

“CHARGED WITH RESISTANCE”: AN ECOCRITICAL READING OF
BARBARA KINGSOLVER’S PRODIGAL SUMMER AND FLIGHT BEHAVIOR

A Thesis
by
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Abstract

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This thesis analyzes Barbara Kingsolver’s *Prodigal Summer* and *Flight Behavior* through an ecofeminist lens. The women in these novels understand that human and nonhuman lives, including plants and animals, intersect in real and meaningful ways. This realization allows the female characters to move past the dualistic or hegemonic culture they inhabit.

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Introduction

“There is an Appalachian literature distinct from southern literature, mostly because the economic and social conditions are different in the two areas....What you’re going to be concerned with, perhaps more than the southern writer, is the impact of technology and industrialization on the ecology—the nuclear industry in Oak Ridge, the Champion Paper Mill in Canton, canneries—that kind of thing. And also the coming of the highway system, which made a difference of a kind in the mountains that didn’t occur in other places.
—Fred Chappell¹

As Fred Chappell notes, when authors write about Appalachia, they often foreground the natural world. Unfortunately, Appalachian ecology is often under siege from environmental pollution resulting from technology and industrialization like coal mines, mountaintop removal, and others mentioned in the epigraph. The Appalachian region and its people have been affected by this industrialization in at least two ways. First, the Appalachian region has endured the loss of its aesthetically pleasing surroundings from environmentally detrimental decisions. Second, these poor decisions can jeopardize human health and safety.

The Appalachian region, like the rest of the mountain ecosystems, has been affected by environmental practices that seek profits through the quickest means available. These profits are also likely to perpetuate exploitive and patriarchal power systems. Appalachians’ standard of living is lower compared to many other regions of the United States, and natural resource extraction is tied to this poverty in many areas of Appalachia. Barbara Kingsolver’s latest novels set in Appalachia, *Prodigal Summer* and *Flight Behavior*, are good examples of fiction with characters who are influenced by landscape that has been altered by an exploitive, patriarchal, and consumptive lifestyle.

¹ (Palmer 240).

Though the characters might face the same faltering environmental conditions through which they try to make a living, each character interacts with the land in his or her own way. The women in these novels view and interact with the land differently than the men. The women acknowledge the ecosphere and its diversity, and this acknowledgment leads them to fight against traditional, patriarchal, environmentally exploitive cultures and practices that are usually perpetuated by the men in the novels. Almost exclusively, the men in the two novels seek to do what has always been done. In one case, a character specifically seeks to restore the dignity of his forefathers through his land practices. Kingsolver seems to have charged the women with resistance, to hold the line and resist the oppression. The women resist the dualistic (i.e. nature/culture, feeling/reason, etc.) culture that pervades the fictional Appalachian setting of both *Prodigal Summer* and *Flight Behavior* and in so doing they exemplify ways that Kingsolver's readers can also resist the patriarchal, exploitive environmental practices and mindsets.

Published in 2001, *Prodigal Summer* is a novel written with three interweaving narratives. The characters learn to deal with love and loss within a mountainous Appalachian landscape that lives with or without human help. An overarching theme is the sexual proliferation in this hot, humid summer where the animals and humans search out the other sex for both love and comfort. The juxtaposition of human and nonhuman urges to procreate and to belong makes this novel an instructive read for its human-animal relations as well as the blossoming human-human relationships. The other novel I examine is Barbara Kingsolver's latest; *Flight Behavior*, published in 2012, is also set in southern Appalachia. This novel narrates Dellarobia's story as she tries to make sense of the various climate-caused wonders that swirl around her home. Concurrently, Dellarobia fights with a recurring

grief that happened before the novel takes place as well as her overbearing in-laws and well-intentioned but ineffective husband, Cub. This novel explores a topic of climate change and what ramifications the changing climate might have for Dellarobia and her homeland.

To better analyze the gendered responses to the land, this thesis analyzes Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer* and *Flight Behavior* through an ecofeminist lens. Using ecofeminism as a lens incorporates these novels into a discourse about both human-human and human-nonhuman relationships. In order to clarify where the theories I will be using come from and how they might be used in reading the chosen novels, I will start the thesis by introducing my theoretical lens as a move from ecocriticism towards greater complexity. Ecofeminism is my primary lens because it allows my analysis to move beyond the limitations I see in the broader ecocriticism and the more focused environmental justice criticism. Ecocriticism, for instance, was born in academia as a way to analyze human-nature binaries, whereas environmental justice and ecofeminism began as political movements before being applied to academic pursuits. Furthermore, I will outline the connections these two recent Kingsolver novels make to their Appalachian socio-economic context. Lastly, this introduction summarizes the critical voices who have written on these works as well as Kingsolver's prior work. The last part of this introduction will discuss others' interpretations of *Prodigal Summer* and *Flight Behavior* and the relatively little critical attention paid to these two novels that were both published within the last fifteen years.

Ecocritical Lens

Born out of a growing unease that the world cannot sustain modern (especially Western) habits of consumption and environmental exploitation, the ecocritical movement in the humanities has taken root in academia within the last thirty years. Since its inception,

ecocriticism has also been divided into sub-categories. For instance, T. V. Reed notes in his article in *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy* the categories of conservationist ecocriticism, ecological ecocriticism, biocentric/deep ecological ecocriticism, ecofeminism, and environmental justice criticism, as constituting ecocriticism. Ecocriticism functions both as a critical lens and as an umbrella term for the nuanced forms of criticism that Reed notes, such as ecofeminism. These various categories of ecocritical thought all have different aims in their examinations of nature and therefore can have tensions among them.

Ecocriticism opened the gates for critics to analyze elements of and treatment of nature and land in literature. Some, like Reed, simultaneously praise and criticize ecocriticism: they praise it for paving the way for ecocritical analysis but criticize it for not going far enough. Environmental justice criticism most often examines power dynamics in relation to racism and classism and how these power dynamics influence environmental politics. Reed argues in his above essay, "Toward an Environmental Justice Ecocriticism," that ecocriticism stems from lived experiences with nature. Therefore, environmental justice ecocriticism should be seriously considered for its socio-cultural questions about who is affected most by environmental actions. More importantly, ecofeminism goes even further in its examination of land use by additionally critiquing humans' frequent speciesism and sexism. I choose ecofeminism for this thesis for its examinations of material, embodied examples of environmental degradation.

Concurrently, ecocriticism continues to branch into new possibilities, such as waste studies and toxic studies while simultaneously digging down through the roots of literature to help us to think ecocritically about how texts, sometimes written hundreds of years before the

conception of ecocriticism, portray human/nature binaries. The field has also added peer-reviewed journals, such as the *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* out of North America and *Ecozone, the European Journal of Literature, Culture and Environment*, to name only a few. Additionally, the field has grown to include single-author monographs, such as Greg Garrard's overview, *Ecocriticism*, and Stacey Alaimo's ecofeminist *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*.

For a better understanding of ecofeminism, I turn to the noted scholar Greta Gaard. In her review article "Ecofeminism Revisited: Rejecting Essentialism and Species in a Material Feminist Environmentalism," she says that ecofeminism grew out of feminism in the 1970s and '80s, including peace protests and protests against nuclear testing. In her latest anthology, *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals & the Earth*, published in 2014, Carol Adams also notes that the '70s and '80s sparked the blossoming of ecofeminist thought; however, Adams adds animal rights activism as a contributing context for ecofeminism. The field fused ecology and feminism into "ecofeminism" (and literary ecology, its close relative, went the same path towards abbreviation and is now called "ecocriticism"). For a definition of what ecofeminism is and how it works, I turn to one of the leading writers and thinkers in the field. Adams's *Ecofeminism* includes Greta Gaard's thoughts on ecofeminism:

[T]he intersectional analysis of nature, gender, race, class, species, and sexuality is not confined to an essentialist definition of feminism or ecofeminism, but rather offers a strategic conceptual approach toward bringing about the social justice, economic and ecological democracy needed to solve environmental crises in the present moment. (qtd. in Adams 31)

Karen Warren, writing in her *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, says more succinctly that “ecofeminism is about the interconnections among *all* systems of unjustified human domination” (2). Warren’s statement is meaningfully ambiguous: ecofeminism analyzes the interconnections among unjustified systems of domination of and by humans (i.e. human-human and human-nonhuman domination). Since both environmental justice ecocriticism and, especially, ecofeminism both question the fairness of existing power dynamics and domination, they are useful in analyzing literary works for how they uphold or critique fictional representations of real power structures.

Appalachian Context

One aspect that ecocriticism analyzes is how a place, environment, or ecosphere influences both the human and nonhuman elements in it, and regional lenses have developed around specific areas of environmental concern. Appalachian literature and culture have proven to be a key area of consideration for environmental issues because of the large mining economy that has exploited both land and workers. Nonfiction media, such as the four-part PBS documentary *Appalachia: A History of Mountains and People*, as well as Ronald Eller’s book *Uneven Ground: Appalachia since 1945*, take a socio-historical-environmental look at the Appalachian region. These two nonfictional works—in addition to many fictional representations of the region—document the ways in which capitalist business models devalue Appalachian landscapes, people, and cultures. An environmentally exploited Appalachia is the historical context for novelist Barbara Kingsolver’s works, *Prodigal Summer* and *Flight Behavior*. Kingsolver does not, as generations of Appalachian authors have before her, take up the fight against coal companies. Instead, she expands the scope of environmental degradation within Appalachia from mainly coal and coal-related

environmental concerns to environmental concerns such as biodiversity, human predation of animals, and climate change. In the wake of the environmental movement and recent climate crisis, her novels meld the hard facts of climate change with the more emotional, character-driven narratives about Appalachians dealing with climate change as it intersects with their everyday lives.

Critical Voices

While Kingsolver is an author and novelist who is well known for novels like *The Bean Trees* and *The Poisonwood Bible*, her later works that I analyze in this thesis have not received as much critical attention. While not as true for *Prodigal Summer*, the lack of critical attention may be due to the novels' recent publishing dates—2001 and 2012, respectively. I will describe some of the critical attention Kingsolver has received about her novels' regional perspective as well as outline the little critical attention that *Flight Behavior* has received to date.

Though Kingsolver's books are well-received, and she has collected several awards and recognitions for her achievements, including being named one of the "most important writers of the 20th Century by *Writer's Digest*" and receiving the National Humanities Medal in 2000, she has not emerged through the gauntlet unscathed ("Brief Biography"). Priscilla Leder has noted in her introduction to *Seeds of Change: Critical Essays on Barbara Kingsolver* that Kingsolver's work has been criticized for being too easily wrapped up or too ambiguous to call her readers to a decisive action or to call them to feel a certain way about the present situation (1-26). For example, *Flight Behavior* ends ambiguously, leaving the individual reader to assess whether she views the ending as hopeful or ominous rather than ending with a narrative voice calling "To arms!" or giving readers a perfect model to emulate

in the main character Dellarobia. Nevertheless, as the title of this thesis implies, the ending of the novel is not flat or static. The end is, as my title suggests, “charged with resistance,” which suggests a melding of hope and caution.

Negative criticism has not only focused on the endings to Kingsolver’s novels but on her depiction of places as well. Kristin Jacobson notes that Kingsolver’s southwest-based novels (particularly *The Bean Trees*) and her Congo-based novel, *The Poisonwood Bible*, have been very controversial among critics (175-198). While the southwestern spaces are not part of my thesis, it is useful to be aware of criticism that Kingsolver has received for her fictitious settings. Those critics who have deplored Kingsolver’s southwestern locations as problematic cite an absence of cultural diversity. To reiterate, those who decry Kingsolver’s geopolitics mostly criticize the fact that she has highlighted the white Americans’ activities and ideologies within those places. Kingsolver’s defenders, such as Jacobson, argue that her imagined places (which are based on Kingsolver’s lived experiences in Tucson and Zaire) are open to the possibilities of imagining multiple experiences and relationships in those spaces: “Kingsolver’s geopolitics are by no means perfect [...but] these imperfect fictional locations grounded in present realities still provide important guides to finding approaches, if not solutions, to current social inequities” (175). Likely, no real or fictional representation of a place will capture each individual subjective experience with the place. As Jacobson suggests, readers of Kingsolver’s fiction should focus on the hope that comes from presenting an alternative voice for the region.

In addition to Leder and Jacobson, who focus on specific areas of Kingsolver’s life and career, Linda Wagner-Martin writes about Barbara Kingsolver on a broader scale. Arguably, Wagner-Martin is the most prolific critic of Kingsolver’s work because she has

published a monograph about Kingsolver called *Great Writers: Barbara Kingsolver* wherein she discusses the biographical influences on Kingsolver's work as well as an examination of many of Kingsolver's works in *Barbara Kingsolver's World: Nature, Art, and the Twenty-First Century*. In *Great Writers*, Wagner-Martin reasons that Kingsolver's post-secondary education in biology has been very impactful to Kingsolver's personal convictions and her writing (115-122). *Barbara Kingsolver's World* includes the first study of Dellarobia the main character in *Flight Behavior*. With the exception of an essay published in the last few months titled "Pessimism, Optimism, Human Inertia, and Anthropogenic Climate Change" in *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* by Patrick Murphy, Wagner-Martin remains the only critic to write about *Flight Behavior* in any capacity to date.² As the only voices speaking about *Flight Behavior*, Wagner-Martin and Murphy are helpful because their reading of the novel works in conjunction with my own. However, they take their conclusions in different directions to write about character development and the emerging genre of climate change fiction, respectively.

Conclusion: Thesis Outline

My first chapter is an exploration of my main lens of inquiry, ecofeminism. This chapter will describe the history of ecofeminism and its sometimes contentious relationship with ecocriticism. Among other voices I consider, such as Greta Gaard and Patrick Murphy, Carol Adams and Lori Gruen's definition of ecofeminism will be vital to contextualizing the approach I will use in my analysis because it focuses on the mistaken notion of human exceptionalism. In *Ecofeminism*, Adams and Gruen summarize ecofeminism in this way:

² Greg Garrard's article "Conciliation and Consilience: Climate Change in Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behaviour*" is another example of articles being written on *Flight Behavior*, but the article is still awaiting publication with the *Handbook of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology* edited by Hubert Zapf.

“Ecofeminism addresses the various ways that sexism, heteronormativity, racism, colonialism, and ableism are informed by and support speciesism and how analyzing the ways these forces intersect can produce less violent, more just practices” (1). Their definition of ecofeminism is helpful because it depicts human selfishness as the underlying cause of many of the other dualisms in modern culture. Notably, the animals and the environment share as much of the narrative in *Prodigal Summer* and *Flight Behavior* as do the human characters—the difference is that the nonhumans do not communicate in the same ways as humans do. I will also develop the related ecocritical lens of environmental justice because it adds depth to ecofeminist intersectionality and communicates how these lenses inform the ecological and identity readings of the novels.

The second chapter covers the analysis of place and context of Appalachian fiction. Place is a very important theme to address in the context of Barbara Kingsolver’s work because her work often situates global concerns in specific, regional locations yet also elevates the Appalachian region out of a possible restrictive thematic use of mining culture. Elizabeth Engelhardt’s *The Tangled Roots of Feminism, Environmentalism, and Appalachian Literature* will be useful in examining proto-ecofeminists and environmental writers in Appalachia. She discusses the risk that outsiders to Appalachian socio-economics run when writing about Appalachia. Outsiders especially run the risk of subordinating Appalachian culture, making Appalachians the object of interwoven systems of oppression (including sexism and nonhuman others) that Carol Adams, Karen Warren, and others examine in ecofeminism. Engelhardt writes about Appalachian characters who experience ecological disenfranchisement on a scale with nonhuman entities: “Not only does the nonhuman world have no agency, but the Appalachian human characters, who are closely associated with

‘uncivilized’ nature, have no agency either” (6). Setting *Prodigal Summer* and *Flight Behavior* in Appalachia invokes a larger literary as well as socio-cultural context for the novels, and Engelhardt provides a literary context for Kingsolver.

The third and fourth chapters apply the themes and theories addressed—such as the binaries of human/nature, man/woman, culture/nature—in the previous chapters to Kingsolver’s recent novels set in Appalachia. In the third chapter, I examine gendered responses to the land and to nonhumans in *Prodigal Summer*. The females treat the land with respect and value nonhuman experiences regardless of perceived monetary value. On the other hand, the males seek to replicate past successes and ideologies on the land regardless of their effectiveness in today’s climate, leading them to seem outmoded and oppressive to both the other humans and to the land and nonhuman animals. In the fourth and last chapter, I examine the realities of climate change as they are presented in *Flight Behavior* and how Dellarobia’s dawning recognition that climate change exists coincides with her understanding of natural processes and unfair power dynamics.

This thesis can make important contributions to Barbara Kingsolver scholarship by reading *Prodigal Summer* and *Flight Behavior* in new contexts. Much of the criticism of Kingsolver’s Appalachian fiction focuses on her work as an Appalachian cultural artifact and a thematic shift back to Kingsolver’s Kentucky-Appalachian roots. This thesis departs from using Kingsolver as merely an Appalachian exemplar because I integrate these novels into a larger discourse about environmental change and disaster. Yes, *Prodigal Summer* and *Flight Behavior* are Appalachian novels, but analyzing them through ecofeminism incorporates Kingsolver’s work into a larger discourse about human-human and human-nonhuman relationships. The ecofeminist reading I will apply is a lens that has yet to be put to

Kingsolver's novels. Finally, an extended analysis of the relatively new *Prodigal Summer* and the very recent *Flight Behavior* contributes to the body of scholarship because few scholars have spent more than an article on either of the novels.

Chapter One:

Ecofeminist Roots and Practices

The first scene of Disney and Pixar's 2008 film *Wall-E* involves a cute and somewhat clunky robot going about his daily business as the only cleaning robot—or anything semi-sentient—left on Earth. The landscape is void of anything human, animal, or green. The whole planet, it seems, is either an abandoned city or landfill. Wall-E's job is to box up the debris into manageable chunks of junk for the supposed human re-colonization of Earth in the future. Later in the movie, the futuristic robot Eve lands on Earth with one mission: to find any plant life, or other signs of life, on the planet's surface. She manages to find only one small plant. *Wall-E* is a romantic comedy based on the two robots, but the backdrop to their relationship is much more sinister and real. *Wall-E* is, apparently, Disney's imagination of what the world could look like if large superstores and rampant consumerism flourish unabashedly.

American patriarchal culture has treated the nonhuman world (both animal and environment alike) as an “other” for most of its existence. The ecology movement in the 1980s and '90s—with examples as early as the 1970s—reinvented the way Americans might conceive of the nonhuman other. Ecofeminists quickly coordinated aspects of the feminist, animal rights, and environmental movements to critique dominant culture and promote awareness of ways that the powerful American elite (i.e. hegemonic, patriarchal culture) were treating lower economic groups, non-whites, women, animals, and the environment as secondary or inferior to wealthy, white men who were by and large making political policy and business decisions.

This chapter outlines the history and application of ecofeminism, which is my main methodology for examining Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer* and *Flight Behavior*. I will progress to ecofeminism through the umbrella term of ecocriticism (environmental literary analysis) as well as environmental justice criticism. In an effort to avoid repetition, I will use environmental justice and eco-justice interchangeably. Ecocriticism and eco-justice criticism aid my own understanding of ecofeminism though their analyses normally do not query as many intersecting binaries as ecofeminism does. Therefore, I consider ecocriticism and eco-justice as supplementary theories to ecofeminism. Essentially, ecocriticism includes all literary examinations of environment in addition to being a critical method in its own right. Ecocriticism, unlike the other theories in this chapter, started in academia through literary studies and has its whole history encased in literary studies. Eco-justice and ecofeminism started in political advocacy and activism before entering the academic realms.

Cheryll Glotfelty opens *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* with a status message: literary studies needs to redraw the maps of the field. She notices a change on the horizon, gathering strength. The change she sees coming is ecocriticism. Others came before her and predate her collection, so she collected the texts. The critics collected in *The Ecocriticism Reader* were, as Glotfelty comments, isolated thinkers who did not have a unified theory to guide their individual efforts. *The Ecocriticism Reader* unifies many voices who were studying how the environment functions within literary spaces.

In addition to housing several well-known ecocritical theorists in her collection, Glotfelty presents guiding questions for her readers to begin their own ecocritical analysis. She poses these questions: "How is nature represented in this sonnet? What role does the physical setting play in the plot of this novel? Are the values expressed in this play consistent

with ecological wisdom? How do our metaphors of the land influence the way we treat it?” (xvii-xix). She offers a summative statement on ecocriticism and how it differs from previous methodology for evaluating and analyzing literary texts:

Ecocriticism can be further characterized by distinguishing it from other critical approaches. Literary theory, in general, examines the relations between writers, texts, and the world. In most literary theory “the world” is synonymous with society—the social sphere. Ecocriticism expands the notion of “the world” to include the entire ecosphere. If we agree with Barry Commoner’s first law of ecology, “Everything is connected to everything else,” we must conclude that literature does not float above the material world in some aesthetic ether, but, rather, plays a part in an immensely complex global system, in which energy, matter, *and ideas* interact. (Glotfelty xix)

Ecocriticism begins taking the metaphorical stance of “the world” literally by examining what the land is doing within the text, what the humans are doing to it, and what the land is doing to the humans in return—an evaluation of the interactions between humans and nature.

However radical or broadening to literary critiques ecocriticism was, it is, of course, critiqued. T.V. Reed has leveled this criticism on the field of ecocriticism as he argues for a more productive methodology of inquiry:

My problem with much past and current ‘ecocriticism,’ ...is less what it is than what it is not (yet). While the field of ecocriticism is in many respects very broad, it has not often dealt seriously with questions of race and class, questions which I and many others believe must be at the heart of any

discussion of the history and future of environmental thought and action.

(145)

Reed complicates the limited view of ecocriticism by supplementing it with social justice. If it is not already evident, the term “environmental justice criticism” comes from the combination of the two ideas, environmental criticism and social justice criticism. Reed’s comment branches off from ecocriticism by adding ways of examining how patriarchal power subjugates the environment, the lower class, and non-whites in similar ways, as many case studies in *The Environmental Justice Reader* attest. In her article “From Environmental Justice Literature to the Literature of Environmental Justice,” Julie Sze comments on the multifaceted history and influences that shape environmental justice criticism:

Environmental justice is, as an emergent academic field, located primarily in sociology, natural resource policy, and environmental law, though environmental justice writings also appear within the disciplines of philosophy and environmental ethics, geography, and radical political economy. (165)

What Sze says about eco-justice as it emerges in academia can be said about ecofeminism as well, both of which are around forty years old.

With a variety of influences shaping the approaches of environmental justice criticism, it is little surprise that Sze, in the same article, moves her argument into the theoretical, subjective literary realm. Instead of considering case studies, as many of the fellow scholars in *The Environmental Justice Reader* do, Sze diverts her attention to analyzing Karen Tei Yamashita’s novel *The Tropic of Orange* as a way, Sze says, “to ‘read’ environmental justice perspectives” (164). Her study deviates from sociological studies of

“environmental racism”—a common term in eco-justice—by adding “methods, such as narrative analysis of cultural texts, [which] offer an alternative strategy to analyzing the roots of environmental racism” (165). Her analysis of *The Tropic of Orange* begins a process of analyzing literary works not just for their human-nature binaries (as ecocriticism might), but for teasing out how multiple binaries intersect in the work. For instance, she analyzes race, labor, and “natural exploitation” in the novel as a cultural byproduct depicting in a fictitious narrative a system that at least disadvantages or, more likely, exploits racial minorities, the working class, and the environment (166-167).

While ecocriticism asks productive questions for our Western culture and for reforming literary studies, it falls short of its potential, as Reed argues. Eco-justice complicates the issue positively by analyzing more binaries than the human-nature, or culture-nature, binary. However, if eco-justice stops at analyzing the intersecting injustices of race, class, and environment, it risks alienating analyses like feminism or animal studies (and potentially others). Where the previous two methods of environmental literary analysis fall short, ecofeminism presents the best chance at fulfilling their promise.

Long-time ecofeminist writer and philosopher Carol Adams writes in her latest book, *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals & the Earth*, co-authored with Lori Gruen, that ecofeminism “addresses the various ways that sexism, heteronormativity, racism, colonialism, and ableism are informed by and support speciesism and how analyzing the ways these forces intersect can produce less violent, more just practices” (1). In Adams’s definition of ecofeminism—readers may note—there is no reference to the environment, landscape, or “green” as a synonym for the environmental movement because ecofeminism is not limited to only examining intersections with nature. Nature, in fact, is not even privileged

in Adams's interpretation of ecofeminism. Her use of speciesism critiques humans' hubris in considering their survival as the primary concern for saving the planet or changing environmental ethics. Speciesism can be alternately thought of as anthropocentrism (also considered human exceptionalism), which refers to the human cultural mindset and practices that privilege the human species, human values, and human experiences above all others, usually to the detriment of other species. Adams uses the term "speciesism," and ecofeminism looks at especially male-centered anthropocentrism. Nevertheless, I prefer the term "anthropocentrism" because it is more broad-ranging and will be using it to discuss human perceptions of human exceptionalism.

Val Plumwood in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* reminds fellow ecofeminists that we should be constantly evaluating ourselves and reflecting on our practices and methodologies to avoid being or acting in the ways we are trying to critique:

Nature, as the excluded and devalued contrast of reason, includes the emotions, the body, the passions, animality, the primitive or uncivilised [sic], the nonhuman world, matter, physicality and sense experience, as well as the sphere of irrationality, of faith and of madness. In other words, nature includes everything that reason excludes. It is important to note this point because some ecofeminists have endorsed the association between women and nature without critically examining how the association is produced by exclusion.

(20)

She reminds those who are evaluating texts that similarities between women and nature do not mean that the connection is positive, simple, or natural. If women and nature are both subjugated to the patriarchal power structures, then realizing that women are compared to

nature (maybe even synonymous with it) is realizing a doubled burden. The similarities drawn between women and nature should give women extra reason to fight the patriarchal powers that seek to dominate and silence devalued women, nature, and nonhumans.

As stated in the Introduction, ecofeminism is a combination of the words ecology and feminism. Ecofeminism seems an easily-constructed word; however, it has a contentious past. Within academic circles, ecofeminism—and ecocriticism has also received some of the same criticisms—has fallen in and out and back in favor due to allegations that it is or has been too essentialist. Greta Gaard notes in her review article “Ecofeminism Revisited” that ecofeminism grew out of feminism in the 1970s and ’80s, which included peace protests and protests against nuclear testing. Gaard says, “Ecofeminism emerged from the intersections of feminist research and the various movements for social justice and environmental health, explorations that uncovered the linked oppressions of gender, ecology, race, species, and nation” (28). Carol Adams also notes in *Ecofeminism* that the ’70s and ’80s sparked the blossoming of ecofeminist thought; however, Adams adds animal rights activism as a contributing context for ecofeminism. Animal rights activism will be used in this thesis in discussing ways animal and human problems are frequently interrelated and helping one can help both parties. For instance, killing predators needlessly would actually harm the ecosystem that would benefit Lusa’s herds in *Prodigal Summer*. Therefore, she helps herself by not killing the predator species. Anthropocentrism is my main use of the animal rights aspect of ecofeminism.

Additionally, Patrick Murphy discusses in *Literature, Nature, and Other: Ecofeminist Critiques* ways of viewing humans’ place in the ecosphere: “At the same time, only by recognizing that humans are not only things-in-themselves and things-for-us but also things-

for-others, including the stable evolution of the biosphere, can we begin to understand our appropriate ecological niche and attendant practices” (22). Murphy is communicating several ideas to his readers in his discussion of “things” and the thing’s relationship to the world around it. Renaming human experiences as things decenters human exceptionalism, specifically in calling human experiences things-for-others. Murphy objectifies humans by using the term “thing.” He presents them in a neutral plane equal with other things (e.g. other humans, animals, or plants). Calling humans things-in-themselves essentially recognizes that each individual should have an equal status as a human regardless of ideological or physical differences. “Things-for-us” employs rhetoric of ownership and asks how other humans as well as plants and animals might benefit the individual. Specifically, the language of things-for-us asks, “What can this person/being/thing/item do for me?” In contrast, referring to humans as things-for-others is less self-centered, less anthropocentric. With this last comparison, Murphy is drawing the connection between humans as they are (things-in-themselves) and humans as members of the ecosphere (potentially things-for-others). This last comparison, for instance, can make some uncomfortable because it decenters human existence in the conversation. Thinking of humans as potentially something for others can be unsettling because it admits that we are not eternal, almighty, or separated from the ecological give-and-take of the earth. Murphy’s relationship between and among “things” creates an ecology that should be remembered. As systems of relatedness, ecologies are less prone to binaries and dualistic thinking; therefore, ecological thinking can resist the binaries that so often plague Western thought. Murphy is not valuing other of the terms more than another but thinks we need to keep all three relationships in mind.

In addition to representing humans' relationship to themselves, others, and their surroundings, Murphy discusses when people are considered Other and when Otherness is applied to people. Other, Otherness, and Other-ing are ways in which a dominant culture, class, gender, sexuality, or species defines what is different or absent in another group, typically degrading the different group. Unfortunately, Otherness is applied only on a contingent basis to put the different group constantly on the wrong footing:

If the recognition of otherness and the status of other is applied only to women and/or the unconscious, for example, and the corollary notion of anotherness, being another for others, is not recognized, then the ecological processes of interanimation—the ways in which humans and other entities develop, change, and learn through mutually influencing each other day to day, age by age—will go unacknowledged, and notions of female autonomy that have been useful to women in thinking through the characteristics of their social oppression will end up complicitous with the traditional American, patriarchal beliefs in autonomy and individualism. (Murphy 23)

Failure to acknowledge our interanimation—Adams and Gruen open *Ecofeminism* with the related word “intersectionality”—limits humans' view of how the ecosphere acts for us and reacts to us just as we (should) act for it and react to it. Murphy's word, interanimation, implies that each human and each one of any other biological being is mutually influencing the life of every other surrounding being. Interanimation means recognizing that we as humans are given life through our ecological relationship to other things. Humans cannot exist and continue to live alone; they must be sustained by some sort of food or water source and by human relationships. Similarly, Adams and Gruen's term reminds us that human lives

intersect with human, animal, and plant lives constantly. Thinking about the overlapping terms “interanimation” and “intersectionality” considers humans as part of the ecology, not aloof or separated from the ecology. Additionally, intersectional living can resist the temptation of substituting one unfair hierarchy with another, which Murphy references at the end of the above quotation. Ecofeminists do not want to overturn patriarchy for a matriarchy; rather, they want a more equitable style of living with others that is enriched by the variety of lives that intersect with human experience.

In light of the intersectional context that ecofeminism requires, Mara Mies suggests adjusting the patriarchal view of research as “from above” to a perspective that includes the researched “from below” (38). Viewing the research from above replicates a patriarchal, hierarchal power structure wherein the researcher adopts an objective tone and attitude towards the researched, according to Mies. She advocates a more personal interaction between researcher-researched and also advocates approaching the subject with one’s humanity intact, remembering that objectivity is a façade the researcher has traditionally adopted. Essentially, Mies advocates for the researcher to communicate who she is as part of the research. The basis for Mies’s assertion is an assumption that true objectivity is a fallacy, or at best an ideal, and therefore researchers should abandon perpetuating the fallacy, replacing objectivity with being open about one’s subjectivity and one’s relationship to the subject matter. Mies advocates research methodologies that bring out the consequences of patriarchal research methods by writing, “Chernobyl showed us more clearly than anything before that the modern techno-patriarchs destroy life, living systems, and symbioses. Afterwards they can even measure the destruction perpetrated. *But they cannot restore life.* For that, they still need—as we all do—Gaia, Mother Earth, and woman” (52). The non-

patriarchal, subjective approach to researching leads this thesis into a strategy that juxtaposes numbers and narratives to analyze realities that exist beneath narratives. Numbers and narratives—in addition to providing a more cohesive strategic element to the thesis—is an intersection of data and case studies. I argue that this is the best way to approach the characters in *Prodigal Summer* and *Flight Behavior* (found in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4) because it relies on combining theory and practice as well as objective and subjective analysis, which is a basis for ecofeminist activism and later ecofeminist literary approaches.

Stacy Alaimo, in her article “Material Engagements: Science Studies and the Environmental Humanities” as well as her book *Bodily Natures*, implores her readers to see the flaw in relying solely on empirical data to inform ecocritical studies because it is only one way of knowing. Ecocritical theory should involve a praxis, such as a narrative, to give the data context. Similarly, narratives without data can be equally problematic. I am including the relationship between numbers (empirical data) and narratives (lived stories) because the practice relies on interanimation.

One critique of potentially unfair hierarchies is the schism between empirical data (numbers) and lived stories (narratives). Combining these two different ways of addressing a situation, with an objective *and* subjective stance, provides more context than either numbers or narratives alone—the difference in the two approaches is a common schism between mathematical sciences and the humanities. Kingsolver’s writing not only gives the Appalachian people she fictionalizes voice—an ecofeminist action on her part—but her narratives are also empirically grounded. The following example about the Chipko movement shows the power of combining numbers and narratives to produce an ethical change.

I turn to a well-known ecofeminist case study to demonstrate the strategy of numbers and narratives that I will use throughout the thesis. The case study below incorporates mainly a socio-economic side to ecofeminist analysis that Rosemary Radford Ruether discusses.

Ruether says socio-economic analysis:

[G]oes beneath the cultural-symbolic level and explores the socio-economic underpinnings of this ideology of women's similarity to non-human nature. How has the domination of women's bodies and women's work by ruling class men been interconnected concretely with the exploitation of land, of water, or animals? [...] How does the positioning of women as the caretakers of children, and of small animals, the gatherers of plants, the weavers, the cooks, the cleaners, the waste managers for men in the family, function to both inferiorize this work and to identify women with a non-human world that is likewise inferiorized? (qtd. in Adams 11)

Ruether poses some ideas above for her readers to ponder as they engage in ecofeminist analysis, and those questions will also inform the Chipko movement's case study below. Ruether reminds us the false narrative that women are supposed to be the caretakers, the gatherers, the weavers, the cooks, and the cleaners is dangerous because it creates a schism between men-power-culture and women-inferior-nature. The harmful binaries are perpetuated by patriarchal power structures, and there is nothing innate or natural about the construction that women are closer to nature.

Karen Warren begins *Ecofeminist Philosophy* with a defense of ecofeminism using a case study that unifies narratives with empirical data. Warren relates a story of a proto-ecofeminist movement in colonial India: "The Chipko movement—a grassroots, women-

initiated, ecologically aware, nonviolent protest movement—is ostensibly about trees. But it is also about women—other human Others—nature interconnections” (3). The Chipko women took “simple but effective action” to stop deforestation in northern India in 1974 (Warren 2). The types of trees that were planted after the initial loggings were ineffective at providing the diverse wood source and land stability that the people needed because the industry wanted the timber traded tree for tree but planted only one or two types of trees that did not properly reflect the diversity they were uprooting. Therefore, the movement protested the deforestation as well as the lack of diversity and effective monoculture the industry substituted for the original forests. The numbers alone cannot encapsulate the complete situation because both sides of the confrontation can use numbers to defend their cause. It is true, too, that both sides can employ narratives in the form of propaganda that would support their respective causes. What is different about including the narrative in addition to the empirical data on the Chipko women is that their story cannot be easily co-opted by others. Data can be used to describe them, to Other them without their involvement; however, including their story—even if it is relayed by sympathetic others—gives the Chipko movement a voice. Warren reminds her readers that ecofeminism is a lens that critiques the subordination of women as it does dominance by race and class. Numbers, especially data regarding profits for the companies deforesting the land, might try to justify the domination of the Chipko women; however, Warren shows the power of combining numbers *and* narratives in her case study. The Chipko movement’s motto is “soil, water, and oxygen” (Warren 3). Any reference to the initial marketability of the trees is absent. Those in the movement realized the ramifications of subjecting their forests solely to industrial needs. By using the combined power of numbers and narratives, Warren is able to better contextualize

the Chipko women's situation in a way that numbers alone cannot do. She notes that the industrial economies that sought to fell the Chipko women's timber were largely non-Indian men from more economically advantaged countries (2-6).

In her discussion of the Chipko movement, Karen Warren implicates Western industrial practices that deforest and replace with monocultures to be reaped later (5-6). The monocultures may create some jobs or solve some immediate ecological concerns; however, larger and more complex problems will emerge in the wake of deforestation. Furthermore, Warren concludes that the ripple effect of problems caused by deforesting whole swaths of land causes more trouble than select cuttings: "small-scale production reflects local priorities, involves multiple uses of many species of trees, and is responsive to the social reality of women's importance in agriculture and forest production, [therefore] to threaten small-scale production is to threaten the livelihood and well-being of women" (6). Warren invokes more than just quick accounting practices in the Chipko case study and her critique: she breathes life into the story by reminding her readers that people, culture, economics, and environment are all intertwined in the Chipko movement's story. Ecofeminist analysis often seeks to analyze the complexities of such problems by looking at sexism, heteronormativity, racism, colonialism, and ableism and how these methods of subjugation perpetuate unfair power dynamics. Ecofeminism can avoid being called essentialist by querying and analyzing the intersection of several forms of unfair subjugation as Warren does.

From this illustrative case study about the Chipko women, Warren concludes that ecofeminists should take back empirical data for the humanities. This taking back should function not as a take-over; rather, it should add to ways of knowing and should bring more context to narratives. Alaimo calls for a similar cooperation between empirical data and lived

stories. Numbers and narratives can be employed simultaneously for a greater effect than either can do alone. For instance, in “Radiation, Tobacco, and Illness in Point Hope, Alaska: Approaches to the ‘Facts’ in Contaminated Communities,” Nelta Edwards argues for a “mobile ontology” which negotiates the truths in numbers and narratives (117-119). The “best case scenario” of employing both data and description can be one method of going beyond binaries. Edwards uses a case study of Alaskans of Point Hope to construct a theory of mobile ontology that would better serve scientific studies of pollution and its effect on populations, helping to bring about environmental justice. Edwards writes about the native Alaskans who needed their personal observations valued. The natives’ anecdotal observations and personal stories were, as it turns out, the basis for scientific inquiry. Edwards reports that the natives hired a doctor to study the unusually high cancer rate (109-110). This doctor took the natives’ stories seriously and found that large companies had been testing explosives nearby and that the aftermath of the explosives caused a high rate of sickness in the human and nonhuman population of the surrounding area. In arguing for mobile ontology, Edwards asserts that there is a gulf or misunderstanding between scientists and lay people. She argues that if the data from scientists and the narratives from the lay populations do not coincide to tell the same story, then the scientific methods need to change. Edwards advocates a mobile ontology that encourages lay narratives and scientific data to question each other’s validity. In addition to supporting the intersecting goals in the eco-justice and ecofeminist approaches, the strategy of numbers and narratives plays out in *Prodigal Summer* and *Flight Behavior* (both fictitious narratives) because the novels are scientifically grounded. Kingsolver’s training in the biological sciences informs her writing, allowing her to merge numbers and narratives.

It is that interaction—Adams’s “intersection” or Murphy’s “interanimation” or ecology in general—in conjunction with the socio-cultural critique of patriarchal, hierarchical systems of domination and exploitation that forms the basis for the ecofeminist analysis that I will employ in the rest of this thesis. My thesis analyzes which characters might be able to answer the call to resist a dualistic culture that Val Plumwood describes: “[B]oth men and women must challenge the dualised conception of human identity and develop an alternative culture which fully recognises *human* identity as continuous with, not alien from, nature. The dualised conception of nature as inert, passive and mechanistic would also be challenged as part of this development” (36). Plumwood urges us to adopt a new culture that resists binaries and dualities. As I examine Kingsolver’s characters and their interactions with the nonhuman world, I pay attention to replications and representations of patriarchy in the novels. Often, these representations of patriarchy are tied to poor land use and underdeveloped understandings of how ecology works. There are some males who do take an ecological approach to the land and women; however, liberating the land from dualisms impacts the women in the novels more than the males. Additionally, I examine how the women respond to their cultural and environmental (non-human) surroundings differently than the majority of the men in the novels. The women are more sympathetic and favorably represented in the novels; therefore, the difference in the female characters’ interactions with nonhumans shows Kingsolver’s readers a path towards rethinking and transforming their practices towards nonhuman others.

Chapter Two: Appalachian Context

Fiction set in Appalachia—often written by Appalachians themselves—tends to address at least two themes: the development of a character’s relationship to the natural, nonhuman world and a skepticism towards exploitive, industrial behaviors. The trend holds true for authors such as James Still, Fred Chappell, Denise Giardina, Lee Smith, Hubert Skidmore, Gurney Norman, and, of course, Barbara Kingsolver. Considering her upbringing in Kentucky, it is easy to see a budding environmental fiction writer emerging from what Kingsolver herself says of her childhood:

I am one of those lucky ones, whose best memories all contain birdsong and trees. In the long light of summer, on every consecrated Saturday of spring and fall...my compatriots and I carried out our greatest accomplishments in the company of hickory and maple...We had no idea we were living at the edge of an epoch...We knew just enough of our world to eat it alive, swallowing wildness by the mouthful. (qtd. in *Great Writers: Barbara Kingsolver* 7)

In an examination of her past, we can see not only a reverence for the natural world, but with wording like “consecrated,” she is deifying or sanctifying her experience during spring and fall Saturdays. Additionally, all of her greatest accomplishments were in the company of hickory and maple trees, as if they were leafy kin.

Jim Wayne Miller’s poem “How America Came to the Mountains” exemplifies the second common Appalachian theme. Miller’s poem is the epigraph to Ronald Eller’s book *Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945*. Miller writes, “And that’s why now so many old

barn doors / up and down the mountains hang by one hinge / and gravel in the creek is broken glass” (Eller xv). In Miller’s poem the people cannot remember exactly when America, symbolized mainly through references to newfound trash in roadside ditches and broken glass, made its way into Appalachia; but the characters agree in describing it through the imagery of a natural disaster, a tornado, leaving debris everywhere. In Miller’s poem, the land is destroyed when America arrives at Appalachia’s doorstep. Its beauty is covered by what quickly becomes out-of-date (broken down cars, barns, barn doors with one hinge, etc.) and distorted: the gravel in the creek has morphed from natural stone to manmade glass. As a region, Appalachia is valued for its natural beauty and for its natural resources underground. What Miller’s poem shows is that America figuratively squeezes the one main resource Appalachians have, their land. Appalachians themselves litter the beautiful surface and, as Eller’s book details, outside companies extract resources (mostly famously coal) from beneath landholders.

This region and its people have been greatly affected financially because, like the tornado aftermath in Miller’s poem, Appalachians are left with the refuse of the corporations that would seek only to make money off of them. *Prodigal Summer* and *Flight Behavior*, as novels set in Appalachia written by an Appalachian, include these classic defining features of Appalachian writing: the main characters are united by landscapes that have been altered by a hierarchal, exploitive, and consumptive lifestyle. Where Kingsolver’s novels deviate from many Appalachian novels is that coal is not a main discussion in her environmental criticisms; rather, the novels examined in this thesis mimic the narratives of female eco-justice activists.

Ecofeminist works like those of Adams, Murphy, or Warren, though insightful, trace back only forty or fifty years at most. Ecofeminism's critique of Western life are powerful; however, the context for this discourse shifts with an Appalachian novel. As a life-long Appalachian myself and an avid reader of Appalachian fiction, I would be remiss if I did not address what ecofeminist and eco-justice approaches contribute to our understanding of Appalachian literature and, conversely, what Appalachian literature can provide to enrich these theories. This chapter will further refine the method of ecofeminism in an Appalachian context by showing—mainly with help from Elizabeth Engelhardt's *The Tangled Roots of Feminism, Environmentalism, and Appalachian Literature*—what kinds of Appalachian literary environmentalism precede Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer* and *Flight Behavior*. In addition to Engelhardt's analysis of literary representations of Appalachian women, Shannon Elizabeth Bell's *Appalachian Women and the Fight for Environmental Justice* presents Appalachian women who got involved in the environmental movement frequently out of desperation to save their families from impending environmental safety concerns like landslides caused by deforestation. Engelhardt and Bell's work shows imagined and real narratives of women speaking up for the land because patriarchal companies sought profits with little or no regard for the human and nonhuman lives affected by the companies' actions.

In her introduction to *Tangled Roots*, Elizabeth Engelhardt says, "In my hometown of Hendersonville, North Carolina, in the Appalachian mountains, strip malls compete with antique stores for the soul of the town. The mountaintops around the town now sport gigantic houses with what I am sure are beautiful views—unless they, too, can only see other huge homes from up there" (1-2). As an Appalachian herself, Engelhardt's remark reveals an

Appalachian's skepticism of capitalism as an asset to the natural environment. Her remarks depict a metaphorical vertical hierarchy where bigger houses claim ever higher ground. The people, and their houses as a representation, are in the "keeping up with the Joneses" mentality that has seemingly no regard to the view of others. This chapter traces the traditions Kingsolver participates in when she publishes ecological Appalachian fiction.

Engelhardt discusses ways in which Appalachian writer Emma Bell Miles asserts that the tourists who come to Appalachia "must understand the culture of Appalachia that ties mountain residents to the nonhuman community" (143). Unfortunately, many do not understand those ties to the natural, nonhuman world, and those who do not understand the Appalachians' predisposition towards environmental, if not ecofeminist, thought risk misunderstanding Appalachian culture completely. Obviously, Engelhardt is exploring the work of a writer who lived a century before Kingsolver's work; however, many of those values in Appalachia have changed little. Engelhardt discusses ways that author Emma Bell Miles was a forerunner of what Engelhardt calls ecological feminism (the term's definition, as she uses it, is remarkably similar to voices from the previous chapter). Miles, Engelhardt says, is a proto-ecofeminist in portraying women who are extra-tuned in to the environmental, nonhuman world:

Moreover, in almost every chapter [Emma Bell] Miles makes women's voices the strongest advocates for the mountains, whereas the literatures of the tourist, voyeur, and social crusader did not imagine Appalachian women's culture at all, and whereas [fellow author Mary] Murfree imagined it but did not or could not give the women voices, Miles makes the culture of Appalachian women explicitly political and vocal. (140)

The Appalachian region, as Engelhardt is exploring it through writings set in the early 1900s, has a cultural history that encourages an environmental awareness that makes the region's literature especially inviting for ecofeminist readings. Engelhardt observes that "Miles's strategy of giving women the lead in speaking for communities hints at her ecological feminism and her belief that women should take action to preserve the human and nonhuman communities in which they live" (140). Miles's strategy can be seen in at least a few of Kingsolver's characters, including Nanny Rawlings and Dellarobia. For instance, many of Engelhardt's sources on ecocriticism for *Tangled Roots*—including Gaard, Glotfelty, and Murphy—can be found throughout this thesis as well.

Other literary examples by Appalachian authors that examine exploitive environmental business tactics abound. I reference several authors above who have written about the coal industry in Appalachia. Probably none are more famous than James Still whose *River of Earth* has many similarities with the washed out fields in *Flight Behavior*. Still's novel is narrated by a boy who must watch his father subject himself to mining to earn a living. The father's mindset contrasts with the mother's because she only wants to relocate to a farm where they can have a garden and grow what they need. As a husband and father, the man is caught up with earning a living in the coal mines while the mother dreams of an agrarian lifestyle that would impact the environment far less. The gendered responses to land use and land practices are evident in *River of Earth* through the parents' responses to how and where they should raise their children. But the father seeks to replicate—whether unwittingly or not—the exploitive system by moving the family to a coal town and teaching his sons to mine.

Similar to the exploitation the father in *River of Earth* endures in the coal mines, the tunnel workers in *Hawk's Nest* face deplorable work environments in the name of feeding their families. *Hawk's Nest* is Hubert Skidmore's historical fiction of the Hawk's Nest tunnel disaster. The foremen in the tunnel and their bosses pursued the work on the tunnel with seemingly little regard for the human beings at their disposal. The miners rushed in to build the tunnel as fast as possible under poor working conditions that also correlated with environmental hazards. The novel fictionalizes the slow, silent infection of real miners' lungs with coal dust, which brings about a painful realization for the fictional townsfolk that their time on earth is severely limited. *Hawk's Nest* is an example of mixing numbers and narratives because Skidmore is directly invoking the Hawk's Nest tunnel disaster in his title as he portrays the fictitiously rendered lives of those affected by the disaster.

While Engelhardt's *Tangled Roots* depicts cultural-symbolic representations of the Appalachian region and women of Appalachia, Shannon Elizabeth Bell's *Our Roots Run Deep As Ironweed: Appalachian Women and the Fight for Environmental Justice* is a medium for the socio-economic side of environmental narratives. In her interviews with female coal protesters from Appalachia, Bell observes that most of the women, in addition to discussing their concern about their children's welfare, "also describe feeling an obligation to defend their communities, the mountains, and/or the Appalachian way of life from the coal industry" (9). Bell asserts that "this latest wave of Appalachian women activists speaks of the mountain landscape as if it is an extension of their families, or even an extension of their very souls" (9). The way the narratives in the collection describe their nonhuman and human communities is reminiscent of the way Miles, whom Engelhardt also analyzes, gives her female Appalachians agency and a special relationship with their environmental context.

They do not call the Appalachian landscape paradise, but they consider themselves lucky to be part of an ecosphere that is functional, beautiful, fun, and soothing. Judy Bonds uses a mix of spiritual and economic language to describe her involvement in environmental protection:

The belief that they are on the side of justice is also a sustaining force. As Donna Branham relates, ‘I think the basis for [my strength] is because I know I’m right’ . . . Similarly, Judy Bonds states, ‘Knowing that what I’m doing is the right thing to do is also helpful to [my] fight . . . That’s how I pay my rent for living on this planet—by being an activist and doing what I’m doing.’ (185)

Women like [these and others] have found their voices through their involvement in social protest, transforming them from passive recipients of injustice into individuals who are taking a stand for themselves, their homes, and their communities. (188)

The excerpt I find most compelling is the semi-religious wording of Judy Bonds’s narrative. Her belief that she is merely renting some space on Earth temporarily demonstrates a things-for-others mindset. She realizes that the world is not only a thing for us.

Bell’s book—a collection of interviews and narratives about many Appalachian women’s fight to preserve the beauty and function of their communities, often from coal companies’ disregard for environmental safety and health—gives agency to the women. Bell comments that she transcribed her interviews as close to the dialect the women speak as possible. Furthermore, Bell grants the interviewees authority in her book by giving their voices the most space—only interrupting their narratives to give context briefly. In Maria Gunnoe’s narrative, the human ecology (i.e. the abstract or ambient sense of community) is her main motivation for becoming an environmental activist: “When you take the people out

that has been there for generation on top of generation, when you take them out, the sense of community is gone. You take the kinship out of the community...And that's one reason I'm fighting so hard to save it" (17). The environmental exploitation is the reason many people have migrated out of the region, causing her to actively defend the remaining community members (human or nonhuman) from further exploitation. Deforesting or flat-out destroying the ecosystem in a place is like taking the kinship out of the ecosystem, the generations-long growth and interanimation are gone. Bell introduces the context for Maria's outrage, saying that "Maria's home was severely flooded on her daughter's birthday in June 2003 because of a mountaintop removal coal mine behind her house. Five acres of her land washed away that night, and the raging water nearly took her house as well" (12). Thus, Maria Gunnoe's eco-justice narrative is beneficial to the fight to maintain safe ecological and economic environments in the region; however, the narratives are often human-centered and revolve around concern for human safety and human health.

Bell concludes that the Appalachian identity is not necessarily an identity only formed by one's long-standing ties to an Appalachian location. Rather, the identity fluctuates and must be negotiated (175-178). The women in Bell's interviews must negotiate their new identities as Appalachians under the auspices of their new environmental justice activism. They had an underlying appreciation for the land and nonhuman world before becoming active in environmental issues, but they close their narratives (via Bell's analysis) reaffirming an identity consciously tied to the environment around them. A series of narrative bits that Bell weaves into her conclusion exemplifies the thesis and themes that run throughout the book. These women, now more resolute than ever, redefine their sense of place, purpose, and

self as part of an ecology that needs to be cared for, because of their work in the environmental justice movement.

The Appalachian context for Kingsolver's Appalachian-based novels is twofold, as I have shown in this chapter. First of all, Engelhardt shows a long literary history that began in the late 1800s that grants women agency as they interact with the land. More recently, novelists including James Still and Hubert Skidmore show that human relations with nature are a common thematic consideration in Appalachian fiction. *Prodigal Summer* and *Flight Behavior* are no exception to the nature theme elements of Appalachian literature. Both novels examine the emotional ties the characters have with their environmental homeplaces, whether those places are new or generations old. Additionally, the novels include themes that examine land use, which I will discuss in depth in chapters three and four. What is different in Kingsolver's Appalachian literature is that she does not examine coal and mining culture as so many others have. Instead, she discusses themes of ecology relating to species diversity in *Prodigal Summer* and climate change in *Flight Behavior*.

Chapter Three:

Prodigal Summer: Narrative and Natural Ecologies

In patriarchal systems like our modern American culture, women are devalued along with elements of nature and animals. It is the ecofeminist movement and subsequent analysis that presents, I argue, the best approach for analyzing the multiple and intersecting areas of domination in patriarchal, exploitive, anthropocentric cultures. Carol Adams says ecofeminism “addresses the various ways that sexism, heteronormativity, racism, colonialism, and ableism are informed by and support speciesism” (1). In describing an approach that discusses multiple intersecting forms of oppression, ecofeminists like Adams suggest possibilities for redress that extend beyond just equality for the sexes, for the poor, for the animals, for the environment, for the other human Others, and more. An ecofeminist view of equality and of leveling power dynamics and of resisting speciesism can result in an earth that is no longer in crisis. Recognizing and implementing ecofeminist ideals can produce a human population that is more respectful and peaceful as well as mindful of human and nonhuman exploitation. In this chapter, I will examine the themes of ecology as they relate specifically to the novel’s structure and characterizations. Additionally, I argue in this chapter that the male main character, Garnett Walker, replicates patriarchal, exploitive, and anthropocentric land use practices and attitudes while the women understand the intersectionality of human lives with nonhumans and try to institute more just land use practices.

The women in the novel understand the ecologies of the land far better than the males, who only understand the ecology in terms of history and tradition, not reality, which is more intersectional. In the men’s eyes, the land is a means to an end. It is for agriculture and

status, and they often speak as if it is theirs to control with no concern for consequences. It is the women in this novel who discuss consequences, thinking of others and future generations, and thinking outside of the anthropocentric model. Further, the women identify with nonhuman nature. The identification with animals and land is a benefit to the women, even though the land is mistreated by the men, because the act of identifying is simultaneously an act of resistance to the traditional, patriarchal culture that most males perpetuate in the novel.

Prodigal Summer narrates the stories of three main characters who all live near Egg Fork in the southern Appalachian mountain range. The novel gives us Deanna's perspective in "Predators," Garnett's perspective in "Old Chestnuts," and Lusa's perspective in "Moth Love." Deanna lives on Zebulon Mountain alone and is trying to find and protect a group of coyotes that live nearby. They are the first of their type of predator to return to the area, so Deanna is excited to see these predators back in the ecosystem. Deanna is excited, she explains, because if the carnivores are "good, then their prey is good, and *its* food is good. If not, then something's missing from the chain" (10-11). A healthy predator population, then, is a sign of a healthy whole ecosystem, one that is sustainable. However, the local farmers down the mountain fear the coyotes because they think the coyotes will eat their livestock.

Garnett, a retired agriculture teacher and widower, is trying to crossbreed the American chestnut, which was nearly wholly killed by a blight generations ago, with the blight-resistant Chinese chestnut. He likes his yard and everything else in his life neat and clean, so he uses herbicides and pesticides to manage his yard and protect his crossbreeds. He has disagreements with his neighbor, Nannie Land Rawley, often because she wishes to have a no spray zone in the immediate area to protect the status of her organic apples.

The last narrative strand follows Lusa. She was recently married to Cole Widener and moves onto his family farm before Cole tragically dies early in the novel. She is left with a hillside full of in-laws whom she does not understand and farm land that might sink her in debt if she is not clever.

The three narratives intertwined in the novel discuss different characters on the side of Zebulon Mountain or in the valley at Egg Fork, a little town at the base of the mountain and Zebulon National Forest. As the narratives progress, though, the narratives start to intersect. The interrelated information starts to become evident within the novels' narratives: the main character in "Predators" is good friends with a character in "Old Chestnuts" and that character in "Old Chestnuts" visits a funeral in "Moth Love." The narratives overlap more and more as the novel progresses. Therefore, the novel creates an overarching theme of ecology structurally with its narration and its characters' relationships with the nonhuman natural surroundings. The title of this chapter is called "Narrative and Natural Ecologies" because Kingsolver deftly intertwines a narrative ecology among the characters as she has the characters discuss elements of ecology. The cross-breeding narratives animate one another. Narratively, the characters all have interactions with other characters whose "home base" is in another narrative, forming an ecology of characters.

Narrative Ecology

The Zebulon National Forest watches over each of the three narratives in *Prodigal Summer*, each focusing on a different set of main characters. Kingsolver deftly intertwines references to similar objects and people within the narratives, but keeps them mainly as individual stories on their own that are enriched by their proximity to and occasional interconnectedness with the other narratives in the novel. For instance, Lusa is comforted by

an unnamed figure whose demeanor and advice is remarkably similar to Nannie Rawley, though Nannie belongs to a different narrative strand. Nannie is known for her long braids and skirts, and the woman who comforts Lusa is described as a woman who “wore her gray hair in a crown of braids wrapped around her head, like someone from another country or another time” (72-73). Additionally, the woman who visits Lusa at the funeral home talks of losing a child, which Nannie did. Furthermore, readers learn that the child Nannie lost was Deanna’s father’s child. Nannie’s one comment in the funeral home bridges all three narratives. The narratives all intersect and show how rich a novel can be when seemingly unrelated stories overlap. I argue that interanimation and intersectionality exist in the overarching narrative structure of *Prodigal Summer* because the novel itself is a representation of an ecosphere where, in this case, narrative strands exist as things in themselves, things for themselves, and things for others.

The “Predators” narrative and chapters are focused on Deanna Wolfe and Eddie Bondo. Deanna is a loner and park ranger whose job also entails observing and studying the natural wildlife. She is particularly interested in the predators of the forest and spends most of the summer tracking a band of coyotes that have relocated up into the mountains from the edges of the town below. Eddie Bondo is a twenty-something-year-old backpacker hiking through the Zebulon forest. He is unique because his tracking skills are on par with Deanna’s skill, and they have an intense yet sporadic romantic relationship. Deanna wants to be left alone, and Eddie keeps drifting around to camp at various points in the forest. He leaves her at the end of the novel. She finally wants companionship and help with her ensuing pregnancy, so she goes to live with Nannie, an old family friend.

Lusa and Cole Widener occupy the “Moth Love” narrative. Lusa is a college-educated scientist who married Cole and moved to his family farm. They live uphill from Cole’s sisters, all of whom appear to dislike Lusa at first. After Cole tragically dies, Lusa must negotiate the new human and nonhuman Widener landscape without Cole. Before Cole died and immediately following the funeral, she frequently thought of leaving the farm for the city; however, she stays and subsequently learns more about farming and the Widener family. Learning about all of Cole’s sisters is like learning about an ecology, because they all interact differently and have such different personalities.

In the “Old Chestnuts” narrative, Garnett Walker and Nannie Land Rawley are the main characters, and they fight over farming styles. Garnett Walker is compared to a feudal land baron because his family once owned much of the land in the area. They made their living on American chestnut timber before the blight hit. Now, in his retirement, Garnett spends his days manicuring his lawn and trying to crossbreed the Chinese chestnut, which is blight resistant, to the American chestnut so that he can reclaim the status of his forefathers. Meanwhile, he feuds with his neighbor, Nannie Rawley. She is a progressive who maintains her organic orchard, does not believe in using insecticides, and does not believe in using herbicides. Societal appearances do not seem to bother Nannie Rawley either, as she refused to marry her lover even when she became pregnant. Additionally, she lets herbivores and insect-eating animals do the job of herbicides and insecticides—all of this, of course, pesters Mr. Walker.

In the Barbara Kingsolver edition of *Iron Mountain Review*, Linda Wagner-Martin wrote a review of *Prodigal Summer* titled “‘Keeping an Eye on Paradise’: The Exuberance of *Prodigal Summer*.” Wagner-Martin discusses the beautiful writing style of Kingsolver and

even has the following nature-minded quote, yet she misses drawing the conclusions about ecology that are clearly expressed in the novel:

[I]t seems to me that her [Kingsolver's] writing of *Prodigal Summer* is a quietly exuberant exercise in creating her own modestly lush world. Perhaps less flashy than *The Poisonwood Bible*, or less apparently erudite than *The Lacuna*, this tripartite evocation of learning to live *well* in a world that benefits from our unlocking its beauties may remain one of Kingsolver's best-loved books. (7)

Wagner-Martin suggests the many ways humans might play productive rather than destructive roles in nature. She says the novel might be an example of how to live *well* (her emphasis) in a world with beauties that we unlock. This seems to misrepresent the characters, especially Deanna, who constantly discusses ways in which the natural world is beautiful without human aesthetic principles. Especially Deanna tries to think outside of her human subjectivity to understand what animals might be thinking. For instance, the narrator captures Deanna's thoughts on a bird: "A scarlet tanager broke the silence with his song. She thought of the bird hidden in leaves somewhere, unseen by any human eye but nevertheless brilliant red. Nevertheless beautiful" (99). The novel suggests that there is no unlocking because beauty is already built in. Deanna's thoughts suggest that it is our responsibility to understand the inherent beauty that is already within nature. Deanna discusses ways in which an animal's function is inherently worthwhile. For example, she understands that the tanager is nevertheless beautiful even if a human never sees it. Later, she remarks that she values the functioning ecosystem over specific species or individual animals when a snake eats some of her favorite birds nesting on her porch.

What Wagner-Martin hints at but does not name is narrative ecology in her review article. She says that these characters are lonely and shut off from human interaction that would benefit their lives (“Keeping an Eye on Paradise” 8). However, their narratives are actually interactive and interanimated. Regardless of how the characters themselves interact with nature, the narrative structure presents an ecology. I agree with Wagner-Martin’s assertion that Garnett is selfish with his crossbreeds; however, Lusa and Deanna are rightfully protective (not selfish) of the land because sharing it would mean giving patriarchal forces the chance to co-opt the land and animals for their own means. Giving in to the patriarchal forces also means giving up authority over their land and silencing their considerable scientific knowledge that can benefit the land and educate the people. To that end, I consider Lusa and Deanna to be protectors rather than selfish, because Lusa protects the Widener farm from monocultures by shifting her produce season to season; Deanna protects the ecology of Zebulon Mountain by protecting the feared and misunderstood coyotes by avoiding the coyotes’ dens when Eddie is around.

For an example of the misconception of calling Deanna alone, we can examine what she tells Eddie about the interrelatedness of all things. She does not see herself as alone; rather, she sees herself as part of a large system of intersecting lives—but few of those lives in her living area are human. She is without human companionship for a while until Eddie arrives (even though the novel opens with his arrival and ends shortly after his summer stay is over). She reminds herself and she reminds Eddie that just because she has no humans up on the mountain to talk to does not mean that she is alone. She says that there is “no such thing as alone. That animal was going to do something important in its time—eat a lot of things, or be eaten. There’s all these connected things you’re about to blow a hole in. They

can't *all* be your enemy, because one of those connected things is you" (320). Every animal and plant is not only connected but interconnected to one another. Additionally, what she reminds Eddie of is the fact that killing predators, who are at or near the top of the food pyramid, affects everything below it. Removing an example from the bottom, like mowing one's yard, will not change the ecology as much as killing a coyote, as Eddie wants to do.

In her review article on *Prodigal Summer*, "Coyote Beautiful," Marsha Taylor writes, "Nature is strong too, and though originally downtrodden, women and nature both triumph, and they triumph through making connections and alliances" (166). Taylor implies but does not specifically state the intersectionality of humans, plants, and animals, but she remarks that human cooperation seems to benefit nonhumans as a result. Taylor does not draw the conclusions about the text that I am with the help of ecofeminism and concepts like interanimation and intersectionality. She says:

The coyotes are spared because Deanna has convinced Eddie they deserve to be, and she comes down from the mountain bearing new life, to rejoin human society. Lusa saves the farm by marketing her goats for the festival feasts of all three of the world's great religions....But she could not have pulled it off without the help and support of her once hostile in-laws and old man Garnett, who turns out to be family, too, and the local goat expert. And finally, Nannie and Garnett stop feuding and start helping each other.... [And] it turns out that she actually has two living chestnut trees which can provide seed for his breeding program. (166-167)

Taylor's remarks on *Prodigal Summer*'s ecological structure are insightful. She links the results of human cooperation with animal and plant proliferation as ecofeminism would.

Taylor, maybe because she is writing a review article, does not use ecofeminism or any theory to back up her claims. Nevertheless, her analysis is compatible with my own because Taylor sees the benefits of human cooperation. However, my own analysis reaches further to assert that humans need to cooperate with plants and animals to produce a more equitable biosphere.

Masculinist Exploitation of Natural Ecologies

In discussing the ecology in *Prodigal Summer*, we can harken back to Patrick Murphy's ideas of a non-anthropocentric ideology: "At the same time, only by recognizing that humans are not only things-in-themselves and things-for-us but also things-for-others, including the stable evolution of the biosphere, can we begin to understand our appropriate ecological niche and attendant practices" (22). Murphy's comments remind us that humans, in this instance, have inherent value, are things for other humans, and are things for other beings in the ecosphere. Therefore, humans have only as much right to anything in the natural world as anything in the natural world has to humans. In this horizontal perspective of power dynamics, no one species is more important or powerful than others and all species are interconnected, interanimated by others' lives (to borrow more of Murphy's words). Adams reminds us that human lives are inextricably bound with nonhumans and other humans. Specifically, as I stated in the first chapter, ecofeminist analysis is intersectional as are ecospheres. Through interanimation and intersectionality, as well as the ecofeminist lens I developed in the first chapter, I will discuss ways in which *Prodigal Summer* has gendered ways of dealing with the land and will evaluate those gendered perspectives. The women recognize the intersectional reality of human and nonhuman lives, whereas the males often fail to recognize that fact and perpetuate patriarchal, exploitive, anthropocentric practices.

The evidence for a gendered view of or interaction with the natural world comes from the main male character in the novel, Garnett Walker. He once worked as an agricultural teacher and agricultural consultant. Since he was a teacher of agricultural methods and wisdom, he might seem as if he were a candidate for environmental recuperating. However, his means are self-serving; and he does not reflect any of the “things-for-others” that builds a harmonious human and nonhuman ecosystem. For instance, he thinks that the “landscape of his father’s [Garnett Walker’s] manhood would be restored” if the American chestnut can be restored to the landscape (130). Garnett’s work to bring back the American chestnut, he feels, will simultaneously restore his father’s fall from land baron-quality greatness. Reintroducing the chestnut should benefit the ecology of the mountainside, but Garnett is (as Wagner-Martin has noted) monopolizing the hybrid for his own gain. Restoring the chestnut is a symbol of restoring his forefather’s greatness and effective lording over the land. In effect, though, Garnett’s thought about restoring particularly his father’s manhood is telling of his attitudes towards the ecology. The land is merely a means to an end for Garnett, a thing-for-others.

The chestnut trees symbolize for Garnett more than just past and future glory. The trees symbolize actual relatives that have passed away. Restoring the chestnuts is a symbolic way of keeping the Walker name tied to the Zebulon Mountain with the chance that the name will even spread as the “Walker Chestnut” will spread throughout the Appalachian region to reclaim its former habitats. Garnett senses the figurative importance of the trees, yet lacks the literal, physical, or ecological importance of the trees: “He was haunted by the ghosts of these old chestnuts, by the great emptiness their extinction had left in the world, and so this was something Garnett did from time to time, like going to the cemetery to be with dead

relatives: he admired chestnut wood” (128). The trees only exist within symbolic arenas for Garnett.

Even though he is able to see the problem of the disappearance of native flora, he is not able to come to any other conclusion than to perpetuate monoculture land use practices that perpetuate the problem (138). He feels sorrow for the quails who lose their young who die in the new overgrown fescue fields, yet he does not wish for an alternative situation. He does not move past just pitying the quail chicks, even though, as a former agriculture teacher, he should have the tools to think of a solution. His sadness is not enough to prompt him to change or alter any future actions:

Now fescue was everywhere, and probably no one but Garnett even remembered the bunchgrasses that used to grow here naturally, the bluestem and such. It must seem strange to the animals to have a new world entire sprouting all around them, replacing what they'd known. What a sadness, the baby quails lost in that jungle with nowhere to go. But you had to have hay.
(138)

The potential loss of a species does not affect him enough to make him think twice about the monoculture that the agricultural industry has promoted in the county. The monoculture is overtaking the natives with its “strange” new “world,” a “jungle” he calls it (138). It is because of that monoculture that the native quails are losing their chicks more often. In this case, less fescue or more natural grasses, like the ones perhaps he alone remembers, would allow the natives to thrive or adapt to their surroundings. Instead, he perpetuates the attitude that what worked for his forefathers must indeed work for him. He seems incapable of providing the solution, even though he can at least name the problem.

The most striking example of Garnett's misunderstandings about ecology, women, and the relationship these main female characters have with the nonhuman other is embodied when Nannie confronts him on some of his accusations against her. In response, Garnett is taken aback. "[W]hat he beheld was nothing to be afraid of. This was no more daunting than a piece of ground that needed plowing—a small female terrain" (*Prodigal Summer* 272). Garnett's pleasing manners mask a severe distrust of anything that is not a mannerly local white male. Nannie is called a "this"; her outburst is dehumanized and given no agency. Likely, though, his comments are about Nannie directly. To him she has no agency, is void of all human characteristics, and can be dealt with easily with a mechanized plow that will turn over her innards to dry and later hold the seeds of Garnett's hope for restored manhood, his American chestnuts (which is also problematic language). Garnett's thoughts about Nannie—calling her a piece of ground that is not doing its job yet, fallow—reveal a utilitarian attitude towards the land. Furthermore, the utilitarian attitude Garnett exhibits is indicative of anthropocentrism because he is defining Nannie via a land's usefulness to human needs (i.e. the ground has not been plowed and seeded for human food).

Thus, Garnett's most obvious antithesis is Nannie Land Rawley who foregoes herbicides and pesticides in favor of a natural, organic ecosystem within her yard and orchard. Even her middle name references plant life. Garnett feuds with her over the image their roadside projects. Like the imaginary glory that he feels must be linked with the restoration of the American chestnut, Garnett feels that he must spray the weeds on the roadside to preserve his image as an orderly, well-kept man. Nannie does not think the opposite; rather, she does not care. She does not want the spraying because it could blow onto her organic apple trees. The roadside and its attendant image means nothing to her. The

wellbeing of her plants means far more to her than the roadside. To respond to Nannie's insistence that the road crews do not spray in their area, Garnett writes a letter to Nannie. In part, the letter reads:

Are we humans to think of ourselves merely as one species among many, as you [Nannie Rawley] always insist in our discussions of how a person might live in "harmony" with "nature" while still managing to keep the Japanese beetles from entirely destroying his trees? Do you believe a human holds no more special authority in this world than ... [animals]? If so, then why is it our duty to set free the salamanders, any more than it is the salamander's place to swim up to the state prison in Marion and liberate the criminals incarcerated there? ... If one species or another of those muddly [sic] little salamanders went extinct, who would care anyway? (186-187)

Again, Garnett sees the ecology in a distorted way. He still thinks anthropocentrically, even after discussing the issue with Nannie. The land is a tool. Garnett would not agree that humans have any obligation to the land except to ensure that he can turn a profit on it throughout his lifetime. To Garnett, land is a plowed field, is a restored manhood, or is a hay field. Land is not, in Garnett's definition, something already, like home to quail. The plowed land will be for tobacco for the countless smokers named in the novel; the restored manhood will be Garnett's new American chestnut; the hay field that smothers baby quail will be, *must be*, a hay field for cattle for future human consumption.

The other men in *Prodigal Summer* mainly flock to Lusa's narrative. She has many brothers-in-law and nephews who come and go on her property because they married into the family and the family farm long before Lusa. In addition to Garnett Walker, these other

secondary male characters who surround Lusa seek to perpetuate the same patriarchal, exploitive status quo onto Lusa's newly-acquired land. Unfortunately, she acquires this land through her husband's death. She does not want it under such terms, but she makes the farm her own project in a revised form of agriculture. She becomes the anti-traditionalist in the county when she chooses not to pursue raising cattle and planting tobacco as most of the farmers in the county do. Moreover, most of the men who cross Lusa's path—be they brothers-in-law (Big Rickie and Herb), nephews, neighbors, or her husband, Cole, before he died—assume that the land is theirs. Rickie and Herb show up at her doorstep to inform her, innocently, that they will be by in the coming days to plant tobacco, just like last year. Lusa informs them that she will conduct business on her farm as she sees fit, effectively taking the power back from her well-intentioned but misguided in-laws (102-109). These men advocate perpetuating the status quo, which involves often poor land use practices and many insecticides and herbicides with unknowable consequences, even while they see that the status quo is declining for the modern farmer. The land is tired and the climate is no longer favorable (perhaps because of out-of-sync climates caused by global warming, which is an idea Kingsolver discusses in depth in *Flight Behavior*) and many families are having to sell out of farming. Despite the declining yields and increasing crop maintenance costs (like fertilizer and bug spray) the farmers continue to plant a tobacco crop that yields less every year, knowing they have few alternatives.

For another example of anthropocentric treatment of animals and plant life alike, turn to government-sponsored employees. Lusa reads a blurb from a county extension office employee who advocates insecticides, which infuriates Lusa. Lusa studied moths and other

bugs in Lexington before moving in with and marrying Cole. The column in the newspaper reads:

“Be vigilant! The project will require repeated applications of a stout chemical defoliant”.... It was the county Extension agent who wrote this awful column called “Gardening in Eden,” whose main concern, week after week, was with murdering things....Grubbing out wild roses, shooting blue jays out of cherry trees, knocking phoebe nests out of the porch eaves to keep the fledglings from messing on the stairs: these were the pastimes of Zebulon County, reliable as the rituals of spring cleaning. (33)

Lusa notes that the title of the column, “Gardening in Eden,” is ironic because the Extension agent most often advocates for killing rather than propagating life. Indeed, Lusa suggests that the whole county feels similarly. The actions described in the cleaning of phoebe nests shows a human self-centeredness that disrupts animals’ lives for the mere purpose of maintaining appearances to the neighbors. It is reasonable to infer that the individuals of Egg Fork would say that they like birds and that birds are fun to look at when they are eating at bird feeders, yet maintaining a pristine house and yard outranks other animals’ lives and homes and ultimately, their agency.

The Extension agent exhibits a view of the natural world that Garnett Walker shares. For instance, Garnett makes a fool of himself while trying to remove Nannie’s no spray zone sign from his road front. Similarly, the agent is advocating removing plants by spraying them with harsh chemicals when, perhaps, simply uprooting them would do the same job with fewer environmental consequences. The problem is then twofold: pests, however the townsfolk define them, are subservient to humans’ social appearances and reputations and

chemicals are highly preferred to more physical effort even though the chemicals might have negative consequences on the environment.

Furthermore, Deanna and Eddie disagree about the use of predators in the region's ecology. Eddie is a hunter and former rancher who is backpacking through the area. His distrust for coyotes stems from his work ranching and caring for sheep. He feels that the coyotes will steal his sheep and, therefore, his profits. Deanna thinks differently. She has written her master's thesis on coyotes' numbers, locations, and habits; therefore, she knows how coyotes function in the ecosphere.

Eddie asks Deanna why she stays so far away from people. She replies, "There's people I love. But there's so many other kinds of life I love, too. And people act so hateful to every kind but their own" (175). She is speaking about anthropocentrism: she dislikes the self-centeredness that humans often—and the townsfolk of Egg Fork below especially—exhibit towards animals and plant life. She continues on, thinking of "people who refused to be inconvenienced for the sake of an endangered fish or plant or owl, not of coyote killers per se" (175). Like the people who Deanna thinks refuse to be inconvenienced for the sake of nonhuman entities, she refuses to inconvenience herself with anything but meaningful human relationships.

Empowerment and Resistance through Nature

Throughout this chapter I have been outlining the status quo for the characters' relationships to the land in *Prodigal Summer*. The novel presents gendered responses to nonhuman nature. The men treat the land as a status symbol—like Garnett Walker who uses his pristine road fronts as a symbol that he is an upstanding citizen—or else as a place for maintaining patriarchal tradition and gesturing. For instance, the men in Lusa's family mostly

seek to replicate poor farming methods by planting the same expensive-to-maintain plants and raising the same expensive-to-maintain cattle in the fields year after year. The men replicate old ideas and hinder the ecology, whether actual or figurative, through their replications. Kingsolver contributes to widening the Appalachian literary landscape by discussing Appalachian ecological problems outside of coal mining; however, as the example from *River of Earth* shows, the men's outlook on the land hardly changes.

The women redeem the land, as I will show throughout the rest of the chapter. They see the connections between humans and nonhumans in the ecology of Zebulon Mountain. Furthermore, they see the problems that the males do not in replicating dominating monoculture environments. Ecologies are natural democracies where no one thing takes up too much space; the farming practices of Zebulon County are the opposite. The land is taken up for cattle or tobacco except where Nannie, Deanna, and Lusa stand to oppose those practices. They stand up to those who seek to impose their patriarchal methods. Their alternative ecologies (which are actually original ecological practices that would have predated modern farming) are forms of resistance to the patriarchy. Furthermore, their ideologies sympathize with the animal bodies that are part of their ecologies. When they engage this sympathetic imagination towards the animals, the female characters are attempting to connect with nonhumans on another, deeper level. Their engagement with the animals on a mental and emotional level allows them a transformative experience that charges them to resist exploitive land practices.

The connection or sympathetic imagining is more than having a descriptor that is likened to nonhumans. For instance, Kingsolver creates characters who have animal or natural references in their names such as Deanna's last name (Wolfe) or Nannie's middle

name (Land) or part of Lusa's last name (*Landowski*). Instead, the connections below show how the female main characters sympathize or empathize with the animals around them, showing their greater state of ecological awareness.

Little Rickie, Lusa's nephew, juxtaposes the way Lusa and his uncle Herb interact with their cows. According to Little Rickie, Herb and his cows are like "oil and water" (150). Uncle Herb milks by machine. Little Rickie finds Lusa milking her own cow by hand as Little Rickie follows up the news about Herb by saying Uncle Herb "hooks up bossy to the tank and sucks her dry" (150). The mechanical milking contrasts with Lusa's hand milking. In addition to providing an industrial contrast for Lusa's actions, Lusa's thoughts show a mental connection with the cow. Lusa thinks, "Sometimes she felt flooded with the mental state of her Jersey cow" (149). Lusa's connection with the animal shows a willingness to connect to the cow on a mental level, wondering what the cow is thinking at the time and also allowing Lusa the chance to leave her humanity behind to assume the cow's mind for a time. Additionally, Lusa engages with the goats on an emotional, motherly level: "But for the first time in all her plotting she also now felt a twinge of sadness for these mothers and for their babies who would all come to naught, at least from a maternal point of view" (239). It is worth noting the directional difference in the connections Lusa makes with the animals. Her connection with the cow seems to originate with the cow; or, at least, she is open and receptive to the cow's emotions. In the second connection with the goats, Lusa projects her emotions to the goat mothers. While it is admirable that she is trying to connect with the goats, her connection is an instrumental use of animal bodies. That is, she thinks about maternity as the successful production of offspring and does not consider the emotional pain of the mothers' loss.

Lusa empathizes towards the goat mothers in her fields. However, when she makes a connection with the cow, the connection comes from the cow she is milking, not her.. Similarly, Deanna connects emotionally with birds, and her connection to the birds comes from the birds. The animals seem to share their things-for-themselves-ness with these women, and the women are willing to engage with that effort. Deanna “clung to her perch on the rock, feeling the same stirring in her breast, a sense of finished business and a longing to fly” (385). It seems as if the birds and the cow (in Lusa’s case) are instigating these connections—connections that no male receives in *Prodigal Summer*. Arguably, these women receive these experiences because they are open to alternative relationships to animals. These relationships are alternative or even subversive because they are antithetical to the instrumental use of animals for food or labor. Similar to the other women, Nannie’s brain is compared to nonhuman beings. “*Birds and oak trees have minds like hers*” Garnett thinks of Nannie (269). Nannie’s role in the “Old Chestnuts” narrative is told through Garnett’s mind, so we cannot see whether the birds and trees instigated the connection nor can we really find what she thinks of the comment since the statement remains in Garnett’s mind. However, based on the other women’s connections and their similar attitudes towards ecology and the nonhuman others around them, we can surmise that Garnett’s comparison between nonhumans and Nannie shows that she too is open to the mental and emotional experiences that nature has to offer.

Ecofeminist Natural Ecologies

Even though they face staunch antagonism to their methods in the form of weird looks, snide remarks, doubt, and outright hostility, the women in *Prodigal Summer* treat the land differently. To them it is not something for them to use. Instead, the women treat the

nonhuman environment with all three of the parameters—things-in-themselves and things-for-us but also things-for-others—that Murphy outlines for effective ecological mindsets and practices. The female main characters in *Prodigal Summer* are able to see the intersections among humans, animals, and plants.

Even though her narrative starts the novel and sustains the most ardent rhetoric for saving the new predators returning to the region, the coyotes, Deanna Wolfe has been largely absent in my previous discussion of the novel. Deanna does not get much time in my above analysis of the novel mainly because her views on nature are only opposed by Eddie Bondo, a single secondary character who leaves the narrative often. Eddie is a proponent of the misguided notion that killing predator species preemptively is a good idea. Rickie, Lusa's nephew, reacts similarly when he and Lusa see the coyote near the goats. However, both Deanna and Lusa want them to let the animals live their lives in peace. At the end of summer, Eddie leaves claiming ambiguously that he knew when he was beat. Deanna could not decide whether she got to him or her argument for coyotes did.

Nevertheless, Eddie shows that his mindset might be redeemable. He writes in Deanna's journal that "*It's hard for a man to admit he has met his match*" (432). I have indicated that this message is ambiguous. Deanna thinks so too. She at first declares that she failed to change his attitude towards coyotes and towards predators in general. However, she later reasons that his leaving was a "gift" (433). He does not specify whether he is referring to Deanna or to the coyotes, indicating an essentialist relationship between the woman protector and the animals themselves. His mindset is unchanged, arguably, because he continues to conflate the two. He does not see the ecology, the relationship among the living entities on the mountainside. He does show progress in leaving both of them alone. If nothing

else, he recognizes the importance of conceding to Deanna's greater understanding and knowledge of the ecology of Zebulon Mountain.

Deanna Wolfe is definitely a proponent of ecological, anti-anthropocentric thinking. She fusses at Eddie for the stories he tells about shooting game as he travels across the continent in the United States and Canada. She wants him to understand that losing a few sheep will not ruin a rancher and that poor farming practices come down to blaming an animal who cannot speak like humans can: "A coyote is just something you can blame," she tells Eddie (176). As he tries to argue his point and possibly trip her up in her own argument, he discusses her mistrust of some animals. She replies, "I don't love animals as *individuals*, I guess that's the way to put it...I love them as whole species" (177). She has favorite animals; however, she does not show her love by ridding the mountainside ecology of that animal's predators because that action would result in a monoculture, which Ynestra King reminds us is as poor for nonhumans as an ethnic monoculture would be for humans (18-28). Deanna loves the phoebes that took residence in her porch rafters. She takes special care not to disturb their nest at night because, she tells Eddie, the mother will stay away all night if they startle her at dusk and the chicks would die. Even when a black snake preys on her favorite porch birds, she does not react against the snake: "She breathed hard against the urge to scream at this monster [the snake] or tear it down from the rafters and smash its head" (329). She does nothing to it. She lets the ecology move at its own pace despite her personal feelings towards the phoebes and the snake.

In addition to leaving nature to its task, Deanna also corrects Eddie's thoughts on anthropocentrism. She reminds him that humans are not the only sentient creatures and are certainly not predisposed to rule over the laws of ecology that tie every being to another. She

says, “And it’s also not a cat’s idea that every life including its own is sacred. That’s a human idea, and I can buy it for humans. But it’s some kind of weird religion to impose it on other animals that have already got their own rules” (178). What she is saying here to Eddie Bondo is that each species looks out for itself by reproducing its own offspring and providing for that offspring. Essentially, she is describing anthropocentrism. Deanna says that each species has its own feelings of species self-centeredness. However, humans seem to be the only species that is trying to force human exceptionalism upon other species or to justify anthropocentrism.

Similar to Deanna’s discussions of anthropocentrism with Eddie, Nannie has to inform Garnett that human exceptionalism is a misguided venture. In their letter exchange, Nannie replies to Garnett’s accusations by saying that releasing rare salamanders (sold in town as bait) back in the creeks is not a fruitless endeavor. She sees it as restoring variability to the ecosystem, and, indeed, she is restoring balance to the ecology. Her rebuttal is similar to Deanna’s words to Eddie because both women censure the males for their anthropocentrism. Nannie says:

Since you asked, yes, I do believe humankind holds a special place in the world. It’s the same place held by a mockingbird, in his opinion, and a salamander in whatever he has that resembles a mind of his own. Every creature alive believes this: The center of everything is *me*. Every life has its own kind of worship, I think, but do you think a salamander is worshipping some God that looks like a big two-legged man? Go on! (215)

Humans can believe anything they wish, so says Nannie; however, they are not at will to impose those beliefs upon other species. Each species should be free to live its life the way it was destined by its genetic makeup and position within the ecosystem.

While Deanna tries to amend Eddie's opinions about predators and the predator's role in the ecology, Nannie is fighting a completely uphill battle against her neighbor. Garnett dislikes her organic gardening, thinking it an unfair advantage not to have to buy or budget for insecticides. He thinks that the field behind her property, behind her manicured orchard, is chaos: "That field looked awful, the way she was letting it grow up, but she claimed it was her and the birds' big experiment and that she'd discovered a particularly good accidental [apple tree] cross up there" (271). Nannie and Garnett's arguments are normally tinged with irony. This one is no exemption. Garnett is devoting his whole retirement to crossbreeding the American chestnut with the blight-resistant Chinese chestnut. Meanwhile, Nannie is reaping the benefits of letting natural pollinators do their job crossbreeding plants naturally. (Unfortunately, the irony is lost on Garnett, and only Kingsolver's readers will get to laugh at it.) Indeed, Nannie feels like land owning rights themselves are artificial, claiming that she "never really think[s] of the woods as belonging to us, exactly. I walk all over your [Garnett's] hills when I feel like it. I just assumed you did the same with mine" (339). The irony here is that she has two American chestnuts on her property that Garnett did not know about. When she told him this information, he realized with a shock that his genetic variability would double if he had known about this sooner—he and his trees would have benefitted from cooperation.

When the monocultures pervade, the diversity and, therefore, the viability and sustainability of the entire ecosystem suffers. The crossbreed apples are a happy accident that

happened as a result of ecosystems making ever-more variety. Nannie understands this. She asks Garnett, “In your father’s day all the farms around here were doing fine. Now they have to work night shifts at the Kmart to keep up their mortgages. Why is that? They work just as hard as their parents did, and they’re on the same land, so what’s wrong” (276). The land is not diversified anymore. The monocultures are depleting the soil and the resources, forcing farmers to buy more herbicides to kill other plants, to buy more insecticides because they have killed all of the other foods for the insects besides the monoculture, and to fertilize because their crops draw all of the nutrients from the soil. No other plants replenish the soil, so the soil is tired, but the farmers ignore the signs because the market will only reward a few types of plants. Nannie likens the modern farmer’s reliance on those chemicals to an addiction.

Similarly, Lusa remarks that she is not the only one widowed. She feels that many modern Americans—the ones who think naively that Kroger grows and sells all of their food—“were widowed from their own food chain” (293). Being widowed from one’s own food chain effectively renounces one’s own animal nature and dismisses that part of one’s own makeup—it is a failure to acknowledge the intersectionality of ecology. Lusa continues this thought while talking to Jewel (Cole’s youngest sister) about her reluctance to support the widowed food culture and monoculture farming practices that dominate the county’s farming tactics:

Farm economics, what do I know? But half the world’s starving, Jewel, we’re sitting on some of the richest dirt on this planet, and I’m going to grow *drugs* instead of food? I feel like a hypocrite.... It’s the only reliable crop around here you can earn enough from to live off a five-acre bottom, in a county

that's ninety-five percent too steep to plow. I *know* why every soul in this end of three states grows tobacco. Knowing full well the bottom's going to drop out any day now. (122)

Lusa is in a balancing act here. She is trying to make up for a lifetime of not farming by trying to think like a Zebulon farmer; however, simultaneously, she recognizes that the current practices are not sustainable for the land, for her own debt, and for others' food practices. In the end, she takes a risk by raising goats and wins big, surprising her supporters and doubters alike. She chooses to raise goats because they require very few chemical additives to sustain. Additionally, the goats eat roughage like weeds, so her potential feed costs dropped dramatically. Despite her success selling goat meat to her cousin's butcher shop at the crux of three religions' holidays, she realizes that she will not be able to always count on the goats as a source of income because they could easily become the monoculture she was trying to evade if she were to keep raising them year after year with no alteration to her farming practices.

It seems, then, that the pace will never slack; change is always a factor. Kingsolver says in a recent interview with *The Sun*, "As a novelist, I love beginning with characters who have a lot to learn and then putting them through their paces. And not just one character. I like to write ensemble pieces about families or communities in which many people change, and not all in the same way" (Supin). By Kingsolver's own admission change is a key theme in her writing. While I do not see change happening overtly throughout *Prodigal Summer*, it does play into the message I have been developing throughout the chapter. The exploitive, mostly male-perpetuated modes and methods for treating nonhumans and women as secondary entities has to change. The women in *Prodigal Summer* enact change in their little

community by resisting patriarchal, exploitive practices. Specifically, Lusa, Nannie, and Deanna try to teach the men who orbit their lives lessons they have learned about how interrelated human *and* nonhuman lives are. Lusa teaches Little Rickie that agriculture has to be reflexive and adaptable; Nannie teaches Garnett that the ecosystem has checks and balances in place that work better than insecticides and selective crossbreeding; and Deanna teaches Eddie that predators are indicators of an ecosystem's health rather than meaningless menaces. Not all of the women are successful in their endeavors converting the mindsets of the men, though they try to enact the change that Kingsolver discusses in her interview.

Chapter Four:

Flight Behavior: Ecofeminism and the Future of Climate Change

Many of the women's stories in Shannon Bell's *Our Roots Run Deep as Ironweed* discuss reluctant activism. They had an appreciation for nature before their experiences with the results of exploitive land practices that caused environmental problems such as coal ash, flooding, landslides, and erosion. After their experience with those problems and the activism they began to save their families. The women in *Our Roots Run Deep as Ironweed* share a renewed wonder and appreciation for the nature around them as well as a new identity as activists. The numbers did not trouble them until they were personally affected by the results of environmental exploitation—now they have narratives to add to the numbers. The main character in *Flight Behavior* falls into a similar camp as she learns about the realities of climate change that are manifesting in her backyard. In this chapter, I will continue my examination of gendered responses to nonhumans. With the notable exception of the scientist Byron, the men in *Flight Behavior* perpetuate exploitive land use practices while the main character, Dellarobia, learns of the realities of climate change that are now evident in her backyard and her town.

Flight Behavior departs thematically from *Prodigal Summer* in its discussion of the realities and consequences of climate change. This novel is characterized by those who deny or resist the fact that climate change is real and that it affects their lives. Gradually, Dellarobia comes to the realization that she cannot deny climate change. *Flight Behavior* is more than just a service announcement about climate change, though. In the novel, the future generations are on the danger zone. The monarchs have had to shift their home place and nesting grounds because of climate change and the ambiguous yet foreboding future of the

monarchs is mirrored by other difficult births in the novel: Dellarobia has a traumatic experience with Hester's birthing lambs as she comes to accept the death of her and Cub's own child. The emphasis on animals and their reproductive successes in this novel creates a significant ecofeminist avenue to pursue. The animals' reproductive successes—and sometimes even their present location—mirror the levels of denial or acceptance of climate change, especially in the main character Dellarobia. The parallels between humans and nonhumans are important to notice because they critique the future of our common reproductive success in the face of climate change. Critiquing anthropocentrism, this novel shows that if humans continue denying their exploitive environmental practices, they will compromise their own potential for successful future generations.

In *Flight Behavior*, Dellarobia has to come to terms with herself as well as come to terms with the environmental devastations that have happened both near (Tennessee) and afar (Mexico). She loves her children, but her husband and his family are exasperating; therefore, she feels repressed in her current family situation. She and the junior Turnbow man, Cub, had a shotgun marriage because of their baby who later died. Dellarobia and Cub now live on a part of the family land that Hester and Bear (Cub's parents) lord over them, keeping them out of key financial decisions that can affect the part of the farm where Dellarobia and Cub live. Furthermore, everything Dellarobia says seems to be the wrong thing in the eyes of the disapproving Hester.

However, things change after Dellarobia sees the butterflies. She initially thinks that the mountainside is on fire and the sign is religious before realizing that they are monarch butterflies, not fire. She meets the press and eventually meets a man named Dr. Byron who has come in to study the monarchs and why they are no longer migrating to their native home

in Mexico. Through her interactions with him and his assistants, she gains a scientific view of the phenomenon: the world is out of sync because humans perpetuate exploitive land use practices. She fights the patriarchal family she married into and ends up leaving, knowing that she has to make do for herself. Importantly, for this project, her coming of age (of sorts) is mirrored by animals and environmental markers throughout the novel.

In Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer*, the characters in *Flight Behavior* have gendered responses to nonhuman life. Males generally, especially Bear Turnbow, treat the land as if they are entitled to its resources, acting with an anthropocentric mindset, by making decisions without regard to the ecosystem and long-term consequences. Dellarobia, the main character, comes to recognize how interrelated animals, nature, and humans are; how, typically, males perpetuate patriarchal, exploitive land practices that devalue women, animals, and nature; and how nonhumans are affected by human exceptionalism that results in those exploitive practices. Thus far in my description of *Flight Behavior* it would seem that Kingsolver is revisiting the same themes that she did in *Prodigal Summer*. Kingsolver is exploring themes, I argue, that are similar in both novels; however, to say that she is replicating the themes would be inaccurate. In *Prodigal Summer* the themes were narrative and natural ecologies and gendered responses to traditional agricultural practices. While there are still gendered responses to nature, Kingsolver goes in a different direction with *Flight Behavior*. The main themes in the novel are failed progeny and failed futures depicted in terms of the climate crisis in the novel. I want to demonstrate that this theme plays out in the novel metaphorically in the diverted monarchs, the weak newborn lamb, and the miscarriages in the novel.

If we actively include distorted relations with nature in critique of Western culture, in hopes of fixing the dualistic culture that devalues women and nature both, Val Plumwood cautions in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* that we should not affix nature with the same dominating discourse that dominated previous discourse that negated women and nature: “We do not have to assume that nature is a sphere of harmony and peace, with which we as humans will never be in conflict. A rejection of the western treatment of nature implies a careful, critical and political look at the category of nature” (37). The call to arms is twofold for Plumwood. First, nature should not be treated either as a helpless victim or as a receptacle for any evils, material or cultural, we wish to throw away. Nature is not helpless. In fact, nature is capable of healing itself of many ills, yet its ability to do so is not inexhaustible. Humans continue to push nature’s self-healing abilities by producing and consuming ever-more products. Second, fixing the problematic Western treatment of nature, as Plumwood’s statement suggests, will require a multifaceted approach including, likely, continued efforts in politics, science, and public information campaigns. Plumwood’s comment grants nature its agency to behave and act as it will in spite of humans’ apparent will to dominate and control it (37). *Flight Behavior* demonstrates this idea through examining climate change and the effects climate change can have on people. If humans are so self-involved that they will ignore the plight of animals and nature, then hopefully humans will work to preserve their own existence.

This last chapter of my thesis progresses to look not at the status quo as *Prodigal Summer* did but at the future as *Flight Behavior* does. Chapter three discussed ways that a masculinist perspective perpetuated traditional land practices that replicated the patriarchal, exploitive environmental usage and also discussed ecological solutions that only the women

in the novel noticed. This chapter examines the consequences of denying climate change brought on by exploitive environmental practices. To continue my discussion of realities and consequences, I will work through this chapter through the topics of denial, realities, and remediation of climate change. In denial, I will analyze the ways humans and nonhumans alike deny the realities around them. Kingsolver herself notes in an interview that others' denial was part of the impetus for this novel. In realities, I will categorize ways the middle class needs an environmentalism that works for them. Dellarobia's status as housewife is reconstructed as a pseudo-scientist. The affective power of the environmental movement is caricatured through those who descend upon the Appalachian region to save the butterflies. Additionally, Dellarobia's work in environmentalism mimics many of the women who became reluctant environmental advocates referenced in chapter two. Lastly, there is hope for remediation. Dellarobia takes Kingsolver's readership through the process to arrive at what might be hopeful winds of change. The ending of the novel is notably open-ended; however, I will argue that it is hopeful because it is *charged with resistance*.

Denial and Climate Crisis

Patrick Murphy's article on *Flight Behavior*, specifically, titled "Pessimism, Optimism, Human Inertia, and Anthropogenic Climate Change," corroborates my assessment of the major themes at play in *Flight Behavior*. He emphasizes (as does Linda Wagner-Martin, discussed later) Dellarobia's growth and subsequent disunion from the Turnbow family. I will discuss that throughout this chapter in my own way. Additionally, Murphy discusses what I call the realities and consequences of climate change. The scientific specifics of climate change are not themes I cannot hope to fully analyze in this thesis, but I can examine the culture that rejects climate change, the same one in which Dellarobia and

her family are embroiled. The first development is Dellarobia's growing self-awareness, whereas the second "focuses on the scientific investigation of the monarchs' alteration of their historic multigenerational migration patterns and the lead scientist's correlations between it and climate change" ("Pessimism, Optimism" 158). The monarch's flight behavior can be contrasted with the multigenerational non-migration patterns of the Turnbow family and many of their entrenched neighbors. Additionally, Murphy says, "The second plotline provides significant opportunity for Kingsolver to educate readers about the impacts of climate change on flora and fauna in terms of the disruption of seasonal cycles and the temperature gradients that induce relocation and possibly extinction" ("Pessimism, Optimism" 158).

Furthermore, Murphy's article discusses Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* and other recent, related climate change fiction. In his comparison, he discusses whether *Flight Behavior* is ultimately pessimistic or optimistic and discusses what implications the novel might have about human inertia in the face of climate change, saying there is an "increasingly inescapable conclusion: the problem is not one of means but one of recognition, acceptance, and *will to act*" (Murphy 149, emphasis added). His article discusses the affect science has on those who choose to or not to listen to the facts presented to them. *Flight Behavior*, along with several other climate change novels he references, deals with the trouble that some have with accepting what most scientists and global community members accept as fact—and our reality. What Murphy says of skeptics is similar to my numbers and narratives strategy. We need both to work cooperatively to achieve the best reasoning, and the greatest argument possible:

Especially when confronting skeptics or people who just don't want to think about the issue of climate change and deflect considerations with remarks about the climate and earth always changing, [etc.]...it is always handy to begin with the finding of military leaders, oil companies, and insurance organizations. (“Pessimism, Optimism” 150)

In Kingsolver’s novel, Dellarobia’s life pinching pennies and shopping at thrift stores contrasts with the national, generic forms of environmental affect that ask people to drive or fly less. To convert those who ignore or do not believe climate change, Murphy suggests, the environmental movement should start with entities that are already familiar or trustworthy sources of information. Dellarobia never travels more than a few blocks via car and never flies. Therefore, the rhetoric needs to change to cause an effect in Dellarobia and her family’s lives. For the characters, they can see the effects of climate change (the butterflies), whether they attribute the monarchs’ new flight path to a miracle, choice, or climate change.

From her perspective as a farmer and author who lives in southern Appalachia, Kingsolver feels particularly equipped to discuss (and fictionalizes the discussion in a novel) the environmental problems of the region. She says in an interview with *Time*:

Our agriculture here has gone through one disaster year after another, so climate change is not some kind of abstract future threat here. It is literally killing our farm economy. We’ve had record heat years. We’ve had record drought years. So the people most affected by climate change already are people among whom I live: rural conservative farmers. And it strikes me that these are the same people who are least prepared to understand and believe in climate change and its causes. Our local politicians are quite

deliberately misinforming us and fighting every kind of environmental regulation that could possibly slow down the release of carbon for the very obvious reason that they're beholden to the big player in this region, which is the coal companies. Here we are, caught between the devil and the deep blue sea. What can I do but write a novel? (Walsh)

The quote is not for naught, though. In discussing part of the impetus for *Flight Behavior*, Kingsolver lights upon one of the themes I discussed in the previous chapter and one that I will continue in this one: traditional environmental practices are bad choices for us all because they might provide a short-term fix but they will have long-term and larger consequences. In addition to hurting the farm economy by making the weather more volatile, the climate changes happening as a result of poor environmental management have cultural stigma attached to them as well. That is where ecofeminism comes in.

The Realities of Climate Change

Dellarobia has to fight for her own voice in a family that wishes to log the mountainside and a culture in general that wishes to keep itself alienated from nature. Dellarobia gains a perspective on nature that allows her to see the connection between human and nonhuman, which, of course, was the truth waiting in the background all along. In this case Appalachian people are being encouraged by the narrative to adopt an ecofeminist perspective—their well-being as ethnic others is bound up with the fate of nonhuman nature. Both disempowered humans like Dellarobia and nonhumans are especially subject to a ravaging capitalist system.

Part of Dellarobia's disempowerment in the family and community culture is her home status. She and Cub are still on the family land with Hester and Bear occupying the

other end of the family farm. Dellarobia's family is beholden to Hester and Bear, who entitle themselves to every facet of Dellarobia's life without reciprocating. For instance, Hester and Bear put up Dellarobia's part of the farm as collateral for a loan without consulting her. As the outsider to the family politics, Dellarobia is without a voice in their decision-making processes. She must communicate through her husband who, she often feels, is ineffective against the stalwart wishes of Hester. The main issue for the family throughout the novel is the lien that Bear took out against the farm. Logging the mountaintop will get enough money to keep from losing part of the farm to the collection agency, Bear claims. Despite seeing the butterflies and hearing some townsfolk call the butterflies signs from God, Bear does not back down. Hester tells Dellarobia:

Bear's signed the contract....He says he's going ahead with it, rain or shine. King Billies [butterflies] or no King Billies. Now see, I don't know why they couldn't wait a month or two and see what happens. I pray about it every day...[but you] were the first to pay attention....He and Peanut Norwood won't give an inch....I don't think it's just the money. I mean, it is the money. But to be in such a rush over it, not listening to anybody. I think they've put each other up to that. A man-to-man kind of thing. (133)

The logging seems to have come down to a matter of male posturing. Dellarobia, exasperated at the prospect of a deforested hillside, thinks of "the great themes: man against man, man against himself" and wonders if man could "ever be *for* anything" (133). This sentiment relates well with the ideas of intersectionality by communicating the futility of man's constant struggle against things. Humans are related to the ecosystem and declaring war on a

certain element of the system will inevitably lead to consequences from the other parts of the system sooner or later.

Going through with the logging will result in the same devastation that caused the monarchs to shift their migration paths in the first place. The butterflies have no home to go to anymore because of logging. Preston makes a friend in school, Josefina, whose family had to move from the monarchs' old home. Dellarobia had done "some looking on the Internet about the town in Mexico where Preston's little friend [Josephina] and her family lost their home, and logging was a part of it. They had clear-cut the mountainside above the town, and that was said to have caused the mudslide and floods when a hard rain came" (137-138). Josephina's family's displacement, considered different because they are a minority in the Tennessee town, mimics the displaced butterflies. The mudslide, in fact, took out houses as well. Humans, trees, and butterflies were all affected by the human decision to deforest the mountain. Now Josefina's family and the butterflies have to relocate.

The gruesome reality of what mudslides can do and what they did do to Josefina's hometown is captured on the internet in that search. Dellarobia "had to shut off the computer before Preston completely figured out what they were seeing. She told him not to worry, that was a long way from here" (137-138). Unfortunately, Dellarobia realizes the problem with deforestation, yet as she tries to protect her son from tragedy, she perpetuates the same rhetoric that keeps the problem distanced and elsewhere. Murphy also picks up on the rhetoric she uses to calm Preston because Dellarobia defends herself when Cub uses this rhetoric. Murphy writes in "Pessimism, Optimism":

When Dellarobia expresses concern about the plight of the monarchs and their loss of viable habitat, Cub replies, "There's always some place else to go"

(172). Exasperated, Dellarobia thinks, “And what if there was no other place?” (175). That question refers both to her desire to escape her marriage and the recognition that climate change leaves no other place to go untouched by anthropogenic impacts. Escape fantasies function to delay decisive action because they promise to enable business-as-usual to continue, whether psychological, economic, or ecological, just in a different location. (159)

She sets up a double standard wherein she tries to reassure Preston that all will be okay while understanding through time that, in fact, everything will not be fine. I understand that comparing Dellarobia’s response to Bear and to Preston might seem unfair considering Preston is a child; however, I do think that she should consider introducing to Preston the idea that the world is not healthy.

Murphy also speaks to Bear’s decision-making habits. Murphy writes, “This clear-cutting is just one example of short-term and short-sighted solutions to systemic economic problems. It also becomes an example of how people can be persuaded by the consumerist culture in which they live to make decisions that run counter to their own personal long-term interests, as well as the long-term health of their human communities, their ecoregional communities, and the biosphere” (159). Murphy’s statement is similar to Kingsolver’s comments about politicians who are engaged in keeping the traditional, exploitive rhetoric resounding in Appalachian farmers’ ears. The clear-cutting might save the farm from this one loan collection, but the farming troubles will persist if the weather remains unpredictable and violent.

Dellarobia's Ecofeminist Remediation

So far I have discussed the extra and intra-textual examples of climate change problems and their relationship to human and nonhuman ecologies or cultures. The decisions to log the land are handed down by the patriarch of the family. Dellarobia must live with the decision or else find somewhere to move. Of course, moving would only separate Dellarobia from the truth that Bear will do what he wants. This section analyzes how Dellarobia fights the traditional, patriarchal power structures of her culture. The chapter is grounded in an ecofeminist analysis of Dellarobia's interactions with nature and her newfound identity which is at least partially informed by a new, symbiotic view of nature.

In her monograph *Barbara Kingsolver's World: Nature, Art, and the Twenty-First Century*, Wagner-Martin notes the shift in Dellarobia that accompanies her renewed sense of self (7). Her newfound confidence and self-sufficiency comes in part from her interaction with the scientists studying the monarchs and also from a new way of seeing the world. Wagner-Martin says, "And for Dellarobia's part, accepting the inevitable began to have some allure; her temperament starts to change from romantic to more nearly objective" (7). Nature is not some illusory god-like being that acts upon and reacts to humans. Instead, nonhuman entities are actually in a symbiotic relationship with humans and are reacting to anthropocentric actions. The scientists that traveled to Tennessee as Byron's researchers regard the butterflies without the emotional or religious attitudes that first gripped the locals:

Lone individuals dropped from the trees steadily like insect rain, trembling where they landed and taking their time to die. She [Dellarobia] wondered if this was a butterfly funeral, but you'd not know it from this science crew. They seemed in a fine mood, just getting down to business with their tape

measures, plastic sheeting, boxes of waxed-paper envelopes, and smaller instruments she couldn't name. (Kingsolver, *Flight Behavior*, 139)

The scientists see the destruction of the butterflies' homeland and resulting new migratory paths as regular work—even though they do understand the potential consequences the butterfly migration might have on butterfly and human life. Dellarobia is only starting to shift to a more scientific mode of thinking. Consequently, the change from romantic to objective coincides with redefining the occurrence, the monarch's new home in Tennessee, as a tragedy. At the outset, Dellarobia thinks the orange of the monarchs was a sign from God, a burning bush for her lost soul. However, she comes to view the altered migration routes as a chaotic, desperate fight for life and a new home place. And in viewing the tragedy from the butterflies' perspective, she is trying to move past human exceptionalism.

Increasingly, Dellarobia starts to grasp the ecological thinking of the scientists, particularly Byron.

[Byron's] 'complicated system' began to take hold in her mind, a thing she could faintly picture. Not just an orange passage across a continent as she'd imagined it before, not like marbles rolling from one end of a box to the other and back. This was a living flow, like a pulse through veins, with the cells bursting and renewing themselves as they went. The sudden vision filled her with strong emotions that embarrassed her. (146)

Dellarobia's perspective, like Wagner-Martin notes, is shifting here. The monarchs are first objectified and yet still abstract in Dellarobia's mind—the butterflies' migration is likened to marbles shifting around in a box. However, she sees the butterflies now as both individuals

(cells) and a collective (living flow), having both individual and collective agency within the metaphor of life-giving veins.

In response to the change the butterflies were having in her mind as well as the outrage she was garnering towards Bear, she resolves to go against him. She says, “These butterflies had been hers. She found them, she’d showed them to her son, in her name they were becoming beloved and important. They seemed to matter, like nothing she’d ever possessed. Already she had made up her mind to throw her one hundred dinky pounds against the heft of her family’s men, if it came to that” (149). Her resolve grows throughout the novel, and she resents the shortsightedness of those around her who are not learning about consequences as she is. Dovey does not fully understand the implications of Dellarobia’s flight path, though she supports almost all of Dellarobia’s decisions. Dovey explains, “Now see...that’s a woman thing. Men and kids get to just light out and fly, without ever worrying about what comes next.” But Dellarobia replies, “No, Dovey, it’s an everybody thing. It’s just a question of how well you can picture the crash landing” (190). They have a misunderstanding about the consequences all of the actions—resisting the Turnbow family, maybe leaving Cub, altering the butterflies’ tragedy—might have. Dovey is not specifically speaking about the monarchs because she is more interested in Dellarobia’s wellbeing. Dellarobia’s meaning is clear: she is speaking in grand terms, uniting everything in a cosmic cause-and-effect pattern—because if everything is interanimated, then everything exists in a cosmic cause-and-effect pattern. The new attention to cause and effect as well as to consequences is part of Dellarobia’s new ecological mindset, wherein she sees human and nonhuman intersecting.

With Dellarobia's growing anti-patriarchal mindset and actions, she would seem to be mirrored in some of the actions and symbolism in *Flight Behavior*. I will draw some further similarities between Dellarobia and the nonhumans in the novel to show how she is thinking more in an anti-anthropocentric mode. What Dellarobia gives us is not a spokesperson for nonhuman entities; rather, she becomes a symbol for alternative responses to the land. She resists the patriarchal, myopic actions of Bear Turnbow and the limiting marriage to Cub, and she transforms her vision of the land from Turnbow property to true ecology with interconnections affecting both human and nonhuman entities.

In addition to her rebellion against limiting personal relationships with the Turnbow men, she gains a greater understanding of animal lives, particularly the butterflies and the sheep that live on the Turnbow farm. She studies up on caring for the sheep and prepares for difficult births. One gives her a shock because, perhaps, she equates its struggle for life with her own firstborn who died: "Black, strangely flat against the snow, unmoving inside its translucent sac: a tiny sheep child. The ewe walked away from it and nosed into the snow, looking for graze" (Kingsolver, *Flight Behavior*, 415). The ewe rejects the kid in a similar way that Hester and Dellarobia had difficult first pregnancies: Hester gave up her baby and Dellarobia's died. "Without ever fully gaining her feet [Dellarobia] made it back to the puddle of lamb, swearing at the mother that stood blandly chewing now. Some distance away from this thing that had definitely not happened to her" (415). This botched birthing can have several interpretations relating to the humans in *Flight Behavior*.

The lamb's struggle to live may very well be symbolic of Dellarobia's first baby; she is able to save this lamb, whereas she could not save her child. Additionally, the lamb who struggles to breathe is symbolic of the out of balance world that the unbelieving humans put

at her doorstep. The lamb is symbolic of the altered flight paths of the monarchs as well as other possible global environmental crises and the sheep who “stood blandly chewing...away from this thing that had definitely not happened to her” are those humans who refuse to acknowledge that they are creating such devastation to their planet (415). However, there is an actual lamb in the novel, not just a representation. Remembering the actual lamb is important because it shows Dellarobia’s newfound connection with nature. The lamb actually reaches her on an emotional level that even Cub, who must also miss the miscarried child, could not touch in Dellarobia. I chose to end this thesis with Dellarobia and with *Flight Behavior* because she represents the hope that ecofeminism holds as a subtext within its analysis.

Dellarobia embodies the hope for a better world and better planet (as synonymous with both human and nonhumans collectively) that we treat fairly and injure as little and infrequently as possible; hopefully, we treat the planet with more respect than anything else. Furthermore, the ending to *Flight Behavior* is ambiguous yet hopeful enough to engender the impression that there is still a chance that we can change things for the better. Wagner-Martin remarks:

Thinking that the novel has been a traditional account of a woman character’s growth through education as well as life experiences, the reader may be momentarily confused: *Flight Behavior* in Kingsolver’s deft hands, however, does *not* give the reader Dellarobia’s outcome. It does not explain how she likes her college courses, or how much influence she will be able to maintain over her smart young son Preston. (*Barbara Kingsolver’s World 3*)

In short, the novel does not give the readers the result of the hope that Dellarobia's decisions create. Instead, the open-ended novel offers more questions than it answers. The novel concludes: "The sky was too bright and the ground so unreliable, she couldn't look up for very long. Instead her eyes held steady on the fire bursts of wings reflected across water, a merging of flame and flood. Above the lake of the world, flanked by white mountains, they flew out to a new earth" (433). "Merging" is, arguably, the pivotal word. Merging represents the too bright sky and the unreliable ground that seem to want to sandwich Dellarobia between them. Wagner-Martin adds that the merging represents a renewed combination of human and nature. In *Barbara Kingsolver's World* Wagner-Martin says, "The books' two final paragraphs are Kingsolver's choice to force the natural world to become integral to the human one, a feat that is accomplished without Dellarobia's name ever being mentioned" (3). Wagner-Martin picks up on the themes of ambiguity and hope that end the novel, and I want to emphasize what she says about the integration of the natural and human worlds. If the reader realizes that one fact, then the book seems both successful, hopeful, and ecofeminist in the resulting unification of human and nonhuman identities. What readers should take away from both novels examined in this thesis is optimism. Through a better understanding of how we humans are related to every other thing on the planet we can start to enact processes and mindsets that will rejuvenate the earth and, hopefully, stop treating one another, animals, and nature with single-minded pursuit of profit and leisure.

Conclusion

When I consider a statement that can summarize the elements of this thesis, I flipped back through my novels and found a highlighted section of *Prodigal Summer* that I had marked when reading it but had not included it in the thesis. It is filled with Kingsolver's artistic appreciation of nature—in this instance, seen through Garnett Walker's eyes:

Garnett had gradually lost the ability to see individual leaves, but he could still recognize any one of these by its shape: the billowy columns of tulip poplars; the lateral spread of an oak; the stately, upright posture of a walnut; the translucent, effeminate tremble of a wild cherry....Garnett had a strange, sad thought about his own special way of seeing trees inside his mind, and how it would go dark, like a television set going off, at the moment of his death.

(367)

The sentiment is moving: even though his eyesight is poor, Garnett is able to “see” and understand the trees on an emotional level. Since his eyesight is poor, the trees are only available to him through his mind and heart. But there is also a sadness about this comment. His own way of understanding the trees will be gone with him if he does not pass on his keen knowledge and awareness of these trees.

Ecocritical studies of literature and its response to the environment can analyze some wonderful prose, like the prose quoted above. Analyzing the relationship between humans and their environments is worthwhile; however, it is through the multifaceted analysis that ecofeminism provides that the true complexities of the relationship of humans and environment are clearer. Analyzing the intersecting ways that humans create or sustain an image of species exceptionalism or ways humans exploit other humans is the basic premise

for ecofeminism. Many of the critics and theorists I quoted in the first chapter discuss their definitions and practices of ecofeminism in ways that look to the future.

And the future is what it is all about. Recent environmental outlooks in the news and at general water cooler talk at the office are bleak. The environment is not a giving parent with infinite resources. Nonhumans have their own agendas just as humans have theirs. The nonhumans want to practice their agendas just as humans want to practice theirs.

Ecofeminists look not only to current exploitations, but by looking to futures, ecofeminists discuss ways that our futures may not be so bleak.

The women in *Prodigal Summer* and *Flight Behavior* are bold and strong women, though not all start out that way. Particularly, Lusa and Dellarobia claim ownership over their futures by realizing the ecological truths around them and working with those truths to foster economic advantages that will lead to better long-term results. For Lusa that is resisting monocultural farming techniques; for Dellarobia the truth is realizing the truths and effects of climate change. Nannie and Deanna have always been strong, and they spend their narratives trying to educate others (Garnett and Eddie, respectively) on how to live in sync with the ecology. Particularly, these women understand their own status as human others whose lives are bound up with the nonhuman. It is the women who realize and resist the patriarchal, exploitive land practices. They work to create a better future for themselves. By creating better futures that are ecologically sound, they are simultaneously creating better futures for others because they are thinking long term. Ecofeminist practices focus on the harmony that is possible after defusing exploitive mindsets and habits.

Recall the discussion of the Chipko women in Chapter 1. They, like the women in the second chapter, became activists not out of desire or planning but out of necessity. Their

livelihood was threatened as was their families, so they took up the charge of speaking on nature's behalf because they saw the lives of the trees and the lives of the people as inseparable. Like many of the women in Bell's book who did not seek environmental justice activism but had to take up the work to save their families, Lusa did not expect to be a farmer or land activist. She invents new ways of interacting with the land (i.e. not growing tobacco) partially out of necessity; however, she relies on her scientific background when making her decision to raise goats and, later, to resist making goats the monoculture in the county.

Dellarobia is similar to Lusa in many ways. Dellarobia must fight her in-laws for personal recognition and recognition as a farmer just as Lusa did. Warren writes, "The Chipko movement—a grassroots, women-initiated, ecologically aware, nonviolent protest movement—is ostensibly about trees. But it is also about women—other human Others—nature interconnections" (3). Warren is right: Dellarobia's story is not about a divorce or a climate-related anomaly, or a growing appreciation for the beauty in scientific inquiry. Rather, Dellarobia's story is about the interconnections among her divorce and subsequent renewed sense of self, the climate-related butterfly migration patterns shifting, and the realization that denying climate change can soon be as physically altering as not discussing the dead child in her life was emotionally altering for Dellarobia. To discuss only the literary environmental aspects of the novel as ecocriticism would limit the rich complexities inherent in the interconnectedness, interanimation, or intersectionality of the various strands of the novel.

I selected the quotation from the ending pages of *Flight Behavior*, "charged with resistance," as part of my thesis title because I feel that this novel—and *Prodigal Summer* as well—is charged with examples of how to understand patriarchal, exploitive environmental

practices. The responses both to the land use as it is and to how we humans might react to it differently are too frequently split down gendered lines with the males in these novels seeking to perpetuate the harmful status quo. The females—Deanna, Lusa, Nannie, and Dellarobia—see the nonhuman world differently than the males, and it is through their vision that Kingsolver’s readers too—albeit with help—might be charged to resist the current environmental inequalities that exist in our non-fictitious world.

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Vita

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