classics (*Wrong Turn* IMDb.2003). It would be easy for us to dismiss the film as simply a “horror” movie, but that would leave unattended its several deeper, and significant, threads of meaning regarding Appalachia. *Wrong Turn* is a direct descendant of the Appalachian Man-as-Monster stereotype we first encountered in *Deliverance*. This is no accident; the narrative actors specifically refer to *Deliverance* in several pieces of dialogue. (Making it even more obvious what a large impact the earlier film had on popular culture understandings of Appalachia). However, *Wrong Turn*, knowingly or unknowingly, also introduces several larger issues that remained unaddressed in *Deliverance*. These pertain to the cultural meaning of the wild, primitive, seemingly impenetrable, mountains of Appalachia and their inhabitants.

Let's start from the beginning of the story. The opening shot shows a long-range view of the Appalachian vista – a vast rumpled sea of green foliage stretching for hundreds of miles. Strange, eerie music plays on the soundtrack. A young couple, perhaps 20 years old, are rock climbing on a limestone cliff “fifty miles from nowhere” in West Virginia, as the young man puts it. When he reaches the top of the cliff, his climbing line suddenly goes limp. The young woman below, calls to him to help her climb up, but there is no response. Suddenly, his bloody and mutilated body tumbles onto her. She drops down and rushes to their car, tripping over razor wire as she runs. She is grabbed by bloodstained hands.

A series of newspaper clippings is then shown on-screen about a group of Appalachian mountain dwellers who are inbred and characterized by monstrous deformities; they are said to have super-human strength, below average intelligence, and to be extremely violent and aggressive. Next a series of “missing” posters is displayed on-screen; these feature young hikers, campers, hunters and tourists who have gone into the region and never come out. Next are shown images of bloody knives, axes, tools, and chains. So we know upfront where the narrative is heading.

The story then shifts to a nicely dressed young man, Chris, driving his blue Mustang along the interstate highway just outside of Greenbrier, West Virginia. He is on his way to a job interview in Raleigh, NC. Abruptly the traffic is brought to a halt by a tractor trailer crash up ahead; Chris becomes concerned the delay could cause him to miss his appointment. Unable to get cell phone service, he asks a local truck driver (also stuck in the traffic) “Is there another way to get to the interstate? I'm going to be late”. The truck driver, likely somewhat offended that Chris thinks his time is more important than the truck driver's time, tells him there is a turn-off a few miles back he can take.

Chris takes the turn-off and soon finds himself at a small, extremely dilapidated gas station where the phone does not work, the attendant is dressed in filthy overalls and has few teeth. Chris sees a tattered map on the wall of the station indicating that Bear Mountain Road, which runs past the station, will take him back to interstate. The attendant does not try to dissuade him from taking this route (which we later learn indicates that he knows exactly what will happen to the foolish outsiders who drive down Bear Mountain road).

Chris turns onto Bear Mountain Road, which is one lane, dirt, and labeled with a handmade sign, and speeds along. After several miles, he suddenly crashes into a white Range Rover carrying 5 college students, also from out of town, and both cars are rendered un-drivable. The young ‘outsiders’ realize that because there is no cell phone service, they must now walk back up the road to find help. Thus, we now have 6 upper-middle class, suburban young people walking through the Appalachian wilderness on a dirt road without water, food, or even pocket knives. What could go wrong??

Lots! The next portion of the narrative is significant, because it does not choose to immediately jump into violence, mayhem and murder. Instead the story gives us some insight into the six wanderers. Two of them are horny college kids who smoke weed and have sex in the wrecked Range Rover. They are oblivious to the seriousness of their situation and used to being able to engage in hedonic activities whenever the impulse strikes – after all, it is summer and they are on vacation from college. Suddenly, they are attacked by strange men who come out of the forest and drag them off.

Meanwhile, the other four are making their way down the dirt road hoping to find a telephone. Two of these are a couple who are intelligent and thoughtful in a liberal-college ideological way. The boy muses about the plight of poverty-stricken areas and the shortcomings of economic development programs. His girlfriend humors him, but expresses a desire to “go to a hotel and take a hot bath”; she is also hungry. The other girl with them, Jessica, has just been dumped by her boyfriend and these friends came to take her on a road trip “to cheer her up”. The older young man, Chris, is still lamenting his missed appointment, and glances periodically at his high-tech, stainless steel watch. He is organized, upwardly mobile and ambitious. If he had just made it to his appointment, he would be well on his way up the socio-economic ladder. But he did not.

The foursome arrives at the end of Bear Mountain road. There is no interstate highway, there is no telephone, there is no one. Now finally beginning to realize the peril of their situation, their opinion of Appalachia shifts: “What we need is a Redneck World Atlas to tell us where we are” says Evan, the college boy. Reminiscent of Hansel and Gretel and even more of *Deliverance*, they come upon a remote cabin surrounded by junk cars and machinery. There is smoke coming from the chimney. (This scenario is copied virtually intact from *Deliverance*; recall the Griner Brothers’ homestead (Hirschman 2021b).

Chris knocks on the door, hoping to use the telephone. Evan tells him not to enter the house, “I’m thinking this is West Virginia; they have strict rules here about no trespassing”. Chris enters anyway and the others follow. They find a filthy interior; plates of leftover food covered with flies sit on the table; there is an old-time record player. Carlie, Evan’s college girlfriend, asks, “Who could live here!” On the table they find a startling collection of car keys belonging to vehicles ranging from Volkswagens to Mercedes; there are similar piles of genuine and junk jewelry, watches, and sunglasses. A pot boils on the stove filled with what they soon realize is human meat. Human meat is also stored in the refrigerator. (The appliances are run by a generator in the basement).

Suddenly they see a dilapidated yellow wrecker drive-up outside pulling their damaged Range Rover. They run out of the cabin and into the woods without being seen. Here they come across a huge junkyard full of wrecked automobiles; bloodstained clothing, some of it belonging to children, is strewn across the ground. The wrecker carrying two of the cannibalistic mountain dwellers drives up, and the grotesque-looking men inside begin hunting the young people with bows and arrows. Evan bravely acts as a diversion to help the others escape. He is shot in the leg, but manages to run away and hide. Three of the young people jump into the wrecker and drive off; Evan is killed before they can rescue him.

However, the truck stalls in mud, and the surviving three ‘outsiders’ must resume walking through the woods. They discover a forest ranger watchtower and climb the ladder. At the top they find medical supplies and tend Chris’s wound from an arrow. They also call for help on the radio and succeed in making contact with a local sheriff’s department. However, night is falling and the mountain monsters discover their location. They set the tower on fire, forcing the three remaining young people to jump into the tree tops to escape. Carlie, Evan’s girlfriend, is killed.

Chris and Jessica begin strategizing against their pursuers; they survive through the night by hiding behind a waterfall. (In essence, the ordeal has turned both these young suburbanites into survivalists). In the morning, still pursued, the two find a paved road and soon a sheriff’s car drives by, responding to their distress call of the night before. Unfortunately, the sheriff is then shot in the head by one of the mountain monsters.

Jessica is kidnapped, as well, and taken back to the cannibal's cabin. Chris returns to the cabin to rescue her and starts a fire outside to draw attention. Jessica frees herself in the confusion and shoots one of the monsters with an arrow. Analogously, Chris shoots another with a shotgun. (The two have now become archetypal Warriors capable of defending themselves.) The entire cabin then ignites as the generator's propane tank explodes; Chris and Jessica drive off in the yellow wrecker.

With Jessica driving, due to Chris's injured leg, the two return to the dilapidated gas station. Chris tears down the misleading map from the gas station wall and takes it into the truck. He and Jessica drive off. (We hope that this time they remain on the Interstate!)

Now let us take a closer look at the archetypal imagery this film presents. In an earlier work, I defined monsters as "any entity which disrupts the social order" (Hirschman 2000). Thus, monsters can include natural phenomena, such as the shark in *Jaws*, the tornado in *Twister*, floods, asteroids, earthquakes and epidemics. Monsters can also manifest themselves in human form when people act in ways contrary to accepted norms; for example, Hannibal Lecter in *Silence of the Lambs*, the Evil Witch in *The Wizard of Oz*, or Michael Myers in *Halloween* are all human monsters. The mountain men in *Deliverance* were monsters, though not so seriously deranged as those portrayed in *Wrong Turn*.

When humans turn into monsters, it is especially troubling to the rest of human society; first, we fear we may not be able to identify them since they resemble ourselves (see e.g., *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*.) and second because we fear we may ourselves turn into them (e.g., *The Lost Boys*, *Zombieland*).

In *Wrong Turn*, we are presented with humans who have *devolved* into beasts; the film attributes this descent to in-breeding (endogamy) which is present in Appalachia, as in many other cultures. But likely the deeper reason why these particular humans turned into animals is their *preference* for living in the forest – away from other humans and civilization. Evil humans, such as witches and werewolves, are typically characterized as "living in the woods", deep in the forest, where they are away from norms, rules and society. In such a place the "law of the jungle" is believed to prevail: eat or be eaten. One is either predator or prey. The Appalachian Mountains, especially as they are depicted in *Deliverance* and *Wrong Turn* are the primary location where this form of wildness is believed to survive in modern American culture.

The film also provides instructive commentary on two detrimental aspects of contemporary society: conspicuous consumption and the tyranny of time schedules. Recall that Chris is driving to Raleigh, North Carolina in order to meet with a potential employer. When he becomes stuck in the traffic jam, he glances nervously at his watch, fearing he will be late. Unable to call to re-schedule the appointment, he makes literally the wrong turn and decides that being 'on time' trumps safety. By the next day, wounded and a witness to horrific violence he will never forget, he realizes the foolishness of rigid adherence to schedules.

The expensive watches cached on the table in the mountain monsters' cabin bear silent witness to the fact that many other persons put the same value on time and paid the penalty. They also serve as testaments to the utter uselessness of expensive jewelry and designer sunglasses when confronting beings who intend to kill and eat you. Likely, the persons who owned these items were affluent, ambitious and time-conscious, just like Chris. They had meetings to go to, hotels to check in to, beaches scheduled to tan on. Their time was valuable. They too were in a hurry – now they are dead.



Caption: The Appalachian Man as Monster in *Wrong Turn*.



Caption: College coeds run through the forest in *Wrong Turn* chased by pickup truck.

Discussion

The six films discussed in this research span a two decade's time period in recent American history; they present a cross section of cultural thinking about Appalachia and its people and indicate that these cultural perceptions were diverse and conflicted. In several of the films, an external agent or source of change enters Appalachian culture and alters it, usually for the better; however, sometimes these improvements are short-lived. In *Fire Down Below* a heroic Warrior enters Appalachia and attempts to rectify environmental damage resulting from toxic waste dumping. However, the narrative also implies that the positive effects of this effort will be short-lived, due to a lack of commitment from the federal government. *October Sky* also presents a warrior-change agent in the form of a young, female high school teacher who helps Appalachian students fulfill their intellectual potential. She does succeed, but the recent history of education in Appalachia suggests that her efforts did not become permanent fixtures in the educational system.

Songcatcher also features an external change agent, a female musicologist, who succeeds in overcoming her own selfish ambitions and bringing the gift of Appalachian music to the larger world. Appalachian music is and has been one of the great gifts to emerge from the Region.

Nell and *Wrong Turn*, ironically, portray countervailing images of the power of Appalachia as a healing, natural force and a corrupting, degenerative force. *Nell* presents Nature and Appalachia as pure, innocent and curative in contrast to the techno-smothering environment of the city, corporations, modern medicine and the popular press. However, *Wrong Turn*, despite resuscitating the Mountain Man as Monster archetype in an especially virulent form, also provides an insightful and caustic critique of modern life in America. The fixation of our current culture on materialism, personal ambition, greed and social status is shown to be a fatal (literally) weakness within American society. Unfortunately, the demonic force used to bring about this revelation to the audience brings with it a revival of the notion that Mountain People are irredeemably scary.

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