



PHOTOGRAPH BY PAUL A. MOORE; ASHEVILLE POSTCARD COMPANY COLLECTION; PACK MEMORIAL PUBLIC LIBRARY, NORTH CAROLINA COLLECTION, ASHEVILLE, NC

McIntyre's comment gives voice to an overall subject in Rash's works, the destruction of a way of life, and the comment also serves as recognition that early Appalachian ecological writing is diametrically opposed to what must be said today. William Bartram, André Michaux, Daniel Boone, and other early travelers to and in North Carolina presented the mountains as strong, beautiful, abundant in riches to be enjoyed, and awe-inspiring. Local color portraits suggest the protective Mother Nature role of the mountains and offer a sense of their unapproachable seclusion. But Rash brings another Appalachia to the view of international audiences, an Appalachia that is frail, easily destroyed. In some instances the destruction is not visible on such a grandiose scale as it is in *Serena*, but it is present. As Mark Powell has elsewhere remarked, *Serena* stands "as the current apotheosis of Rash's fiction," but the total body of work reveals "a growing recognition that we are fast destroying nature, and with nature go the last ties that bind us to a recognizable humanity."<sup>16</sup> New and seasoned readers will see this theme in Rash's earlier writings and in current ones. They will admire the growth of vision and the writer's skill as they explore what he has written before *Serena*. Always looking at the individual story in the context of Appalachian history, he offers a cosmos of themes, rich in character and historical detail. This choice of direction, away from the self, has brought *Serena* to life, and it continues to assure Rash's vitality as a writer.

And what of this sudden fame brought about by a cascade of praise for *Serena*? After the twelve drafts of the novel *Serena*, the three years of developing the character Serena, the thirty years honing his craft, Rash can celebrate his own philosophy: "Tenacity and perseverance are essential to good writing," he says. *Serena* validates his approach; it also reflects its author's belief in the importance of reading and rereading: "Every writer I've ever known who's any good is a voracious reader." Strong in his convictions about "good writing" and the depth of commitment required, Rash has not acquired any of the arrogant trappings that sometimes come with widespread recognition. "This success fills me with humility after all these years. Now I'm beginning to enjoy and accept it with humility." Perhaps in part because he worked and wrote for so long before

receiving international acclaim, or perhaps just because he is who he is, Rash is still grounded in his sense of purpose as a writer in and of his Appalachian mountains, knowing that therein lies the universal. ■

**"The Appalachia I knew as a child has been transformed. . . . Sometimes we don't notice our places until they start to disappear, and art comes out of that tension."**—Ron Rash

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Powell's review of *Serena*, forthcoming in *Southern Quarterly* 45.3 (2010).

ABOVE **The Chimneytops in the the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, circa 1930–1950**

**JOYCE COMPTON BROWN** has written about Sharyn McCrumb as well as Ron Rash. See her book reviews in *NCLR* 13 (2004) and 18 (2009), her poem on page 60 of this issue, and her introduction to the interview with Pamela Duncan that follows.

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