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The Rise of the Appalachian Ecofeminist: Environmental Degradation in the Literature of Wilma Dykeman and Barbara Kingsolver

Authors Wilma Dykeman and Barbara Kingsolver are two women who have a loving connection to southern Appalachia, but they have also witnessed and acknowledged how the region is being torn apart due to various environmental threats. Southern Appalachia has aesthetic and spiritual beauty, a primary reason why the residents call the region home. The region is known for its beauty in regards to the Appalachian Mountain range that spans across the Eastern United States. The mountains serve as support as well as a place where residents can develop roots and grow with the Appalachian Mountains: “Mountain residents, in other words, stay not because of human society or human values but because of the mountains themselves” (*Tangled Roots* 144). However, southern Appalachia is also home to environmental problems such as water pollution and climate change, which are two common threats causing chaos for the natural environment and residents of the region. Both Dykeman and Kingsolver incorporate environmental problems into their novels and non-fiction as a way to inform readers of the reality that is facing southern Appalachia and its residents. To affectively analyze and provide clarity of the main arguments addressed in the selected literature of Dykeman and Kingsolver this paper will be separated into sections as follows: context, analysis of the selected works of fiction, analysis of the selected works of non-fiction, perspectives on anti-environmentalism and lastly a conclusion. Applying the critical lens of ecofeminism to Wilma Dykeman’s *The Tall Woman* and Barbara Kingsolver’s *Flight Behavior* illuminates how each author underscores

pressing threats to the environment posed by unchecked industrial capitalism. The characterization and story arcs of each novel's protagonist emphasize the dangers of exploitation and neglect of the environment as well as the central role women can play in addressing these dangers. Lydia McQueen and Dellarobia Turnbow influence changed perspectives among members in their communities about environmental issues stemming from their understanding about the natural world, which enable them to educate and inspire environmental activism in a manner that is rooted in rather than opposed to community values and ethos.

Introduction to Ecofeminist Theory, Novels, and Themes

Ecofeminist theory and its relationship with the literary community did not have a positive or optimistic outlook when first introduced. The critical theory "l'eco-féminisme" or ecofeminism was coined by Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974, in the hopes that women would bring about an "ecological revolution" using the slogan, "Feminism or death [Le féminisme ou la mort]" (Glazebrook 12). Glazebrook explains how ecofeminist theory functions when using the critical lens to analyze a piece of work: "In general, ecofeminist work applies feminist analyses to environmental issues, so the claim is not so much that feminist worries are environmentally grounded, as that environmental issues warrant feminist analysis" (13). The claim that Glazebrook makes about environmental issues warranting feminist analysis summarizes the idea of ecofeminism in just a few words. However, amongst literary critics, when the theory became popularized in the years following the coining of the term there was a negative stigma attached to the theory's base: "few literary critics adopted this perspective [...] in literature departments, the intersections of ecology and feminism were largely ignored during the 1970s and 1980s" (Vakoch 2). In addition to the way that the theory invokes both the environment and women, the theory is also known for equality: "The ecofeminist ethic promotes equality between groups of

people, between genders, and between humanity and nature” (Swanson 89). Kingsolver has been labeled an ecofeminist writer: “Kingsolver’s feminist and ecological themes are found throughout her fiction [...] she has sometimes been referred to as an ecofeminist. All of her novels contain strong female characters, usually as the protagonist” (DeMarr 21). The critical theory of ecofeminism can be applied to the literature of Dykeman and Kingsolver, yet both authors may not have purposefully written in an ecofeminist perspective, it is through their relationships of the female protagonists and environmental issues of water pollution or climate change that invoke ecofeminist ideals.

Barbara Kingsolver introduces the environmental issue of climate change in her novel *Flight Behavior*. In *Listen Here*, editors Sandra L. Ballard and Patricia L. Hudson provide brief overviews of women writers in Appalachia. In a section devoted to Barbara Kingsolver’s common themes, Ballard and Hudson mention “the tension between individualism and one’s need for community, [...] the need for reconciliation between humans and the natural world” (330). Kingsolver structures her female protagonist in *Flight Behavior* to serve as a teacher within her community when addressing the environmental issue of climate change. Kingsolver’s novel *Flight Behavior* introduces a persistent and passionate woman named Dellarobia Turnbow living in the fictional town of Feathertown, Tennessee around the year 2010. The story follows the life of Dellarobia, as well as her family and friends. At the beginning of the novel, the reader is immediately shown Dellarobia at her worst, when she is about to embark on a romantic tryst with a man who is not her husband. As Dellarobia hikes up the mountain to the scheduled location for the affair, she is shocked by what appears to be a forest fire: “The forest blazed with its own internal flame [...] Brightness of a new intensity moved up the valley in a rippling wave, like the disturbed surface of a lake” (Kingsolver 14). In this section of the novel, Dellarobia has

yet to learn that what she believes is a forest fire is actually a large population of monarch butterflies nesting in the forest. The sight is unusual and causes Dellarobia to analyze the situation as a second chance at life believing that if she were to stay the fire would eventually reach her, “It was not too late to undo this mess. Walk down the mountain, pick up those kids. The burning trees were put here to save her” (Kingsolver 16). Although Dellarobia is unaware that what she has seen are monarch butterflies, she takes advantage of the situation as a way to bring her character back to reality. Climate change as the main environmental issue in the novel has yet to make a grand appearance, but the beginning section of the novel provides an introduction to how Dellarobia will address the same patch of forest later in the novel upon returning.

Wilma Dykeman’s first novel *The Tall Woman*, published in 1962, follows the story of protagonist Lydia McQueen. The role of being wife and mother is essential to the development of Lydia’s character throughout the novel, especially when the community of Thickety Creek is concerned. The novel is set in southern Appalachia as the Civil War is coming to an end. In the first chapter of the novel, there is a conversation between Lydia and her mother, Sarah Moore, about Lydia’s relationship with Mark McQueen where Sarah is speaking to her daughter about how her life would no longer be the same after marrying Mark stating, “Living won’t be easy with Mark McQueen. He’s a proud man, with a restlessness on him that will be hard to still” (16). Lydia does not share the same belief that her mother has of Mark McQueen, but Lydia is aware that her life will change after marrying Mark and responds by saying, “I never asked for easy, Mama” (17). Lydia craves the unfamiliar, seeking out adventure. Later in the chapter, Sarah is speaking with Lydia about Mark’s absence because he has gone off to fight for the Union army, but Sarah does not want her daughter to be alone, and Lydia disagrees with her

mother, choosing to stay firm in her choice of taking care of the home and animals that both Lydia and Mark have built together, causing her mother to say, “You never did have fear in you” (25). The first chapter acts as an introduction to Lydia for the course of the novel, expanding on how her character is unafraid of what turns life may take or how her parents view her relationship to Mark McQueen. The beginning of Dykeman’s novel establishes her female protagonist as a brave and fearless character, which is essential towards the development of the story because of how the community may interpret Lydia McQueen, especially when the environmental issue of water pollution introduces itself later in the novel.

Dykeman and Kingsolver introduce environmentalism and feminism as prominent themes within their literature. The theme of environmentalism is shown through the development of water pollution and climate change in the works of each author. On the other hand, the theme of feminism is shown through the main characters in the authors fiction, as well as through the authors themselves. In Kingsolver’s non-fiction book *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* the main focus and environmentalist message examines the food industry, specifically the unknown elements surrounding how crops are raised and what pesticides may be used to increase the growing process. Kingsolver’s novel *Flight Behavior* addresses climate change through the abnormal migratory path of the monarch butterfly and its presence in Feathertown, Tennessee.

Anthropogenic climate change, meaning human induced is the main argument surrounding the topic of global climate change. Sylvia Mayer’s article addresses global climate change within novels: “As the latest assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2014) once again confirmed, decades of research – and controversy about its results – have culminated in a by now overwhelming scientific consensus that current global warming has anthropogenic causes” (207). To further understand the concept of how humans

have impacted global temperature shifts, the University of California Museum of Paleontology provides information on the Holocene epoch, which is the current epoch of history and has been for the past 11,700 years (“The Holocene Epoch”). The UCMP also touches on the idea of anthropogenic causes of global climate change, “The vast majority of scientists agree that human activity is responsible for “global warming,” an observed increase in mean global temperatures that is still going on. Habitat destruction, pollution, and other factors are causing an ongoing mass extinction of plant and animal species” (“The Holocene Epoch”). Humans are experiencing the sixth mass extinction in the Holocene epoch because of anthropogenic causes mentioned from the UCMP such as habitat destruction and pollution both a direct result from humanity’s involvement with the environment. Mayer discusses Kingsolver’s novel *Flight Behavior* and the abnormalities surrounding the weather and monarch butterfly, “In addition to the altered migratory route of the monarchs, the Feathertown community has been recently plagued by severe weather anomalies, especially by continuous rainfall and unusual seasonal temperatures” (218). Mayer’s comment on the abnormal weather patterns further extends the point Kingsolver is making in her fiction to address the environmental issue of climate change and its impact on Feathertown. Fredrick Buell states that risk can also contribute to anthropogenic climate change, “Risk is an inescapable facet of anthropogenic global warming” (274). Risk is shown in *Flight Behavior* through informing the community about the anomalies in Feathertown through the irregular weather patterns and migration of the monarch butterfly. Altogether, climate change and environmental risk are connected to the theme of environmentalism in Kingsolver’s novel, and are prevalent through the lens of Dellarobia and the community’s point of view on the subject.

The theme of environmentalism in Dykeman's books *The Tall Woman* and *The French Broad* is shown through water pollution. In Dykeman's novel *The Tall Woman*, Lydia McQueen's character acts as the lens for observing the effects of water pollution, specifically the springs in the town of Thickety Creek. In Dykeman's non-fiction book *The French Broad* she explains the effects of water pollution on the French Broad River, and the importance of the river to the community. Viki Rouse addresses Lydia's connection with the spring in Dykeman's novel: "A metaphor for Lydia herself, the state of the water reflects ways in which Lydia constantly strives to purify and improve herself, her family, and her community" (43). Lydia's relationship with the environment is conflicted, because she is passionate about caring for both the land and spring that is located outside her home. On the other hand, Lydia's death is directly connected to water pollution and involves a contaminated spring in Thickety Creek. Water pollution and climate change serve as the environmentalist perspective in Dykeman and Kingsolver's novels, showing the devastating impact that both problems cast among communities in southern Appalachia.

The authors use the theme of feminism as a way to build strength and persistence in their fiction. Feminism's connection with the environment is shown through the critical lens of ecofeminism, which analyzes how women have connection with the natural world. James Bronwyn explores how women gain a sense of empowerment from the environment: "women interact with the environment in a spiritual, nurturing and intuitive manner" (8). Women and nature are depicted as powerful forces, by both maintaining strength and agency through relationships with family and community, for women and persistence in fighting for a healthy environment, and for nature despite negative environmental effects. The female protagonists Dellarobia and Lydia, are written as Appalachian women who consistently maintain a brave and

fearless nature throughout their stories, which relates to the point Bronwyn makes when directly connecting women with the environment. Women are nurturers due to their ability to birth life, as with the phrase “Mother Earth” where the Earth is viewed as a mother because of its nurturing qualities and care for human civilization. Dykeman is noteworthy for not adopting or claiming to be a feminist in her lifetime. The ideals that structure the feminist movement of wanting equality of the sexes are important to Dykeman; however, she does not use the term to label herself, stating, “Mine is not a feminist world nor a masculine world—it’s a people world” (Rouse 43). Feminism is rooted in the ideals that women and men are meant to be equal, therefore not creating a hierarchy of the sexes, and regardless if one wants to coin themselves a feminist, they can still stand for the ideals of the movement, which is shown through the characters Dellarobia Turnbow and Lydia McQueen.

Analysis of the Appalachian Woman in Dykeman’s and Kingsolver’s Novels

Dykeman and Kingsolver create two female protagonists that share similar connections with the environment in each novel. Both Dellarobia Turnbow from *Flight Behavior* and Lydia McQueen from *The Tall Woman* share similarities regarding family and their relationship with the environment. Each story is set in southern Appalachia, where Dellarobia and Lydia are immersed into similar cultures and lifestyles allowing for both characters to gain insight on a particular area of southern Appalachia. As mentioned earlier both of the novels have different time settings, *Flight Behavior* is set around 2010 and *The Tall Woman* is set as the Civil War is coming to an end. Although the time setting of each novel is drastically different, Dellarobia and Lydia share similarities that allow for their characters to connect despite the significant gap in time. The time gap between the settings creates an interesting comparison between both characters, and knowledge of risk posed to the environment, meaning each community in the

novels have a varied understanding on how the environmental issues of water pollution or climate change threaten the environment. Danny L. Miller writes about native Appalachian writers and how they began to write about people from the region in the 1930s, but Miller's main focus is how Appalachian women were portrayed in these writings: "In the novels and stories of these native writers [...] mountain women are portrayed as strong, proud, full of life and indomitable spirit. [...] [T]he native writers, by focusing on family relationships and the inner lives of women, emphasize the qualities in the lives of Appalachian women that make them admirable rather than pathetic" (Miller 2). Although Dellarobia and Lydia come from different time periods, the significance of family, meaning close relatives, is an important theme in both novels.

In Dykeman and Kingsolver's novels, Dellarobia and Lydia share similar family dynamics, meaning how the protagonists view and signify relationships with their relatives. The family relationship is essential when considering how both Dellarobia and Lydia are considered models for their communities, due to how both characters convey trust and support to others. Dellarobia has a close connection with her in-laws. When Dellarobia was still rather young, she met her husband Cub Turnbow in high school, and she quickly attached to his family developing a connection with his parents; however, Dellarobia's relationship with her mother-in-law, Hester Turnbow lacks communication and respect. In contrast, Lydia remains close to her immediate relatives throughout Dykeman's novel. Although the two protagonists are close to different relatives, both characters value their families, and those relationships, over the course of each story, to help and encourage them to understand themselves and their purpose.

The relationship between Dellarobia and her mother-in-law Hester Turnbow remains tense throughout the story, which contributes to a divide within the Turnbow family, mainly

between Dellarobia and her in-laws. Although there is a shift in the relationship between Dellarobia and Hester towards the end of the novel, the tension between the two remains constant until Hester opens up about how she has viewed Dellarobia over the years. Towards the end of the novel, both Dellarobia and Hester are in conversation about Dellarobia's relationship with Cub, and Dellarobia starts out by saying, "I'm five-foot nothing, Hester. I look up to everybody" (Kingsolver 345). In response, Hester says, "No, you don't. Not Cub. You never did [...] You two were no match, I told Bear that from day one. You wait, I told him. That smart gal will not stick around" (345). At the end of the section, Dellarobia, although angry at the situation and the discovery of Hester's thoughts about her relationship with Cub, provides her thoughts on family: "Her family was still family, an alliance of people at odds, surviving like any other by turning the everyday blind eye" (346). Dellarobia's thoughts of family signify her devotion towards relatives and the value she places on family relationships are meaningful, despite the tension between her and her mother-in-law. However, at the end of the novel, Dellarobia discovers Hester's secret life, one where she had a child before marrying her husband Bear Turnbow and gave him up for adoption, and Dellarobia soon discovers that the child was Feathertown's church pastor, Bobby Ogle. Although the relationship between Dellarobia and Hester does not have a happily-ever-after ending, the fact that Hester is honest with Dellarobia about her darkest secret, and about her true view of Dellarobia and Cub's relationship proves a lot about Hester's character, in how she appears to trust Dellarobia, proving that she does not feel hatred towards her daughter-in-law; rather, she appreciates the presence Dellarobia has in her life. In the end, Dellarobia decides that she does not want to lie about her feelings or faults, and she would prefer to value herself and form a positive future for her children.

For Lydia McQueen, in contrast to Dellarobia, the relationship between family is focused solely on support and the love that stems from support. The family of Lydia McQueen is a close-knit group that show respect and gratitude for one another. Although Lydia had a number of siblings, she was the eldest, which translated to her having to take responsibility for her brothers and sisters when their parents were in trouble. In the beginning of the novel, the reader is introduced to Lydia, and by the second chapter, Sarah Moore, Lydia's mother, has been kidnapped and attacked by a group called the Outliers. The group are known as raiders who did not choose a side in the war, and instead sought out cruelty and preyed on "helpless Unionist and Confederate alike" (Dykeman 29). Lydia's brother Robert comes to her house and informs her about the kidnapping, which means that Lydia has to take over the role of being an older sister and mother to her younger siblings, because Lydia's father is away fighting for the Confederate army: "Outwardly she must remain calm. She was the oldest. She was a woman married now, steady and knowing" (31). Despite the various roles of mother, wife, and sister Lydia must play throughout the story, the relationship Lydia shares with her Aunt Tildy remains steady, meaning Lydia does not have to switch into a different role when conversing with her aunt. Aunt Tildy offers unconditional love and support to her niece Lydia while Mark is fighting with the Union army. The McQueens and Moores, Lydia's family, worked alongside one another however, as the story develops, both families grow distant due to characters moving away or simply growing up. The divide between the families cause distance for Lydia's character, because she is separated from those of whom she loves, and thus signifies that Lydia must become more self-reliant for herself and the future of her family. The underlying feeling of love that both Dellarobia and Lydia share with their families radiates out amongst the small towns in each novel. Both female protagonists are models for their communities, but that starts with how both

women are seen with their families, because their close bonds show the community how each character exemplifies trust and support to others.

Both Dellarobia and Lydia share one other commonality in regard to family dynamic: both characters are wives and mothers. Susan Mann writes about women's role in the environment, especially women that are thought to only have significance in being a wife and mother living at home:

While the doctrine of separate spheres freed well-to-do women from much arduous labor, it also constrained them by dictating that woman's place was in the home. Consequently, women of the middle and upper classes who participated in environmental activism had to defend their new activities as extensions of their traditional roles of wife and mother. The term "municipal housekeeping" was used to describe this environmental activism. Under the banner of municipal housekeeping thousands of women were drawn to home-related issues like ensuring safe air, food, and water [...] and to better educate their children. (7)

While both Dellarobia and Lydia embody the ways in which wives and mothers took on the tasks that filed under the term municipal housekeeping, both women expand beyond those tasks.

Dellarobia and Lydia live in rural southern Appalachia, having both grown up with a background in agriculture. Through their background in agriculture, both women have a basic understanding and appreciation for the land and its value towards their communities in terms of farming as their town's main source of economy.

Both Dykeman's and Kingsolver's novels are set in rural southern Appalachia, placing both protagonists in an area where agriculture is prominent, and both characters have connections with the landscape because of their background in farming. Farming is the main

source of income for both Dellarobia and Lydia, and thus any type of environmental threat posed towards the land could potentially be catastrophic and alter their ability to care for their families. In terms of Dellarobia, farming is something that she understands, something she is comfortable with. Furthermore, Dellarobia views the land as intrinsic value also known as the just-because value that the land offers to humanity. The intrinsic value is shown through the land's ability to provide, especially when farming is concerned because of the resources that the job supplies. When Dellarobia's father-in-law, Bear Turnbow, is not receiving the necessary income to sustain a support system for his family, he looks into selling a plot of land to a logging company that is interested in clear-cutting the plot of land. However, Dellarobia, her husband Cub, and occasionally her mother-in-law Hester (when she feels as though her husband is acting radically instead of rationally), do not want to resort to selling the plot of land for clear-cutting. When Dellarobia is informed by Cub of the clear cutting, she seems to be the only one that considers how the landscape would be altered after the job is completed: "A clear cut. Cub, honey could you at least sit up and discuss this like a human?" (39). However, Cub responds in defense of why his father is considering the deal: "That's where they'll give you the most money. According to Dad, it's easier when they don't have to pick and choose trees" (39). The conversation continues with Dellarobia informing her husband of how the landscape will be permanently altered, drawing a comparison to another member in the community, "Oh, Cub. They'll make it look like a war zone, like the Buchman place. Have you looked at that mountain since they finished logging it out? It's a trash pile. Nothing but mud and splinters" (40). After the conversation, it dawns on Dellarobia that her family was unaware of the sight she unfortunately found earlier in the novel when she was about to embark on an affair, but she could not tell her husband or his parents about what she found without having to admit to the planned affair.

In an attempt to save the land from the possible clear-cut, Dellarobia proposes an idea to Cub that she hopes her father-in-law will take heed of. Dellarobia insists to Cub that Bear and the logging company should go scope out the landscape of where they want to clear-cut. However, after getting the family to agree and see the landscape, Dellarobia must tag along, and that is when she discovers what she actually saw at the beginning of the novel: “*Butterflies*. How had she failed to see them? [...] They filled the sky” (Kingsolver 52). Even after the discovery, Bear Turnbow was not concerned about the species, and he did not care about the butterflies instead he would rather damage the butterfly population in order to attain a small influx of money: “We’re going to spray these things and go ahead. I’ve got some DDD saved back in the basement” (55). In reply to his father, Cub corrects what he meant and further expands his belief of the chemical Bear is suggesting to be used: “DDT, [...] Dad, that stuff has been against the law for more than my whole life” (55). However the point Cub was attempting to make by stating that the chemical is illegal and banned for proper reasoning did not affect Bear, “Why do you think I saved it up? I knew it would be hard to get” (55). After much debate, Cub insisted that his father wait for the butterflies to fly away before moving forward with the clear cutting. However, this scene shows that to Bear, the land does not have an intrinsic value; rather the land is viewed as merely a source of income that is desired. Bear’s opinion of the species and land is especially true when he informs his family of the DDT he has kept for years after its ban to be used as a pesticide for crops, because of its fatal and harming effects to the people working on farms. Dellarobia’s conversation with her husband about clear cutting was in defense of the land, for she knew that after clearing a plot of trees, there is nothing left except for a muddy plot of land that offers zero support for the surrounding environment. Introducing how Bear Turnbow views the environment offers a different point of view from Dellarobia, allowing for the reader to

learn about the opposing sides squaring off on the topic of environmentalism. In contrast to Dellarobia, Dykeman's protagonist Lydia McQueen does not tackle an impending environmental issue consistently throughout the novel, and the issue only arises towards the end of the story where the events unfold in a rapid pace. Although Lydia shares an intrinsic value with her land in the novel, where clarity and beauty are an important factor towards Lydia and her outlook on the environment.

In Dykeman's novel, her protagonist Lydia resides in the fictional town of Thickety Creek. Lydia grows up accustomed to farm life and how to raise livestock. When Lydia marries Mark McQueen, Mark gifts Lydia a dairy cow that he traded from a fellow community member as a wedding gift, "You bring us milk and cream for rich yellow butter and we'll see you get all the grass and fodder you can hold and a snug place to sleep nights when winter comes. You'll be a valuable to us. I'll call you Pearly" (20). Lydia's relationship with Pearly is built on love and support, which is a shared similarity for how Lydia also views a natural spring flowing outside the home Mark and Lydia have built together. Later in the novel Lydia engages in a conversation with Dr. Hornsby, another community member of Thickety Creek, when Hornsby spots Lydia working along the spring near her home. The sight is quite odd, which causes Hornsby to ask what it is Lydia is doing, "Cleaning my spring" Lydia gave in response (176). The conversation continued where Hornsby asked, "And pray tell me, Lydia McQueen, how do you clean a spring? Do you wash the water?" (176). In an effort to educate Hornsby on why she was cleaning her spring, Lydia points out to him, "There—she pointed with the hoe—"look under the ledge where the roots of those poplar trees are, and tell me if you ever set eyes on a bolder, finer spring than that? Or a cleaner one?" (176). Hornsby's gaze shifts to the direction Lydia pointed, surveying the land and spring where dead briars, weeds or fallen limbs were no longer spread

about the banks, instead moss, vines and other plants were spread out along the banks signifying that “Someone had worked here lovingly and well” (177). The care and appreciation for the land is apparent in this section of the novel, showing how Lydia’s character values the environment and therefore wants to care for the nature. Rouse argues that the spring also serves as metaphor for the community of Thickety Creek, signifying that the community’s well-being is at risk unless corruption is cleaned out (42). Lydia’s patience and diligence with working on the spring explains how her character acknowledges the value of the land; however, the community is also crucial in this scene. Unless action is taken for the community of Thickety Creek in regards to the health and benefit of the residents, then nothing will change and no lesson will be learned. This lesson becomes a reality later in the novel with the death of Lydia McQueen. The shared outlook that both protagonists have of the land, meaning the automatic love and devotion, is also shown through their ability to care for their families, because Dellarobia and Lydia are cast as the main caretakers or providers for their households.

In both *The Tall Woman* and *Flight Behavior*, Dellarobia and Lydia are married; however, their husbands are rather distant, which causes both protagonists to act as the providers of their families. Susan Mann’s concept of municipal housekeeping is an important factor to understanding how Dellarobia and Lydia must act as the main providers for their families, due to the absence of their husbands. In an anti-feminist or old fashioned sense, a man is thought to act as the income provider for a family and the woman’s role is to take care of the home and children; that idea is not valid for Dykeman and Kingsolver’s protagonists. Both Dellarobia and Lydia undertake the roles of wives and mothers, but they must also make up for the lack of a male figure in their households, meaning both women take on laborious tasks that would not be common for a woman in society or residing in a town with said beliefs. Appalachian women that

have grown up living on the land and learning about farming or other labor intensive work understand how to get their hands dirty, meaning sweat induced work which is thought to be seen as masculine instead of feminine. The concept of distant husbands is used to explore how both protagonists are seen as superior to their male counterparts, making the women more appealing and realistic.

In Dykeman's novel, Lydia's husband Mark McQueen is distant in two ways, one being he goes off to fight for the Union army for part of the story, and secondly upon his return since Mark suffers from trauma experienced in the war, he is mentally detached from his family. The absence of Mark causes Lydia to step up as the primary provider for their family and children, which does not appear to negatively impact Lydia's character; however, the relationship between Mark and Lydia changes after he returns from the war. Upon Mark's return, he experiences severe Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, which impacts his relationship with Lydia and his children throughout the course of the story. Once home, soon after the birth of Mark's first son, David McQueen, Mark is noticeably different to Lydia. She is aware that he is no longer the same man that he once was before departing for the war: "the Mark who had come back to her was not the Mark who had left. [...] He still brought excitement with him, but tenderness had disappeared" (Dykeman 61). Although Mark's outlook on life changed due to the trauma faced in the war, he still loved his family dearly, and maintained his relationship with Lydia. The relationship between Mark and Lydia for the remainder of the novel was not full of negativity or uncertainty instead, their love was still strong and resilient. Nonetheless, there was no longer an equal partnership between Lydia and Mark, due to Lydia having to raise and teach their children while Mark ran off in search of jobs to maintain an income. The lack of equality in a relationship between a couple, especially when the couple has children, causes everything to be thrown off

balance and furthermore making situations unstable. Kingsolver's protagonist shares a similar case with Lydia, in the sense that she too suffers from an unstable relationship with her husband.

In Kingsolver's novel, *Dellarobia* is structured as a brave and fearless character from the beginning; however, the relationship between Dellarobia and Cub Turnbow can be shown as two high-school sweethearts that made the mistake of getting married too young. The relationship between Dellarobia and Cub blossomed into a marriage because Dellarobia became pregnant in high school. However, the pregnancy did not carry into full term, because of a miscarriage. After the loss of the first pregnancy, Dellarobia soon became pregnant again, resulting in their son Preston, and a couple years following came along a daughter, Cordelia. Both Dellarobia and Cub loved their children endlessly; however, the love between Dellarobia and Cub was not equal, for Dellarobia wanted a different life than Cub, one where she would have the chance to further her education and discover her potential. Towards the end of the novel, Dellarobia and Cub are moving an old armoire from Cub's parents' house but have to wait before dropping it off at the local thrift store, which made Dellarobia suggest that the two of them go grab a bite to eat at a local fast food restaurant. While eating their meal in Cub's truck, Dellarobia starts to discuss their relationship and how it is not what she envisioned it to be, "It's like I'm standing by the mailbox waiting all the time for a letter. Every day you come along and put something else in there. A socket wrench, or a milkshake. It's not bad stuff. Just the wrong things for *me*" (383). The reaction of Cub was surprising, for Dellarobia stated that his ability to express sadness towards the conversation made the situation all seem real; however, Dellarobia continued her thoughts of the relationship further, "I'm thankful for our children. But I'm not what you need" (383). The love between Cub and Dellarobia only stemmed from their love of Preston and Cordelia, not extending out to one another. In contrast to the relationship of Lydia and Mark,

Dellarobia and Cub did not remain together, and Dellarobia went forth with filing for divorce. The divorce was not because of anger or frustration about their relationship; rather both Dellarobia and Cub wanted different lives, and in order to fulfill those hopes and dreams, both needed space from one another. However, the reader does not know if the divorce was finalized, because the ending of the novel was ambiguous and the fate of Dellarobia is unclear. Dykeman and Kingsolver write tragic endings for their protagonists, yet the endings create a realistic ending of how the environmental issues of water pollution and climate change can impact a community.

Dellarobia and Lydia share a connection through their death scenes, leading the reader to question how the environment plays a role in the fate of each character. In Dykeman's novel, Lydia McQueen is portrayed as a strong mountain woman, who supports and loves her family and wants nothing but happiness for people in her community. However, throughout the story Lydia struggles with one man in Thickety Creek, Ham Nelson. The McQueens and Nelson are in conflict since the beginning of the story when Lydia denied a proposal from Ham Nelson. The scene between the two did not go in the direction Ham believed it would, and allowed Ham to feel overly confident that Lydia would jump at the proposal and agree to be his wife. Lydia refused the proposal a few times, and then proceeded to inform Ham, "I don't love you" (27). The response Ham gave to Lydia was rather alarming, because instead of respecting Lydia's answer, he chose to ignore the polite refusals: "Won't, not can't. Well, you could learn that. I'd make it easy for you" (27). The conversation between the two carried on for a while longer, until Ham chose to stop pushing Lydia. The refusal of the proposal from Lydia further exemplifies how she is superior to the male, Ham, and that a woman's voice is strong. The environmental issue of water pollution is introduced through Nelson's farm and the sawmill on his land, where

a spring flows nearby the mill. One evening Lydia was out walking and decided to stroll past her old home that she and Mark had once rented on Nelson's land when she came upon the spring: "Years of rain seeping through that mound of sawdust had turned the water in the spring brackish. The spring itself was full of leaves, abandoned and diminished" (305). Lydia was thirsty and chose to clear out the leaves and filth in the spring and wait for the water to run clear before taking a sip. After tasting the water, Lydia called the water "tepid and tasteless" (305). Later that evening, Lydia's nose started to bleed and her body switched from hot to cold. The discovery was made that Lydia was suffering from Typhoid fever. In the last two pages of the novel, the illness picks up pace with Lydia. On the last page, Lydia is with Mark who has come to see his ill wife when she finally takes her last breath. The fever had killed Lydia, which was a direct result from the contaminated water on Nelson's land. The old sawdust that was being collected near the spring had contaminated the water. Since Lydia's death is described on the last page of the novel, it is never known if Ham Nelson is held responsible for Lydia's death or how the community of Thickety Creek reacts. The unfortunate fate of Lydia McQueen serves as an example, for how environmental issues pose threats to communities, taking lives and leaving families with a gap in their family tree, and forever altering a community.

The fate of Dellarobia Turnbow is inexact, leaving the reader questioning what happened to her character and why Kingsolver chose to write an ambiguous ending, thus forming the idea that the ending is similar to the environmental issue of climate change because of its uncertainty. By the end of the novel, Dellarobia has chosen a new path for herself and children, so she sits down with her eldest child, Preston to discuss three "somethings" (423). First, she tells her son about the first child that she lost before Preston was born, which confused him, but Dellarobia wanted her son to know about his brother who had died. Second, Dellarobia bought a new cell

phone for herself that she will allow Preston to use as a way to search about animal species and anything science related on the internet, this stems from Preston's fascination with science after learning about the monarch butterflies. The new cell phone relates to the third piece of news, that the family is moving to Cleary with Dellarobia's best friend Dovey where Dellarobia will attend college and finally receive the education she had always wanted. Dellarobia then tells Preston that Cub will not be joining them, informing her son that they got married accidentally (427). However, Dellarobia reassures her confused son that Cub and she made him and his younger sister, Cordelia, which they meant to do, and that the separation is acceptable. The ending of the conversation holds weight, possibly signifying what is about to come of Dellarobia's fate because she makes Preston say out loud that life will never go back to the way it was, "You have to say that right now, okay?" (429). Preston agrees and says aloud, "It won't ever go back how it was" (429). In the last few pages following the conversation between Dellarobia and her son, a sudden flood appears around the Turnbow house where Dellarobia is alone. The snow that had been on the ground melted, and caused all of the water from the melted snow on the mountain above the home to come crashing down quickly, eventually engulfing the house. Along with the water, the leftover population of the monarch butterflies follows the flood, covering the nearby environment with an orange hue. The last few sentences in the ending paragraph allow for the reader to interpret their own idea of what Kingsolver is conveying and what happens to Dellarobia, "Instead her eyes held steady on the fire bursts of wings reflected across the 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). Assuming that the "they" mentioned refers to the monarch butterflies, Kingsolver appears to be forming a message to her readers about the future of their population. Considering that climate change altered the monarch butterflies flight plan away from Mexico

and into southern Appalachia, connects to how most of the population was dying over the course of the novel. Ultimately the environmental issue of climate change permanently damages the monarch butterfly, leading towards its extinction. Lloyd connects the conversation between Dellarobia, Cub and her in-laws about how the logging would lead to mudslides towards the ambiguous ending of Kingsolver's novel: "Much like the 'mudslides' that Dellarobia warns against if the farm is logged (and those that displaced the butterflies to begin with), the novel concludes with a disintegrating landscape" (923). Dykeman and Kingsolver create tragic endings for their protagonists as warnings to southern Appalachia. Dellarobia and Lydia serve as examples for how the environmental issues of water pollution or climate change can effect communities, teaching readers about the dangerous outcomes that the issues pose to the environment.

Dykeman's and Kingsolver's Non-Fiction as Support

The personal connection both Dykeman and Kingsolver share with the environment is shown throughout their non-fiction expanding on the topics of water pollution and climate change, while also examining how their understanding of the natural world is portrayed through the female protagonists in their fiction. Dykeman's non-fiction book *The French Broad* informs her audience of the water pollution facing the French Broad River. Dykeman casts blame on the residents in the region for the state of the river and ultimately its death, meaning how the river is being polluted killing aquatic species and harming nearby residents. Similarly, Kingsolver's memoir *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* explicates where food that is sold in grocery stores comes from and how it is raised, in order to combat the lack of awareness of where food comes from. Dykeman and Kingsolver's non-fiction tackles the same environmental issues as seen with their

novels *The Tall Woman* and *Flight Behavior*, yet their non-fiction can be used as support for the arguments made in their fiction.

Barbara Kingsolver's memoir *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* follows a year in her life when her family decides to move from Arizona to southern Appalachia in search of discovering the environments connection with food. The decision to move was something that Kingsolver believed was an all-around good choice as a way to better her family's health and to introduce them to a different culture. In the first chapter of the book, Kingsolver explains the reason for moving and what motivated her and her family to finally make the decision, "We wanted to live in a place that could feed us: where rain falls, crops grow, and drinking water bubbles right up out of the ground" (*Animal* 3). Kingsolver sought out a chance to grow healthy food for her family, which eventually influenced her to leave Arizona for southern Appalachia. The title of the first chapter is "Called Home" which is a point that Kingsolver addressed a few pages in, "But after twenty-five years in the desert, I'd been called home" (*Animal* 3). Southern Appalachia's roots are connected with its residents who live in the region, and who understand that the area is known as home. However, the region is more than just the word home or a location where a person or family may reside, for Appalachia develops a connection with the people who visit, and invites visitors to become part of an area that supports and nourishes its residents through the act of supplying resources. The connection between community and the environment is central in Kingsolver's writings, both through the female protagonist Dellarobia Turnbow and in Kingsolver's description of her personal life in southern Appalachia.

Wilma Dykeman's first book *The French Broad*, published in 1955, is focused on southern Appalachia. Dykeman focused on different aspects of the region, which include people, culture, and the environment, and she notes in the introduction to the book, "This book was, and

is, an effort to increase understanding and appreciation for a rare region, a tough and fragile people and their hard and lovely country” (VI). Every chapter in the book is centered on a story about a prominent figure to the region or on Dykeman’s interpretation of a particular topic. *The French Broad* is an inspirational book for southern Appalachia because it identifies the environmental issue of water pollution facing the region and its residents. Although the book is filled with stories of important figures throughout the region, it is most notable for its eighteenth chapter entitled “Who Killed the French Broad?” Dykeman grew up in Asheville, North Carolina, which meant that she was immersed into the area and the knowledge that surrounds Asheville’s culture, which includes the French Broad River. Elizabeth Engelhardt points out that Dykeman’s book was published seven years prior to Rachel Carson’s book *Silent Spring*, which is considered a landmark for environmental writing. Nevertheless, Dykeman was part of the public conversation on environmental issues, more specifically on the issue of water pollution, before Carson’s book was published (*Tangled Roots* 170). Both Carson and Dykeman sought to educate their readers about the harm that is posed to the environment through the impacts humans can cause. At the end of *The French Broad*, Dykeman holds the residents surrounding the French Broad River accountable for the damage posed to the river: “There is only one respectable course for a free citizen [...] to shoulder his share of the responsibility for “killing”, for the pollution” (291). Dykeman’s voice in *The French Broad* is part of a movement that involves other women authors: “Her [Dykeman’s] presence suggests that these earlier writers are not isolated incidents but are instead part of a movement throughout the century—a movement of women authors writing about gender and nature in Appalachia in such a way that ecological and feminist concerns are intimately interdependent” (*Tangled Roots* 168). Dykeman is an unsung hero for southern Appalachia, for raising awareness about the pollution of the French Broad

River and informing fellow community members of the hazards that water pollution can cause. The environmentalist message that both Dykeman and Kingsolver impart throughout their writings is focused on the community, and how the environmental issues negatively impact members of the community as seen with the protagonists in *The Tall Woman* and *Flight Behavior*.

Significance of place in calling southern Appalachia home resonates with Dykeman and Kingsolver while also being shown in the female protagonists in their fiction. The idea of calling southern Appalachia home has been a fundamental element into why residents choose to live in the region, mostly due to the surrounding environment of the Appalachian Mountain range. As mentioned earlier, the region has a tendency to invite outsiders into the mountains, similar to how Kingsolver appears to have been called to the region from her home in Arizona. Kingsolver's background in biology aids her writing, because she can accurately depict the effects that an environmental disaster can cause, and form connections with the natural world, "Her [Kingsolver's] scientific training also affects her writing more subtly by forming her process. She begins most writing projects with a question, much like a research scientist in the laboratory or in the field" (DeMarr 7). In the author's note following the ending of *Flight Behavior*, Kingsolver addresses claims made throughout the novel involving the monarch butterfly and how she sought out help from fellow scientists in order to construct a story that accurately addresses the controversial topic of climate change: "I've looked to many expert sources for guidance in constructing a fictional story within a plausible biological framework" (435). Kingsolver's personal connection with southern Appalachia helped influence her desire to write about climate change in the region, and the negative effects of the environmental issue

influenced her relocation from Arizona to southern Appalachia in search of a healthier lifestyle for herself and her family.

Perspectives on Anti-Environmentalism in Southern Appalachia

Although Dykeman and Kingsolver praise the environmentalist movement throughout their writing, and structure their characters to work with the idea of environmentalism, there are residents from southern Appalachia who do not have a positive connection with the environmentalist movement. Dykeman and Kingsolver's literature provides an overview of how the idea of environmentalism is portrayed in southern Appalachia from an informative perspective as a way to educate their readers on environmental issues in the region. However, not every resident of southern Appalachia views environmentalism or the environmental justice movement in a positive light, because of how the experience some residents have with the movement has impacted families and homes. Benita Howell's book *Culture, Environment, and Conservation in the Appalachian South* provides context on the residents who were affected by the establishment of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The establishment of the national park ultimately forced families out of their homes that were within the boundaries of the park. The residents who were impacted sought out their agitation to the environmentalist movement: "It was not traditional attitudes but the federal government's act of redefining their homes and communities as wilderness that pitted the former residents against environmentalism" (Howell 94). In support of Howell's point, Kathryn Newfont's book *Blue Ridge Commons* also comments on the development of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and its impact on residents: "Whole communities were forcibly removed and their histories erased to make way for the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, for instance. People in these communities traditionally relied on agriculture for a living, but few found affordable farms to replace the ones

they lost. The park thus took from them not only home and community but also livelihood” (127). Dykeman and Kingsolver advocate for one side of the environmentalist movement; however, in order to appropriately analyze the movement as a whole it is essential to consider all sides and perspectives. As with any movement or idea there are benefits and flaws, and an example of a flaw for the environmentalist movement rests with residents of southern Appalachia that lost homes and livelihoods after the establishment of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Conclusion

The strength and persistence of an Appalachian woman radiates out amongst authors Dykeman and Kingsolver, and in the protagonists from *The Tall Woman* and *Flight Behavior*. Through including and surrounding the writers work with the environmental issues of water pollution or climate change there is a proper foundation built for how southern Appalachia is being impacted in modern day society. The literature of Dykeman and Kingsolver is structured as a warning message to residents of southern Appalachia, and informs communities about the dangers posed to the environment, and how those dangers can inflict destruction on the mountain residents. Dellarobia and Lydia are cast as examples for how the destruction of environmental issues can impair a community, yet both characters are structured as leaders for members in their communities through using their story as a warning about environmental dangers, and how to educate and change the future for improved health in community members and the natural world. Southern Appalachia is a region joined together through its aesthetic and spiritual beauty however, that beauty is constructed from the mountain residents who call southern Appalachia home, and who will continue to fight for the benefit of the land and its purpose towards humanity.

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