



doi <https://doi.org/10.58256/gb9j2575>

Research Article

Section: Literature, Linguistics & Criticism



Published in Nairobi, Kenya by
Royallite Global

Volume 5, Issue 1, 2024

Article Information

Submitted: 27th October 2023

Accepted: 16th December 2023

Published: 9th January 2024

ISSN: 2708-5945 (Print)

ISSN: 2708-5953 (Online)

Additional information is available
at the end of the article:

To read the paper online, please scan
this QR code:



How to Cite:

Ali, R., & Sasani, S. (2024). An ecofeminist study of Barbara Kingsolver's *Animal Dreams* and *Prodigal Summer*. *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.58256/gb9j2575>

An ecofeminist study of Barbara Kingsolver's *Animal Dreams* and *Prodigal Summer*

Ridha'a Ali & Samira Sasani*

Department of Foreign Languages and linguistics, Shiraz University, Iran

*Correspondence: samira.sasani21@yahoo.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7305-9068>

Abstract

Ecofeminism has pervaded many disciplines such as science, philosophy, politics, and literature. It emphasizes the ultimate interconnectedness of lifecycle. Ecofeminists contend that any shot to liberate and release women won't be fruitful and prolific without the liberation of nature. This article intends to study the woman/nature interconnectedness with ecofeminist perception in Kingsolver's selected two novels *Animal Dreams* and *Prodigal Summer*. It, strictly, challenges environment, animal elimination and how the female protagonists using their environmental consciousness, creating some connections with natural settings and imitates a union between women and nature. The study, indeed, focuses on women (feminism) and nature (ecology) under the authority of men. Ecofeminists attempt to find solutions for the social problems and the diseased cultural masculine system of the societies. Thus, they attempt to examine women and nature and the way they react against the masculine, misogynists, and unequal communities. Hence, they insist to mirror themselves as the source of life. Life will be continued by women who are the backbones of civilizations and families. They deliver courage, nurturing, provision, maintenance and are vital to the development of the children. Consequently, they have the right to take on leadership roles in communal organizations.

Keywords: *Animal Dreams*, ecofeminism, feminism, Kingsolver, masculine, nature, *Prodigal Summer*



© 2024 The Author(s). This open access article is distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY-NC-SA) license.

Public Interest Statement

The study discusses the diverse spheres of the feminist characters in Barbara Kingsolver's most famous novels, *Animal Dreams* and *Prodigal Summer*, from an ecofeminist standpoint. The works' primary theme is on the oppression of women and nature as inferior to men, and how they are dominated in patriarchal society. It also explores the interconnectedness of women and nature via the experiences of the heroines. Furthermore, it raises two societies' ecological awareness while highlighting catastrophic deterioration and exploitation. This study demonstrates the concerns of ecology and feminism regarding equivalency for the purpose of safeguarding nature through the participation of both genders.

Introduction

This article aims to show the inseparable interrelation between women and nature through applying the ecofeminist theory upon Barbara Kingsolver's *Animal Dreams* and *Prodigal Summer*. *Animal Dreams* is a captivating novel, published in 1990. Set in a fictional town called Grace, Arizona, the story follows Codi Noline, a young woman who returns to her hometown to care for her ailing father. As she grapples with her own personal struggles, including coming to terms with her sister's disappearance and dealing with her troubled past, Codi develops a deeper understanding of herself and discovers love, healing, and a connection to the environment around her. Regarding its critical reception, it must be stated that *Animal Dreams* received widespread acclaim for its lyrical prose, complex characters, and its exploration of themes such as identity, family, and environmental activism. Kingsolver's vivid descriptions of the Arizona landscape and wildlife were particularly praised. The novel's thought-provoking narrative and its ability to evoke both emotional depth and environmental consciousness greatly resonated with readers and critics alike.

Prodigal Summer (2000) as the second subject of this analysis weaves together three interconnected stories that take place in rural southern Appalachia during a single summer season. As the lives of characters unfold against the backdrop of the natural world, the book explores themes of love, loss, human connection, and the delicate balance between humanity and nature. Similar to *Animal Dreams*, *Prodigal Summer* received widespread acclaim for its lush, descriptive writing style and its skillful handling of varied narrative threads. Critics praised Kingsolver's ability to create richly drawn characters and her keen observations of the complexities of human relationships. The novel's thematic exploration of ecological awareness and the interdependence of each living being garnered particular praise. Kingsolver's adept intertwining of personal and environmental narratives in *Prodigal Summer* has earned it a special place among her notable works.

The substantial role of the environmental concerns in these novels is noticeable as both *Animal Dreams* and *Prodigal Summer* signify Kingsolver's attempt to demonstrate people who are deeply aware of their natural surroundings and how they are endangered. As noticed in her interviews, In *Animal Dreams*, Kingsolver means to highlight the interconnectedness between humans and nature. She emphasizes the importance of understanding and preserving the environment, asserting that ignoring this connection can lead to personal and societal turmoil. *Prodigal Summer* further expands on these themes, delving into the delicate balance of ecosystems and the intricate relationship between humans, animals, and the natural world (Epstein, 1996, p. 1-12).

In both *Animal Dreams* and *Prodigal Summer*, Kingsolver explores the complexities of the man-woman relationship, drawing from the sources of ecofeminism and binarism. Kingsolver's depiction of male-female dynamics challenges traditional gender roles and norms, emphasizing the need for equality and mutual respect. Ecofeminism, a key source in Kingsolver's works, analyzes the intersection of gender and environmental issues. It underscores the interconnectedness between the oppression of women and the destruction of the natural world. Kingsolver seamlessly weaves ecofeminist themes into her narratives, highlighting the importance of embracing a sustainable and caring relationship with nature and one another.

Binarism, another source present in Kingsolver's novels, refers to the rigid categorization of male and female roles. Kingsolver dismantles these binary constructs by presenting her characters as complex

individuals who defy societal expectations. Through her storytelling, she challenges the notion that gender roles should confine and limit individuals, encouraging readers to question and reshape traditional gender norms.

Environmental criticism which is highly palpable in Kingsolver's writings is a discourse with very old roots (Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996, p. 2), because early in history, some stories can be found regarding the earth's formation and man's impression in the world. In *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters*, Karen J. Warren has openly referred to nature as a feminine topic. It is also believed that ecofeminism was established as a movement directed by women and with the universal contribution of men who intended to discuss "gender-based" problems and preserve "human and nonhuman" surroundings. According to Warren's *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, women often play a chief role in community environmental involvements since ecological problems influence their lives more instantaneously (2000, p. 14). Furthermore:

The term 'ecofeminism' emerged as a concept that encompassed a range of viewpoints, orientations, and methods—both methods of activism and methods of analysis and critique. From the beginning various academic and activist factions sought to dismiss or discredit ecofeminism. (Vakoch and Mickey, 2018, p. 1)

Since the ancient times, the notion "dualism" has been assumed as an essential component of the mentality and philosophy of large groups of people. The features that a dualistic structure embraces have altered and developed through time and still carry on to do so. This perception involves two terms that are put opposite of each other in conflicting pairs. Dualism is actually a chief type of repression in different sorts of creatures. Some imperative pairs include male/female, human/nature, mind/body, and reason/emotion (Plumwood, 2002, p. 43). As noticed, the words on the left side of the oppositions are typically linked with men and are given dominance over the right side that has often been associated with women's subordination.

In terms of gender, dualism shows that men are habitually referred to as being knowledgeable, reasonable, and vigorous whereas women are viewed as obedient, inactive, and natural (Plumwood, 2002, p. 50). These characteristics upsurge the detachment between the two genders even more. Due to dualism, not only are these dissimilarities noted, but also a particular attention is given to consider the right side as having a deficiency and being an undesirable contrast of the left side as the prevailing side.

As Plumwood asserts, in some cases ecofeminism refers to all four practices of oppression, including race, class, gender, and nature (2002, p.1). Such literary texts as Kingsolver's novels with ecofeminist concerns revolve around the influence of patriarchy over natural and feminine difficulties. This is why Jones refers to ecofeminism in this way: "From ecology, it learns to value the interdependence and diversity of all life forms; from feminism, it gains the insights of a social analysis of women's oppression that intersects with other oppressions such as racism, colonialism, classism, and heterosexism" (2006, p. 169).

Nature, Gender, and Resistance: An Analysis of Ecofeminism in *Animal Dreams* and *Prodigal Summer*

Nature in all of Kingsolver's writings is clearly a dynamic character through which many of her characters develop their sense of self, depending on either connection with it or fighting against it. According to Swartz, in almost all her novels, Kingsolver has been extremely obsessed with revealing how one's soul is closely connected with nature (1993, p. 65). In such novels as *Animal Dreams* and *Prodigal Summer*, nature does not function merely as a setting, since it has thematic inferences as well.

In this article, it is attempted to show that Kingsolver would recurrently highlight the significant role of nature in human beings' mental and transcendent growth, and how a respectable affiliation with nature assists them to get united to both the mystical and the societal domains. This issue has been also verified by Wagner-Martin and King Dunaway who state that:

A woman who loved the lush forests of her Kentucky childhood, the austere and crisp edged

desert of her years as a young professional in Arizona, and the remote environs of wildlife preserves, Kingsolver has lived a life more private than public. For all her established fame as a novelist, she prefers the quiet of a somewhat reclusive existence. (2004, p. 1)

In ecofeminism, it is asserted that women and nature are similarly manipulated by a prevalent masculine mentality; therefore, ecofeminism requires a thorough examination of this interrelated coercion. According to many ecofeminists, a masculine society uses and upholds its authority by imposing power arrangements. Consequently, ecofeminist critics struggle to abolish all the many existing dichotomies.

Nature is so important for Kingsolver that she openly relates *Animal Dreams* to the Harriet Beecher Stowe's practice of social integrity by depicting a new "parallel" to the social turmoil and moral quandaries of slavery in Stowe's time (Campbell, 2009, p. 17). Most of this American writer's novels revolve around female characters who seek to overcome the many glitches that women may go through.

Hence, benefitting from females as the leading characters, and ecological calamity as a main theme, *Animal Dreams* and *Prodigal Summer* portray people who are suffering from disastrous ecological contamination. By writing these novels, Kingsolver has confronted dichotomy and masculinity; in other words, she has intended to demand the essential affection for nature and women in order to cultivate coordination between nature and all individuals, no matter men or women.

Animal Dreams and *Prodigal Summer* both call attention to the fact that differentiation and male-centered communities are damaging both nature and women. As Richard Hofrichter has declared, ecological justice focuses on "social transformation directed toward meeting human need and enhancing the quality of life...using resources sustainably" (1993, p. 89-90). Its fundamental goal is hence to achieve "equal access to natural resources and the right to clean air and water, adequate health care, affordable shelter, and a safe workplace" (1993, p. 90). However, this sort of justice is not only about the environmental resources, but also the equality between all human beings.

The female protagonists in both novels are unquestionably under the influence of the environment they live in. The effect of a place on these characters and the role occupied by the male characters in this respect are actually the key subjects of discussion in this article. The implication of the place in one's life specifies that a place also inspires that person's actions. The feelings that one has towards a specific place automatically generate a sort of layer that includes reminiscences and meanings, thus enforcing itself as an "imaginative landmark" (Ryden, 1993, p. 40) on that particular person.

Animal Dreams

As specified by Warren and Cheney, ecology signifies a feminist topic by "identifying theoretical points of intersection between ecofeminism and ecosystem ecology" (1991, p. 179-80). Such an intersection is noticeable in every part of *Animal Dreams*. For instance, in the very beginning of the novel, when Codi as the main character arrives in Grace, we witness her concern and affection for the animals. According to the following excerpt from the novel, while going to her friend's house, she sees some boys who seem to be chasing a bird; at first, she decides not to interfere, but very soon she changes her mind and stops them from hurting it:

There was something up there at the edge of the orchard all right, a bunch of kids, and something in the trees over their heads --- Whatever it was they were chasing, they were going to get it... I dropped my bags and walked a little faster, trying to think of some commanding thing to say. If they didn't stop soon the thing would be maimed or dead.'Stop it!' I yelled. My heart was thumping. 'You're killing that bird!' (Kingsolver, 1990, p. 18-19)

Her attempts to save the poor bird imply her struggling to summon up her care for animals by recalling her reminiscences as a girl who used to be highly worried about the wellbeing of animals. This connection

between Codi and animals demonstrates the closeness between nature and women. Both are regarded to be inferior creatures that deserve to suffer by the robust and powerful male individuals. Based on what was before declared concerning the notion of dualism, both animals and women are the members of the right side in a binary opposition and are similarly presumed to be always at the service of men:

The categories “woman” and “animal” serve the same symbolic function in patriarchal society. Their construction as dominated, submissive “other” in theoretical discourse (whether explicitly so stated or implied) has sustained human male dominance. The role of women and animals in postindustrial society is to serve/be served up; women and animals are the used. (Gruen, 2018, p. 61)

This can be the reason why Codi is unable to see a poor bird suffer and cares about its safety so much. This scene in the book is in fact just one representative of Kingsolver’s call for culminating all kinds of subjugations, since like any ecofeminist, she is completely aware that if there is no effort to free nature, women will not achieve freedom either. The important role played by animals in this writer’s fiction is due to the fact that such ecofeminist authors as Kingsolver are to a certain degree required to stand for the animals’ rights, especially because the theoretical justification for women’s unverified submissiveness has its roots in relating them with animals (Birke et al., 1995, p. 10).

In many senses, Kingsolver resembles a romantic writer according to whom the nature should be regarded as an untainted and divine source of rebirth, the fact that has also been emphasized by Rosemary Ruether who was highly fond of the significance of nature in religious issues. In *Animal Dreams*, when Codi describes the canyon, she likens it to religion, signifying how inspirational and sacred it is for the inhabitants:

The canyon walls rose straight up on either side of us, ranging from sunset orange to deep rust, mottled with purple. The sandstone had been carved by ice ages and polished by desert eons of sandpaper winds. The place did not so much inspire religion as it seemed to be religion itself. (Kingslover, 2000, p. 183)

Ruether also believes that any environmental predicament has its roots in the lack of faith in the spirituality of the earth. She has claimed that the comfort of women is highly linked with the health of the earth and if women are hurt, the planet will be hurt as well. She assumes that nature and everything or everybody related to it are all manifestations of God and thus, they should be respected. Based on what is mentioned in *My Quests for Hope and Meaning*, Ruether would presume that much environmental extinction is done by human beings. As well, lots of unceasing ecological damage has happened owing to appalling religions which eventually bring about men’s superiority over women, animals, and all the natural resources) (2013, p. 26).

Hence, women and nature are similarly two important sources of productivity and fertility whose endurance is compulsory in order to guarantee the existence of the whole planet. Consequently, for the evolution and subsistence of human beings and all other non-human creatures, there should be a stable affiliation between nature and individuals. In *Animal Dreams*, the role of peacocks cannot be ignored either. There are lots of these beautiful birds in Grace. There is a story that they were brought as the Gracela sisters’ properties:

The nine blue-eyed Gracela sisters came over from Spain to marry nine lucky miners in the gold camp, sight unseen. Back then these hills were run through with gold veins and drew a crowd of men who had too much money and too little love. The sisters were just children, and only agreed to come if they could bring their birds with them in the hold of the ship. Their legacy in Gracela Canyon was a population of blue-eyed, dark-haired descendants and

a thousand wild peacocks. (Kingsolver, 1990, p. 16-17)

Now, they are closely linked with the ethos of Grace, and the female characters of the novel are all determined to benefit from them as an emblem to protect their birthplace because they see a relationship between themselves and these birds. In other words, women know that they are bottled-up mostly as the result of the Western patriarchal denial of the human-animal affiliation (French, 1985, p. 340). The durable bond between females and nature is also emphasized in other parts of the novel which verify Herman's attitude, according to which such a connection represents a step towards recovery in those who are suffering from trauma (1997, p. 155). For example, when describing Hallie, Codi incessantly makes use of natural elements like trees, animals, or fruits:

And somehow Hallie thrived anyway-the blossom of our family, like one of those miraculous fruit trees that tap into an invisible vein of nurture and bear radiant bushels of plums while the trees around it merely go on living. (Kingsolver, 1990, p. 46)

Kingsolver's female characters continuously defy political and societal inequalities and injustice. Hallie as Codi's sister is one of the main characters whose role in developing the ecofeminist themes of *Animal Dreams* must be considered seriously. In fact, Codi's description regarding her sister shows that their main difference was owing to Hallie's ecological concerns and attempts to save the nature, "I was getting a dim comprehension of the difference between Hallie and me. It wasn't a matter of courage or dreams, but something a whole lot simpler. A pilot would call it ground orientation. I'd spent a long time circling above the clouds, looking for life, while Hallie was living it" (Kingsolver, 1990, p. 197).

At the beginning of the novel, we are informed that she has left for Nicaragua in order to help local people develop their agriculture practices, "Hallie is the one who went south, with her pickup truck and her crop-disease books" (1990, p. 12); however, she is later killed by the Contras because of her faith and belief in what she is doing. In spite of having a very strong relationship with her older sister, Hallie cannot be so close to her father because she thinks that he did not let her or Codi interconnect properly with others in Grace.

According to Wagner-Martin and King Dunaway, writing each novel for Kingsolver would begin with asking a grave question. *Animal Dreams* is no exception and probes into a significant philosophical question: "what do the classifications *human* and *animal* mean?" In *Animal Dreams*, Kingsolver seems to be also fascinated by the question of how two sisters who are raised in one family could be this different. It is found that Hallie and Codi are in fact contraries due to their different ways to perceive and interrelate with their surrounding sphere (2004, p. 78), meaning that one's connection with nature is so important that it can even lead to specific kinds of characterization. Hallie was always closer to nature and this is why she was more soft-hearted and loved, especially when Codi says that, "every man I'd ever loved had loved Hallie best and settled for me" (1990, p.14).

The contrast between Codi and Emelina is another representation of how nature may influence one's life and happiness. Emelina is Codi's high-school friend whom she is planning to stay with after her arrival in Grace. Emelina is married and has five children, "Emelina's was a pleasant, ramshackle place with animals, an old plum orchard and five boys" (Kingsolver, 1990, p. 24). In spite of her humble life, Emeline has put all her attention on her family and on the land she resides. In fact, she is, like other people of her community, highly obsessed with protection of her hometown's natural resources.

Her five children also signify her productiveness in comparison with childlessness of Codi who is not even sure about her true plans for life. This distinction shows that the closer a woman is to the nature, the more abundant she and her life can be. However, this intimacy may vary from woman to woman. For example, when Emelina recalls some memories of Hallie, she says, "She used to get so pissed off at me because I wouldn't go along with the boycott of Abuelita's chicken and rice" (1990, p. 29).

The barrenness of Codi's life is even more highlighted when we find that she left medical school because

of inability to deliver a baby. She does not live a stable life and has to work at peculiar jobs. However, just as soon as she is able to pull through her past reminiscences, she can develop a close relationship with other people of the town, and encourage the womenfolk to fight against the destruction of the local river by Black Mountain Mining by saying:

Black Mountain Mining has been running sulfuric acid, which is a clear, corrosive, water-miscible acid, through their tailing piles to recover extra copper. It combines to make copper sulfate, which is also known as 'blue vitriol.' --- The EPA has tested it too, and they agree. But your trees knew all this way before we did. (Kingsolver, 1990, p. 152)

In *New Woman/New Earth*, Ruether maintains that "Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They must unite the demands of the women's movement with those of the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socioeconomic relations and the underlying values of this society" (1975, p. 204). As a result, an amalgamation of women and ecology is desirable in order for both to be saved, the unity that is achieved at the end in *Animal Dreams*.

Ecofeminism regards men as one main reason behind the oppression of women and nature. Men's role in *Animal Dreams* is also a central one. This issue is in agreement with d'Eaubonne's viewpoints against the role of men in the ecological calamities. This French scholar would assume that the most noticeable cause behind many current anguishes and approaching sorrows is patriarchy. Many natural resources are perishing and likewise, the population all over the world is incessantly increasing; these features will eventually result to the rapid development of patriarchal standards; thus, patriarchy is the direct outcome of the present-day ecological tragedies. So, the abolition of patriarchy and formation of a close relationship with the environment that is ultimately stable are tremendously compulsory so as to overcome these glitches (d'Eaubonne and Paisain, 1999, p. 179-180).

As the most significant male character, Doc Homer can be observed as the major cause why his daughters are so detached from their own community. This lack of connection makes both Codi and Hallie feel isolated from their own father as well, and this is why they leave him. However, as soon as realizing that he is suffering from Alzheimer's disease, Codi comes back in order to take care of her sick father. It is clearly noticed that unlike Hallie, Codi is extremely confused about her goals and where she truly belongs to.

Her return to Grace to look after Doc Homer saves her from confusion because she starts a close relationship with the town's inhabitants and develops a more outstanding goal which is protecting Grace from obliteration by a mining firm that is mostly managed by men; this firm implies the man's annihilation and exploitation of his surroundings, and how chemicals have damaged the natural world. In other words, these chemicals not only ruin the world, but also affect human beings extensively. Despite the fact that Carson has referred to them as "formless and obscure" (1994, p. 100), they still could have severe and terrifying effects on humankind; for instance, they could be able to arouse countless sorts of illnesses in different parts of the human body and eventually, lead to death.

However, not all the male characters consider themselves as superior to the nature. Loyd Peregrina as an Apache is a man whose passion for the environment has a noticeable effect on Codi. When Codi asks him what is worth for him to die for, he replies "the land" (1990, p. 122). This answer makes Codi more resolute to be engaged in the ecological movements since she is enthused by Loyd's perception of the nature, which is owing to his being raised as a Native American; hence, Loyd is deeply aware of how to prudently foster the land and spreads this awareness successfully.

The unbalanced relationship between nature and human beings is also emphasized in the novel when Mr. Rideheart says, "During the last century while men labored underground to rob the canyon of its wealth, the women up above had been paying it back in kind. They'd paid with embroidery and peacocks and fruit trees and piñatas and children" (Kingsolver, 1990, p. 239). This is why Codi's move from a city

to the more rural Grace not only resolves her inner conflict, but also provides her with the opportunity to express her viewpoints regarding the natural resources. The novel's female characters' preoccupation with nature is, according to *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, due to the reason that:

Women often play a primary role in community action because it is about things they know best. They also tend to use organizing strategies and methods that are the antithesis of those of the traditional environmental movement. Minority women in several urban areas [of the United States] have found themselves part of a new radical core of environmental activists, motivated by the irrationalities of capital-intensive growth. These individuals are responding not to "nature" in the abstract but to their homes and the health of their children. Women are more likely to take on these issues than men precisely because the home has been defined as a woman's domain. (Warren, 2000, p. 14)

What we notice in *Animal Dreams* is exactly in line with d'Eaubonne's demand for a revolt directed by women with the purpose of rescuing the earth, and also the claim that repression of women and nature has one source which is patriarchy. Just like d'Eaubonne, Kingsolver shows that an interwoven relegation of womankind and the planet has been at the root of both the ecological predicament and women's universal subjugation. In many ways, Codi resembles Kingsolver because just the same as Codi, Kingsolver has been always eager "to change the world," which is also one of the incentives behind her fiction (Epstein, 1996, p. 12). Hence, it is not surprising why Wenz thinks of Kingsolver's novels similar to Aldo Leopold's fiction which refers to the "Land Ethic by showing how it might guide" human beings presently (2003, p. 106).

2.2 Prodigal Summer

Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer* is another example of this American writer's ecological and feminism concerns. Regarding this issue, Wagner-Martin writes in *Barbara Kingsolver's World*, "By focusing on only the human characters of *Prodigal Summer*, as readers and critics have tended to do, they ignore Kingsolver's own directive that the novel is 'not exclusively—or even mainly—about humans'" (2014, p.126).

Deanna Wolfe as one of the main characters is a 47-year-old ranger and biologist at Zebulon National Forest. She also looks after such animals as coyotes in the region, and is very fervent about nature. Another central character is Lusa Landowski who lives on a farm. The young Lusa who has just lost her husband, Cole Widener in an accident does not know exactly whether to continue her life on the farm or to go back to the city. Finally, she decides to stay on the farm, and grow tobacco or nurture goats. The other chief female character in the novel is Nannie Rawley. Nannie is incessantly arguing with her neighbor, Garnett Walker as a chemical sprinkler. As viewed, each of these three women challenges hard in order to protect the nature.

Unlike her boyfriend, Deanna loves coyotes and is completely aware of the abhorrence of western planters toward these animals. She considers killing coyotes and insecticide spraying similar to interrupting the balance in the nature due to extinction of rabbits or insects. In some cases, Deanna believes that the farmers who would slay a coyote do not even know how to say its name (Kingsolver, 2000, p. 36). The affection that Deanna has for coyotes is due to the reason that both of them are considered as the "other" and are present in a man's life to be abused. This can be clearly noticed in many instances throughout history. Since the beginning of mankind, men have been assumed to be superior to animals and consequently, they are responsible for killing many of them.

Hunting was regarded as a significant and essential part of life since it empowered human beings to feed their family. A hunter was accordingly considered as a fundamental supplier of society and a savior of culture. Women were seldom able to join this activity owing to their physical capabilities. They were bodily feebler and had a procreative role. So, women's role stands in contrast to the imperative role held by men and were often regarded as being "naturally inferior" (Gaard, 1993, p. 62). Their powerlessness to take part in such occasions would make them analogous to the animals that were hunted. In other words, both of

them were oppressed in order to serve the male.

The attitude of such men as Eddie or some male farmers towards coyotes signifies that the animals' feeling are largely neglected and totally forgotten by them since the most important thing for them is in fact their own benefits. On the other hand, such women as Deanna identify with these animals because both are considered to be pathetic beings that deserve to agonize under the robust and powerful male hands. Warren's *Ecofeminist Philosophy* refers to this issue:

Women are described in animal terms as pets, cows, sows, foxes, chicks, serpents, bitches, beavers, old bats, old hens, mother hens, pussycats, cats, cheetahs, bird-brains, and hare-brains . . . 'Mother Nature' is raped, mastered, conquered, mined; her secrets are 'penetrated,' her 'womb' is to be put into the service of the 'man of science.' Virgin timber is felled, cut down; fertile soil is tilled, and land that lies 'fallow' is 'barren,' useless. The exploitation of nature and animals is justified by feminizing them; the exploitation of women is justified by naturalizing them. (2000, p. 37)

And so, Deanna's concern for coyotes leads to the inference that Kingsolver has used her female characters as a means to struggle against the old beliefs regarding the oppressed role of females and nature. For instance, Nannie warns that, "Time doesn't change; ideas change" (2000, p. 276). Deanna also says that human beings and especially men are habituated to see that "we're the top of our food chain" (2000, p. 331).

The outcome of this selfish sort of thought is that human beings destroy anything in their way, including coyotes and overlook the fact that "the early human settlers migrating into this region had loved them and promptly killed them" (2000, p. 66). As "people act so hateful to every kind but their own" (2000, p.182), they establish an antagonistic association with nature and their own surrounding environments. Such a hateful bond can be noticed in the relationship between Garnett and the nature. Garnett degrades any esteem for nature and by doing so, he derides Nannie's point of view of modern farming as being "absurd" (2000, p.226):

'Dear Miss Rawley,' he scrawled, I am weary of your grabbing every opportunity as a pulpit for your absurd views on modern agriculture!! If you can prove to me your so-called Voltaire principal, i.e. spraying pesticide is good for the health of insects, then by all means I will drink a quart of malathion, pronto!! (Kingsolver, 2000, p. 226)

As perceived, Garnett's standpoint validates d'Eaubonne statement that men are oppressing women and the earth. Also, d'Eaubonne's standing against the belief regarding the role of women in the environmental calamities is just due to the part played by such men in extermination of natural resources. Nannie believes that a balanced relationship between nature and human beings is essential but Garnett does not think so and insists on continuing chemical spraying as the greatest method to destroy pests. Nannie, conversely, specifies that the chemicals will destroy not only the pests, but also their killers and pests "reproduce fast. . . . Predator bugs don't produce so fast, as a rule. But see, that works out right in nature because one predator eats a world of pest bugs in its life. The plant eaters have to go faster just to hold their ground. They're in balance with each other" (1999, p. 285).

What Nannie means is that such people as Garnett are just eradicating this balance. As a matter of fact, men's attitude toward nature and women makes them believe that they are superior; still, nature and women must be regarded as the foundation of human life as without them, there will not be any life. The way Garnett treats Nannie and the nature discloses the reason why Kingsolver and other ecofeminists repeatedly try to associate the exploitation of the nature with women's subjugation.

Lusa is also like Deanna and Nannie because she is correctly defensive of the nature and knows

that sharing it will provide the men with the opportunity to make the most of the nature and animals for their own interests (Hawkins, 2015, p. 44). However, Lusa's obsession with protecting the nature may be, according to her husband, the result of not really knowing the nature and the needs of people close to it. For example, Lusa and Cole once had a dispute over the requirements and worries of farmers and ecologists regarding the bees' invasion. Cole criticized Lusa due to her coming from a city.

Cole meant that such a city girl could not notice the actual glitches that nature would have for people in the countryside. This criticism shows how detached he, as a man, was from the nature. Moreover, along with other male characters of the novel, Cole is attached to industrial methods of farming; this is why he believed no motions should be involved while dealing with nature. However, after his death, Lusa, who is a researcher and receives the family farm, decides to be a farmer. Unlike her husband who was disconnected from the nature despite living close to it, Lusa is determined not to let go of the farm and return to the city. In fact, she has been feeling a strong connection between herself and the nature since marriage (Kingsolver, 2000, p. 38).

Not only Lusa, but also Deanna and Nannie have been constantly undergoing an improper status in their patriarchal society due to their relevance to nature. They want to be behaved as entirely human beings and as important members of culture just like their male counterparts. That is why they challenge the idea of nature as submissive, unreceptive, and unfeeling.

According to Magee Deanna, Lusa, and Nannie epitomize various stages of nature. Deanna symbolizes the embryonic, motherly, and primitive "earth-goddess," while Nannie who is older signifies "natural folk wisdom." Lusa is also an up-to-date, sophisticated woman who benefits from her acumen and willpower in order to be a more environmentally sensitive farmer compared with any of the surrounding male farmers (2008, p. 18). What Kingsolver has portrayed in *Prodigal Summer* represents the dream of these women in which they are living peaceably with themselves and with the nature:

This is a land where there is no hierarchy, among humans or between humans and animals, where people care for one another and for nature, where the earth and the forest retain their mystery, power and wholeness, where the power of technology and of military and economic force does not rule the earth, or at least that part of it controlled by women. (Plumwood, 2002, p. 18)

Such a dream is somehow impossible to come true because nature and women are extensively oppressed, and enduring against the aggressive world of men with all their authority and omnipotence is demanding. However, writers like Kingsolver have done their best by attributing constructive implication to the association between women and nature which was formerly assessed adversely and which was the chief foundation of women's deflation and repression.

Deanna whose passion for coyotes was discussed already is the daughter of a farmer. She has been so close to the nature that she even knows very well when it is going to be rainy. When Eddie asks her how she knows about rain, she thinks, "How? About six different ways: first, a wind just strong enough to make the leaves show their white undersides" (Kingsolver, 2000, p. 98). But she decides not to tell him; instead, she just says, "I don't know," and thinks to herself "This might be the one man she'd met since her father died who would be interested to hear all six" (2000, p. 98). Such a close relationship can be seen in other female characters' association with their surrounding nature as well; it is hence concluded that the unity between the female characters and the nature justifies Reuther's recollecting the figurative and the communal connection between the coercion of nature and that of women as Elizabeth Gould Davis (1971) asserts:

Woman ... is the ally of nature, and her instinct is to tend, to nurture, to encourage healthy growth, and to preserve ecological balance. She is the natural leader of society and of civilization, and the usurpation of her primeval authority by man has resulted in uncoordinated chaos. (p. 336)

Conclusion

Animal Dreams and *Prodigal Summer* celebrate the marriage of woman and nature. This article presented an ecofeminist analysis of Kingsolver's *Animal Dreams* and *Prodigal Summer*. It was argued that both the mentioned novels revolve around the fact that distinction and patriarchal communities are seriously hurtful to nature and women. The extent to which the characters were connected to their surroundings was investigated and followed by an examination of men's relationships with women and nature through the eyes of Francoise d'Eaubonne, Rosemary Ruether, and Karen Warren. It can be concluded that what Kingsolver has been always trying to portray in her fiction is meant to make grave improvements in the world. As she has also pointed out, by demonstrating a number of characters' plights and elations, she seeks to stimulate optimism and make her readers look at life from a different perspective. It seems as if her desire for the characters to appreciate others and attain individual development has come true through a sense of association between "earth, people, animals, past and present"

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Acknowledgments: I am grateful to the faculty members of English Department at Shiraz University for their endless teaching efforts during my study. I also would like to acknowledge and give my warmest thanks and gratitude to my supervisor Associate professor Samira Sasani who made this study possible. Her guidance and advice carried me through all the stages of writing my article.

Conflicts of Interest:

We declare no conflict of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript, or in the decision to publish the results.

Disclaimer Statement: This article is part of a Ph.D. dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Shiraz University, Iran, for PH.D. Degree requirement under the supervision of Associate Professor Samira Sasani.

Biographies:

My name is Ridha'a Ali J. I am a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Foreign Languages and linguistics, School of Literature and Humanities, Shiraz University, Iran. I have eight years of experience when it comes to research, University teaching, and everything allied to writing. My interests comprise reading, writing, and doing researches. Doing so, it gives me great inclination to assemble caring guides for societies who have wondered.

Authorship and Level of Contribution:

This article is written under the guidance and supervision of associate professor Samira Sasani. Her guidance, comments and efforts make this study possible.

References

- Birke, L., Dunayer, J., & Kheel, M. (1995). *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*. Duke: Duke University.
- Campbell, A. (2009). *New Directions in Ecofeminist Literary Criticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars.
- Carson, R. (1994). *Silent Spring*. Routledge: Routledge.
- Davis, E. G. (1971). *The First Sex*. P. New York: Putman and Sons.
- d'Eaubonne, Françoise, and Jacob Paisain. (1999). "What Could an Ecofeminist Society Be?." *Ethics and the Environment*, 4(2), 179-184.
- Epstein, R. (1996). "An Interview with Barbara Kingsolver." *Progressive*, 12(9), 1-12.
- French, M. (1985). *Beyond Power*. New York: Summit.
- Gaard, G. (1993). *Ecofeminism*. Philadelphia: Temple University.
- Glotfelty, C., & Harold, F., (1996). *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Georgia: University of Georgia.
- Gruen, L. (2018). "Dismantling Oppression: An Analysis of the Connection between Women and Animals." *Living with Contradictions*, edited by Alison M. Jaggard, Routledge, 537-548.
- Hawkins, Brendan. (2015). "Charged with Resistance": *An Ecocritical Reading of Barbara Kingsolver's Prodigal Summer and Flight Behavior*. Diss. NC Docks.
- Herman, J. L. (1997). *Trauma and Recovery*. New York: Basic.
- Hofrichter, R. (1993). "Cultural Activism and Environmental Justice." *Hofrichter et al*, 85-95.
- Jones, S. W. (2006). "The Southern Family Farm as Endangered Species: Possibilities for Survival in Barbara Kingsolver's Prodigal Summer." *The Southern Literary Journal*, 39(1), 83-97.
- Kingsolver, B. (1990). *Animal Dreams*. London: Abacus.
- . (2000). *Prodigal Summer*. London: Faber and Faber.
- . (2002). *Last Stand: America's Virgin Lands*. Washington: National Geographic Society.
- . (2011). *Small Wonder*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Mack-Canty, C. (2004). "Third-Wave Feminism and the Need to Reweave the Nature/Culture Duality." *NWSA journal*, 154-179.
- Magee, R. M. (2008). "The Aridity of Grace: Community and Ecofeminism in Barbara Kingsolver's Animal Dreams and Prodigal Summer." *New Directions in Ecofeminist Literary Criticism*, edited by Andrea Campbell, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 15-26.
- Plumwood, V. (2002) *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. Routledge: Routledge.
- Ruether, R. R. (1975) *New Woman/New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*. New York: Seabury.
- . (2013). *My Quests for Hope and Meaning: An Autobiography*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock. Print.
- Ryden, K. C. (1993). *Mapping the Invisible Landscape: Folklore, Writing, and the Sense of Place*. Iowa: University of Iowa.
- Swartz, P. C. (1993). "Saving Grace": Political and Environmental Issues and the Role of Connections in Barbara Kingsolver's "Animal Dreams." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 1(1), 65-79.
- Vakoch, D. A., & Sam, M., (2018). *Literature and Ecofeminism: Intersectional and International Voices*. Routledge: Routledge.
- Wagner-Martin, L. (2014). *Barbara Kingsolver's World: Nature, Art, and the Twenty-First Century*. Bloomsbury: Bloomsbury.
- David, K. D. (2004). *Barbara Kingsolver*. New York: Infobase Learning.
- Warren, K. J. (2000). *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Jim, C. (1991). "Ecofeminism and Ecosystem Ecology." *Hypatia*, 6(1), 179-97.
- Wenz, P. S. (2003). "Leopold's Novel: The Land Ethic in Barbara Kingsolver's Prodigal Summer." *Ethics and the Environment*, 8(2), 106-125.