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Wilma Dykeman: Wellspring of Ecofeminism in the Appalachian South

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WILMA DYKEMAN: WELLSPRING OF ECOFEMINISM IN THE
APPALACHIAN SOUTH

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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This ecofeminist study champions Wilma Dykeman as an important early twentieth-century voice for feminism, environmental responsibility, and civil rights, at the same time that it questions the traditional marginalization of regional literature. I begin by placing Dykeman's work in context with that of other writers, providing biographical details as needed for contextualizing her thematic concerns. The focus then shifts to Dykeman's texts and examines her treatment of women's issues, environmental concerns, and social issues of race, class, and socioeconomic status. I assert that, although the school of ecofeminism had not fully come into its own during Dykeman's lifetime, her work—examined in a context of current ecofeminist scholarship and placed in a context of better-known writers—promotes values important to feminism, environmentalism, and social activism. While Dykeman's concerns may be focused on the southern Appalachian region, they bear wide-ranging relevance and set the stage for writers who would follow her.

I concentrate in this study on her novels *The Tall Woman* (1962), *The Far Family* (1966), and *Return the Innocent Earth* (1973), along with her two collections of newspaper columns, *Explorations* (1984) and *Look to This Day* (1968), her first published book *The French Broad* (1955), and her seminal book of collected interviews, *Neither Black Nor White* (1957), co-authored with James R. Stokely, Jr.

I come to the conclusion that Dykeman's prolific writing came from an intense sense of place as well as a concern for human values and issues, and the ideological, socio-political, hermeneutical, and aesthetic importance of her fiction and non-fiction provides a model for social and ecological responsibility. Dykeman's work has been under-appreciated and deserves wider recognition, especially in light of the fact that she tackled environmental issues well ahead of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), faced difficult race issues before the 1960 sit-ins, and published a feminist novel a year before Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). This study is especially timely, given the current burgeoning interest among scholars in ecocriticism and place studies.

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PREFACE

My first introduction to Wilma Dykeman came through an obscure reference in the *Mossy Creek Reader*, a literary publication issued periodically by Jeff Daniel Marion, then a professor in the English Department of Carson-Newman College in nearby Jefferson City, Tennessee. In 2000-2001, as I was researching Mildred Haun, the subject of my Master's thesis, my research took me to the Special Collections Library at Vanderbilt University. Laboriously sorting through Haun's letters and miscellanea, I had no idea that Marion and his students had in 1993 put together an entire issue of the *Mossy Creek Reader* devoted to Haun. Thanks to a diligent librarian who pulled from the archives a copy of that publication, I perused previously unpublished stories by Haun as well as photographs and critical essays. Included in the *Mossy Creek Reader* was a 1941 letter written to Haun by James R. Stokely, Jr., husband of Wilma Dykeman.

Upon further investigation, I learned that both Dykeman and Stokely appreciated Haun's work and that Haun had, in fact, given them a copy of *The Hawk's Done Gone* as a wedding gift in 1940. Although Stokely was deceased, his widow was alive and well in nearby Cocke County, Tennessee, one of the two East Tennessee counties Haun claimed as home. I telephoned Ms. Dykeman, introduced myself, and stated my interest in Haun and especially their friendship with her and any information that Dykeman might be able to impart in answer to several questions I had. Graciously, Ms. Dykeman acknowledged that she and James considered Haun's work to be significant and well-written, and she answered my questions and volunteered additional information. Much to my surprise and delight, I received in

the mail several days later a yellowed newspaper clipping from Ms. Dykeman, a 1941 editorial from the *Newport Plain Talk*, written by one Mrs. Ruth O'Dell, in which she lambasted Mildred Haun for painting the residents of their county in such a negative light, fictional or not, proof that I needed to show that Haun was not well received at home.

We subsequently corresponded, and my reading led me to Dykeman's fiction and nonfiction. A couple of years later, I had the opportunity to hear her read at a Knoxville bookstore. Afterwards, she was signing her books and greeting each of us, and upon learning that I was that graduate student she had once assisted with research on Mildred Haun, Ms. Dykeman had me sit down beside her, and she then began to ask me questions, one of which was "What are you writing?" I had to admit that I wasn't writing much, I was teaching composition, and that left little time for anything else, and her face became stern, her eyes boring deep into my own. She took my hand, patted it twice for emphasis, leaned toward me, and commanded, "*Write.*"

I have never forgotten her kindness and her philanthropy, to me personally, to her community, and to the world of writers and intellectuals with whom she had contact. I saw that her writing was special, not only to me, but to others who were familiar with it. My young Appalachian Literature students always find *The Tall Woman* (1962) to be a favorite. In considering all her literary contributions as well as her influence as a speaker and educator, I thought that while most Appalachian scholars know Wilma Dykeman rather well in East Tennessee and Western North Carolina, she is virtually unknown beyond southern Appalachia. I realized that not only should this important and talented writer receive greater recognition, but she

should also be acknowledged as someone whose significance as an advocate for resolving women's issues, environmental concerns, race relations, and class issues also must not be ignored. While driving across the beautiful French Broad River, the subject of Dykeman's first book, I decided that I would make that my task.

Although several articles have been written about Wilma Dykeman, only one dissertation has been discovered. Patricia Miller Gantt's "'Appalachia in Context': Wilma Dykeman's Search for the Souths [*sic*]" (1992) provides an examination of Dykeman's literary and historical presentation of the South as a complex cultural and ideological entity, touching on her inherent feminism and early advocacy of social and environmental issues, but emphasizing the historical and fictional representation of the Appalachian South in context with the larger division of Southern Literature, but with little emphasis on the Appalachian southern region in itself. Since Gantt's dissertation, little critical analysis has emerged on Dykeman's fiction and nonfiction, and with the exception of Elizabeth S. D. Englehardt, whose work in ecofeminism I have covered in this dissertation, scholars have overlooked Dykeman as a writer who could, and should, be viewed through an ecofeminist lens.

Throughout my thematically arranged ecofeminist study, I also interweave biographical details and contextual references that lead to an increased understanding and appreciation for Dykeman's contributions. Throughout her long life, she wrote prolifically, gave countless speeches, worked for improvements in the Appalachian South and beyond in conjunction with educational institutions and boards, and her legacy continues. As citizens of the United States and, indeed, the world, become more keenly aware of environmental concerns and social issues, her work is as timely

and important in the twenty-first century as it was when she first began writing in the mid-twentieth century.

In Chapter One, my introduction, I establish Wilma Dykeman's importance in her roles of author, speaker, historian, educator, and environmentalist, noting her early contributions to issues regarding women, the environment, race, and class. Some of these issues might include women's roles, opportunities available to women, women's speech patterns, and stereotypes of mountain women. Environmental issues might relate to the symbiotic relationship between the natural world and its human inhabitants, the role of individual and corporate greed with regard to environmental responsibility, and long-term loss versus short-term gain. Racial issues may be related to the heretofore under-recognized presence of African Americans in the Appalachian South, the presence of the mixed race of individuals known as Melungeons, and the treatment of Native Americans. Class issues affect women, the neglect of the environment, the racial Other, and families near or below the poverty level. Biographical details appear within this chapter as they are crucial in fully understanding her earliest connection to the land and residents of the Appalachian South. Her earliest education sensitized her to the natural world, and her foundation prepared her well for the partnership she would establish with her husband, James Stokely. This chapter situates Dykeman within a framework of ecofeminism and other women Appalachian writers as well as within the realm of regional writing as it relates to the larger body of literature. The chapter previews Dykeman's significant books that will be covered in more detail in the chapters that follow, and it notes Dykeman's place among other writers such as Harriette Arnow, Edward Abbey,

Wendell Berry, Leslie Marmon Silko, Liam O’Flaherty, Annie Dillard, Barbara Kingsolver, Mary Noailles Murfree, Emma Bell Miles, James Still, Rachel Carson, Lee Smith, and Silas House. This chapter also examines the marginalization of Appalachia as a region and the codification that occurred through the work of a number of historians and novelists.

Chapter Two incorporates Dykeman’s strong connection to the land, from her earliest years, to her advocacy of environmental responsibility. Although that theme occurs in several of her books, *The French Broad* (1955), her first book, provides the most direct conversation of environmental respect and responsibility. Nestled within the volume, commissioned as a part of the Rivers of America series, Dykeman situates her chapter, “Who Killed the French Broad?,” smack in the middle of other chapters filled with anecdotal character sketches, descriptive passages extolling the beauty of the river, land, and surrounding mountains. Unlike the other chapters, “Who Killed the French Broad?” describes the abuse and pollution heaped upon the river, its consequences to the land and people, and issues a plea for change. Dykeman’s strong sense of accountability enabled her to resist her publisher’s urgings to eliminate the chapter because he felt her readers would find the subject of water pollution too unpleasant. She insisted on including it, and that chapter received more praise than any of the others, calling attention to the serious problem of irresponsible corporate pollution. While pointing out problems, Dykeman was also quick to suggest the potential. She always provided hope, as long as positive change occurred. She used the same techniques that Rachel Carson would use in her 1962 *Silent Spring*, techniques described by Fred Waage as “emotionally compelling”

(134). She, along with other environmentalists, discovered that a singularly scientific approach was less effective than a humanistic approach. *The French Broad* began Dykeman's continuing theme of the close connection between the land and its people. In light of her accomplishments as an environmental writer, Dykeman is in the company of Rachel Carson, John Muir, Mabel Osgood Wright, Theodore Roosevelt, Aldo Leopold, and Edward Abbey. Within chapter two, some consideration is also given to Dykeman's environmental concerns in her two collections of newspaper columns, *Look to This Day* (1968) and *Explorations* (1984), as well as *The Tall Woman* (1962) and *Return the Innocent Earth* (1973).

Chapter Three applies an ecocritical lens to Dykeman's approach to the issue of racism, primarily through *Neither Black Nor White* (1957), co-authored with James Stokely. Some treatment is provided with regard to the connection between feminism and social concerns, including racial issues, as well as its close connection with ecocriticism. She continues her theme of the connection between human beings and the natural world, and *Neither Black Nor White* is unique and important because the authors collected varying views through interviewing numerous people throughout the south, black and white, those in favor of segregation and those in favor of desegregation. The lack of editorial comment is an honest attempt to let the South, with all its voices, speak for itself. The book was published before the sit-ins and demonstrations of the 1960s and ahead of Dr. King's books and the March on Washington. The book dispels the myth of a solid, monolithic South, and points ahead to Dykeman's fictional treatment of race issues in *The Tall Woman*, *Return the Innocent Earth*, and *The Far Family* (1966).

Chapter Four covers the treatment of women's issues throughout Dykeman's body of work. Without claiming herself to be a feminist, Dykeman clearly projects her objections to discrimination against women, and she builds female protagonists who are strong and active change agents in their families and communities. These traits are seen most clearly in *The Tall Woman* and *The Far Family*. She recognized that women have historically been "unknown" and "unnamed," and she brings her women characters to the forefront and establishes their strength and importance. Dykeman stands with contemporary Irish poet Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill and American writer Joyce Carol Oates in a desire to be seen as simply "writer," instead of "woman writer." One need not embrace the title of "feminist" in order to encourage fair treatment and recognition of women. Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse make a very similar argument with regard to "regional writing" and its unfair marginalization. In her adamant refusal to embrace labels such as "woman writer" or "regional writer," Dykeman took a stand against the widely accepted practice of labeling the less powerful of any given dichotomy. For example, the "default" writer is "male writer." Rarely, if ever, are male writers labeled as anything other than "writer." The terms "man writer" or "male writer" are never applied. Likewise, the tendency to label "regional" literature in such a way is to lessen its impact as simply "literature" or even "American literature." In those ways, labels can, in fact, limit one's influence and impact. Similarly, the flatland South is never designated as such but is merely the South. Only the Appalachian, or mountain, South has such restrictive labeling applied to it.

In both novels, Dykeman juxtaposes her concern with fair treatment of women with the appreciation of the land and its water and the far-reaching consequences of irresponsible use. This chapter also briefly touches on Dykeman's 1974 *Too Many People, Too Little Love*, a little-known biography of Edna Rankin McKinnon, a pioneer for family planning and birth control, in terms of her impact upon women as well as McKinnon's courage in the face of opposition.

Chapter Five brings together all of Dykeman's concerns with women's issues, racial equality, environmental responsibility, and widens them to include the effects of corporate greed on the lower levels of labor. *Return the Innocent Earth* (1973), the least popular of her novels, provides the clearest argument, with management consisting of individuals who are complex and often conflicted between profit and fair treatment of workers. The linkage between the ecology and the people continues in this book, as well, and the short-sightedness of those at the top of the corporation whose goal is profit at any cost is clearly pointed out. It is a novel of choices, and Dykeman claimed it as her favorite, containing all the issues about which she cared most. How disappointed she must have been to discover that *Return the Innocent Earth* did not initially receive the popular and critical acclaim enjoyed by her earlier books. Following Carson's absolutely ground-breaking *Silent Spring*, *Return the Innocent Earth* had its place in the environmental movement's idealism and utopianism, and building on the recognition that challenged economic progress regardless of cost. The establishment of the first Earth Day in 1970, with advocates who in like manner to Dykeman, recognized an environmentalism that was based on quality of life. Greta Gaard's *The Nature of Home: Taking Root in a Place* explores

the convergence of feminism, ecology, and social justice, noting the interrelationships, a concept recognized by Wilma Dykeman in her fiction and nonfiction.

My conclusion is both projective and retrospective, examining her body of work as a whole, in combination with her contributions as a speaker, teacher, historian, and philanthropist, placing her in context with those writers who preceded and followed her. Further work is needed to promote knowledge of and appreciation for the life and work of Wilma Dykeman. An extensive biography would be useful, as would articles in *ISLE* and other environmental publications. Additionally, an updated edition of her poetry, newspaper columns, articles, and local and global application of her treatment of issues concerning the environment, women, social equality, and marginalized groups and regions would be useful. Any unfinished manuscripts in her personal collection would be excellent material for light editing and subsequent publication.

Such a project as mine would be impossible without the assistance of others. At Indiana University of Pennsylvania, first and foremost, I must thank Dr. James M. Cahalan for his patience in guiding, directing, and suggesting improvements throughout the development of this study. He has always maintained a high standard, unapologetically insisting on thorough scholarship and a clear focus. He has been both friend and mentor, sharing without reservation his own interest and enthusiasm for all things Appalachian. Dr. Lingyan Yang and Dr. David B. Downing have been valuable readers of the dissertation, offering their unique perspectives and enhancing the project. Dr. Karen Dandurand began this journey with us, but, sadly, she lost her

battle with cancer, and so she is not, in the end, able to be with us to celebrate the completion of this dissertation. For her kindness and diligence during the first part of this project, however, I wish to dedicate this work to her. She will not be forgotten.

Along the way, I met both of Wilma Dykeman's sons, Dykeman Cole Stokely and James Rorex Stokely, III (hereafter referred to as Jim Stokely), as well as Jim's wife, Anne. No one could have asked for a more gracious welcome into the family fold. Both sons have been forthcoming with any information I requested, and each has volunteered additional leads, articles, and material that have enhanced this study. I have spoken with them in person numerous times, and we have continued a vigorous email correspondence. Dykeman Stokely gave me a tour of the Newport, Tennessee, property, including the library, which is off limits to most visitors. He also took me to visit the Stokely family graves, and Jim welcomed me to the Asheville, North Carolina, childhood home of Wilma Dykeman, where I had the unique experience of standing in her old bedroom, window open, and listening to the music of Beaverdam Creek, music that had been the background of her life and writings. Jim also directed me to the church graveyard where his mother and her parents are laid to rest.

At the University of North Carolina at Asheville, a special thank-you goes to the staff of the D. H. Ramsey Special Collections library for allowing me access to the Wilma Dykeman collection. The R. Jack Fishman Library staff members of Walters State Community College have also been extremely helpful in assisting me in obtaining articles and texts relevant to this project. Dr. James E. Crawford, Dean of Humanities at Walters State, has been instrumental and unwavering in his

encouragement and support, as have my colleagues in the English department and Humanities Division. I am especially grateful for the encouragement and feedback that I received from Carla Todaro, Erika Stevens, Sherri Jacobs, Samantha Isasi, Laura Ritter, Sarah Eichelman, and Lori McCallister. It truly does take a whole village to catch the typos and to figure out the pagination! My mentor from the University of Tennessee, Dr. Allison Ensor, has been a friend and advisor, and his role as my Master's thesis director prepared me well for my doctoral journey.

Many friends along the way have also provided me with encouragement, humor, distraction and recreation when I needed it, as well as keeping me focused on the goal when I was in danger of losing my way. Katie Hoffman and I have taken many steps together from our earliest graduate classes at the University of Tennessee. Linda Scott DeRosier must be recognized for showing me a way to keep my creative writing alive, while keeping in sight the academic task at hand. The Hindman Settlement School Appalachian Writers Workshop put me in touch with many other kindred souls, both living and dead. At the forks of Troublesome Creek, the spirit of James Still murmured in my ear, much as Wilma Dykeman had done, "*Write.*" Mike Mullins, longtime director of Hindman, is another friend and mentor whose death occurred during the writing of this dissertation. Gurney Norman, Jeff Daniel Marion, Robert Morgan, Lee Smith, and Loyal Jones have also been instrumental in sharing anecdotes and insight on Wilma Dykeman, urging me on in my scholarship.

Last but certainly not least, I must thank my entire family, beginning with my parents, Victor and Ruth Wisenbaker Dasher, who would have been so proud to see this educational journey come to fruition, my sister Ollie Dasher McLeod, my brother

Charles Dasher, and my sister-in-law Linda Casper Dasher, who offered their unwavering support all along the way. I must especially express my gratitude to my husband, Bill, who shared my enthusiasm for delving deeper into the life and scholarship of Wilma Dykeman as the two of us drove over the beautiful French Broad River together one balmy spring day. I would like to thank our two grown children Ben and Becky; our grandchildren Emma, Ella, Will, Jake, and Henry; our beloved children-in-law Shawna and Anthony, all of whom give me a reason to live, and to whom I bequeath any literary legacy and love of learning that I might have uncovered along the way. What a joy to have you all in my life!

My great desire is that we might all share Wilma Dykeman's vision for a world in which all individuals, regardless of gender, race, economic status, or social standing, are treated with equality and fairness, and a world in which we recognize the supreme importance of responsible care of its natural resources, appreciating every minute of every day the beauty that surrounds us. Embracing her practical idealism would serve us all well.

CHAPTER ONE

WATER COMING DOWN: INTRODUCTION TO WILMA DYKEMAN'S
LIFE AND WORK

Celebrated in southern Appalachia as an author, speaker, historian, educator, and environmentalist, native North Carolinian Wilma Dykeman (1920-2006) left a legacy that must not be ignored. Her body of work consists of over twenty books of fiction and nonfiction, articles and short stories, and a sprinkling of poetry. In the broader tradition of writers such as Harriette Arnow, Edward Abbey, Wendell Berry, Leslie Marmon Silko, Liam O'Flaherty, Annie Dillard, Barbara Kingsolver, and others, Dykeman's fiction, nonfiction, and poetry address concerns of place with all its connotations as well as its relationship to those who dwell in those specific places. Her writing and, indeed, her life issued a clarion call for environmental responsibility and recognition of the social issues that cry for attention within the mountain culture of East Tennessee and western North Carolina, concerns that are specific to the region yet, at the same time, relevant to the global community.

Born near Asheville, North Carolina, and living most of her adult life in split residency between Asheville and Newport, Tennessee, Dykeman wrote fiction and nonfiction that are grounded in particular places, and her contributions are worthy of increased recognition. Hers was one of the earliest voices calling for environmental and social responsibility—concerns that are specific to the Appalachian region, yet widely relevant. Her ideas were ahead of their time in terms of their cohesiveness with the definition of ecological feminism, as articulated by Elizabeth S. D.

Engelhardt: “humans are not conceived of as separate from and superior to the world around them [but rather] are part of the total ecology” (3). Long before ecofeminism came into its own, Dykeman promoted these tenets. She claimed that all her writing came from an “intense sense of place . . . and concern for human values and issues” (qtd. in “Wilma Dykeman”).

Hailed throughout her lifetime as an author, speaker, historian, educator, and environmentalist, Wilma Dykeman was born on May 20, 1920, in Asheville, the only child of Bonnie Cole Dykeman and Willard J. Dykeman. Dykeman’s father, a New York native, brought to the family a perspective beyond the southern Appalachian mountains, and he was nearly a generation older than his wife, a fact that also broadened Dykeman’s familial experience. Bonnie Cole’s family’s acceptance of Willard Dykeman’s age, geographical and cultural roots, and previous marriage further illustrates that during this conservative period of American history in Appalachia, the Cole family was more open-minded than other residents of the southern Appalachians.

According to Dykeman, her parents’ love of literature shaped her early life. She recalled spending hours with her parents as they read aloud together. The readings were seasoned with lively commentary, and Dykeman reported that rather than reading to put their child to sleep, her parents “read to each other so that they could be more awake every day” (“Rooted Heart” 8). The nature of these family reading sessions consisted of poetry, biography, and the writings of Thoreau and Twain, all interests that would later show up in Dykeman’s own writing. Dykeman would publish short stories and poetry during her college years and would continue

the publishing tradition throughout her adult life. The lively family intellect likely influenced Dykeman's varied interests. As a child, she did not understand all the words she heard her parents reading, but she understood that her parents' attitude meant that "books were important" (8). She would later claim to have been influenced by such writers as John Galsworthy and Nikolai V. Gogol. Graduating at the top of her high school class, Dykeman entered Biltmore Junior College (now the University of North Carolina at Asheville) and later transferred to Northwestern University, where she graduated with a degree in Speech in 1940. Even her choice in colleges sets Wilma Dykeman apart from other young women growing up in the south, and she was quick to give credit to her ever-supportive mother. She reflects on her decision, so remarkable for that time and place:

[My mother] encouraged me when I told her that I wanted to go to Northwestern University. That was a big decision, a major choice, a big turning point. She understood and trusted my judgment. You know, I made myself different from my friends when I chose Northwestern. All of my friends were going to small colleges here in North Carolina, or my goodness, if you grew up in North Carolina, you wanted to go to Chapel Hill. I don't know exactly why I wanted to go to Northwestern. I'd read about Chicago and Northwestern, and I was all excited about the famous School of Speech. I really wanted to live near Chicago, maybe because of Carl Sandburg. (Ballard, "Interview" 446)

Her intellectual curiosity continued after her marriage when her husband, James R. Stokely, Jr., introduced her to the work of James Still and Marcel Proust. Having just graduated from Northwest, Dykeman had come home to Asheville and was outside in her mother's garden when she was introduced to James Stokely by Mabel Wolfe Wheaton, sister of Thomas Wolfe, during the summer after she had completed her education at Northwestern University. Both Dykeman and Stokely admired Thomas Wolfe's writing, and James considered him a close friend.

Dykeman herself related her only meeting with Thomas Wolfe, interviewing him while she was in junior college at Biltmore. She visited Wolfe in 1937 at his Old Kentucky Home and at his cabin. She remembers him as being quite gracious to her and her group of fellow college students—would-be journalists. Although he invited them to return, Dykeman never got that chance because her mother had learned that Wolfe might have some corn whiskey on the premises. Dykeman reflects, "She didn't think that it would be a good idea for me to go back. And I regretted that" (Ballard, "Interview" 452). Recently, when I was visiting the Asheville home of Wilma Dykeman, her son proudly displayed the childhood rocking chair of Thomas Wolfe, a gift to Wilma and James from the Wolfe family.

After meeting and falling in love with James Stokely, Dykeman abandoned her plans to begin a lucrative teaching position in New York, and consequently received a vitriolic letter from her would-be employer stating that "This is the trouble with hiring women, you know, their lives are always changing" (9). Dykeman commented on the irony of this reprimand coming from an employer who was herself a woman. The couple married just a few months after they met, and Dykeman and

her husband would continue that tradition of reading together, a tradition begun in the Dykeman household when Wilma was but a child.

An heir to the lucrative Stokely canning business, albeit not one of the primary heirs, James struggled against family expectations and his own interests. Dykeman and Stokely raised two sons in Stokely's hometown of Newport, Tennessee. Dykeman credited her family for keeping her grounded, stating that her two sons and "perfectly candid" (Stokely et al. 12) mother kept her "in harness" (12), ensuring against an inflated ego even as she collected accolades and awards for her writing. Although Dykeman was happily married for thirty-seven years, until her husband's death in 1977, she retained the use of her maiden name during a time when women customarily used their husbands' surnames. She recalls her marriage as a partnership in which each influenced and encouraged the other, and she co-authored a book and several articles with Stokely, and later, she collaborated with each of her sons on similar projects.

Having lost her father during her teen years, Dykeman became much closer to her mother, and, in fact, dedicated *The Tall Woman* to petite Bonnie Cole, "the tallest woman I know." The two women became closer still when Dykeman was widowed in 1977, and they relied upon one another as travel partners and companions. Bonnie had long been involved in her grandchildren's lives as well, and the family knew first-hand of the strength of women. Dykeman's choice of the old mountain saying, "A tall woman casts a long shadow," as the epigraph of *The Tall Woman* further underscores her understanding of the influence of women within the family and the community. Incidentally, Dykeman herself was a bit above average height at 5'7".

Upon his marriage in 1940, James Stokely had accumulated around \$30,000 or \$40,000 from his canning legacy, money that he and Wilma used to build a stone cottage and invest in a 100-acre apple orchard in the English Mountains of Coker County as well as another orchard in North Carolina. Even the interest in raising apples, however, had a literary connection for the young couple. Dykeman claimed that James was emulating Robert Frost whom he recognized as a poet and apple farmer (9). The couple later sold the orchard partly because it left little time for James to write poetry and Wilma to write fiction, and partly because in the early 1950s, mailing a crate of apples cost more than growing them. At that point, they sold the orchard and moved to the old Stokely home place in Newport.

James was known as an encourager and benefactor to the art community. A devotee and friend of Thomas Wolfe, James was largely responsible for securing the Thomas Wolfe home in Asheville as a national historic site after Wolfe had died and the family had lost its claim on the house. Dykeman related that, soon after Thomas Wolfe's death, the entire Wolfe family "sort of adopted" James out of gratitude for his devotion and helpfulness during their grief. It was James who brought Mabel leather notebooks after he had noticed Wolfe's letters and notes "just scattered around everywhere, in the bedrooms, all around." He instructed her, "Now, look, Mabel, these letters are going to be destroyed if you don't get them together," and he helped her organize them. Thus, because of his foresight and concern, these items are preserved in Chapel Hill (Ballard, "Interview" 452).

Their mutual appreciation for literature also gained the couple entry into the Carl Sandburg home in Flat Rock, North Carolina. Sandburg later wrote in a letter to Dykeman:

Since your book arrived here time, fate, circumstance have pressed me hard. And not til the last month did I get to reading THE FRENCH BROAD, taking it slow and often rereading certain passages. Your blood and brain absorbed that tributary so completely in feel and imagination that the book would not have been misnamed, “Hey feller, how does it feel to be a river?” So often when reading a book, and before the decision not to finish reading it, I feel sorry for the author, but with this one I said a couple of times, “Jesus, she can write!” (qtd. in Ballard, “Interview” 453)

Following some lengthy correspondence between James and the poet Robinson Jeffers, a significant northern Appalachian poet from just outside Pittsburgh, whom James had long admired, Dykeman and Stokely traveled to Carmel, California, managing to actually meet the reclusive Jeffers at Tor House (his striking home, influenced by Yeats’s tower). Adding to the prestigious list of literary connections is a relationship with Robert Frost. Stokely and Frost became immediate friends, and Frost sent his legendary Christmas cards to Wilma and James each year. Not only did James promote literature and preserve literary history, but he loved music and assisted with symphony drives in Asheville. He had a unique ability to enjoy and appreciate the simple pleasures of the outdoor life as well as the finer points of art in all its forms.

All their lives, however, Dykeman and Stokely struggled financially, much like other middle-class families. Although Stokely was closely connected to the family business that would become Stokely Van-Camp, he and his siblings lost control of the company while they were still in their teens. Before her marriage, Dykeman and her widowed mother worried about money every day for the last six years of the Depression, Willard Dykeman having lost the majority of his financial assets with the onset of the Great Depression. Dykeman's unique economic experiences, first-hand and by marriage, enabled her to sympathize with the rich and the poor although she certainly enjoyed some class and financial privileges.

In addition to her lifelong interest in literature, Dykeman recalled her close affinity to nature from an early age. She reported that her first words were, "Water coming down" (Ballard, "Interview" 444). As a child growing up in "a little wooded cove outside Asheville" (Stokely et al. 4), Dykeman found "life in all the forest around me and the stream that gathered in the roots of trees and under grey ledges and mossy banks where I played and plunged past our home on its way to the distant river—and . . . eventually to the great waters of the world" (4). This connection between the local and global would manifest itself in Dykeman's literary works through the years. In addition to her deep connection to the land which grew from her childhood, Dykeman shared that appreciation for the land with her husband who enjoyed the outdoors, particularly taking walks in the woods. Although he was one of the heirs to a successful family business, his heart was in literature and the natural world, and his family was "puzzled" (9) by James' interests. Dykeman reported that James' parents and siblings viewed themselves as living "a real life," but she added

that “Most people don’t realize how intensely ‘real’ a writer’s life is” (qtd. in Stokely 9).

In addition to her prolific writing career, Dykeman held the office of Tennessee State Historian for twenty-two years; taught college classes and served on the board of trustees for several colleges and other associations; and worked tirelessly on social issues that plagued the people of Appalachia, specifically, and the United States and world at large. She received numerous awards, including a Guggenheim Fellowship, National Endowment for the Humanities Senior Fellowship, Chicago Friends of American Writers Award, North Carolina Gold Medal for Contribution to American Letters, Tennessee Outstanding Speaker of the Year by State Association of Speech Arts Teachers and Professions, and the Distinguished Service Award from the University of North Carolina at Asheville. Additionally, she was awarded the Thomas Wolfe Memorial Trophy, the Distinguished Southern Writer Award for 1989, and the Hillman Award for Best Book of the Year on World Peace, Race Relations and Civil Liberties. Her accolades further include the North Carolina Award for Literature, the John Tyler Caldwell Award for the Humanities from the North Carolina Humanities Council, and the Zebulon B. Vance Award from Brevard College. She was also awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of North Carolina, Asheville, and was inducted into the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame.

Novelist John Ehle refers to Dykeman as a “Teller of stories, writer of nonfiction and fiction books, reviewer, teacher, friend of writers, [who has] become the first lady of Appalachia” (qtd. in Ballard and Hudson 198). In June 2007 the General Assembly of North Carolina passed a resolution honoring and expressing

appreciation for the “life and memory of Wilma Dykeman, one of the most influential contributors to Appalachian Literature,” noting her literary, historical, and educational contributions as well as her scholarship on cultural heritage, water conservation, and race relations.

The remainder of this chapter will situate Wilma Dykeman within a framework of ecofeminism and other women writers from Appalachia as well as provide some treatment of regional writing in general, Appalachian writing in particular, and Appalachia as a region. Some context is required in order to fully understand Dykeman’s importance as a writer, as well as the limitations and challenges faced by categorizations such as Appalachian writer, regionalist writer, and woman writer.

Although a relatively recent approach, the critical lens of ecofeminism lends itself especially well to Dykeman’s literary legacy. In his essay, “‘The Women Are Speaking’: Contemporary Literature as Theoretical Critique,” Patrick D. Murphy claims that “[e]cofeminism from its inception has insisted on the link between nature and culture, between the forms of exploitation of nature and the forms of the oppression of women” (23)—a connection clearly apparent in Dykeman’s texts. Although little attention to the natural environment has come from feminist theorists until recently, as early as 1986 Bidy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty proclaimed that they were “interested in the configuration of home, identity, and community; more specifically, in the power and appeal of ‘home’ as a concept and a desire” (293). While Martin and Mohanty focused on the abstraction of “home,” the physical “home” must not be overlooked. Although a “home” may signify a dwelling

place, a family, or a hometown, the term also refers to the natural world in which we live, without which none of these other homes would be possible. Dykeman's concern for the environment appears in nearly all her texts and is closely connected to social issues relating to women, racial minorities, and socioeconomically-challenged individuals.

A close examination of the kinship between feminism and ecocriticism requires the acknowledgement of a widespread claim that women have a healthier, more intimate, and more harmonious relationship with land than do men, both in Appalachia and elsewhere. A later chapter will examine this possibility as it exists in Dykeman's writings. In *Wingless Flights*, Danny L. Miller discusses this particular relationship as one that, while not unique to Appalachian literature, is a facet of patriarchal Western civilization. Susan Griffin elaborates this concept in *Woman and Nature*:

[Man] says that woman speaks with nature. That she hears voices under the earth. That wind blows in her ears and trees whisper to her. That the dead sing through her mouth and the cries of infants are clear to her. But for him the dialogue is over. He says he is not part of this world, that he was set on this world as a stranger. He sets himself apart from woman and nature . . . *We are the bird's eggs. . . flowers, butterflies, rabbits, cows, sheep. . . caterpillars. . . leaves of ivy and sprigs of wallflower . . . We are woman and nature.* (3)

Griffin points out that the widely held notion that women are closer to nature than are men is not meant to be a complimentary image. She notes that “[i]n the hierarchical

geography of European tradition, not only are human beings elevated above the rest of nature, but men are closer to heaven than women. In short, the idea that women are close to nature is an argument for the dominion of men” (ix). This coincides with the Norse mythological image of Jord, the earth goddess, as literally “beneath” Odin, the sky father. That ancient view seems to have colored modern thought to some extent. Miller notes that men tend to hold themselves in a position that is superior to both women and nature, stating that whereas “woman’s impulse is to protect and save nature, of which she is a part, man’s is to subdue and conquer it” (5)—a widely accepted view of the gender divide in terms of human beings and the natural world. Such a view, unfair to women, is, at the same time, unfair to men, many of whom would not wish to hold such a dominant position. The stereotype of Mother Earth lends itself to a sympathetic view toward women, a victimization of the ultimate “mother,” at the same time it generalizes and stereotypes men.

The realm of the natural world is certainly not the exclusive domain of women writers. To provide an even-handed approach, one must acknowledge that some male writers have also provided insight and sensitivity with regard to respect for the “land” and appreciation for “place.” Appalachian writers James Still, Jesse Stuart, Edward Abbey, and Silas House, for example, depict the natural world with great sensitivity, and their love of “place” is evident, although Abbey’s treatment of women and the feminization of nature is somewhat problematic in more than one instance, as noted by James Cahalan and other scholars. Likewise, Wendell Berry, on the fringe of Appalachia, and Tennessee-born Scott Russell Sanders are also known for their sensitivity to and concern for the land as well as their keen sense of stewardship.

Even so, in the fiction of Still, Stuart, and House, it is often their female characters who provide the site of mythic attachment and complex relationship to land.

Noted feminist Nina Baym, while disputing inherent differences between men's and women's writing, does, however, in her essay "Melodramas of Beset Manhood," acknowledge nature as "feminine and maternal from time immemorial" (1528). She also recognizes the "archetypal female resonance of the image [of] a female construction on nature" (1528), conceding that this necessitates an increased likelihood of women writing of nature as "more active, . . . stress[ing] its destruction or violation" (1528). But she argues that women should refuse to cast themselves as virgin land, as Annette Kolodny, in her examination of the canon, suggests that male writers have presented women. Baym observes another approach, as well: that of the woman writer "adjust[ing] the heroic myth to her own psyche by making nature out to be male" (1528), placing a double bind on her in the view of the critics. Whether she conforms to the expected myth or writes against it, she is judged by the critics as a woman and not considered in the same way in which male writers are viewed. The point is that, even though she argues that women are the targets of masculinist bias among critics, Baym sees women as having special and intimate relationships with nature, different from the relationship between men and nature. Dykeman's work will address this issue in ways to be discussed further in subsequent chapters.

Even so, the certainty of a unique relationship between women and place remains questionable, as does the oft-raised query of whether women's writing is innately different from the writing of men, areas that easily connect ecocriticism to feminism. Hélène Cixous claims that all women write "in white ink" (352), that

“good mother’s milk” (352), and she is not alone in suggesting that women have a language of their own and a writing style of their own. That debate continues, with other scholars such as Baym contending that male and female writing has no inherent difference in origin. Baym presents a logical case against such gender differences in her essay “The Madwoman and her Languages,” deconstructing the concept of “natural” women’s writings—for example, diaries and letters as representative of woman as a “wholly private, purely expressive being” (280). Early feminist attempts which would define women’s writing as inherently private and personal, worlds removed from male writings, must ignore women such as Hannah Arendt, Margaret Mead, Suzanne Langer, Rachel Carson, and, in fact, all the women who have written reams of “non-imaginative” discourse. Further explanation for the phenomenon of distinct women’s writing appears in “Melodrama of Beset Manhood,” in which Baym explains that some of the differences noted between men’s and women’s writings come, in fact, from educational opportunities or the lack thereof, cultural expectations, and, at times, the necessity of writing in a specific style for specific audiences and purposes. Additionally, Baym sees “simple bias” as one explanation for the “critical invisibility” of many women authors, stating that “[t]he critic does not like the idea of women as writers, does not believe that women can be writers, and hence does not see them even when they are right before his eyes. His theory or his standards may well be nonsexist, but his practice is not” (1521).

Some critics disagree, stating that women have been, and perhaps still are, pressured to write in styles similar to the dominant male standard, a view most notably expressed in Gilbert and Gubar’s essay “Sexual Linguistics.” Dykeman

successfully wrote in genres often considered more in the masculine realm; for example, journalism and documentary, and her work lacks the sentimentalism often associated with women novelists of the first half of the twentieth century.

Additionally, she has successfully collaborated with several male authors. Further attention will be given to this notion of whether women's writing is inherently different from men's writing, with close attention given to Dykeman's writings.

The debate continues, with evidence to be found all along the continuum.

Some women—for example, early Appalachian writer Mary Noailles Murfree—have written quite successfully under male pseudonyms without audiences identifying their gender through writing style, leading to the conclusion that gender is not especially observable based on the writing itself. Women's writing has no doubt been shaped by opportunities available to female authors by virtue of the patriarchy of the literary establishment that has proscribed ways in which their writing will be accepted, and by the fact that each individual writer, male or female, is shaped by his or her unique experiences and perceptions. Value is inherent in good writing, regardless of the author's gender.

Like women's writing, regional writing should not be pigeon-holed and set apart, considered less far-reaching than “non-regional” writing, but it should instead be considered in terms of its literary worth. Since all writers are shaped by place, all writing is, in effect, regional. Traditionally, regional literature has been viewed as having less literary value than texts that are not categorized in that way. Furthermore, within the genre of regional literature, some regions have been privileged over others; for example, the regional literature of New England has historically been valued more

generally than literature from other regions across the United States. Perhaps the explanation lies partially in writer Leigh Allison Wilson's remark that "All American fiction . . . is circumscribed by place. I have the feeling that my work ends up being labeled regional simply because fewer people come from my particular place" (qtd. in Ballard and Hudson 624). Jim Stokely posits that two other factors might come into play that would place New England fiction in a privileged position. He cites that region's longstanding value placed on education and literacy, and he also notes that "that's where the bookbuyers are," a point often made by John Ehle. He states, "Victors in war write the history books, and bookbuyers control the literary tropes" (qtd. in "Re: Dissertation").

Furthermore, critics and general readers sometimes fail to recognize the "region" that occurs in certain texts. For example, New York City is in a region, but its literature is not often categorized as such. Each region has its own unique qualities, but an awareness of place clearly shapes writers and their literature. Dykeman resented such labeling and adamantly resisted the notion of regional writing as in any way provincial.

One characteristic that might set Appalachian literature apart from some of the regional literature elsewhere is its especially sharp sensitivity to environmental damage. Although many fine recent works have appeared, one might not be as aware of the ways in which so many early Appalachian writers addressed this issue. Mary Noailles Murfree in *His Vanished Star* (1894) pronounced an indictment of land developers who would destroy the landscape in their greed; however, her short stories did not make quite so bold a statement. Nevertheless, one can read in the stories her

view of the damage done to women, particularly when they are casually treated by men from outside the region who toy with their emotions. Along with the vivid descriptions of the mountain landscapes, this victimization of women can easily be read as an ecological analogy, further emphasizing the close connection between feminism and ecocriticism. Dykeman's work will also demonstrate this symbiotic relationship and will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters.

Although well-educated and well-traveled, Wilma Dykeman was a product of Appalachia, an area that is unique among regions. Its geography has isolated the area from the rest of America to some extent, although, with the advent of the railroad, Appalachia was not as isolated in its early days from the cities of the greater United States as one might imagine. However, there is no doubt that its rugged physical topography shaped its people and, along with its depressed economic status, prevented innovations such as indoor plumbing and electricity from arriving as early as they came to the rest of the United States. Perhaps the lack of these modern conveniences caused Appalachians to be keenly aware of the value of a clean water supply. The lack of easy medical care caused them to rely heavily upon natural cures, with the "granny woman" a vital component of the community, leading to a greater respect for natural cures and herbal medicines than might be found in more scientifically advanced areas of the United States. The geography itself, along with a deep connection to the land, kept many of Appalachia's residents from leaving their native land, even though poverty was widespread.

Like the region, the Appalachian population has certain distinctive characteristics notwithstanding the expected complexity of individual make-up.

Although the mountain folk of the Southern Appalachians are as individual as folk anywhere, the following characteristics seem to be prevalent. The ruggedness of the land seems to have shaped individuals who are themselves rugged. The women are as hard-working as are the men, taking pride in their everyday accomplishments. They are fiercely independent, suspicious of outsiders (sometimes with good reason), yet hospitable once they are assured that no harm is meant. Although the majority of the earliest white settlers were of Scots-Irish descent, bringing with them a Protestant work ethic and a stoicism that is prevalent still, historian John Alexander Williams correctly points out the importance of the presence of other ethnic groups, specifically African Americans. He claims that Emma Bell Miles, Horace Kephart, Cecil Sharp, and John and Olive Dame Campbell all “codified” the region, incorrectly, as predominantly white, paying little attention to the social diversity readily apparent throughout the region. During the 1740s and 1750s “more than twice as many Africans settled in colonial America as Germans and Irish Protestants combined, outnumbering all other ethnic groups combined during this period” (47). In the late 1800s, the majority of railroad construction workers and a large number of miners were African Americans (183). During Campbell’s research in the early twentieth century, approximately 12% of the population of Appalachia was comprised of African Americans, yet Campbell concentrated his attention on the white settlers (211). In reality, Appalachia’s percentage of African Americans exceeded that of the African American population percentage in the United States as a whole. Through her writing Dykeman, like other Appalachian writers, recognized and resisted the

stereotypes associated with Appalachia, and her recognition of the diverse population of Appalachia is manifested throughout her writings.

As a region, Appalachia has been widely viewed as a site of backwardness and ignorance; therefore, much of the popular literature from Appalachia, especially in its earliest configuration, fell into the “local color” genre, with stereotyped, ignorant “hillbilly” characters whose lifestyles were primitive, with early readers often missing the ecological and feminist implications and intertwinings within the texts. The complexities of Appalachia and its people can only be comprehended through a panoramic view of histories and fictional texts over time.

Writers’ points of view, places in time, social backgrounds, and geographical origins often shape the ways in which they portray Appalachian men and women in literary texts. Mary Noailles Murfree, for example, has been the most recognized of the early “local color” writers of Appalachia, but she herself was not “of” the mountain people. She was a frequent tourist at Beersheba Springs, Tennessee, not traveling into the mountains themselves until late in her life, and then only peripherally. She relied on the stories of others and on the observation of the few mountain folk whom she would encounter at this popular resort. Her stories almost always are told from the point of view of an educated outsider, and the condescending view is of an ignorant mountain population among whom only the young girls are in any way attractive or admirable, and these young girls are, most generally, doomed. Murfree’s mountain men are shiftless, lazy, and not to be trusted, a view which certainly fueled the burgeoning negative stereotypes.

In addition to the fiction of Murfree and others, some historical texts also perpetuated a stereotypical view of Appalachia and its residents. Outsider Howard Kephart, the historical authority for so long, presented Appalachian residents as stereotypes in *Our Southern Highlanders* (1913). Kephart acknowledges Murfree as the painter of “our Highlander’s portrait” (11), citing only Edgar Allan Poe’s reference to the wild mountains of western Virginia as “tenanted by fierce and uncouth races of men” (210) as appearing earlier than Murfree’s stories. Kephart opens his history with a view of the mountaineer as “a tall, slouching figure in homespun, who carries a rifle as habitually as he does his hat, and who may tilt its muzzle toward a stranger before addressing him, the form of salutation being: ‘Stop thar! Whut’s you-unses name? What’s you-uns a-goin’ ter?’” (11-12). Kephart admits that “there is just enough truth in this caricature to give it a point that will stick” (12), but then he continues to describe the “typical mountaineer [as] lank. . . always unkempt. . . fond of toting a gun on his shoulder” (12). At times Kephart seems to regard the mountaineer with affection, and certainly, he lived out a great deal of his life in the region; however, in the end his assessment is that “[t]he mountaineers are homogeneous so far as speech and manners and experiences and ideals can make them” (428). In other words, he has them categorized and stereotyped into a single portrait, and an unappealing picture at that.

Partly because of these prevalent stereotypes and the longstanding neglect of Appalachian literature by the New York City literary establishment, mainstream readers have not readily gravitated to Appalachian literature. The fact that so many of the writers have used dialect in their fiction also renders the texts somewhat

inaccessible to those unfamiliar with the language. Writers face a challenge in presenting authentic language patterns of Appalachia, finding that the incorporation of dialect, if not handled well, may produce a text that is unapproachable and even meaningless to some readers. As the convention of heavy dialect use changed with the advent of the twentieth century, writers began to lessen the emphasis on dialect and instead rely more on patterns and diction to portray regional speech. One need only examine the dialect of George Washington Harris, Marietta Holley, and Joel Chandler Harris to understand how remote a distance is placed between dialogue and reader in this heavily altered style, once a convention in regional literature. Modern authors such as Lee Smith, Sharyn McCrumb, and Wilma Dykeman have accomplished authenticity through diction, pattern, and rhythm, seldom relying on altering the spelling of words.

Rooted in the poetry and rhythm of Appalachian speech, Appalachia has also been shaped in large part by its ballads and traditional music. Perhaps nowhere else in America has traditional music been so well preserved in ways that link the generations. This musical tradition is also related to a strong tradition of storytelling. Many Appalachian writers relate their earliest memories of listening to stories as having inspired their later writing. Lee Smith, for example, cites her childhood spent in the hearing of the stories of Grundy, Virginia, residents, as the source of her keen sense of story and voice.

Another characteristic that delineates Appalachia is its liminal position with regard to the rest of the United States. It spans north and south and has been divided in terms of its allegiances. This was most evident during the Civil War, but is still

true politically, although there are pockets throughout the region that are more nearly aligned than others. The Appalachian South does not share the same values and characteristics as the flatland South, possibly due to deep-seated political, cultural, and religious differences stemming from the Civil War era.

In reality, much Appalachian literature, especially from those writers who are intimately familiar with Appalachia, dispels stereotypical thinking, and is, in fact, activist from a very early period, a tradition that has continued and gained power with writers such as Wilma Dykeman. Interestingly, it is the early fiction of Murfree and other “outsiders” that depict Appalachian women as victims. Writers more familiar with Appalachian people, beginning in about the 1930s, wrote instead of the strength of mountain women, even though their circumstances were harsh. Dykeman, as an insider, clearly recognizes the innate strength of the women of Appalachia and builds it into her fictional characters in much the same manner as she emphasizes the strength of the land in her poetry and her nonfiction.

To understand more fully Dykeman’s activist writings, one must consider the work of women writers from Appalachia who preceded her. Emma Bell Miles’ *The Spirit of the Mountains* (1905), useful for both its own literary value and its value as a social and historical commentary of Appalachia, provides a view from one who is both “outsider” and “insider.” Miles was city born to upper middle class, educated parents, but she married a mountain man and lived much of her life in poverty with him in the mountains. Her own conflictedness is apparent throughout the book, as she sometimes refers to the mountain residents as “them” and sometimes as “us.” This idea of double consciousness has applied to many areas of identity, such as in

W. E. B. Du Bois' discussion of racial double consciousness, a useful theoretical model for understanding the psycho-social divisions existing in American society in general. Likewise, noted Appalachian scholar Cratis Williams discovered that he would lead a "divided life" when he left his rural home and entered an urban high school, leading to an educational path that would result in his seminal dissertation on "The Southern Mountaineer in Fact and Fiction." His rural speech and manners were ridiculed by his teachers and colleagues, and so he cultivated a style of standard English to use in academic settings. Along with his new speech, he also developed a sense of shame with regard to his Appalachian origins, an issue that he would only resolve with maturity and contemplation. The other half of his divided self, as he explained in the documentary *Cratis Williams: Living the Divided Life*, came from the knowledge that he had to resume his birth language patterns and accent when he returned to visit his rural friends and family who would misinterpret the reinvention of his speech.

Dykeman herself speaks of this duality as she relates the necessity for her mountain-born mother to translate mountain speech on a regular basis for her New York-bred father. Rather than allow this language barrier to divide their marriage, Bonnie and Willard Dykeman grew from their shared experiences, enjoying an "undiminished curiosity about life's diversity, its shifts and swerves, its stability and surprises" ("It's Difficult"). With a healthy sense of humor and a deep appreciation for the uses of language, the two enjoyed the differences between the "spoken language of Northern and Southern Appalachia," for, after all, official Appalachia extends well up into the state of New York, a fact often overlooked in the standard

perception of Appalachia as consisting only of the southern portion of the mountain range. Dykeman notes that “no one ever thought to call my father an Appalachian” (“It’s Difficult”). Willard Dykeman had grown up and lived as part of a farming family in rural Putnam County, New York, near the town of Carmel and the villages of Brewster and Patterson. Although geographically located only about fifty miles north of Times Square, that portion of rural New York was worlds removed from the culture of New York City (James Stokely, “RE: Two Quick”). Incidentally, Willard had to do the same sort of linguistic interpreting for Bonnie when the family visited his relatives in New York! (Ballard, “Interview” 446).

With reference to the linguistic challenges presented in light of regional differences, Dykeman commented in her newspaper column on Tony Earley’s “The Quare Gene,” published in the *New Yorker* in 1998. Among other aspects of life in Appalachia, Earley considers the “secret language of the Appalachians” and devotes a bit of time defining the term “quare,” meaning, according to the dictionary definition, “queer, strange, eccentric,” and it is a term that is “dialectical, archaic, obsolete, an anachronism, a muted, aging participant in the clamoring riot of the English language.” However, the majority of Earley’s article is a reflection on his experience of having dual languages, similar to Cratis Williams, the language of his public life and academia and the personal, private language of his Appalachian homeland, a language in which the connotations of “quare” include

sea voyages and migrations [and] speaks of families stopping after long journeys and saying, for any one of a thousand reasons, “This is far enough.” . . . of generations of farmers watching red dirt turn below

plow blades, of young men stepping into furrows when old men step out
 . . . of girls fresh from their mothers' houses crawling into marriage beds and becoming mothers themselves . . . bears witness to the line of history, most of it now unmappable, that led to my human waking beneath these particular mountains. (84)

Earley notes that many words and expressions commonly used in southern Appalachia are rich beyond their denoted use and as our language becomes homogenized, we are at risk of losing much of our Appalachian heritage. He further discusses the notion that Appalachian identity is often tied to past generations. In answering his nonagenarian grandfather's question, "Who are you?", Early gave the only logical response possible: "I'm Reba's boy. Clara Mae's grandson," and that was enough to satisfy the old man (84). Dykeman points out a similar passage in James Agee's *A Death in the Family* in which little Rufus has been taken far back into the mountains to visit with an ancient great-grandmother who seems to recognize no one. Only after he identifies himself to her with "I'm Jim's boy Rufus," could he "feel her face turn towards him" (139).

These two characteristics—that of language and blood—appear in Dykeman's *The Far Family* in which one character tries to deny her Appalachian identity in exchange for her husband's Charleston background. As the realization dawns, Phoebe admits, "I've tried to deny my blood for something that seemed better. It was a killing thing to do . . . [I'm] something made of watered blood and secondhand ideas and other people's wishes" (361) She realizes that her forebears had carved out

for themselves a place in this world. They knew who they were. Tony Earley makes the same statement: “Words and blood are the double helix that connect us to our past” (84).

The sense of a divided self was shared by native and non-native Appalachians. Any examination of Appalachian literature necessitates an awareness of who is telling the story and how well the writer knows the people. Emma Bell Miles had a foot in both “worlds.” Her observations ring true, and she portrays the mountaineers in ways that dispel many of the stereotypes perpetuated by writers such as Mary Noailles Murfree and historian Howard Kephart. Miles notes the close connection of the mountain people to the land, stating that

only a superficial observer could fail to understand that the mountain people really love their wilderness – . . . for its beauty, for its freedom. . . nothing less than the charm of their stern motherland could hold them here . . . Occasionally a whole starved-out family will emigrate westward, and having settled, will spend years in simply waiting for a chance to sell out and move back again. (17-18)

Literary examples abound, proving Miles’ point. In Harriette Arnow’s *The Dollmaker* (1954), it is Gertie who saves up to buy a farm, and her husband Clovis who disassociates himself from land and nature in favor of placing his trust in the machinery of Detroit. Mary Noailles Murfree’s Cynthia Ware responds to the beauty of nature upon her return to the mountains in the short story “Drifting Down Lost Creek.” Murfree describes the beauty of the mountain and imparts it with its own spirit: “There it stood, solemn, majestic, mysterious: masked by its impenetrable

growth, and hung about with duskier shadows. . . The spirit within it was chanting softly, softly. . . here was [Cynthia's] home and she loved it" (59-60). In the same manner, Murfree's Celia Shaw in "The Star in the Valley" shares a "subtle affinity" with the natural world, both "fed by the rain and the dew" (131). She is, in fact, repeatedly referred to as a wildflower, first in simile and finally in metaphor. Women seem to find peace, solace, security, and even identity in the land, whereas men, collectively or individually, more often seek to conquer it much as they often seek to conquer women.

The fictional women in earlier women's Appalachian texts are often in conflict with the men in power, as reflected in Harriette Arnow's *The Dollmaker*. Along with James Still, another mid-twentieth century pioneer in Appalachian literature, Arnow depicts families in transition, families who are conflicted between their desire to stay in the mountains or leave the region in search of improved employment opportunities. In Still's *River of Earth* and Arnow's *The Dollmaker*, the strong women protagonists are in favor of holding onto their land and mountain culture. In *The Hawk's Done Gone* (1940), Mildred Haun's protagonist Mary Dorthula Kanipe, is constantly at odds with her husband, Ad, and his sons. The men are cruel to the animals that are so desperately needed for sustenance, they mistreat the women (particularly the younger ones), and their greed drives them to make short-sighted decisions that will, in the end, adversely affect their families and themselves. Mary Dorthula draws her mental and emotional strength from the land and her physical strength from the healing powers of the plants and herbs. Significantly, the novel opens with a view of "Leticia Edes Mountain," a mountain believed to have

grown from the corpse of a legendary Melungeon¹ woman; thus, the body of the woman and the body of Nature become one. In this novel, as in others, much of the conflict comes from a deep-seated failure to communicate. According to Emma Bell Miles, “They [mountain men and women] are so silent. They know so pathetically little of each other’s lives. . . the woman’s experience is the deeper; the man’s gain is in the breadth of outlook. His ambition leads him to make drain after drain on the strength of his silent, wingless mate” (70), yet the fiction of insiders such as Dykeman gives voice and flight to many of the women of Appalachia, while acknowledging the existence of the powerlessness forced upon some mountain women by circumstances, culture, or economics.

Compared with Murfree’s fiction, Emma Bell Miles’ *The Spirit of the Mountains* (1905) makes a more didactic statement condemning greed and misuse of the land and offering an alternative solution to the poverty of mountain folk. Her final chapter opens with the heart-wrenching observation that “My people, everywhere on the borders of the mountain country, are being laid hold of and swept away by the oncoming tide of civilization, that drowns as many as it uplifts” (190). She sees the onslaught of tourism as enslavement of the mountain residents, brought on as “an easy way of making money” (191). She is, in effect, sounding the alarm about a type of capitalism that will enrich only those who bring it in, and when the money has been made, the businesses will leave the mountaineers worse off by

¹ The Melungeons are a mysterious, mixed-race group of people in the southern Appalachian region, the most well-known settlement occurring on Newman’s Ridge in Hancock County, Tennessee. The Melungeons suffered discrimination and prejudice from the dominant “white” culture and were denied such privileges as voting and owning land due to their designation as “people of color.” Many theories exist regarding the origin of the Melungeons, but DNA tests have proven inconclusive.

having cultivated dependency. Better, says Miles, to cultivate those talents already “in blossom” (198), better to incorporate a “development not foreign to our natures” (198). She advocates educating the mountain residents while keeping intact those arts and crafts that will provide a living wage while preserving their tradition.

Miles could not have foreseen the measure to which “civilization” would encroach upon Appalachia, but more recent authors have dealt extensively with these social issues. In *Storming Heaven* (1987), Denise Giardina provides a fictionalized account of the West Virginia coal mine wars, and through this is able to sound a call to arms for activism. Giardina is involved in political activism beyond her literary accomplishments, having run for governor of West Virginia in 2000 on the Mountain Party ticket. In the same vein of the activism promoted through the work of Giardina, Lee Smith in *Fair and Tender Ladies* (1988) has her protagonist, Ivy Rowe Fox, place herself bodily in front of a bulldozer to prevent the onslaught of her land from the owner of the mineral rights. The historical accuracy of the practice of purchasing mineral rights from residents who are unaware of the repercussions is undeniable, and Smith relies on the historical record of the widow Ollie Combs who in 1965 at the age of sixty-one, was placed in jail for physically blocking strip mining bulldozers and the powerful, influential coal operators (Mullins).

Although these literary works and heroic acts occur in the twentieth century, they hark back to the eighteenth-century Chipko movement, literal female tree-huggers in India much celebrated by current ecofeminists and environmental justice critics such as Susan Comfort. The Appalachian texts discussed also look ahead to socio-ecological movements as current as the late twentieth and early twenty-first

century. For example, in 1997, Julia Butterfly Hill, activist and environmentalist, lived in a 180-foot tall, 1500-year-old California Redwood tree for 738 days to prevent loggers from cutting it down. She is the author of the book *The Legacy of Luna* and co-author of *One Makes the Difference*. Hill was a part of the Earth First! movement whose chief original inspiration was the novel *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975) by Appalachian native Edward Abbey.

Thus, Appalachian fiction has situated itself as a locus of informed activism, past, present, and future, and the woman writer becomes the spokesperson for the land. In her collection of poems, *Kettle Bottom* (2004), Diane Gilliam Fisher speaks eloquently of the human casualties caused by the coal mining industry. Many of her poems such as “Explosion at Winco No. 9” come from a woman’s point of view and show how the entire population is affected:

Delsey Salyer knowed Tom Junior by his toes,
 which his steel-toed boots had kept the fire off of.
 Betty Rose seen a piece of Willy’s ear, the little
 notched part where a hound had bit him
 when he was a young’un, playing at eating its food.
 It is true that it is the men that goes in, but it is us
 that carries the mine inside. . . (lines 1-7)

Here, the woman has intimate knowledge of the casualties, far beyond the mere fact of the deaths. While the specifics of concerns such as unsafe mines may occur more frequently in Appalachia, injustice and exploitation of our land and people are widespread concerns.

Although at times her books tend to border on didacticism, Wilma Dykeman was a writer who recognized the complexity of gender relationships and individual identity, as well as the complexity of social and environmental issues. She consistently refused to present dichotomous relationships, opting instead to portray the more realistic subtleties of character and situation. As a woman of comfortable, if not privileged, social and economic status, Dykeman's concern with those less fortunate than herself was all the more remarkable, and she displays considerable empathy and understanding toward men and women at all socioeconomic levels.

As a native who claimed both North Carolina and Tennessee as home, Dykeman was far from provincial, traveling extensively throughout the world. Her sense of humor, sharp wit, and love for the natural world endured throughout her long lifetime, and she remained interested and engaged in living fully. Dykeman's attitude toward life and writing may be partially explained by her fondness for George Santayana's discussion of "the rooted heart and the ranging intellect" from "The Philosophy of Travel," which she explains arises from an "intense sense of place. . . and concern for human values and issues" (qtd. in "Wilma Dykeman), characteristics that she saw as central to all of her writing. Unfairly pigeon-holed as a regional writer, she adamantly rejected such labeling. She claimed in an interview with Sandra L. Ballard that labels tend to "limit and de-emphasize the central thing—which is that you're just writing and you want to try to communicate your own special vision" (18). Her fiction and nonfiction address concerns of "place" in all of the connotations of that word, and her contributions are worthy of increased recognition. Hers was one of the most significant voices in the mid-twentieth century

calling for environmental and social responsibility, concerns that are specific to the Appalachian region, yet widely relevant.

Dykeman's concerns were ahead of their time in terms of their cohesiveness with the definition of ecological feminism as articulated by Elizabeth S. D.

Engelhardt:

Humans are not conceived of as separate from and superior to the world around them [but rather] are part of the total ecology. . . The nonhuman world has agency [which is] the ability to consider and to act . . . [A]ctivism and actions in communities must consider long-term sustainability for the community[,] recognizing that the least socially empowered [community members] may be the most environmentally threatened . . . Ecological feminists recognize the particular effects on and roles for women in activism without erasing differences. (3-4)

Long before ecofeminism came into its own, Dykeman promoted these tenets. Through her body of work Dykeman demonstrates that her concern for the human condition was matched by her enormous appreciation for the natural world, and her deep connection to the Appalachian South shaped her literary texts. From the first words of her childhood, "water coming down" (Ballard, "Interview" 444) to her expression of the yearning of her last years to "walk in the country and smell . . . snow and rain. . . and water" ("Wilma Dykeman Profile"), Dykeman remained connected to the natural world. Just as an appreciation for "water" connected her earliest years with her final years, Dykeman had a concrete grasp of the concept that "Life's a big cycle – things are connected" (Ballard, "Interview" 444). Her deep

connection to water and its environmental importance, as well as its connection and symbolism in human lives, figures in her first book, *The French Broad* (1955), and in her first novel, *The Tall Woman* (1962). Her attention to social issues was most apparent in *Neither Black Nor White* (1957), a nonfiction text co-authored with her husband, James R. Stokely, Jr., and in her activist novel, *Return the Innocent Earth* (1973). *The Far Family* (1966) deals with racial justice as well as perceptions of stewardship of the land, noting generational conflict. *The Tall Woman* also deals with race issues. Her newspaper columns, poetry, nonfiction, and recorded speeches also offer fertile ground for exploration.

Through *The French Broad*, Dykeman hoped to “increase understanding and appreciation for a rare region, a tough and fragile people and their hard and lovely country” (vi). Predating Rachel Carson’s absolutely ground-breaking and environmentally significant *Silent Spring* (1962) by seven years, Dykeman extolled the beauty and grandeur of the French Broad River, but she also sounded an alarm concerning its pollution and misuse, against the advice of her editor. She won the Western North Carolina Historical Association’s first Thomas Wolfe Memorial Award as the region’s outstanding author of the year for *The French Broad*. She advocated that we give our rivers, “like the people of the region, our concern and respect” (346), showing her appreciation of the intimate relationship between people and the natural landscape.

Without proclaiming herself a feminist, Dykeman sent a clear feminist message along with her clarion call for environmental responsibility. Published in 1962, *The Tall Woman* was written as the Women’s Liberation Movement and the

Civil Rights Movement were moving toward their apex. Dykeman was aware of inequities for women and non-whites in America, but she resisted the label of “feminist,” as she rejected all labels. There is no doubt that one reason for her reluctance to identify herself as a feminist is because the feminism with which Dykeman would have been most familiar was First Wave feminism, a militant movement perceived as angry, anti-male, anti-tradition, attitudes that Dykeman would not have shared. In an interview with Harvard professor Richard Marius, she defined her outlook: “Mine is not a feminist world nor a masculine world—it’s a people world” (“Rooted Heart” 8), further proof of Dykeman’s aversion to the practice of labeling as well as her sense of inclusiveness. Clearly, her understanding of feminism during its first wave was quite likely in line with others of her generation who saw feminism as “anti-male” or “anti-tradition.” Dykeman’s work, albeit traditional in its view of gender and family, provides ample evidence that she is in complete agreement with feminism as it redefined and polished itself into its present positive force.

In addition to her attention to the condition and status of women, Dykeman also confronted racial prejudice in *The Tall Woman*, an issue that she and her husband also addressed in their collection of interviews and oral histories in *Neither Black Nor White*. For this book, the two writers set out to immerse themselves in the South’s response to vitally important human rights issues. They attended Ku Klux Klan meetings and meetings of the White Citizens’ Councils, met with Black leaders, and went to NAACP meetings. Presenting the multiple voices of the South, they dispelled the myth of a “Solid, or monolithic, South” (Jones 74). The book earned the

Sidney Hillman Award for the best book of the year on civil liberties, race relations, or world peace.

Dykeman's third novel, *Return the Innocent Earth*, demonstrates her sense of social and ecological responsibility, showing her concern for the human and nonhuman components of our world. The conflict between profit and humanitarianism drives the novel, and the characters respond in various ways, becoming hardened to the plight of the workers or developing a conscience that disallows mistreatment of the land or the people. Through her various texts Dykeman also dispels the myth of a unified and single-voiced Appalachia, refusing to romanticize, simplify, or stereotype its inhabitants or gloss over the complexity of its problems and the challenges of defining its identity.

In many ways, Dykeman was ahead of her time, tackling environmental issues well ahead of Rachel Carson, and facing difficult race issues before the 1960 sit-ins. Her feminist novel was published a year before Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Even so, Dykeman has also been unfairly relegated to the periphery of literature through classification as a "regional" writer, a label she strongly resisted. In a 1973 newspaper interview, Dykeman spoke to that very issue: "This is what I resent most. . . I think the most frustrating thing that can happen to an author is to have regionalism equated with provincialism. . . When really you are an American writer writing from place. Most great writing, I feel, has a sense of place. I hope this would make it more universal rather than limited" (qtd. in Gantt 15), an argument that Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse have since made in *Writing Out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American Literary Culture*.

Although the school of ecocriticism had not fully come into its own during the time when Dykeman was writing most of her books, her texts display her deep concern for and appreciation of the natural world. Dykeman was a native Appalachian writer whose contributions deserve wider recognition. Her fiction and nonfiction address concerns of “place” with all its connotations. Hers was one of the earliest Appalachian voices calling for environmental and social responsibility, concerns that are specific to the region, yet widely relevant. Her concerns are cohesive with the working definition of ecological feminism, and this dissertation will explore the importance of her life’s work.

Dykeman was a prolific writer who claimed that all she wrote came from an intense sense of place and concern for human values and issues, and her body of work is quite large, so, of necessity, the following chapters must focus on select texts, while treating broadly her entire literary corpus. The critical theoretical lens of ecofeminism provides a venue for arguing the ideological, socio-political, hermeneutical, and aesthetic importance of Dykeman’s fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. Dykeman also presents a model for successful collaborative writing, having produced notable texts with other writers, most specifically her husband, James Stokely, Jr. Because her body of work is larger in the genres of fiction and non-fiction, these will receive greater attention than her poetic juvenilia.

Dykeman’s first novel, *The Tall Woman*, will serve as the primary text in terms of a study of feminist concerns. The field of ecofeminism recognizes the close alliance between feminism and ecocriticism, so the discussion will move seamlessly into Dykeman’s treatment of environmental responsibility, focusing on *The French*

Broad (nonfiction), *The Tall Woman*, and *Return the Innocent Earth*. Dykeman takes a courageous stand for ecological responsibility in each of these texts, and her determination in the face of editorial and familial resistance further exemplifies her literary and social activism.

Dykeman's concern with race is evident in *Neither Black Nor White*, a documentary consisting of collected observations and numerous interviews across the South, written in partnership with her husband. Herein Dykeman articulates the link between her concern for human resources and her advocacy for preserving natural resources: "As we have misused our richest land, we have misused ourselves; as we have wasted our beautiful water, we have wasted ourselves; as we have diminished the lives of one segment of our people, we have diminished ourselves" (5). However, Dykeman returns to the theme of race issues again and again in her fiction as well, most notably in her treatment of the Melungeon population of Appalachia. All three issues converge in *Return the Innocent Earth*, and Dykeman confessed that the novel encompasses "everything I care about . . . racial issues, powerful women, the ways people make choices" (Ballard, "Interview" 457). This comprehensive treatment of Dykeman's literary and social contributions is long overdue.

Especially given the current interest in ecocriticism and place studies, Dykeman's literary and social contributions deserve wider attention and recognition. Although a number of articles have addressed the importance of Wilma Dykeman's literary contributions, no comprehensive treatment exists, in book or dissertation form, that effectively emphasizes the importance of her writing and, in fact, her life. Dykeman is indeed one of the most important twentieth-century voices for

environmental responsibility, labor and class issues, civil rights, and feminism. While Dykeman's work is well known in east Tennessee and western North Carolina, she has not received the national recognition that she so richly deserves. In addition to recognizing the importance of this individual writer, one must also acknowledge the importance of regional literature as valid and worthy of a respected position within the American literary canon. With the current renewal of concern for preserving the environment and promoting the rights of women and other oppressed groups, an ecofeminist examination of Dykeman's fiction, non-fiction, and poetry, as well as an examination of her offerings as Tennessee State Historian, teacher, and lecturer, offer a fertile field for placing this fine Appalachian writer within the context of important nature writers and feminists within the wider realm of American women writers. While resisting the label of feminist in feminism's first wave, Dykeman's texts and, indeed, her life's work, promote feminist values of strength, leadership, and influence.

Although Dykeman did not claim or desire the label of "feminist," certainly she did advocate for strong women and fair treatment for all. An examination of her work through an ecofeminist critical and theoretical lens will thus establish her prominence and her importance through her literary contributions. Dykeman's legacy deserves an increased, and more extended, awareness and appreciation beyond her immediate region, and, likewise, regionalism as a genre should not be limited to the locality from which it emerges but should receive recognition for its far-reaching importance. The local is also the global, and Dykeman's life, as well as her literary

treatment of ecological and social concerns led to significant progress for feminists, environmentalists, civil rights advocates, and social activists.

In light of Dykeman's early significant contributions in these areas, her concern for environmental issues is most readily apparent in her first book, *The French Broad*, but *The Tall Woman* and *Return the Innocent Earth* also provide ample opportunity for examining the author's concern for the natural world and her ideas regarding stewardship of the land as well as the dire consequences of irresponsibility and misuse. Throughout these texts, the idea of clean water is a marker for humankind's physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

CHAPTER TWO

MUDDY WATER: ENVIRONMENTALIST CONCERNS

Upon arriving at Wilma Dykeman's childhood home in Asheville, North Carolina, I am unprepared for the overwhelming essence of the land, and especially the water that runs through it. Bold and insistent, the sound of Beaverdam Creek cannot be ignored. As I move inside to the bedroom that was Dykeman's and open the window, I hear the rushing sound of water that drowns out the chirr of locusts and the occasional passing vehicle. Surrounded by water as she was from an early age, Wilma Dykeman was destined to acknowledge its worth and become an advocate for its care.

From Beaverdam Creek in Asheville to the Pigeon River that flows by the Newport, Tennessee, home that Wilma Dykeman shared with her husband, James Stokely, and her two sons, Dykeman lived her life in awareness of water's presence. Dykeman's first book, *The French Broad* (1955), provided an opportunity and challenge for her to acquaint herself most intimately with her geographical surroundings. Aware of water's impact on human life, aware and appreciative of its importance, Dykeman found through her research of the French Broad River, which snakes its way across North Carolina and empties into Watts Barr Lake in Tennessee, an increased awareness of and concern for the health of the waters of the world, and this body of water in particular. Only the Nile River in Africa and the New River in West Virginia are older than the historic French Broad. Clearly, Holt Rinehart did not understand the grandeur, history, or age of the river, because their initial response

to Dykeman's book proposal was that they only covered important rivers, and they would not be interested in publishing a book on such a small river as the French Broad. They added a caveat in their originally discouraging letter, stating, however, that "If [the book] is interestingly enough written, we would publish the story of a river no bigger than a man's hand" (qtd. in *Southern Living* 74). Sure enough, Dykeman convinced the publisher through her early chapters that she could write an interesting book on this river that winds its way through the Appalachian mountains.

Although the French Broad was grand and picturesque, the health of the waterway was at risk, and Dykeman deemed it her responsibility to sound a clarion call for action. The complex portrait that she would paint would consist of "problems and potential" (v). In this chapter I will argue that, while *The French Broad* was her most overt treatment of environmental concerns, Wilma Dykeman exhibited a concern for environmental health throughout her lifetime and that nearly everything she wrote connected in some way with preserving and protecting the natural world.

Through *The French Broad*, commissioned by Holt Rinehart for the Rivers of America series, Dykeman hoped to "increase understanding and appreciation for a rare region, a tough and fragile people and their hard and lovely country" (vi). She wrote of a "river and a watershed and a way of life where yesterday and tomorrow meet in odd and fascinating harmony" (vi). With her keen sense of environmental responsibility and her compelling narrative style, Dykeman was in the company of two other Appalachian writers. Marine biologist and conservationist Rachel Carson hailed from Springdale, Pennsylvania, near Pittsburgh in the northern portion of Appalachia. Carson produced a huge impact with her 1962 *New York Times* best-

seller *Silent Spring*. Selling over 500,000 copies in twenty-four countries, *Silent Spring* marked a watershed moment in the environmental movement, effecting change in terms of raising awareness when other such efforts had failed. Likewise, Annie Dillard grew up in the Point Breeze neighborhood of Pittsburgh and studied literature and creative writing in Roanoke, Virginia, in southern Appalachia, where she lived for several years. Dillard was lauded by Edward Abbey, another native son of northern Appalachia, as Thoreau's "true heir" (McClintock 88), high praise from the Indiana, Pennsylvania, native who was himself known as the "Thoreau of the West." Seven years before Rachel Carson's phenomenally important *Silent Spring* (1962), and nineteen years before Annie Dillard's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1974), Dykeman extolled the grandeur and beauty of the French Broad in her first published book, but she also issued a clear warning regarding its pollution and misuse. Lacking the scientific background that established Carson's ethos as an environmentalist, Dykeman nonetheless presented her case in a way that was, as Fred Waage would later describe that method, "emotionally compelling" (134), a goal that Waage would seek through the small magazine he began to publish in 1975: *Second Growth: Literature of Environmental Concern*, probably the first deliberately ecocritical publication, effectively placing literary art in an ecological context. Waage himself was instrumental in raising awareness and interest in ecocriticism, the growing critical approach that married environmental concerns with literature. His excellent, more recent article "Exploring the 'Life Territory': Ecology and Ecocriticism in Appalachia" (2005) provides a useful overview of instrumental steps in this confluence as well as the contributions of other scholars and critics. Dykeman,

however, was well ahead of these ecocritical pioneers, even though she did not use the terms ecocriticism, ecofeminism, or environmentalism.

In the chapter “Who Killed the French Broad?” Dykeman presents an argument that clearly delineates the reasons why water pollution should be of concern to all, and she urges action to counter its ill effects, arguing against those who would defer to financial gain in the name of “progress” above environmental soundness, claiming that such thinking is

the falsehood of inevitability. And it is time every individual shook himself [sic] from lethargy and probed for the truth obscured by that falsehood: the truth that filth is not inevitable. Pollution is not the price we have to pay for securing industries in our midst or for building great cities. We can have factories and we can have towns and we can have clean water. Filth is the price we pay for apathy.

(291)

Clearly, Dykeman showed her deep concern for the health of her region’s natural resources, and she struck at the very root of the problem: apathy. She was not anti-progress, but she believed that the watershed did not have to be sacrificed in the name of industry and profit. Interestingly, her publisher advised Dykeman to strike this particular chapter on the pollution of the French Broad, claiming that it would not capture the interest of her readers and would, in fact, detract from her work. She refused to remove it and, consequently, through the years this chapter has received more attention than any other chapter in the book. For her efforts Dykeman won the

Western North Carolina Historical Association's first Thomas Wolfe Memorial Award as the region's outstanding author of the year (Stokely, et al.).

Dykeman's tenacity and insistence paid off in terms of her audience taking notice of the attention she gave to the mistreatment of the French Broad River, the pollution and consequent danger to residents. Established in 1987, RiverLink is a regional non-profit organization spearheading the economic and environmental revitalization of the French Broad River and its tributaries as a place to work, live, and play. While the organization was born through the efforts of many concerned citizens to address water quality throughout the French Broad River basin, expand public opportunities for access and recreation, and spearhead the economic revitalization of Asheville's dilapidated riverfront district, it owes no small debt to Wilma Dykeman. From their website, here is their explanation of the role she played:

A young woman named Wilma Dykeman published a book entitled *The French Broad*. Today she regales audiences with tales of her difficulty getting the book published. Publishers looked at the title and assumed that a titillating tale awaited them regarding a foreign woman. Even more difficult were her efforts to include a chapter in the book about pollution. The river had endured decades of misuse with no state, local or federal regulations to protect it. To interest her publishers, and to provide a sense of anticipation, she entitled her chapter on pollution "Who Killed the French Broad?" In spite of her publisher's reservations, she convinced them [sic] that

pollution of the river was a story in need of telling. Once the book was published “Who Killed The French Broad” became the most talked about chapter, and attracted the most national media attention. (“River”)

The revitalization plan for the French Broad River and its tributaries as a place to work, live, and play included the well-deserved honor of bearing the name of the woman who first called attention to the dire environmental concerns of the French Broad River. The Wilma Dykeman RiverWay linked the French Broad and Swannanoa Rivers into a seventeen-mile continuous greenway with separate walking and biking trails. RiverLink today is one of the most successful efforts of its type and is bearing fruit from years of labor, beginning with Dykeman’s book in 1955.

Wilma Dykeman spoke of the river in a video produced by RiverLink and aired by *World News*:

I believe that one of the main virtues and most interesting aspects of the French Broad River is also part of its history, and it might be summed up, I think, in the word diversity. This is one of the most abundantly watered regions in the whole United States, and here we are with this great treasure. And the use of it and the misuse of it has been our great challenge. (*Riverlink*)

Dykeman cared about the river, not just for the purpose of producing her book, but for the long term. Today the area is thriving, the water is clean, but as environmental activist and long-time resident of Asheville Jean Webb states, “The

water was so dirty that even the mud turtles came out of the river—there was so much sewage and pollution, and now we are playing in the river, using the river, talking about it as a drinking source. It is our lifeblood” (*Riverlink*). Duay O’Neal’s newspaper account of Dykeman’s memorial service in 2006 noted that “it was indeed appropriate that her last journey to and from Newport Friday followed the route from Asheville through Hot Springs and Del Rio into Newport, passing along the river she loved so deeply.”

Dykeman’s intimate understanding of the natural world is abundantly evident in her little-known 1984 book of essays, *Explorations*. Here she effectively demonstrates the close connection between understanding one’s regional roots and taking that understanding to the world beyond and back again. Perhaps her epigraph from T. S. Eliot says it best:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

The lead essay begins with the statement “Here I stand facing the mountains” (1). As she describes the room, adjoining another room, both lined with shelves of books, the location becomes evident: This is the home of Wilma Dykeman and James Stokely in Newport, Tennessee. She continues her perusal of her surroundings and stops to describe the map on the wall:

Dark lines draw boundaries around oceans, continents, countries, all
the major and minor divisions by which we separate this green

whirling planet to fit our human imagination. Blues, greens, pastel colors shade one into another representing Homer's wine-dark seas, Hilary's mountains, Huckleberry Finn's rivers, and land as varied as Hudson's Green Mansions and Lawrence's sun-scorched deserts. Vastness and variety— scenes, smells, sounds, heat and cold—reduced to a dry, stiff bit of cardboard. And wandering like a snail's spoor across an infinitesimal portion of this immensity is a thread of ink: my own tiny trails reaching from this room out, circling back again. (1-2)

Here Dykeman's poetic voice correctly observes that the world is divided only by human perception, and she sees a connection between her own hearth and the map. She sees that "[t]here is a tug-of-war between the hearth and the map, the books and the woods. Two kinds of exploration . . . the journeys out, the reaching in" (2). Her desire is "[t]o explore, identified with but not confined by, this place which is burdened by stereotypes like an ancient ship crusted with generations' accumulation of barnacles" (3), and so is the story of Appalachia.

Dykeman's gift is to place the present and the future within the context of history. As she describes "Shaconage—Place of Blue Smoke" (3), the Cherokee name for today's Great Smoky Mountains, she notes the beauty and wonder of that place, and, again, water predominates: "Moving water is the voice of the Smokies" (5). She beautifully and meticulously writes of the trickle of melting icicles and the roaring of Cosby Creek as it rushes past the campground after a summer storm. She places these mountains within temporal context as well:

It is an ancient affair, this relationship between water and mountains. We are overhearing only the most recent moment's tick in 200 million years of erosion chiseling the contours of this landscape. The Great Smokies stand as patriarchs among American mountains, already millions of years old when the Rockies and the Sierras and the Cascades were born. (5)

Into this ancient setting, Dykeman effectively places again the predominant presence of water: "The voice of the water commences as a splattering of raindrops on the polished, leathery leaves of rhododendron and on the dark evergreen of red spruce wilderness, soaking into the deep sponge of centuries-old earth mulch" (5). As she had established in *The French Broad*, Dykeman also notes that the water "bubbles forth from crystal-cold springs whose abundant presence in these hills often determined the site of a pioneer's cabin" (5), and she effectively traces the water cycle from the smallest spring to the vast ocean. Jim Stokely pointed out on the Asheville property Beaverdam Creek, and he stated that his mother had learned of the water cycle from an early age by listening to her father as he used their own creek as an object lesson.

Dykeman soon makes a transition within these essays from the idea of exploration and appreciation to the vigilance and sense of responsibility that is necessary for human beings to live harmoniously within the natural world. Similarly, in *Look to This Day* (1968), a one-year collection of memoirs, largely inspired by the regular newspaper columns that Dykeman wrote for the *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, Dykeman beautifully describes the land, the water, and her relationship to it, inviting

readers to share her appreciation, but at the same time, she acknowledges the problems with pollution and misuse.

The book opens with a vivid description of the view, near and far, that visitors to her Newport home may expect to see:

When a visitor comes up our driveway between forsythia bushes and tamarack, mimosa trees and crepe myrtle, and stops his [sic] car under the broad limbs of an old elm tree, if he walks across the lawn and up three front steps, then pauses and turns, in the distance, facing south, he will see the entire range of the Great Smoky Mountains. (1)

She continues to describe the panoramic view as it would appear on a clear day, a misty day, or a snowy day, pointing out the grandeur specific to each possibility. She paints a lovely picture of the mountains on an early winter morning: “When the first sun glints along their icy crests, and when the purple shadows of an early winter sunset creep up the steep inclines, the mountains are aloof, remote, and detached from any man-made world” (2). Paradoxically, however, the effect of human interference is all too evident. The Pigeon River, which flows into the French Broad, “rises clear and bold in the high mountains of North Carolina and Tennessee, but by the time it comes to us its waters are brown and polluted and we have little joy of it” (2). Perhaps her clarity and concern for the condition of the water arises from her earliest memories.

Dykeman compares the Asheville home of her childhood to the mountain grandeur of the Newport home that she has described. Perhaps because it was her

earliest home, Dykeman sees the Asheville property in a more intimate, up-close manner:

There are sixteen acres in this place: a rolling meadow edged by grapevines, an old apple orchard and steep wooded hillside. A bridge between thick rhododendron bushes and tall white pines crosses the stream in the front yard, and nearby is a pool fed by a spring at the base of a large old oak tree. The stone and concrete edges of the wide shallow pond have been softened by moss and vines that the years have brought to grow there. (2)

She acknowledges that she can “remember when that pool seemed as large as a sea to me and when its cycles of life—tadpoles and frogs, minnows and fish, dragonflies and lizards—held me fascinated for long hours during many seasons” (2). Jim Stokely informed me that it was beside that very pond and stream that his mother had learned from her father of the water cycle, and, as a child, she marveled at the idea that the water could flow to the ocean, evaporate, and return to that very spot in the form of rain.

The state of the water, humanity’s reliance on its health, and the implications of misuse and negligence affected Wilma Dykeman both on a macro and a micro level. She could clearly observe the negative impact on the water that flowed by her Asheville home and the Pigeon River near her Newport home. She easily relates the problem at home to the larger problem of environmental responsibility at a global level. Perhaps this local/global connection is best explained by her attitude toward

her two residences as well as her view of her relationship within her region and within the larger global community. She explains her relationship to her two homes:

And so, at one home we are on a crest, looking out upon a long, sweeping prospect of distant mountain ranges. At the other home we are in a green wooded valley, with the sound of a rushing stream, in the midst of hidden pockets of beauty. We should hate to have to choose which of the two we prefer, for by their combination we come to a whole view: the near and the distant, the intimate and the panoramic, the spacious and the specific. (3)

She analogizes the two settings as “the background for our own search for the whole life.” She notes that the family frequently travels because “[f]resh scenes, different modes of life, other people and their ideas, other countries and their past—all are of interest to us.” She correctly sees the interconnectivity of the local and the global, as she notes that “we always return. We have roots. In a time when rootlessness is not only a vogue but a way of life, we hope that our roots do not make us smaller, but larger human beings” (3). Her appreciation of her region, coupled with the awareness and thirst for understanding of the world beyond, yield a collective vision rather than the provinciality often associated with “regional” writers. In *Look to This Day* and *Explorations*, Dykeman gently awakens awareness with her introspective musings and lovely descriptions of the natural world and the simple pleasures of quotidian life, but her indictment of ways in which human beings have damaged the environment provoke the sensibilities of responsible readers. It is likely that the very gentleness of the book is the quality that caused it to be overlooked by America’s reading public.

We have long been trained to seek the exciting, the sensational, and the conflicted. Dykeman has the ability to present internal and ethical conflicts subtly, and the reflective qualities of *Look to This Day* and *Explorations* have not been widely popular or critically acclaimed.

Her most flagrant condemnation of capitalist greed and environmental and social irresponsibility occurs in *Return the Innocent Earth* (1973), the novel based on a family dynasty built on the food-canning industry. The Clayburn family strongly resembles the Stokely family, and Jim recognizes some of the family dynamics and personalities described in the novel. Yet the novel, like Dykeman herself, has a dual view: the personal story of the Clayburn family with the conflicts and dichotomies that they face, and the larger story of America itself, with the complex social and economic fabric that is woven out of the conflicts between traditional values and personal or corporate gain.

Running the risk of alienating the Stokely family into which she had married, Dykeman confessed to Sandra Ballard that *Return the Innocent Earth* was the “favorite of anything I have written” (“Interview” 457), even though she also acknowledges that it was her most difficult. Dykeman professed the book contains “everything I care about . . . racial issues, powerful women, the ways people make choices. It’s really a novel of choices” (457). The novel did not enjoy the popular or critical success of her earlier publications, possibly because it was indeed ahead of its time, promoting ideas of social and environmental responsibility well before those ideas were of widespread concern to mainstream readers.

The novel centers on a successful, family-owned cannery and its “progress” and modernization that include the use of deadly chemicals, resulting in sickness and death for workers and neighbors. Here Dykeman’s sense of social and environmental responsibility converge, and she demonstrates her concern for the human and nonhuman elements of the globe. The conflict between profit and humanitarianism drives the novel, and each character responds in unique ways, becoming either hardened to the plight of the workers or developing a conscience that disallows mistreatment of the land or its people. Paralleling the Clayburn family in the novel, Dykeman’s relatives by marriage made their fortune in the canning industry. One Coker County resident who wishes to remain anonymous stated that some members of the Stokely family disapproved of the novel and took the criticism quite personally. Dykeman addressed this issue in her interview with Richard Marius by telling him that “Most of the family has been very supportive and interested in all my writing. A few, I’m sure, were upset, but you know these things pass” (“Rooted Heart” 9).

If a few Stokelys were upset by the novel, it would not be the first time that Dykeman had been ostracized for her outspoken activist views. According to Oliver King Jones, Dykeman “faced considerable criticism in her approach to [race relations and the environment]. These were not the subjects a proper, Southern white lady mentioned in polite company, much less wrote about, in the 1950s and 1960s” (73). She and her husband were “ostracized by his family and many of their friends” (74) for their declarations of support for the Civil Rights movement. Yet Wilma Dykeman shared with her husband and her mother, Bonnie Cole Dykeman, a strong sense of injustice even when taking a stand placed them at odds with the community or family

at large, and hers was one of the earliest and most courageous voices insisting on environmental and social responsibility.

Although *Return the Innocent Earth* deals primarily with social issues, the treatment of the land appears throughout the novel, and, in particular, Dykeman shows the difference between the way the land was regarded by the earlier “mom and pop” business of raising and canning vegetables, comparing it to the disregard for the land’s long-term well-being as the family business progresses into a conglomerate that values profit and machinery above the human element. The condition of the land directly affects the condition of its inhabitants, primarily the laborers, but the cannery’s executives display shortsightedness and greed in their blatant disregard for either. The protagonist, Jon, serves as the voice of responsibility and conscience throughout the novel. The grandson of the cannery’s founder, he cannot ignore the injustice he sees exercised by his relatives. Dykeman opens the book with an epigraph from Genesis that indicates the cycles of the earth as God-ordained:

. . . and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake; for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done.

While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease. (Gen. 8.21-22)

As Daniel J. Philippon points out in *Conserving Words: How American Nature Writers Shaped the Environmental Movement*, nature writers such as John

Muir, Mabel Osgood Wright, Theodore Roosevelt, Aldo Leopold, and Edward Abbey played a seminal role in founding or revitalizing important environmental organizations such as (respectively) the Sierra Club, the National Audubon Society, the Boone and Crockett Club, the Wilderness Society, and Earth First!. Additionally, their nature writing set the stage for writers like Wilma Dykeman to point out the clear connection between human life and nonhuman life and ways in which each affects the other. Philippon points out their use of metaphors that he calls “conserving” words: park (Muir), frontier (Roosevelt), garden (Wright), wilderness (Leopold), and utopia (Abbey). Using these “conserving” words in a way that integrates literature, history, biography, and philosophy, these writers employed narratives to convey environmental values.

An avid reader, Wilma Dykeman had a great admiration for the work of Rachel Carson, devoting an entire newspaper column to a consideration of the (then) recently published *Silent Spring*. In that article, she reviews the book in a manner that calls for an answer to Carson’s dire warnings that chemicals and insecticides might be more dangerous than the fall-out from atomic explosions:

If this is so, one reason is the careless abandon with which we saturate grass and trees, water and air, earth and plants with poisons about which we know far too little. It is, I think, our responsibility to read Miss Carson’s arguments and meet her challenge with a courage free of commercialism . . . her subject is vital, not only to our own health, but to the continued existence of future generations. (“Are We”)

Dykeman goes on to consider that Carson's theme has invited criticism from assailants who would accuse her of being an emotional nature lover who has lost her grip on reality. Dykeman defends Carson, noting the irony of the charges against a scientist who has displayed thoroughness in her documentation, calling on unusually impressive sources for support. Dykeman extols Carson, not only for her message, but for her style as well, noting that it can be "both abrupt and graceful, learned and commonplace, but always it serves a purpose. That purpose is to startle us into taking a long, fresh look at the world around us—the whole world" ("Are We").

Additionally, Dykeman would likely have been familiar with the nature writers identified by Philippon. Jim confirmed that his mother was familiar with the work of John Muir, admiring him just as her father had before her ("RE: Three Items?"). Dykeman, in using Biblical references, follows Muir's perspective of nature as religion. In *My First Summer in the Sierra*, Muir repeatedly refers to the grandeur as the gift of God—divine handiwork. His descriptions of the camp on the North Fork of the Merced invoke all the senses:

The air is distinctly fragrant with balsam and resin and mint,—every breath of it a gift we may well thank God for. Who could ever guess that so rough a wilderness should yet be so fine, so full of good things. One seems to be in a majestic domed pavilion in which a grand play is being acted with scenery and music and incense,—all the furniture and action so interesting we are in no danger of being called on to endure one dull moment. God himself seems to be always doing his best here, working like a man in a glow of enthusiasm. (101)

Like Muir, Dykeman sees the care of the earth as a moral and spiritual responsibility, completely in line with movements such as the currently active Interfaith Stewardship Alliance which grew out of the “Green Gospels” movement of the late 1990s, a movement based on a statement by Bartholomew I, a spiritual leader of Orthodox Christianity, that “pollution and other attacks on the environment could be considered sins” (B. Murphy). Responsible environmentalism has also received support from groups as varied as Muslims around the world and evangelical churches in the United States, with most major religious groups including a movement of environmental responsibility. Thus, Dykeman brought forward some of the earlier nature writers’ philosophies in taking a moral and spiritual view of the care of the land.

As the novel opens, Jon has been asked to return to Churchill (a thinly disguised Newport, Tennessee), to investigate the death of Perlina Smelcer, a laborer who died after ingesting greens that the corporation had sprayed with chemicals meant to retard maturity and keep vegetables at their peak for maximum harvest. Clearly, while Jon is concerned with Perlina’s death and the possibility that the spray is harmful to both human and plant life, Stull, a relative who steers the cannery, has a different view. Stull points out to Jon that they have a “responsibility to nineteen thousand and twenty-two stockholders,” and Jon retorts that “our duty to them begins with Perlina Smelcer.” Stull shifts the focus: “My duty to [the stockholders] is to keep this company alive.” He is unconcerned about Perlina’s death or the possibility of chemical toxicity except as it may affect the company’s profit, and Jon immediately sees Stull’s priorities, adding to Stull’s comment, “[a]nd profitable”

(16). As the two continue to argue, Stull attempts to needle Jon by suggesting that he does not have the “guts to take a risk.” Jon demonstrates his integrity and social conscience when he replies, “I’ll tell you what I don’t have the guts for. Perlina Smelcer taking my risk for me. Especially when she’s not even been told—or asked”

(16). The social aspects of this novel will be discussed more fully in Chapter Five, but, this conversation sets the stage for Jon’s observation of the demise in the care of the land through the family’s three generations of ownership.

Jon drives himself to one of the Clayburn fields just as the picking machines are leaving for the day. His perception of them is telling:

I watched them roll out of the fields with the massive tread of dinosaurs, their long mechanical necks (for spitting out vines and stalks and leaves) weaving slightly like the necks of those prehistoric animals, sluggish and cumbersome. A stench of oil and fuel trailed behind them like offal. Where they passed the vines are strewn and crushed, the earth packed hard as asphalt. (33)

As he tries to stir the unyielding dirt with the toe of his shoe, Jon finds it to be “as unyielding as the concrete of streets I have just left” (33). He cannot help but compare the current state of the soil to its previous condition: “When we tended this land we were careful to keep it loose and loamy, never plowing too wet for fear it would bake into clods, making sure it could breathe” (33). He remembers his grandfather’s letting the “rich black dirt filter through his hands, saying ‘The land outlives us all—’” (33). Jon completes the comparison:

Now Clayburn Foods has just about come full term. Now our tractors and cultivators and planters gouge up the earth, turn it to rows, beat the clods to dust, feed it, irrigate it, make it yield whatever those gleaming cans demand. I can trace the ridges of the departed dinosaur's tracks even in the early darkness. Once the Clayburns treated the land as if it were a deep, warm, fertile woman worthy of all the care they could lavish. Now the using is all. (33)

The female analogy is indicative of the conflicted view noted by scholars of the earth's long relationship to women, whether that relationship causes the earth to be revered or abused. Certainly the novel's very title assumes that the earth has lost its innocence somehow, much as one might regard a rape victim as having lost her prior state of virginity or choice. As the novel progresses, Jon himself is faced with choices regarding his own integrity and his responsibility to the family business, the laborers, and the land itself.

In her first venture into fiction with *The Tall Woman*, Dykeman continued to build on the theme of the importance of clean water that she had begun in her earlier book of nonfiction, *The French Broad*. Set in the southern Appalachians just as the Civil War reached its end and continuing for another thirty years or so, the novel accurately depicts the importance of a clean water supply in selecting a home site, a theme that Dykeman had explained in *The French Broad*:

The cold springs of these mountains . . . which feed with thousands of steady streams to make a river, have been valued for generations by the families they feed. If halfway up a hillside or deep in the heart of

some remote cove you see a house and wonder why its people built there rather than on easier slopes, the answer is probably their water. Cupped in a clear shady pool under a thicket of blackberry vines and old shade trees, their spring bubbles from the earth like a rare gift for the taking. (11)

The protagonist of *The Tall Woman*, Lydia McQueen, and her husband, Mark, build high on a mountain near a spring. The soil is poor, and Mark is away more than he is at home, leaving Lydia responsible for the farm and the children, both of which are dependent upon access and cleanliness of water for their health and well-being. Lydia's close affinity with the spring becomes evident as she enters into a conversation with Dr. Hornsby, who asks what she is doing on "this bleak day on this godforsaken mountain." As she responds that she is "cleaning my spring," Dr. Hornsby teases her a bit: "And pray tell me, Lydia McQueen. . . how do you clean a spring? Do you wash the water?" She shows him her healthy and thriving spring, urging him to "[l]ook 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). She confesses to the doctor that the spring is her "favorite place on [the] farm" (177), indicating that she appreciates the spring both for its beauty and for the health that it bestows on her family.

Additionally, the spring symbolizes Lydia's own mental and physical well-being, and she will suffer by the novel's end by tasting the tainted water of Ham Nelson's spring, representing the moral decrepitude, greed, and contagion that will infect the entire community. Lydia begins to suffer symptoms of illness, becoming

increasingly feverish. She reflects on what she would “give to bury her face . . . in the coolness of her spring. . . she could veritably taste the sweetness of its water on her parched tongue. So different it was from the sluggish water she had found in the old spring on Ham Nelson’s farm” (304). In traveling the day before, Lydia had visited Nelson’s spring on property that she and Mark had rented when they were newlyweds. Nelson had allowed the once-clear spring to deteriorate through leaving rotted vegetation and waste from his sawmill on the site, the result a marker of the end result of carelessness and neglect. Lydia notes that

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

On the following day Lydia set out to clean her own spring and springhouse with the help of her daughter, Jessie, to whom she remarks, “I reckon I’m plumb foolish about this spring” (305). The typhoid fever that finally takes Lydia is a direct result of drinking the water from Nelson’s polluted spring. His neglect of his own spring has incited Lydia to take immediate action to make sure her own is clean, and her taking her young daughter along assures the continuation of the care of the water through the generations.

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. Dykeman attaches a literal and figurative meaning to the water throughout the novel, demonstrating clearly the interdependence between water and life. At the novel's end Lydia's life has indeed counted for something. She has been a leader in her community and has taken a stand for education and environmental awareness. Inscribed on Lydia McQueen's tombstone appears a single line: "Precious above rubies" (315). Although Lydia is a God-fearing protagonist who embraces the traditional role of wife and mother, she is nonetheless a paragon of feminine strength and courage, and she manages to change her community and bring education to the children through unorthodox methods.

Significantly, on Wilma Dykeman's tombstone, her sons inscribed those same words from the book of Proverbs describing a worthy woman. Just above that Biblical quotation appear the words "WRITER, SPEAKER, EDUCATOR, ENVIRONMENTALIST" —and certainly her body of work indicates her significance in all these areas. A newspaper article written by Duay O'Neil memorialized Dykeman by accounting the well-attended funeral service. The First Baptist Church hosted a gathering of family and friends, with music that ranged from Beethoven to Southern gospel hymns played on the banjo and guitar, a diversity that represented Dykeman's wide and varied interests particularly well. O'Neil pointed out that "Her love of the earth and especially the Appalachian region was evident in her simple wooden coffin topped with a spray of native hemlock, laurel, and rhododendron" ("Wilma Dykeman Eulogized" 1A). Like Lydia, Wilma Dykeman was

a God-fearing and, in some ways, traditional, woman, yet she accomplished much and demonstrated the same kind of strength and courage that she gave to Lydia.

Additionally, Dykeman's concerns have been handed to the next generation in much the same way that Lydia McQueen's progeny have picked up her love for the land and her aptitude for leadership and action. Her eldest son, Dykeman Cole Stokely, providing a tour of one of Dykeman's properties, pointed out specific trees, and even marked the spot where a particular tree once stood. He mourns the loss of the large trees that once stood in the cemetery where his ancestors are buried. He knows the names of the mountains intimately, pointing each one out as we looked across the Tennessee vista, and this land with all its natural wonders seems to be as much a part of his home as does the Queen Anne style house, built in the early 1900s by one of his grandfathers. According to Duay O'Neal, Wilma Dykeman, in her later years, was known to stand on her porch and direct each cut and trim of the rhododendron and laurel which surrounded her home (3A). Her older son shares his mother's concern for the natural world, and he represents the generational continuity so vital to the well-being of our resources. Wilma Dykeman shows the continuity of concern for natural resources through her depiction of Lydia's progeny in *The Tall Woman*. One of Lydia's grandchildren prefers to play with

blocks from [her grandfather's] sawmill . . . [b]ut the baby, Ivy, seemed to love the woods best. She clutched at every leaf and vine and flower they passed. And her hands were already Ivy Thurston's worst feature —and her best: long and large-boned hands that would

hold loosely and give generously and build well, strong, like her grandmother's, Lydia McQueen's. (315)

Named for a persistent natural vine, Ivy is a symbol of hope that other tall and strong women would rise up to continue her grandmother's legacy.

Dykeman, too, reaches out to include her literary children as well as her own family in her own awareness of the need for environmental responsibility. As though reaching out to include her readers, Dykeman ended *The French Broad* with an invitation. After noting the diminution of many of America's rivers, she advocated that we give our rivers, "like the people of the region, our concern and respect" because the French Broad and its surroundings boast "so much variety of beauty and species and experience." She noted the inability to fully articulate the substance of the body of water: "How can a sentence sing it or a chapter describe it or a book give it full life?" (346). Following this beautifully poetic note, Dykeman paraphrases and personalizes one of Robert Frost's poems:

I'm going out to clean the spring and wait for it to flow clear again; I may taste its sweetness. I'm going out to feel the soft yield of winter moss and mulch beneath my woods' feet. Won't you come too?

I'm going out to hear the slow talk of some stranger becoming friend as I listen to his life; to see the wide sweep of the river's silent power around a certain bend beneath the sycamores. I'm going out to smell fresh rain on summer dust and the prehistoric water odors of the old French Broad in flood.

Won't you come too? (346)

Dykeman's life always revolved around her awareness of the need for clear, healthy water—from her first words, “water coming down” (Ballard, “Interview” 444), to her intimate knowledge of the French Broad, to her wistful yearning during her last years to again smell fresh rain (“Wilma Dykeman Profile”). And she shares the deliciousness of that fresh drink with all the world.

Not only did Wilma Dykeman make significant inroads in raising awareness of environmental issues, she also addresses through her fiction and nonfiction social issues surrounding race. In addition to the books previously discussed, Dykeman's high regard for her Appalachian homeland is also readily apparent in three pictorial publications for which she provided the text: *Tennessee* (1979), with photography by Edward Schell; and *Appalachian Mountains* (1980), co-authored with her son, Dykeman Stokely, with photography by Clyde H. Smith; and *Mountain Home: A Pictorial History of Great Smoky Mountains National Park* (2008), co-authored with her son, James R. Stokely, III (a new edition of *Highland Homeland: The People of the Great Smokies*, 1978). As Waage points out, “photography and visual art involving Appalachian nature is inherently interpretive, and thereby ecocritical” (159), setting the stage for later artistic works such as films, and effectively inviting the audience through visual media to engage itself emotionally with the land and recognize the deep relationship between the land and its people.

Wilma Dykeman's keen sense of injustice applied not only to the stewardship of the land, but also to human beings, and she and her husband, James, were both intensely interested in racial issues and published *Neither Black Nor White* well ahead of many of the better known civil rights texts. In the following chapter I will discuss

Dykeman's contributions to the civil rights movement, for which she was, again, well ahead of the general movement.

CHAPTER THREE

BRIDGING TROUBLED WATERS: RACISM IN APPALACHIA

Wilma Dykeman fought injustice all her life, with racial issues coming to the forefront of several of her texts. While Wilma Dykeman resisted labels and never claimed for herself the title of “feminist” or “social activist,” her concerns as evidenced in her life and writings are clearly in line with both, and her concern for environmental responsibility locates her as an ideal study through the critical lens of ecofeminism. With her concern for the environment, for civil rights, and for women’s issues, Dykeman’s fiction and nonfiction are firmly rooted in ecofeminism, although the term did not come into its own during her lifetime, and, thus, she never claimed to write from that vantage point. Ecofeminism is a critical and theoretical approach that combines feminism and ecocriticism in its recognition and championing of the Other, a patriarchal ideology the concept of which was introduced and developed in Simone de Beauvoir’s ground-breaking book *The Second Sex* (1949). In the introduction to their anthology *Feminisms*, Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl point out that, while “feminisms are multiple, feminists . . . are always engaged in an explicitly political enterprise, always working to change existing power structures both inside and outside academia” (x). This idea is shared by ecocriticism, which “gathers itself around a commitment to environmentality” (Buell 11), and in its activism “is becoming increasingly conspicuous as women and men resist the waste, injustice, and cultural impoverishment of global capitalism

while attempting to preserve indigenous lifeways or create new, sustainable ones” (Carr 15).

From a treatment of Nature as an element that is voiceless and thus subject to domination and oppression, the leap to social justice is but a short distance. In their introduction to *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism*, Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy define ecofeminism as

a movement for social change arising out of the struggles of women to sustain themselves, their families, and their communities . . . against the “maldevelopment” and environmental degradation caused by patriarchal societies, multinational corporations, and global capitalism . . . waged for environmental balance, heterarchical and matrifocal societies, the continuance of indigenous cultures, and economic values and programs based on subsistence and sustainability. (2)

Although this definition demonstrates the connection between feminism and ecocriticism, Gaard and Murphy add that “[e]cofeminism is not a single master theory and its practitioners have different articulations of their social practice” (2). Rather than fear these diverse voices, ecofeminism seeks to honor them, as argued by Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein: “ecofeminism seeks to reweave new stories that acknowledge and value the biological and cultural diversity that sustains all life. These new stories honor, rather than fear, women’s biological particularity while simultaneously affirming women as subjects and makers of history” (qtd. in Gaard and Murphy 2). Ecofeminism, then, is one more way in which feminism recognizes and legitimates an under-represented and under-valued element of our culture—in

this case both the environment and any human population that is the repository of injustice.

Wilma Dykeman's concerns are cohesive with the working definition of ecological feminism as articulated by Elizabeth S. D. Engelhardt that "[h]umans are not conceived of as separate from and superior to the world around them [but rather] are part of the total ecology" (4), a view that had long been held by Dykeman, as she pointed out the close connections between misuse of natural resources and mistreatment of human beings.

Dykeman articulated her appreciation for the natural resources of her region in *The French Broad*, and she issued a call to action for greater responsibility for its preservation and use. Likewise, she identified in *Neither Black Nor White* (1957) the link between her concern for human resources and her advocacy for preserving natural resources: "As we have misused our richest land, we have misused ourselves; as we have wasted our beautiful water, we have wasted ourselves; as we have diminished the lives of one segment of our people, we have diminished ourselves" (5). Here she personalizes and brings close the issue of civil rights.

Similarly, her concern for the land and her strong sense of social injustice are closely aligned with feminism, which includes the marginalized, overlooked, and oppressed. Lawrence Buell explains the tension between "deep" ecology and "social ecology" and the ways in which ecofeminism situates itself between the two by pointing out the "broader shift in environmental criticism that ecofeminism's predilection for the more sociocentric path bespeaks" (111). He compares the current shift to the 1980s propensity of feminism to become involved in minority and

“third world” feminisms and the 1990s “autocritique of its prior focus on Western white middle-class concerns,” leading to an increased initiative for environmental criticism to become more substantially engaged with “issues of environmental welfare and equity of more pressing concern to the impoverished and socially marginalized: to landscapes of urbanization, racism, poverty, and toxification, and to the voices of witnesses and victims of environmental injustice” (111-12). Predating the surge of the environmental justice movement which Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein attribute to Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, Wilma Dykeman clearly saw connections between social injustice and misuse of natural resources. As an early voice advocating increased responsibility for protecting our natural resources, Dykeman further connected social injustice, particularly racial prejudice, to environmental concerns, and she anchored that connection to economic concerns, maintaining in *Neither Black Nor White* that “[i]f the South has been wasteful of its fish and fowl, its woods and waters, it is being no less shortsighted in its squandering of human resources today” (123). She followed that statement with careful data showing the tremendous out-migration of African Americans from the South, and the studies showed that, during the time the book was written, most of the African Americans who relocated to the North were the better-educated, upper-economic individuals who could find employment in their professions elsewhere, leaving the poor and uneducated behind, a drain on southern economics (124-25). According to one of the anonymous subjects interviewed by the authors, a black Memphis native who relocated to Chicago for the purpose of practicing his profession, African Americans “have to go where our talents can be used” (123). Seldom have civil

rights activists argued for equality as a factor that affects the economy, but Dykeman understood that she must assess her audience and argue in ways that would convince, and she correctly identified economic wealth as power. Her idealism manifested itself in practical ways.

Neither Black Nor White was a collaborative documentary written by Dykeman and her husband, James R. Stokely, Jr. Through interviews conducted with people from multiple racial and social backgrounds, the duo explored race issues throughout the South, and by extension, the very nature of the South itself. The research for *Neither Black Nor White* occurred through travel during the year following the monumental *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling (1954) that desegregated the public schools, and the authors sought to discover ways in which they could provide “honest praise and constructive criticism springing from affectionate concern for the region” (Stokely et al. 7). They conducted over 500 interviews with governors, senators, business leaders, ministers, and ordinary citizens. Describing the climate in the mid-1950s as a “cultural earthquake,” Dykeman and Stokely set out to immerse themselves fully in the South’s response to vitally important human rights issues. The two attended Ku Klux Klan meetings and meetings of the White Citizens’ Councils, met with Black leaders, and went to NAACP meetings. Their goal was to collect oral histories from ordinary people as well as dignitaries and leaders. They spoke with persons in power, black and white, but, as Dykeman told Richard Marius, they would also “stop and talk at filling stations . . . with anyone and everyone in the South” (“Rooted Heart” 10). Dykeman comments on the year and a half spent gathering data: “It was a strangely wonderful

time . . . There was an openness about everybody. They thought if you went to talk with them that you agreed with them. We didn't have to agree to be interested. What we wanted to know was what *they* believed in. And we wanted to *listen*" (10).

Reflecting on the project, Dykeman shared her impressions with Sandra Ballard:

A major concern was that we saw people who really knew better, who had reason to care more about the community, were so reluctant to admit other people to their friendship. Educated, financially comfortable people were in positions where they could have made such a difference . . . I remember time after time when we were talking to people and this underthread of prejudice would come out. And when it wasn't overt prejudice, they just didn't want to talk about it. They didn't want to touch it. They were "good to the cook," you know, or they had "a really good friend who's black . . ." (Ballard, "Interview" 455)

The project brought with it a degree of danger, and Dykeman, in typical fashion, did not back down. During their research for *Neither Black Nor White*, and later as they traveled to Montgomery, Alabama, as stringers for the *New York Times*, the two were often followed by a sheriff's deputy. The Reverend John Nelson recalled asking Dykeman, "Were you afraid?" and she answered, "No. There are things you have to do. They must be done, even when it is uncomfortable to do so" (qtd. in O'Neil, "Wilma Dykeman Eulogized" 3A). This statement is representative of the kind of courage that Wilma Dykeman showed in her every endeavor. She

never took the easy way out, choosing rather to suffer the criticism of both strangers and relatives.

Important to their project of collecting data for *Neither Black Nor White* was the authors' attempt to "let the South speak for itself" with its "multitude of voices" (10). Because of the volatile nature of racial relations during the 1950s, only a promise of anonymity would assure completely candid statements from those persons interviewed by the authors. A reissue of the book with the subjects identified would be useful now that enough time has elapsed. Dykeman's careful notes make this possible.

Jim Stokely commented that having a woman as a part of this journalistic team presented both benefits and obstacles. Other journalists, mostly male in the 1950s, scorned the idea of a woman as a serious journalist and writer, but Jim stated that Wilma Dykeman brought a unique point of view and noticed details that Stokely might have missed. The two worked well together as a team, with Dykeman doing most of the actual writing. Stokely was personable and conversational, and his friendly manner quickly won the confidence of their subjects, as did the fact that the husband and wife team did not appear threatening or judgmental. With a poet's sensitivity and command of language, Stokely contributed "flashes" to the project, but Dykeman wove the narrative and wrote the majority of the book. Their goal was to "know the South" (10). Presenting the multiple voices of the South, Dykeman and Stokely dispelled the myth of a "Solid, or monolithic, South" (Jones 74). In large part, *Neither Black Nor White* merely presents the multi-voices of the South and allows them to speak for themselves. The book primarily consists of presenting all

manner of responses to the racial climate all over the South during the 1950s, without a great deal of editorial comment; however, both authors abhorred injustice in any form, and interjected at times, however sparingly, their views. Most eloquently, with the threat of nuclear war omnipresent, they end the chapter “Alphabet Stew” with the following commentary, after interviewing various subjects on the KKK (Ku Klux Klan), NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), and various configurations of the WCC (White Citizens’ Council):

Between the blackness of the night behind us and the whiteness of the day ahead, revealed in one atomic flash, our common humanity stands poised, Neither Black Nor White, but only blood and bone and spirit. When we betray it, alone or collectively, we admit we have let the prattle of our neighbors deafen us to the thunder of Jehovah. (114)

Although *Neither Black Nor White* was primarily concerned with the relationship between the black and white citizenry of the South and ways in which the idea of desegregation was perceived and implemented, the book’s focus is larger still. As Dykeman and Stokely considered the races, they did not overlook the injustices of the past and the mistreatment of cultural groups occurring well ahead of the racial tension of the 1950s, pointing out that the infamous 1828 Cherokee Trail of Tears had been instigated by greed over land and gold. Dykeman’s interest in the Cherokees began as early as her research for *The French Broad* and would continue throughout her lifetime. In an interview dated March 13, 1990, Dykeman discussed her draft of *Sequoyah’s Gift* with Patricia Gantt. The book arose from her earlier (1987) *New York Times* article entitled “Honoring a Cherokee.” Although the draft is not stored

in the Dykeman manuscript collection at the University of North Carolina at Asheville, Gantt cites several passages that demonstrate Dykeman's keen concern and painstaking research ("Appalachia in Context" 145-46). In her 2002 interview with Sandra Ballard, Dykeman again referred to the novel, stating that she planned to return to the manuscript and "do it all over again in an entirely different way" (444). Dykeman's two sons would not comment when questioned on the status of the manuscript.

From her keen interest in the past to her concern for current sociopolitical issues, Wilma Dykeman's primary focus was always rooted in justice, whether social or environmental. Having recognized the threat of nuclear war during the 1950s, the authors, in their trek through the South, discussed the social dynamic of Oak Ridge, Tennessee, the city established in 1942 as a production site for the Manhattan Project, a federal government initiative that developed the atomic bomb. Dykeman and Stokely recognized that Oak Ridge was certainly unique in its composition and purpose and could single-handedly disprove any notion of a unified South. In Oak Ridge, composed of residents from all over the United States, with schools run by federal authority, desegregation was accomplished quickly and without incident or murmur. The authors got to the heart of the climate of unease by stating that "[p]erhaps the anachronism of discussing mankind in terms of black and white is particularly apparent in this town of the split atom, in this age of the massive bomb" (371). As one Alabama-born resident of Oak Ridge noted, "The question used to be how people lived . . . now the question is, *if we live*. . . [a]ctually I suppose the two are one: how we live determines if we live" (371). Given the uneasy political

climate and the threat of atomic annihilation, the book's ending is especially poignant. Perhaps nowhere is the local so clearly connected to the global as it is in the book's final sentence: "The dilemma of the world, in microcosm in the South, is as simple and involved as that" (371). With the threat of nuclear war, those residents and officials at Oak Ridge had no time or desire to quibble over the federally mandated desegregation process.

As is true of many texts of cutting-edge social significance, *Neither Black Nor White* was not unanimously well received. The idea of racial equality was not accepted by all audiences, and Oliver Jones points out that the authors were "ostracized by [Stokely's] family and many of their friends" (26), many of whom were steeped in traditional "southern" values. Dykeman became unpopular with the Conference of the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association, of which she was president in 1955, due to the themes that emerged in the books following *The French Broad*. James Stokely wrote in a 1965 letter to playwright Paul Green, "I suppose you know that Bill Sharpe & Co., and others of the Old North State official cultural custodianship, placed Wilma Dykeman Stokely in the literary doghouse some years ago because she was, and has continued to be, outspoken on the subjects of racial integration and civil liberties" (Green). She suffered harsh criticism from the editors of *The State*, a magazine published in Raleigh, North Carolina, following the publication of *Neither Black Nor White*. The magazine had previously praised Dykeman's work, but with the publication of her book on racial issues, the editorial view perported that she was a "holy hack" who unfairly showed the South at its worst by writing about its intolerance. Additionally, the editors labeled her an "erratic

banner-waver” (22 Feb. 1958) who favored blacks as they participated in “the art of violating trespass laws” (30 Apr. 1960), especially with regard to her visits to the Highlander Research and Education Center in New Market, Tennessee, a training ground that, from its inception in 1932, has served as a

catalyst for grassroots organizing and movement building in Appalachia and the South. [They] work with people fighting for justice, equality and sustainability, supporting their efforts to take collective action to shape their own destiny. Through popular education, participatory research, and cultural work, [they] help create spaces—at Highlander and in local communities—where people gain knowledge, hope and courage, expanding their ideas of what is possible. [They] develop leadership and help create and support strong, democratic organizations that work for justice, equality and sustainability in their own communities and that join with others to build broad movements for social, economic and restorative environmental change. (“Highlander”)

The Highlander Center has been instrumental in labor, Civil Rights, and people’s movements for nearly eighty years, but in the eyes of its detractors in the 1950s, it was merely a hotbed for “liberals,” and Dykeman certainly bore this label due to her courageous treatment of the subject of race relations. There Dykeman met and worked with civil rights activists, including Rosa Parks.

Her sons report that the general populace of Newport identified both Dykeman and Stokely as liberals and that the reputation of their parents trickled down

through adults to their children and became a bit of a burden for the Stokely sons in public school. The children also bore the burden of widespread belief that the Stokely fortune had trickled down to James and Wilma. Jim reports that he and his brother each inherited \$420 worth of Stokely stock—no trust funds or savings—and the family actually had less money than many others in the county. Nonetheless, both Dykeman and Stokely held firm to their convictions and refused to bow to what must have seemed, at times, virulent popular opinion.

Other reviewers lauded the book without reservation, most notably Ralph McGill, editor of *The Atlanta Constitution*, himself an avid and early supporter of civil rights. In his review of *Neither Black Nor White* for the *New York Times*, McGill praised the authors for their honest coverage, calling it “painstaking, probing and faithfully done” (7). He especially admired their presentation of the best and the worst of the 1950s South: “The way led by quagmires and pits of injustice, steep hills of prejudice, and dark and terrible depths of the human spirit, sunny glades and bright pastures of decency, gloomy prisons and their dead, a few places all shiny and bright” (7). McGill recognized the expertise of Dykeman and Stokely in their endeavor: “Where other writers have journeyed briefly, or taken samples in the manner of a taker of polls, these two brought their intelligently seeing eyes and sensitive hearts to the whole South” (7). In the days following McGill’s review, writers of some letters to the editor took umbrage with his glowing response to the book; others agreed with him. Pulitzer prize-winning historical writer Bruce Catton extolled *Neither Black Nor White* as “the best study of the present-day South that I have yet read” (Walser Papers #4168).

Dykeman's courage in writing the truth during a volatile period in the history of the United States, and in the face of her husband's prominent family and some disapproving literati and historians, places Wilma Dykeman firmly in the tradition of other writers who refused to waver in the interest of honest presentation of controversial issues. The careful research of the authors in penning this monumental text earned *Neither Black Nor White* the Sidney Hillman Award as the best book of the year on civil liberties, race relations, or world peace.

Although *Neither Black Nor White* was obviously significant in Dykeman's contribution to race relations and understanding, she dealt with race in her other work as well, particularly in her first novel *The Tall Woman* (1962), as she presented the Melungeons, a racial "Other" of the Appalachian region, as victims of negative racial stereotyping. Just as race relations in the South may be considered a microcosm of the world, so can the tensions and resolutions in the southern Appalachian region reverberate beyond those boundaries. Dykeman had long resisted the national trend of discounting regional literature and regional writers to a place of lesser value than writers who are not viewed in that way. She spoke of the disadvantages incurred by labeling writers in ways that confine their impact:

Being considered a Southern, an Appalachian, a regional writer, has diminished serious evaluation of my work in some circles. I believe that much of the world's best literature is regional, in the largest sense of that word. Discovering all that is unique to a place, or a person, and relating that to the universals of human experience may be old-

fashioned, but I feel it is one of the challenges of writing. (“Wilma Dykeman”)

Historically, to call a writer “regional” was to imply that the writer was not “national” and important. As James M. Cahalan notes in his article “Teaching Hometown Literature: A Pedagogy of Place,” Appalachia is not the only marginalized region. Although Lawrence Buell correctly states that “there never was an is without a where” (*Writing*), some regions such as sections of the American West, Midwest, and all of Appalachia have typically been marginalized. Cahalan states that his intention in focusing on hometown literature has been to “extend our reach beyond regionalism to hometowns both national and international in range. Doing so helps students better appreciate the lives and writings of literary authors, in part by resurrecting authors and works thought to be ‘parochial’” (250). He commandeers the term “glocal,” a term coined by economists who used the term to indicate the global taking over the local, with Cahalan instead revising the term to suggest that global thinking must begin with attention to the local and that indeed the two are so closely intertwined that everything may be considered global and local simultaneously (251). Dykeman expressed a similar view, along with her annoyance with the negative label of regionalism, noting that “the most frustrating thing that can happen to an author is to have regionalism equated with provincialism . . . when really you are an American writer writing from place. Most great writing, I feel, has a sense of place. I hope this would make it more universal rather than limited” (qtd. in Gantt 15).

In her introduction to *Bloodroot: Reflections on Place by Appalachian Women Writers*, Joyce Dyer suggests that, while “[l]iterary history. . . has not been kind to women who have chosen to write with a strong sense of their regions, . . . it has perhaps been least kind to women from Appalachia” (2). Her statement underscores the traditional privileging of one region over another, and the point becomes clear that gender has also factored in the prejudice against certain types of literature. In their research for *Listen Here: Women Writing in Appalachia*, Sandra Ballard and Patricia Hudson realized that the 1995 *Oxford Companion to Women Writing in the United States* included only seven women writers from the Appalachian region. Ballard and Hudson have since corrected this oversight with attention to 105 Appalachian women writers in their collection. Yet, they freely confess that there were many more, and they have provided a supplement of additional names. As a region, Appalachia has been viewed as a site of backwardness and ignorance; therefore, much of its popular literature, especially in its earliest configuration, fell into the “local color” genre, with stereotyped, ignorant, “hillbilly” characters with primitive lifestyles. In reality, much of the Appalachian literature that has arisen, especially from writers intimately familiar with Appalachia, dispels stereotypical thinking, and advocates activism against injustice early on.

Some of the earliest literature to be written about Appalachia served to perpetuate the stereotypes that came in part from historians such as Horace Kephart, himself an émigré from the North. Kephart himself admitted, in the preface of *Our Southern Highlanders*, that he was concerned with presenting a picture of “the mass of the mountain people” as he experienced them. He was not concerned about “the

relatively few townsmen, and prosperous valley farmers, who owe to outside influences all that distinguishes them from their back-country kinsmen.” As he saw them, the “real” mountaineers were the “characters,” the ones who “interest the reading public” (2). He sought to present, not a true picture of the variousness of mountain residents, but instead the expected “local color” characters. He both reinforced and developed the hillbilly stereotype.

Kephart cited examples from Murfree’s work, as well as the work of John Fox, Jr., and Alice MacGowan, examples in which mountain characters are presented in various ways, but he claimed that “when we have closed the book,” it is “he of the long rifle and peremptory challenge” that “stands out clearest as type and pattern of the mountaineer” (12-13). Perhaps this characterization of mountaineers stands out largely because of the ways in which Kephart and others have written about them. Kephart described “one definite type that greatly predominates,” claiming that the type has developed because of the homogeneity of the cultural heritage of the mountain population and the common practice of intermarriage (286). This type he described as “lean, inquisitive, shrewd . . . lean-faced, sallow, level-browed, with rather high cheekbones. Gray eyes predominate, sometimes vacuous, but oftener hard, searching, crafty—the feral eye of primitive man. . . [with a habitual] sullen scowl, hateful and suspicious . . . sinister and vindictive” (287-88).

Although Kephart based his impressions on his eighteen years in Appalachia, his view was not a complete, or even an accurate, one. For example, in his claim of homogeneity, Kephart declared that “the mountains proper are free not only from foreigners but from negroes as well” (453), a claim that is disputed, with more even-

handed statistics to support the opposite view, by historian John A. Williams and others. Kephart cited the low numbers of African Americans in two Kentucky counties and one Virginia county, but this does not, in any case, represent the entirety of Appalachia. Likewise, while the Scots-Irish roots are most prevalent for most residents of Appalachia, other cultural groups were represented, a fact that is, again, covered in Williams' text. Kephart's stereotyping and condescension did not go unnoticed by the mountaineers. Donna Trent reports that her father, Andrew Lee Posey, now deceased, a long-time resident of North Carolina, held a view of Kephart shared by many other North Carolinians, showing that Kephart was none too popular with the local folk. "He was an outsider," he stated, "who came in here and told us who we were" (qtd. in Trent).

Historians and "local colorists" were not solely responsible for Appalachian stereotyping. Even the great Mark Twain, in the opening chapter of his first novel, *The Gilded Age* (1873), depicted the mountaineer, as well as the landscape and even the domestic animals, in unflattering terms, and thus perpetuated and developed the negative stereotype:

The locality was Obedstown, East Tennessee. You would not know that Obedstown stood on the top of a mountain, for there was nothing about the landscape to indicate it—but it did: a mountain that stretched abroad over whole counties, and rose very gradually. The district was called the "Knobs of East Tennessee," and had a reputation like Nazareth, as far as turning out any good thing was concerned.

The Squire's house was a double log cabin, in a state of decay; two or three gaunt hounds lay asleep about the threshold, and lifted their heads sadly whenever Mrs. Hawkins or the children stepped in and out over their bodies. Rubbish was scattered about the grassless yard; a bench stood near the door with a tin wash basin on it and a pail of water and a gourd; a cat had begun to drink from the pail, but the exertion was overtaxing her energies, and she had stopped to rest. (17-18)

The illustrations provided by Augustus Hoppin and others reinforce Twain's portrait of the lazy, dirty, and ignorant mountaineer. Even the cats and dogs are portrayed as lethargic and worthless.

In addition to somewhat innocent stereotyping that found its source in fictional and historical accounts of the area, portraying mountaineers in stereotype served certain political purposes as well. In his cultural commentary *Appalachia on Our Mind*, Henry D. Shapiro notes that "Both the local-color writers and the Protestant home missionaries had a practical stake in promulgating their respective visions of Appalachia, for the validity of their efforts depended upon public acceptance of assertions that Appalachia was indeed a strange land inhabited by a peculiar people, a discrete region, in but not of America" (xiv). This strange and peculiar quality, according to David Whisnant, took on one of two extremes. On one end of the spectrum, the Appalachian people are portrayed as "'backward,' unhealthy, unchurched, ignorant, violent, and morally degenerate social misfits . . . a national liability," while a radically different view often occurring in local color texts was that

of a “pure, uncorrupted 100 percent American, picturesque, and photogenic pre-moderns who were a great untapped national treasure” (110). A number of fiction writers were responsible for developing and perpetuating either extreme of the stereotype.

Mary Noailles Murfree (1850-1922) was one of the most prolific and popular “local color” Appalachian authors. Although Murfree was a Tennessean by birth, her privileged status, Chegary education, and her distance from the mountains place her some distance from those mountaineers about whom she wrote. Her summer visits to Beersheba Springs, a watering hole of the rich and famous, gave her glimpses into the lives of mountain people who came down the mountain to hold positions of servitude to the summer residents; thus, her stories often consist of an educated outsider, and the reader sees a world of ignorant mountain population through his eyes, and in that view only the young girls of the mountains are in any way attractive or admirable, traits that will be lost through tragedy or age. In his significant study of Appalachian culture and literature, Cratis Williams maintains that Murfree’s stories, although well-crafted, have served to add to, and even create, Appalachian stereotypes (580).

In *Literary North Carolina*, in a chapter presenting a comprehensive discussion of post Civil War novelists, Richard Walser specifies Murfree, along with Frances Hodgson Burnett and Maria Louise Pool, as writers whose portrayals of mountaineers have been particularly significant in establishing negative stereotypes, failing to “show any genuine understanding of mountain people” (23). These novelists have had a strong impact on the reading public due to their popularity. The development and popularity of local color fiction, dictated by “Victorian standards of

romantic sentimentality and lily-white propriety” rendered fiction that “would not scandalize the tender sensibilities of young maidens. . . In these novels men were either heavenly paragons or hellish scoundrels” (21). Walser covers a number of post Civil War novelists whose books are set in Appalachia, particularly North Carolina, and their impact was in direct relation to popular sales of their books. He sets aside Constance Fenimore Woolson (1840-1894), as not only a more skillful writer than her “local-color sisters,” but he also notes that, while she “make[s] use of the mountain scene” in her short story, “Up in the Blue Ridge,” and in two novels, *For the Major* (1883) and *Horace Chase* (1894), she focuses on the town-dwellers rather than the “‘picturesque’ mountaineers” (23). Frequent visits to Asheville, North Carolina, during the 1870s provided Woolson with a sense of place as evidenced in the beginning sentences of one of the chapters of *Horace Chase*:

Nothing could exceed the charm of the early summer, this year, in this high valley. The amphitheatre of mountains had taken on fresher robes of green, the air was like champagne; it would have been difficult to say which river danced more gaily along its course, the foam-flecked French Broad, its clear water open to the sunshine, or the little Swannanoa, frolicking through the forest in the shade. (65)

Yet another reason that Woolson might have escaped the stigma of the local colorist label might well have been her kinship to James Fenimore Cooper and her friendship with the famous Henry James. Together with her New England roots and her privileged boarding school education, her literary connections quite likely protected her somewhat from such categorization.

Perhaps one of the most even-handed early Appalachian writers was Emma Bell Miles (1879-1919), a writer whose very identity was somewhat mixed. Born in Evansville, Indiana, young Emma moved with her family to Rabbit Hash, Kentucky, where both parents taught school. At age nine, Emma relocated with her family to Walden's Ridge near Chattanooga, Tennessee. Culturally, then, she was part of the higher, educated class, and she had lived, quite literally, on the edge of the mountains rather than in their heart. This dividedness gives her a unique perspective of Appalachia. Even her writing style gives evidence of her own divided nature. In her memoir *The Spirit of the Mountains* (1905), Miles refers to the mountain people as "they," and just as often, she refers to them as "we." Clearly, she felt at times distanced from these people, and, as often, she felt herself a part of them. To her credit, she does not over-romanticize the mountaineers or judge them, but she provides an intelligent and realistic view of the residents of rural Appalachia.

In addition to the "local color" fiction of Mary Noailles Murfree, a number of other writers published books that followed the formula for providing the reading public with mountaineers who were, in turn, quaint and picturesque, or ignorant, vicious, and dangerous, with some clear lines drawn between the mountain girl, innocent, natural, and beautiful, the object of desire, and her male counterparts with little to redeem them. John Fox, Jr. (1862-1919), popular author of *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (1908) was also responsible for perpetuating stereotypical ideologies of the mountain folk. Although born near Paris, Kentucky, and living for a number of years in Big Stone Gap, Virginia, Fox, like Mary Noailles Murfree, was not a part of the mountain culture about which he writes. The son of a school master, he received

an excellent education from his youth onward, graduating from Harvard University in 1883. Like the protagonist in *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine*, Fox was interested in real estate development and business. Fox presents the mountaineers as ignorant, the men hot-blooded and bloodthirsty, involved in an ongoing feud that began with one schoolboy making fun of another schoolboy whose trousers were patched. Like Murfree, Fox singles out a young woman, June, who is beautiful and full of promise, but he infantilizes the mountain residents over and over, and he makes a stark comparison between their culture, stuck in the Middle Ages, and that of modernity, racing toward the twentieth century. The book is filled with beautiful descriptions of landscape, but the outsider protagonist, Jack Hale, has no qualms about purchasing mineral rights to the land, taking advantage of the ignorance of the mountain residents, and lining his own pockets by exploiting both the land and its people. This he justifies as he considers the possibility of wealth from mining the coal and building a steel mill: “if he would take the old man’s land for a song—it was because others of his kind would do the same!” (36). Hale is somewhat conflicted over his ambitions, noting that buying the land or the mineral rights to it would be “a cinch,” yet he reflects, “It’s a shame to take the money” (45). His popular book is a mountain version of *Pygmalion*, with June Tolliver as Eliza to Jack Hale’s Henry Higgins. Fox’s novel received a great deal of popular acclaim and was later made into a film and an outdoor drama, the latter still in performance in Big Stone Gap since 1964 (Virginia’s longest-running play). The book, film, and the play have served to reinforce Appalachian stereotypes for over a hundred years.

An insider status positions writers such as Wilma Dykeman to present a more balanced view of the culture even though, as Jim Wayne Miller stated, the position of “being an insider does not save you from mistakes and failures, Appalachian writers are now giving us our own perceptions; we are writing our own dispatches” (54). Dykeman sought to “put Appalachia in context,” seeing that context as “the South, the larger region; . . . America, the nation, especially as it burgeoned after the Civil War until the Great Depression of the 1930’s; and finally, the larger world of international tensions and challenges” (“Appalachia in Context” 28). She maintained that “we’re not a strange little body of people” (39), thus acknowledging the complexity that exists in Appalachian culture as in all cultures.

Dykeman’s treatment of race issues in her novel *The Tall Woman* demonstrates the commonality of the issue of racial injustice, although the setting and characters in the book are specific to the mountains of Southern Appalachia. Dykeman’s position as an insider lends ethos to her work, and she understands the values that drive the residents of Thickety Creek, providing a balanced view of realistic characters with virtues and flaws.

Her treatment of race surrounds the prejudice of the Bludsoes, known for their violence and moonshining. She never uses the word “Melungeon” to describe the Bludsoes, but scholars recognize the lore as presented in the novel: “They’ve got dark blood in them from somewhere . . . They’re mixed. They claim from Indian or Portugee” (39). This, coupled with the physical descriptions of dark-skinned, dark-haired, vibrantly blue-eyed or strikingly amber-eyed individuals can only point to the Melungeon culture, an isolated group of people whose racial origin is unclear.

Although Melungeons cannot be proven to have descended from any particular group, many theories exist, and all of them point to a mixture or “mélange” of black, white, and Indian heritage. The earliest romanticized version of possible descent from Portuguese sailors, Turkish, Spanish, or a lost colony, seems to have been contrived in part to counteract the stigma that might have come from any association with Africans or Indians. DNA studies, available recently, have been inconclusive, with members of the Melungeon community having the same kind of mixture as most other individuals. Their appearance, however, has remained somewhat distinctive in terms of skin tone, eye color, and hair texture and color, leading to more speculation over their origin and the reasons they have remained separate from “mainstream” culture. Their isolation is due, at least in part, to the geographical divide once imposed by ostracism that sent them to the uppermost and outermost mountain regions, separate from white settlements. Increased pride in their Melungeon heritage has recently caused many individuals to claim their roots and wish to investigate the past, whereas many in the past had denied their origins and “passed” when possible.

In *The Tall Woman*, Dykeman points out that whenever thievery or other mischief occurs, the first inclination of the white mountain residents is to accuse one of the Bludsoes. They are referred to as “savages” (45), and their children as “heathenish” (46). Even Lydia, the otherwise morally sound protagonist, suspects the Bludsoes of thievery and worse and wants nothing to do with them. To his credit, Mark, Lydia’s husband, refuses to buy into the community’s preconceptions regarding the Bludsoe family. Unlike other residents, he does business with them,

buying a little piece of land on which to settle with Lydia. He understands that they deal in moonshine and that they had, on occasion, been violent, but he believes them to be honest. He considers the Bludsoes friends and hunting companions and remarks that “They won’t cheat us in a trade. No matter what else may be said about the Bludsoes, nobody ever gave them a name for anything but straight-out honesty” (74). In truth, the Bludsoes perform charitable acts for Lydia and her family when others in the community do not always rise to meet her needs. Twice the Bludsoes provide meat for Lydia’s table, refusing payment or accolades. Although Lydia graciously thanks them, she, like others in her community, tends to suspect the Bludsoes at the first sign of trouble. She suspects that they have stolen meat from her storehouse, she suspects them when her ginseng bed is raided and destroyed, and she, along with others, believes the Bludsoes are responsible for burning the new schoolhouse.

A woman known for her integrity and good morals, Lydia’s tendency to blame the Bludsoes demonstrates a serious flaw, and she has fallen into the kind of prejudice held by the white population at large against the Melungeon family. Dykeman uses Lydia’s blindness with regard to the Bludsoes to demonstrate that good people with the best of intentions can be short-sighted in terms of accepting hearsay and the opinions of the community at large to condemn individuals and cultural groups. Mark’s refusal to prejudge and accuse the Bludsoes, however, is his finest trait of character, even though he may be blamed for falling short in many other ways. Mark actually intercepts an angry band of men intent on wreaking vengeance on the Bludsoes for their alleged arson of the schoolhouse, and he and Lydia travel up the mountain to ask the Bludsoes outright. Mark has defended them to their accusers:

“The Bludsoes don’t lie . . . Fight and kill and make liquor, yes, but their word’s their bond” (32).

Dykeman’s scene is the turning point of Lydia’s change of attitude. Driven as much by curiosity about these strange folk as by the need to determine their involvement, if any, in the destruction of the school, Lydia’s paradigm shifts dramatically. She sees the squalor in which they live instead of her expectation of “something rare and exotic . . . the stuff of mysterious legends” that she had half expected. She realizes that the family “were outcasts, and nature had not redeemed them from the wildness and poverty to which men had sentenced them” (247). Here Lydia discovers that the Bludsoes are not guilty of any of the crimes against the settlement with which they are charged. She sees the damage that public opinion and prejudice has placed on an entire group of people. She admits, “I was wrong,” and she reflects to Mark as they descend the mountain, “All these years . . . none of us down here have ever really known what those folks were like . . . We’ve packed off on them everything bad we didn’t admit of doing ourselves” (251). This realization is a tremendous moment of growth for Lydia and an important lesson in terms of stereotyping and judging; a willingness to come to know the Other and to observe the reality of their lives and natures, leading to understanding and compassion, a theme that would continue with Dykeman’s attention to feminist issues in this and other books. Dykeman shows through Lydia’s self-realization that wrong thinking can occur even in well-intentioned, otherwise good, people.

In contrast to the wrong thinking and prejudice directed toward the Melungeon family, Dykeman presents several other scenarios in which a high status in the community held by white individuals does not result in matching moral behavior. Hamilton Nelson, the richest, most politically influential man in the area, is not only dishonest and immoral, but he thwarts the efforts of those who would improve the community as a whole. Morally bankrupt, Nelson refuses to acknowledge the child he has fathered with Dolly Hawkins. Dolly, born into one of the wealthiest and most socially prominent families of the community, perpetuates and maintains a lie about the parentage of her child, allowing Lydia's brother, Paul Moore, to believe that he is the father, marrying him out of necessity and convenience, not for love. Dolly is more concerned about appearances and reputation than honesty and integrity. She is willing to maintain a deception that ultimately hurts others, including Paul. Additionally, Gentry Caldwell, the local preacher, turns out to be directly tied to the attack by the outliers that wrought havoc and harm on the Moore family, including the loss of their livestock and a violent attack on Sarah Moore from which she will never physically or mentally recover. Instead of an upright spiritual leader, he leads the way to violence and destruction. As she is fond of doing, Dykeman deliberately chooses a name, "Gentry," that will surely prove ironic, as this preacher does not fit the description one would expect to find within the "gentry."

Given the disappointment in Gentry, Dolly, and others who purport to be religious, it is no wonder that Dykeman has Lydia finding God in the natural world rather than through organized religion. Lydia admits to her sister Katy:

I'm not a-tall sure what I really do think about the Lord. It may sound heathenish, out in words like that, but it's truth. . . I'd take more pleasure in Heaven if there was a wide green field and plenty of woods, with streams and all manner of flowers and birds and living things to discover. (157)

She further condemns the short-comings of ministers like Gentry, stating that they are “so wrapped up in the glories of that next world . . . that they're missing half the glory of this world. I can't believe the Lord meant us to be heavyhearted every minute here when He made so much to lift our hearts” (158).

In short, hypocrisy, short-sightedness, and selfishness often result in character flaws that cause entire communities to hold prejudice against groups and individuals, and social standing or occupation do not automatically accord virtue.

Dykeman continues the theme of racial injustice in *The Far Family*, a continuation of the McQueen/Moore/Thurston family saga begun in *The Tall Woman*. The protagonist of *The Far Family* is Ivy Thurston Cortland, Lydia McQueen's granddaughter and heiress of Lydia's love of the land and devotion to family and community. The Bludsoe family, victims of racial prejudice in *The Tall Woman*, appear again as the family has grown well into the 20th century. Ivy, a baby at the end of *The Tall Woman*, is a middle-aged woman as *The Far Family* opens. A credit to her ability to create multi-faceted and complex characters, Dykeman's Homer Bludsoe carries out his family tradition of honesty as he admits to the murder of Hawk Williams, an African American ne'er-do-well, refusing to allow Clay Thurston to take the blame. Ironically, it is Homer, himself a Melungeon, judged to be racially

“Other,” who makes the boldest and most obvious statement against racism. During his trial, Homer attempts to explain his reasons for killing Hawk Williams outright instead of seeking justice through the judicial system: “Don’t none of you know anything? All that’s tearing apart this world today between black and white, and you still don’t see?” (300). His own racial insecurity had stood between Homer and the judicial system. He articulates his complicated identity:

My Bludsoe folks, nobody rightly knows who they were . . . [b]ut my pappy and my grandpappy, they wouldn’t say they were Negro because they were ashamed of that. And they wouldn’t say they were white because they were afraid of that. When they first brought me to town, I didn’t know whether I was country or city. I turned it all over in my mind a lot, this way of separating people, and I determined one thing: A man’s got to be whatever he is without shame or fear. (335)

Even though he killed Williams in retribution for Williams’ violence against Homer’s daughter, he did it because he had no confidence that the court system would protect him or his family due to their low social status. Although Williams was held in contempt by the black and white communities alike, his and Bludsoe’s characters underscore Dykeman’s ability to portray the fact that all races contain individuals of all types.

Dykeman’s more obvious portrait of race relations in the 1960s comes from the Cortlands’ maid, Naomi Henderson. Although Naomi is highly regarded within the household, she is not treated equally. The clear divide between the races is apparent in the relationship between Naomi and the white family. Naomi could have

been the key to discovery with regard to Hawk's murder, but she is never considered as someone who could fill in the missing pieces. Naomi has served the family for years, and she addresses her employers respectfully, with surname and title.

Conversely, they address her by her first name, expect her to maintain the household and look after the aging Martha Thurston, and do not even accord her the privilege of choosing her own mode of transportation. Ivy's visiting sister, Frone, voices her opinion: "That Naomi makes me nervous . . . [s]he looks like a little dried-up high priestess, seems to know too much" (144). Ivy accedes the fact that the knowledge is one-sided by stating that Naomi "knows all about us—what we eat, wear, talk about, do, how I keep my house, what's on Mama's mind, where and how all of you live. And we don't know a thing about her except what she wants us to know" (144).

Frone dismisses the entire matter by stating, "I never did know many Negroes anyway" (145). Dykeman comes back to this toward the end of the book as Ivy's son Phil acknowledges to his mother the connection between the local and the global: "If I can know my family, my folks here well enough, maybe I can understand people on the other side of the world, too" (370). As in Lydia's misconceptions about the Bludsoe family from *The Tall Woman*, the insidious racism infecting *The Far Family* is often unnoticed—at least until it explodes in violence.

Perhaps not since Lillian Smith's *Strange Fruit* (1944) had the issue of racial equality been addressed by a southern woman writer from Appalachia. Lillian Smith herself reviewed Dykeman's *The Far Family* favorably, admiring her "skilled avoidance of stereotypes" and her ability to develop "complex and interesting characters" (Walser Papers). Loyal Jones notes that *The Far Family* centers on the

conflict between families upgrading themselves versus others holding onto their traditional mountain culture. Dykeman was ahead of her time in recognizing this trend that would divide families in ways they had not anticipated. While she does not buy into the stereotypes, Dykeman does not hesitate to confront them head-on in honest and realistic ways, using her complex characterization to demonstrate the various ways in which human beings interact. Wilma Dykeman's treatment of social issues led the way for other women writers to deal extensively with environmental issues as well as social equality with regard to race and gender, especially injustice that is of specific concern in Appalachia. For example, Denise Giardina, Lee Smith, and Diane Fisher Gilliam have written extensively on social issues in Appalachia, from the coal wars to land exploitation, and always providing evidence of the human cost involved when injustice reigns. Even Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), without a doubt one of the most influential books since *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, followed Dykeman's *Neither Black Nor White*. Lee's fictional depictions flesh out the attitudes found throughout the South and recorded by Dykeman and Stokely in *Neither Black Nor White*. Likewise, John Howard Griffin's *Black Like Me* (1961) is an account of a white journalist's six-week experience traveling throughout the racially divided south disguised as a black man, and like *Neither Black Nor White*, was an attempt to gain honest opinions and reactions from the black and white communities.

In addition to her fiction and nonfiction books, Wilma Dykeman also addresses the issue of racial equality in her frequent articles written for the *New York*

Times Magazine, co-written with her husband, James Stokely. These are organized chronologically and briefly assessed here.

“Inquiry into the Southern Tensions” (13 Oct. 1957) was drawn largely from the interviews that would comprise *Neither Black Nor White* that would appear later that year. This article provides excerpts from interviews in which Southerners seek to explain some of the causes of the racial conflicts underlying the South’s reaction to integration. Some of the primary causes for the conflict were believed to fall into the categories of sex and intermarriage, lack of communication, and a lack of leadership. Difficult to read because of the harsh views and language of the racists interviewed, the even-handed treatment included representation from liberals and conservatives, blacks and whites. In the best representation of unbiased journalism, the authors simply record the views of those southerners closest to the racial issues of the 1950s.

“Clinton, Tennessee: A Town on Trial” (26 Oct. 1958) provides interviews in the same vein as *Neither Black Nor White*, providing views from a variety of individuals involved in the volatile integration resistance culminating in the 1958 dynamiting of Clinton’s high school. The authors interviewed black and white citizens of all ages whose opinions ran the gamut in terms of acceptance of integration. They ended with the words of a prominent Baptist minister, the Reverend Paul Turner: “I am a pastor working with individuals, and I see that prejudice is one of the ailments of their minds. You know, we send rockets to explore the depths of outer space, but we fail every day in our duty to explore inner space” (65).

“Report on ‘The Lost Class of ’59’ (4 Jan. 1959) appeared in the wake of the resistance of Norfolk, Virginia, to integrating its schools. The victims of the city’s refusal to open its high schools that year were the white students, many of whom were disillusioned and determined to give up their educational efforts. As a result of the resistance, 10,000 pupils were locked out of six of their seven white junior and senior high schools. Virginia’s largest city took this action after its Board of Education, under protest but also under Federal District court orders, assigned seventeen black pupils to the six white schools. In September 1958, by authority given him under state anti-integration laws enacted in 1956, Governor J. Lindsay Almond, Jr. closed the schools, calling upon the law that allowed this action when schools were “threatened” by integration. All the black schools and the one white school without black students continued to be open, as did the Catholic high school, successfully integrated some years prior. Parents took action when the schools did not reopen within two or three weeks, with some forming neighborhood tutoring groups, some founding a private academy, some transferring attendance to unaffected schools in the area and beyond their home districts. Each of these solutions carried its own pitfalls, financial and otherwise. Episcopal rector Peyton Randolph Williams stated that “The closed mind, the impossibility for people to talk things over—these are doing more damage to our democracy than even our closed schools. We must recover some means of communication between people.” One resident summarized the situation in this way: “When you close the public schools, you haven’t rejected the Supreme Court—you’ve rejected civilization” (55).

“New Southerner: The Middle-Class Negro” (9 Aug. 1959) considers the importance black parents placed on integrating the schools when there were still serious inequities with regard to employment, housing, and political opportunities. The authors provide a number of statistics regarding income and employment for black adults as well as the trend of relocating from rural to urban areas and relocating to the north. The article opens with an anecdote from a young black father in one of the South’s larger cities who stated, “I can’t understand why they [certain white politicians in his city] keep shouting that when we try to send our children to the best schools we can, it means we want them to marry whites. What it means is that we want our children to have a chance at owning a station wagon and a ranch-style house and carrying a briefcase instead of a shovel” (11). The authors point out that “If many white Southerners could understand the implications of this man’s statement, then the equality which they envision largely as nightmare might be reappraised as closer to the fulfillment of a dream—the American dream” (11). They point out that “Education is one of the master keys unlocking the door of opportunity—economic, political, social—into the middle class world, and Southern Negroes, no less than other Americans who want to ‘get ahead,’ seek ways to improve educational opportunities” (54).

“‘The South’ in the North” (17 Apr. 1960) points out that there are some similarities along with differences above and below the Mason-Dixon line. An examination of Clinton, Tennessee, and Deerfield, Illinois, seems to support the folk saying that “in the South white people don’t mind how close a Negro gets to them as long as he doesn’t rise too high (economically or socially), while in the North white

people don't mind how high a Negro rises as long as he doesn't get too close" (8).

The thesis of this particular article is that "every region, and every individual, would be well advised to examine their own inconsistencies with at least as much enthusiasm as they expend on deploring the shortcomings of others" (8).

"Integration: Third and Critical Phase" (27 Nov. 1960) provides information on the "hard core" segregationist deep south states and municipalities which met with violence the new phase of integration—that of winning in reality what was granted by law in the Supreme Court decision of 1954. The incident that sparked this article was the violence exhibited in mid-November 1960 toward four black children who entered the first-grade classes of two previously all-white public schools in New Orleans. The "deliberate speed" with which state and local governments were mandated to desegregate had been interpreted to mean "at a snail's pace." Finally, the deep south would be brought into compliance, even though many of its legislators were outspokenly opposed to desegregation. The article cautions that, without proper preparation and leadership, the crisis experienced in New Orleans would be indicative of many locations throughout the Deep South.

"The Big Cure for Segregation" (24 Sept. 1961) encourages increased voter representation from the black community. Although not as dramatic as demonstrations and sit-ins, power rests in the vote, and voting is basic to every other freedom. The authors provide success stories of increased votes from black citizenry, and they also cover some of the reasons blacks have not been quick to embrace the idea of voting. Many black citizens fail to vote, not due to apathy but instead due to

disillusionment, frequently believing they have no viable options in candidates or opportunities to swing the vote.

“Hopeful Dialogue of the Races” (11 Aug. 1963) focuses on the example set in Knoxville, Tennessee, of establishing a biracial committee to create a truly “open city.” The authors state that “Because Knoxville has neither the intransigence of the Deep South nor the complacency of the North, its experience has significance for cities both North and South” (10). The biracial committee was formed at the urging of *Knoxville News-Sentinel* editor Loye W. Miller who issued this challenge:

Let’s make Knoxville an “Open City” . . . this means admit everybody to every place that caters to the general public—to the movies, the stores, the hotels, motels, and to the “private” hospitals. And let’s do it by common consent and not by force. This calls for leadership from Knoxvillians of all races and faiths. (10)

The black members of the committee added equal employment opportunities to the list of goals, and all agreed that the black representatives should be truly representative of all facets of the black community. Change occurred in Knoxville through the efforts of the committee.

Given the attention Dykeman gave to social justice and civil rights, as evidenced in these significant and important articles, and given her established concern for environmental issues, she was just as concerned about women’s rights, under the umbrella of her strong abhorrence of injustice. She saw all these as connected within the web of humanity, and through her novel *The Tall Woman* and *Too Many People, Too Little Love*, her biography of birth-control pioneer Edna

Rankin McKinnon, Dykeman makes her case for strong women receiving the justice and recognition they deserve.

CHAPTER FOUR

COME HELL OR HIGH WATER: WOMEN'S ISSUES

In addition to Wilma Dykeman's environmental and racial themes in *The Tall Woman* and *The Far Family*, she also sends a clear, albeit subdued, message that aligns itself perfectly with twenty-first-century feminism. Perfectly aware of inequities with regard to women and non-whites in America, Dykeman nonetheless resisted all labels for herself, including that of "feminist." In her interview with Richard Marius, she states, "Mine is not a feminist world nor a masculine world—it's a people world" (8). Although she lived through the surge of feminism of the 1960s and 1970s, she never declared her allegiance to Gloria Steinem, Betty Friedan, or other feminists so prevalent during those decades. Like so many other labels, that of "feminist" functioned a limitation to Dykeman. Jim Stokely reveals that his mother was simply opposed to labels, and felt that accepting a label was a confining act—limiting her to the featured trendiness and less visible constraints of the "[feminist] movement" [in its earliest manifestation].

In some of her talks she would pose a rhetorical question—"What do women want?"—and would answer it very simply: "We want it all," complete with open palms and a look of dismay to signal "What did you think we want and deserve? We are people and we want what anybody wants." ("Re: Question")

Obviously, Dykeman did not shy away from speaking for women and advocating equal rights. Jim further elaborates on a characteristic inherent in both his parents, that of recognizing the “inherent and ultimately equal worth of every human being.” He notes that Dykeman was outraged when she saw women not receiving their fair share, but this held true for any social injustice. Her concern and advocacy for social justice was not limited to women only. In her view, through shunning labels, she was in a better position to take action against any sort of injustice (“Re: Question”).

In her interview with Marius, Dykeman reflected over the inspiration of the many voices that appeared in her fiction, specifically *The Tall Woman*. She cited her interest in “the unknown person . . . the person who is not famous, who doesn’t become well-known, who influences so much of life” (10). Those uncelebrated and unknown people had piqued Dykeman’s interest as she collected material for her first book *The French Broad*. She noted that in her research for that book she had “talked with wonderful women in the mountains . . . with men whose mothers and whose wives had meant so much to the life of the region” (10). Dykeman questioned, “Who had ever heard of Mrs. Daniel Boone, or Mrs. Davy Crockett, or those other frontier people? And yet, those women were there; they were raising the logs on one side of the cabin; they were having their children on those cornshuck mattresses; they were bringing the schools there; and they were nameless” (10).

Her sensitivity toward the “unknown” and “nameless” increased as she and her husband collected data for *Neither Black Nor White*. As the duo traveled throughout the South, Dykeman was impressed with the tremendous risks taken by ordinary people, specifically women. She stated, “I know women who were divorced

by their husbands because they supported a hospital for crippled children that admitted black children. And I know one or two of the women whose families were completely broken—who lost whole relationships with family or friends because of this” (10).

Noted Appalachian scholar, educator, and author Loyal Jones met Wilma Dykeman in the 1960s and worked closely with her for a number of years through their association with Berea College and through membership in the Council of the Southern Mountains, along with a number of other organizations. Willis D. Weatherford made plans to open the Appalachian Center at Berea College in 1970, and Loyal Jones became its first director. By 1972, Dykeman, along with such renowned Appalachian scholars and writers as Cratis Williams and Jim Wayne Miller, became a regular summer visitor, providing a series of lectures for teachers, librarians, and interested students. Jones knew her writing, and he heard her speak on numerous occasions. He confirms her positive views of feminism:

I don't remember her ever saying negative things about feminists. It's just that she was so far ahead of the feminist movement. All the time I knew her, she was so self-assured about her abilities as a writer that she would not have felt it a burden that she was a woman . . . I don't think that she ever was hindered by her status as a woman. (“RE: Wilma Dykeman”)

In her resistance to this, and other, labels, Dykeman is in good company with other noted writers. This resistance is not limited to Appalachian authors. As noted in James M. Cahalan's *Double Visions: Women and Men in Modern and*

Contemporary Irish Fiction, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, one of the most successful contemporary poets who happens to hail from Ireland, agrees with American writer Joyce Carol Oates that she wants to be viewed as a poet writing among women and men, not as a “woman poet” or “feminist.” Likewise, Irish writers Jennifer Johnston and Julia O’Faolain also see feminism as too limiting. Additionally, Cahalan points out that Irish writer Edna O’Brien has rarely been regarded as a feminist, even though she is the novelist who has “done perhaps more than anyone else to encourage the entire current generation of Irish women novelists” (4). These are merely a handful of examples of women from another country who eschew labels that would, in any way, limit or categorize them beyond their preferred position simply as a more wide-reaching “writer.” Writers have commonly rejected labels that readers and critics have assigned to them. Edward Abbey, for instance, rejected the titles of “nature writer” and “naturalist,” but his readers almost always refer to him by those titles.

Although Dykeman herself was fortunate in the success of her career and self-confident in all her roles, her position as a member of the Defense Advisory Committee for the Advancement of Women illustrates her concern for the status of all women. In an interview, Jim Stokely admitted that, at least early in Dykeman’s career, some doors would have been closed to her as a woman, particularly in the field of journalism, but working in collaboration with her husband helped break the barriers (30 Mar. 2011). She described their technique in her interview with Sandra Ballard:

We neither one took notes while the conversations were happening.

We were both good listeners. We talked to a range of people—from

state officials and business leaders and bankers to people just out working in the fields. It was surprising to me how many black people would talk to us when I expected they might be reticent . . . We would listen and then go to the car and write like mad on legal pads, both of us recording everything we could remember about the conversations, little bits of language, stories we'd heard. When we got home, we would compare notes.

We waited to do any synthesis until we were home. We worked separately, though I wrote a lot of the book. James would make changes and additions . . . I would do most of the initial writing, and then James would add things, ask questions, make changes. (448)

Although her gender might have presented obstacles, Dykeman insisted upon continuing her important work, not as a woman writer, but as a writer, period. One need look no further than the title of the *Courier-Journal's* article on Dykeman to see that she took issue with all labels. In "Dykeman Resents Regional Label," she stated that she most resented that her strong sense of place had perhaps led to her being regarded as provincial. She elaborated, "the most frustrating thing that can happen to an author is to have regionalism equated with provincialism . . . when really you are an American writer writing from place. Most great writing, I feel, has a sense of place. I hope this would make it more universal rather than limited." Jim Stokely further elaborated on Dykeman's resistance to any type of labeling, especially as it might restrict or confine writers:

She likewise rejected the label of “regional” or “Appalachian” writer, not because she had any aversion to regionalism in general or her own region in particular, but, again, because this type of labeling served to limit the writer in question and take her out of the realm of “writer,” holding her in a smaller place. Wilma Dykeman’s world was inclusive, even as it embraced and appreciated the local and the particular. Her appreciation for her own Appalachian region appears unquestioningly in her fiction and nonfiction. (“Re: Question”)

In examining her texts, and based on statements made by Dykeman herself, this emphatic response by her son should put to rest any concerns that Dykeman was not concerned about women’s issues, and certainly through an examination of her writing, one easily sees that her passion equals that of anyone of her era claiming the title of “feminist.”

Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse argue that women’s regional writing is a site of subversive and oppositional questioning of the dominant culture. Certainly, Dykeman’s books demonstrate this type of questioning through their presentation of marginalized individuals within a particular region, whether the marginalization is due to gender, race, or class. Such a view of regional writing certainly calls greater attention to the category of the popular and entertaining “local color” writing that had long been regarded as having little literary or social value. In a movement largely led by Fetterley and Pryse, many of these texts are being revisioned and may be seen as America’s “big” history, heretofore believed to have been captured only in such epic, male-authored novels as Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*. Melville, by the way,

although hailing from the New England region, is rarely labeled as “merely” a regional writer. Regional writers such as Dykeman tend to relate America’s larger history not through epic panoramas, but in small and specific chapters of individual lives, and especially through marginalized characters and marginalized regions, offering yet another perspective on America’s multiple stories. Lee Smith makes this distinction by calling these two approaches “Big History” and “Little History,” and claims that personal, specific stories—or “Little History”—helps us understand and care about the telescopic panorama of “Big History” (“Historical Fiction”). Loyal Jones remembers an incident during one of the Berea College Appalachian Studies workshops—Dykeman’s engagement in a

heated argument with a young history scholar with a newly-minted Ph.D., who asked why we were giving so much attention to fiction in our attempt to understand the Appalachian region and its people when he thought a study of the region’s history would be more enlightening . . . Wilma argued forcefully and convincingly her point of view. (“RE: Wilma Dykeman”)

Dykeman was well aware of the power of fiction to present, as Lee Smith would call it, “Little History,” which, in many cases sheds at least a different point of view on a truthful historical perspective, and it is these stories, often penned by women, that make up “Big History” as explained by Fetterley and Pryse. A historian herself—twenty-one years as Tennessee’s State Historian—Dykeman was well aware of the value of a historical perspective, but she was unwilling to agree that fiction has no place in presenting historical truth.

Here we might remember that it was Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) that is widely recognized as one of the most effective catalysts bringing the issue of slavery to its culmination in the American Civil War. Certainly, much had been written, and much had been said, but these characters brought to life—"Little History"—struck a note with Americans that nonfiction did not. Other examples of this phenomenon include Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906), which presented a chilling story of the atrocities in the meat-packing industry, leading to the creation of the United States Food and Drug Administration that imposed restrictions on food industries. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), was a "story," if you will, or "Little History" that caused the entire world to take notice of the devastating effects of DDT on the environment. Ann Pancake's *Strange as this Weather Has Been* (2007) has recently had the same effect in striking a chord with readers regarding the unsafe and unethical practice of mountaintop-removal mining. Thus, the particular and the local, from this revisionist perspective, resists and questions the dominant culture and which writers are qualified to represent America's history which also includes "her-story."

With such a view in mind, close examination of early local colorists such as Mary Noailles Murfree may reveal undercurrents of resistance and opposition, demonstrating in a style much like that of Wilma Dykeman, that one need not be strident and insistent to make one's point for feminism. Contained in Murfree's sentimental romanticism and Holley's humor are sharp indictments of the dominant culture. Although Mary Noailles Murfree's flowery stories usually present beautiful, but weak, stereotypical mountain women, she does occasionally find ways to subvert

the stereotype as evidenced in one of the stories from *In The Tennessee Mountains* (1884). Mandy Tyler, in “The Dancin’ Party at Harrison’s Cove,” presents a refreshing change from Murfree’s tragic female figures. This young girl has behaved outside the norm of accepted female behavior when she promised five different young men the privilege of driving her home after a social event. The last to leave, Mandy exits the party to find all five men waiting for her, and she strikes out on foot, alone, leaving the five furious suitors. Not only had Mandy attended the event alone, but, by her own choice, she left without male escort as well. In the wake of the young coquette with a mind of her own having raised the consternation of the entire community, all the young men decided that at the dancing party hosted by the Harrisons, none of them would ask “that thar Mandy Tyler” to dance.

True to their word, the young men refuse to ask Mandy to dance, but when Rick Pearson shows up, reputed to have committed many lawless acts, including horse theft, he asks Mandy to dance, scandalizing the other guests. Mandy’s response and Murfree’s commentary are telling:

She did not reply immediately, but looked timidly about her at the shocked pious ones on either side, who were ready but for mortal fear to aver that “dancin’ ennyhow air bad enough, the Lord knows, but dancin’ with a horse their air jest scandalous!” Then, for there is something of defiance to established law and prejudice in the born flirt everywhere, with a sudden daring spirit shining in her brightening eyes, she responded, “Don’t keer ef I do,” with a dimpling half-laugh;

and the next minute the two outlaws were flying down the middle together. (233)

At this point the story's focus shifts to the animosity between Rick and the other men, but astute readers must not miss that this is one young mountain lass who does not suffer a tragic fate of an early death, nor does she suffer from unrequited desire.

True, the story stops short of revealing Mandy's eventual future, but when we last see her, she has defied her cultural mores and has demonstrated a degree of agency hitherto unseen in Murfree's young female characters. For her efforts, she is considered, as is Rick, an "outlaw," and seems to evoke secret admiration from her neighbors. One might consider Murfree's reasons for giving this daring young woman a name with "man" in it. Perhaps, while Murfree has pushed the boundaries with Mandy, she can't quite seem to completely break the bonds of the patriarchy.

Likewise, Dykeman's protagonist in *The Tall Woman*, Lydia Moore McQueen, while assuming a traditional role of wife and mother, subversively undercuts the prevailing patriarchal hierarchy of the late nineteenth/early twentieth century by positioning herself in ways that insist on bringing education to the community, equally to males and females, white and non-white residents, and she thus undermines the politically and economically privileged male reign.

One of the most famous local colorists of the late nineteenth century was Marietta Holley from upstate New York, best known for her humorous writing comprised of satirical sketches written from the persona of Samantha Allen, "Josiah Allen's wife." From the voice of the protagonist, Holley challenges the status quo of women, and she uses an uneducated country woman's commonsense viewpoint to

ridicule the twisted logic that would prevent women from participating as fully as men in American culture and politics. These issues are usually treated as a dialogic argument between Samantha and Josiah. In spite of the vigorous marital conversations in the novel, Holley herself never married. She was well regarded by writers and suffragists during her lifetime, and Susan B. Anthony often asked Holley to give speeches at suffrage conventions. Although she made a number of public speeches, Holley's preferred medium for promoting her ideas was, in fact, her writing. Nonetheless, the reading public largely regarded Holley as "merely" a local colorist, and few were able to see her serious message underlying the humor. She is plain about her intended audience. The epigraph of *My Wayward Pardner; or, My Trials with Josiah, America, the Widow Bump, and Etcetery* (1880) reads,

TO JOSIAH AND AMERICA.

With the hope that he and she both will put their

Best foot forward and walk off nobly in

The path of right this book

Is dedicated by

Their affectionate friend and well wisher,

JOSIAH ALLEN'S WIFE. (iv)

"Josiah" represents all the husbands, or men, and he is seen as a separate entity from the feminine "America." It is telling that Samantha signs as "Josiah Allen's Wife," indicating that many see her identity as coming from her relationship to her husband rather than her own personhood, but the nomenclature is, in fact, a subversive message that calls into question women's identities. Her placement of

“America” as feminine indicates that both she—and all women—and indeed the entire nation, suffer from certain patriarchal practices and attitudes that she will address in the book. Dykeman portrays the same type of message as she demonstrates in *The Tall Woman* the profound effect that the Civil War has on families in America. Not only is the country split in half, but families are split, and the psychological suffering experienced by the men who fought in the war and the women they left behind is perhaps deeper and less easily healed than the physical wounds suffered by many of the soldiers.

Holley indicates in the preface (in the voice of Samantha) that her purpose in writing the book is to protest the “agony and wrongs” (v) committed against women. She states, “I love the female sect . . . I am one of ’em myself” (v), but Josiah urges her to “[l]et ’em write about it themselves” (v). Samantha repeats several times throughout the preface that Josiah “had reasons for not wantin’ [her] to tell all [she] knew about certain things” (v), indicating that he is complicit in the mistreatment of women.

In answer to Josiah’s urging her to let someone else address the issues, she responds by reminding him of an incident in which he had injured a leg and was helpless to help himself. She, too, was unable to assist him beyond her call for help which came from a friend, Sam Snyder. She likens this to the state of “them sufferin’ female wimmen” (vi) for whom the book is a call for help, and Samantha hopes that “another Samuel, an uncle of mine, that I honor and admire, may hear it, and start off on the run, and lift the hull of them poor female wimmen up, out of their pain and humiliatin’ situation” (vi). Here America becomes the familiar personification of

Uncle Sam, so Samantha calls for those in power to awaken to the plight of women. Her use of dialect and humor, as well as her frequent assurances of her high regard for the nation (and for men), softens the tone of her message, making it more accessible and palatable to the general (male) public, yet her opposition to the status quo is plain. The domestic site of the home becomes a political arena to show the inequities suffered by women across the nation. Samantha's outspokenness to her husband provides a model for women who must make their own case and insist upon change. While Lydia Moore McQueen (*The Tall Woman*) remains supportive and faithful to her husband, she cannot rely on him to bring about the sorely needed social changes within the community. In fact, Mark is more often away than home, and, when home, he is often absent emotionally, so Dykeman portrays the necessity for Lydia to act on her own behalf and on behalf of the women and children of Thickety Creek.

If these examples of subversion and opposition may be detected in the writing of early local colorists, how much more, then, might contemporary regional novels contain this same type of questioning?

The Appalachian region itself is somewhat marginalized, perhaps more than other American regions, as is easily seen in the prevailing and early literary acceptance of such regional writers as Sarah Orne Jewett, Kate Chopin, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, and Willa Cather. These women were no less regionalists than Mary Noailles Murfree, Emma Bell Miles, Harriette Arnow, and Wilma Dykeman, yet they came from and wrote about regions traditionally accorded more respect than the southern Appalachian mountains: New England and the Northeast, New Orleans,

the South, and the Gulf Coast, and the Midwest. Only Kate Chopin wrote from the South, and she was a northerner by birth, writing about the Louisiana Creole culture, seen as more exotic and foreign than typically American or Southern. Within the range of Southern literature, the flatland South has typically been privileged over the Appalachian South.

With its very title, *The Tall Woman* sets out to debunk myths and stereotypes of the Appalachian woman. Its protagonist, Lydia Moore McQueen, resists the feminine stereotype, particularly the Appalachian feminine stereotype, from the beginning. Instead of Mary Noailles Murfree's and John Fox, Jr.'s presentation of the young mountain girl as beautiful, fragile, helpless, and naïve, sure to become a victim, Dykeman provides a woman who is not only physically tall, but, more importantly, of a high moral stature. Lydia McQueen fulfills the mountain saying that serves as the epigraph of the novel, "A tall woman casts a long shadow," by profoundly impacting those community members whose lives she touches. Her determination and strength transform the entire community in significant ways, and her influence continues to shape strong men and women, as is evidenced in the sequel, *The Far Family*.

The wife of a husband who is mostly absent from home, Lydia Moore McQueen shows herself to be capable of caring for her family at the same time that she inserts herself into the role of change agent with regard to the community's inadequate school system. Demonstrating her assertiveness early on, young Lydia Moore rejects a marriage proposal from the community's wealthiest man, choosing instead to marry Mark McQueen for love, against her family's wishes. Although she

rejects Ham Nelson's offer of marriage, she will continue to face him throughout her lifetime as he becomes her adversary after this rejection. Although Ham through his wealth holds the most powerful position in the community, Lydia single-handedly forces him to provide the community with a new school.

Not only does Lydia serve as a catalyst for improvement within the community at large, but she also fulfills the traditional role as wife and mother. She remains faithful to her husband even though he is absent for a great deal of their married life. Mark is the weaker character, preferring to run away from the drudgery of farm work and family, and his return visits often bring unpleasant results. Even though she is a traditional wife, Lydia does not see her role as subservient or weaker, and she does not hesitate to question Mark and disagree with him, speaking her mind in the aftermath of the damage often wrought by his actions. In perhaps one of the most disturbing episodes of the book, Mark kills their milk cow for beef simply because of his own pride. He cannot bear to have visitors think that they are so poor that they cannot afford to put meat on the table. He overrules long-term gain for short-term gratification and the saving of face. Lydia responds with tears, hurt, and outrage—not only because she needs the milk that the cow will provide but because the cow represents “the high confidence Lydia and Mark had shared on their wedding day when he had said [of the cow], ‘She’s all yours’” (89). The cow is symbolic of the “hope that had carried Lydia through the suspense and destruction of the war” (90). Even the cow's name, Pearly, is indicative of the great value attached by Lydia to her. Turning to Mark, too late to stop his destructive act, Lydia voices her consternation and disappointment, questioning his impulsive and unwise decision:

“‘How could you ever a-thought it, or a-done it?’ . . . For the first time since their marriage she turned on him in full hot anger. ‘Something that never harmed you, something gentle, how could you go out in the night and kill?’” (90). Not only is this an analogy for the accepted treatment of women—wasteful, cruel, and self-defeating—but in terms of its senselessness, shortsightedness, and pride, it is also indicative of the indictment of the senselessness of war, particularly appropriate during the Civil War setting of the novel.

Dykeman emphasized the importance of the cow to Lydia by her response when she first received it as a wedding gift from Mark. It is their “finest possession” (20), and Lydia extols the cow’s worth as she makes a promise to the beast upon receipt of the gift: “You bring us milk an cream for rich yellow butter and we’ll see you get al.l the grass and fodder you can hold and a snug place to sleep nights when winter comes. You’ll be valuable to us. I’ll call you Pearly” (20). With one babe in arms and another on the way at the time the cow is killed, having the milk that the cow would have provided would have made all the difference to the family’s well-being, yet the chapter ends with a telling clue to the strength of Dykeman’s female protagonist. Mark has just declared again his love for Lydia following the sharp words over the cow, when Lydia recognizes a great truth:

Out there beyond this brief charmed circle, all around them, invading even their own minds, was something that disbelieved and destroyed and defeated . She knew it and recognized its power and yet she would never cease to deny it. In this moment of large weakness she suddenly knew large strength, a core buried deep within her that would

refuse to be daunted by the outrageous blows or the niggling trifles
human life was heir to. (91)

She is sometimes unable to prevent the damage, whether inflicted by Mark, other individuals, or simply circumstances, but Lydia McQueen is no martyr. No doubt Dykeman deliberately inserts in Lydia's married surname that quality that would enable her to both assume the reign of the household in assuming the responsibilities that rightly should have belonged to her husband, and also to demonstrate the wisdom apparent in a well-respected monarch in her ability to understand the long-term effects of choices. Mark, on the other hand, only a part-time member of the home and community, tends to see only the short-term effects of his decisions. Without benefit of a royal birth, Lydia is "queen" of her household and, in essence, "queen" of the community as well. Lydia refuses to be defeated even in the face of great odds against success and happiness. She endures and shows strength by facing her difficulties head-on, within her own little family and extending into the greater community, and she does not hesitate to confront wrong-thinking in males in this patriarchal time and place, even when the male in question is her own husband.

The cow symbolizes, in important ways, Lydia herself, as demonstrated by Dykeman's skillful use of Biblical references and allusions. Prior to her marriage, Lydia's own father had praised her as fulfilling the proverbial commendation that "sets the value of a good woman beyond rubies" (18), an allusion to the thirty-first chapter of Proverbs, widely recognized as the chapter that contains the praise of a worthy woman. The cow, aptly named Pearly, could be attached to at least two

Biblical illustrations, one attesting to the cow's value by comparing her to a rare, beautiful, and valuable item, a "pearl of great price" (Mt. 13.45-46), the possession of which the Bible proclaims to be worthy of selling all of one's earthly goods. The other allusion refers to the casting of one's pearls before swine (Mt. 7.16); that is, wasting something of great worth by offering it to those who could not appreciate its value. Clearly, Mark did not recognize the value of the cow, and he wasted her potential merely to save appearances before his visiting friends.

Readers may well question whether Mark likewise lacked the proper appreciation for his wife. By novel's end, Lydia has cast her own significant shadow in the community, and her tombstone bears a single line, "Precious above rubies" (316), both a note of praise as her family and friends recognized her contributions, but also perhaps an indictment against her careless husband who failed to recognize to the fullest extent her worth.

If Mark does not always fully appreciate his wife, the community does recognize her worth, and respect and admiration for Lydia increases with time. Through outsmarting Ham Nelson, she brings a school to Thickety Creek, benefiting all the residents of the community as well as her own children. In Lydia, Wilma Dykeman presents a woman of strong moral fiber and determination, although perhaps a target for criticism for living with a husband who does not always satisfactorily provide for his family, financially or emotionally. However, she is no frail, mountain flower, doomed to disaster. Lydia McQueen is no one's victim; instead, she rises triumphant over the hardships life deals her, and although her eventual death comes from contaminated water, that is a far different outcome than

the stereotypical tragic death of the young mountain maidens in earlier texts by Appalachian writers such as Mary Noailles Murfree and John Fox, Jr. In the wake of Lydia's death at the end, future hope is suggested in the baby Ivy, born to Lydia's daughter Martha. While Martha's older daughter, Frone, likes to stay inside, the baby Ivy already shows a preference for the outdoors: "[t]he baby, Ivy, seemed to love the woods best. She clutched at every leaf and vine and flower they passed" (315). Additionally, Dykeman shows in the book's final sentence Ivy's early similarity to her grandmother Lydia: "And her hands were already Ivy Thurston's worst feature—and her best: long and large-boned hands that would hold loosely and give generously and build well, strong, like her grandmother's, Lydia McQueen's" (315).

In *The Far Family*, Dykeman continues the saga of the families introduced in *The Tall Woman*. Lydia's granddaughter Ivy Thurston Cortland has inherited her grandmother's strength and moral fabric. Although the majority of the novel focuses on the family's fragmentation, with some of them continuing to live in Nantahala County, North Carolina, and others leaving to seek lives and fortunes elsewhere, Ivy is the thread that holds the family together. She is peacemaker and moral standard-bearer. She has been the one who has steadfastly remained at "home," and, although she no longer lives on the farm at Thickety Creek, it is Ivy who continues to appreciate the natural world, as did her grandmother Lydia. Even though Ivy has traveled the world, her homeland is never far from her thoughts. She remembers: "Even in Paris once, not long ago, walking along the Boulevard Hausmann, she had stirred a rustle of leaves under her feet and suddenly she heard Papa in the September

corn rows of the Sandy Field: ‘You girls step lively now. Lay by all the fodder we can against a hard winter’” (13). The farm is never far from Ivy’s consciousness.

The novel opens with a sentence of memory: “Always in autumn she thought of the farm” (13). Dykeman revises to clarify: “No, she did not think of it; she felt it again” (13). Ivy’s relationship with the land is visceral and emotional: “The bitter smell of damp fallen leaves, the sight of purple farewell-summer blooming in a random field, the cry of a blue jay high in the noon sky—any of these or a dozen other sensations could bring the farm into the present; breathe the land to life again” (13).

Ivy’s name provides a great deal of insight into her character: she tenaciously holds to her roots, to the ground, yet she climbs upward, tying all that she touches to her, covering the small scars along the surfaces she touches. She admits that she has “never really left the farm,” although “in many ways she had gone farther from it than any of them [her siblings]” (14). She has moved up in economic and educational status, and she has ventured into the world beyond her home county, “but the feel of earth, of woods, of weather in the hills, was part of her and would always be part, as indivisibly as skin, as air she breathed” (14). Just as the land remains a part of Ivy, so does Ivy serve to remind her family members of their roots and values.

Dykeman provides Lydia’s son Phil with the same character traits as his mother, although Phil has left the mountains and is now a United States senator. He has returned to North Carolina for a quick visit, only to find that an uncle, Clay, is in serious trouble with the law, implicated in a murder case with racial undertones, as discussed in the previous chapter. While other family members have adapted to

change and even embraced it, Clay's venture north, to work with a contractor in New York City, has resulted in only loss. He has lost both his job and his wife, and he has resorted to alcohol as he mourned for a "time that never was" (14). While Clay cannot deal with the changes wrought in his life, Ivy is made of stronger stuff. Just as Ivy's name has certain implications, so does Clay's. He is earthbound, static.

Although Clay has made, and will continue to make, many wrong choices, he is not an unsympathetic character. Again, Dykeman does a masterful job of presenting a complex character with many facets to his personality, and the reader sees him unfold chapter by chapter. He is still an enigma, however, even at the conclusion of the novel, when the reader is uncertain whether he has committed suicide or has simply gambled with his life and lost.

Dykeman refuses to stereotype Ivy to conform to the earlier depictions of tender mountain maidens such as those painted by Mary Noailles Murfree, John Fox, Jr., and others. Instead, she describes Ivy as a

strong, simple and complex woman. She was not pretty. Her eyes were wide and brown and shiny as new chestnuts, the auburn highlights of her crisp wavy hair were now grey, her figure was still slim and firm and agile. But growing up on the farm had not allowed for prettiness. Her face was lined with crow's-feet that came from looking into strong sunlight. The wrinkles around her mouth and eyes came from ready laughter and openness to weather. Her hands had enlarged and toughened with every chore she undertook. (14-15)

Following the pattern she had begun in *The Tall Woman*, Dykeman refuses to present a stereotypical female protagonist. She states it outright: “Ivy Thurston’s gift was more unique than prettiness” (15). Dykeman will give readers a mature woman whose abilities include strength and moral fiber. Perhaps Lee Smith’s use of the name “Ivy” for her protagonist in *Fair and Tender Ladies* (1988) is no coincidence and may well represent Smith’s acknowledgement of the literary debt she owes to Wilma Dykeman, a writer whom Smith acknowledges as having influenced her own work. Smith states, “[T]he first time I ever read Wilma Dykeman, it was like her work had been written just for me to read . . . it was the oddest sensation, and totally inspiring. She has shown the way to so many of us” (“From Lee Smith”).

Dykeman again uses the natural world to demonstrate the difference between Ivy and Clay. As Ivy works in her flower bed, she encounters the steadfast roots of the plantain: “With her trowel she dug down into the tenacious roots and wrenched them from the ground. Thick, tough, far-reaching, they were prepared to feed the plant through drought or flood” (15). Similarly, Ivy, well-rooted, grounded yet growing, nurtures her family. On the other hand, the shallow-rooted morning glory causes Ivy to consider “[h]ow quickly indeed the surface-rooted things died in a hard season” (16). Clay, like the morning glory, has failed to sink his roots deep enough into the rich soil of his source to surmount life’s obstacles. Although the novel focuses on the drama of the unfolding murder case, Ivy’s strength and steadfastness sees her family through, and she not only survives, but thrives. Clay, although acquitted of the murder, cannot survive, and the novel suggests that he has perhaps even deliberately taken his own life.

In addition to surviving quite well personally and helping her family to remain connected to one another and to their ancestors, Ivy is also an effective spokesperson for the land. The irony is that the very means that brought Ivy and the other Thurston siblings off the farm, significantly improving their financial status, is the means by which the forest was clear-cut and the land pillaged. By the time of this novel, some mountain residents have begun to realize the price they were paying for the economic gain of a few, and Ivy responds to Leck Gunter's objection to the thoughtless development that was destroying the land. Gunter comments, "[W]e stirred up a strange beestand before we knew the price of honey" (27-28). He and Ivy both recognize the double-edged sword of progress and the complexity of the issue of modernization and industrialization. In fact, during a conversation with Clay in which he bemoans the loss of the land as he knew it as a child, Ivy responds to his question of "What happened to it all?": "*We* happened to it, Clay . . . Papa cut it, sold it. We used it, lived on it. You did your share of hunting it clean. And Papa thought he was doing the right thing. We didn't think about it one way or the other. *We* happened to it, Clay" (347). Here Dykeman recognizes the complexity of the issue, the lack of realization of the offenders, and, again, the harm done by otherwise good people. She takes responsibility for the damage and moves on to try to take responsibility for change. Before Phil returns to Washington, his mother exhorts him to enact legislation that will protect human and natural resources, and Phil decides to do just that through involvement in a committee on regional and national human resources. He will, like his mother and great-grandmother before him, advocate for the earth and its inhabitants.

In addition to her fictional portrayals of strong women, Dykeman advocates for fair treatment of women through identifying women of strong determination, women who have accomplished much even in the face of adversity. Not only did she give us Lydia Moore McQueen, the fictional tall woman, and her granddaughter Ivy Thurston Cortland, but Dykeman also wrote *Too Many People, Too Little Love*, a biography of Edna Rankin McKinnon, pioneer for birth control. Sister to Jeannette Rankin, pacifist and the first woman ever elected to the U. S. Congress, Edna Rankin McKinnon began her family planning work first in Tennessee, Alabama, and Kentucky and then extended her endeavors throughout the United States and finally into remote areas of the world such as Bali, Fiji, Saudi Arabia, and Ethiopia. Her chief concerns were always the changing status of women and the problem of overpopulation, and birth control linked the two momentous issues. For her efforts McKinnon received praise and persecution, but Dykeman details the long and arduous journey that led to McKinnon's success and her unending courage in the face of all odds. The issue of birth control, during McKinnon's crusade, was "unknown to the point of ignorance and unpopular to the point of persecution" (viii). As the first woman to receive a law degree and be admitted to the bar in Montana, Edna Rankin McKinnon's own success served to light the way for women to realize their options.

Dykeman related the circumstances that led her to write the biography. She had been urged by her friend Martha Ragland to write such a book, but one evening about 11:00 p.m., Dykeman's phone rang, and a voice said, "Is this Wilma? Edna McKinnon here. I want to invite you to visit me at Carmel . . . I'd love to have you come out." Dykeman traveled to California to meet McKinnon, but, initially, no

discussion of a biography ensued. During the ten days or so of her visit, however, Dykeman eventually began to tape the conversations. Those tapes are now kept at Harvard. Dykeman stated, “She was wonderful. So that’s how I got interested, because she’d had experiences that were unbelievable. She’d gone out to Saudi Arabia, to Kuwait, Bali . . . to many other countries, too” (Ballard, “Interview” 455).

Dykeman decided to write McKinnon’s biography because of her own interests in women’s changing status, the population explosion, and peace initiatives, but she also made the decision because “it is a good story. It casts complex social issues in a human framework of fallibility and humor, shows idealism sustained by common sense and incredibly hard work . . . it demonstrates the effectiveness of the individual” (ix). As important as this account is, Dykeman’s passion is not as obvious as it is in her novels and earlier nonfiction. The book is historically important, but not one of Dykeman’s most moving and poetic texts.

Quick to recognize the achievements of others, Dykeman demonstrated in her own life her keen sense of justice. A firm advocate for women’s rights and one who recognized and appreciated the strength and power that found its source in women, Dykeman herself enjoyed a relationship with her husband, James R. Stokely, Jr., that was both equal and fulfilling. They were partners in life and partners in writing, soul-mates. Jim Stokely confirmed Dykeman’s own claim that while only *Neither Black Nor White* showed joint authorship of the duo, James Stokely contributed much in the way of interest and ideas to both *The French Broad* and *The Tall Woman*. Stokely observes that the two had very different personalities and approaches to their work. Whereas Dykeman was by far the most prolific writer and the writer who had the

ability to see a long project through to the end, Stokely had the poet's gift for insight and flashes of genius that would inspire and illuminate portions of Dykeman's work (30 Mar. 2011). Dykeman herself was quick to recognize her husband's poetic genius, adding, "He thought of himself more as a poet, and I was more of the narrative writer" (Ballard, "Interview" 448). Additionally, the couple often shared ideas and insights, an intellectual partnership that likely colored all the books that Dykeman published while James was still living.

Dykeman was fond of pointing out her husband's gift of poetry, even though he had never published a volume of poetry. She noted that several of his poems appeared in respected scholarly journals and were later anthologized. She was especially fond of "The Mate," and perhaps an understanding of his theme illuminates the relationship between Wilma and James as well. She would have been pleased to have the poem shared in an analysis of her own life and work.

The Mate

By James Stokely

I was only sixteen

And sat trying not to cry in the woods.

I had had no luck

And the October sun was nearly gone.

Uncle Rance, over to my right,

Already had a dozen partridges,

And Lute McSween, a quarter of a mile to the left,

A brace of ducks.

I stood up, wiped my eyes,
And tiptoed into a little clearing
With only the sound of hidden insects
To accompany my ritual stalk and breath.
Suddenly my heart leaped into my hand
As I saw a movement not fifty feet away
The sunlight filtering through the leaves
To envelop the gorgeous creature
In a golden-brown haze,
Strange, proud scion of sky and earth,
Its neck firm and erect,
Its tuft of wing flecked with a lost-world tint
Of rainbow trout in a pool of ferns.
There was no sound
But the beating of two wild hearts.
With the ancient thirst ripe within me
My finger squeezed the lock of my 20-gauge
And the long-tailed ring-necked pheasant
Surprised in its solitary foraging
Collapsed like a rag doll
The prize was mine!
Why did I not move?
I saw something greenish-blue and red

Come running from the brush
In a frenzy of clucking
Speaking to the lump of bone, flesh and feathers,
Seeking to lead it to safety.
Rance called from the farther hill
But I did not answer.
I looked at my gun.
The woods and the bird and I
Were equally still.

Not only does the poem illustrate the poignancy of a male and female so closely united and tragically parted, but it also demonstrates Stokely's appreciation of the natural world, so like that of his wife. This is but a sampling of Stokely's poetry. Jeff Daniel Marion devoted an entire issue of *The Small Farm* to the work of James Stokely.

Not only did Dykeman fight injustice through her writing, both with and without the collaboration of James Stokely, but she also participated in organizations and institutions whose goals were positive social change. Some of the organizations in which she participated include the Council of the Southern Mountains, the Southern Regional Council, the Highlander Center, the North Carolina Writers Conference, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Appalachian Writers Workshop at Hindman Settlement School, the Children's Museum at Oak Ridge, Riverlink, the YWCA, the University of Tennessee, Berea College, and the University of North Carolina at Asheville.

Full of self-confidence and achieving her goals, not as a woman writer or an Appalachian writer, but simply as a “writer,” Dykeman nonetheless felt the effect of the limitations placed on women. These limitations for women writers are widespread. James M. Cahalan notes about that different but also parallel situation in Irish literature, “For far too long, Irish women writers have tended to be largely segregated (and often marginalized) as ‘women writers,’ whereas generally Irish male writers have been regarded simply as ‘writers’—as if gender were not everywhere in their works, too” (*Double Visions* 1). Often, the limitations and biases based on gender are imposed on women by women. As mentioned previously, Dykeman’s earliest would-be full-time employer, when notified that Dykeman would not, in fact, be moving to New York to accept the job, assigned blame to Dykeman’s gender, stating that the trouble with hiring women is that they are always getting married or having babies. Certainly, much of her success in gathering interviews for *Neither Black Nor White* had to do with the collaborative approach with her husband, but as Dykeman herself admitted, “we influenced each other” (Marius 8). As Jim Stokely has pointed out, some doors would have slammed shut had a woman alone attempted the task. Even now, Dykeman has been unfairly relegated to the category of “regional” writer by some who fail to recognize the widespread relevance of regional texts. Rather than denigrate writers as “regional,” one must recognize that all writing, in essence, is written from a sense of place. Appalachia, as a region, however, has been marginalized and thus regarded as less significant than regions such as New England, New York, the American West, London, or France. In his powerful poem “Epic,” Patrick Kavanagh brings home the importance of the local:

. . . I inclined

To lose my faith in Ballyrush and Gortin

Till Homer's ghost came whispering to my mind.

He said: I made the *Iliad* from such

A local row. Gods make their own importance. (lines 10-14)

Indeed, "local rows" have universal importance, and because they do, all writers should be seen as regional writers, and literary scholars must recognize that since all writing comes from place, regional writers are simply "writers."

In addition to resisting the trend of the past to categorize writers by region, the important role of women writers must be recognized. As Cahalan states, "We need to gender-balance literary studies, to continue to bring women writers into the mainstream, and to attend to gender in male authors just as much as we tend to do when writing about women" (*Double Visions* 174). Cahalan's clarion call continues to remind literary scholars that, even after all these years, long after feminism's rise and insistence, women writers are still in danger of being overlooked.

A great deal of Dykeman's strength seems to come from her strong upbringing, with parents who never placed limitations upon their daughter. In fact, most of Dykeman's early years are filled with memories of her mother's capably taking charge of the household after the death of Willard Dykeman. Bonnie Dykeman would succeed at caring for herself and her daughter even though most of Willard's wealth was lost in the Great Depression. Books and education always held a high ranking of importance in the Dykeman household, and there was never a question that their bright daughter would be positioned so that she could acquire the

best education possible. Although Wilma Dykeman enjoyed, by all reports, a fine relationship with James R. Stokely, Jr., her equal in every way, she retained the use of her maiden name, a practice uncommon in the early to mid-twentieth century, and perhaps this retention is, in part, an homage to the parents who shaped her into the strong and independent person that she became, as well as a statement of her own identity.

Like her fictional women, Dykeman cared deeply about her own family, and her sons and grandchildren remember her fondly. They chose to inscribe the words “Precious above rubies” on her tombstone, and she continues to leave a legacy through her life and writing that will live on.

The following chapter will explore other ways in which Dykeman confronts issues of social justice, especially in terms of socioeconomic status. While her biography of Edna Rankin McKinnon is relevant to this topic, *Return the Innocent Earth*, her last novel, better known than *Too Many People, Too Little Love*, provides a perfect arena for the effects of a wealthy commercial family upon the workers they employ and makes a profound statement about responsibility and social justice.

CHAPTER FIVE

MORE THAN BREAD AND WATER: SOCIAL JUSTICE

Women's issues, the environment, racism, and class issues all converge in Wilma Dykeman's final novel, *Return the Innocent Earth*. As discussed in Chapter Three, Dykeman's and James Stokely's *Neither Black Nor White* (1957), winner of the Sidney Hillman award, was a compilation of interviews that expressed attitudes throughout the South on race relations. That book was followed by numerous articles on the same issue written for the *New York Times Magazine*. Less celebrated, but perhaps just as worthy in terms of recognizing early leaders in race relations, *Seeds of Southern Change* (1962), a biography of Will W. Alexander, continues Dykeman's theme for racial equality, as does her 1966 biography of W. D. Weatherford, *Prophet of Plenty*. Will W. Alexander (1884–1956) was chief executive officer of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation and the first winner of the Gold medal for distinguished achievements in race relations bestowed by the Harmon Foundation. W. D. Weatherford is recognized as a spokesperson for Appalachia, a statesman of the South, and a leader of American youth. He wrote twenty books, including some of the earliest textbooks on race relations, pioneered improvement in human relations in industry, taught at Fisk University, and fought poverty and ignorance throughout his long life. Dykeman's theme of race relations continues throughout her novels, as discussed at length in Chapter Four.

In addition to addressing racial issues, Dykeman, through the characters in *The Tall Woman* (1962) and *The Far Family* (1966), developed strong female

characters who effectively broke the stereotype of weak, fragile mountain women, perpetuated by many regional writers prior to Dykeman,. Her interest in Edna Rankin McKinnon, culminating in the biography *Too Many People, Too Little Love* (1974), further demonstrates Dykeman's concern with women's issues, especially family-planning options.

Both *The Tall Woman* and *The Far Family* continue Dykeman's theme urging environmental responsibility, covered so well in her first book, *The French Broad* (1955), winner of the Thomas Wolfe Memorial Trophy. Her third novel, *Return the Innocent Earth* (1973), also concerns itself with ecological and human casualties, building on the thesis of linkage between nature and people that Dykeman had expressed in *Neither Black Nor White*: "As we have misused our richest land, we have misused ourselves; as we have wasted our beautiful water, we have wasted ourselves; as we have diminished the lives of one segment of our people, we have diminished ourselves" (5). This statement may well be seen as the thesis appearing in one form or another in all that Dykeman wrote.

In her final novel, *Return the Innocent Earth*, Dykeman addresses a different sort of injustice and a different arena in which it appeared—that of corporate America's disregard for the labor force as well as the powerlessness of the economically deprived. As courageous an endeavor as was *Neither Black Nor White*, *Return the Innocent Earth* required bravery of a different sort, as Dykeman risked upsetting her relatives by marriage because of her indictment in the novel of big business and greed in its effects on workers. Nonetheless, Dykeman confessed to Sandra Ballard that this novel was her favorite, acknowledging also that it was her

most difficult, containing “everything I care about . . . racial issues, powerful women, the ways people make choices. It’s really a novel of choices” (“Interview” 457).

In addition to taking on the entire Stokely family, if need be, Dykeman conducted copious and careful research into the world of business, subscribing to the *Wall Street Journal*, *Fortune*, and similar business publications. She notes,

I listened to every conversation about business in every men’s group I could. I wanted to get the jargon, the language, you know. When James would go and talk to people, I would go with him and listen while they talked about business. He would do this for me and with me so that I could get what I needed. The thing I was really worried about was that someone would come along and say, “Now this isn’t about Appalachia; she’s written about the South and knows that; but why does she think she could write a novel about a big national *business?*” That was one thing I was very aware of. (Ballard, “Interview” 457)

Here again, in much the same way Stokely opened doors for her as a woman journalist, he introduced her into the heart of American business during a time when those doors customarily slammed shut in the face of women. Perhaps her greatest accomplishment was the praise she received following the publication of the book, praise from businessmen who lauded the book for its intimate knowledge of the interworkings of the corporate world. In response to one of these individuals, Dykeman answered, “You have just given me the Pulitzer Prize” (457).

Return the Innocent Earth centers around a successful, family-owned cannery begun around the turn of the century and now in its third generation. In the name of progress and profit, the business has incorporated many modern changes, including mechanization and, as this novel opens, the use of what might have been a deadly chemical, useful for preserving the freshness of the vegetables beyond their usual maturity, but an incident has occurred that suggests that the chemical could be harmful to humans. In their haste to be the first to use the chemical, Clayburn-Durant has failed to insist upon complete testing before spraying the vegetables with the chemical.

By 1973, the year when *Return the Innocent Earth* was published, the environmental movement in America was in full force. In *The Greening of a Nation? Environmentalism in the United States Since 1945*, Hal K. Rothman recognizes the 1960s as an era of idealism and utopianism. He credits thinkers and leaders of that decade for giving birth to the back-to-nature movement, and he notes that Rachel Carson “created a national sensation and challenged the idea of unbridled economic progress at all costs” (89). The first Earth Day occurred on April 22, 1970, the result of increasing awareness of environmentalism as social responsibility which, according to Rothman, “exemplified public response to the idea of an environmentalism based on quality of life” (121).

In this context of heightened consciousness about environmental and social responsibility, Dykeman’s sensibilities converge in *Return the Innocent Earth*, and her concern for human and nonhuman damage reveals itself through the characters and plot. The conflict between profit and humanitarianism drives the novel, and her

characters respond in unique ways, some becoming hardened to the plight of the workers, and others displaying or developing consciences that disallow mistreatment of the land or its people. Paralleling the Clayburn family of the novel, the Stokely family made their fortune in the canning industry. Because of this similarity, some members of the Stokely family disapproved of the novel and took it as personal criticism. Dykeman addressed this issue in her interview with Richard Marius: “Most of the family has been very supportive and interested in all my writing. A few, I’m sure, were upset; but you know these things pass” (9). Jim Stokely readily admits that some of the characters and incidents in *Return the Innocent Earth* are loosely based on the Stokely side of the family, while *The Tall Woman* and *The Far Family* arose from events and individuals from Dykeman’s mother’s family (Interview).

Dykeman was no stranger to criticism, receiving plenty of it along with praise of her approach to race relations and the environment for her earlier books and articles; for example, as noted in Chapter Three, *Neither Black Nor White* received reviews ranging from Ralph McGill’s high praise in the *New York Times*, to the vitriolic opinions of other reviewers and letters to the editor disagreeing with McGill’s positive response. Family members, friends, and strangers held strong views of Dykeman’s opinions, and she had learned to withstand the negative and embrace the positive. With her strength of character and confidence, Dykeman would no more back away from her examination of corporate America and some of its unconscionable practices than she would have remained quiet on civil liberties, women’s issues, or environmental responsibility.

Jonathan Clayburn, Jr., the protagonist of *Return the Innocent Earth*, is Lydia Moore McQueen's literary heir, holding himself and his relatives accountable for the abuse against the land and the family's workforce. Here Dykeman departs from her usual "strong woman" portrayal, writing much of the book from a first-person, male perspective, but Jon is a man who does not embrace the ideology of most males in his family. He is influenced, however, by three generations of women as well as the woman currently in his life, Holocaust survivor Deborah Einemann. Additionally, his outlook may come from the fact that he has to carry on a role that has been traditionally female in his own nuclear family. A widower, Jon alone is responsible for raising his two teen-aged children. This nontraditional role has strategically placed him in a position that requires his close interaction with individuals and places him in a position that must regard the role of the next generation and the legacy that will be left to its members.

As in Dykeman's two previous novels, race relations comprise an integral component in *Return the Innocent Earth*, but that story is only a subplot, given through Jon's recollection of the family's history. The main point of that subplot has to do with assumptions of guilt and the need for the family's black worker, Cebo, to be protected by his employers. Because they trust Cebo, they believe him when he denies involvement in the robbery and murder with which he is informally charged. Jon realizes that Cebo and the other black servants of the family still suffer from slave mentality, and they are completely vulnerable to the judgment of the white community. He recalls Cebo's account of his slave mother who was tortured and killed. Important in their own right, these incidents seem to loom larger, however,

and connect to both Deborah, a Holocaust survivor, and the laborers who are at the mercy of their employers in so many ways.

The larger issue in this novel is the labor force at large, seen as expendable and unimportant by Jon's cousin Stull Clayburn. Through his recollection of the past, of his family's heritage of integrity, and his own sense of right and wrong, Jon weighs his own humanitarianism against looking out for the health of the business. Like Dykeman herself, Jon connects responsibility to the land with responsibility to its people. He compares the current generation of Clayburns to their land-loving ancestors:

I can remember hearing about the day Elisha Clayburn, my grandfather, stood not far from where I am tonight and let the rich black dirt filter through his hands, saying "The land outlives us all—and within the month he was dead. Now Clayburn Foods has just about come full term. Now our tractors and cultivators and planters gouge up the earth, turn it to rows, beat the clods to dust, feed it, irrigate it, make it yield whatever those gleaming cans demand . . . Now the using is all. (40-41)

In a subsequent conversation between Jon and Stull, Jon urges a system of accountability for "damage to air or water or land, to the health of a human being" (405). He is ultimately unwilling to sacrifice human life or the life of the land in the quest for wealth.

Although environmental concerns intersect and align with concerns for all human beings, social injustice often appears in ways that are specific to women. The

crisis that brings Jon back to East Tennessee is the sickness and death of one Perlina Smelcer, a female laborer. Although the main concern of most of the corporate management is keeping the incident out of the media and denying connections between Perlina's death and the use of chemicals, Jon concerns himself with discovering the truth about Clayburn-Durant's use of the untested chemical and about their responsibility to Perlina herself. He is unwilling to pay a human cost for profit, and he is equally unwilling to deny responsibility for Perlina's illness and death.

This patriarchal theme aligns itself perfectly with ecofeminism. In "The Body as Bioregion," Deborah Slicer discusses the close connection of the body to the natural world and the relationship between the female body, especially, and corporate irresponsibility. She argues that "before it's safe for either women or men to go back into the home, even in the broader, environmentalists' sense of home as one's most proximate ecological bioregion, we must come to terms with the complex and destructive social meanings of the body" (108). Slicer examines the conflict of interests at work when corporations profit from manufacturing carcinogens that poison our bodies and our world but "wears a benevolent face" (109), sometimes even sponsoring fund-raising events for fighting cancer and other diseases that have, in effect, been caused by their own products. She claims that the female body is still viewed as property, not unlike the view of slave ownership of the past, and she likens the ideology that resists the idea of women owning their own bodies to that which denies that the land can exist independent of ownership, promoting the idea that the land "does not, *cannot*, own itself" (111).

Certainly, *Return the Innocent Earth* displays a prime example of corporate greed and lack of regard for human cost in seeking to increase profit margins. The damage to Perlina's body makes clear Dykeman's point of corporate preying on the powerless, and perhaps the "pearl" suggested in her name emphasizes her innate value, even if it is unrecognized by her employers, and even though the name itself is a diminutive—"little pearl," ironic because of Perlina's large physical size. The diminutive appropriately describes, however, Perlina's powerlessness in the face of big business and big wealth. After her death, Jon recognizes a more fragile aspect of Perlina as her husband comments on the bunch of artificial lily of the valley he has placed in her dead hands. Incongruous with the hands that are "larger, rougher, more veined than any man's" (362), the delicate flowers were Perlina's favorites. Burl recalled that Perlina had cultivated and nurtured a little patch of lily of the valley each spring, and "whenever they blossomed she'd say they smelled sweet enough to be angels' breath" (362). Jon realizes that although he remembered Perlina and thought of those large, work-worn hands clutching a water dipper, a hoe, or a crate of vegetables, he had no idea of her love for the tiny flowers. He marvels: "Who would have thought that Perlina's coarse hands nurtured such fragility, that the light fragrance of those white bell-blossoms filled some need in rough-shod days?" (362). In contrast, he thinks of Bonita Fredericks, the riding instructor who has been suggested as an ideal wife for him, and he realizes that although Bonita is beautiful, clothed and perfumed in the best that money can buy, "underneath her sheen Bonita Fredericks is harsher, harder, more invulnerable than old Perlina Smelcer with a skin

like bark and a laugh like a sonic boom” (362). Inside, Perlina is fragile and vulnerable and powerless, qualities that are directly tied to her socioeconomic status.

The Smelcer family, long-time employees of the Clayburn business, have never moved beyond a basic level of economic stability. Upon hearing that Perlina’s burial insurance will be forthcoming, Burl responds, “It’ll come in handy. Seems like me and Perlina stay caught between the hard place and the rock these days” (362). Jon sees that Burl’s economic situation continues to be just as it was when Jon was a boy, “owning neither land nor home nor even his own strength—which he owes on a dozen due bills” (363). Jon recognizes that “[o]n the company’s accounts [Burl] is one of ‘them’: tenant, labor, abstract item,” but in this moment of encountering Burl face to face, Jon recognizes that “here, now, he has become Burl Smelcer, unique, individual to me. That reality fills the room. It embraces Perlina (sixty baskets of tomatoes in one day, a thousand heads of cabbage—a dozen children, several dead) who still seems alive” (363).

Even in the face of his wife’s death, Burl does not accuse the cannery of any wrong-doing, although Jon realizes from his face that the thought has crossed Burl’s mind. Instead he demonstrates trust and a spirit of community, qualities that Jon will hold to as he makes his own decision. Burl will not allow an autopsy to be performed on Perlina’s body even though the doctor has suggested it. The autopsy might have proven a connection between Perlina’s death and the use of the Clayburn-Durant chemical. It is noteworthy that Dykeman does not indicate that the chemical was surely the cause of Perlina’s illness and death. The hastiness with which the chief executives of the business proceeded with the use of the chemical, before knowing its

effects, is enough to demonstrate corporate greed and complete disregard for the welfare of their employees.

In *The Nature of Home: Taking Root in a Place*, Greta Gaard explores the convergence of feminism, ecology, and social justice, noting the interrelationships of all three, a concept recognized by Wilma Dykeman throughout her fiction and nonfiction. Ecofeminism provides an effective lens through which to examine social justice in all its manifestations, as argued by Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands who broadens the view of ecocriticism, noting that “ecofeminist critics have always gone ‘beyond nature writing,’ perhaps out of awareness of the historical and ongoing importance of other genres to the articulation of ecological feminist principles” (70), and that ecofeminists have insisted on the “inextricable connection between literature and politics” (70). She advocates plurality and breadth in ecofeminism, as Dykeman had already advocated plurality and breadth in addressing all issues of injustice.

In *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism*, Joni Adamson points out a seeming disparity between activist groups and the field of literary criticism:

The contrast between groups such as the Diné Alliance, which are working for and often effecting concrete social, political, and environmental change, and large academic organizations which often seem as if they champion only skepticism and ambiguity, has led many in the creative and critical arts to reflect on their roles and the role of their profession in the struggle to preserve the environment. (78)

Literary studies, however, have moved toward engagement in social issues, however, especially with the increased approach of feminism, and, now especially, ecofeminism. In her introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Cheryl Glotfelty notes that social movements such as the Civil Rights and Women's movements during the 1960s and 1970s were largely powered by postmodernism's critique of dominant power structures, and that a transformation in literary studies occurred through the profession's taking into consideration issues of race, class, and gender (xv).

As *Return the Innocent Earth* opens, the Clayburn family members comprising the management of the family business have relocated to the Midwest and are enjoying the fortune that their canning business has engendered. They have nearly forgotten their Appalachian background and are now tied to the land only due to its money-making capabilities, and Jon recognizes the impact of their dissociation when he returns to the mountains and stands on the earth that grows the vegetables. He recognizes that "land such as this across America has made Clayburn-Durant Foods, which has been my life. None of the Clayburns has been here in a long while, too damn long" (34). Likewise, their relationship with their labor force is one-sided; Stull, in particular, is interested only in the wealth that the workers can generate for the firm. The current executives, members of the Clayburn family, no longer feel connected to the mountain culture and instead rely on stale stereotypes to describe the workers in their employ.

When Perlina becomes ill, possibly from eating turnip greens that have been sprayed with the chemical spray, two of the three top executives are more concerned about legal ramifications and negative publicity than they are with getting to the truth

of the matter or investigating the damage to Perlina and her family. The worst offender within the family organization is Stull who urges his cousin Jon to smooth things over: “We can’t let some loudmouthed old mountain woman who doesn’t know a snuff stick from a chopstick ruin the whole ball game for us” (12). Perlina herself is powerless to take action because of her low socioeconomic status, yet she had the potential to follow in the literary footsteps of Lydia McQueen. A large and strong woman, Perlina had cared for her ne’er-do-well husband and children until those children finally left the mountains. When Perlina dies, possibly from the effects of the chemical, Jon returns to Churchill, a thinly disguised Newport, Tennessee, in an effort to placate the Smelcer family and cover up any perceived connection between Perlina’s illness and death and Clayburn-Durant’s use of the chemical. He is torn between his obligation to his family and the business and his moral responsibility to investigate the truth and admit the possibility of error on the part of the corporation.

Jon and Stull are completely different from one another in terms of their morals and integrity, but both are keenly interested in preserving the success of the family business. Stull’s concern stops with the bottom line of profit; however, Jon cares deeply about the human beings who work for them and the compromise in ethics that he discovers in his investigation. While Jon is a satisfyingly complex character, Oliver Jones finds Stull a rather poorly painted villain, stating that he is too totally depraved to be completely believable. In comparing Stull to Clay Thurston of *The Far Family*, a fallen man, readers are likely to find that Stull has no redeeming qualities, no characteristic that makes him remotely sympathetic. Dykeman does

provide, in the flashback scenes, a glimpse of Stull's childhood that suggests that somehow his upbringing was deficient, but she does not dwell on that or provide it as an excuse for his adult behavior. A close examination of Stull shows that he actually fits the profile of a sociopath in nearly every aspect, an observation that could explain Jones' opinion. In a 1992 interview with Patricia Gantt, Dykeman admitted that she chose the name "Stull" quite deliberately, intending to signify dullness and sterility (130). Throughout her novels, Dykeman's choice of names often provides keen insight into the characters themselves.

One example highlighting the difference in the two cousins comes from their remembrance of Perlina herself. While Stull only remembers Perlina's husband, also an employee, as "somebody named Burl Smelcer," Jon has a more intimate memory: "Of course I remember Burl Smelcer . . . Foreman at the Riverbend Farm for twenty or thirty years. I used to pull beets and pick tomatoes on his crew. Two teeth, eleven children, fourteen dogs" (2). He has an equally detailed memory of Perlina:

I could see Perlina Smelcer's great freckled arms bulging from the sleeves of her sweat-stained gingham dress whenever she drank from the dipper at the water bucket where a motley crew of pickers would be stripping green bean vines when I was a boy. In her greed for water, rivulets ran from the sides of her mouth faster than she could swallow and fell on the red, heaving flesh of her neck, then disappeared in the depths of her bosom like a stream soaked up by desert sand dunes. She would see me watching her and she would grin with friendliness and satisfaction, fanning the neck of her dress back

and forth to enjoy the full benefit of the cool water trickling down her front. (2-3)

Stull's only response is, "Perlina her name?" . . . making it the most inconsequential knowledge since the date of the invention of the yo-yo" (3). Not only are the details unknown to or unremembered by Stull, but Perlina herself, and in fact all the workers, are themselves as inconsequential to him as their names.

In justification of his disregard for Perlina, Stull tells Jon that he feels responsibility only to the "nineteen thousand and twenty-two stockholders" (16), and he glibly assigns responsibility for Perlina's illness to her own actions, as he believes that she probably went out into the fields and "help[ed] herself" to the crops (16). Jon quickly responds that their duty to the stockholders "begins with Perlina Smelcer" (16). Stull counters that his duty to the stockholders is to "keep this company alive" (16), underscoring his privileging of the corporation over the individual. He has little regard for keeping Perlina alive. As the argument escalates and Stull badgers Jon about his unwillingness to take a risk in the interest of the business, Jon responds, "I'll tell you what I don't have the guts for. Perlina Smelcer taking my risk for me. Especially when she's not even been told—or asked" (16). Stull shows himself the equivalent of a school bully as he showers Jon with sarcasm: "our executive vice-president massages his bleeding heart. Sweetness and light—and bullshit!" (16), and follows the insult with a question, "Whose side are you on, anyway?" (16). Stull has completely given over to the industrialization and rampant capitalism of his generation, and he has completely alienated himself from his mountain roots. The question Stull asks brings Jon to a moment of soul searching, and his response is, "I'll

have to let you know, Stull” (16). The remainder of the book consists of Jon’s own soul-searching along with his quest for the truth in Perlina’s death.

The novel opens with a fragrance of ketchup that takes Jon back to his early years and back home to the mountains, a mundane association that has its parallel in Marcel Proust’s opening of *Remembrance of Things Past*, as the narrator is carried back to his youth as the smell of a madeleine takes him back to his childhood home in Combray. The aroma haunts Jon as he goes about his morning in his urban Midwestern office, and within that aroma is a recognition of the earth: “old and warm, familiar and wrenching” (1). Torn between his memory of his past and his desire to move ahead into a very different future, Jon’s relationship with Holocaust survivor Deborah Einemann serves to underscore the issue with Perlina. In one way, Deborah’s unspeakable past may be likened to lesser persecutions suffered by all women, and Perlina has not survived the system under which she lived and worked.

Jon’s mantra when he thinks of Deborah is “In the beginning was the number, and the number was of Deborah and the number was with Deborah and the number was Deborah” (4), a reference to the number tattooed on her arm at Auschwitz. He cannot stop thinking about the way in which the woman he now loves was reduced to a mere number by her captors, paralleling Stull’s lack of regard for Perlina. Additionally, the phrasing of the mantra harks back to the Bible: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (Jn. 1.1), an unusual choice for Dykeman to use in Jon’s consideration of Deborah’s Jewish background. Of course, in Christian theology, the “Word” is generally believed to refer to Jesus Christ, but Dykeman could well have been using the “Word” in a more

standard sense, indicating the written word, the story, emphasizing that all plotlines and all issues must of necessity come back around to the individuals involved. The Holocaust cannot be reduced to mere numbers, and the oppression of corporate America cannot be reduced to mere stockholders.

Deborah's function in the novel also serves to emphasize the connection between past and present. As the novel nears its end, the reader has learned of the Clayburn family's history as well as the progression of the business that would become Clayburn-Durant. Deborah arrives in Churchill at Jon's request, and he drives her around the countryside, showing her landmarks and historical sites, relevant to his family. They have agreed to marry, and Deborah relates to him one of the reasons she is choosing to marry him and not one of her other suitors:

All these years, there were friends—friends who wished to marry me, care for me. But you wanted to care for me *and* me to care for you. There was something I could give as well as take. And you had a family, a past, something I had lost, lost so violently and irretrievably that sometimes in the night I used to waken and wonder if there had ever been anyone, if I had imagined it all in a nightmare— (396)

Deborah's final comment in this section may well serve as the thesis of the entire novel: "When we cut the tap-root we're free to destroy the earth and each other" (396). Jon had come perilously close to cutting his connections with the past simply because of the geographical distance from his homeland and because he was more engaged in preserving the financial well-being of the business than in a sense of responsibility to the workers.

One possible weakness in the story could have been the believability of using an untested chemical, but Dykeman covers the reason. In a conversation between Stull, Jon, and Morrison, the scientist who has developed the growth-inhibiting chemical, Morrison expresses his wishes to test it further before allowing its use agriculturally. Although the chemical does not appear to have any ill effects when used alone, Morrison questions its effect when used in conjunction with fertilizers and other commonly used agricultural substances. He admits, “I think it will be okay. But I’m a scientist and I like to be sure” (8). Here Dykeman shows clearly Stull’s greed and lack of concern for social responsibility, as he responds, “And I’m a businessman and I like to be first” (11). Jon remembers that Stull has exhibited this type of behavior in the past:

In the pause I considered why Stull was on the attack, setting up the situation of offense-defense rather than of cooperation in a mutual enterprise. I had personally encountered this arrangement too many times before. When I first joined the company . . . Stull wanted something. And whatever it was, he wanted it exclusively and totally and at the cheapest price possible. Whoever sat opposite him was automatically an adversary. Winning was all. (8)

Jon demonstrates more responsibility, yet he makes clear that he is also interested in the well-being of Clayburn-Durant as he asks, “Isn’t there a way to be both? Be sure and be first? Take another year for tests but let us have the option until the safety factor is proved and we can begin to use the spray. Then you can be sure and we’ll still be first to reap the advantage” (8). Stull rejects that idea completely, suspicious

that in the corporate world the idea would leak out and someone else would get ahead of Clayburn-Durant.

As the novel draws to its close, Jon has his answer ready for Stull. After a showdown in which Jon accuses Stull of destroying the principles upon which the family had built the business, he asks Stull about his vision for the company's direction: "I want to know whether we're going for bigger and bigger—or bigger and better . . . I want to know if a corporation, if this corporation to which I'm giving my life, is more than a profit-and-loss statement. Is it in the end a machine, or is it a human experiment—of, by, and for human beings?" (416). Jon acknowledges the need for progress and mechanization, but he refuses to disregard the humanity of the workforce. Over-dependence upon nonhuman labor can result in detachment and can cause the corporate leaders to become impersonal, as Stull has already done. Jon sees the danger, claiming that such a condition "can breed the greatest evil of all. Like the number on Deborah's arm. Like Burl and Perlina Smelcer" (417). He cannot support the irresponsible and unsavory business practices Stull embraces, but instead of bowing out of the corporation as Stull has expected, Jon has bought a controlling interest and is now in a position to insist that if Stull wishes to continue with the company, he will have to abandon his unethical practices. Even so, Jon has to threaten Stull with revealing his drunkenness before Stull will agree to the terms. With this seemingly tidy closing, however, Dykeman does not give in to a simplistic solution. Jon realizes that he is at risk of becoming like Stull if he is not careful, especially when faced with accountability to other stockholders for a report of expected net dividends.

Furthermore, Dykeman presents an unexpected twist to the story when she has Burl Smelcer, who had voiced allegiance to the family and refused to consider the possibility that Perlina had been harmed by the chemical spray, now approach Jon and suggest that perhaps some payment for Perlina's death was in order, ironic indeed since it was Burl's trust and community-mindedness that had been the turning point in Jon's decision. Even Burl, a "good" man, yields to temptation, when money is involved.

The chemical spray is no longer an issue, as it has proven ineffective in prolonging the freshness of the canned vegetables after a few weeks. The affected fields will be plowed under, and the spray will not be used again until it has been thoroughly tested and reformulated, so the particular incident of chemical spray usage is no longer relevant.

Jon takes responsibility for past wrong decisions, even as he appraises Stull's involvement: "None of us is a devil. We're only ignorant and arrogant. That may be worse. We just stay here, ignorant of our past and its consequences, arrogant while the waves wash in and threaten to destroy us" (418). Jon spells out the new vision for the corporation: "no more field experiments with the food people may eat . . . We can help develop foods to feed the world" (422-23).

Jon realizes that he has won the battle with Stull, but he has perhaps not completely won the battle within himself: "Knowing, remembering how the kernel of our victories is defeat, that the winner may become a reincarnation of the enemy he thought to vanquish, I pause . . . calling into account both the realism I serve and the idealism I cherish" (428). The closing sentence ties together perfectly past, present,

and future: “To make the Clayburn-Durant I want I’ll need computers, research, image, luck. But most of all I need my father and my son” (428). Jon recognizes that the old-fashioned standards of honesty, hard work, and fairness that built the business will serve him well as he moves into the future.

For anyone seeking more intimate knowledge of Wilma Dykeman’s fiction, *Return the Innocent Earth* would provide a fine sampling of all the issues with which she was most concerned, although at times Stull’s malicious malignancy is reminiscent of Shakespeare’s villain, Iago. One might question why Dykeman did not publish any more fiction after 1973. Increased demands for Dykeman as a public speaker (at times she gave fifty to seventy-five speeches in a year), her regular newspaper columns, frequent articles, and the demands placed on her by a busy family all made it difficult for her to carve out time for writing. Additionally, the loss of her husband in 1977 robbed her not only of her life partner, but also her favorite intellectual conversant. In a very real way, the team served as literary muse, each to the other. Nonetheless, Dykeman remained active in her civic life in her local community and beyond. She rather single-handedly managed to organize the Newport-Cocke County Museum, refusing to take “no” for an answer. Dykeman traveled to Washington, D. C. to fiercely fight for the D.A.R.-sponsored museum. She realized the importance of Cocke County’s preserving its history, and she was determined to see that the funding and interest supported such a project. The museum now resides in the upper floor of the new community center. At about the same time, Dykeman was named the first, and only, woman director of Merchants & Planters Bank, a job that she took seriously, rarely missing a meeting, and contributing in

important ways. In 1981 she was asked by then-governor of Tennessee, Lamar Alexander, to serve in the position of Tennessee State Historian. She took on such tasks as organizing a three-day writers' conference in Nashville for the benefit of Tennessee's teachers, hosting such renowned writers as Alex Haley and Nikki Giovanni, as well as songwriters Tom T. Hall and Emmylou Harris. Her numerous speaking engagements included speaking at a joint meeting of the Tennessee House and Senate. Duay O'Neal comments on her myriad accomplishments:

I've often wondered if Wilma had any idea of her own fame and influence. Whether traveling with the first group of Americans to visit China in the 1970s, sitting on the boards of various colleges and universities, or meeting a neighbor in the produce department of Newport, Tennessee's White Store, Wilma's eyes would light up in delighted recognition as she engaged in conversation.

O'Neal continued his recollection of this astonishingly accomplished woman by noting, as I had noted on my first meeting with her, "She tirelessly encouraged other writers" ("First" 3C).

Dykeman herself postulated a theory. In noting her interest in history, social issues, and environmental causes, she stated that she had tried to write about all these topics in her fiction and nonfiction, and she adds,

It's a dangerous way to write because none of the genres really want to accept me as being a one thing or another. I can't really be a historian, because people say, "well, she's written novels," or people can't think of me as a person interested in writing novels, because "well, she's

written all these histories.” Same for social commentary. I think variety has really worked against me. (Ballard, “Interview” 450)

In reflecting on her life’s work, Dykeman claimed *Return the Innocent Earth* as her favorite, although most difficult, work; however, it did not enjoy the popular or critical acclaim of her previous novels. A contemporary novel with characters from corporate America, Dykeman’s third novel did not appeal to the reading public in the same way that her previous novels did. The book includes mountain characters from the past, similar to the characters of *The Tall Woman* and *The Far Family*, but they are given in recollection and do not guide the plot as much as the contemporary, urban characters. Dykeman’s keen understanding of the canning industry provides authenticity to the novel, but some readers might not be particularly interested in such close examination of what might have been considered such a mundane industry. The reviews of the book were mixed. *New York Times* reviewer Martin Levin criticized the novel’s slow pace, particularly in Jon’s recollections, stating that Dykeman reaches the “showdown in the canning complex . . . at a funereal tempo” and resolves the conflict only after the reader is “long past caring” (3 June 1973). This view was echoed by a review in *Publishers Weekly* (5 Apr. 1973).

Other reviews from New York, Chicago, Raleigh, and Nashville were favorable. Betty Hodges claimed that Dykeman “[did] not [sound] any hollow notes,” and she saw the resolution of the novel as both believable and acceptable (31 July 1973). Dykeman’s portrayal of complex characters who range from good to evil and all qualities in between, with the flaws and foibles resident in all human beings, leads Ruth Moose to deem them “completely believable, warm or cold” (215).

More recent opinions of the book have been overwhelmingly favorable, suggesting that perhaps the ideas explored in *Return the Innocent Earth* might have been ahead of their time. Oliver Jones lauds Dykeman's treatment of her environmental theme, stating that "[s]he sees the irony of people who are drawn to a place for its natural beauty, yet end up wasting the land's resources until it becomes ugly" (30). Dykeman's advocacy for social change and responsibility of powerful corporations for labor were well ahead of her time. Through a well-told story, a moral point is made, without preaching and didacticism. The true-to-life events that would come about with the discovery of the repercussions of irresponsible hazardous waste at Love Canal and the 1979 meltdown at Three Mile Island, to name only a couple of environmental disasters, document the truth behind Dykeman's well-grounded fears that corporate greed could have disastrous results on both the environment and human beings.

In placing Wilma Dykeman's life and writing in context with other writers and historical events, especially those related to environmentalism, feminism, and social activism, one cannot but agree that she has been instrumental in building upon the work that has preceded her. In my next chapter, I will reflect on Dykeman's writing as a body, in combination with her contributions as a speaker, teacher, historian, and philanthropist, and consider her influence on writers, scholars, and activists that followed her.

CONCLUSION

WILMA DYKEMAN'S LITERARY AND ACTIVIST LEGACY

Wilma Dykeman, who grew up in Lynn Cove at the head of Beaverdam Creek just north of Asheville, North Carolina, wrote more than twenty books of fiction and non-fiction, numerous articles, essays, and newspaper columns; gave hundreds of inspirational speeches; held the office of Tennessee State Historian for twenty-two years; and taught and served as a trustee at multiple colleges. She received numerous accolades and awards, including a posthumous proclamation of recognition and appreciation issued by the North Carolina General Assembly. The news release that announced her death noted that “She worked tirelessly for respect and realism in the public perception of the Southern Appalachian mountain community, and was a pioneer in bringing national attention to civil rights, women’s issues, and environmental imperatives throughout her career as an author, speaker, educator, and environmentalist.”

In addition to her professional achievements, she also raised two sons, enjoyed her two grandchildren, and partnered with her husband in a thirty-seven-year marriage until his death in 1977, remained a devoted daughter and companion to her mother, who died in 1992, and worked as a civic leader in East Tennessee and western North Carolina.

Although Dykeman is best known in her own southern Appalachian region, her contributions have global implications and must not be considered unique and important only in her immediate region. Such broad concerns as women’s issues, the

environment, racial equality, and social issues reach across our nation and even across the globe. Her writings are worthy of attention for criticism and classroom study and should receive greater recognition through this study as well as perhaps future publications. Her long and rich life would provide material for an interesting and inspiring biography. Her many contributions in the areas mentioned could certainly be broken down into articles in *ISLE* and other environmental publications. Although she did not write a great deal of poetry, and the greatest bulk of her poems appeared during her college years, this juvenilia, with its strong attention to the natural world and its effect on Dykeman as a young woman, would make an interesting publication on its own, perhaps incorporating some of James Stokely's poetry, which was never published as a volume. Although many of her newspaper columns were published in *Look to This Day* and *Explorations*, a thematic reordering of her columns, perhaps with additions from her numerous columns, would also be well received.

Wilma Dykeman left behind manuscripts that include her unfinished historical novel about the Cherokee Sequoia. With the cooperation of her family, one might be able to consider editing and publishing that and any other significant manuscripts left behind at her death. Her sons have recently discovered a manuscript of *The Valley*, a novel mentioned in Dykeman's letters from the 1940s. The story consists of two major characters, young girls named Ruby and Violet, and the Henderson family who were ostracized from the valley (like the Bludsoes in *The Tall Woman*). An idealistic schoolteacher comes to the valley, but valley residents do not want two Henderson children with "nigger blood" attending their school. The family members have kindly allowed me to read the manuscript with an eye toward light editing and subsequent

publication. Although not as sophisticated as her later works, this manuscript is important in identifying Dykeman's thematic concerns and pointing ahead toward the books that she would subsequently publish.

Wilma Dykeman's two properties—one in Newport, Tennessee, the other near Asheville, North Carolina—remain intact. She and James Stokely had collected a library of books, the like of which is seldom seen these days. Her sons have discussed the possibilities of preserving the properties in some way that would benefit the artistic community of the region. If that comes to fruition, perhaps a concerted effort might be made to advertise beyond southern Appalachia, drawing scholars and literati from beyond the immediate region. In the spirit of Wilma Dykeman herself, who was always gracious and generous in extending assistance and encouragement, perhaps her legacy might be kept alive by using the properties to educate and inform visitors of those concerns that Dykeman held close to her heart.

In 2012, Walters State Community College held the second annual Mildred Haun Conference: A Celebration of Appalachian Literature, Culture, and Scholarship, named for one of the native daughters of East Tennessee. During that conference, Wilma Dykeman's life and works were highlighted by a special exhibit and special presentations, one by her long-time friend, Jeff Daniel Marion, the other by her son James R. Stokely, III. One conference guest was so impressed by the conference that he donated a rather large sum of money to be used to add to WSCC's collection of Appalachian books. At this point, Walters State librarians, the Dean of Humanities, and the conference director are inclined to name its collection of Appalachian texts after Wilma Dykeman, whose contributions were so important.

The Appalachian Studies Association offers yearly the “Wilma Dykeman ‘Faces of Appalachia’ Post-Doctoral Research Fellowship” and recognizes her contributions to the field of Appalachian studies, along with Gurney Norman, Cratis Williams, Helen Lewis, and others. The Appalachian Writers Guild’s Wilma Dykeman Award honors her. This award is given each year to the best essay on Appalachian life and literature, religion, folklore, culture, or values. The East Tennessee Historical Society also has given a Wilma Dykeman Award for Regional Historical Literature.

Nonetheless, without significant scholarship on Dykeman, some of the newer Appalachian scholars are unfamiliar with her work. During the 2012 Appalachian Writers Workshop held at Hindman, Kentucky, keynote speaker Robert Morgan brought four lectures on significant Appalachian scholars, and his first presentation centered on Wilma Dykeman. Approximately two-thirds of the audience, writers and scholars from southern Appalachia, were unfamiliar with her work. Following Morgan’s lecture, the book sellers sold out of every Dykeman book on display. It is our hope that she will become better known within southern Appalachia and beyond those borders, as well.

In her later years, Dykeman spent more time speaking publicly than she did publishing books. This was, no doubt, due to the fact that she still bore the scars of financial loss from her father’s losing his fortune during the Great Depression, so Dykeman felt the pressure, as a widow, to earn a regular salary through her speaking engagements and her newspaper columns. She was solely responsible for the care of her mother and her college-aged sons. Additionally, after her husband’s death in 1977, she likely missed the camaraderie and feedback that they had enjoyed. Even

though she was not writing as prolifically as she had done in the past, and even though she would never publish another novel in her lifetime, Dykeman's friend Loyal Jones considered Dykeman a great public speaker. Although some of those who heard her speak commented to Jones that she was "the best woman speaker [they] had ever heard," Jones was quick to say that "she was one of the best speakers of her time, period. She always did her homework on the speech topic and fitted it to the particular audience. I think her success was due to her self-assurance about herself and her abilities." Jones continued to say that after her husband's death, she found it a bit easier to make a living with her speaking than from the equally hard task of writing. He noted that

Wilma prided herself on her hard work at the task of writing. She told of a woman telling her, perhaps at a book-signing, that she was lucky to have the "knack" for writing. Wilma insisted that what success she had was from hard work. She would not have added that perhaps her superior intellect and imagination and confidence were also factors.

("RE: Wilma Dykeman")

Perhaps Wilma Dykeman herself said it best in a March 7, 1966, letter to Loyal Jones. Although she was specifically referring to *The Far Family*, her statement might well be applied to her other books:

I have tried to show the interrelationship of man [sic] with nature—conservation of the spirit as well as the woods and waters and living things which are so abundant in our mountains. I have tried to dramatize the impact of urbanization and the twentieth century on one

family—those who keep the strength of their roots even as they adapt to today, and those who cut themselves off and perish without the nourishment of their past.

Writers who followed Wilma Dykeman have followed her lead by refusing to stereotype Appalachian characters, presenting them instead as complex, with positive and negative traits. One writer who achieved recognition far beyond his Appalachian roots is Earl Hamner, Jr., whose *Spencer's Mountain* (1961) and *The Homecoming* (1970) became the basis for the highly popular television series *The Waltons*. Additionally, Lee Smith's novels have received popular and critical success beyond the borders of southern Appalachia, as have the novels of Sharyn McCrumb and Denise Giardina. As Danny Miller and his co-authors point out in the "Appalachian Literature" chapter of *A Handbook to Appalachia: An Introduction to the Region*, a plethora of writers whose work has appeared since the early texts of Wilma Dykeman have all likely felt her influence. Some of these include Gurney Norman, Mary Lee Settle, John Ehle, Fred Chappell, Jim Wayne Miller, David Huddle, Charles Frazier, Robert Morgan, Chris Holbrook, George Ella Lyon, Meredith Sue Willis, Ron Rash, and Silas House—and the list continues to grow. Certainly, the world and its inhabitants, so loved and admired by Wilma Dykeman, will long be the beneficiaries of her legacy of honest character portrayal and her deep concern for promoting an awareness of the connection between social and environmental issues.

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