

Ecofeminist Resistance and the Politics of Gender, Nature, and Power in Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer*

Faria Ashfaq

University of Education

PhD scholar at NCBA&E (Al Hamra University) sub campus Multan

Dr. Muhammad Shafiq

Professor, Department of English, NCBA&E (Alhamra University), Sub Campus, Multan

Corresponding Author: Faria Ashfaq

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ABSTRACT

Barbara Kingsolver's Prodigal Summer (2000) presents an intricate relationship between gender, ecological interdependence, agricultural practices, sexuality, and systems of power. Set in the Appalachian mountains of Zebulon County, the novel brings together three interconnected narratives centered on Deanna Wolfe, Lusa Maluf Landowski, and Nannie Rawley. Although the three women occupy different social positions and possess different forms of knowledge, each challenges dominant assumptions about women's roles and humanity's relationship with the natural environment. This article examines Prodigal Summer through an ecofeminist framework, focusing particularly on the intersections of gender, nature, and power and on the ways female characters transform ecological knowledge into resistance. Drawing on Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies, Ynestra King, and contemporary ecofeminist scholarship, the study argues that Kingsolver challenges the parallel domination of women and nature by patriarchal, agricultural, and economic systems. Deanna's defense of predators challenges masculine hunting culture and conventional ideas of femininity; Lusa's rejection of pesticides and her development of alternative agricultural practices challenge environmentally destructive farming and patriarchal ownership of land; and Nannie's defense of biodiversity challenges technological agriculture and monocultural thinking. The novel ultimately proposes an ethics of interdependence in which ecological diversity, gender diversity, and social diversity are mutually reinforcing. Recent scholarship has continued to identify Prodigal Summer as an important ecofeminist text, particularly through its treatment of organic farming, biodiversity, women's ecological knowledge, and environmental consciousness.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, gender, nature, resistance, power, ecological knowledge, biodiversity, sustainable agriculture, Barbara Kingsolver, Prodigal Summer

INTRODUCTION

Environmental degradation and gender inequality are increasingly understood as interconnected social and political problems rather than as separate concerns. Ecofeminist theory provides an important framework for examining this intersection because it investigates how systems that subordinate women are frequently connected to systems that exploit animals, land, forests, water, and other forms of nonhuman life. Contemporary ecofeminist scholarship continues to emphasize that environmental justice requires attention to gender, social inequality, knowledge, and power. Recent work has particularly stressed women's participation in environmental protection and the importance of moving beyond simplistic assumptions about a natural or biological connection between women and nature.

Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer* is especially suitable for an ecofeminist reading because ecological questions are not simply a background to the narrative. Nature constitutes the central structure through which the characters understand sexuality, agriculture, community, survival, and identity. The novel is divided into three interwoven narratives: "Predators," centered on wildlife biologist Deanna Wolfe; "Moth Love," focused on Lusa Maluf Landowski; and "Old Chestnuts," involving the elderly farmer Nannie Rawley and agricultural scientist Garnett Walker. The three narratives initially appear independent but gradually reveal their ecological and thematic connections.

Kingsolver's ecological vision is grounded in interdependence. The novel repeatedly challenges the assumption that humans exist outside nature. Predators depend on prey, plants depend on pollinators, farmers depend on soil and insects, and human communities depend on ecological systems that are often invisible to them. In this context, the oppression of nature parallels other forms of domination, including patriarchal control over women.

Recent research confirms the relevance of this approach. Rojer and Jayapaul's 2025 study explicitly examines *Prodigal Summer* through ecofeminism, emphasizing Deanna, Lusa, and Nannie and their ecological consciousness, organic cultivation, protection of coyotes, and resistance to pesticides. Ali and Sasani's 2024 study similarly identifies the novel's representation of the interconnectedness of women, nature, animal life, and environmental consciousness. Earlier scholarship has also identified the novel as an important example of ecofeminist literature, particularly because its female characters attempt to protect both ecological systems and their communities.

However, there remains room for a more focused examination of resistance. Much of the discussion of *Prodigal Summer* emphasizes women and nature or environmental consciousness. This article instead asks how ecological knowledge becomes a form of resistance against structures of patriarchal, agricultural, economic, and cultural power. The study therefore focuses on the relationship between gender, nature, and power.

The central argument of this article is that Kingsolver does not portray nature simply as something that women naturally understand better than men. Such an interpretation would risk reproducing gender essentialism. Instead, the novel demonstrates that ecological knowledge is produced through observation, experience, care, scientific inquiry, and participation in local environments. Deanna, Lusa, and Nannie acquire different forms of ecological knowledge and use them to challenge dominant practices.

The article therefore argues that *Prodigal Summer* constructs ecofeminist resistance through three major strategies: Deanna's defense of ecological interdependence, Lusa's rejection of environmentally destructive agriculture, and Nannie's resistance to monocultural and chemically intensive farming.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ecofeminism and the Interconnection of Gender and Nature

Ecofeminism emerged from the intersection of feminist and environmental movements and developed around the recognition that the exploitation of women and the exploitation of nature are often supported by related structures of domination. Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies have been particularly influential in demonstrating how capitalist development and patriarchal structures can marginalize women's labor while simultaneously commodifying and exploiting natural resources.

Shiva's *Staying Alive* (1988/1989) emphasizes women's ecological knowledge and critiques development models that replace diverse local systems with centralized, industrialized systems. Mies and Shiva's

Ecofeminism (1993) further develops the relationship between patriarchy, capitalist accumulation, women's labor, and ecological destruction.

Ynestra King similarly emphasizes the political dimension of ecological feminism. Rather than treating women and nature as inherently identical, ecofeminism can expose the ideological structures that position both as objects of domination. This distinction is important for reading *Prodigal Summer*. Kingsolver does not simply suggest that women are naturally ecological. Instead, she places women in situations where their knowledge and practices challenge dominant systems.

Recent ecofeminist scholarship has expanded these ideas toward environmental justice, intersectionality, and women's voices in ecological activism. Somokanta's 2024 discussion of women's environmentalism emphasizes the importance of women's participation in protecting natural resources and cautions against reducing ecofeminism to a simple woman/nature binary. Similarly, recent environmental-feminist research emphasizes the intersection of gender, environmental degradation, social justice, and unequal power structures.

These developments are particularly relevant to Kingsolver because *Prodigal Summer* presents ecological problems through social relationships. Hunting, pesticides, farming, land inheritance, marriage, and gender expectations are all interconnected.

Ecofeminist Scholarship on *Prodigal Summer*

Scholarship on *Prodigal Summer* has consistently recognized its ecological dimensions. Magee identifies Kingsolver's novel as explicitly concerned with community, environmental awareness, strong female characters, and ecological threats.

Hirsch's study of *Prodigal Summer* and Ruth Ozeki's *All Over Creation* argues that Kingsolver uses scientific knowledge to protect both systems of nature and systems of gender. The study particularly highlights biodiversity, cultural diversity, motherhood, maternity, fertility, and toxic human behavior.

More recent scholarship strengthens this interpretation. Ali and Sasani's 2024 article identifies the relationship between women and nature as a central ecofeminist concern in the novel. Rojer and Jayapaul's 2025 study specifically focuses on Deanna's protection of coyotes, Lusa's ecological farming, and Nannie's organic cultivation.

The existing literature therefore establishes *Prodigal Summer* as an important ecofeminist novel. However, the present study shifts the emphasis from simply identifying ecofeminist themes toward examining how ecological consciousness becomes resistance against power.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs ecofeminism as its principal theoretical framework, drawing particularly on Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies, and Ynestra King.

Vandana Shiva: Ecological Knowledge and Diversity

Shiva's work is useful for understanding the importance of biodiversity and women's knowledge. Industrial systems frequently treat diversity as inefficiency, while ecological systems depend upon diversity for resilience. This tension appears repeatedly in *Prodigal Summer*.

Nannie's agricultural philosophy, for example, values naturally occurring variation rather than strict uniformity. Her wild apple trees become a metaphor for ecological and social diversity.

Maria Mies: Patriarchy, Labor, and Production

Mies's ecofeminist analysis helps illuminate the relationship between women's labor and systems of economic production. Lusa's experience is particularly relevant. After Cole's death, she inherits agricultural responsibilities within a patriarchal community that assumes land and farming should ultimately be controlled by men.

Her struggle therefore concerns both ecological practice and ownership.

Ynestra King: Resistance to Systems of Domination

King's ecofeminism emphasizes the relationship between social hierarchy and environmental domination. This perspective is particularly valuable for analyzing Deanna's opposition to hunters and Lusa's arguments with Cole.

The novel repeatedly presents domination as a problem of worldview: the same desire to control land, animals, and plants appears in masculine attempts to regulate women.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative textual-analysis methodology. The primary text is Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer* (2000). The analysis focuses on passages concerning women, ecological systems, agriculture, biodiversity, animals, gender expectations, marriage, land ownership, and environmental practices.

The analysis is organized around three central characters: Deanna Wolfe, Lusa Maluf Landowski, and Nannie Rawley. These characters are selected because each represents a distinctive form of ecological knowledge and resistance.

The quotations are drawn from the user's uploaded copy of *Prodigal Summer*. The parenthetical page numbers below refer to the novel's printed pagination. The uploaded PDF begins the novel on PDF page 9, so the file citation may display a PDF page eight pages higher than the printed page number.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Deanna Wolfe: Female Ecological Knowledge and Resistance

Deanna Wolfe represents one of the strongest examples of female ecological agency in *Prodigal Summer*. She is a wildlife biologist who lives alone in the forest and studies predators, particularly coyotes. Her professional and personal relationship with nature immediately challenges conventional gender expectations.

The novel establishes Deanna as physically independent. Her former husband criticized her walking style because it did not conform to conventional femininity:

“Can’t you just stroll like other women do? But no, she couldn’t” (Kingsolver 15).

The narrator then states:

“‘Feminine’ was a test like some witch trial she was preordained to fail” (Kingsolver 15).

This passage directly connects gender and power. Femininity is represented as a social test rather than a natural condition. Deanna's body becomes a site where patriarchal expectations are imposed. Her fast walking, physical strength, independence, and outdoor lifestyle are interpreted as failures of femininity.

Kingsolver therefore rejects the assumption that women must behave according to socially prescribed forms of softness, dependence, and domesticity.

Deanna's relationship with the forest becomes an alternative to these expectations. She is most comfortable when she is outside. Her body becomes capable and knowledgeable within the ecological environment.

Her ecological knowledge also gives her authority.

When Eddie Bondo questions why she studies predators, Deanna explains:

“They’re the top of the food chain, that’s the reason. If they’re good, then their prey is good, and its food is good” (Kingsolver 11).

This statement summarizes one of the novel's central ecological principles: interdependence.

Deanna does not understand nature as a hierarchy in which humans stand above animals. Instead, she understands the ecosystem as a network in which each species contributes to the functioning of the whole.

Her explanation continues:

“Keeping tabs on the predators tells you what you need to know about the herbivores ... the vegetation ... the insect populations, small predators like shrews and voles. All of it” (Kingsolver 11).

The phrase “All of it” is especially significant. Deanna's ecological vision is holistic. She rejects fragmented thinking.

From an ecofeminist perspective, this holistic approach challenges the logic of domination. If humans understand nature only in terms of usefulness, they may destroy species whose ecological significance is not immediately visible.

Predators and the Politics of Domination

Deanna's interest in predators also challenges the masculine hunting culture represented by Eddie Bondo and the local hunters.

The novel explains the disappearance of the red wolf:

“You wouldn’t. It’s gone from the planet, is why” (Kingsolver 15).

The extinction of the red wolf is not merely an ecological fact. It represents the consequences of human attempts to control predator populations.

Deanna therefore protects coyotes because she understands them as part of a larger ecological system.

Her resistance is particularly significant because she must protect ecological knowledge against people who interpret animals primarily through the categories of hunting and economic utility.

The novel also complicates the gender dimension. Deanna is a woman working in a male-coded environment. She is not simply observing nature; she is challenging men who believe they have authority over the forest.

Her ecological expertise becomes a form of intellectual and professional power.

Deanna and the Rejection of Patriarchal Femininity

Deanna's ecological independence is closely associated with her rejection of conventional femininity.

She has lived alone in the forest for two years, maintains trails, studies wildlife, and carries a weapon for protection. Her lifestyle contrasts with the conventional expectation that women should live within domestic and marital structures.

Her former marriage had already taught her that her independence could be interpreted as a problem.

The novel states that her husband regarded her walking style as something that could be “used against her” (Kingsolver 15).

This is important because it demonstrates how patriarchal power operates through ordinary judgments about women's bodies.

Deanna's eventual relationship with Eddie Bondo is therefore not simply a romantic plot. It also raises questions about whether intimacy necessarily requires the surrender of autonomy.

Kingsolver does not present Deanna's independence as a rejection of sexuality. Instead, the novel separates sexuality from submission.

This distinction is important to an ecofeminist reading because the female body is not represented merely as a passive object. Deanna's body, like the forest around her, possesses agency and complexity.

Lusa Maluf Landowski: Woman, Land, and Agricultural Power

Lusa's narrative provides the strongest connection between gender, land ownership, and agricultural power.

Unlike Deanna, Lusa initially enters the agricultural community as an outsider. She is educated, scientifically trained, and culturally different from the farming families around her.

After Cole's death, she inherits the farm and must decide whether to leave or remain.

Her situation reveals a patriarchal assumption about land ownership. Hannie-Mavis warns her:

“A few years down the line you’ll marry somebody around here. Then this farm will be his” (Kingsolver 309).

This statement reveals that marriage can function as a mechanism through which female property becomes male property.

Lusa's ownership of land is therefore unstable.

Even though the law gives her the farm, the social system imagines that the property will eventually belong to a future husband.

The land becomes a site where gender and power intersect.

Lusa's Reclamation of the Farm

Lusa gradually transforms her relationship with the land.

Her agricultural work is not merely economic. It becomes part of her identity.

Eventually she declares:

“I’m married to a piece of land named Widener” (Kingsolver 388).

This statement can be read as a radical transformation of the conventional marriage metaphor.

Under patriarchy, a woman is frequently imagined as belonging to a husband. Lusa reverses this relationship. She does not say that she belongs to the land. Instead, she describes herself as being committed to it.

The land becomes a relationship rather than a possession.

This distinction is central to ecofeminism.

Lusa's relationship with the farm gradually becomes based on care, responsibility, ecological awareness, and continuity rather than ownership alone.

The farm is no longer simply Cole's inheritance. It becomes part of Lusa's own identity.

The “Woman's Garden” and Female Agricultural Knowledge

Lusa's garden represents another form of resistance.

Jewel observes:

“It looks like a woman’s garden, some way. It doesn’t look like other people’s gardens” (Kingsolver 380).

The phrase “woman's garden” is important because it associates agricultural difference with gender.

Lusa plants different crops from those traditionally cultivated in the region. She grows Swiss chard, fava beans, and several varieties of eggplant.

Her agricultural practice is therefore based on diversity rather than uniformity.

This directly corresponds with ecofeminist critiques of industrial agriculture.

Instead of treating the land as a machine designed to produce a single profitable crop, Lusa creates a diverse ecosystem.

Resistance to Pesticides

Lusa's strongest ecological resistance concerns pesticides.

She explains:

“I hate pesticides” (Kingsolver 301).

She objects to agricultural chemicals because they kill beneficial insects along with pests.

Earlier, she explains that pesticide use can destroy enormous numbers of insects:

“Look at all the beautiful creatures that die” (Kingsolver 301).

Her objection is not merely emotional. It is ecological.

Lusa understands that insects are part of the agricultural system.

She therefore develops alternative farming methods.

When Jewel asks how she controls hornworms, Lusa explains:

“I use different things. I use Bt on the tomatoes” (Kingsolver 380).

She explains that the biological control affects hornworms without harming bees and ladybugs.

This is an important example of ecological knowledge replacing chemical domination.

Lusa does not reject science. Instead, she challenges a particular form of industrial science that prioritizes control and profit over ecological balance.

This distinction is crucial.

Kingsolver is not presenting women as anti-science. Rather, she presents Lusa as advocating a different form of science—one attentive to ecological relationships.

Ecological Interdependence and the Critique of Chemical Agriculture

Nannie's discussion of pesticides provides a more explicitly scientific critique.

She explains the consequences of broad-spectrum insecticide:

“you end up boosting the numbers of the bugs you don't want and wiping out the ones you need. And every time you spray, it gets worse” (Kingsolver 276).

This passage is central to the novel's ecological philosophy.

The problem with pesticide use is not simply that chemicals kill insects. The deeper problem is that they interfere with ecological relationships.

Predators depend on prey, and prey populations are regulated through ecological interactions.

When humans destroy these relationships, they create new ecological problems.

The novel therefore criticizes the assumption that nature can be controlled through technological intervention without consequences.

Nannie Rawley and Biodiversity as Resistance

Nannie Rawley represents another form of female ecological knowledge.

Her most important ecological principle is biodiversity.

She explains to Deanna:

“There’s nothing so important as having variety” (Kingsolver 395).

The statement appears in a discussion of sexual reproduction and genetic variation, but its significance extends beyond biology.

Nannie associates variation with survival:

“That’s how life can still go on when the world changes” (Kingsolver 395).

This statement can also be interpreted socially.

A system that permits difference is more resilient than a system that demands uniformity.

Nannie's agricultural practices reflect this philosophy. Her orchard contains trees that have grown from seeds and cross-pollination rather than from genetically identical cuttings.

The narrative describes these trees as:

“the illegitimate children of a Transparent crossed with a Stayman’s winesap” (Kingsolver 395).

The language of “illegitimate children” is deliberately ironic.

What society might describe as abnormal or uncontrolled is precisely what produces ecological diversity.

Kingsolver therefore reverses the conventional hierarchy between purity and mixture.

Biodiversity and Gender Diversity

Nannie's defense of biodiversity also has a gender dimension.

She tells Deanna:

“There’s Deannas and there’s Rachels, that’s what comes of sex, that’s the miracle of it” (Kingsolver 395).

The biological discussion becomes a commentary on human diversity.

The novel resists the desire to make everything identical.

This idea can be connected to Deanna's experience of femininity. Deanna is criticized because she does not behave like conventional women. Yet Nannie's ecological philosophy suggests that difference is not a defect.

Variation is necessary for life.

Consequently, the novel creates a conceptual relationship between biodiversity and gender diversity.

Both depend upon rejecting rigid systems of uniformity.

The Politics of “Modern” Agriculture

Nannie also challenges the ideological assumption that technological agriculture automatically represents progress.

When Garnett argues that agricultural practices change with time, Nannie responds:

“Time doesn’t change; ideas change. Prices and markets and laws. Chemical companies change” (Kingsolver 276).

This is an explicitly political statement.

Agricultural transformation is not presented as inevitable progress. It is shaped by economic interests, markets, laws, and corporations.

Nannie's criticism therefore moves beyond environmentalism into political economy.

Her question is essentially: Who benefits from agricultural modernization?

This question is central to ecofeminist thought because environmental destruction is often connected to economic and political systems that value profit over sustainability.

Women's Knowledge Versus Institutional Authority

Nannie and Lusa possess knowledge that is not always recognized by male authority.

Nannie understands ecological relationships through decades of farming experience.

Lusa possesses scientific training in entomology.

Deanna possesses professional knowledge as a wildlife biologist.

The three women therefore represent different knowledge systems:

- **Deanna:** scientific ecological observation;
- **Lusa:** scientific and practical agricultural knowledge;
- **Nannie:** experiential and intergenerational ecological knowledge.

Kingsolver does not suggest that one form of knowledge should replace another.

Instead, the novel suggests that ecological survival requires the integration of multiple forms of knowledge.

This is consistent with ecofeminist critiques of dominant epistemologies that privilege centralized, institutional, and masculine forms of knowledge while marginalizing women's experiential knowledge.

Nature as a Subject Rather Than an Object

A major strength of *Prodigal Summer* is its refusal to treat nature simply as scenery.

The forest is not merely the setting in which Deanna's story occurs.

Animals have ecological functions.

Plants reproduce.

Predators regulate populations.

Insects pollinate.

Water shapes the landscape.

The forest therefore functions as an active ecological system.

Deanna's statement that predator populations tell us about the health of the entire ecosystem illustrates this point:

“If they’re good, then their prey is good, and its food is good” (Kingsolver 11).

Nature is therefore presented as a network of relationships.

This challenges anthropocentrism—the assumption that the natural world exists primarily for human use.

Resistance to Human Control of Nature

Lusa's disagreement with Cole provides a direct example of conflicting ecological philosophies.

Cole believes:

“You have to persuade it two steps back every day or it will move in and take you over” (Kingsolver 44).

Lusa challenges this worldview:

“You’re nature, I’m nature” (Kingsolver 44).

This is one of the most important ecofeminist statements in the novel.

Lusa refuses the distinction between human beings and nature.

She does not say that nature is something outside human society that must be controlled.

Instead, humans themselves are part of nature.

Her statement:

“The world will not end if you let the honeysuckle have the side of your barn” (Kingsolver 44)

challenges the ideology of domination.

Cole's agricultural philosophy is based on control: weeds must be eliminated, nature must be pushed back, and land must remain productive.

Lusa proposes coexistence.

This difference is not merely environmental. It also reflects their marital conflict.

The argument about weeds becomes an argument about power.

The Honeysuckle as a Symbol of Ecological and Marital Conflict

The honeysuckle becomes symbolic because it connects ecological domination with domestic conflict.

Cole wants to control the plant.

Lusa sees no need to eliminate it completely.

Their disagreement reveals two different models of power.

Cole's model is:

identify → classify → control → eliminate.

Lusa's model is:

observe → coexist → adapt → negotiate.

This distinction can be read through ecofeminist theory.

The first model resembles patriarchal domination: authority is established by controlling the environment.

The second model resembles an ethics of interdependence: humans must negotiate their relationship with other forms of life.

The novel does not claim that every plant should be allowed to grow without limitation. Instead, it questions the assumption that control is always the appropriate response.

Land, Marriage, and Patriarchal Ownership

Lusa's relationship with the farm becomes increasingly significant because the novel connects land ownership with marriage.

The warning that a future husband will acquire control over the farm exposes the patriarchal structure underlying inheritance:

“Then this farm will be his” (Kingsolver 309).

The statement reduces female independence to a temporary stage between male forms of ownership.

Lusa's resistance therefore has two dimensions:

1. She must establish herself as an independent woman.
2. She must establish herself as an independent farmer.

Her decision to remain on the land challenges both gender expectations and agricultural expectations.

Lusa's Relationship with the Land as an Alternative to Patriarchal Marriage

When Lusa declares:

“I'm married to a piece of land named Widener” (Kingsolver 388),

she transforms the meaning of marriage.

The land becomes a relationship of responsibility rather than an object of possession.

This is significant because patriarchal marriage in the novel has been associated with male control.

Lusa's metaphor reverses the relationship.

She chooses the land.

She chooses agricultural work.

She chooses ecological responsibility.

The farm consequently becomes part of her feminist identity.

The Mulberry Tree and Ecological Continuity

The mulberry tree at the end of Lusa's narrative provides another powerful ecological image.

She recognizes it as:

“the Tree of Life ... a bird tree” (Kingsolver 388).

The tree is valuable not because it produces a commodity but because it supports a community of living beings.

Lusa observes robins, towhees, cardinals, orchard orioles, and goldfinches in the tree.

The image provides an alternative model of value.

Under an economic model, the tree may be valued according to its productivity.

Under Lusa's ecological model, the tree possesses value because it sustains life.

This is central to ecofeminist ethics.

Nature should not be valued solely according to its usefulness to humans.

Women and Alternative Agricultural Futures

The three women ultimately represent three forms of ecological resistance.

Deanna protects predators.

Lusa develops sustainable agricultural practices.

Nannie protects biodiversity.

Their actions are different, but their underlying principle is similar: life cannot be understood through domination alone.

The novel's ecological vision therefore depends on diversity and interdependence.

This aligns strongly with recent scholarship that identifies organic farming, biodiversity, conservation, and women's ecological consciousness as central features of *Prodigal Summer*.

Ecofeminist Resistance as Knowledge

One of the most important conclusions from the textual analysis is that resistance in *Prodigal Summer* is primarily a form of knowledge.

Deanna resists because she knows how ecosystems work.

Lusa resists because she understands insects and sustainable agriculture.

Nannie resists because she understands biodiversity and farming history.

Their knowledge allows them to challenge dominant assumptions.

This is particularly important because none of the three women initially possesses conventional political power.

Their power comes from knowing differently.

Ecofeminism is therefore represented not only as political activism but also as an epistemological challenge.

Kingsolver asks whose knowledge counts.

The men in the novel frequently possess institutional or economic authority.

The women possess ecological knowledge.

The novel gradually demonstrates that ecological survival may depend more upon the latter than the former.

DISCUSSION

The analysis demonstrates that *Prodigal Summer* presents gender and environmental issues as mutually connected rather than independent.

Deanna's experience illustrates the social construction of femininity. Her husband interprets her physical independence as a failure of femininity, while her professional ecological knowledge gives her authority in a male-dominated environment.

Lusa's experience reveals the relationship between women's land ownership and patriarchal inheritance. Although she legally possesses the farm, the community assumes that a future husband will eventually control it. Her ecological practices therefore become part of her struggle for independence.

Nannie's narrative exposes the political economy of modern agriculture. She challenges the assumption that chemical-intensive farming represents inevitable progress and points instead to markets, corporations, laws, and agricultural ideology as forces shaping environmental degradation.

The novel therefore presents three levels of power:

Social power

The regulation of women's behavior and femininity.

Economic power

The control of land, farming, markets, and agricultural production.

Ecological power

The human attempt to control animals, plants, insects, and natural processes.

Ecofeminism is useful because it allows these forms of power to be considered together.

The novel does not suggest that all men are environmental destroyers or that all women are ecological protectors. Rather, characters are differentiated according to their relationships with systems of domination.

This is particularly important for avoiding a simplistic ecofeminist reading.

Eddie Bondo, for example, is a hunter, but his relationship with Deanna becomes more complicated than a simple opposition between man and woman.

Likewise, Garnett is initially attached to agricultural control, but his conversations with Nannie create the possibility of intellectual transformation.

Kingsolver therefore allows ecological consciousness to cross gender boundaries.

The fundamental conflict is not simply women versus men.

It is more accurately:

domination versus interdependence.

This distinction strengthens the ecofeminist interpretation.

Ecological Diversity and Social Diversity

One of the most significant ideas in *Prodigal Summer* is that biodiversity and social diversity are connected.

Nannie's statement that:

“There’s nothing so important as having variety” (Kingsolver 395)

has implications beyond biology.

The novel celebrates:

- different species;
- different plants;
- genetic variation;
- different agricultural practices;
- different forms of knowledge;
- different female identities;
- different forms of sexuality;
- different ways of living.

The insistence on variety therefore challenges systems that demand conformity.

Deanna does not behave like the women expected by her former husband.

Lusa does not farm like the traditional farmers around her.

Nannie does not accept modern agricultural orthodoxy.

Their differences are precisely what make their ecological contributions valuable.

The novel thus connects ecological resilience with social and gender diversity.

Resistance, Agency, and Empowerment

The three women also demonstrate different forms of agency.

Deanna's agency

Deanna chooses solitude, wildlife conservation, scientific observation, and physical independence.

Lusa's agency

Lusa chooses to remain on the farm, rejects pesticides, diversifies production, and develops a personal relationship with the land.

Nannie's agency

Nannie preserves biodiversity, challenges chemical agriculture, and refuses to accept the authority of conventional agricultural ideology.

These forms of agency demonstrate that resistance does not always involve dramatic political rebellion.

Resistance can be everyday:

- protecting a coyote;
- refusing a pesticide;
- planting a different crop;
- preserving a wild apple;
- challenging a gender expectation;
- refusing to surrender land;
- teaching ecological knowledge to another generation.

This conception of resistance is especially valuable for ecofeminist literary analysis.

CONCLUSION

Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer* offers a complex literary representation of ecofeminist resistance by connecting women's experiences with ecological systems, agricultural practices, and structures of power. Through Deanna Wolfe, Lusa Maluf Landowski, and Nannie Rawley, the novel demonstrates that ecological knowledge can become a powerful form of resistance against patriarchal, economic, and technological systems of domination.

Deanna's defense of predators challenges both ecological ignorance and conventional gender expectations. Her assertion that the health of predators reflects the health of the entire food chain presents nature as an interconnected system rather than a collection of isolated resources. Her rejection of restrictive femininity further connects gender freedom with ecological freedom.

Lusa's narrative provides an even more direct intersection between gender and environmental politics. Her struggle over land ownership demonstrates how patriarchal inheritance structures can undermine female autonomy. Her decision to remain on the farm and her declaration that she is "married to a piece of land named Widener" represent the reclamation of both land and identity. Her rejection of pesticides and

adoption of alternative agricultural practices further demonstrate how women's ecological knowledge can challenge environmentally destructive forms of production.

Nannie Rawley represents another form of resistance. Her defense of biodiversity and her criticism of chemical agriculture expose the ideological assumptions behind “modern” farming. Her statement that “there’s nothing so important as having variety” becomes a central philosophical principle of the novel. Diversity is not weakness; it is the basis of ecological survival.

The novel ultimately refuses the division between human society and nature. Lusa's declaration—“You’re nature, I’m nature”—captures this principle particularly clearly. Humans are not external managers of the natural world. They are participants within ecological systems.

This understanding makes *Prodigal Summer* particularly relevant to contemporary ecofeminist thought. Recent scholarship continues to emphasize the novel's treatment of women's ecological consciousness, organic agriculture, biodiversity, and environmental protection. At the same time, contemporary ecofeminist scholarship increasingly emphasizes environmental justice, women's voices, and the need to understand ecological problems through broader structures of power.

The central conclusion of this study is therefore that Kingsolver's ecofeminism is not based on the simplistic idea that women are naturally closer to nature. Instead, *Prodigal Summer* shows that women can become important ecological agents because their experiences, knowledge, and practices enable them to challenge systems based on domination and control. Deanna, Lusa, and Nannie do not merely “love nature”; they understand, defend, cultivate, and reinterpret it.

Their resistance ultimately suggests that environmental survival requires a transformation of power itself: from domination to interdependence, from uniformity to diversity, from ownership to stewardship, and from exclusionary authority to multiple forms of ecological knowledge.

In this sense, *Prodigal Summer* presents ecofeminist resistance not simply as resistance by women, but as a broader challenge to the cultural logic that permits the domination of both women and the more-than-human world.

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