

THE EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN AND NATURE IN APPALACHIA: AN ANALYSIS OF
LABOR RIGHTS AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AS PRESENTED BY THREE
APPALACHIAN WOMEN WRITERS

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ABSTRACT

THE EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN AND NATURE IN APPALACHIA: AN ANALYSIS OF LABOR RIGHTS AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AS PRESENTED BY THREE APPALACHIAN WOMEN WRITERS

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Environmental activism in Appalachia in recent years has focused on the harm that practices such as mountaintop removal mining, hydraulic fracturing, and deforestation contribute to the natural landscape of the Appalachian region. However, because of a history of outside industries exploiting Appalachia for its natural resources, writers in Appalachia have been grappling with the environmental and social effects of industrial development for centuries. Wilma Dykeman's 1962 novel *The Tall Woman*, Rebecca Harding Davis's 1861 novella *Life in the Iron-Mills*, and Florence Cope Bush's 1989 biography *Dorie: Woman of the Mountains* are three relatively unstudied Appalachian texts that wrestle with the economic and environmental changes facing Appalachia from the early days of the American Civil War to the mid-20th century. These texts more specifically show how marginalized populations such as women, immigrants, and the poor are disproportionately affected by decisions that are made about the environments in which they live—decisions often made by outsiders. As texts written by three Appalachian women, the works studied here offer perspectives on feminism and

environmentalism that too often go unnoticed in both American literature and American history. In an acknowledgement of the marginalization of women and of the silencing of Appalachian voices overall, this thesis looks to ecofeminist theory and literary analysis in order to explore the connections between environmentally harmful practices, increases in women's labor, and the suppression of women's voices in outcry over social and environmental concerns. In addition, this thesis examines the ideological and economic reasons why labor exploitation and environmental degradation in the Appalachian Mountains are able to continue despite the far-reaching ecological and social consequences of such practices.

CHAPTER ONE: ECOFEMINISM AND APPALACHIAN LITERATURE: A THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

Appalachia stretches across 13 states in the eastern U.S., forming a 205,000 square mile region that has been the subject of both fascination and misunderstanding in pop culture, in the media, and even in literature. Part of the overall focus on Appalachia in recent years, however, has been on efforts to address concerns over mountaintop removal mining, hydraulic fracturing, pollution of water sources, and the overall irresponsible use (or abuse) of natural resources in the region. Often, logging, mining, and other environmentally harmful industries that move into Appalachia uninvited and then leave once it is no longer profitable to stay contribute not only to vast environmental devastation in the region but to economic and social problems as well. However, conversations about environmental advocacy in Appalachia have often failed to include intricate examinations of industry efforts to increase profits at the expense of Appalachian communities. In many ways, environmental and social issues in Appalachia are connected to the region's history and are as unique as the region itself. As such, these issues cannot be solved without careful attention to how environmental devastation has been permitted to occur, nor can they be solved without acknowledgement of the unique social implications that arise when outside industries manage to exert control over what happens to the forests, mountains, rivers, and people of a region.

At first glance, one might argue that concerns for the Appalachian environment have mostly followed more recent national movements towards clean energy (and thus away from energy extracted from the mountains) and forest conservation, but in reality, Appalachian writers have been calling attention to these issues long before they appeared on the national radar.

Diligent study of Appalachian social and environmental issues demonstrates how problematic it is to articulate questions about these issues from a national rather than from a local standpoint, particularly when the industries and stockholders contributing to environmental damage do not experience any of the social or environmental drawbacks to which local communities are subjected. As a result, environmentalism as a movement has persisted for centuries in Appalachia, as study of Appalachian literary history reveals. In an effort to demonstrate Appalachian environmentalism and social advocacy as well as to uncover the linkage of environmental and women's labor exploitation in the Appalachian Mountains, this project will focus on works by three local community-minded women writers that each take place in Appalachia around or soon following the American Civil War: Rebecca Harding Davis's 1861 novella *Life in the Iron-Mills*, Wilma Dykeman's 1962 novel *The Tall Woman*, and Florence Cope Bush's 1989 biography *Dorie: Woman of the Mountains*. Each work points to the manipulation of women and families and to the exploitation of the environment that ultimately harms Appalachian communities.

Dykeman's *The Tall Woman*, for example, contains heartbreaking examples of suffering at the hands of those who exploit other humans and nature, yet much of the published scholarship on the novel tends to focus on environmental concerns within the story's characters and plot rather than on social concerns. When the novel begins, most of the male characters are fighting in the Civil War, and Lydia McQueen is forced to take on extra work and responsibility in order to care for her mother and siblings. Immediately, the masculine (war) has an effect on women and families that literary scholarship has not yet fully articulated. When Lydia's husband Mark leaves again later in the novel to head West with other explorers, Lydia once more takes responsibility for running the household, farming, caring for their children, and making extra

money by harvesting ginseng in the mountains. But even while Lydia demonstrates ecological care and understanding, Dykeman contrasts her with other characters, such as the wealthy Ham Nelson, who care more for profit than for living in ways that benefit natural and human-made communities.

In other texts, such as *Dorie: Woman of the Mountains* and Davis's *Life in the Iron-Mills*, women are often voiceless against labor oppression and environmental concerns because dominant social structures have determined that women and nature are to be compliant to masculine endeavors. Often, decisions made concerning the well-being of women and the environment are made by men in the interest of industry. For example, when industry moves into Dorie's home town, Dorie's mother has to take in many of the new employees as boarders. In such a role, her work hours are increased and her home becomes open to others. Ultimately, Dorie's family is forced to leave the place where she grew up because the land has been purchased by American officials who have the power to tell them that they can no longer live in their home communities. In *Life in the Iron-Mills*, the protagonist Deborah trudges through rainy streets to deliver supper to Hugh after her own 12-hour work shift. The setting in which she is depicted is polluted, dark, and uninhabitable, and women and children are shown again and again to suffer the most. Even though *Life in the Iron-Mills* also points to the marginalization of immigrants and the poor, the unique suffering of women remains a central component in understanding Deborah's character and her actions in the novella.

As further study of Appalachian literature reveals, the goals of industry, advancement, and progress championed by outsiders tend not to consider the well-being of the Appalachian people, who are often looked down on as uneducated and uncivilized. Scholars of Appalachian writing have argued that literature written by people living in Appalachia, much like people

living within the region itself, has been seen as “other” since its beginnings, with feminist scholars pointing out that Appalachian women are even less likely to be heard either politically, socially, or culturally. Too often, Appalachian literature has been tucked away as simply a subset of either American or Southern literature, with the result being that Appalachian literature is largely missing from considerations of social and environmental issues. Despite such a glaring omission, Appalachian writers have a depth of knowledge and perspective to contribute to discussions of these issues. As Appalachian literary scholar Elizabeth Engelhardt points out in *The Tangled Roots of Feminism, Environmentalism, and Appalachian Literature*, women in Appalachia supported and wrote about social and environmental advocacy long before these conversations were highlighted at a national level, thus challenging the stereotype of a typical Appalachian woman as destitute, uneducated, and uninvolved in the larger community discourse (15-6). In reality, Engelhardt argues, activists and writers in the Appalachian region were proposing environmental solutions and arguing over the implications of environmental misuse decades before the topic’s mainstream acceptance on a national scale. Davis, for example, published *Life in the Iron-Mills*, a novella with strong environmentalist and feminist themes, in 1861. Even so, the works discussed in this thesis have been grossly underutilized in literary criticism simply because Appalachian literature, like the region itself, has been marginalized in academia and in literary study. Further, because of the additional “othering” of Appalachian women, relevant questions pertaining to the effect that environmental degradation has on women’s lives and on women’s labor is often missing in even feminist and environmentalist scholarship.

Engelhardt writes in her introduction to *Beyond Hill and Hollow* that stereotypes about Appalachians tend to be twofold for women or for people of color because often, discussions of

race, class, and gender are removed altogether from examinations of the Appalachian region. Engelhardt, who focuses generally on feminism and environmentalism within Appalachian literature, argues that “such erasures allow the stereotype itself to frame the conversation about who Appalachians are,” particularly when stereotypes against Appalachians are compared to and thus distanced from stereotypes against certain races, classes, or genders (2). In other words, contemporary critiques of the marginalization of people in Appalachia maintain a masculine focus, and the exploitation of women and the environment in Appalachia are subjects that have remained largely untouched in literary and other studies. With this gap in criticism in mind, this project will attempt to look at the ways that exploitation of Appalachian women and the degradation of the Appalachian environment have contributed to the continued oppression of “othered” people in the region by forcing women and their families to become more dependent on the decisions and resources of powerful outsiders hoping to exploit land and people for profit.

In *The Tangled Roots*, Engelhardt uses ecofeminist theory as a critical lens through which to advocate for the value of Appalachian literature as a response to environmental and social problems in the region. Greta Gaard, in her introduction to *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, defines an ecofeminist thesis as one that insists “that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature” (1). In essence, then, social and environmental issues are connected and thus must be solved alongside one another. For Engelhardt, then, this theory can be utilized to examine the exploitation of the environment in tandem with the exploitation of women, children, immigrants, people of color, and the poor in Appalachia. She posits additionally that approaching Appalachian literary studies through an

ecofeminist lens can highlight both global *and* local social criticisms. In her introduction to *Beyond Hill and Hollow*, Engelhardt writes:

If fully realized, a global feminist perspective on Appalachia will go beyond the oft-repeated, only recently analyzed sentiment that Appalachia is the third world of the United States – a sentiment both evocative and facile. It might help us, for instance, analyze the connection between Appalachia’s female Wal-Mart employees, struggling to maintain cultural identities and basic employment in the face of rapidly changing economics, and China’s “working sisters,” migrating away from rural farms to unsecured factory jobs producing the goods sold by women in Appalachia’s Wal-Marts. The power dynamics of language classes in Appalachia to help women telemarketers “lose” their distinctive accent could be compared with female telemarketers in India encouraged to create fictional American lives so as to mask the outsourcing of jobs from U.S. companies. (10-11)

In each of these examples, marginalized groups are exploited for the benefits, profit, and “progress” of others, and this exploitation has been permitted to continue because the voices of those who have been exploited are silenced—in the case of Appalachia through stereotypes and through ideologies that insist that industrial progress is progress for everyone. Further, those same marginalized groups are encouraged to shed their own cultural identities, which in turn sends the distinct message that the perspectives and opinions of women in exploited regions are meaningless. Therefore, when we begin to think about power structures that oppress women, minorities, and the environment, we can begin to see the new perspectives that Appalachian literary studies can contribute to larger understandings of the social, cultural, environmental, and political issues that society faces today.

In Engelhardt's presentations of Appalachian ecofeminism, one can begin to understand why the Appalachian people, and why literature produced by people living and working in the region, would portray the environment in terms of partnership and solidarity rather than in terms of resources and ownership. Scholarship and literature about the region has often pointed to the idea that Appalachia is a secret wilderness separated culturally and politically from the rest of the United States, yet it is also clear that such a notion may have helped to encourage the abuse of Appalachian land and labor that is critiqued in much Appalachian literature. Works such as Bush's *Dorie: Woman of the Mountains* and Davis's *Life in the Iron-Mills* demonstrate the exploitation outsiders have managed not only against the environment but also against the people living in the region, particularly those who lack power or influence to thwart the actions of dominant oppressors. It is this link between social and environmental oppression that has inspired many scholars, including Engelhardt, to advocate for literary criticism that seeks to join the social critiques of feminism with the environmental focus found in ecocriticism. Cheryl Glotfelty, who calls the current environmental crisis "the most pressing contemporary issue of all" and criticizes literary studies for ignoring it (xv), also praises the value of efforts "to understand and critique the root causes of environmental degradation" found in fields like ecofeminism (xxi). For Glotfelty, environmental conservation efforts can't be truly successful without understanding the social and cultural issues and ideologies that have led to the current environmental crisis. In studying Appalachian literature, social and environmental issues are effortlessly intertwined, making the genre an important focus of ecofeminist study.

Ecofeminism, by acknowledging a connection between the social issues at the center of feminist writing and the environmental issues on which ecocriticism focuses, goes beyond Glotfelty's call in her introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader* for "the study of the relationship

between literature and the physical environment” through an “earth-centered approach to literary studies” (xvii). Ecofeminism goes further in insisting that the destruction of the environment leads to the marginalization of women and the poor while also reinforcing systemic social, political, and economic oppressions. This cycle can be witnessed in the environmental devastation of areas that are poor or rural and in the additional social and economic barriers faced by women and people of color in these devastated regions. In other words, ecofeminism explores how exploitation of a region’s environment contributes to the exploitation of the people living within that region, often through low or unpaid labor, and how such exploitation and environmental devastation is able to continue unchecked. Because the environments and people being affected have generally already been marginalized through social, economic, gender, racial, cultural, religious, or other discrimination, the far-reaching impact of industrial development remains largely ignored by the majority of society.

In essence, ecofeminism contributes an important lens through which to study Appalachian literature, allowing for a more overt acknowledgement of connections between environmental and social oppression. A focus on feminist issues as they pertain to environmental issues is important for several reasons. As Gaard argues in her article “New Directions for Ecofeminism,” discussions of women and gender have been missing from ecocritical inquiry, an oversight that she contends has led to fewer discussions of how environmental issues affect women overall. The linking of women with nature has also often served as an excuse for oppression and for the exploitation of women’s labor. In addition, rationalist, patriarchal social structures have further made such exploitation possible by devaluing the contributions of both women and nature to modern society.

For these reasons, women's contributions to discussions of environmental advocacy are crucial. Although ecofeminism examines the oppression of various demographics and cultures and does not always limit itself exclusively to women, the focus on women in this project is important. Appalachian literature is unique in part because characters' closeness to the land is generally not associated with a subordinate political or social position nor with a specific gender. In two of the works discussed in this thesis, Bush's *Dorie* and Dykeman's *The Tall Woman*, the female protagonists' connections with nature are viewed as positive characteristics that benefit the community as a whole. However, as Carolyn Merchant points out in *The Death of Nature* and as other ecofeminist scholars have argued, a metaphor that ties women to the environment, thus subordinating both under the dominant powers of a patriarchal society, enables the cycle of oppression that ecofeminism seeks to expose. An ecofeminist reading, then, would consider the discrimination of Appalachian communities, the marginalization of women even within those communities, and the ease with which outside industries exploit the region for its environmental resources, often to the permanent detriment of surrounding lands and communities. The exploitation of the land and of "othered" human beings, of which women are typically members, is rationalized by a way of thinking that reasons costs and profits in quantifiable terms. Such exploitation is justified by the idea that actions harming women, children, minorities, and the environment are a small but necessary cost of increased profit, resources, and the expansion of industry, all of which benefit the mostly male decision makers who are already in power and who have no real incentive to operate in ways that would instead help people or the environment.

An ecofeminist reading of literature, then, requires a critical look at the social hierarchies that place women and nature in subordinate positions to masculine calls for industrialization and capital gain. According to Merchant in *The Death of Nature*, the fervor of the Scientific

Revolution assisted in devaluing nature as well as female-dominated labor. Much of Merchant's eloquently written history of industrialization, science, and the literature of Renaissance and Early Modern Europe points to a tendency to portray nature as pastoral, passive, and caring – qualities deemed feminine by much of the West's social and political history. Not only, Merchant points out, are these qualities determined to be feminine, but they are also seen as less-than their masculine counterparts of mechanization and rationalization, which began to dominate scientific arenas at the end of the British Renaissance. It is this distinction of hierarchy, not the distinction of identity, which is key. Merchant points out that, although female-dominated practices such as natural medicine and midwifery were once valued, these practices were ultimately devalued for the benefit of a society “which depended on activities directly altering the earth” through enterprises like mining and deforestation (2).

An ecofeminist lens can also highlight patriarchal society's rationalization of the exploitation of nature and the marginalization of various groups of “othered” selves, a rationalization that allows such environmental and social abuse to continue in an effort to satisfy the development needs of the powerful majority. Even Christopher Manes, who argues that humanist philosophies devalue nature by placing the environment below mankind on a social hierarchy, admits that within humanity hierarchies also exist that subordinate groups of people to one another. Ecofeminism is a unique field in that it examines both subordinations and the systemic oppression of nature and the poor that results from such social hierarchical thinking. Generally, patriarchal values of progress, industry, development, and capital enjoy a dominant position within this social hierarchy. In her introduction to *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, Gaard explains that, for ecofeminists, the masculine view is one that sees the self as separate from nature, whereas women tend to value interconnectedness with nature and the

community. The masculine “disconnected sense of self,” Gaard argues, “is most assuredly at the root of the current ecological crisis,” particularly when the “rights” of the patriarchal framework are valued above responsibility to land, communities, humans, and nonhuman animals (2). The feminine connection to nature becomes an excuse to subordinate both women and nature to the mostly-male forces in power. In his environmental criticism, Manes blames an “easy alliance of power and reason that sustains those institutions involved in environmental destruction” (17) for a current lack of action or criticism relating to a host of well-known environmental problems, such as species extinction, pollution, climate change, and land development. Something similar could be said for a lack of action on numerous social issues affecting women, children, and minorities as well.

One of these issues is equal pay for equal work, a problem with which ecofeminist scholars and Appalachian women’s scholars have grappled at length. Ariel Salleh, speaking from a global perspective, writes that “on an international pay scale women, undertaking 65 per cent of the world’s work for 5 per cent of its pay, effectively are ‘the proletariat’” (6). Salleh points in part to “a ‘scientific’ approach to housemaking” which “reinforced the importance of unpaid housework as women’s proper role” in the 1920s (60) as a reason for current global discrepancies in women’s pay for labor. In her book, Salleh argues that a housewife’s unpaid work hours—seventy per week—are nearly double that of a “typical” work week, yet the work of women, such as gardening, growing community food, home maintenance, childcare, cooking, and cleaning, are devalued simply *because* this work is unpaid work in a society which so values profit, development, and monetary gain (89). Ecofeminist scholar Vandana Shiva blames the market economy for its treatment of both “nature’s economy—through which environmental regeneration takes place— and the people’s subsistence economy—within which women

produce the sustenance for society through ‘invisible’ unpaid work called non-work,” and which she argues is being “systematically destroyed to create growth in the market economy” (75). The key here is that what women and nature have to offer is artificially but consciously devalued by a development- and profit-centered economy that benefits from the delegitimizing of opposing voices. As a result, women see longer working hours, lower wages, limited opportunities for growth, and less freedom to speak out against injustice or inequality.

Shiva describes the West’s current economic system as “based on a notion of bringing all natural resources into the market economy for commodity production” (71-2). Women and nature, in other words, have become resources to be used for the gain of those who exploit them, and this exploitation leads to the continued oppression of already marginalized groups (Shiva 73). The implications of this practice are far-reaching in that a view of humans and nature as expendable resources will ultimately result in the degradation of entire communities and their environments. In areas with water shortages, malnutrition, or toxic hazards, women, children, and the poor often suffer the most (Shiva 78-84). In addition, Shiva points out that women and children often have to “walk further to collect the diminishing supplies of firewood and water” in rural communities and that, in urban communities, women often find that they “must take on more paid outside work” which “conflicts with the time and energy needed for child care” (84). In other words, when additional work is required in exploited societies because of consequences such as rising costs of commodities or the mass exportation of resources once belonging to the community, it is generally women who are forced to take on the extra labor needed for survival.

Rob Nixon, in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, argues similarly that poorer communities are more likely to suffer environmental and thus social and economic hardships because the consequences of environmental degradation tend to develop slowly and

without the media hype that typically accompanies large-scale violence. Because violence against nature, Nixon argues, is “dispersed across time and space” constituting “an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all,” the consequences of abusing power and natural resources remains largely invisible (2). Further, poor and minority communities suffer even greater consequences because the issues affecting these communities already receive less attention than the issues that face communities with privilege. According to Nixon, “unseen poverty is compounded by the invisibility of the slow violence that permeates” the lives of those living in poor communities (4). In the case of Appalachia, whose hardships are ignored in favor of cheap energy and resources to fuel the rest of the country, the social and environmental woes of marginalized communities are demonstrated through literature produced by Appalachian writers.

Nixon reiterates the claims made by Shiva and other ecofeminists that women within marginalized communities are often the most affected by environmental devastation. In part, such marginalization is permitted by the tendency for a consumer-driven society to ignore the needs of those whom they feel do not contribute adequately to development and “progress.” A society that devalues the contributions of women and the importance of a clean and sustainable environment also rationalizes itself by masking subordinate voices that could potentially offer different and even groundbreaking perspectives on the economy, community, natural preservation, consumption, and community production. Evidence of the effect that environmental degradation and exploitation has on women can be found throughout the works of Appalachian women such as Wilma Dykeman, Florence Cope Bush, and Rebecca Harding Davis, texts which contribute to current understandings of both environmental and social issues as they pertain to marginalized women. Literature written by such women who share valuable

experiences and whose voices have largely been ignored can also bring to light solutions to environmental and social issues that have not yet been pursued. As Engelhardt argues in *The Tangled Roots*, Appalachian portrayals of the environment treat it in a light of partnership and community rather than of mystery or resource management. Further, issues in the Appalachian region, including the environmental troubles caused by mining, deforestation, and other activities that Engelhardt refers to in her book, as well as issues of unfair wages paid to women, poverty, and the legacy of unpaid domestic work Salleh refers to in her writing, seem in Appalachian literature to trace back to a connection between the environment and the notion of an outsider or oppressor. Ecofeminist analysis of writing by Appalachian women can help to uncover the roots and implications of this exploitation.

While ecofeminist criticism generally focuses on women—and the focus of my analysis is on literature written by Appalachian women—ecofeminism as a social criticism spans to groups of people marginalized based on class, race, ethnicity, or disability as well. Feminism lays the ground here for social criticism across boundaries. In her chapter, “Nature is a Feminist Issue,” ecofeminist scholar Karen Warren explains:

Ecofeminists begin with gender as a category of analysis. As such, ecofeminists highlight claims about women *as* women in their discussions of interconnected systems of unjustified domination (rather than, for example, on women *as* humans, *as* mothers, *as* wives, *as* daughters, *as* sisters). But this is not because gender oppression is more important than other forms of oppression; it is not. It is because a focus on “women” reveals important features of interconnected systems of human domination: First, among white people, people of color, poor people, children, the elderly, colonized people, so-called Third World people, and other

human groups harmed by environmental destruction, it is often women who suffer disproportionately higher risks and harms than men. (2)

Warren goes on to point out that women, as well, often hold gender roles that necessitate greater interaction with and care for the environment, and that the ideology calling for dominance over nature is distinctly male-gendered (2). In Appalachia, scholars such as Erica Abrams Locklear, Mary Anglin, and Celia Williamson are beginning to document some of the unique experiences of Appalachian women that make an ecofeminist exploration of writing by Appalachian women especially important, and I hope to continue that work here.

In quoting Appalachian writer Denise Giardina reminiscing bitterly about a lack of Appalachian literature in her school curriculum as a child, Erica Abrams Locklear makes clear that the omission of Appalachian writers from American history and literature classes has further marginalized and silenced an entire region and its population (142). Because of the wealth of unexplored Appalachian women's writing, and because of the environmentally-conscious attention to nature present in so much writing by Appalachian women, the genre could potentially be read as being ecofeminist in nature, a distinction that could strengthen arguments for analysis of such texts. In addition, because Appalachian experiences of marginalization and exploitation (of both people and the land) occur to this day, the genre itself includes a plethora of contemporary narratives focused on the environmental exploitation of the region. By analyzing Appalachian writing, we will further uncover the possibilities of a genre that challenges typical American—and even Western—assumptions of the environment as a fertile ground for opportunity, a pastoral paradise for men to enjoy at their leisure, or a terrifying wilderness waiting to be conquered.

CHAPTER TWO: DEVALUING THE ENVIRONMENT AND WOMEN'S LABOR IN
REBECCA HARDING DAVIS'S *LIFE IN THE IRON-MILLS*

The very title of Rebecca Harding Davis's 1861 novella *Life in the Iron-Mills* begs for an ecocritical or ecofeminist reading of the text. The iron mills, the title suggests, constitute the environment in which the characters of the story live and work—an environment that is dirty, hazardous, and largely controlled by the employers who hope to profit from the labor of the workers and the use of the land. The text explores the implications of both environmental and human exploitation implicit within a “life in the iron-mills.” The opening pages offer a grim portrayal of the story's setting: the atmosphere is “thick, clammy with the breath of crowded human beings” and smoke from the chimneys of the iron mills “settles down in black, slimy pools on the muddy streets” (39). The novella's mysterious narrator declares that “the idiosyncrasy of this town is smoke”; there is “smoke on the wharves, smoke on the dingy boats, on the yellow river,—clinging in a coating of greasy soot to the house-front, the two faded poplars, the faces of the passers-by” (39). Here, Davis has linked a disregard for the well-being of the environment with a disregard for the well-being of certain people—in this case those who live and work in the very factories that have caused this damage.

Life in the Iron-Mills is a text that can be used to study the implications of environmental degradation on nineteenth century industrial workers, particularly women, because of its depiction of both women's labor and of the environment of a West Virginia mill town. Environmental and social issues are linked, at the very least, metaphorically, and they additionally seem to share the same industrial roots: the state of the environment in the novella is due to pollution and additional development from the mills, and Deb's working conditions and

low wages have also been determined by an industry that values profits over the people it pays. The novella's narrator seems to be separate from the dirtiness of the town, which she watches from a second-story window. In other words, the living and working conditions of the most marginalized characters—immigrant workers, particularly women, in Appalachia on the cusp of the Civil War—have been achieved through environmental destruction.

Ecofeminist scholars such as Maria Mies, Vandana Shiva, and Ariel Salleh have linked the economic and labor issues of oppressed women to industrial development that destroys the environment with a disregard for the people, often women and children, who live in those environments.¹ According to Shiva, the nature-based economy in which women have long worked is devalued through colonization as the industrial economy instead takes over. Not only is women's work devalued, Shiva argues, but concern for nature itself decreases as natural sustenance begins to appear inferior when compared side-by-side to the man-made possibilities of mechanical and industrial production (75). As women and the poor are pushed increasingly into manufacturing jobs, Shiva points out, their dependence on those industries to deliver them from poverty is solidified. Mies takes this argument a step further, claiming that colonization, typically of the so-called impoverished global South, is enabled by a system which convinces developing communities not only that they can get ahead by mimicking the development of the North, but that it would be in their best interest to do so. I would emphasize additionally that such a model views both people – particularly those marginalized by gender, immigrant status, or region – and the environment as resources, thus justifying the low wages, disregard for living

¹ Mies and Shiva's collection of essays, *Ecofeminism*, as a whole examines women's labor and economic conditions as they pertain to environmental exploitation and colonization. This chapter pulls from Mies's "The Myth of Catching-Up Development" and Shiva's "The Impoverishment of the Environment: Women and Children Last" unless otherwise noted.

conditions, and irresponsible environmental degradation that best enables unchecked development and profit.

Salleh in *Ecofeminism as Politics* insists that ecofeminism differs from other theoretical perspectives because “while many feminists may be content with nothing more than equality alongside men in the existing system, ecofeminists are concerned about global sustainability as much as gender justice: in fact, they see the two as intrinsically interlinked” (91). Further, Salleh explains that “the enclosure and privatisation of women, the subsumption of women’s time, energies and powers through patriarchal family and public employment alike, parallel or more accurately underwrite the class exploitation of labour by capital” (94). That is, the very developmental models that have led to industrial progress have also disproportionately harmed women through lower wages and dire living conditions that have forced them to complete both paid labor (again, at a lower wage than what men receive) and unpaid labor within their homes and families. Furthermore, the environmental plight in Davis’s novella is highlighted as a clear component of the depressed existence of the mill town. As Davis’s narrator watches the streets below an open window at the beginning of the novel, the reader begins to see the connections between an unhealthy environment and a suffering population. The narrator personifies the land, describing the river as “dull and tawny covered” and remarking further that

The river...drags itself sluggishly along, tired of the heavy weight of boats and coal-barges. What wonder? When I was a child, I used to fancy a look of weary, dumb appeal upon the face of the negro-like river slavishly bearing its burden day after day.

Something of the same idle notion comes to me to-day, when from the street-window I look on the slow stream of human life creeping past, night and morning, to the great mills. (40)

The river, in this case, is personified so as to reflect the very people who suffer at the hands of industry: in other words, those who are poor, sick, and not white. The men who pass the narrator's window are "masses of men" whose "dull, besotted faces" are then linked directly to their work in the mills. They are "begrimed with smoke and ashes" from "stooping all night over boiling cauldrons of metal" and "breathing from infancy to death an air saturated with fog and grease and soot." Such an environment, the narrator remarks, is "vileness for soul and body" (40).

The narrator ultimately concludes that humankind faces a plight worse than the river: "it [the river] knows that beyond there waits for it odorous sunlight" and "quaint old gardens, dusky with soft, green foliage" (40). Even so, the happier future of the river lies in its ability to find those dusky gardens – and the "air, and fields, and mountains" that the narrator insists lie outside the borders of the story's mill town. The narrator draws an additional contrast when she invites her audience to "hide your disgust, take no heed to your clean clothes, and come right down with me,—here into the thickest fog and mud and foul effluvia" (41). In other words, not all human beings live in this environment; only the workers, who are othered through immigrant, class, or gender status, are subject to the hazards of living and working in such conditions. *These* people and *this* region have faced dehumanization and degradation, and the contrast between the two types of scenery the narrator presents—that of the mill town's pollution as well as the beauty of the gardens outside of the mill town—is significant in understanding why and how such degradation has occurred.

The idea of othering, as it is in much ecofeminist theory, is also important in understanding an ecofeminist reading of *Life in the Iron-Mills* that pays careful attention to the implications of the text's Appalachian setting. The novella and its author occupy murky

territories in American history, literature, and geography that further contribute to the idea of “othered” identities in the text. The story was published in April 1861, a few months before western Virginia began efforts to secede from the state, and Davis herself has been criticized for a privileged white and middle-class point-of-view on issues of class equality and the working conditions of industrial laborers. Despite these criticisms, Elizabeth Engelhardt in *The Tangled Roots* remarks that Davis remains a largely unstudied but important figure in Appalachian literature, particularly because “she is one of the few writers of nineteenth-century Appalachian literature who actually lived in the region” (49). Further, although much literary scholarship written about Davis’s work has focused on an autobiographical reading of her frustrations as a female writer in the mid-19th century, much of this same scholarship has linked her to Hugh Wolfe, the novella’s male protagonist, while largely ignoring Deborah, the female textile worker whose actions and desires influence most of the story’s plot and climax.² An ecofeminist reading of this text will begin to uncover the contrast of female/nature labor with industrial development which rationalizes lower wages and longer hours for women by writing off women’s work, particularly unpaid domestic work, as inferior to men’s work. Shiva calls this rationalization a legitimization of development at the expense of the natural environment, which enables subsistence living and natural solutions to be portrayed as inferior. By linking nature-based lifestyles to poverty, developed countries and industrial interests can insist that further

² See Miles, Caroline S. “Representing and Self-Mutilating the Laboring Male Body: Re-examining Rebecca Harding Davis’s *Life in the Iron Mills*;” Molyneaux, Maribel W. “Sculpture in the Iron Mills: Rebecca Harding Davis’s Korl Woman;” and Morrison, Lucy. “The Search for the Artist in Man and Fulfillment in Life – Rebecca Harding Davis’s *Life in the Iron Mills*” for examples of scholarship that focuses on Hugh Wolfe.

development will help such societies rise out of poverty, even if, in reality, such development only perpetuates continued poverty and dependence on oppressive interests for survival (72).

In Davis's novella, oppression and environmental degradation are most clearly seen through Deborah's perspective. Although Davis introduces her story as a tale about "a furnace tender in one of Kirby and John's rolling mills—Hugh Wolfe" (41), the first active character the reader encounters is Deborah. The reader first meets Deborah as she and her fellow workers, all female, meet outside of the cotton mill at the end of the work day. While most of the other women plan to spend the few hours they have off at a house gathering, Deborah declines the invitation despite the persistence of the others, who insist that "if hur'll come, hur'll hef fun" (42). Instead, Deborah returns to the two-room cellar she shares with her cousin Hugh, his father, and Janey, a character who in many ways represents a foil to Deborah. The setting is described as having an "earthen floor covered with a green, slimy moss" with "a fetid air smothering the breath" (43). As Deborah begins to prepare potatoes for dinner, the narrator depicts her as "deformed, almost a hunchback" wearing "a faded cotton gown and a slouching bonnet." As Deborah eats the cold potatoes left for her, the narrator informs the reader that "it was the first food that had touched her lips since morning." Further, the narrator remarks that although Deborah does not drink alcohol, "perhaps the weak, flaccid wretch had some stimulant in her pale life to keep her up ... Man cannot live by work alone" (43). Deborah's love for her family is then shown when, upon learning that Hugh will not be home until morning, she forgoes the rest of her own supper in order to take food to Hugh at the iron mills. Within Deborah's character Davis portrays a notion of responsibility for caring for family, a thought which later leads Deborah to commit actions that ultimately endanger Hugh and the others.

Deborah's work day, as scholars such as Jean Pfaelzer have pointed out, does not end at the close of her 12-hour shift at the textile mill. In contrast to other scholars who have mostly focused on Hugh's frustrations as an artist and as a mill worker, Pfaelzer draws parallels between Davis's frustrations as a female author and the unrealistic expectations Deborah faces as a woman in the nineteenth century. Deborah's domestic duties such as cooking and caring for members of her family constitute "unpaid or hidden work" according to Pfaelzer, and this work is in addition to the long hours of labor that Deborah and other working class women would have shared with male laborers. Additionally, this role places responsibility for the happiness and well-being of others squarely on Deborah's shoulders, yet she has very little control over the actual working and living conditions of her family, particularly during a time when worker's rights movements advocating for higher wages and better working environments had not yet achieved much success. Pfaelzer argues that this responsibility, in part, leads to the theft that Deborah commits in the novel because, ultimately, Deborah commits a crime that she believes will give Hugh and Janey a chance at a better life (61).

Although Pfaelzer argues that Deborah's workload is more difficult because she is a woman and that the oppression women workers faced would have resonated with a struggling female writer in the late nineteenth century, I would argue additionally that the stringent expectations placed on women to provide for and care for others helped to silence voices that might have protested the exploitation of women workers and destruction to the environments in which women lived and worked. Pfaelzer attributes the phenomenon of discounting women's unpaid household labor to the nineteenth century notion of "The Cult of the True Woman," an idea which insists that women find peace and refuge in their domestic work. Pfaelzer argues against this perception, maintaining instead that unpaid work is still work and thus constitutes

additional work hours for women. Unfortunately other Davis scholars, by focusing primarily on Hugh's role in the story, have mostly ignored the implications and causes of the suffering of Deborah and other women seen throughout the novel.

Even in bringing Hugh his supper, Deborah is well aware that although "it was her almost nightly walk to take this man his supper, though at every square she sat down to rest . . . she knew she should receive small word of thanks" (Davis 45). By the time Deborah arrives, "her back pained her sharply; and her teeth chattered with cold, with the rain that soaked her clothes and dripped from her at every step" (46). Despite this discomfort, she waits for Hugh to have time to receive the meal that she has brought him, even though he forgets almost immediately that she is there and only takes his supper when another worker offers Deborah a place by the furnace to rest. Although Hugh eats what Deborah has brought him, "with a woman's quick instinct, she saw that he was not hungry" and was only "eating to please her" (46). While it is true that characters such as Hugh—and even Janey and Hugh's father—are suffering their own hardships and are forced by circumstance to work long and miserable hours in the iron and textile mills, it is Deborah's unpaid work—her care for the Wolfe family and for Janey—that Davis portrays as the most thankless task and one which Deborah endures in addition to her own long days at work.

According to an editorial published in a late nineteenth-century issue of *The Wheeling Register*, women of that time often worked eleven-hour days for lower wages than were paid to men. Additionally, the article argues, women had "no trade unions or social organizations to assist them, but toil on, uncomplainingly, day after day and week after week for less wages than men" ("The Wages of Women"). This work, the editorial points out, is in addition to the household chores and caretaking roles that working women also filled. Another article, published

in North Carolina's *Charlotte Observer* in 1893, throws its support behind a law in the North Carolina legislature which would reduce the work hours of women and children to eleven a day and limit their working hours to between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. ("The Hours of Labor of Women and Children"). However, the editorial supports this measure because "women and children are, or should be, wards of the State." The writer of the piece goes on to argue that if the reduced wages resulting from reduced work hours is too much for these workers to survive, then, "they are supporting a life which is not worth having and had as well be turned out to starve"; fortunately, the article assures critics, "there is subsistence for all of them, if the worst should come to the worst, as house-servants, cooks, or washer-women." Essentially, the article takes on a positive tone that not only espouses the virtues of its own charity to women but also reaffirms the dependence of women and children on men in power and reminds women that they can always take on more work in other ways if needed. This change, brought on by legislation introduced by many of the same powers that contributed to poor working conditions in the first place, is repackaged as something that helps women break from this "life which is not worth having" and offers a false sense of equality to men.

Powerful male figures in Davis's novel, such as Kirby, his brother-in-law Mitchell, and Dr. May, help to popularize what ecofeminist scholar Maria Mies calls "the myth of the catching-up development," which is based on the notion that "the poor in the North, those in the countries of the South, and peasants and women worldwide may attain this 'good life' ...by following the same path of industrialization, technological progress, and capital accumulation" taken by the largely male-run wealthier society (55). In other words, the myth insists that environmental degradation, rather than hurting the already poor and marginalized, will eventually lead them to the kinds of opportunities and economic development which have made

the current men in power so powerful. In *Life in the Iron-Mills*, this myth is promoted during a tour of the mills by Kirby, the mill owner, and several other prominent men, including the town physician Dr. May. Dr. May is particularly impressed with Hugh's abilities as a sculptor, and he tells Hugh that "you have it in you to be a great sculptor, a great man...to live a better, stronger life than I, or Mr. Kirby here." Further, he tells Hugh, "a man may make himself anything he chooses. God has given you stronger powers than many men" (56). In this instance, May has voiced Mies' myth: if you work hard enough and are talented enough, you succeed. Even further, May invokes religious reasoning: God has even given Hugh an advantage over others, according to May, because God has given Hugh artistic talent.

What May does not say is that Hugh has another advantage over a worker like Deborah because Hugh is male. The discrepancy between Hugh's experience and Deborah's experience is even apparent in the scholarship that has been written about *Life in the Iron-Mills*. The discovery of the korl woman sculpture and Hugh's explanation of her desperate appearance—"She be hungry" (53)—has been a topic of discussion in most of the scholarship concerning the novella and has often focused on Hugh's own hunger for something more than his work at the iron mills. On closer examination, Deborah is also "hungry" in a way that has been unexplored in Davis scholarship and that is largely ignored by every male character around her. She loves Hugh, and in many ways is desperate to please him, which leads her to take money from Mitchell's pocket when he and the other men visit the mill. When Deborah brings Hugh the money she has stolen, Davis writes that "her eyes glowed . . . she was young, in deadly earnest; her faded eyes, and wet, ragged figure caught from their frantic eagerness a power akin to beauty" (60). This moment, it seems, is the first time that Hugh has witnessed or recognized Deborah's yearning for something more. Later, as Deborah says goodbye to Hugh in his prison cell, Davis's narrator

asks, “Do you laugh at her, standing there, with her hunchback, her rags, her bleared withered face, and the great despised love tugging at her heart?” (69). Unlike Hugh, who asks Dr. May how to become a great man—essentially, how to “catch up”—Deborah’s primary focus is on the happiness and well-being of others. Deborah’s “hunger” is different from the hungering of male characters like Hugh, and it has therefore largely been ignored.

Hugh’s decision to carve a female figure rather than a male, and by extension Davis’s choice in writing the korl figure as a woman, should also not be ignored. The korl woman is “of giant proportions” with “a nude woman’s form, muscular, grown coarse with labor, the powerful limbs instinct with some one poignant longing” (52-3). The korl woman, according to Hugh, does not hunger for whiskey, although liquor “ull do it, in a way” (54); similarly, Davis writes earlier in the novel that, in Deborah’s case, “the weak, flaccid wretch had some stimulant in her pale life to keep her up,—some love or hope, it might be, or urgent need. When that stimulant was gone, she would take to whiskey” (43). For both Deborah and for other women in her situation, then, the demands on body and mind are such that, eventually, previous hopes and goals are abandoned for practical relief.

Davis’s readers would have likely been familiar with the Massachusetts Lowell girls, textile mill workers who in the early nineteenth century became known for their literary and cultural accomplishments as well as their financial independence (Cook 5). Sylvia Jenkins Cook, in her text *Working Women, Literary Ladies*, examines the history of female industrial labor and women’s writing in nineteenth-century America. According to Cook, the Lowell mill girls were gifted with the opportunity to express their own thoughts in publications such as the *Lowell Offering*, which published several articles about factory life, including Harriet Farley’s “In Defense of Factory Girls,” an argument that factory work provided one of the most high-paying

and culturally lucrative opportunities available to working women (54). By the late 19th century when Davis published *Life in the Iron-Mills*, however, conditions had largely changed for working women, and in the early chapters of her book Cook also points to questions of whether the Lowell writings could have been completely objective when the girls were faced with twelve-hour workdays and living conditions entirely manufactured by their employers (42; 45-6). Additionally, the limited opportunities available for women to earn a living would have discouraged criticisms of the few opportunities that *were* available.

By the second half of the nineteenth century—decades marked by an “intensification and acceleration of industrialization”—“the codes of urban industrial capitalism were becoming more entrenched, so that the experience of factory labor could no longer be viewed as a chosen stage in a worker’s life from which progress or retreat was a real possibility” (Cook 188). Women writers such as Davis thus began “noting the ways [working women] were victimized by both poverty and sexual prejudice” either through lower wages, increased discrimination, or the longer working hours that result from combining women’s unpaid labor with women’s paid labor (Cook 189). Cook points to the clash between Hugh and Mitchell as a metaphor criticizing “the Romantic notions of self-culture to the needs and dreams of the working-class” (192); in other words, it is difficult for women such as Deborah to be concerned with artistic expression when they experience the difficulties and fatigues of long hours in industrial labor as well as the expectation that they will enthusiastically provide for their families even when food, clean environments, and opportunities for better wages or workplace advancements are limited. In Deborah’s character, we see the double oppression she experiences due to her status as an immigrant worker and as a woman caring for a household. It even falls under Deborah’s responsibility to care for and feed Janey while Janey’s father is in jail. Like many of the other

workers Davis's narrator depicts, Janey is described as having a "haggard and sickly" face complete with eyes "heavy with sleep and hunger" (44). With her father in jail, Janey is vulnerable and has no place to go, yet rather than falling on the overall society and community to care for one another, responsibility for friends and family inevitably falls on women such as Deborah.

When Deborah brings Hugh his supper, she endures a long walk and extra work after an already tiring day as well as the degradation of the environment around her. As Deborah walks, she is exposed to heavy rain and the bleak, ash-covered environment the narrator describes at the novel's opening. By painting a picture of the surrounding landscape through Deborah's point of view, Davis attempts to articulate the environmental damage of the mill town through a woman's eyes. As Deborah completes her journey, Davis writes that

The road leading to the mills had been quarried from the solid rock, which rose abrupt and bare on one side of the cinder-covered road, while the river, sluggish and black, crept past on the other. The mills for rolling iron are simply immense tent-like roofs, covering acres of ground, open on every side. Beneath these roofs Deborah looked in on a city of fires, that burned hot and fiercely in the night. (45).

All of Deborah's surroundings consist of the mills and their effect on the environment. The mills themselves take up "acres of ground," while the road is covered in ashes and the river itself is black and "sluggish." Just as Deborah and the "masses of men" the narrator describes at the beginning of the novella move slowly and monotonously from one task to another, the natural landscape within and around the city is also depicted as sick, suffering, and weak.

There are significant implications to the way that Davis has chosen to portray Hugh and Deborah in the novella. First, Hugh's own suffering is often attributed to limits on his artistic

opportunity; Deborah, however, is clearly affected not only by limited opportunity and poverty but by the effects of environmental degradation as well. Therefore an ecofeminist reading of the text with the goal of uncovering the effect of environmental exploitation on those marginalized by poverty, immigration status, or gender should therefore focus on Deborah's perception of and reaction to the environment around her. Davis's narrator insists that, if Deborah had "possessed an artist's eye, the picturesque oddity of the scene might have made her stagger less . . . but to her the mills were only 'summat delish to look at by night'" (45). This statement immediately draws a contrast between how Deborah views her surroundings and how an artist such as Hugh, introduced later, might perceive it. As Deborah eyes the mill's "pits of flame waving in the wind; liquid metal-flames writhing in torturous streams through the sand; wide caldrons filled with boiling fire, over which bent ghastly wretches stirring the strange brewing," the narrator writes that "even Deborah muttered, as she crept through, 't looks like t' Devil's place!" (45). In other words, Deborah's perception of the mill environment is portrayed in terms that are dull and less creative than Hugh's. Although Hugh's artistic ability is most commonly read as an attribute, thus subordinating Deborah's supposedly unimaginative viewpoint, it is important to note that, if our critical focus is on treatment of the environment, the character who we see most often in the outside environment is Deborah—first as a worker leaving her shift, then in her duty to bring Hugh his supper, and finally, at the close of the novella, at peace in the Quaker colony she lives in after her release from prison.

Carolyn Merchant in *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* points to the linking between natural science and feminine domains, as well as to the nature-female metaphor which has enabled the masculine exploitation of both women and the environment. In Davis's *Life in the Iron-Mills*, environmental degradation is obvious, as is the

suffering of the female workforce seen at the beginning of the story. Deborah, as a woman, is exploited because of her class, immigrant status, and gender and the combination of these factors makes exploitation of women laborers easier in a profits-and-progress-based masculine society that justifies the lower wages and longer hours endured by women by devaluing the work done by women. Even when Davis describes Hugh, who is a male worker, she does so in feminized terms that in some ways may have allowed the reader to more easily accept Hugh's subordinate position. Davis writes that Hugh's body "had already lost the strength and instinct vigor of a man" (47), and scholars such as Amy Schragger Lang have pointed to such feminization as "both debilitating and distorting" while working to also "ensure his demise" (79). As a feminized figure, Hugh becomes subject to similar hierarchical trends that disempower women and the environment, making them essentially resources for development that will largely benefit oppressors rather than the oppressed. Even so, there is still a contrast between Hugh's opportunities for advancement and Deborah's. By feminizing Hugh while at the same time revealing female laborers' subordination to working men, Davis has pointed out once again the ease with which men in power are able to control and exploit those they have "othered," including women, the poor, and the environment.

In *Life in the Iron-Mills* then, the once "fertile" or "abundant" environment of southern West Virginia has been devastated and the workers of the mill have been dehumanized through a way of life that allows for little resistance against those in power. When Hugh and Deborah try to resist such a fate, arguing that they have a right to the Mitchell's money, they do not even truly have the opportunity to make a claim for the lack of wages and harsh conditions to which they have been subjected so that men such as Kirby, John, or even Mitchell can succeed with limited competition or recognized complaint from the lower classes. Consequently, Davis has shown

how the feminization and the resulting dehumanization of workers and the environment as resources have allowed for the further advancement of a few powerful men at the expense of health and happiness for everyone else.

When Deborah is finally rescued by a charitable Quaker woman at the end of the novella, Davis emphasizes the change in scenery. She writes of the “long years of sunshine, and fresh air, and slow, patient Christ-love, needed to make healthy and hopeful this impure body and soul” of Deborah’s (73). Davis has clearly drawn a distinction between the unhealthy environment of the mill town and the natural landscape that allows Deborah to heal and live out a much happier life. At the beginning of her story, when Davis’s narrator asks the reader: “Can you see how foggy the day is?” as she goes on to describe the “dirty backyard and the coal-boats” below her window (40). With this presumably middle-class narrator, who is physically separated from the scene as she peers from a window onto the landscape below, Davis is pointing to the effects of an environmental degradation that harms not only workers such as Deborah and Hugh but which holds implications for Davis’s upper- and middle-class readers as well. Although the narrator is not subjected to the labor and living conditions of the working class, she is still clearly affected by the ashen and smoke-covered land around her. Davis’s story, then, reveals both an environmentalist message as well as an acknowledgement of the abuses of women’s labor by men in power. Davis successfully weaves these concerns together so as to emphasize that the implications of social and environmental degradation often go hand-in-hand.

Davis’s story is important for this study in part because the novella’s events take place just before the Civil War begins in 1861. The additional texts that will be discussed—Dykeman’s *The Tall Woman* and Bush’s *Dorie: Woman of the Mountains*—also take place in the late 19th century and in many ways are grounded by the events of the Civil War. Further, Davis’s novella

draws a contrast between urban industrialization, which Deborah witnesses, and the industrialization of rural Appalachia, which takes place mostly following the War and which Dykeman's Lydia McQueen and Bush's Dorie Cope experience in their lifetimes. Because Davis's novella takes place a few years earlier than Dykeman's novel and almost four decades before Bush's story begins, it foreshadows the labor and environmental issues that have solidified the marginalization of women and nature in Appalachia.

CHAPTER THREE: *THE TALL WOMAN'S* RESPONSE TO ECONOMIC PRIVILEGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

While Davis's novella depicts an environment that has become degraded and dirty through industrial actions, Wilma Dykeman presents in her 1962 novel *The Tall Woman* a natural habitat that has remained, at least in the beginning of the novel, largely undeveloped by outside industries. The contrast between the two natures presented in these works contains a veiled warning against the kind of industrialization that leads to the environmental destruction Deborah witnesses in *Life in the Iron-Mills*. Even so, in *The Tall Woman*, Dykeman features the environment in a way that demonstrates the effect of industrialization on the living and working conditions of people in the Appalachias, similar to the way that Davis portrays the environment in her novella. The environmentalism apparent in Wilma Dykeman's *The Tall Woman*, an environmentalism that advocates for continued respect of nature and for avoiding the consequences of industrial revolution, has received a fair amount of attention with Appalachian literary studies. Scholars such as Elizabeth Engelhardt and Patricia Gantt have written extensively about Dykeman's work and its reflection of the author's environmental concerns, which surfaced in many forms even before publication of Rachel Carson's highly influential *Silent Spring* the same year. Dykeman's penchant for environmental and social causes can also be inferred through much of the work she published in her lifetime, from interviews and newspaper editorials to more well-known texts such as 1955's conservation-focused *The French Broad*, a volume of the Rivers of America Series,³ and 1957's *Neither Black Nor White*, a

³ For extensive discussions on environmentalism in Dykeman's *The French Broad*, see Patricia Gantt's "'A Mutual Journey': Wilma Dykeman and Appalachian Regionalism" and

statement on civil rights and the ugly consequences of racial inequality written by Dykeman with her husband, James Stokely. Dykeman scholars, including Oliver King Jones, III, have pointed out that Dykeman's work showcases the author's concern for issues of civil, social, and environmental rights. *The Tall Woman*, with its focus on environmental issues and attention to the effects of agricultural development and wealthy land ownership on the community, offers a plethora of avenues for criticism that have not yet been fully explored.

This chapter intends to go further in analysis of *The Tall Woman* by coupling the novel's environmental concerns with women's labor and other social issues found in a careful analysis of the text. In her article "Nature-Loving Souls and Appalachian Mountains," Engelhardt writes that ecofeminism asks two questions: "how does an author talk about—in theoretical terms, 'construct'—nature in his or her text? and, how does the author's discussion of race, class, and gender intersect with that construction of nature in the text?" (343). In other words, ecofeminist criticism of *The Tall Woman* can examine the intersections between environmental exploitation in the Appalachian region and the industrial or agricultural progress that typically fuels irresponsible or even unethical treatment of the land. Dykeman's novel additionally uncovers the marginalization of "others" within the Appalachian region, particularly women and the poor, in order to demonstrate how the consequences of environmental exploitation fall most heavily on these marginalized groups who often find that the "progress" of development, rather than bringing about positive change, fundamentally alters their work and way of life, especially when the notion of "progress" is articulated from an outside perspective.

Elizabeth Engelhardt's "Nature-Loving Souls and Appalachian Mountains: The Promise of Feminist Ecocriticism." As a work detailing the history of the French Broad River, Dykeman's *The French Broad* is an important work in early American environmentalism.

Dykeman's novel also invites analysis of the feminist and environmentalist undertones of the story because of the environmental and social causes quietly championed by the main character of the story. In *The Tall Woman*, the novel's protagonist Lydia McQueen becomes, throughout the course of the story, a woman her mother describes as "our mountain girl, Lydia, and our natural-born mother" (131). In other words, Dykeman works to portray Lydia in terms that some, in an initial reading of the novel, may find to be stereotypical; Lydia is an environmentally-focused nurturer, midwife, educational activist, and advisor for her family and for her community of Thickety Creek. However, Lydia's character resists the notions of a patriarchal hierarchy that insists a connection with nature is a detriment to progress rather than a valuable and conscientious attribute. Part of Lydia's growth and the obstacles she overcomes demonstrate the difficulties with which women are faced when decisions regarding the environment are made by men in power rather than by the working women and mothers of the community. These obstacles include some of the labor that she has to endure during her husband's many extended absences. For Lydia, labor includes farming, raising livestock, caring for her family and her home, gathering water for household use, cooking, cleaning, and gathering and selling herbs for extra money. Because the novel chronicles Lydia's and the community's growth from the early days of the Civil War to the final decades of the nineteenth century, we can even better examine the connections between Lydia's environmentalism, her dependence on the land to be successful at her work, and an appreciation of nature apparent from the novel's opening pages. In addition, we are able to gain a deeper understanding of the social criticisms of masculine-dominated war, the inequities of expectations of women's labor, Western exploration, and industrial and agricultural development that contribute to so many of the issues that characters face in the novel.

Within ecofeminist criticism, scholars such as Greta Gaard and Rob Nixon have emphasized the intersections between environmental hazards and their negative effects on the world's most vulnerable and powerless populations. Ecofeminist scholars go even further in highlighting how a privileged perspective, such as that which Ham Nelson enjoys, enables those with power to essentially ignore any perspective that would challenge their harmful environmental practices. To make this point, Dykeman compares Lydia's situation of living and working in harmony with the land with Ham Nelson's position, one which views the environment as property or as a resource to the detriment of less privileged members of the community. Dykeman establishes the difference in the two characters' attitudes in the first chapter of *The Tall Woman*: Lydia remembers Ham claiming that Thickety Creek would be "his, the creek and earth a personal possession as though it were a land-deed to fold and put in his pocket, or a hat to keep in his closet" (25). For Ham, the value of nature lies in ownership of it because only ownership can bring more money and, thus, more power, which Ham exercises throughout the novel by denying credit to shoppers at his store beginning with the winter offseason and, as the largest community taxpayer, by halting measures to build a community school that would be paid for with taxes.

While ecofeminism generally examines intersections between human and environmental concerns, this thesis has dedicated most of its emphasis on the issue of women's labor as it relates to decisions about how to treat the environment. Fundamentally, Ham's view of nature invokes connotations of masculinity because of its emphasis on production and capital progress. Under Ham's interpretation of environmental and social value, the less privileged members of Thickety Creek, often women, children, and the poor, are further marginalized because, with so much ownership in the hands of one man's interests, opportunities to work for oneself through

subsistence farming, to own land, or to receive an education are less often realized. According to ecofeminist scholars such as Vandana Shiva, the environmental costs of development, such as in Ham's purchase and misuse of land for a tobacco venture which eventually fails, fall most heavily on women and the poor in the community. The McQueen family first discusses Ham's ventures at length more than halfway through the novel when Lydia's two sons remark that Ham believes a school would conflict with his hiring of tobacco workers. Later, when Lydia confronts Ham about his opposition, Ham asserts that "I don't aim to lift one little finger to help another school open on this creek and keep good tobacco hands out of the field, raise land taxes, get things stirred up" (297). This is even after Lydia points out to him that he was only able to receive an education because his mother, unlike most parents in the community, had been educated enough herself to teach Ham. The "tobacco hands" Ham refers to most likely don't have the same opportunities to become educated that Ham has been fortunate enough to receive.

While Ham's use of land for profit disrupts the environment and allows him nearly unchecked social and political influence in the community, the most marginalized members of Thickety Creek are seen to suffer, including Lydia as she strives to work to provide and care for her family. Shiva argues that increases in production and wealth generally indicate a destruction in "the potential of nature and women to produce life and goods and services for basic needs." She concludes that "more commodities and more cash mean less life—in nature through ecological destruction and in society through denial of basic needs" especially when women and when work tied to nature are devalued (75). Nature's economy, she argues, which includes the nontraditional (unpaid) work of women such as Lydia, is inevitably destroyed by the market economy that has allowed Ham to become so successful in the novel. For example, when Ham refuses to accept credit for goods at his store during the winter offseason, families who depend

on the land to get by are most affected. By emphasizing Ham's capital interests alongside Lydia's work with and around nature, Dykeman has implied that, in addition to ecological losses, environmental destruction has both economic and social ramifications as well, particularly for those who are already marginalized in other ways.

One of Ham's most obvious advantages is his wealth; unlike other members of the community, Ham's tax dollars are able to decide how the environment is used and what educational and economic opportunities are available for others. As Ham Nelson defends his right to the tax dollars that would help build a community school, he is also valuing his own worth over his responsibility to Thickety Creek, and as he makes money off of land that once housed families in the community, through logging surrounding lands for tobacco fields, he is also destroying the regenerative properties of the environment that had long benefited farming families in the region. Lydia, on the other hand, is often depicted as providing for others because it is her responsibility to do so and because she feels a human rather than an essentialist gendered connection to the earth not because she plans to profit from exploiting people or the land.

Lydia's workload spans masculine and feminine roles, and as the novel progresses, readers watch Lydia take on the responsibilities of a head-of-household, unusual for the time period, while men are either absent or unavailable. Like Rebecca Harding Davis's Deborah from 1861's *Life in the Iron-Mills*, Lydia's role as a worker also encompasses two realms: that of provider and that of nurturer and caregiver to her family, thus challenging, once again, the gender roles and stereotypes regarding the work of women in Appalachia and the value of work connected with nature or domesticity. Lydia's character serves as a challenge to Ham in that her attitudes toward the environment and the community are entirely different from his. Ham values profit and agricultural progress often at the expense of the environment and the community, whereas

Lydia values the environment and community far above profit or investment. Lydia's work does not exploit nature but rather works with it. Throughout the novel, Lydia's dual roles as caretaker and provider in conjunction with nature defy gender stereotypes and call attention to the realities of women's labor issues in both the household and in the workplace, which for Lydia, is often in and around her own backyard. Additionally, Dykeman emphasizes through Lydia's point of view the importance of human, nature, and nonhuman animal connections. Through Lydia's character, Dykeman challenges gender stereotypes, labor issues, and environmental and social exploitation in an effort to uncover connections between environmental degradation, a male-informed social and economic system, and the expanded labor and social responsibilities which then result for women and for other marginalized persons in Appalachia.

Despite emphasis on the marginalization of women, Dykeman is careful to avoid essentialisms that would render Lydia's environmentalism as a stereotypical attribute of her gender. Through Lydia's eyes and through the omnipresent voice of the novel's narrator, nearly all characters and events are described in natural terms. As the story begins, the wind is depicted as "a wild dark thing plucking at the trees outside, pushing at the doors and chinks of the house, then dying down still as death before another rise and rush and plunge" (13). Lydia, newly married and pregnant with her first child, is lying alone in her cabin thinking of her husband and the other men who have gone away to fight in what the novel refers to as the War Between the States. The wind, to Lydia, is "like the great fine horse Papa had owned once, strong and willful with no bit or stirrup that could tame it" (13). As Lydia's thoughts move to her wedding day, she describes the spring season in similarly personal terms:

Spring was chancy, but she liked it best of all the seasons. One day would be still and soft with the sun flowing like honey along the hillsides, over the brown winter leaves and the

tender green things peeping through, with time slow and the bees buzzing somewhere in the sunshine . . . and the next day fierce, with the wind tearing through the woods in gusts, shaking the last dry oak leaves, bending treetops, piercing every crevice of house and clothing with a bitter chill, and time rushing with it down the valley. (14)

Lydia, the reader learns, is “chancy too, like March” (14). Almost immediately, the reader begins to see how Dykeman employs natural metaphors in ways that resist typical depictions of Appalachia or of the people living within the region. These metaphors, depicted neither as entirely negative nor entirely positive, instead demonstrate a range of behavior both for people and for the environment.

Dykeman scholar Patricia Gantt has argued that, by beginning her novel with passages such as this one, Dykeman is “establishing the ebb and flow of natural forces that dominate both Lydia McQueen’s life and the novel” (95). Additionally, Dykeman is signaling to her readers that depictions of nature are neither positive, negative, nor entirely stable. Nature, like humans, resists essentialism. Engelhardt, in her analysis of Appalachian poet Effie Waller Smith’s work, writes that “If she [Smith] had stopped with her feelings of awe and consolation, Smith could be mistaken for simply romanticizing nature. Instead, she presents a range of humans’ interactions with the world around them” such as reactions to the physical challenges of living in the mountains or the comfort of the natural scenery (“Nature-Loving Souls,” 340). Similarly, Dykeman does not simply rely on picturesque portrayals of the mountain region; rather, she presents nature in a way that emphasizes its connection with the fluidity of life. Appalachian literature, according to Engelhardt, “insists that humans are interdependent with the places in which they live” (341). As an important attribute of Appalachian literature, this emphasis on the interconnection between humans, nature, and nonhuman animals will be lost if Appalachian

literature continues to be ignored. Further, as a hallmark of Appalachian literature, the specific rhetorical choices connecting human characters with the environment opens new possibilities for examining deeper consequences of environmental degradation.

In Dykeman's novel, Lydia's spring "chanciness" becomes both an attribute of her charm and a sign of her youth. Rather than simply tying personal characteristics to environmental depictions, Dykeman begins to link women's labor issues with Lydia's life as a newlywed in Appalachia, particularly in Lydia's memories of her mother's warnings against marriage to Mark McQueen, a brooding outsider whose union stance in the war sets him at odds with many of the Confederate men in the community. Sarah Moore wishes her daughter had chosen to marry Ham, reminding Lydia of the struggles that the family has endured and explaining to Lydia that "wanting you to like Hamilton Nelson, I only wanted you to find the work of life a little easier" (15-6). In other words, as Ham Nelson's wife, Lydia would be less likely to experience the trials of a working-man's wife. She would, instead, experience life as the spouse of a man who, by the end of the novel, owns much of the land on which other families live and work.

Lydia's response—"I didn't choose, Mama. It's like I was chosen" (15)—frames the protagonist's position for the rest of the novel, an attitude which enables her to take on the economic, social, and environmental hardships that she faces, often alone, throughout the story. Lydia's first moment of leadership in the novel occurs when thieves attack her family's farm in an attempt to steal livestock and meat during the Civil War. In the novel, Dykeman refers to the group as "outliers," described in Lydia's mind as "raiders who banded together under no flag but one of robbery and cruelty and took from helpless Unionist and Confederate alike" (28-9). In the harsh winter months, Lydia's mother and her younger siblings are relying on stored meats and other preserved food to get through the cold season. Lydia's mother, rather than leading the

outliers to the family's storage of meat, endures a torture that is never outright defined in Dykeman's novel. In the midst of these horrible events, Lydia asserts herself as leader, provider, and caretaker of the children and her mother. As she looks at her sister, Lydia realizes her responsibility to her family and decides that "she must feed the children and restore order and help her mother get well" by bringing her own cow to the farm and staying until the war is over and her father returns (34). Lydia, in this moment, even expresses concern for the cow, drawing attention to her family's dependence on the cow for milk as well as her ethical responsibility to care for the nonhuman animal who provides for her family. The greed of men in the novel⁴ harms Lydia's mother and disrupts her family while also showing disconnection from community responsibility and consideration for the vulnerable women and children left behind to tend to their homes and farms during the war.

Such an introduction establishes Lydia as a heroic figure in the nontraditional sense because her heroism, as Dykeman scholar Patricia Gantt has pointed out, occurs primarily within a domestic setting and also emphasizes a relationship with nature (99). To restore order, Lydia turns to domestic responsibilities to ensure that others are cared for. Similarly, Lydia's Aunt Tildy, who comes to assist Lydia with her new responsibilities, is also a figure who defies gendered stereotypes of heroism or household leadership. Tildy, having never married, resists nineteenth-century gender norms, and Lydia, as a younger married woman, when compared to Tildy also resists the stereotypes which would define her role in her family according to her gender. Gantt writes that "like the men in the family, Lydia and Aunt Tildy are revered for their skills and intellect, their advice, and their physical and emotional strength" (98). At one point in

⁴ Lydia discovers later in the novel that two wealthier Thickety Creek men, including Ham Nelson, purchased the goods the outliers managed to steal and then sold them for a profit.

the novel, Aunt Tildy remarks on the domestic consequences of war, which she attributes to men who are unable to “set aside looking after the affairs of the big world long enough to stay home and look after their own plot and parcel” (47). In other words, war, a patriarchal response which marks success in part by increased territory and power and which often results in destruction of life *and* the environment, has dangerous implications affecting women and children that are largely ignored in historical accounts. By emphasizing the effect the war has had on women and children through Lydia’s perspective, Dykeman is calling attention to similarly overlooked narratives from Appalachian rural communities.

During the war, Lydia and the other women and children in her family are left alone while the men are away fighting. Like industry, war in this case disrupts families, communities, and the environment while also disregarding the hardships of the women and children left behind. As ecofeminist scholars such as Shiva or Salleh would argue, “women’s work” is so devalued that when there is war or new industry, the extra work and stresses that women must endure are barely acknowledged. When Mark does come home after the war is over, Lydia suddenly finds that she has to care not only for her mother and siblings, but for her newborn son and her psychologically scarred husband as well. In the first days of his return, Lydia remarks to herself that Mark has become “a strange, greedy, knowing man, alien to the affection” of others (61). His persistent anger and difficulty in connecting with his son or the other members of the community reveal deep scars in Mark’s psyche that can certainly be attributed to his time in the war as a prisoner. Dykeman seems to be emphasizing, then, the deep-rooted consequences of the patriarchal response to problems that Aunt Tildy alludes to earlier in the novel. Ghosts of war haunt Mark throughout the story and often contribute to Lydia’s own hardships in caring for her family, including Mark. It is Mark’s restlessness, in part, that sends him out West in search of

better opportunities for settlement mid-way through the novel. When Mark leaves for the second time, Lydia is once again left to both provide and care for her family, essentially taking on roles as both mother and father, provider and caretaker.

Mark's continual absence in the novel has drawn criticism from some Dykeman scholars such as Viki Dasher Rouse, who writes in *Appalachian Heritage* that "Mark's frequent and lengthy absences require her [Lydia] to shoulder the responsibilities that would typically fall to the husband" and that even "when Mark is home, Lydia must continually run interference in his exchanges with the family, and she often smooths the way when Mark's characteristic impatience or lack of understanding causes problems" (44). Mark seems to be away more than a typical family member, and his absences are lengthy, usually over a year, which leaves Lydia with more work and more responsibility during those times. Indeed, in the first weeks after Mark's Western departure, Dykeman remarks that "It was May and work did not stay done. Weeds came overnight in the fields; milking was morning and night; sassafras and locust sprouts she and Mark had thought they had grubbed out of the pasture during the winter put out tough new shoots" (149). Lydia's tireless efforts not only support the family around her, but they also support Mark's ventures in leaving his family and exploring the West. Once again, the consequences of development and exploration have fallen most heavily on Lydia as she struggles over years of Mark's absence to care for her family despite poor growing seasons and loss of livestock.

While Mark's attention to nature is on the West, with its "wide sky, the open lands, the opportunity," Lydia works in her fields for crops and in the forest to gather herbs to sell for extra money. Once again, Mark's decision to explore West is made without any obvious regard for the extra labor or hardship that such a move will entail for Lydia, who is being left behind to care for

the farm and the family. As with Lydia and Ham, Mark's and Lydia's views on human relationships with nature are decidedly different, with Mark approaching the environment for its potential for development and settlement and Lydia looking to the land around her for sustainable living. Evidence of Lydia's respect for nature's offering can be seen in her treatment of the ginseng bed from which she gathers valuable herbs to sell in town. When Lydia first finds the ginseng bed, she demonstrates her careful attention to the regenerative promises of nature:

At first, Lydia hesitated to tear it up, but then she taught David how to dig the forked roots out gently and they worked for several days, filling their sacks. Aunt Tildy had said the patch would come back again big as ever if they left some of the plants for seed. So Lydia left a wide swatch of ginseng in its bed, and as she went down the trail, she wondered if the plants that were still there in the woods didn't give her mind more satisfaction than the ones she had carried away. (170).

This scene, while drawing further contrasts to Ham's treatment of the environment during his tobacco ventures later in the novel, also marks a contrast between Lydia and her husband in one of the novel's earlier scenes, wherein Mark butchers the couple's cow so that they can provide meat for guests at their housewarming. Lydia, in her first instance of anger against her husband, cries out, "Killing and thinking of killing has got to stop sometime, somewhere" (90). To Lydia, destroying life – either human, nonhuman, or plant – without reason is not only irresponsible, but it is inexcusable and immoral.

Rouse, in her criticism of Mark, also points to the incident when Mark kills Lydia's cow, arguing that, in this moment, Mark "overrules long-term gain for short-term gratification and the saving of face" (44). Lydia, on the other hand, values the cow from the beginning for its ability to provide milk and butter for her children, which becomes evident from the way Lydia promises

to provide the cow with the warmth, nourishment, and space it needs to thrive as well. Dykeman, I would argue, sets up a contrast between Lydia and Mark to avoid the binaries of good and bad that could be implied by the contrast between Lydia and Ham Nelson. Ham, whose marriage proposal Lydia turns down at the beginning of the novel, is more similar to Mark than readers may first realize. One can begin to note the parallels between Mark's and Ham's similar treatment of the environment as well as their goals in using the environment, either to display worth or to potentially capitalize on investment and exploration. In each decision these men make against or about the environment, the perspectives of female characters are either absent or outright ignored. Because Mark is generally a sympathetic character in the novel and is usually viewed through his wife's eyes, Dykeman demonstrates how even a loving husband and responsible member of the community can seem to so easily disregard the consequences his family faces when he exploits nature for his own pride or to satisfy his own yearning for new opportunities.

Lydia's strength in these moments allows Dykeman to emphasize the marginalization of women's stories in conjunction with the environmental exploitation women such as Lydia are, in the end, unable to stop. Lydia's hardships often lead back to decisions made by men to protect their own interests, such as decisions to go to war rather than solve differences in other ways or decisions to explore new terrains rather than tending to home and family. The trauma Mark experiences during the War changes him dramatically, and it is Lydia who is left to tame Mark's restlessness and deal with the consequences of his decisions throughout the novel. Gantt argues that by calling attention to the struggles of women such as Lydia, Dykeman challenges the marginalization of women whose experiences have long been overlooked. Lydia, Gantt argues, "integrates concerns for self, home, and community" atypical of female protagonists outside of

Appalachian literature. By highlighting Lydia's attention to these concerns, Dykeman shows how Lydia's care for both people (particularly children or those in trouble) and for the environment inevitably must converge. Calling her the "matriarch of Thickety Creek," Gantt writes that, with Lydia, "Dykeman has fashioned a literary construct to serve as a powerful rejoinder to generations of stereotypes – a new hero from a reconstructed and gendered mythos" (100). Lydia, by performing the work that would have typically fallen to both men and women, demonstrates the value of the domestic work that has been devalued by much of patriarchal society.

For Lydia, however, it never seems as though she realizes that she is defying any gendered construct at all. Instead, Dykeman reveals that, for women such as Lydia, work does not fit into neat, gendered constructions because they rarely have the luxury of perceiving certain jobs as "man's work," even when instances of men performing "women's work" are rather rare. In the examples discussed so far in this essay, it is assumed that Lydia can perform two jobs, both hers and her husband's, because her primary work has been devalued to the point of being ignored. As Shiva has argued, "women's work" is often devalued because it does not result in a tangible output, such as money, property, investment, or material goods to be sold for profit rather than used for personal consumption. As with environmental resources, the contributions of women are only valued based on what, economically or domestically, they can provide to men in power. In essence, Lydia's household and child care work "doesn't count" as real work in the patriarchal sense of the word. Merchant in *The Death of Nature* has argued that this thinking has resulted from mankind's movement away from the "daily, immediate, organic relation with the natural order" on which societies once thrived (1). Europe's Scientific Revolution, Merchant argues, "proceeded to mechanize and rationalize" the world view that once valued natural

processes because society's progress from that point forward has tended to rely on "activities directly altering the earth" such as mining and deforestation (2). In other words, Merchant has concluded that much of the devaluing of nature-based labor and of the environment as a whole is a result of a system of thinking that has propped up mechanization and commercialization at the expense of other modes of production. Even pastoral poetry of the late twentieth century, Merchant points out, contains "the implication that nature when plowed and cultivated could be used as a commodity and manipulated as a resource" (8). When one considers the parallels drawn between women and the environment, the implications of this statement are perhaps even direr. As an ecofeminist understanding of the connections between nature and society reveals, when women are unable to speak, the lack of perspectives challenging harmful development allows for such development to continue, further destroying the environment and marginalizing women in intersecting ways.

Dykeman's novel continually demonstrates through events such as these that patriarchal values and ideas, without an anchoring in natural processes or a connection to the land, ultimately result in destruction of either nature, marginalized others, or both. Ecofeminist scholar Deborah Slicer argues in her article "Toward an Ecofeminist Standpoint Theory" that neither nature nor the body – social or physical – can "escape the effects of institutional power" (60). Further, she insists that an inability to recognize illness in nature is akin to allowing illness to fester in the body. In Dykeman's novel, the decades that pass allow the reader to more clearly glimpse the way that the community of Thickety Creek has changed and the way that community members and the land have been affected. Further, Dykeman allows her reader to compare and contrast individual community members' interactions with nature and to realize that ignoring the environmental plight encouraged by investment and capital development has a negative effect on

both the land and individual members of the community, particularly if those community members do not have the power, privilege, or money to protect themselves from the continual destruction of their home environments.

In *The Tall Woman*, this idea is most emphasized when differentiating Lydia's care for the spring on her property with how Ham Nelson has neglected the spring on his, a natural water source that once served Lydia and Mark when they rented the property early in the novel. At one point in the novel when Mark is out West, Lydia receives a visit from Dr. Hornsby while she is busy clearing away roots and debris from the spring on her property. Dykeman describes the spring:

The natural bowl of water, surrounded on three sides and overhead by a ledge of rock and tangled web of roots and earth, stood clear and cold as glass. Around the spring and beside the stream that flowed from it were beds of moss and galax, a luxuriant winter green, and the vines of other carefully preserved plants that bloomed in summer. On the far side and overhanging the spring, were a dozen wild blackberry stalks. There were no other briars or dead weeds or fallen limbs around this spot. Someone had worked here lovingly and well. (176-7)

As Lydia shows Dr. Hornsby the work that she has done, she remarks, "look under the ledge where the roots of those poplar trees are, and tell me if you ever set eyes on a bolder, finer spring than that? Or a cleaner one?" (176). Lydia, understanding that the spring will provide valuable water for her family to use, treats it with compassion, care, and respect.

When Lydia returns to the spring on Ham Nelson's property, however, the differences between the two natural resources are stark. She finds that the poplar trees which once stood

around the spring are gone with “only their decaying stumps” remaining (305). Further, she notices:

Years of rain seeping through that mound of sawdust had turned the water in the spring brackish. The spring itself was full of leaves, abandoned and diminished. She cleaned out handfuls of the leaves, down to the sandy bed, and waited for the water to flow clear again. The trickle came so slowly she could hardly believe this was the bold, fine spring she had once dipped into with deep buckets. When the sand had settled and the stream seemed pure again, she cupped her hands and took a drink of water. It was tepid and tasteless. (305)

Here, Dykeman once again draws attention to the “bold, fine spring” that Lydia has kept on the two properties on which she and Mark live throughout the novel. Additionally, Dykeman points out that Ham’s spring, once bold and fine when it was cared for by Lydia, has turned entirely into a weak and dirty source of water not fit for plants, humans, or nonhuman animals to drink. According to the novel, the spring now sits next to “a pyramid of rotting sawdust, signifying where the mill had stood while this part of the Nelson tract was being lumbered out” (305). In other words, Ham’s business endeavors have directly led to the degradation of the spring from which Lydia drinks and later contracts typhoid fever. To Ham, progress in business is more important than caring for the land; the patriarchal ideology to which Ham belongs subsequently devalues nature while applauding capital instead.

Ham’s neglect, though perhaps indirectly, leads to Lydia’s death. Throughout the novel, Ham’s best interests allow for such degradation and marginalization of the environment and other people to continue without protest or a demand for change. Dykeman’s novel, in recognizing the costs of man-made progress, advocates for the environment and for those who

depend on nature to survive, such as the working families in Dykeman's Appalachia. In *The Tall Woman*, readers witness Lydia enduring hard work and a shortened life, often while male characters in the novel are either absent or ambivalent toward the environmental degradation that they are causing in their claims for land, money, and opportunity. Just as Deborah of Davis's novella works long grueling hours caring for Hugh and the rest of her family once her 12-hour work shift is over, Lydia's work also stretches through all hours of the day and encompasses both housework and child care as well as harvesting, gathering, raising livestock, and other farm work. With Lydia's death and the description of the sawmill-polluted and neglected natural water spring at the end of the novel, Dykeman reestablishes her claim that the values of nature and the social and ecological dangers of destroying the environment are in fact connected, and she urges her reader to recognize these connections.

One clear difference between Dykeman's novel and Davis's novella is the inclusion of community. Until Deborah moves to the Quaker community at the end of Davis's story, she is not able to enjoy the partnership and a sense of belonging within her environment as Lydia does in *The Tall Woman*. Within this thesis and within ecofeminism itself, community is important because it reveals the interconnectedness of people with their environments and with one another. In the next novel this project examines, Florence Cope Bush's *Dorie: Woman of the Mountains*, Dorie's family is continually robbed of their environment, their homes, and their sense of community. Because Bush's novel begins chronologically as Dykeman's novel ends, *Dorie* in a sense presents the progression from the kind of lifestyle that Lydia enjoys to the kind of life that Dorie leads: one marked by constant moving, absence of a sense of belonging, and inevitable dependence on the very industries that have come in to Appalachia to destroy and

eventually leave it. As such, Bush's novel can serve as a demonstration of some of the invisible effects of environmental degradation about which ecofeminism seeks to explore.

CHAPTER FOUR: OWNERSHIP AND POWER IN THE COMPANY TOWNS OF
FLORENCE COPE BUSH'S *DORIE: WOMAN OF THE MOUNTAINS*

The final chapter of Florence Cope Bush's 1992 biography of her mother's life *Dorie: Woman of the Mountains* describes the Cope family's return to western North Carolina from a lumber camp in Tennessee. As she does throughout the text, Dorie narrates:

For the fourth time we traveled the narrow, crooked road into the hollow on Middle Creek. The house looked the same as it had the first time. The giant oak stood tall and serene by the roadside. I looked at it with envy—it never bowed in defeat no matter how rough the times. Drought, storms, ice and snow didn't seem to touch it. Why, I wondered. Then the answer came—roots. Roots was the answer. It had stood in the same place and grown strong, sending roots deep into the earth, while we had moved all over the mountains, even back into North Carolina. In the ten years we'd been gone from this place, we had lived at Jake's Creek, Wildcat Flats, Stringtown, Mark's Cove, Sam's Creek, Pittman Center, and Tremont. Our roots were like those of a fragile flower that only lives one season before it is pulled up and cast aside. (211)

Dorie's focus on roots highlights the kind of lifestyle which she and her family, through little real choice of their own, have been forced to endure. Throughout the novel, which begins in the final years of the nineteenth century and continues through the early 1940s, Dorie and her family continually move to find new economic opportunities once industries begin to come into the Appalachian Mountains, disrupting the setting and way of life of the rural farming community. The environment around Dorie is stripped of its resources, physically destroyed, and home are snatched from members of the community in ways that silence marginalized voices while fueling

a continual cycle of invisible environmental oppression. Although Bush, through Dorie's voice, continually struggles with questions of progress and the benefits of industrialization, she is adamant in her criticism of the destruction to the Appalachian environment and the subsequent exploitation of the Appalachian people, many of whom fail to substantially benefit from late nineteenth and early twentieth century models of "progress."

By writing a story that defines the drawbacks of progress while also admitting to some of its more practical benefits, Bush is able to articulate the ways that mountain families in Appalachia are exploited and then ignored by those with the privilege, money, and power to make decisions about the land on which Appalachians live, work, and have raised generations of families. Additionally, Bush's dedication of the novel to her mother and to her daughter solidifies the feminist undertones of the story, a current which whispers the truths of the special hardships and the difficult labor endured by women in Appalachia, as well as the added difficulties that come from raising a family in a company mill town. A surface reading might initially focus too heavily on some of the benefits of progress, but upon closer examination, it becomes clear that Bush is urging her reader to consider what has been lost in the name of industrialization and who has been most unfairly affected. The text calls attention to the ways that the education, labor, and economic stability for these working families becomes dangerously intertwined with the whims and goals of those who justified abuse of the region for financial and business gain. In addition, although Dorie's family appears to be more materially wealthy by the novel's end when they move into the Knoxville, Tennessee suburbs, Dorie is also up-front about losing the beauty of the mountains and the freedom of a life in which she could raise her family separate from the material and class distinctions marking life outside of the small mountain community in which she herself was raised.

In the biography, the natural resources of the mountains and the labor of working Appalachians are exploited for the benefit of wealthy outside landowners who permanently and without permission alter Dorie's and her family's way of life. Even when the federal government steps in to preserve land in the Great Smokies region, this preservation largely benefits wealthy tourists rather than the Appalachian people themselves. When one keeps in mind that such efforts at preservation were a result of the deforestation, mining, and other environmental exploitation conducted largely by outsiders, one can begin to see where the Appalachian people have been entirely omitted from the decisions regarding their homes and ways of life. As scholars such as Elizabeth Engelhardt and Ronald Eller would argue, such exploitation is able to move forward so easily because of the intense marginalization of the Appalachian region and the people who live there. The actions of industry leaders in the novel fail to consider the needs and desires of the marginalized workers within the industry, even when the workers are supposed to benefit from higher wages. Instead, we see throughout the novel that these higher wages are negated by a lack of job security and by the control that company stores have over the spending power of Appalachian families. Claims that industrial work will help to combat poverty in Appalachia never seem to come to fruition in Bush's novel, and the reader instead witnesses Appalachian families such as Dorie's struggle with a loss of independence and control over their own lives.

Ecofeminist study is crucial in understanding how powerful interests are able to gain control of the natural environment and of the people who live and work in those environments. Ecofeminism advocates for a perspective on environmental policy and treatment that has been lost on the patriarchal structures promoting industrial development at the cost of environmental health. As Nixon explains, "the environmentalism of the poor is frequently triggered when an

official landscape is forcibly imposed on a vernacular one,” or when motives of bureaucracy and resource extraction are forced upon regions whose people are unable to defend their homes against the powerful forces behind those motives (17). Indeed, Nixon’s ideas of slow violence and the invisible consequences of environmental degradation can be seen in Bush’s novel in the way that Dorie’s family is forced to submit to decisions that undermine their personal well-being and that ultimately rob them of their homes. In Bush’s story, it becomes clear that actions that harm the environment in the name of resource extraction benefit the wealthy while permanently destroying the earth and further marginalizing women and the poor.

Following the cues of the other Appalachian writers studied here, Bush incorporates natural scenes throughout her novel to showcase humanity’s connection with the environment. The first time Dorie’s family leaves the mountains, it is the turn of the nineteenth century and they are headed for the cotton mills of upstate South Carolina. As the train races toward Spartanburg, Dorie notes that “the land was getting flat and the mountains were left behind. I had to turn around and look over my shoulder to see the hazy, blue mountains” (28). Almost immediately, Bush begins to point toward Dorie’s and her family’s cherishing of their home, marked by recollections of its natural character. Ma and others later seem to agree with Dorie’s original disposition toward the move. Although Dorie’s father is able to secure a home and employment, as well as enough income to support an easier life for his family, Dorie remarks that “still, Ma and Pa were not happy. Pa didn’t like being cooped up in the mills. His free, mountain spirit was cramped” (28). The family finds also that they are looked down upon by the foremen and others in the area, and Dorie’s mother seems more than a bit irritated by the Christmas customs of Santa Claus and gift-receiving the children learn of from their friends. By the time Dorie’s family is leaving, “many of the mountaineers who thought the cotton mills were

the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow soon found they didn't like what was in the pot. The air was bad, the water tasted funny and they didn't like being subject to the whims of the overseers." In other words, despite money and opportunity—the "civilization" families like Dorie's are supposed to want—"the things they valued most, freedom and independence, were gone" (28-9). In Bush's story, the concerns of the workers, including positive working conditions; clean air and water; independence; and freedom, are constantly ignored by industries seeking to exploit the Appalachian region.

Ronald Eller writes in his book *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South* of the extensive implications of industrial overreach in the Appalachian region both for its people and for the environment. Eller critiques at length the claim that Appalachia needed to be "modernized" and that industrialization was a benefit for the region. Instead, Eller claims early in his book that expansion of industrial capitalism led to subsequent reductions in farming, and further that "the immediate effect of this concentration of landholding was to dislodge a large part of the region's people from their ancestral homes" (xxii). In other words, outside companies went into southern Appalachia, Eller claims, with the intention of taking ownership of the environment and exploiting so-called "poor" families in Appalachia for labor. Eller describes how families like Dorie's would often have to move for work, something they wouldn't have had to do if industry had stayed out of the region. Such practices and the extent to which these companies bought land in Appalachia, Eller argues, enabled those same industries to exert such power over Appalachian mountaineers that the people eventually became unwillingly integrated into social and economic forces outside of their control. By 1930, Eller writes:

To say the least, this dependence was not on their own terms—that is to say, it was a product not of mountain culture but of the same political and economic forces that were shaping the rest of the nation and the western world. The rise of industrial capitalism brought to Appalachia a period of rapid growth and social change which those who hold to the static image have chosen to ignore. The brief prosperity brought on by the bonanza of modernization broadened the mountaineer's economic horizon. It aroused aspirations, envies, and hopes. But the industrial wonders of the age promised more than they in fact delivered, for the profits taken from the rich natural resources of the region flowed out of the mountains, with little benefit to the mountain people themselves. (xxii-xxiv)

As Eller points out, any wealth mined, logged, or otherwise extracted through the labor of the Appalachian people not only destroyed the environment around them, but the wealth largely went to benefit the rich elite who lived outside of the region. In this case, those who benefit, rather than those living in Appalachia, are able to make decisions about use of the environment without even consulting the Appalachian people. Further, because typically those living outside of the region benefit, they can continue to overlook the horrific tragedies of environmental abuse. Later, when outside conservationists push to preserve the Great Smokies region from such exploitation, it again comes at the cost of homes for families like Dorie's, families whose plight is brushed off as a small cost of conservation necessary in rectifying the environmental damage which was—once again—caused by wealthy outsiders.

Dorie's family moves again in 1912 so that Dorie's father can go to work for one of the many new lumber companies beginning to flourish in eastern Tennessee. According to the text, "mountain farmers were already lumbermen of sorts. Their knowledge of the trees, used for their own purposes, made them valuable workers for the company." Bush adds that, "the remoteness

of the timber and lack of transportation had prevented them from becoming commercial lumbermen themselves” (83). Had locals been able to control commercial logging themselves, the well-being of the environment in which their families lived would have likely been a higher priority than it had been for logging companies whose corporate decision-makers lived outside of Appalachia. Instead, outside companies with the proper tools for logging needed the local mountaineers for their knowledge, and Dorie further remarks that “ironically, most of the walnut wood went to a sewing machine company to build its cabinets. Our timber was being used for a machine we didn’t know existed for home use.” Couple this with the admission that, by the final decade of the nineteenth century, “most of the valuable hardwood was gone” from lower areas of the mountains, meaning that companies were moving into higher elevations to log (84).

According to the text, camps and railroads were also being built to help in transporting the material. Families such as Dorie’s, then, provided knowledge and labor while nature provided the raw materials that enabled continued privilege and power for those exploiting the region.

In Bush’s biography, we can closely study how connections between communities and environments enable the exploitation of both. Further, Bush makes clear that the outside companies that come in and destroy the environment are able to secure the dependence of the local community members by overtaking entire economic and social systems within the regions these companies exploit. For example, although Pa’s work with the lumber company provides him with a valuable paycheck and the family is able to make extra money caring for boarders, once again prices and rents are set by the very company paying these men. Dorie and her mother help care for eight boarders in addition to caring for members of their own family. The typical routine is described as “long and tiring,” and Dorie gives an account of the cooking, washing, laundry, and other tasks she and her mother perform. Dorie complains further that “I couldn’t go

to bed at night until every dish was clean and the table set for tomorrow's breakfast. We didn't get a day off because the men worked seven days a week" (92). Women's labor, too often ignored in discussions of worker's rights and working conditions, is on full display in Bush's biography.

Along with her descriptions of the women's tireless labor, Bush also illustrates the extent of the lumber companies' reach on the environment:

By 1910, before we moved to Fish Camp, the Smokies were covered with logging camps and a network of railroads. There were ten lumber companies from Chilhowee, Tennessee, to Waterville, North Carolina. Little River Lumber Company was the largest company on the Tennessee side of the mountains. Champion Fiber Company was the largest of all the companies, reaching from Waterville on the North Carolina side to the Tennessee foothills near Greenbrier. Besides Champion, there were six smaller companies on the North Carolina side. (96)

Even companies that were not in the area for lumber, Bush relates, had interest in the water for its energy possibilities. According to the text, energy created from area dams could then be used to power industrial plants. The entire region, as Bush relates it, is being used to fuel more industry that will, in turn, benefit families outside of the Appalachian Mountains who have the luxury of remaining blinded to the environmental degradation and the social issues to which such progress has contributed.

Eller, once again, verifies Bush's claims as to the purposes of such development in southern Appalachia, arguing that "the development of railroads, coal mining, textiles, and other industries came about as a result of growing demands in maturing industrial areas outside of the mountains . . . and the new commercial order to the region emerged to meet those nonresident

needs” (229). Further, Eller points out, industries coming into the mountains drove up prices on land, thus making it even more difficult for average families to own land— something which may then prod those families to leave their homes and farms for the company towns and labor in factories and lumber mills. Eller also argues that crowded camp conditions, the abundance of prepackaged rather than fresh foods at the company stores, and on-site job injuries created poorer working and living conditions for workers and their families. Indeed, Bush writes of numerous accidents throughout her novel, accidents which generally result in a loss of life, injury, or even a devastating loss of livestock—all of which greatly affect the families in question. For these losses in life and property suffered by Appalachian families, Bush and Eller both imply that the companies, despite having the means to assist these workers in hard times, refuse to offer benefits such as paid leave, even when workers are very sick or have been injured at work. At one point in the novel, Dorie’s husband Fred contracts typhoid fever and continues working because “the company paid you when you worked, with no time off for illness or anything else” (165). Later, when Fred is injured on the job and can’t work, Bush writes that “he didn’t get any pay while he was off, and again our meager savings were used up” (186). Despite the value that Appalachian workers like Fred bring to their large industrial employers, the workers in question are also painfully aware of how much they must depend on these companies, rather than the land, for survival. Such dependence makes it even harder for families like Dorie’s to fight the environmental destruction and calls for progress that have contributed to problems in Appalachia in the first place, and even with the supposedly superior pay and lifestyle, Dorie’s family is subject to hard times that are often made worse by limited opportunities to either catch up or get ahead.

Work by industrial companies in mining, building railroads, and otherwise altering the landscape also directly contributes to the natural hazards such as earthquakes and forest fires that plague the camps throughout the novel. Some of the consequences of development, such as the effect of rail cars and transportation built into the mountains, are more obvious. Dorie describes at one point in the novel an instance when logs from the railroad fall from the cars that are carrying them, just barely missing Dorie's home (123). Other events more clearly define the impact that development has had on the balance of nature. Bush describes a great fire that takes place in the camp: "winds were driving the flames along the treetops, gathering heat and speed as they went. Trees were exploding, sending fiery debris sailing through the air into the virgin timber. Smoke filled the sky with a gray-black ceiling" (132). When the fire finally dies down, Dorie narrates that "everywhere we looked was desolate. Charred snags stood where tall, green trees grew yesterday . . . We'd saved our home, but now it stood in a barren wasteland. I'd never seen such ugliness where beauty had reigned" (134). Not only, then, has the development directly stripped the land of its resources; by contrasting Dorie's material home with the lost beauty of the mountains, Bush is also pointing to the environmental costs of such development.

Even when Dorie, Fred, and the children move again to North Carolina, they are still plagued by natural disasters linked to industrial development. Although in their new home, "the children liked school, timber was plentiful, and the weather beautiful," Dorie relates that "sometimes without warning, a heavy thunderstorm high on the mountain changed it [the nearby river] into a roaring, tearing monster. At night, after a storm, we could hear the giant rocks being pushed and crushed together by its force. Trees, loosened by the flood, crashed into the water to be swept downstream" (171). Although Bush does not come right out and blame industrial development, it is clear that the strain to which the environment has been subjected by such an

influx of expansion over the decades covering the novel would have a profound effect on how the natural environment can cope with storms and other disasters. The close conditions of the camps and increases in population, as well, would obviously alter residents' abilities to deal with disasters such as fires, tornadoes, and floods. Once again, Bush points out that the benefits of "progress" to those living outside of Appalachia, in the eyes of powerful industrial decision-makers, are valued more strongly than the negative consequences caused by industrialization that Appalachian communities face.

Bush's biography, however, goes further than the other two stories discussed in this thesis because Bush also describes the efforts of conservationists who, rather than accounting for the people living in the region, further marginalize and ignore Appalachian families in the early twentieth century despite claims to want to help the region. Eller describes conservation efforts at this time to be a battle between interests to protect forestry through more sustainable logging methods and interests to preserve the forests themselves, as though they had never been touched by humans. Eller argues that "both factions approached the issue of conservation from a decidedly nationalistic and predominantly urban perspective. National needs, whether they were those of the tourist, the scientist, or the industrialist, were given priority over local concerns." Echoing Engelhardt, Eller further argues that "the popular image of the mountaineer as backward, degenerate, and uncivilized (the very 'idea of Appalachia') seemed to justify this attitude, placing power in the hands of those who seemed 'best equipped' to bring progress and civilization to the region" (114). Bush's *Dorie* is important because it provides a narrative for these changes, a narrative that showcases the effects that national decisions about their homes had on Appalachian families such as Dorie's. Bush, for example, despite criticisms of the lack of freedom families felt and the control companies had over the families' wages and purchases, is

equally critical of outsiders who come into the mountains offering “literature and unasked advice, telling the workers how bad off they were” (152). In *Dorie*, the message is clear: despite portrayals of good intentions, advice and preservation that failed to consider the views of locals only contributed to the hardships already felt by people in the region.

Stories of lumber mills closing, a development that would undoubtedly affect Appalachian workers in various and far-reaching ways, begin as only rumors in the novel. Finally, however, Dorie and her family learn that the land they live and work on is being sold to the government. No one, of course, has asked the workers how they feel about this news as workers begin to change their long-term plans. According to Dorie, “nothing changed on the surface, but we knew how the loggers felt about moving out and looking for work. Many of these people had lived their lives in the shadows of the mountain peaks.” Although “generations of ancestors had lived and died here,” Bush tells her reader that now, “their descendants were displaced citizens with no claim on the land” (176). Historical and personal ties to the land, in other words, meant very little when money, power, and the desires of wealthier elite groups outside of the region became involved.

Bush’s point regarding land ownership is important and is emphasized in several places throughout the novel. Bush explains:

It was common practice for men to be paid by the company to live in cabins on land the company was claiming through legal occupancy. Most of the lumber companies used this method to secure thousands of acres for timber cutting. The Little River Lumber Company had a special representative known as a land agent, surveyor, and title man. He knew where the possession cabins were and how much land was included in the claim . . . Mountain people seldom bothered to make legal claims or documentation on their

property. If a deed or ownership of land was questionable, the company would build a possession cabin, have somebody live in it several days a month, maintain a small garden or orchard for seven years, and the occupancy was not questioned—the land became theirs. (131)

Something Dorie's family had never had to consider—legal ownership of land—becomes a tool that the lumber companies are able to use to further exploit the environment and put themselves in a more privileged position than the mountaineers who actually live and work on the land. As Bush later explains, and as Eller argues in his text, the lumber companies' ownership of land later enables them to sell the forests, displacing the families who are, once again, unjustly affected by outside interests.

Carlos C. Campbell's 1960 publication of *Birth of a National Park in the Great Smoky Mountains* reveals the extent to which privileged interests were valued over the interests of local mountaineers, whose opinions or livelihoods seem to have barely, if at all, been considered in decisions regarding use of land in the Great Smokies region. As then-Secretary of the Great Smoky Mountains Conservation Association, Campbell is obviously biased toward the Association's cause, and the rhetoric he uses to talk about people in the Appalachian Mountains and the goals for preserving forests in the region reveal multitudes about how the Appalachian landscape and the Appalachian people have been consistently marginalized, largely for the benefit of either tourists or outside industries. In Campbell's preface to *Birth of a National Park*, he writes that "forty years ago this outstanding mountain range was known to but a few hardy men and women of the two states in which it lies." Although "the mountains contained farms and families which had been there for generations," Campbell quickly dismisses those families and instead goes on to praise "the far-seeing men of ideals and great civic pride [who] undertook to

save the beautiful mountain paradise” (v-vi). While Campbell certainly implies that saving the land means saving it from the deforestation caused mostly by industries that had moved into the region, he also indicates that these “far-seeing men of ideals” are saving the environment from—or perhaps in spite of—the people who actually live there.

In fact, when Campbell tells the story of how efforts to build a national park began, his story highlights the privilege of those who are making these decisions. While viewing the mountaintops on a train ride from Knoxville to Elkmont, Mrs. Davis, wife of the manager of an iron company in Knoxville, proposes the idea to her husband. Remarking that, “despite the fact that the virgin timber had been or was being cut by the Little River Lumber Company, the steeply rising mountains that flank Little River Gorge were fascinatingly beautiful to the Davises,” Campbell goes on to reiterate that “not only did Mr. Davis believe that the region should be made a national park, so as to save much of the virgin timber, but he urged others to help launch a movement to bring it about” (13-4). Later, when leaders on efforts to build the park are forced to consider the thoughts of landowners, Campbell writes that “the leaders were soon faced with a serious dilemma”—they had to highlight the natural beauty and potential of the area for Congressional leaders while at the same time “to get the land at reasonable prices, the owners had to be shown that their mountain land was relatively worthless for other purposes” (19). Land owners, in other words, had to be convinced that the land could not be used for production and should therefore be sold. Any actual reasons local families may have wanted to remain in their homes are quickly dismissed.

Campbell later admits that reservations of landowners may be somewhat warranted, but he is quick to offer defense for the Association’s actions. While “it is only natural that many persons living in Cades Cove and other sections of the Great Smokies foothills wished to remain

there,” Campbell writes, “it was recognition of this situation that prompted the Parks Commissions to give such owners the option of selling outright at the full price of their land or at a somewhat reduced price and a lifetime lease.” Campbell goes on to insist that “the establishment of a national park, like the building of a hydroelectric dam or other large-scale project, unavoidably imposes on a few for the benefit to the whole public” (99). Unfortunately, for many families such as Dorie’s who were forced to uproot their existence and found themselves suddenly out of work, such benefits – those supposedly for the “whole public” – were and have continued to be far less often realized.

This question over “ownership” of pieces of the earth and the subsequent marginalization of those without power who live close to the lands being seized is an area ripe for ecofeminist scholarship’s examinations of the silent exploitation of women and the environment in a system that heralds patriarchal values over any other perspective. Bush’s novel additionally draws this conversation into Appalachia, where people and the environment are constantly marginalized or used for the benefit of outsiders. Alison Blyerly’s argument calling out the hypocrisies of wilderness “management” also brings attention to how humans retain power over the environment in these instances, and such arguments can certainly be applied to Bush’s story. Bush, however, also brings attention to the link between environmental exploitation and continued marginalization and manipulation of people based on social class, lifestyle, gender, and race. Dorie’s family, finding often that they can no longer support themselves by farming alone, move frequently to find employment secured in towns also owned and operated by the hiring company. Dorie, her mother, and other women then have to keep boarders in order for their families to make enough money to live this “improved” lifestyle while the men work long hours in dangerously unregulated conditions. When forests in the region are then sold to the

government, families like Dorie's are again faced with the prospect of moving and finding work so that the land on which they live can be officially "managed" by others.

William Cronon and Carolyn Merchant each go further than Blyerly in their criticisms of wilderness management. Cronon, for example, argues that protection of wilderness has reinforced and even "domesticated" notions of the sublime in nature – notions that he says have contributed to many of the current issues between human-nature relations. Cronon insists in his article that "idealizing a distant wilderness too often means not idealizing the environment in which we actually live" (83). In "Reinventing Eden," Merchant similarly criticizes efforts to set aside and preserve pieces of land, efforts which she criticizes as being steeped in a recovery narrative that privileges money and power. Such a narrative, in the context of Bush's story, would argue that Americans outside of Appalachia recovered the Great Smokies region from the lumber companies and other industries destroying it. This argument, of course, ignores the fact that lumber companies and other industries first exploited that land without the consent of the Appalachian people who were most affected, and such a narrative also fails to consider the well-being of those people. In each scenario, the well-being of local populations and of the environment itself are both ignored. Further, Merchant argues that these narratives, typically engineered by men, favor a patriarchal ideology of taming wilderness for man's purpose. In *Dorie*, companies move in to the region initially for the production of timber and other resources to benefit businesses owned by men. By the end of the story, lands are being preserved for the benefit of those who can afford the time and money to visit them. In each instance, the voices of the Appalachian people are ignored and nature becomes primarily a tool, resource, recreational endeavor, or place of refuge for human use.

The loss of the natural beauty of Dorie's and her family's homes should not be understated, as descriptions of nature are an important part of the biography. Throughout the story, Dorie describes her environment, the consequences of the degradation done to it, and the uses of herbs, plants, and the wildlife available to her family. Even when enthralled by store-bought dresses and furniture, Dorie and her mother again and again rely on natural medicines to treat illnesses, and they repeatedly resist moving away from the mountains. In her epilogue, Bush directly addresses the notion that the environment was not important to Appalachian families:

Dorie's narrative is important because it offers one definite answer to the question frequently posed by scholars as to how aware the Appalachian people were of the natural beauty surrounding them. Throughout her life, Dorie had an almost mystical appreciation of the sights, sounds, smells, and resonance of her beloved mountains . . . The crystal spring water, rhododendron and mountain laurel, moss, wildflowers, birds, and squirrels of Mark's Cove remained indelibly fixed in her dreams and imagination. At the end of her life, she tells us, "I can feel the good, cold water in my mouth and the pure, crisp air in my lungs." (233)

Dorie's narrative is also important because it calls attention to disregard for the environment by those who are not affected by environmental degradation as well as the extreme voicelessness of the Appalachian people, particularly women, in decisions regarding their own futures, homes, and livelihoods. It is clear in Dorie's story that the Appalachian characters as a whole have little power in deciding where and how they can make a living. For women such as Dorie and her mother, such powerlessness is even more prominently displayed because of the already unquestioned marginalization of women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

For the reasons outlined in this chapter, Bush's biography provides valuable insight into the social and environmental issues brought in to Appalachia by unchecked business interests. Even within Appalachian literary studies, however, very little analysis of *Dorie* has been pursued. Bush's biography of her mother's life, complete with photos, folk recipes, and descriptions of household labor, deserves more scholarly attention than it has gotten. Bush's honest depiction of industrial progress in the southern Appalachias wrestles with both the benefits and costs of the lifestyle changes brought on throughout the course of the story. Dorie's life is certainly easier than her mother's life has been. However, Dorie faces natural hazards and displacement from her home far more times than her mother, at Dorie's age, had experienced. The fires, floods, storms, tornadoes, constant moves, and economic uncertainty Dorie and her family endure throughout Bush's novel can be linked back to a disregard for the environment or for marginalized "others" by the companies that have come in to the region. By increasing production and lowering costs, industrial companies are considered successful, even when higher costs could have translated into better benefits or wages for workers or could have helped to diminish the environmental degradation caused by the company's practices. In writing this biography, Bush has revealed that industry profits do not translate into the economic progress for workers advertised by companies whose primary goal is profit; rather, it seems that an interest in profit and an interest in environmental and social well-being can rarely work in tandem. Further study of *Dorie* and of the other works discussed in this thesis, because such stories are written from the often-ignored point of view of women in Appalachia, can continue to examine the effects of environmental degradation on economic and political opportunity for marginalized people within regions of the world that have been exploited for the benefit of powerful corporations, interests, and leaders.

CHAPTER FIVE: EXPOSING THE COSTS OF “PROGRESS”: INDUSTRIALIZATION AND LITERARY STUDIES IN THE APPALACHIAN MOUNTAINS

The works of literature discussed in this thesis are evidence of a long history of environmentalism and feminism within the Appalachian literary tradition. Ranging in publication from 1861 to 1989, each work has contributed to conversations about the far-reaching effects of industrial development and labor exploitation in Appalachia. In addition, because these texts are written by women, the lessons and ideas presented within the literature discussed here offer alternatives to the patriarchal viewpoints that often dominate literary study. Overall, this thesis has focused primarily on women in Appalachia for several reasons. The first reason is that women belong to every marginalized group and face additional marginalization even within those groups because of their gender. Further, women and nature are connected by the expectations that society holds over them: nature is expected to provide resources for humankind’s consumption while women are expected to care for others. Additionally, women are more often expected to take on extra work outside of their roles as either breadwinner or caregiver. When work done by women is devalued and placed as subordinate to the work that men perform, it becomes easier for society to place expectations on women to take on additional labor. Similarly, when progress and the company bottom line are valued over sustainable environmental practices, the conversation between development and environmentalism breaks down into a false binary wherein nature is secondary to, not interconnected with, human progress. For these reasons, an examination of women’s labor, including an examination of whether women’s work has been devalued in a patriarchal society, can offer further insight into how and why women and the environment are being exploited for the sake of progress.

This project has also focused on women writers and their female characters in pieces of Appalachian literature because the perspectives of these women offer fresh challenges to the patriarchal status quo. Whereas the societies in which these women live value development and progress, the female characters themselves hold more value in family and nature than they do in financial advancement. Literary analysis, with its emphasis on character dynamics, conflict of ideas, and the interconnectedness of events, encourages a deeper level of thinking about how issues of women's rights, labor, and environmental degradation influence our own communities and our society as a whole. It is then absolutely necessary that scholars engage in further literary analysis of writing by women whose voices have been silenced for centuries on topics such as environmentalism, gender equality, civil rights, and labor rights. When women's opinions and perspectives are not valued, then half of the population is essentially silenced. Because Appalachian literature and culture has been even further marginalized, devalued, and often labeled simplistically as regional writing, women's voices in Appalachia continue to be denied an audience. Couple this idea with the understanding that Appalachian women writers, as we have seen throughout this project, maintain focus on the interconnectedness of humans and nature, and we can begin to see how Appalachian literature offers a crucial perspective that should not be ignored. The denial of an audience or a place in the literary canon to women writers, particularly those living and working in regions being exploited by the privileged members of the status quo, only serves to further promote patriarchal notions of success and progress while diminishing the truth about its consequences.

Art and literature offer opportunities to speak out against societal oppressions, and a significant duty of literary analysis is to uncover the intricacies, causes, and effects of oppressions that have escaped the public conscience. The fact that writing by women in

Appalachia has been ignored demonstrates the extent to which their thoughts and viewpoints have been marginalized and often silenced. Reading Appalachian literature through an ecofeminist lens, as this thesis has shown, begins the process of unveiling the many consequences of patriarchal environmental and social practices. Greta Gaard in “New Directions for Ecofeminism” argues that ecofeminism can break through the limitations of other fields that have ignored links between people and the environment and can thus do a greater job of solving many of the world’s social, environmental, and economic problems. According to Gaard, “our failure to accurately and inclusively describe the past” by ignoring the stories, art, and voices of poor and marginalized women around the world “will surely limit our capacity to envision potential maps for viable futures” (18).

Gaard goes on to argue that ecocritical inquiry can “draw on the work of feminists, ecofeminists, and environmental justice activists and others around the world” who are “challenging ecophobia, economic globalization, and corporate governance,” for example (18). In the case of Appalachian literature, women such as Rebecca Harding Davis were writing about environmental and labor issues in the early 1860s, yet her writing is typically absent from discussions of environmental or feminist literature. Female authors such as Wilma Dykeman similarly began tackling social and environmental issues in the 1950s, and many other Appalachian women writers have offered unique perspectives on these issues through their writing. We cannot continue to pretend to advance environmental and social causes while continuing to ignore the rich legacy of literature that women in the Appalachian region have already offered dealing personally and directly with many of the consequences of environmental degradation and labor exploitation.

When Appalachian literature is ignored, it becomes even easier for people outside of the region to justify stereotypes of Appalachia and to reason that destruction of the Appalachian environment does more good than it does harm. An analysis of Appalachian literature focusing on the perspectives of marginalized women will draw parallels between the oppression of Appalachia and benefits of resource extraction in the region as they are promoted by wealthy industrialists to consumers in the rest of the world. In a 2011 article published in *Critical Sociology*, researchers Kelly Austin and Brett Clark find that in the case of Appalachia, “although electricity from coal-fired plants is used throughout the United States, many of the negative social and ecological effects of extraction remain concentrated in Appalachia” (441). They refer to this trend as evidence of spatial inequalities, “‘uneven development’ whereby wealth is accumulated in certain areas, and poverty and environmental degradation are concentrated in others” (441). By restricting many of the consequences of progress to isolated and stereotyped regions, the majority benefits while the marginalized minority suffers. Too often, the suffering of a minority group is even ignored by many of the beneficiaries of exploitation. Austin and Clark write that “millions of people are connected to the exploitation of Appalachian communities and mountains through their use of electricity, while coal extraction is made almost invisible to the public” (442). If the social and environmental consequences of such practices remain hidden and profits continue to mount, then the industries at fault will have little incentive to adjust their methods.

When practices like mountaintop removal mining are brought into the Appalachian region, the industry destroys the natural landscape while also remaking the local economy to encourage further dependence on the industrial companies in question. Even as Appalachian residents come to depend on the jobs brought in by outside industries, they face poverty, fewer

opportunities for economic advancement, and degradation of the land and water sources needed by all life forms. Meanwhile, outside industries profit. In 1967 James Millstone wrote a report for *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* already calling attention to the discrepancies between profits outside of the Appalachian region and wages within the region. This report was then reprinted in the 1974 edited collection *Appalachia: Its People, Heritage, and Problems*. In his essay, Millstone argues that in the Appalachian state of Kentucky, “coal is the single important industry in the impoverished mountains, yet a reporter searches in vain for signs that the smashing new coal comeback is denting the poverty that has gripped, crushed, and depopulated this most backward corner of Appalachia” (260). Millstone’s own language on the subject, despite his journalistic intentions, reveals the extent to which stereotypes about Appalachia have persisted in the public mind. Millstone posits further that even if “the coal surge has brought no comfort” to the people of Appalachia, “it must be a source of deep satisfaction in far-off board rooms in Philadelphia, New York, Pittsburgh, Detroit, and Baltimore” because of the soaring production of coal in the late 1960s (263). Keeping in mind that the goals of industry leaders are to make profits, then we can begin to understand how those goals might not match with using environmentally responsible practices or with providing sufficient wages or benefits to workers in the region—concerns that would dig in to the profit margins of business owners.

Austin and Clark take Millstone’s concerns a step further by arguing that these outside industries create conditions that implement a cycle of poverty in industrially-colonized regions like Appalachia. Ecofeminist scholarship also points to an interconnectedness between humans and the environment through which, when the environment is destroyed, people in impoverished and otherwise marginalized communities suffer as well. Once outside industry comes in to the area, as Lydia McQueen finds when she drinks water from Ham Nelson’s spring in *The Tall*

Woman, the land quickly becomes unusable to the communities who depend on it. When communities can no longer depend on their environment for food and water, then outside industries can exercise more power over the working lives and living conditions of employees and their families. In the case of mountaintop removal mining in Appalachia, Austin and Clark argue that “each stage of mountaintop removal produces unique socio-ecological contradictions that create distinct metabolic rifts in the soil, carbon, and water cycles” (445). In fact, “throughout the entire mining operation metabolic rifts are created, as the integrated ecosystems are torn apart” (448). Their article points to the destruction of natural habitats caused by clearing away forests for mining, water contamination that occurs as a result of mining, and increased instances of flooding and landslides due to the loss of water-absorbing vegetation around mining sites (446-9). These environmental issues lead to decreased property values for Appalachian families, a declining population, and “heightened levels of poverty [that] make this region even more vulnerable to the whims of coal companies” (450).

This notion of poverty, to those outside of Appalachia, seems to justify the use of environmentally unethical and exploitative business practices because people in Appalachia and the land itself are deemed as lesser-than those who have the power to delineate what constitutes progress. The thinking seems to be that if Appalachians are poor and uneducated, industry is doing them a favor by settling into the mountains. In *The Tangled Roots*, Engelhardt chronicles the existence of tourist and voyeuristic literature that has helped to solidify portrayals of the Appalachian people as uneducated, poor, and uncivilized to the rest of the nation. In a 2007 article, Jill M. Fraley echoes Engelhardt’s claims that stereotypes such as these, supported by derogatory images of Appalachians in pop culture and in the news media, help to justify continued destruction of the region as a whole. These stereotypes, Fraley argues, are designed to

position Appalachia as “a place quintessentially un-American,” thus separating the powerful majority from the oppressed minority and endowing the majority with a sense of elitism that justifies actions performed against the minority—in this case, Appalachia. Fraley writes that “historically, stereotypes have been wrapped up in efforts to dominate and oppress—to take land and resources—through dehumanizing a group and eroding their dignity” (367). She calls such stereotypes “tools for oppression, the subordination of a particular group, and the establishment of lasting power structures” because “by labeling the outgroup [Appalachia] as one that is socially unacceptable . . . stereotypes produce the emotional background that allows the majority population to justify oppression” (367). As a result, “the great attack on the Appalachian Mountains continues unabated precisely because the public consciousness does not value Appalachia” (369).

Fraley, like Austin and Clark, connects stereotypes and oppression with the business and lifestyle interests of the majority. At one point in her article, Fraley remarks that “these cultural stereotypes of Appalachians are noticeably similar to stereotypes of other peoples whose land, natural resources, and labor have been stolen by a majority group. Were those people not also lazy, backward, violent, uneducated, dirty, and sexually deviant?” She adds that “it is highly unlikely that by mere coincidence the majority perceptions of Appalachians perfectly match the traditional formula for dehumanization and oppression of a minority group” (366). Her analysis coincides with Austin and Clark’s conclusions that Appalachia is viewed as a site that in many ways can be sacrificed to provide resources for the rest of the nation. It is easy to understand, then, why the reality of the deplorable living conditions described for West Virginia mill workers in Davis’s novella might come to fruition. In her story, the workers live in a dirty environment and work for low wages, yet they depend on their jobs for survival and are unable to leave them.

Dykeman and Bush also demonstrate the power of wealthy business owners; Dykeman writes of political and economic opposition to Lydia's efforts to start a school, and Bush shows how families can be displaced by the interests of money and profit. In each of these stories, women struggle against the double oppression they face as women in Appalachian communities that are being permanently altered by outside interests.

Austin and Clark's study is unique in that it explores the links between marginalization and dehumanization of the Appalachian people and the necessities of constant development outside of Appalachia. Literary studies can contribute more to these ideas by increasing scholarly focus on writing by women and other marginalized groups in Appalachia. As Elizabeth Engelhardt has pointed out in her work, and as this project has argued, marginalized women in Appalachia face greater challenges than men do because much of the labor that women perform has been devalued. Further, women have fewer opportunities to speak out and be heard on issues affecting their lives. Of the three female protagonists this thesis has analyzed, Dykeman's Lydia McQueen is the most forthcoming with her ideas, yet in many ways the peace of her mountain community and its economy depend on Ham Nelson, whose selfish entrepreneurial decisions—decisions designed to increase his profit while reducing his costs for labor, land, or taxes—impact community members' ability to buy land for farming or to send their children to school. Similarly, life in Davis's *Life in the Iron-Mills* and in Bush's *Dorie: Woman of the Mountains* depends largely on the decisions that industry leaders and mill owners make regarding the habitat and the workers in Appalachia. In each story, women's labor is made more difficult while working and living conditions are made less habitable because of the environmentally-harmful practices promoted by industries seeking quicker and larger profits.

In Dykeman's, Davis's, and Bush's stories, the state of the environment presents an important backdrop to explain the conditions of industrial Appalachia. Each story even begins with a description of the environment; in Davis's novella, it is "a cloudy day" in which "the sky sank down before dawn, muddy, flat, immovable" (39). In Bush's story, the narrator reveals the importance of telling time through nature. She writes that in the fall, "when the leaves on the hillside began showing their full blaze of color, we knew the cold, crisp air would come down from the north and remind us to get ready for winter" and that the autumn harvest moon "looked like a big ball of white ice floating in a sea of purple velvet" (3). Similarly, Dykeman begins her novel with a narrator's reflections on nature as Lydia ponders the strong wind of a March storm, which reminds her not of danger but of free-spiritedness and independence. Because these Appalachian authors begin their stories with depictions of the environment, the reader begins to make connections between the lives of the three female protagonists and the state of the environment around them.

Despite the relatively positive portrayals of nature at the beginning of *Dorie* and *The Tall Woman*, both Bush's and Dykeman's settings begin to move towards a world more like the dirty mill-town described in Davis's novella. As stories that encompass the adult lives of two female characters, both *The Tall Woman* and *Dorie* are able to demonstrate the negative effects of mass industrial and agricultural development on the small mountain communities in the Appalachian Mountains over time. Towards the end of Dykeman's novel, Lydia reflects on the effect that tobacco planting has had on her community. She decides that "for the first time, the welfare of many of the people on Thickety Creek had become dependent on the outside world, on the habits and fashions of people living a long distance away, and their prosperity was vulnerable in a way they had never known before" (264-5). It is at the end of Dykeman's novel, as the plot nears the

turn of the nineteenth century, that we begin to see hints of the industrial development which takes place in Bush's book. It is 1907, approximately a decade after Dykeman's novel ends, that Dorie's family moves to Spartanburg for their first attempt at working in a mill town, an attempt that will be repeated in various industries and locations throughout Dorie's life.

Davis's novella, although it takes place earlier than the other two stories, offers a grim outlook on the environment and on social issues, particularly women's labor, because of the destruction of nature caused by industrial progress. Often, this progress seems to benefit wealthy landowners who live mostly outside of Appalachia and who do not seem to be bothered by the pollution and environmental destruction their mills have caused. In Davis's story, readers find a town covered in dirt and ash from the mill, and the title of the work as well as the implications of the term "mill town" set up a hierarchy in which workers and residents are subject to and therefore dependent on the wealthier, land-owning class. Unlike the wealthier class, of which the narrator is presumed to be a member, Deborah and the other workers in the novella are not privileged enough to be able to escape the environmental hazards of the mill's "progress." Deborah, then, does not have the luxury of ignoring the effects of the smoke, ash, and polluted river because these effects manifest themselves in dilapidated living conditions, low wages, long working hours, and even further marginalization of women and the working class. For women in Appalachia such as Deborah, Dorie, or Lydia, the problem is exacerbated by the close relationship with nature that much of their work necessitates as well as by the double marginalization that they face as women working in economically "poor" regions of Appalachia.

Literary analysis of Appalachian works are necessary in combatting stereotypical and simplistic images of the region, including the kinds of stereotypes that have enabled exploitation of Appalachia to continue unquestioned. Further, literary analysis is one of the best methods for

examining the intricate connections between human action and social and environmental consequences, particularly the effects on people who are most vulnerable to the whims and decisions of those who have power. While industrial development has allowed for the modern lifestyles enjoyed across the United States, the connections between our actions and their environmental consequences have become blurred in the public mind. In one of the final chapters of *The French Broad*, Wilma Dykeman writes that when “we turned away from the spring at the edge of the kitchen yard and turned on the faucet in our porcelain sink, we turned off our interest in what came out of the spigot” (281). Too often, we have also turned off our interest in what happens to the people who live in the environments that are being destroyed to satisfy the consumptive needs of the rest of the world, especially when the people who are being exploited do not have the power or privilege to defend themselves and their homes. Although this thesis, by focusing on texts written by three white Appalachian women, does not go nearly far enough in exploring the diverse promises of Appalachian literature, it is my hope that the ideas defended here can lay new groundwork for analysis of literature written by Appalachian women of all colors, races, and backgrounds, and that such groundwork can begin to turn the tide against industrial exploitation in one of the most vulnerable regions of the country.

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