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Declaration of Authenticity

I confirm to have conceived and written this diploma thesis in English all by myself. Quotations from other authors are all clearly marked and acknowledged in the bibliographical references and within the text. Any ideas borrowed and/or passages paraphrased from the works of other authors have been truthfully acknowledged and identified.

Lena Kusebauch

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1. Introduction

Literature that was written in the US South or deals with it as its subject has been an interesting and challenging field of study for decades, and fiction written by contemporary authors continues to be a fascinating subject for literary analysis. Barbara Kingsolver is one of the many highly productive modern women writers whose works are set in the “The South” and address issues that are closely connected to this particular geographic area. This is one of the many reasons why this diploma thesis will deal with selected novels by Barbara Kingsolver.

The first part of this thesis will explain the methods that are used to analyze Kingsolver’s novels. It also presents an introduction to Southern literature with the aim to explore any specific features of this particular kind of literature. Furthermore, this work seeks to investigate to what extent Barbara Kingsolver introduces distinctly Southern features into her novels and in what way she might thus be regarded as a typical Southern author.

The second part of this thesis will focus on the analysis of specific novels by Barbara Kingsolver. I chose to analyze and compare three novels by Kingsolver, which are *Animal Dreams* (1990), *Prodigal Summer* (2000) and *Flight Behavior* (2012). The novels were chosen according to their topics, their geographical setting and their date of origin. Two of the novels, *Prodigal Summer* and *Flight Behavior*, are set in the South of the United States, a fact which is relevant for this thesis. Furthermore, all of the selected novels address numerous local issues, for example regarding farming, livestock breeding and local wildlife.

The selected novels were published in intervals of roughly ten years. Their publishing dates are relevant in order to identify any changes and developments Kingsolver’s writings may have gone through regarding the importance and meaning of nature in her novels or her choice of narrative perspectives.

The analysis of the novels will largely focus on the significance of narrative perspectives within the novels. The narrative situations in Kingsolver’s novels are exceptionally meaningful. The author’s literary techniques contain frequent changes in perspectives, with narrators often adopting different roles and features. This is particularly relevant with regard to the course of events,

the degree of information provided to the reader, or the characters' attitudes towards environmental issues.

The third and final part of this thesis will explore the meaning of nature and the settings in Kingsolver's novels from the angle of ecocriticism. The selected novels are all set in mostly rural areas and issues such as environmentally friendly farming or the consequences of global warming are addressed in a critical way. Drawing from her academic knowledge in biology, Kingsolver provides the readers of her novels with detailed information about environmental local and global issues.

2. Methods

Kingsolver's novels lend themselves to analysis from multiple perspectives. The narrative situations put forth in her work are thought-provoking, as are the individual characters she introduces. Additionally, the plots and the social and global issues that Kingsolver addresses within her narratives are equally intriguing. The complexity calls for a combination of methods to explore the various meanings of the texts. Close reading and wide reading have turned out to be the most appropriate methods to obtain meaningful results when examining Kingsolver's novels. Likewise, analyzing her work from the perspective of ecocriticism has proven useful. The following subchapters will discuss the benefits and shortcomings of these methods.

2.1. Close reading and wide reading

Any literary analysis of Kingsolver's novels must not only focus on the textual level, such as, for example, the narrative situation or plot development, but also on their cultural aspects. This is basically why both close reading and wide reading seem to be the most suitable methods to analyze Kingsolver's narratives. According to Ansgar Nünning and Vera Nünning, close reading and wide reading are based on the assumption that the cultural dimension of a text is inherent and also as available for interpretation as the text itself (293). As Kingsolver's novels are concerned with a number of social, global and especially ecological issues, it seems obvious that their cultural background needs to be taken into account. Therefore, a close reading will be offered initially in order to analyze the selected novels on a textual level. Close reading on its own, however, is not sufficient enough to interpret a text in its full cultural extent. This is mainly because a text should always be perceived as embedded in its cultural context and by performing only close reading this context is not taken into account as much as it should be (Nünning and Nünning 295). As a consequence, this thesis will use wide reading as a complementary technique. Wide reading essentially serves as a method allowing the reader to grasp the wider cultural and historical background of a text by relating it to other fictional or non-fictional texts, also referred to as the intertextual context (Nünning and Nünning 294). On the one hand, such intertextuality can thus be found on a

textual level, for example in the form of references to other literary texts, and on the other hand, by referring to non-literary concepts. In Kingsolver's novels, the latter are exemplified by numerous references to scientific theories in relation to climate change. Generally, it can be said that wide reading is based on the assumption that a text's meaning can not only be identified by interpreting the text itself but by relating it to its context (Nünning and Nünning 294). This thesis will focus on relating the selected novels to academic texts, which will mainly be theories of narrative perspectives and theories of ecocriticism.

2.2. Ecocriticism

One of the most striking features of Barbara Kingsolver's novels is the importance of the settings. In her novels, she frequently addresses local and global environmental issues, which is why the significance of the regions and places where her novels are set should in no way be neglected. As a consequence, I chose to analyze Kingsolver's novels from the viewpoint of ecocriticism in order to highlight the relevance of environmental criticism in Kingsolver's novels. The following subchapter will provide an overview of the development of ecocriticism and its influence as a tool for literary analysis.

2.1.1. Historic development

Literary studies are an academic field that has seen ongoing development, even transformation. Ecocriticism can be regarded as one of the most recent theoretical approaches that have been developing within the area of literary studies. It may also be considered as a reaction to the current global environmental crisis (Glotfelty, *Introduction* xv).

Regarding the history and the development of ecocriticism, it can be said that environmental movements started to influence literary studies rather late, having developed only from the 1960s onward (Heise, *Hitchhiker's Guide* 165). Until then, the concern of literary studies with environmental issues was rather limited. According to Cheryll Glotfelty, "there has been no sign that the institution of literary studies has even been aware of the environmental crisis" (*Introduction* xvi). This seems particularly striking given the fact that other fields in the humanities, such as politics, law, sociology or history, had already

included environmental concerns into their discussions well before (Glotfelty, *Introduction* xvi).

Ursula K. Heise explains this delayed development with the experience that literary studies went through from the 1960s to the 1990s – a period in time in which new perspectives developed and “[e]cocriticism found its place among this expanding matrix of coexisting projects, which in part explains the theoretical diversity it has attained in a mere dozen years” (*Hitchhiker’s Guide* 165). Glotfelty shares this opinion noting that as early as in the 1960s and 1970s, scholars were interested in environmental literature, but it obviously took some time until these scholars were united as a distinct school within the area of literary studies (*Introduction* xviii).

The term “ecocriticism” came up in the 1970s (Hiltner, *First-Wave* 1) and is mostly a short form for “what some critics prefer to call *environmental criticism*, *literary-environmental studies*, *literary ecology*, *literary environmentalism*, or *green cultural studies* (qtd. in Heise, *Hitchhiker’s Guide* 166). Glotfelty suggests that the term was used for the first time in an essay by William Rueckert 1978, “Literature and Ecology: an Experiment in Ecocriticism”, in which he defined ecocriticism as the “application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature” (qtd. in Glotfelty, *Introduction* xx). It seemed important and useful to develop a specific term for this particular branch of literary studies in order to prove that numerous scholars engaged in questions of ecocriticism were eventually heading in a common direction (Glotfelty, *Introduction* xx).

The development of ecocriticism can roughly be divided into two phases. The so-called first-wave of ecocriticism took place during the 1960s and 1970s, when “a number of literary and cultural critics, including Lynn White, Jr., Leo Marx, Carolyn Merchant, and [Raymond] Williams [...] began considering what literature can tell us about our relationship to the natural world, as well as our current environmental crisis” (Hiltner, *First-Wave* 1). Clearly, literature which deals with the relationship of people and the environment as well as with the impact of humanity on the environment has been produced for much longer than this narrow time span, if not for several thousands of years. First ecocritics in the modern sense analyzed texts from various centuries, thus opening up new perspectives on numerous well-known and bestselling texts, for example the Bible (Hiltner, *First-Wave* 1). One of the major concerns of many ecocritics

has been that human needs are often regarded as being more important than those of other species, a conflict which leads to numerous severe ecological problems and which is an issue that is often addressed in literature (Hiltner, *First-Wave* 2). One of the features of first-wave ecocritics was that they often concentrated on texts that are set in the wilderness and thus frequently tended to romanticize wilderness. In contrast, second-wave criticism has focused on different types of landscapes, including not only wild and unspoiled nature, but also cities, as well as on current environmental concerns. First-wave ecocritics strongly argued in favor of theories of deep ecology, which means that they focused on “the value of nature in and of itself, the equal rights of other species, and the importance of small communities”. Second-wave critics, on the other hand, have based their argumentation on social ecology, which “tends to value nature primarily in its human uses and has affinities with political philosophies ranging from anarchism to socialism and feminism” (Heise, *Hitchhiker’s Guide* 167).

Second-wave criticism, as Ken Hiltner stresses, would not have developed if first-wave criticism had not built the foundation for the strong interest in the relation of literature and nature (Hiltner, *Second-Wave* 131, 132). The field of environmental literary studies grew considerably in the early 1990s; typically, it was included into a number of university curricula and literary conferences, while magazines addressing this topic were founded and specialized literature on environmental literary concerns proliferated (Glottfelty, *Introduction* xvii).

Second-wave ecocritics started to include issues of gender, ethnicity and economics into their studies and, for example, examined the consequences of environmental pollution for the lower classes. Another aspect of second-wave ecocriticism was that scholars sought to establish global connections instead of focusing on the local and narrowly defined spaces only. Whereas first-wave scholars frequently focused on recently produced texts, second-wave ecocritics also dealt with texts that were written a long time ago. It has been demonstrated that Western society’s recent attitudes towards air pollution, for example, can be traced back to the Renaissance – an argument which shows that ecocritics can gain valuable insights from contemporary as well as older texts (Hiltner, *Second Wave* 132). For the near future, it is to be expected that ecocriticism will be focus on the environmental crisis which humanity is facing currently, while

monitoring and cooperating closely with other schools of literary studies (Hiltner, *Second Wave* 133).

Ecocriticism is primarily concerned with literature written in English, mainly in American, British, Australian and Canadian literature, while its relationship with literature in other languages as well as its interaction with non-English language scholars has yet to improve. This need to connect their findings and include literatures produced in various other languages from different cultures into their discussion certainly constitutes a challenge for future scholars and authors. This current lack of international connectivity might be explained by the predominant monolingualism because “[t]he environmentalist ambition is to think globally, but doing so in terms of a single language [English] is conceivable – even and especially when that language is a hegemonic one” (Heise, *Hitchhiker’s Guide* 173).

Clearly, ecocriticism as a subdivision of literary studies still has considerable potential as it constantly proves to be a stimulating and challenging discipline for a variety of scholars. Lawrence Buell is one of the numerous scholars who have been involved in ecocriticism and its role within literary studies from the very beginning, having written several books about this topic. One of his more recent books, which was published in 2005, is concerned with the future of ecocriticism. Buell argues that, similar to the development of any other critical movement, ecocriticism is likely to face at least four major challenges in the future. These challenges are “the challenge of organization, the challenge of professional legitimation, the challenge of defining distinctive models of critical inquiry, and the challenge of establishing their significance beyond the academy” (Buell 128). The progress that ecocriticism has made so far, Buell maintains, can be regarded both promising and mixed at the same time. On the one hand, it can be considered as very positive that the interconnectedness of scholars researching in this field has improved both globally and in terms of cooperation with other fields, such as the arts or civil society activism. However, in comparison to literary studies concerned with race, gender, sexuality or class, ecocriticism still has a lot of potential to develop and expand beyond its current scope, such as, for example, including it into the curricula of universities (Buell 129). One possible reason for this development is, according to Buell, that “[e]nvironmental criticism in literary studies has, thus far, not changed literary studies or environmental humanities so much as it has

been increasingly absorbed therein” (130). This is, amongst other reasons, due to the fact that it has not established its own methodology, for example in terms of inquiry methods; instead it “only” introduced a new perspective into the field of literary studies. This new perspective involved, for instance, neglected genres or combined analytical tools from different fields (Buell 130). Buell stresses that “to succeed in changing the subject or in changing the archive is every bit as important in the evolution of critical inquiry as a revolution in critical theory as such” (130). He summarizes this idea and states that the main achievement of ecocriticism will most likely be to have drawn attention to a “domain[s] of inquiry” rather than inventing new methods of inquiry (131). According to Buell, the most difficult challenge that ecocriticism may face in the future will be to establish its role outside the field of literary studies, possibly even outside the academic world (132). So far, ecocritical literature has mainly been relevant to teachers and students of literary studies, while any outreach to other academic fields is still carries a lot of potential. It is nevertheless, an achievement that ecocriticism has gradually found its way into universities and is gaining significance within the field of literary studies (Buell 132). Buell is optimistic about the future of environmental criticism and believes that it will help to “install and reinforce public concern about the fate of the earth, about humankind’s responsibility to act on that awareness, about the shame of environmental injustice, and about the importance of vision and imagination in changing minds, lives and policy as well as composing words, poems, and books” (133).

Besides Buell, numerous other scholars are concerned with the future of ecocriticism. Greg Garrard, for example, is one of these scholars. He agrees with Buell that one of the strengths of ecocriticism is its methodological variety (202). In contrast to Buell, Garrard states that ecocriticism will not have to face four, but rather three major challenges. These comprise its relation to animal studies, the “intellectual and theoretical response required by the present geographical and institutional spread of ecocriticism” and the challenge of “developing constructive relations between the green humanities and the environmental sciences” (203). Regarding the international diffusion of ecocriticism, Garrard assumes that the concepts of nature and the environment are likely to differ from nation to nation and that the development or the transfer of common concepts will be one of the future projects for ecocritics (203). He

further states that, with regard to the relation between green humanities and environmental sciences, presumably it will be a major concern for scholars to examine concepts and fixed notions, for example the concept of “nature’s wisdom, [which] is so deeply ingrained in environmentalist discourse and ecocriticism that only sustained research at the borders of the humanities and the new postmodern biological sciences can disentangle it from our system of basic presuppositions” (Garrard 204).

In the preface of the *Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, Glotfelty expresses her views regarding the previous achievements as well as the promising future of ecocriticism. Glotfelty states that “[e]cocriticism has changed the landscape of literary studies, moving from the margins into the mainstream. [...] Ecocriticism has given literary scholars, most of whom are teachers, a meaningful role to play in addressing the most pressing issue of our time – the degraded environment”. However, she also cautions that it will take some time to see whether the influence of ecocriticism will prevail or not, mainly because it is such a young literary movement (*Preface* xii).

In summary, it can be said that, according to many scholars, the future of ecocriticism will be determined by how this rather young literary discipline manages to face up to the challenges. Overall, however, it seems that the future of ecocriticism appears to be both prospering and promising.

2.1.2. Key aspects

“[T]he act of writing, of communicating, can have enormous impact environmentally” (Hiltner, *Introduction* xiii). However, literature might not be the first field people have in mind when they ponder ways to support the environment. Still, one should not underestimate the role that the humanities, for example literary studies, “play in our shared challenge of forging an environmentally better future” (Hiltner, *Introduction* xii). This is when the role of ecocriticism becomes evident because, in short, “environmental critics explore how nature and the natural world are imagined through literary texts” (Hiltner, *Introduction* xiii).

Ecocriticism is a growing field within literary studies which addresses a series of questions, including the following:

in what ways do highly evolved and self-aware beings relate to nature? What roles do language, literature, and art play in this relation? How have modernization and globalization processes transformed it? Is it possible to return to more ecologically attuned ways of inhabiting nature, and what would be the cultural prerequisites for such a change? (Heise, *Hitchhiker's Guide* 164, 165)

A short notional definition of ecocriticism by Glotfelty defines it as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (*Introduction* xviii). Glotfelty notes that ecocriticism “takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman” (Glotfelty, *Introduction* xix).

It is not easy to briefly summarize the concerns of scholars of ecocriticism because it is still a rapidly growing field of literary studies and, according to Heise, “[r]ecent vigorous critiques and ripostes are healthy signs of a rapidly expanding field” (*Hitchhiker's Guide* 166). She further states that “[s]omewhat like cultural studies, ecocriticism coheres by virtue of a common political project than on the basis of shared theoretical and methodological assumptions, and the details of how this project should translate into the study of culture are continually subject to challenge and revision” (Heise, *Hitchhiker's Guide* 166). Hence, its “theoretical diversity and interdisciplinarity” and “the rapid expansion of its analytic canon” can be regarded as some of the key features of ecocriticism, demonstrating that it is a field of literary studies which boasts connections to numerous other academic fields (Heise, *Hitchhiker's Guide* 172). Although ecocriticism is a field of interest for scholars of different academic backgrounds, they share a common motivation, which is “the troubling awareness that we have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet's basic life support systems” (Glotfelty, *Introduction* xx).

Literature which emphasizes the importance of preserving nature would not be written today if people's attitude toward nature had not changed substantially during the last two centuries. While nature used to be considered as dangerous and hazardous for a long time – a notion which is connotated in the term “wilderness” – about two centuries ago the perception of people changed and wild nature became something that needed to be preserved and

was highly valued. It is necessary to bear in mind that this perception of nature is based on cultural and historical developments and can therefore be regarded as socially and historically constructed (Hiltner, *Introduction* xv). The awareness that the perception of nature is socially constructed can also be useful because “[t]o the extent that a scientific view of nature forms part of the analysis of it all, it is to study science’s role in the emergence of socioculturally grounded conception of the environment” (Heise, *Hitchhiker’s Guide* 170, 171). This can be regarded as one of the many functions and goals of ecocriticism.

As has been mentioned, the perception of nature has strongly changed within the last two centuries. During the romantic period, nature was perceived as sublime and a place of natural beauty, whereas over the past few decades, humanity was torn between growing exploitation or outright devastation of nature and the challenge of preserving it. First-wave ecocritics such as U.S. Henry David Thoreau or Ralph Waldo Emerson often focused on images of wilderness. This, in turn, led to the discussion if and how this romanticized idea of wilderness is simply constructed and, therefore, only an idea that is culturally and historically produced by people. This attitude towards nature as being separated from humans changed in the last decades (Heise, *Hitchhiker’s Guide* 167). Contemporary writers are less concerned with the wilderness, but rather with nature affected by human actions. For example, they frequently address problems related to climate change and thus just “want to draw attention to the worsening condition of the earth” (Hiltner, *Introduction* xvi). One could say that

[e]nvironmentalism and ecocriticism aim their critique of modernity at its presumption to know the natural world scientifically, to manipulate it technologically and exploit it economically, and thereby ultimately to create a human sphere apart from it in a historical process that is usually labeled “progress”. This domination strips nature of any value other than as a material resource and commodity and leads to a gradual destruction that may in the end deprive humanity of its basis for subsistence. Such domination empties human life the significance it had derived from living in and with nature and alienates individuals and communities from their rootedness in place (Heise, *Hitchhiker’s Guide* 167).

As can be seen in this quote, the issues and concerns addressed by ecocriticism essentially affect the whole planet. Thus, they also clearly connect to various other academic fields.

Contemporary ecocritics do not only focus on authors who are traditionally part of the ecocritical canon but also include writers of minority groups and communities, such as, for example, Native Americans or African

Americans. This inclusion of different communities reveals how images and perception of nature and the environment are culturally constructed and can therefore differ strongly (Heise, *Hitchhiker's Guide* 167). In the early days of ecocriticism, the literature of British Romanticism along with the American literature of the 20th century seemed to lend itself to analysis. This canon was, however, expanded and gradually included the works of women writers as well as texts written by Native American authors. Furthermore, science fiction was included in the range of genres that were discussed (Heise, *Hitchhiker's Guide* 172, 173).

Another important aspect of ecocriticism is its concern with “environmental justice”. This term describes the correlation of environmental problems and class problems. A concrete example would be that poorer communities often have to deal with higher degrees of air and water pollution, as has been discussed in Robert D. Bullard’s *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class and Environmental Quality* (Hiltner, *Second Wave* 132). One of the possible definitions of environmental justice states that it is “the right of all people to share equally in the benefits bestowed by a healthy environment” (Adamson, Evans and Stein 135). Put differently, it can be argued that this branch of ecocriticism “rejects economic globalization, which it understands to be dominated by transnational corporations, but welcomes cultural border crossings and alliances, especially when they are initiated by the disenfranchised in the current economic world order” (Heise, *Hitchhiker's Guide* 173). Furthermore, it can be said that

[e]nvironmental justice initiatives specifically attempt to redress the disproportionate incidence of environmental contamination in communities of the poor and/or communities of color, to secure for those affected the right to live un-threatened by the risks posed by environmental degradation and contamination, and to afford equal access to natural resources that sustain life and culture (Adamson, Evans and Stein 135, 136).

These definitions and descriptions illustrate that environmental justice movements are interested in the intertwined nature of global phenomena and that they are not simply interested in certain regions or areas. Numerous authors have started to include concerns of the environmental justice movements into their work or can be interpreted accordingly, including, for example, Octavia Butler, Linda Hogan, Simon Ortiz or Alice Walker (Adamson, Evans and Stein 137). It is an important aspect of the environmental justice

movement that it is not “merely” a political movement but also closely connected with the arts, which is why it is also interested in cultural methods of representation (Adamson, Evans and Stein 139).

As the previous elaborations on ecocriticism have shown, it is a very large field that is not easily put into categories and fixed explanations. Glotfelty suggests to use a scheme similar to Elaine Showalter’s “model of the three developmental stages of feminist criticism” in order to gain a systematic overview of the subject (*Introduction* xxii). According to this suggestion, the first stage would include representations of nature in literature and the analysis of, for example, stereotypes. The second stage is concerned with consciousness raising, especially for the neglected genre of nature writing because “[i]n an increasingly urban society, nature writing plays a vital role in teaching us to value the natural world”. The third stage includes theoretical considerations, for example the examination of “the symbolic construction of species” (Glotfelty, *Introduction* xxiii). This model seems to be useful because it is not too detailed and therefore does not narrow the field of ecocriticism but correlates with the numerous different approaches and interests that make this field so challenging and stimulating.

To summarize, it can be said that ecocriticism examines the relation of literature and nature. As a consequence, it seems to be a highly suitable approach to analyze novels written by Barbara Kingsolver, in which nature itself and the relation between people and the environment are particularly relevant.

3. Barbara Kingsolver as an author of the American South

This chapter aims at providing an introduction to one of the most intriguing regions of the United States, the so-called South. Firstly, an overview of what defines the South as a region will be provided and some of the frequently occurring characteristics of Southern literature will be discussed. This is followed by an overview of Barbara Kingsolver's biography. Finally, it will be discussed whether Barbara Kingsolver can be regarded as a typical author of the American South.

3.1. Literature of the American South – An outline

The literature of the American South has a long tradition, having been read, studied and discussed intensely at length. In order to analyze Southern literature one has to regard it as a product of the South, which leads to the question what makes the South so specific and interesting as a region of the United States. This chapter is supposed to outline the ongoing discussion regarding Southern literature and provide an overview of this specific kind of literature, including the culture(s) in which it is produced.

The American South is a region with a complex history. Finding a clear definition of what constitutes the South and which U.S. states form part of this region is rather challenging. Different approaches and perspectives provide different definitions, and choosing just a single one of them in order to define the region runs the risk of neglecting its variety and diversity.

Thadious M. Davis is one of the numerous scholars interested in the South. Apart from other issues, she has dealt in depth with the question of how to define the South and also how to define a Southern writer. Davis states that some of the characteristics of Southern writers that have frequently been defined as such, are "a sense of place, a preoccupation with the past, a sense of family and community, and a desire for the concrete" (124). What is particularly interesting about this list of characteristics is that "[t]here is nothing [...], however, that specifically distinguishes the Southern writer from any other writer who establishes a base in a particular community or tradition". Different attributes and characteristics have been assigned to Southern writers, yet they were often very general and applicable to other groups of writers as well (Davis

124). Another problem of such a list of characteristics, in addition to its generalization, is that it usually describes only a certain group of writers. This will be discussed later in greater detail, but it should be noticed at this point that earlier scholars such as C. Hugh Holman and Louis D. Rubin Jr., when discussing Southern writers, primarily referred to white, male writers of the Renaissance, thereby excluding many other writers such as female or black authors (Davis 125). Davis states that one of the reasons why it is so difficult to define Southern writers is that “the South today is different from the “Souths” of the past. [...] [T]he changing South or “New South” has been a phenomenon of the last fifty years” (125). Nevertheless, she tries to specify some of the attributes that would allow to characterize Southern writers. Davis states that a writer’s place of birth itself is not as defining as “the place central to the individual writer’s formative years”. By place, she means the “exterior reality with its nexus of relationships that shapes the writer’s individual sense of landscape or cityscape, or people and society”. To summarize this idea, she says that “[t]he writer, then, whose imagination is nurtured by the South becomes a Southern writer” (126). As another characteristic of a Southern writer, she lists a certain “attitude towards self and by extension towards fictional characters”, which she traces back to the wish of Southern authors to be acknowledged by the American literary establishment, plus specific historical influences, such as slavery or the defeat in the Civil War (Davis 127). Davis mentions another interesting aspect of Southern writers, which is that they themselves have no common unifying idea of what defines a Southern writer. She states that “[t]he writers today are not united in their vision of the South or in their conception of the role of Southern writing. Nevertheless, they do seem convinced of their difference; whether factual or not, that difference sets them apart, makes them distinct” (127). Once again this illustrates the point that it is quite difficult to agree on a definition of what constitutes Southern literature. In fact, this search is still ongoing.

As has been shown and will be discussed later in this subchapter, it is difficult to define the South culturally. Furthermore, it is also challenging to define the South in geographical terms. Davis states that “[a]s a physical place and a background for writing, the South is changing, losing its cohesiveness – slowly in the Mississippi Delta region or in the backwoods of the Piedmont, rapidly along the “progressive” East Coast from Virginia to Florida and along the

Gulf Coast all the way up to Dallas” (125). One has to be aware of the fact that even geographical definitions of the South, although they seem to be objective, are strongly influenced by historical events, for example the Civil War. According to the US Census Bureau, the South is a region of the United States of America that currently includes 17 states, as can be seen on the map below.

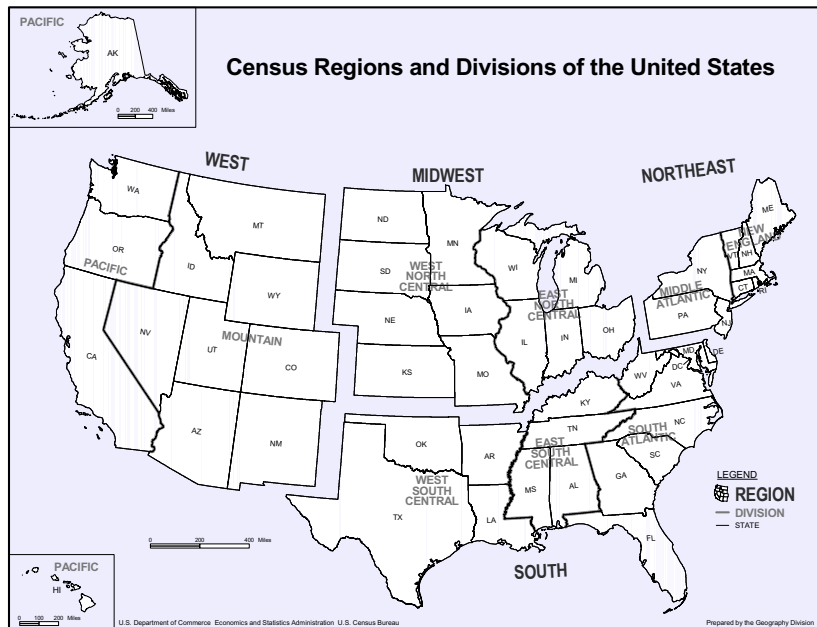


Figure 1: South US Region

The South is a diverse region with a complex history and also a region that has experienced various changes in the last decades, such as the civil rights movement, women’s advocacy movements and other changes in social structures (Gray 5). When speaking of the South, it should be taken into account that it is a region populated by numerous and highly diverse communities which all harbor their own idea of what constitutes the South (Gray 5). This should be considered when discussing the South, or otherwise it would mean to simplify history to a large extent (Gray 5). However, Richard Gray also cautions that these “acts of regional self-definition” are to be questioned because they “involve a reading of existence as essence” (4,5). One of the distinctive features of the South, as understood by Gray, is being one part of a pair of opposites, with the North as its counterpart (4). Michael Kreyling argues that the “Southern cultural self-consciousness has historically expressed itself in such terms of anxiety of invasion and takeover” (171). This idea supports an argument put forth Gray that says that “[w]hatever else Southerners may have in common (and it is sometimes very little), they have habitually defined themselves [...] against a national or international other” (4). This sense of being

different from the rest of the United States might be explained by the region's wish to remain unique, which "parallels the efforts of other societies around the world to preserve their identities in the face of a rapidly evolving global econoculture in which the significances of regional or even national distinctions seems to be diminishing by the day" (Cobb 606).

However, the gap between the South and the North appears to be decreasing for a number of reasons. James C. Cobb states that "[w]hether the American mainstream has captured the South or vice versa, the region's differences with the remainder of the United States now seem minimal at best to a number of observers" (605). There are a several reasons for this development, for example the increasing role of the South as a region of tourism based on its cultural and geographical heritage, or a "greatly enlarged sense of the pluralism of *any* culture, including the Southern one" (Gray 7). Also, products of the South, for example music or magazines that deal with presumably Southern issues, are widely selling items and hence contribute to closing the gap between the South and the North, while at the same time they perpetuate a selective image of the South (Gray 8). There is no doubt that the image of the South, which is distributed widely nowadays, is a very selective and often biased one. Gray argues that today, "we accept the counterfeit as *if* it were the true currency", meaning that people are aware of the fact that the current image of the South very often is the result of a generalizing and simplifying discourse, yet they enjoy the very idea of it (10). Clearly, it is rather challenging to explore and then describe exactly what defines the South, given its diversity and our

vastly expanded sense now of precisely what "making" a culture involves: the recognition that a culture identifies and in fact creates itself by a variety of means – means that include the individual book or essay, of course, but go far beyond this to incorporate the artifacts of everyday life and the potentially endless products of mass culture (Gray 11).

So while it is generally difficult to pinpoint what defines a culture, it can be argued comfortably that it is literature that represents one of the identifying aspects that form the image of the South.

When writing about Southern literature one has to consider the numerous meanings behind this term and also be aware of the fact that to think of Southern literature as a standardized concept would mean to simplify a very heterogeneous subject. Kreyling argues that "[t]he history of southern literature

is not the history of an “entity”, of “fact” understood to be within time but not of time” (XVIII). Hence, one has to consider the diversity in Southern literature and not to generalize it. There are a number of topics and motifs, however, which seem to be particularly interesting or challenging for Southern authors and, as a consequence, occur frequently in Southern writing.

Gray states that “Southerners are living *between* cultures. Some are living more openly than others, and with more sensitivity to the problems that come with the territory; among these are Southern writers” (15). These struggles, which may take place on a local or a global level, are often dealt with in novels, and so “Southern books, in particular, very often become a site of struggle between, on the one hand, the culture(s) of the South and, on the other, the culture of a global marketplace” (Gray 15). Gray goes even further and suggests that Southern authors should use these struggles and include and discuss them in their writing because

they have the chance, maybe even the obligation, to insert themselves in the space between conflicting interests and practices and then dramatize the contradictions the conflict engenders. Through their work, by means of a mixture of voices, a free play of languages and even genres, they can represent the reality of their culture as multiple, complex, and internally antagonistic. [...] They have the chance, in short, of getting “into” history, to participate in its processes, and, in a perspectival sense at least, getting “out” of it too – and so enable us, the readers, to begin to understand just how these processes work (16).

Barbara Kingsolver is a good example of an author who tries to engage her readers and to broaden their perspective about the environment and the influence of human behavior on it.

Another topic that is very often addressed in Southern literature is racism. The history of the South cannot be understood without considering slavery, segregation and its consequences, which are still forming today’s society. Slave narratives, for example, constitute a genre that provides “powerful commentaries on certain aspects of human condition”, which used to shape the image of the South for a long time (Phillips 43). Not only slavery, but also the civil rights movement and its implications are repeatedly discussed in literature. Contemporary women writers in the South also frequently address issues of racism and race; one of the many examples would be Alice Walker (Monteith 541).

Relationships between family members are also frequently discussed in Southern writing. Kreyling suggests that, “[i]f shunning the racist element of southern culture is the strongest negative obligation of the definers of that tradition, then affirming family is the strongest positive” (180). This family, however, nearly always seems to be based on patriarchal structures that shape its social hierarchy (Kreyling 181). The importance of family in Southern literature is being demonstrated in countless novels that deal with relations between family members; a prominent example would be Eudora Welty’s novel *The Optimist’s Daughter*. Contemporary writers often deal with the concept of family in a critical way and their “emphasis is on alternative “family” units that are cross-racial and intergenerational, allowing creative space in which to breathe beyond familial stereotypes” (Monteith 540). Not only family relations but also “[c]ommunity is a constellation of concerns for contemporary writers”, as argued by Monteith (539). Barbara Kingsolver is also one of the authors who are concerned with exploring relationships between members of a community. In doing so, she also illustrates the roles that the characters of her novels have within their communities in great detail, which will be discussed later on in this thesis.

Also, the meaning of the past seems to be an important issue, on the one hand for the construction of the identity of the South (Gray 4-6) and, on the other hand, as a common motive for Southern writers. Sharon Monteith notes that “[t]he compulsion to recall events and to revisit Southern places and past times animate Southern fiction, whether mordantly witty or hopelessly tragic” (549). An observation that can be made in texts by Southern women writers is that “[h]istory is a terrain that Southern women writers have long been reclaiming in very imaginative ways” (Monteith 547). Eudora Welty, Lee Smith or Josephine Humphreys, for example, discuss the relationship between the present and the past in their novels (Kreyling 115-117). Kreyling suggests that this might be explained by the “southern habit of preferring “the past” to the varied circumstances of day-to-day history” (170). Storytelling, especially stories that are told by older generations to subsequent generations, is a motif that occurs frequently in Southern literature (Gray 12).

The role of nature and the environment is another topic that is frequently dealt with in Southern literature. Monteith argues that, “[a]s Southerners embrace environmentalism, a strong ecocritical concern over Southern places

is developing” (544). Numerous authors broach the issue of environmental concerns in their writing, and Barbara Kingsolver is one of them.

The Appalachian region (see chapter 4.2.2. *Prodigal Summer*) is a region in the South where numerous novels are set, including Barbara Kingsolver’s *Prodigal Summer*. Traditionally, the starting point of Appalachian literature were works by so-called local color writers. They were writers who were mainly visitors documenting their experiences and journeys in the Appalachian region. It took some time until local writers began to find their voice and to provide their point of view (Tate 132, 133). In the early years of Appalachian literature, residents of the Appalachian region were observed and described from an outside perspective and often regarded as different, not only from the rest of the United States, but even from the rest of the South (Tate 134). Literature written by non-local writers often contributed to the proliferation of stereotypes about inhabitants of the Appalachian region and to the spreading of a romanticized image of the region. By contrast, literature written by native Appalachians flourished from the 1930s on, developing its own styles. Typically, there was a very vivid tradition of storytelling, while the ballad genre became equally popular. Not only white settlers but also Native Americans and African-Americans were involved in the development of Appalachian literature (Tate 136). One of the distinguishing features of literature written by native Appalachian authors was the use of dialect. Generally, it can be said that native writers spoke “with greater authenticity and sensitivity about the region, but they also drew from the rich oral tradition of the mountains” (Tate 137). Female as well as male writers contributed to the increase in authentic Appalachian literature, turning it into a prospering literary discipline.

Younger generations of writers have recently been developing a sense for the “multicultural dynamics of the region”, while at the same time looking into the rich historical background of the region. This is illustrated by the discussion of the history of Native Americans or the history of African-Americans (Tate 140). Linda Tate states that one of the specific features of Appalachian literature is “a kind of ongoing oral tradition delivered via the written word” that emphasizes the importance of the past and its influence on the present for Appalachian writers (143). Although the role of literature written by native Appalachian authors should not be underestimated, Tate stresses that

stereotypes about the region are hard to diminish, as it is often still regarded as a “different” and “other” place” (144).

Within the studies of Southern literature, the works of female writers play an exceptional role, as they “explore an ever-widening web of concerns when they take the region as their subject” (Monteith 551). Looking back to history, women writers from the South have not always been as appreciated as today. It is argued that “[t]he traditional southern canon, the inclusion of Eudora Welty, Katherine Anne Porter, and Caroline Gordon notwithstanding, has not accommodated gender issues comfortably” (Kreyling XV). This can partly be explained by the fact that, according to Kreyling, the majority of influential scholars or, in other words the “choosers of meanings”, were male (105) and therefore led the discussion in a certain direction that set the focus on male authors (100). Not surprisingly, the role of women in society is frequently discussed in texts by female authors. Monteith believes that “[o]ne of the heaviest burdens Southern women writers carry is the burden of history as it cordons them off from others, in trailer parks on the outskirts of town or in shacks even further into the margins of society” (547). The gap between female and male authors seems to be ongoing, and Mab Segrest argues that women writers in the American South are linked by their “shared consciousness of exclusion from a constructed center” (qtd. in Kreyling 107). She further states that “Southern literary tradition gives evidence to this – it is female and feminist writers who are most rigorously excluded from the canon (which is to say, the canon is unloaded, defused)” (Segrest 29). The exclusion of female writers affected and affects, to a different degree though, African-American as well as white women writers (Kreyling 109). Nevertheless, there are a large number of Southern women writers, and, after all, their work has strongly contributed to the image and representation of the South. Women’s writing is becoming increasingly influential, and Segrest describes this development as “a literature that will rise [...] out of our [women’s] refusal to accept political analysis that substitutes guilt for action and that divides Black women from white and Northern women from Southern” (40).

One might ask whether women’s writing in the American South shares common features. Kreyling tries to answer this question by stating

“[i]f their works share identifying traits, they are the traits of writers united in the complicated enterprise of getting out from under one burden of

cultural assumption (Faulknerian/southern) and trying out the viability of another (feminist/utopian). (112)

Many contemporary authors address recent social and cultural changes in their writing; these range from “the civil rights movement and the women’s movement to environmentalism, multiculturalism, and gay revisionism” (Monteith 536). One of the frequently discussed concepts is class, which is often also linked to issues of gender, as there is “a commitment to explore class to expose the visceral daily negotiations of working-class women with men and with institutions” (Monteith 545).

It is difficult to find common features in contemporary Southern literature but it is noteworthy that there are numerous writers, female or male, who show a “tendency to write about the South critically – often, from the perspective of native sons and daughters of the South orphaned by its culture and mythology” (Guinn 571, 572). Contemporary writers frequently try to challenge the existing and often generalized idea of the South, try to avoid perpetuating stereotypes and to “self-consciously dramatize rather than crystallize a sense of coherent Southern identity” (Monteith 536). As Matthew Guinn states, it appears as if one of the most recognizable trends in contemporary Southern writing is the tendency to challenge tradition in different ways (573). Traditional concepts, for example the concept of the Southern Belle, are often questioned, which shows that writers as well as readers tend to be interested in more thought-provoking literature (Monteith 537). Monteith illustrates that the choice of narrative perspective can also be an important determinant to provide insight into characters’ thoughts and feelings because it can help to convey the message of a novel or generate a reader’s interest in certain topics and issues. Blanche McCrary Boyd’s novel *The Revolution of Little Girls*, written in first person narration, serves to illustrate this point. Eudora Welty is another author who frequently chooses first person narration or dramatic monologues as narrative perspectives in her novels (Monteith 537). The choice of narrative perspective is only one of the numerous aspects that show how crucial the use of language in literature actually is. Regarding Southern literature, the role and image of the Southern accent are some of the many linguistic features that might be addressed in novels, such as, for example, in one of Kingsolver’s earlier novels entitled *The Poisonwood Bible* (Monteith 538).

Concluding this subchapter, it can be said that Southern literature is a field of literature that continuously provides material for readers as well as scholars and continues to show how varied and vivid this region has been and still is.

The following subchapters will deal specifically with Barbara Kingsolver; firstly, an overview of her biography will be provided; secondly, there will be a discussion as to the very characteristics which, if at all, allow her to be regarded a Southern author, and which characteristics she shares with other Southern authors.

3.2. Barbara Kingsolver's biography

Barbara Kingsolver is an award-winning author whose books are not only well known in the United States but have also been translated into numerous languages. Born on April 8th, 1955, in Annapolis, Maryland, she grew up in an environment which cherished literature and with parents who encouraged her interest in reading. Beyond that, she was also interested in music and languages. Her family traveled a lot and one of the most influential journeys for Kingsolver was a stay in the Republic of Congo in 1963 (Kingsolver, *Autobiography*).

Kingsolver earned academic degrees in biology from DePauw University as well as from University of Arizona. She worked as a scientist before she turned to writing in 1985, mostly working as a freelancer. She travelled a lot and also used to work abroad, for example in France and Greece. Today she lives on a farm in southern Appalachia, Virginia, together with her husband and their two daughters, Camille and Lily. They live in an old farmhouse and raise their own vegetables as well as animals, for example Icelandic sheep and poultry (Kingsolver, *Autobiography*). Generally, it can be said that it seems that Kingsolver tries to pursue an environmentally friendly lifestyle, fully aware of her surroundings. Barbara Kingsolver's strong interest the global and local ecosystem is shared by her husband, Steven Hopp, who teaches environmental studies. Together with her husband and one of her daughters, Camille, Kingsolver wrote a nonfiction book about their experiences in local farming and living only on local produce (Kingsolver, *A Brief Biography*).

It took Barbara Kingsolver a number of years before she became confident enough about her own writing and decided to send her first novel to her agent. Eventually she became a nationally well known author whose books are on bestseller lists as well as on national curricula across the U.S.. Kingsolver received numerous prestigious awards, for example the National Humanities Medal in 2000 and the British Orange Prize for Fiction in 2010. She was even got nominated for the Pulitzer Prize in 1998 for her novel *The Poisonwood Bible*. Furthermore, she founded the Bellwether Prize for Fiction in 1998, which is a prize for unpublished first novels (Kingsolver, *A Brief Biography*).

To conclude, it can be said that Barbara Kingsolver seems to be a very engaged author who actively promotes her literature as well as the ideas and messages behind it.

3.3. Barbara Kingsolver as an author of the American South

Barbara Kingsolver is one of the many influential Southern writers who have managed to portray the region vividly and in an intriguing way to their readers. As such, her work can be regarded as an important contribution to the region's cultural development.

In her novels, Kingsolver shows her strong connection to the regions that she writes about, which is why nature and the environment play important roles in her novels. She also repeatedly addresses concerns about the particular regions because she describes current ecological problems and challenges which these regions and their inhabitants have to face. In *Animal Dreams*, Kingsolver tackles the problem of water pollution from mines, in *Prodigal Summer* she describes how hard farm-life can be when the *cultivation* of numerous plants is not profitable and in *Flight Behavior* she lines out possible consequences of global warming that might affect animals. It becomes clear that all of her novels are environmentally critical and it seems that Kingsolver wishes for her readers to be or to become equally sensitive to environmental problems. She is one of the many contemporary authors from the South who are strongly concerned with environmental changes, in a global as well as a local sense, and she addresses these concerns openly in her writing.

The literature of the Appalachian region has attracted growing national interest throughout the last few decades, as has been discussed in the previous subchapter. Literature written by Appalachian women contributes to this development, and Barbara Kingsolver is one of the numerous women writers who represent this thriving branch of literature, together with authors such as Lee Smith, Mary Lee Settle, Bobbie Ann Mason, Nikki Giovanni and many more (Tate 141). Kingsolver's earlier novels deal with her experiences in Arizona and Africa but her later novels, for example *Prodigal Summer* and *Flight Behavior*, are set in the Appalachian region and clearly express her deep interest in the region, while stretching clearly beyond purely environmental criticism (Tate 143). One of the main characters in Kingsolver's novel *Animal Dreams*, Loyd Peregrina, is a Native American who descends from Apaches, Navajos and Pueblos. Kingsolver uses this character to illustrate some traditions, practices and beliefs of Native Americans. Her illustration might seem idealized at times, however, the danger of idealization and, hence, generalization, is also addressed to a certain extent. And it also shows that Kingsolver tries to show the cultural variety of the region. In *Animal Dreams*, she displays not only Native Americans' rituals but she also includes habits and traditional festivities of descendants of Spanish immigrants who seem to strongly cherish their cultural heritage.

Kingsolver's texts blend in well with the ongoing discussion about Southern writing, and with Southern women writing in particular, for a number of reasons. On the one hand, she is a female author who is likely to be included in the national canon. After all, her books are best sellers which are read widely and also discussed in classes at school and in universities across the country. On the other hand, she addresses, amongst other issues, the image and role of women in the South in her novels. Her female main characters are mostly strong and independent women; they might not be independent by choice (for example Lusa, who is all of the sudden alone when her husband dies) but they manage to go their own way and be successful in their own way. In Kingsolver's latest novel, *Flight Behavior*, the main protagonist Dellarobia Turnbow is torn between being a wife and mother and her personal interest in science and the dreams she has had for her own life. Eventually, she follows her own interests and does what is best for her, despite traditions and social habits. This implies that Kingsolver herself questions social habits, for example when it comes to

the role of women, and that she tries to illustrate alternative, or at least differentiated, ways of living. In conclusion, it can be said that by being a successful female author, Kingsolver contributes to making women writing more important, not only in the South but also on a national level.

As has been mentioned in the previous subchapter, the contrast between the North and the South is often addressed in Southern writing. Kingsolver does not tackle this issue directly, but the selected novels are mostly set in small towns, which creates the impression of them being isolated from the rest of the United States. This notion of isolation is occasionally interrupted, mainly by characters that come from somewhere else or stay somewhere else. Two examples are Hallie, who sends letters from Nicaragua in *Animal Dreams*, and Ovid Byron and Preston's Mexican friend and her family in *Flight Behavior*.

Another frequently used feature of Southern writing is its tense focus on relationships between family members. Kingsolver's novels clearly exemplify this characteristic, as the relationships between the main characters and their family members stand at the center of her novels.

To sum up, it may be said that Kingsolver's affection for the region as well as her concerns about regional problems and challenges are without doubt strongly noticeable in her writing. Her ecocritical approach is only one of the aspects that make her novels so interesting and absorbing and that show how complex Southern literature can be.

4. Analysis of the selected novels

In the following chapters of this thesis, the selected novels by Barbara Kingsolver will be analyzed in greater detail. The focus of the analysis will lie on the settings, the narrative perspective, and on providing overview of the most striking character traits and features of the main protagonists.

4.1. Plot summaries

4.1.1. Animal Dreams

Animal Dreams is one of Kingsolver's earlier novels; it was published in 1990. It tells the story of Cosima Noline, who returns to her hometown to take care of her father who suffers from Alzheimer's.

Cosima and Halimeda Noline, called Codi and Hallie, were raised only by their father because their mother had died shortly after Hallie's birth. They live together with Codi's boyfriend in Tucson, Arizona, until Hallie decides to go to Nicaragua to support locals with her expertise on farming. Refusing to stay in Tucson without Hallie, Codi ends the relationship with her boyfriend Carlos and returns to her hometown Grace, Arizona, when she learns about the decreasing mental state of her father. Homero Noline, also called Doc Homer, used to be a doctor who did research on the genetic heritage of the people in Grace. It takes Codi some time to face her father, with whom she has a complicated relationship because they have a lot of unresolved issues which still stand between them. For example, Homero told Codi and Hallie that his family came from somewhere else to Grace, although they actually used to live in Grace and did not get along with other people in town.

In Grace, Codi stays in the guest house of her high school friend, Emelina Domingos, and starts work as a biology teacher at the local high school. She feels like an outsider in her hometown, where she has not been back since she graduated from high school. After high school, she went to college and medical school, but never finished her medical training. Codi reconnects with a former high school romance, Loyd Peregrina, and after initial difficulties, they renew their relationship. Loyd also introduces her to his family, who are Native Americans. Codi and Loyd become very close, but Codi always

seems to keep a certain emotional distance between them, as she does not yet plan to stay in Grace indefinitely. It also turns out that, when they were in high school, Codi became pregnant from Loyd but did not give birth to the baby because she had a miscarriage. This is one of the many secrets and unresolved issues between Codi and her father. After all, it turns out that he was aware of the pregnancy and the miscarriage, which she had not known.

In the course of a biology project with her high school students, Codi gets to know that a nearby mine pollutes the river and, as a consequence, the local orchards suffer from this pollution. A group of women from Grace gets together and they start protests, which eventually force the mining company to shut down the local mine.

Codi and Hallie stay in touch by writing letters but after a couple of months, Hallie is being kidnapped and killed by a right-wing rebel group called Contras. Codi decides to leave Grace because it reminds her too much of the loss of her sister. On the train leaving Grace, she changes her mind about leaving but instead comes back and reunites with Loyd. She arranges Hallie's funeral and finally overcomes her troublesome past.

By the end of the novel, Homero Noline has died. Codi decides to settle down in Grace together with Loyd, where she continues to teach at the local high school and they expect a baby.

4.1.2. Prodigal Summer

Barbara Kingsolver's novel *Prodigal Summer* was published in 2000. It is set in Kentucky, for the most part in a fictitious town called Egg Fork in Zebulon County. Also important for the plot are the Appalachian Mountains because one of the protagonists is a forest ranger. The plot is told from the perspectives of three protagonists.

Firstly, there is Deanna Wolfe, a wildlife biologist who started working as a forest ranger in the Appalachian Mountains after her divorce. She lives in a cabin in the woods and observes the wildlife in the area. Deanna is very passionate about the environment and the ecosystem in the Appalachians, including all kinds of animals. She is particularly interested in a pack of coyotes that live in the mountains and which she believes to be a sign of a functioning and healthy ecosystem. However, the population of Egg Fork does not share

this opinion, regarding coyotes mainly as a threat for farm animals. One day, Deanna meets a young hunter named Eddie Bondo and they begin a passionate affair. While their relationship does not last long, it is very intense. After Eddie leaves the forest and moves on, Deanna realizes that she is pregnant. Therefore, she decides to move back to Egg Fork and to stay with her friend Nannie Rawley.

The second main protagonist is Lusa Widener, formerly Maluf Landowski, who was recently widowed when her husband Cole Widener died in an accident only a year after they were married. In the beginning, she struggles to keep her life going at the farm, and is not sure if she wants to stay there or move back to Lexington, the city where she originally came from. She is an entomologist and is interested in alternatives to planting tobacco, a farming activity Cole and his family used to do for years. She starts to breed goats in order to sell them for religious festivities. In the beginning, Lusa feels like an outsider and does not feel included in Cole's family. But, eventually, she finds her place and stays at the farm. When Cole's divorced sister Jewel dies from cancer, Lusa promises to take care of her two children.

Garnett Walker is the third protagonist whose perspective is chosen as narrative perspective within the novel. Garnett has an ongoing feud with his neighbor Nannie Land Rawley because they disagree about farming techniques. He is an elderly widower who does not talk to his family anymore and spends most of his days alone at his farm. His main interest is growing chestnuts, which are extinct in the woods in Zebulon County. In the end, Garnett and Nannie get to know and appreciate each other and seem to become friends.

In the course of the story, the reader realizes that the lives of the different characters are interwoven.

4.1.3. Flight Behavior

Flight Behavior is Kingsolver's most recent novel, which was published in 2012. The main event in the story is that millions of Monarch butterflies choose a valley in Tennessee to hibernate instead of travelling to their usual places in Mexico. It must be clarified that these events are imaginary and that, so far, this has not happened in reality.

The main protagonist in *Flight Behavior* is Dellarobia Turnbow, who is a 28-year-old married housewife and mother of two children. Together with her husband they live at a farm close to a small town named Cleary in rural Tennessee. Dellarobia became pregnant at the age of seventeen and gave up her own plans in order to raise the child and marry the father, Cub Turnbow. Unfortunately, the child died but the couple still married and they subsequently had two children, Preston and Cordie.

At the beginning of the novel, Dellarobia is about to start an affair with a telephone repairman but on her way to meeting him, she stumbles across millions of Monarch butterflies, which amazes and confuses her so much that she changes her mind about her previous plans. When the rest of the family and the town find out about the Monarchs, Dellarobia's discovery gains a lot of attention. Local and, later on even, national media show considerable interest in this topic and report about the Monarchs. Besides the media, scientists also express their interest in the Monarchs' unusual behavior. A team of scientists is particularly interested in the strange behavior of the Monarchs and start to camp next to Dellarobia's house. They are led by Ovid Byron, who is a university professor with a special academic interest in Monarch butterflies. Dellarobia is fascinated by the scientists' work and starts to support and help them; eventually she even becomes a part-time employee and assists Ovid and the others. She also develops intimate feelings for Ovid but does not pursue them any further as she finds out that Ovid is happily married. However, all of this makes Dellarobia realize that she regards her own life as unsatisfying.

Cub's family intends to cut down the wood on the slope behind Dellarobia and Cub's house because the farm does not make enough profit to sustain them anymore. Dellarobia desperately wants to prevent the logging because of the hibernating Monarchs and receives unexpected support from Hester, her mother-in-law.

The Monarchs become an attraction for large numbers of visitors of all kinds. However, the butterflies are in danger because, as they usually hibernate in Mexico, they are not used to Tennessee winters, which can be cold and harsh. Luckily, it seems that at least a part of the Monarchs survive the winter and can continue their journey.

At the end of the novel, Dellarobia's life seems to have taken a promising turn and she has decided to drastically change her life. She and Cub have

agreed to get divorced and Dellarobia intends to move to Cleary to stay with her friend Dovey. Furthermore, she is determined to continue her education and Ovid supports her in going to college, where she is supposed to work part-time and also be trained to be a scientist. However, in spring, when the butterflies set out for their flight, there is a flood and it appears that Dellarobia's and Cub's farm is destroyed. Dellarobia is all by herself when this happens and, apparently, cannot call for help; so it is not clear whether or not she survives this natural disaster.

4.2. Settings of the novels

In Kingsolver's novels, the settings of the novels are particularly important because the environment, especially local wildlife in the portrayed areas, and also the methods and customs of local farming play major roles within the plots. In the following subchapters, the settings of the selected novels will be discussed in detail.

4.2.1. Animal Dreams

The plot of *Animal Dreams* is set in Arizona, in a fictitious town called Grace. This means that, in contrast to the other selected novels *Prodigal Summer* and *Flight Behavior*, it is not set in a U.S. state that is part of the South, but in the South West (see figure below).



Figure 2: Map of the US States (Arizona)

Besides Grace, the town mentioned is Tucson, Arizona. Codi and Hallie used to live there together with Codi's boyfriend Carlos, before Hallie went to Nicaragua and Codi returned to Grace. Nicaragua is another very important location within the novel because the younger one of the Noline sisters, Hallie, moves there to teach the locals about sustainable farming techniques.

Grace is described as a small city in which most of the inhabitants know each other or are even related to each other to varying degrees. According to a local legend, the people of Grace originate from marriages between miners from the local mine and the seven blue-eyed Gracela sisters, who came to Grace from Spain to marry miners. Numerous inhabitants of Grace have blue eyes, something Doc Homer was very interested in and even published a study about. This legend contributes to Codi's sense of being an outsider because Homero had told her that their family does not descend from the Gracela sisters. Eventually, this turns out to be a lie and Codi recognizes that she truly belongs to Grace.

Although *Animal Dreams* is mainly set in one place, there are other places important for the development of the story. Including two places into a novel, one of which not being southern, is one of the ways to broaden one's perspective about the South. Tellingly, this specific genre is called dual-location novel. One of the features of this genre is that, "[f]rom an estranged, displaced perspective[,] the South is divested of its seemingly generic [features] in dual-location novels where comparative landscapes become symbolic of cultural interaction and exchange" (Monteith 542). Several of Barbara Kingsolver's novels are not set in the South, for example one of her earliest novels, *The Poisonwood Bible* (1998), which is mostly set in Belgian Congo. This enables Kingsolver to illustrate the "absurdities of transposing Southern etiquette to a context that is so different" (Monteith 543). In *Animal Dreams*, the setting does not yet seem to be as crucial as in the other selected novels, *Prodigal Summer* and *Flight Behavior*. The focus of the novel is set on the relationships between the protagonists Codi and her father and their family and friends, as well as the town community. Regarding the role of the location, the pollution from a mine's waste water as well as places as a symbol of heritage assume great importance in the novel.

Yet, *Animal Dreams* can only be regarded as a dual-location novel to a certain degree because Nicaragua itself plays a minor role in the plot. The fact

that Hallie leaves to support people in a less developed region seems to be more important than where she actually goes to. Nicaragua only plays a passive role within the novel and is only mentioned whenever Codi thinks about Hallie or when she receives a letter from her in which Hallie reports about her experiences abroad. Readers only get few details about Hallie's life in Nicaragua. The images of the country, which the readers are offered, are furthermore influenced by Codi's interpretation of the letters because she is hardly objective but strongly driven by her emotions. However, the role of Nicaragua in the novel should not be underestimated, because Kingsolver repeatedly criticizes the US support of the Contras, a rebel group that was responsible for numerous killings in the region.

As has been mentioned before, *Animal Dreams* is the only one of the novels, which were selected for this thesis, that is not set in a state that belongs to the South. Interestingly, there are a number of novels written by Southern authors that are not set in the South but in the West. Some scholars, for example Robert H. Brinkmeyer, argue that this might prove that these settings "reflect a sense of the South as being at last depleted of artistic resources – and indicate that the frontier may [...] be the best landscape on which to play out the themes of the Southern imagination" (qtd. in Guinn 573). Regarding Kingsolver's writings, this argument does not seem very convincing, particularly when taking into account that her subsequent novel, *Flight Behavior*, is again set in the South and not elsewhere within the United States. Matthew Guinn disagrees with Brinkmeyer's argument and states that, according to his opinion, "contemporary Southern fiction is not striking out for the territories, but striking *in*, toward a more incisive and critical interpretation of the South, informed by postmodern currents of thought that interrogate history and culture [...] with a new level of scrutiny and distrust" (573). Kingsolver's own biography shows that she has travelled considerably throughout her life, which might explain her interest in various regions. However, it also becomes clear that the South, in particular Arizona and the Appalachian region, are of particular interest to her.

In terms of the time frame of the novel, it can be observed that there are very few specific dates mentioned in the novel. However, it can be assumed that the novel is set in the 1990s because of the references to the activities of the Contras in Nicaragua and because Codi mentions the Day of All Souls 1989 in the final chapter.

4.2.2. Prodigal Summer

Prodigal Summer is set in the state Virginia (see figure below), more specifically in the border region between Virginia, Tennessee and Kentucky.



Figure 3: Map of US States (Virginia)

The story mostly takes place in a fictitious agricultural town called Egg Fork, which is located in Zebulon County, Virginia. The name refers to a small town in Kentucky, which is most likely known to Kingsolver because she grew up in this area (Hughes 159).

The novel is located in the Appalachian region of the United States. In correlation to the specific narrative situation (see chapter 4.3.2. Prodigal summer), the plot is not only set in one place but in two. Two of the story lines, those of Lusa and Garnett, are set in or close to Egg Fork, whereas the story line of Deanna evolves in the Appalachian Mountains in the region above Egg Fork. In the lives of the main characters, the places where they live are crucial for their personal development and actions, which shows the great importance of setting in this novel.

Deanna lives in the Appalachian Mountains and works as a forest ranger, which means that she observes and preserves animals and plants in the area. She is said to have studied biology at a university, which is why she has detailed knowledge of the Appalachian wildlife and provides this information to the reader, who as a consequence, learns to a certain extent about the region. The Appalachian region is not defined by clear boundaries, neither in a cultural nor in a geographical way, but it can

loosely be understood as the mountainous areas of the South – the highland regions of eastern Kentucky, eastern Tennessee, northern

Alabama, northern Georgia, western North Carolina, western Virginia, western Maryland, all of West Virginia, and even southeastern Ohio and parts of western South Carolina. (Tate 130)

Martyn Bone discusses the concept of place in Southern literature and comes to the conclusion that this concept has been mostly referring to rural and agricultural areas (243). Referring to contemporary Southern literature, it seems important that, “rather than constructing simplistic binary oppositions between the country and the city, it is important to recognize their dialectical links” (Bone 244). Bone considers Kingsolver to be one of the contemporary authors who have “reconfigured rural, agricultural ‘place’ against the Agrarian grain”, meaning that they have developed their own sense of agricultural and rural life and try to move away from an idealized version of country life (245). *Prodigal Summer* is set in a mostly rural area and focuses on people who work in agriculture or in other professions that are related to nature.

The novel *Prodigal Summer* repeatedly dwells on the contrast between the rural and the urban because of Lusa, one of the main protagonists, who grew up in the city and only recently moved to the countryside when she married and decided to live on her husband’s farm. This will be discussed later in greater detail (see subchapter 5.2. *Prodigal Summer*). Generally speaking, it can be said that Kingsolver includes local farming and breeding practices in this novel, for example when Lusa considers alternatives to growing tobacco or when Garnett is interested in growing chestnuts, which are extinct in the area. Discussions about the role of predators in a functioning ecosystem as well as the interaction of humans and the environment are also frequently included in the novel.

Regarding the temporal setting of *Prodigal Summer*, there are no clear indications given in the course of the novel. However, it can be assumed that it is set in the time shortly before the publication of the novel, which points to the mid 1990s.

4.2.3. Flight Behavior

The third of the selected novels by Kingsolver, *Flight Behavior*, is again set in a Southern state, namely Tennessee (see figure below).



Figure 4: Map of the US States (Tennessee)

The setting of the story is particularly important because of the Monarch butterflies which, contrary to their routine behavior, hibernate in the woods behind the main character's farm. There is no specific focus on the fact that the butterflies spend the winter in Tennessee. Instead, Kingsolver draws attention to the greater phenomenon of the butterflies not travelling to their usual winter places. Kingsolver describes a fictional scenario, in which global warming has affected the flight behavior of the Monarchs and caused them to hibernate in Tennessee instead of California or Mexico, where they used to hibernate. This will be discussed in more detail later in this thesis (see subchapter 5.3. Flight Behavior).

The main characters live on a farm next to a fictitious town called Cleary. The town plays just a minor role in the novel because the main events happen around Dellarobia and Cub's farm. Cleary is mentioned when Dellarobia makes a shopping trip there and again at the end of the novel, when she decides to move to Cleary to go to college. It seems that the region, in which the story of *Flight Behavior* is set, is rather exchangeable and that ["t]here is *nothing* magical or mysterious about the setting for *Flight Behavior*" (Wagner-Martin 189). The focus is clearly set on the unusual behavior of the butterflies instead on the local wildlife. The reader is provided with more information about the Monarchs than about local animals. Some information about local farming and breeding habits are provided, for example breeding sheep, but in general, the focus is set on the resting place of the butterflies. As Linda Wagner-Martin observes, "In a sense, the glorious color of the huddling butterflies is a bright spot both literal and figurative: the rest of the Appalachian hillside is greyed into a sameness that seems, to Dellarobia, to match the tenor of her days" (5).

Another place that is mentioned is the Mexican state Michoacán. One of the classmates of Dellarobia's son Preston, Josefina, used to live there but her family had to leave their hometown Angangueo because a flood destroyed their home. This will also be discussed later (see subchapter 5.3. Flight Behavior) but it can be said that this is supposed to show that the consequences of global warming are very severe and also that a large number of countries are affected by them. Furthermore, it could be regarded as foreshadowing the flood that destroys Dellarobia and Cub's farm at the end of the novel.

The chronological setting of *Flight Behavior* is not explicitly mentioned, but it is most likely set in the present because it deals with current ecological concerns. A flood in the Mexican town Angangueo that is referred to in the novel happened in 2010 and, as the novel was published in 2012, the events of the story might be placed within these two years.

4.3. Narrative situations

The narrative perspective of a novel is a crucial aspect and strongly influences not only how the readers perceive a story, but also how they view the characters within that story. Kingsolver seems to choose the narrative perspectives in her novels particularly carefully, adapting them to the message, which she wants to convey in her novels.

The terminology that will be used for the following analysis is based on concepts of narratology by Franz Karl Stanzel, *A theory of narrative*, and Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*. Dorrit Cohn has examined and compared both concepts and came to the conclusion that "Stanzel's theoretical purview is deliberately limited to narrative mediation", which makes it comparable to Genette's concept of figures (159). Although the concepts of narratology developed by Stanzel and Genette differ, their "principal categories themselves tally remarkably well" (Cohn 160) and describe similar features of narratives. Stanzel makes the distinction between two categories, mode and perspective, whereas Genette focuses on distance and focalization as being two subcategories of mode (Cohn 160).

For the analysis of Kingsolver's novels, concepts and terms will be used from both, Stanzel and Genette, in order to describe the selected novels in the most suitable and precise way.

4.3.1. Animal Dreams

The most striking feature of the narrative situation in Kingsolver's novel *Animal Dreams* is that the narrative perspective alternates throughout the course of the story. The novel is divided into fourteen parts, in which the narrative perspective switches and features either Codi Noline or her father Homero Noline as narrator. The fourteen parts are further divided into twenty-eight chapters, which contain references to the events happening in each chapter as their titles.

The story of *Animal Dreams* is mostly told from the perspective of Codi Noline, the main protagonist of the novel. In the chapters, in which Codi is the narrating voice, she serves as a first person narrator. The following quote is an example of Codi as a first-person narrator:

It was midmorning when I stepped down off the bus in Grace, and I didn't recognize it. Even in fourteen years I couldn't have changed much, though, so I knew it was just me. [...] I dragged my bags to the edge of the street. Carlo, my lover of ten years, whom I seemed to have just left, would be sending a trunk from Tucson when he got around to it. I didn't own very much I cared about. I felt emptied-out and singing with echoes, unrecognizable to myself: that particular feeling like your own house on the day you move out. I missed Hallie. (Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams* 8,9)

One of the typical features of a first-person narration, according to Gerard Genette, is that the narrator "is presented right away as character in the story" (221). Also, he states that "[t]he narrating instance of a first narrative is [...] extradiegetic by definition" because the act of telling the story lifts it a level above the narrative level of the story itself (Genette 244). Another term to describes Codi as a narrator is called "homodiegetic" (Genette 245), which means that she is part of the story she tells. Using terminology by Franz Karl Stanzel, the narrative perspective in *Animal Dreams* can furthermore be defined as an "internal perspective", because Codi and her father both do not have access to all the information and, hence, a limited point view (126).

Another aspect that needs to be taken into account for an analysis of the narrative perspective is the reliability of the narrator. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan argues that "[a] reliable narrator is one whose rendering of the story and commentary on it the reader is supposed to take as an authoritative account of the fictional truth. An unreliable narrator, on the other hand, is one whose rendering of the story and/or commentary on it the reader has reasons to suspect" (100). Typical characteristics of an unreliable narrator, which are

easier to identify than the characteristics of a reliable narrator, are “the narrator’s limited knowledge, his personal involvement, and his problematic value-scheme” (Rimmon-Kenan 100). According to this, Codi can only partly be regarded as a reliable narrator in terms of events that happen in the course of the story. In the first part of the story, it seems that she has only limited knowledge about her own past because she suppresses memories. Additionally, she seems to be unsure about some of the memories she still harbors and apparently remembers events differently from how they actually happened. Regarding her personal involvement, it can be said that although she is strongly involved in the events in the story, physically and emotionally, one can assume that she tells the events truthfully whenever she can and does not provide false information on purpose. Also, Codi’s value-scheme seems to be mostly congruent with Kingsolver’s own, which makes her a more reliable than unreliable narrator (Rimmon-Kenan 101). When it comes to Codi’s perception of herself, it appears that her self-perception differs strongly from how others perceive her. For example, she feels like an outsider in Grace but it turns out that she is liked a lot by numerous people, that her opinion is valued and that she is a great teacher who connects with the children easily. Also, in the beginning of the novel, she has some difficulties remembering events and people from her past; “She was nobody I recognized. [...] She paused, finally taking in my face. “You don’t remember me, do you?” I waited, expecting help. It had been fourteen years, after all. But she offered no hints. “ No, I’m sorry,” I said. “I don’t”” (Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams* 67). About her fragmental memories she says, for example, “Memory is a complicated thing, a relative to truth but not its twin” (Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams* 49). Other characters, for example Codi’s high school friend Emelina, complement her knowledge about the people in Grace as well as her own past, as can be seen in the following quote:

“Emelina, who’s Uda Ruth Dell?” “Well, you know her, she lives up by Doc Homer. She used to take care of you sometimes, I think. Her and that other woman that’s dead now, I think her name was Naomi.” “She used to take care of us?” I’d been trying all day to place her. I couldn’t believe I’d draw a complete blank on someone who’d been a fixture of my childhood. (Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams* 78).

This clearly shows that Codi does not have a complete picture and memory of her own childhood. The reader learns in the course of the story about some aspects of Codi’s childhood that she did not remember in the beginning of the

novel. From the perspective of trauma theory, Codi's narration is "a perfect example of language that meets the conflicting demands of self-protection and truth-telling that constitute the dialectic of trauma" (Stevenson 332).

Regarding the time frame of the novel, it can be said that it switches between being mostly set in the present and telling events which happened in the past. According to Genette, these narrating styles can be defined as "*subsequent* (the classical position of the past-tense narrative)" and "*simultaneous* (narrative in the present contemporaneous with the action)" (217).

Codi's narration includes numerous flashbacks, for example when she thinks about her teenage pregnancy; "I was fifteen years old, two years younger than my own child would be now. I didn't think of it in those terms: losing a baby. At first it was nothing like a baby I held inside me, only a small impossible secret" (Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams* 52). Genette uses the term "analepsis" to describe these flashbacks and defines them as "any evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at the given moment" (40). Codi's memories of the pregnancy and the loss of the child also show again that she is only partly reliable as a narrator because it turns out in the course of the novel that her father actually knew about the pregnancy but did not say anything to her. Codi also remembers past events that happened to her and Hallie when they were little and it is particularly interesting how these past events have affected Codi and still seem to influence her life and her self-perception. Not only Codi, but also Doc Homer looks back at their lives; he mostly thinks about his children Codi and Hallie and about his relationship to them when they were little or adolescent. What seems particularly interesting is that both, Codi and Homero, share these difficulties of remembering and relating past events to the past, only for different reasons (Stevenson 329). When Hallie is kidnapped, Codi and her father remember events that they had forgotten or suppressed. But whereas Codi can cope with the loss of Hallie and eventually also copes with the losses she experienced as a child, Homero loses his mind to Alzheimer's and cannot give any structure to his memories anymore (Stevenson 329).

The novel not only demonstrates the use of flashbacks, but also the use of foreshadowing. Hallie's death, for example, is indicated already before Codi knows for certain that she has lost her sister.

As has been said, there are two narrative situations in the novel that alternate. While most parts of the novel are told from the perspective of Codi, Codi's father Homero Noline serves as the reflector character in a figural narrative situation in the other chapters. The passages that are told from his perspective are partly set in the past and therefore shed light onto the childhood of Codi and Hallie, as can be seen in the following quote:

There is a deeper draft of breath and they both move a little. Their long hair falls together across the sheet, the colors blending, the curled strands curving gently around the straight. He feels a constriction around his heart that isn't disease but pure simple pain, and he knows he would weep if he could. Not for the river he can't cross to reach his children, not for the distance, but the opposite. For how close together these two are, and how much they have to lose. How much they've already lost in their lives. (Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams* 4)

This quote shows that the relationship between Codi and Homero is rather distant and implies that there are numerous unresolved issues between the father and his daughters, but instead Homero Noline watches and cares for his children from almost an outsider's perspective.

Like Codi, Homero can be described as a homodiegetic narrator, in Genette's terms (245), because he is also an active part of the story he tells and does not only view and narrate from the outside. Another feature they have in common is that he also tells the story from an "internal perspective" (Stanzel 126) because he has only limited access to information. For example, when Codi and Hallie were children or teenagers, he hardly knew about their feelings although he tried his best to take care of them.

It has already been mentioned that the chapters that are narrated by Doc Homer are set in the present as well as the past. The chapters that are set in the present serve to inform the reader that Homero's mental health decreases because he suffers from Alzheimer's. When Hallie is kidnapped, for example, he does not seem to fully understand what is happening:

He hears silence, static, several different voices and questions and then the same voice again, emphatically repeating its word: *Secuestrada*. Kidnapped. [...] It's a woman, a friend of his daughter. He tries to understand which daughter they mean. [...] "You should let her come home. She hasn't done anything wrong. She's being punished for an act of bravery." He isn't sure whether he has just spoken in Spanish or in English. (Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams* 253, 254).

This quote clearly shows that Homero begins to confuse present and past events because of his disease, which strongly affects his reliability as a narrator.

In contrast to Codi, Homero is presented as a less reliable narrator from the beginning because of his decreasing mental health. Sometimes, he seems to be confused because of his increasing Alzheimer's disease and, therefore, his reliability erodes. In terms of the previously mentioned characteristics of an unreliable narrator, limited access to knowledge, personal involvement and problematic value-scheme (Rimmon-Kenan 100), it can be said that Homero is a partly unreliable narrator. He has limited access to knowledge, not only because they hardly shared information within their family, but also because of his disease, which additionally limits his access to his own information, such as memories. Also, he is highly involved in the story because Codi and Hallie are his daughters, which is why he can only be objective to a certain extent. Regarding the question if his value-scheme is congruent with that of Kingsolver, it appears that as a reader one does not get enough information about information about Homero and his opinions and values in order to make a well-grounded judgment. However, it seems that he and Codi share similar values, which would mean that this does not affect his position as a reliable narrator in a negative way. What affects his narration the most is his mental illness and, what is likely to be a consequence of this, his tendency to be stuck in past memories and events.

There is a third character whose perspective and voice is sometimes in the foreground of the novel, which is Hallie Noline. She is physically absent in the parts of the novel that are set in the present but Codi and Homero frequently think of her, especially, when a rebel group in Nicaragua kidnaps and eventually murder Hallie. Also, Codi repeatedly receives letters from Hallie from Nicaragua, which enable the readers to directly get a glimpse of Hallie's personality. Hallie is often presented as a counterpart to Codi's narration and helps the reader to complete the image of Codi and her characteristics, which can be seen in the following quote:

I am like God, Codi? Like GOD? Give me a break. If I get another letter that mentions SAVING THE WORLD, I am sending you, by return mail, a letter bomb. Codi, please. I've got things to do. You say you're not a moral person. What a copout. Sometime, when I wasn't looking, something happened to make you think you were bad. [...] Jesus, Codi, how long are you going to keep limping around on that crutch? It's the

other way around, it's what you *do* that makes you who you are.
(Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams* 231)

This quote illustrates how Hallie almost seems to be the voice of Codi's subconscious and, by that, supports her in sorting her feelings and thoughts. To summarize, it can be said that the letters from Hallie complement the narration of Codi and her father nicely and provide another point of view to the reader.

Language features are not in the focus of this analysis. However, one noteworthy aspect is that numerous Spanish words are included, for example "abuelita" (Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams* 43) or "secuestrada" (Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams* 253). Spanish is used to show the people's connection to their ancestors, the Gracela sisters who came to Grace from Spain.

4.3.2. Prodigal Summer

The narrative situation in Kingsolver's novel *Prodigal Summer* is a very interesting subject of analysis because it alternates throughout the novel. This enables the reader to learn about the story from different perspectives, whereby each character's experiences can develop and be described in considerable detail.

The plot of the novel is told from alternating perspectives held by the three protagonists, Deanna Wolfe, Lusa Widener and Garnett Walker. The relationships between these characters are particularly interesting because it turns out in the course of the story that they are related in different ways. Their relationships to each other are only revealed gradually and only in the last chapters of the novel all of their relations unfold before the readers and, hence, show that the plots are entangled. The chapters have individual titles that refer to the main characters and to one of their specific interests. The chapters which focus on Lusa are called "Moth Love" because she is an entomologist and also particularly interested in the behavior of the Luna moths. Deanna's chapters have "Predators" as the title, which is already a reference to the coyotes that she observes. "Old Chestnuts" is the title of the chapters that tell about Garnett's life and it refers to his wish to reintroduce chestnut trees, which are extinct in the area.

The narrative situation in the novel is a so-called figural narrative situation. This means that "the mediating narrator is replaced by a reflector" (Stanzel 5). A

reflector character can be described as “a character in the novel who thinks, feels and perceives, but does not speak to the reader like a narrator. The reader looks at the other characters through the eyes of this reflector-character” (Stanzel 5). In *Prodigal Summer*, Lusa, Deanna, and Garnett serve as the reflector characters. This means that the reader is told “the reflection of fictional events through the consciousness of a character in the novel without narratorial comment” (Stanzel 48). According to this, the events in the story are presented to the reader from the characters’ points of view and their opinions, thoughts and feelings play an important role. However, they do not address the readers at any time in the novel.

Lusa Widener is one of the protagonists who serve as reflector characters in the novel. She can be described as a homodiegetic reflector, who tells the story from an internal perspective. Generally speaking, her perception can be regarded as reliable with only a few limitations. These limitations are mainly due to the fact that she has limited access to information, especially in the beginning, and makes assumptions about other people and their relationship to her without knowing the truth. Lusa serves as reflector character and is at the same time an internal focalizer of the story, which means that she is an internal part of the story that is told (Rimmon-Kenan 74). The reader only gets information about present or past events that Lusa has experienced herself or has been told by other people.

In the course of the novel, there are numerous flashbacks, in which Lusa has memories about her marriage to Cole and thinks about their relationship. These flashbacks provide the reader with information about the relationship between Lusa and Cole and shed light on some of the differences between them but also on the similarities that they shared, as can be seen in the following quote:

Every word they said to each other was wrong, every truth underneath it unsayable, unfindable. Their kindness had grown stale, and their jokes were all old chestnuts, too worn out for use. Lusa threw down the dish towel, feeling suffocated in clichés. “You have a nice day out there in the big wooly jungle. I’m going to do your laundry. Your damn cigarettes are stinking up the kitchen.” “While you’re cursing tobacco, you might consider it was last year’s crop that bought your new washer and dryer.” (Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer* 48)

This quote shows that Lusa and Cole had to deal with a number of difficulties

and disagreements, most of which were caused by Lusa's discontent about farm life and the difficult relationship to Cole's sisters.

Another reflector character in the novel is Deanna Wolfe. She also serves as an internal focalizer of the story because she is an active part of it. In addition, she can be described as a homodiegetic narrator because she is part of the story that is told from her point of view. Deanna can be regarded as a mostly reliable narrator. She is only reliable to a certain extent because she has only limited access to information but, in general, there is no cause for readers to doubt her statements and her narration of the story. The following quote is supposed to provide an impression of the narrative situation in the chapters, in which Deanna is the focalizer:

She went inside, smiling in spite of herself as she checked the bottoms of the storage canisters and emptied out the one that looked more watertight. She felt excited. She's passed so many days now on forest time, timeless time, noting the changes in leaf and song and weather but imposing no human agenda. Even her birthday she'd let pass without mentioning it to Eddie. But something in her body had been longing for a celebration, or so it seemed right now. He'd guessed right. She *wanted* this feast. An extravagant event to mark this extravagant summer. (Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer* 317)

This quote clearly shows how Deanna's thoughts and feelings stand at the center of the narration. It also shows another feature of the narrative technique of Kingsolver, which is the use of foreshadowing. "[S]omething in her body" (Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer* 317) might already be regarded as a hint to Deanna's pregnancy, of which she is not aware yet but soon will be. Close reading reveals that Kingsolver includes numerous hints in her novel, some of which show connections between the characters and others indicate future events of the story.

The third reflector character in the novel is Garnett Walker and, again, the story is told from an internal perspective. He is the internal focalizer in the chapters in which his experiences are told, and can also be described as a mostly reliable narrator. Garnett is only reliable to a certain extent because, like Lusa and Deanna, he only has limited access to information. This limited access to information causes several humorous misunderstandings but does not make Garnett an unreliable narrator. Another feature of the chapters in which Garnett is the focalizer, is the use of flashbacks. Garnett thinks back to the time when his wife was still alive or he remembers the beginnings of his

quarrel with his neighbor Nannie. The following quote is an example of Garnett as the focalizer:

Garnett waded carefully down the embankment through the tall weeds and yanked up the sign, with enough difficulty that he changed his mind and hoped she *wasn't* watching. He had to grasp it with both hands and wobble the stake for quite a long time to loosen it out of its hole. The woman must have swung a four-pound mallet to drive it in; he was lucky she hadn't dug a posthole with her antique tractor and set it in cement. He could picture it. She had no respect for property, for her elders in general, or for Garnett in particular. No use for men at all, he suspected darkly – and just as well. No love lost there on either side. (Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer* 86)

As can be observed in this quote, the feud between Garnett and his neighbor Nannie Rawley is described with a humorous note.

The final chapter in *Prodigal Summer* is different from the other chapters because it does not feature Lusa, Deanna or Garnett as focalizers. Instead, the female coyote, which Deanna follows in the Appalachians, is the focalizer of this passage. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan explains that “[...] speaking and seeing, narration and focalization, may, but need not, be attributed to the same agent” (72). As the coyote in the last chapter is clearly not able to speak and, hence, narrate, it can be described as the focalizer. The following quote shows how the coyote is at the center of the narration of the final chapter:

She had reached the place where the trail descended into a field of wild apple trees, and she hesitated there. She wouldn't have minded nosing through the hummocks of tall grass and briars for a few sweet, sun-softened apples. That whole field and the orchard below it had a welcoming scent, a noticeable absence of chemical burn in the air, that always made it attractive to birds and field mice, just as surely as it was drawing her right now. But she felt restless and distracted to be this far from her sister and the children. She turned uphill, back toward safer ground where she could disappear inside slicks and shadows if she needed to. (Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer* 445)

One interesting characteristic of the narrative situation in *Prodigal Summer* is that the reader does not know at the beginning of the novel that the main characters, which serve as narrators, are connected to each other in different ways. However, a close reading shows that there are hints early into the novel that refer to their links. For example, when Lusa talks about a den of coyotes that had been killed by one of her brothers-in-law (Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer* 47, 48) or when she describes the jokes between Cole and her as “old chestnuts, too worn out for use” (Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer* 48). The coyotes

in this example provide a reference to Deanna, who wants to protect these animals, and the chestnuts function as a reference to Garnett, who tries to grow chestnuts that are actually extinct in the area. Another example of the connections between the main characters that can be found in the novel is presented when Deanna is frightened by a storm, she reflects about the wood that was used to build the cabin and she thinks that it was built by a “[g]uy named Walker, Garnett something Walker. There was this whole line of them, all with the same name. Kind of like land barons in this area, a hundred years ago” (Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer* 175). Several of these hints to the connection between the characters do not reveal themselves immediately and demand a great deal of attention from the readers.

Another noticeable feature of the narrative situation is that Kingsolver adapts the language and the topics of the chapters according to the narrating characters. Deanna, for example, explains a lot about the local wildlife of the Appalachians and also conveys her concern about the protection of animals. Although the relationship between her and the young hunter Eddie Bondo is discussed intensely, it seems that her focus is set on the environment. This is also reflected in the vocabulary that is used in the chapters where Deanna is the focalizer, as exemplified by the following quote:

What she had here on this mountain was a chance that would never come again, for anybody: the return of a significant canid predator and the reordering of species it might bring about. Especially significant if the coyote turned out to be what R. T. Paine called a keystone predator. She'd carefully read and reread Paine's famous experiments from the 1960s, in which he'd removed all the starfish from his tidepools and watched the diversity of species drop from many to few. [...] No one had known, before that, how crucial a single carnivore could be to things so far removed from carnivory. (Kingsolver, *Prodigal Dreams* 64, 65)

It can be observed that Kingsolver uses academic vocabulary from the field of biology, for example “predator” and “carnivore”, or refers to a well-known zoologist, Robert Treat Paine, and his work on so-called keystone species.

In contrast to Deanna, Lusa is more focused on interpersonal relationships between herself and Cole's family members than on explaining her environmental concerns explicitly. However, she includes information about animals in her narration as well, as she is an entomologist and displays considerable knowledge about insects and moths, in particular. In the chapters

narrated by her, the emphasis is on her personal development and the development of her relation to others:

Crys had taken up a stalk of long grass and was very lightly touching Lusa's skin in the spot where her T-shirt rode up and exposed her belly. It was the closest thing to intimacy she'd ever seen this child share with anyone. Lusa held her breath and lay very still, stunned by luck, as if a butterfly had lit on her shoulder. Finally she breathed out, feeling a little dizzy from watching the high, thin clouds race across the blue gap in the trees overhead. (Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer* 359)

This quote characterizes the relationship between Lusa and Crys, whom she will adopt in case her sister-in-law Jewel dies from cancer.

Garnett adds another facet to the novel because the chapters that are told from his perspective are often humorous due to a number of entertaining misunderstandings that happen to him. In one of those amusing scenes, he believes to have a stroke, while he is actually bitten by a snapping turtle:

His chest felt constricted, like a bulging tree trunk wrapped too tightly in barbed wire. Oh, sweet Jesus! Through his ragged breathing he cried out in spite of himself: "Help!" And there she came, down the embankment. Of all God's creatures he had summoned to his aid Nannie Rawley, wearing a pair of dungarees and a red bandanna around her head like that woman on the syrup, Aunt Jemina. [...] "Miss Rawley," he said weakly once the spinning of the world had ceased, "I don't like to trouble you. You go on with your business, but maybe if you get a chance directly you could call up the ambulance. I think I've had a stroke." [...] "You haven't gotten a stroke. You've gotten a turtle." (Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer* 90, 91)

Garnett Walker is described as a person who takes things very seriously. At the same time, these misunderstandings, which happen to be comical and entertaining to readers, lighten up his otherwise serious narration.

Another aspect of the chapters in which Garnett serves as the focalizer, relates to the fact that they include letters. These letters are written and exchanged by Garnett and his neighbor, Nannie Rawley, and are used to express their feelings towards the personalities and actions of each other, as can be seen in the following quote:

Dear Miss Rawley, I have been greatly troubled by a suspicion that occurred to me last Friday, June 8, in the Little Bros. Hardware. I could not help but overhear (though I did not wish to, but the conversation was quite unavoidably audible) your remarks to the Little Bros. concerning a "snapper". [...] I write to ask you this, Miss Rawley, not because it is a matter of any great concern to me, but because in keeping with the lord's counsel I feel I should advise you it is a sin that does not rest lightly on any soul, to slander the good name of a neighbor who has worked long

and hard these many years to serve with wisdom and dignity his county (vo-ag teacher for 21 yrs, f-H adviser more than 10 yrs) and his Lord. Sincerely, Garnett S. Walker III (Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer* 187)

This excerpt shows once again that Garnett tries his best to be as serious as possible, which is amusing to the readers. Another comic incident which happens to Garnett occurs at the end of the novel, when he tries to confront a mysterious man who has apparently been lingering in front of Nannie's house. As it turns out, "[h]e'd been jealous of a scarecrow" (Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer* 426). This final incident leads to an honest conversation between Garnett and Nannie and serves to connect them on a personal level.

To summarize, it can be said that the alternating perspectives in *Prodigal Summer* provide an enjoyable reading experience for the readers. This is mainly due to the interesting turns of events as well as to the connections between the characters that are revealed only gradually.

4.3.3. Flight Behavior

Flight Behavior is divided into fourteen chapters, some of which are further divided into subchapters. In contrast to the two novels analyzed previously, the narrative perspective in *Flight Behavior* does not alternate but remains consistent throughout the novel. Similar to *Prodigal Summer*, this novel relies on a figural narrative situation with an internal focalizer, Dellarobia Turnbow. The story is told from her point of view and the opinions and thoughts of other characters are only perceived through Dellarobia. The narrative situation can be described as homodiegetic because Dellarobia, the focalizer, forms an active part of the events and stands at the center of the narration. Furthermore, she can be described as a mostly reliable narrator. Dellarobia has, to a certain extent, limited access to information because she only knows what she experienced herself and does not have access to all the other characters' thoughts and feelings. Her value-scheme seems to be congruent with Kingsolver's own value-scheme, as Dellarobia is portrayed as an individual not only highly interested in the protection of the Monarch butterflies, but also in the ecological reasons which caused the butterflies to change their flight behavior. Dellarobia is personally involved in the story; however, there is no reason to assume that she provides false information on purpose, so she can be regarded

as a mostly reliable narrator. The following quote, in which Dellarobia sees the Monarchs for the first time, serves to illustrate the narrative situation in *Flight Behavior*:

A small shift between cloud and sun altered the daylight, and the whole landscape intensified, brightening before her eyes. The forest blazed with its own internal flame. “Jesus,” she said, not calling for help, she and Jesus weren’t that close, but putting her voice in the world because nothing else present made sense. The sun slipped out by another degree, passing its warmth across the land, and the mountain seemed to explode with light. Brightness of a new intensity moved up the valley in a rippling wave, like the disturbed surface of a lake. Every bough glowed with an orange blaze. “Jesus God,” she said again. No words came to her that seemed sane. (Kingsolver, *Flight Behavior* 19)

As can be seen, the reader perceives the event through the eyes of Dellarobia. At this point in the story, she does not yet know what she sees because she does not know anything about Monarchs – a fact which shows her limited access to information.

One of the narrative characteristics of the novel is the use of flashbacks and references to the characters’ past. The past is not only referred to in Dellarobia’s thoughts but also in conversations with others, for example when she speaks with Cub about her first pregnancy, ““I never really felt like a wife in this room, you know? Much less a newlywed.” “Well, what did you feel like?” Cub asked. “I don’t know. Like a kid. I know this sounds weird, but more like a sister.” She laughed. “A really pregnant one” (Kingsolver, *Flight Behavior* 520). Although there are flashbacks used in order to provide information about Dellarobia’s past, it seems that the focus of the novel lies on Dellarobia’s present developments and the current events.

An interesting feature of the narrative perspective in *Flight Behavior* is the slight shift in perspective that occurs towards the end of the novel. Here, the narrative perspective slightly changes at a point when the flood reaches Dellarobia’s farm and she is trapped by the water. The figural narrative situation shifts from Dellarobia as a focalizer to a more objective point of view, which can be noticed in the following paragraph:

She was wary of taking her eyes very far from her footing, but now she did that, lifted her sights straight up to watch them [the Monarchs] passing overhead. Not just a few, but throngs, an airborne zootic force flying out in formation, as if to war. In the middling distance and higher up they all flowed in the same direction, downmountain, like the flood itself occurring on other levels. The highest ones were faint trails of specks,

ellipses. Their numbers astonished her. Maybe a million. (Kingsolver, *Flight Behavior* 596, 597)

As can be noticed, Dellarobia's name is not mentioned anymore, but instead she is referred to only with the personal pronouns "she" or "her". The focus of the narration in the last paragraphs of the novel focuses on the flight of the Monarch butterflies and Dellarobia seems no more than an observer, whose feelings and thoughts are not conveyed. A possible interpretation of this shift in perspective might be that the final paragraphs in the novel represent "Kingsolver's choice to force the natural world to become integral to the human one" (Wagner-Martin 3). The absence of Dellarobia as the focalizer in the last paragraphs of the novel might also represent the absence of any choice for her. It is not up to her whether or not she will survive the flood, as she is fully dependent on nature. Essentially, the narrative perspective correlates with the fate of her main character Dellarobia.

4.4. Analysis of the main protagonists

The following subchapters serve to analyze the complexities of the main characters which have not been addressed in the previous part of this thesis and which do not belong to the analysis from the angle of ecocriticism. In order to obtain sufficient knowledge and understanding of Kingsolver's novels and to provide a comprehensive analysis of her work, it is indispensable to take a close look at some of her main protagonists.

4.4.1. Animal Dreams

Codi, the main protagonist in *Animal Dreams*, is a very troubled character with a number of traumatic experiences that she has not processed at the beginning of the novel. Her stay in Grace helps her to deal with these experiences and she manages to overcome her past and become more optimistic towards her own future. The most influential events in her past were, firstly, the loss of her mother who died shortly after Hallie was born and, secondly, her miscarriage at the age of fifteen. Growing up without a mother and also losing a baby at such a young age influenced her strongly. On the one hand, it strengthened the relationship between Codi and Hallie, both of whom did not have a mother while

growing up, depending very much on one another. But on the other hand, the relationship between Codi and her father suffered because Codi used to think their father was too strict and that they did not have enough freedom to express themselves. Also, Codi appears to have a rather distorted self-perception and very often underestimates what people see in her. She highly values Hallie, almost idolizes her and she “defines herself by negation and implies that the real story is happening elsewhere, with Hallie as hero” (Stevenson 33). The difficulties in the relationship between Codi and her parents greatly influence her behavior. The absence of her mother as well as the distance between her father and herself, seemingly forced Codi to keep a certain distance between her and other people, for example her boyfriend Carlos. Hallie seems to be the only one Codi feels really close to. It is only at the end of the novel that Codi realizes that Hallie’s life had not nearly been as idyllic as she had imagined it, because “[s]he wanted to save herself. Just like we all do” (Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams* 344). At the end of the novel, Codi’s perception of herself and also her perception of Hallie have finally become realistic and less idealistic and blurred.

Sheryl Stevenson is one of the many scholars who are interested in Kingsolver’s works. One of her article focuses on the role of trauma and memory in *Animal Dreams*. The field of trauma studies has increased over the last two decades, which directly correlates to the growing interest in literature that deals with trauma as a core subject (Stevenson 327, 328). Stevenson states that “[a]mong many works that might be designated as belonging to the “literature of trauma”, Barbara Kingsolver’s *Animal Dreams* invites further attention, particularly as an illuminating exploration of complex relationships between trauma and memory” (328). She explains that it was published at a time when interest in trauma and its impact on memories were particularly high. Codi is a fictional example for someone who tries to deal with his or her traumatic experiences by banning them from out of their mind. This coping strategy seems to be only useful to a certain extent because “without the effort of remembrance and witnessing, unresolved fear, anger, and grief fester, and the avoidance of memory produces a numbed, constricted self” (Stevenson 328). Codi can be regarded as an example for this strategy because she keeps a certain distance between her and people around her, even when it comes to Hallie, whom she did not inform about her miscarriage. Also, she always seems to be on the move and ready to pack her things, ready to leave everything

behind and start over somewhere else. Stevenson suggests that Codi might be regarded as an example of how society deals with traumata, claiming that

[h]er [Codi's] amnesia becomes a metaphor for the widespread tendency of responsible citizens to "forget" unpleasant social realities, to become desensitized and apathetic, as in Kingsolver's chosen example, had jumped America's well-known but widely ignored financing of violence against civilians in Nicaragua. By making Codi's response to loss and violence seem both ordinary and representative, part of a widely shared process in which memory is crucial, *Animal Dreams* highlights trauma theory's everyday implications along with its power as a tool of social analysis. (330).

It might be argued that this interpretation stretches somewhat too far, but one cannot deny the fact that trauma and memory are crucial motifs in *Animal Dreams*. From the beginning on, Codi frequently makes references to the tragic events that have shaped her when she notes, for example, that "I'm not the moral guardian in my family. Nobody, not my father, *no one* had jumped in to help when I was a child getting whacked by life, and on the meanest level of instinct I felt I had no favors to return" (Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams* 15).

Codi's pregnancy and miscarriage also show the difficulties in the relationship between Codi and her father. In the course of the novel, it turns out that he knew about the pregnancy but did not act on this knowledge. As Breyan Strickler observes, "[r]ather than showing concern in a typical fatherly fashion, Doc Homer assumes the role of detached observer and clinician, relying on the privilege of sight" (123). This becomes obvious, for example, when Homer watches Codi hold and bury her baby:

The house is dark. Her curtain of hair falls as she leans out, looking down toward the kitchen. She comes out. The small bundle in her arms she carries in the curl of her upper body, her spine hunched like a dowager's as if this black sweater weighed as much as herself. When he understands what she has, he puts his knuckle to his mouth to keep from making a sound. Quiet as a cat she has slipped out the kitchen door. [...] Then her head pushes up through the fringe of acacias and she moves toward him, her face shining beautifully with its own privacy of tears. He sees how deeply it would hurt her if she understands what he knows: that his observations have stolen the secrets she chose not to tell. She is a child with the dignity of an old woman. (Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams* 142, 143)

Homero does not actively intervene as he sees his teenage daughter bury her baby, although he seems to be strongly disturbed by the events himself. Instead, he decides to respect Codi's privacy and continues to observe his daughter's development from a rather detached perspective. It is only very late

in the novel that Codi and her father actually begin to talk about Codi's pregnancy, and Codi realizes that, "You gave me some pills, didn't you? You really did want to help" (Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams* 342). It seems that they eventually come to terms with each other, mainly because Codi has become more confident.

Codi needs help from other people to reveal the memories she had blocked for years. One such trigger person is Emelina, her high-school friend in whose guest house she stays. When they discuss events that happened to Codi and Hallie during their childhood, Emelina corrects Codi's memories and, as a consequence, also corrects Codi's perception of herself. For instance, when Codi watches Emelina's sons decapitate some chickens, they talk about how Codi used to protest against chickens being killed by Emelina's grandmother. And although Codi is convinced that Hallie was the one who protested, Emelina thinks differently; "'I'm sure it was you that had a fit over the chickens. You'd start, and then Hallie would do it too. She always followed whatever you did" (Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams* 31). Another person who supports Codi in regaining her memories is Uda, the woman who took care of her and Hallie when they were little. She shows Codi that her memories are often blurry and that the truth might be different from what she remembers. For example, Uda observes, "He just wanted awful bad for you kids to be good girls [...]. It's hard for a man by himself, honey. You don't know how hard. He worried himself to death. A lot of people, you know, would just let their kids run ever which way" (Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams* 287). This quote shows that, while Codi thought her father to be overly protective and strict, actually cared a lot about his daughters and tried his best to keep them from experiencing any harm. When Codi's childhood memories return, she feels overwhelmed; "I was experiencing a flash flood of memories. I feared I might drown in them. My skull was so crowded with images it hurt" (Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams* 288). The regained memories help her to understand her family's past and also her role in Grace. By the end of the novel, she has found a way to overcome her past and also to cope with Hallie's death. Moreover, she even finds Grace to be a place where she wants to stay and build a future together with Loyd. While the future of Codi seems promising, her father Homero is about to lose his mind to Alzheimer's and eventually dies. This adds a sad tone to an otherwise optimistic ending.

4.4.2. Prodigal Summer

The three main protagonists in *Prodigal Summer* show very different character traits and interests. Deanna Wolfe and Lusa Widener are the two female characters in *Prodigal Summer*, allowing readers the most detailed insights into their lives and minds.

Deanna is mostly presented as a very independent woman, who does not mind living in the Appalachian Mountains all by herself. The only thing she is afraid of is thunderstorms, but apart from that she seems to be just fine on her own. Deanna was married but later divorced her husband. When it seems that she does not expect to find love ever again, she falls for the young hunter Eddie Bondo. They start a very passionate affair that disrupts Deanna's habitual solitude, and soon she seems torn between her affection for him and her desire to be on her own. Also, their strongly differing interests in the coyotes divide them further as they repeatedly discuss the role of predators and their influence on the ecosystem. Priscilla Leder states that "[t]he productive resolution of their dialogue occurs not literally but symbolically with Deanna's pregnancy, raising the possibility that future generations might grow to be good gardeners" (233). Their relationship does not last and, in a certain way, he is the reason why she quits living in the mountains because she expects a baby from him. It seems that Deanna does not change very much in the course of the novel. Although she opened up to Eddie, she again finds herself on her own, about to raise her child mostly by herself. However, one could say that her stay in the Appalachians was her way to recover from her failed marriage and that, eventually, she goes back into civilization.

Deanna is presented as a character who knows a lot about the environment and the wildlife in the Appalachians also because she has a degree in wildlife biology. She seems to be most interested in predators, in particular coyotes, about which she is said to have written her thesis. Her appreciation of the coyotes, which are said to take over the role of the extirpated red wolf in the Appalachians, is one of the differences between her and her lover Eddie, who came to the Appalachian Mountains for hunting coyotes (Hughes 160).

Lusa, the other main female protagonist of the novel, is also presented as an independent, occasionally even stubborn, woman who does things her

own way without trying to impress others. She studied biology and is specialized in moths. When she was holding a workshop in integrated pest management, she met Cole and they got married after a relatively short amount of time. Lusa decided to move in with Cole and they live at his farm, although she struggles with farm life in the beginning of the novel. The relationship between Lusa and Cole is shaped by differences; “he is farm while she is city; he is uneducated while she has studied for 20 years; he is rural in outlook while she is global” (Wagner-Martin 131). Nevertheless, Lusa very much appreciates their marriage and she also learns to appreciate the kind of life Cole has enabled her to live.

Lusa develops in several ways the course of the story. For example, she learns to cope with the loss of Cole and commits herself to keeping the farm. She trusts her own instincts and does not follow regional traditions, but tries innovative strategies instead, for example by breeding goats. Commenting on her marriage to Cole, which lasted only a short time due to his fatal accident, Lusa says to her sister-in-law Jewel, “I’m having this retrospective marriage, starting at the end and moving backward, getting acquainted with Cole through all the different ages he was before I met him” (Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer* 165). In the time span following Cole’s death, in which she is on the farm by herself, Lusa does not only learn about her husband but also about his family. Eventually, she comes to understand that her sisters-in-law did not dislike her, but that their family history is actually quite complicated and that it only took some time for all of them to appreciate Lusa. Cole’s nephew, for example, says, “They’re [Cole’s sisters and brothers-in-law] just jealous that Uncle Cole went so crazy about you. But who wouldn’t? You’re so pretty and smart and stuff” (Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer* 166). Lusa even becomes so close with one of Cole’s sisters, Jewel, that she offers to adopt her two children when Jewel dies from cancer. She is finally being included into the Walker family who appreciate her hard work and her honest interest in the farm.

The third main protagonist in the novel is Garnett Walker, a retired vocational teacher of agriculture who is almost eighty years old. He is a widower and does not have any contact to his family. Eventually, it turns out that he is the grandfather of Jewel’s children and, at the end of the novel, he is likely to meet them because Lusa wants the children to get to know their grandfather. His main interest is growing chestnut trees that are resistant to the blight, which

is a disease which caused the chestnuts to become extinct in the area. Garnett is presented as a very serious person and he seems to have developed his own habits that he sticks to. He is religious, a fact which also reflects on his attitude towards nature. Garnett's nature-loving stance is also a reflection of his family background, which points to generations of landowners in the family tree. It can be said that, "though he cherishes the nature he knows, he regards it as his to possess and control" (Leder 235). Garnett is startled by Nannie Rawley's behavior and her attitude towards, for example, organic farming, the use of pesticides or the role of human beings in the environment in general. But eventually he grows very fond of her and they seem to connect on a personal level. After the incident, in which Garnett wanted to confront Nannie's scarecrow, he admits that he "didn't care for the way Buddy [the scarecrow] was looking at you in your short pants" (Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer* 429). Garnett's plot ends on an optimistic note because, due to his developing relationship to Nannie, he "begins to lose his illusion of solitude" (Leder 236).

All of the main characters in *Prodigal Summer* seem to develop on a personal level in the course of the novel. Lusa manages to find a way to sustain the farm, which has become her home, and she plans to adopt Jewel's children, Deanna is pregnant from the passionate affair with Eddie Bondo, and Garnett warms up towards his neighbor Nannie and is about to get to know his grandchildren. To sum up, it appears that at the end of the novel the characters are in a better emotional state than they were in the beginning.

4.4.3. Flight Behavior

The main character in *Flight Behavior* is Dellarobia Turnbow, who is also the focalizer of the narration within the novel. The story is presented solely from her point of view, allowing readers to experience Dellarobia's development first hand.

Dellarobia is married to Cub Turnbow, with whom she has two children. They married when they were very young because Dellarobia was pregnant but, unfortunately, she lost her child. She has a very loving and caring relationship to her children, in particular to her kindergarten son Preston who shares her interest in the Monarchs. The family lives in a house that was financed by Cub's parents, which is something that bothers Dellarobia because

she feels that Cub's parents act as if Dellarobia and Cub owe them a lot and are not truly independent from them. The relationship to her parents-in-law is generally difficult because it seems that Dellarobia would much rather like to be more independent from them, which is not possible due to their financial situation. In the course of the novel, Dellarobia gets to know her mother-in-law, Hester, and she learns to acknowledge similarities between them and also that they share some interests and opinions, which enables her to develop a respectful relationship with Hester.

Dellarobia is presented as a person who strives for more, although she does not act upon that wish. As Linda Wagner-Martin observes, "Dellarobia has lived as a stay-at-home mom, chafing at her dependence on Cub and his father but doing nothing to change that status" (193). She remains more passive than active and "[e]ven her personal thirst for knowledge is given to her; she does not know how to hunger for a change in her circumstances, or how to enact anything that resembles change" (Wagner-Martin 197). However, the discovery of the Monarchs is actually a result of Dellarobia's discontent about her life because at the beginning of the novel she is about to start an affair when she stumbles across the butterflies. Due to the butterflies, she does not continue the affair and her life changes drastically.

Dellarobia's desire for significant changes is also a characteristic that distinguishes her from her husband, who seems to be more content with their life than Dellarobia. She repeatedly mentions that she wants him to stand up against his parents, especially his father, and stand in for his own opinion and his own family. Obviously they are still married out of a sense of convenience and not because they love each other dearly. Dellarobia is different from most other female characters in the novel, which is already expressed by her "ornate name" (Wagner-Martin 197).

In the course of the novel, Dellarobia undergoes a significant change and develops emotionally and personally. At the beginning of the novel, she is a housewife and mother and is presented as being rather dissatisfied with her situation. But then her whole life changes when she discovers the Monarchs and develops an interest in science. Eventually, Dellarobia even decides to go to college and to get divorced from Cub. The end of the novel seemingly opens up a very promising new chapter of Dellarobia's life. However, the flood that

destroys Dellarobia and Cub's farm undermines this impression. It does not even become clear whether she survives this natural disaster.

4.5. Common features and differences

The analysis of the selected novels identifies several similarities as well as differences, which will be discussed in this subchapter.

Regarding the narrative situation, it can be said that the narrative perspective in Kingsolver's novels is very important and that it strongly contributes to the readers' understanding of the story as well as the characters. In two of the three selected novels, there is not one consistent narrative perspective but rather two or more narrative perspectives that alternate. *Flight Behavior* is the only one of the selected novels in which the narrative perspective does not alternate in the course of the story. Whereas one single third-person narrator tells the whole story in *Flight Behavior*, the narrative perspectives in *Animal Dreams* and *Prodigal Summer* switch between two or more narrators.

Another aspect of the narrative technique that all of the novels have in common is the frequent use of flashbacks and foreshadowing. The characters' pasts are crucial for their current situations and also their developments, thus they play important roles in the novels. In all of the three novels, the characters frequently think about their past and reflect on decisions they made and events that happened to them. Besides the use of flashbacks, foreshadowing is another frequently used narrative technique in these novels. Although less obvious than the flashbacks, there are frequent hints to events that will happen to the characters in the later stages of the novels. Calling up the past plays an important role in the novel because it still influences the actions, thoughts and feelings of the characters and serves to explain why they act and how they act a certain way. What is intriguing for the reader is the fact that the characters' pasts are being revealed only gradually in the course of the novels, so that it takes some time to fully understand the characters and their actions and behavior.

The characters' past plays an important role in their current lives. The influence of the past is most noticeable in *Animal Dreams*, in which the main protagonist's life is strongly shaped by a teenage pregnancy as well as the loss

of her mother at a young age and the difficult relationship to her father. In the other two novels, *Prodigal Summer* and *Flight Behavior*, the main characters are concerned with their past in a slightly different way because they are, unlike Codi in *Animal Dreams*, not traumatized, but instead struggle with certain events that happened to them and decisions they made. So, although the characters' past is dealt with differently in the novels, it assumes an important role for all of them.

In terms of the settings of the novels, once again certain differences and some similarities can be made out. Two of the novels, *Prodigal Summer* and *Flight Behavior*, are set in US states that are considered to be part of the South. Also, they are set in mostly rural areas and the events take place mainly on the farms of the main protagonists or in the area around them. *Animal Dreams*, by contrast, is set in a small town. As a consequence, farm life in this narration is not nearly as important as it is in the other novels.

All of the novels feature primarily women as their main protagonists. Male characters are important as well, but they mainly seem to serve as complementary characters for the female characters. All of the female protagonists develop their personality in the course of the story. Codi, for example, manages to cope with her difficult past and finally settles with Loyd in Grace; Lusa eventually finds her place on the farm and starts to enjoy farm life; and Dellarobia intends to get divorced and start a new job and education. The women are depicted as strong and mostly independent characters who manage to cope with the difficulties life brings them and at the same time maintain their personal values and moral ideals.

One of the similarities between the main characters in *Animal Dreams* and *Flight Behavior*, Codi and Dellarobia, is the fact that they both lost a child at a very young age. Both of them have not yet fully recovered from this traumatic loss, but eventually manage to do so in the course of the respective stories. Codi did not tell anyone, not even the baby's father Loyd Peregrina, about the pregnancy, keeping it a secret for many years. In contrast, Dellarobia and the baby's father, Cub, got married although the baby had died. They built a house together and got two more children. But, eventually, they will get divorced, whereas Codi and Loyd get back together and start a future together. A similarity between Codi and Deanna, one of the main characters in *Prodigal Summer*, is that they both are pregnant at the end of the novels. Generally, it

can be said that children and pregnancies in particular, play an important role in the novels and contribute to shaping the lives and characters of the main protagonists.

One of the distinguishing features of the novels are their endings. While the endings of *Animal Dreams* and *Prodigal Summer* are mostly promising, the ending of *Flight Behavior* is more ambivalent. In *Animal Dreams*, Codi learns to cope with her miscarriage and settles down in Grace, together with her high school boyfriend Loyd and they expect a baby. Only Hallie's death and the death of Codi's father stand in the way of a seemingly happy ending. In *Prodigal Summer*, Deanna expects a baby and quits her solitary life in the Appalachian mountains to return to Egg Fork; Lusa settles in at the farm and finds a new family with Jewel's children, and Garnett is about to develop a relationship to his neighbor Nannie Rawley. The ending of *Flight Behavior* stands in contrast to the endings of the other novels. Dellarobia is about to start a new chapter of her life by getting divorced, moving to Cleary and going to college but her family's home is destroyed by a flood and is not certain whether she survives or not. As a consequence, the flood might be regarded as a symbol for the new chapter in Dellarobia's life. It could also mean, however, that she is unable to leave her former life and might even perish.

5. Kingsolver's novels from the angle of ecocritics

The concerns and goals of ecocriticism have already been discussed in detail (see chapter 2.2. Ecocriticism). It is thus obvious that Barbara Kingsolver's novels prove to be particularly suited to be analyzed from the point of ecocriticism. Glotfelty mentions a number of general questions that ecocritics might ask and which seem to be appropriate for an analysis of Kingsolver's novels, such as, "[w]hat role does the physical setting play in the plot of this novel? Are the values expressed in this play consistent with ecological wisdom? In what ways and to what effect is the environmental crisis seeping into contemporary literature and popular culture? [...] What bearing might the science of ecology have on literary studies?" (*Introduction* xix). Some of these questions will be addressed in the following chapters, which will examine the selected novels by Kingsolver from the perspective of ecocriticism.

All of the selected novels express Kingsolver's great interest in the environment and the interdependency of people and their environment. Kingsolver's academic knowledge about biology and ecology, acquired during her years of study and research at various universities, allows her to describe biological processes, for example, the migration of the Monarch butterflies, in great detail and provide her readers with biological knowledge that is based on scientific facts. Her own opinion and beliefs regarding the numerous environmental concerns addressed by her are represented by the main characters, whereas other characters tend to represent more general beliefs and assumptions.

Ecocritical literature and science seem to be strongly connected because they share similar goals. Heise argues that "[t]he relationship between modern environmentalist thought and the sciences has always been fraught with contradictions, paradoxes, and reversals" (*Environmental Literature* 22). On the one hand, science is believed to provide solutions for current problems but, on the other hand, science is viewed as contributing to the said problems because

[t]he idea that humans stand apart from the rest of the natural world and have the ability, the right, and perhaps even the duty to explore and reshape it have led to our collective underestimation of ecological complexity, our neglect of other species' needs and rights, and an overestimation of our own knowledge and skills. (Heise, *Environmental Literature* 22, 23)

Kingsolver also seems to be concerned with the question of how people interact with the environment and how people perceive their influence on the environment, for example farming techniques or the use of pesticides.

The relationship between scientists and cultural critics has been an ambivalent one, having also changed over the past few decades. One of the essential and critical questions posed in this context was as to whether nature was only a constructed concept, and, if so, by whom and how the construction had been influenced (Heise, *Environmental Literature* 23). Heise observes that the trust in science has returned in the last decade and that “large sectors of the environmentalist movement once again rely on science to provide the ethical guidelines for how to live in nature” (*Environmental Literature* 24, 25).

As has been discussed previously (see subchapter 2.1.2. Key aspects), fictional and nonfictional literature is frequently engaged in the discussion of environmental concerns. Recurring issues and themes are, for example, “[e]nvironmental toxins and their often subtle but destructive impacts on the human body”, the treatment of endangered species and, in particular in the last two decades, climate change and its consequences (Heise, *Environmental Literature* 26-28). This trend can also be observed in Kingsolver’s novels, which will now be analyzed in greater detail.

5.1. Animal Dreams

Of all the novels selected for this thesis *Animal Dreams* seems to be the one that is least concerned with environmental problems. However, careful examination of the novel shows that here, too, Kingsolver already includes references to current social and environmental concerns and that it can be regarded as one of her earliest ecocritical novels.

Kingsolver openly addresses environmental issues in *Animal Dreams* because one of the main environmental concerns in the novel is the pollution of the local river in Grace. After Codi has lived in Grace for several months, she gets to know that the local orchards suffer from polluted water, which they have to use from the river nearby. The reason the water is polluted is a local mine, which diverts its waste water into the local river. As a consequence, the trees in the local orchards suffer from the polluted water. Codi finds out about this by accident, when she makes a field trip with one of her classes and they discover

that there are hardly any traces of life in the water samples the students collect. She further learns that the people from Grace know about the pollution but have not undertaken action against it because their situation seemed to be hopeless. With Codi's help local women form a protest group and quickly earn attention from the media. Eventually, they manage to have the mine shut down. Kingsolver's intention behind this plot might be to show that a sense of community and cooperation can cause positive changes. Codi's stay in Grace does not only support her own healing because she can learn to cope with her past but she also contributes to saving Grace. *Animal Dreams* was written in a time, in which the public was not very interested in the pollution Western rivers but, nevertheless, it received numerous prizes and attracted attention for literature that dealt with ecological problems (Wagner-Martin 62). Another aspect worth mentioning in regard to the protest in Grace against the pollution of the river is that Kingsolver could draw from personal experience because she used to do research about actual protest against the pollution of orchards through mines and published a book about her observations in 1989, which is called *Holding the Line: Women in the Great Arizona Mine Strike of 1983* (Wagner-Martin 63).

There are some analogies to be found between Codi's traumatic past and the situation in Grace, for example that they are both influenced by something invisible. Codi's past is hidden from other people and the river of Grace lacks any life although the water looks normal (Strickler 124). Codi's personal healing is strongly connected to the fact that she recaptures her sense of identity as well as her sense of belonging. In the process of coping with her past, she also begins to feel as a member of the community of Grace, which shows that "the relationship between place and identity and how place can reclaim memory and create new perspectives on identity" (Strickler 125).

The role of the media is, to a certain extent, one of the addressed issues addressed in *Animal Dreams*. This becomes evident in the course of the town's protest against the pollution of the river. The peacock, one of the local birds in Grace, becomes a symbol for their protest. The media, in this case TV stations and newspapers, help the protest group by drawing attention to their cause and are presented as mainly useful.

It seems that Kingsolver does not want to address environmental problems in an isolated way but also tackle their causes, which may be found in

politics. This can also be observed in *Animal Dreams*. The local mine that leads its polluted water into the river from which Grace's orchards are watered, for example, is threatened by the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency), which prompts them to divert the river instead of cleaning it. In the beginning, the EPA does not intend to help the inhabitants of Grace. Its opinion is only changed after the people from Grace founded protest groups and alerted the media. Kingsolver obviously wants her readers to think not only about ecological problems but also about political and social topics and issues that are important to her, and she addresses these problems openly, for example in a letter that Hallie writes to Codi from Nicaragua:

Sometimes I still have American dreams. I mean literally. I see microwave ovens and exercise machines and grocery-store shelves with thirty brands of shampoo, and I look at these things oddly, in my dream. I stand and think, "What is all this for? What is the hunger that drives this need?"
(Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams* 307)

It seems that Kingsolver intends to show that environmental problems and politics are very often closely connected. As a consequence, it becomes clear that an analysis from the angle of criticism is likely to benefit from considering different points of view from different academic fields. As has been discussed earlier in this thesis, ecocriticism is a literary movement that strongly profits from interdisciplinary exchange (see 2.1.1. Historic Development).

Another ecological problem that is briefly addressed in *Animal Dreams* is the difficult situation of farmers in Nicaragua. They are described as often lacking supplies. They need technical supplies as well as knowledge about profitable farming techniques. The U.S. government and, in particular, its influence in Nicaragua is described rather critical in *Animal Dreams*. On the one hand, because the EPA does not seem to care about the polluted water in Grace and, as a consequence, also does not provide any help for the people in Grace. On the other hand, it is mentioned several times in the course of the novel that the US government uses tax money to support the Contras, the rebel group that kidnaps and murders Hallie. Codi is aware of this fact, as can be observed in the following quote:

We learned nothing useful. They were sure now that Hallie had been taken across the border into Honduras, probably to a camp where many other prisoners were held. It was a well-outfitted camp; they had Sony radios and high-quality C-rations. It made me smile, a little, to think Hallie might be eating C-rations I'd dutifully paid for with my taxes. Dinner was on me. So were the landmines. (Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams* 268, 269)

Clearly, the financial support of the Contras is presented in a very critical and accusing tone. The events that Hallie describes in her letters become more and more alarming as the novel goes on. For example, she describes how three teenage girls get killed by a U.S. helicopter (Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams* 184). Hallie's letter mediate a disturbing impression of what happens in Nicaragua and, a few years after the publication of *Animal Dreams*, Kingsolver states that she regarded the novel as a sort of protest against the events in Nicaragua; "I wanted to bring that evil piece of history into a story, in a way that would make a reader feel sadness and dread but still keep reading, becoming convinced that it was necessary to care" (qtd. in Wagner-Martin 60).

One of the features of *Animal Dreams* is that Kingsolver tries to include different cultural aspects in the novel. For example, the origin of the people in Grace is important for the story. Codi develops her sense of belonging partly because she discovers that she is also one of the descendants of the Gracela sisters, who came from Spain to settle in Grace. Also, Native Americans play an important role within the novel, mostly represented by Loyd Peregrina, Codi's former and future boyfriend. Loyd introduces Codi to a number of Native American rituals and habits and seems to be a tranquil contrast to her restlessness. It might be said that "much of his wisdom accrues from the native culture that is his background and his blood" (Wagner-Martin 58), which shows that his family background is a major part of his personality. The conversations and trips with Loyd, furthermore, contribute to Codi's healing process.

5.2. Prodigal Summer

In *Prodigal Summer*, Kingsolver addresses a number of environmental issues, which are presented as relevant for rural Virginia. It seems that the author drew strongly from her own experiences and scientific training for this novel. About the process of writing *Prodigal Summer*, she wrote:

I've been trained as a biologist, more or less from the beginning. [...] Specifically, I wished I could explain a handful of important ecological principles: speciation and natural selection, the keystone predator, genetic diversity and resilience, and the Volterra principle, which (for instance) shows mathematically why spraying a field with pesticides will increase the number of pests in the next generation. (qtd. in Wagner-Martin 118)

All of the concerns addressed in this quote are interwoven in the story and discussed by one or more characters throughout the course of the novel, which will be examined in detail in this subchapter.

The narrative perspective which Kingsolver chose for *Prodigal Summer*, is particularly useful for providing the reader with different perspectives on the topics and issues that are raised in the course of the story. The events are described from different perspectives and each of the focalizers provides an individual point of view. Also, the interests and concerns of the main characters differ. Deanna, for example, focuses on the wildlife in the Appalachian Mountains, whereas Lusa is most interested in farming and Garnett is concerned with growing chestnut trees. As a consequence, the reader obtains insights into very different topics and concerns through the main characters.

In the chapters that feature Garnett as the focalizer, numerous issues are addressed, most prominently growing chestnuts and the use of pesticides. Garnett's main interest is to grow a new kind of chestnut that is resistant to the blight and he explains, "If he lived long enough he would produce a tree with all the genetic properties of the original American chestnut, except one: it would retain from its Chinese parentage the ability to stand tall before the blight. It would be called the Walker American chestnut" (Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams* 132). It is not said in the novel whether or not he is successful with his project. The main focus in his chapters is set on his interaction with his neighbor Nannie Rawley. The feud between Garnett and his neighbor can be regarded as the representation of the differences between traditional and modern farming. Hughes describes their communication, which happens in person or by writing letters, as "constitute[ing] for the reader a delightful anthology of two people talking past each other, but also explor[ing] some of the great issues of the environmental dialogue in America" (160, 161). Their differences derive from their contrarian beliefs about the use of pesticides; whereas Garnett uses strong chemical pesticides to get rid of detested Japanese beetles, Nannie is worried that her organic orchard might be in the spraying range of Garnett's insecticides. As Kingsolver herself grows her own vegetables and fruits, Nannie seems to be the character in this quarrel that expresses Kingsolver's own opinion and beliefs. Although Garnett is presented as rather eccentric to the reader, his opinions are likely shared by a majority of people, and Nannie Rawley seems to be the one who stands up against "normalized practices,

which in turn lets readers consider how resistance at the micro scale might lead to positive changes in rural places such as the fictional Zebulon County” (Fraser 146).

Alistair Fraser mentions another possible interpretation of the argument between Garnett and Nannie Rawley. The interaction between Garnett and Nannie Rawley often takes place at the fence between their properties, which is why the fence both joins and divides them. Their opinions concerning gardening also divide them. Garnett seems to believe to be able to form and control nature to a certain extent, whereas Nannie thinks of herself as being part of the nature around her (Fraser 148). Nannie summarizes the harmful use of chemical pesticides, arguing that,

[i]f the predators and prey are balanced out to start with, and they both get knocked back the same amount, then the pests that survive will *increase* after the spraying, fast, because most of their enemies have just disappeared. And the predators will *decrease* because they’ve lost most of their food supply. So in the lag between sprayings, 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, *Prodigal Summer* 278)

Subsequent to this explanation, the industry responsible for the production of such pesticides is also mentioned. Garnett states that “[t]he agricultural chemical industry would be surprised to hear your [Nannie’s] theory”, and Nannie replies, “[o]h fiddle, they know all about it. They just hope *you* don’t. The more money you spend on that stuff, the more you need. It’s like getting hooked on hooch” (Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer* 287). This conversation shows Kingsolver’s critical approach towards the agricultural chemical industry and the use of pesticides. Fraser uses the differences between Garnett and Nannie as an example to illustrate that Kingsolver does not seem to believe that the issues addressed in her novels are hopeless. Nannie cannot ignore or refuse Garnett’s beliefs and actions because he affects her own orchard but she needs to convince him of her concerns (148). Eventually, it appears that Garnett and Nannie come to good terms, which contributes to a positive tone in the novel’s ending.

Kingsolver further highlights some of the difficulties that small-scale farmers have to face nowadays. Lusa, for example, is faced with a number of difficult decisions regarding the farm. Firstly, she has to decide whether to go back to Lexington or to stay on the farm and be a farmer on her own. And

secondly, Lusa must decide whether she wants to continue growing tobacco, like Cole did, or whether she can find something else to generate income. In a conversation with her sister-in-law Jewel, Lusa squibs, “Farm economics, what do I know? But half the world’s starving, Jewel, we’re sitting on some of the richest dirt on this planet, and I’m going to grow *drugs* instead of food? I feel like a hypocrite. I nagged Cole to quit smoking every day of our marriage” (Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer* 124). Growing tobacco is discussed in a very critical way and Lusa seems to be desperately looking for alternatives at first because she says, “It’s the only reliable crop around here you can earn enough from to live off a five-acre bottom, in a county that’s ninety-five percent too steep to plow. I *know* why every soul in this end of three states grows tobacco. Knowing full well the bottom’s going to drop out any day now.” (Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer* 125) and she summarizes that “[t]hey’re trapped” (Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer* 125). Kingsolver does not immediately provide a solution for Lusa’s challenges but includes the reader in the “deliberative process” of making a decision (Leder 237).

Through Lusa, Kingsolver addresses some of the challenges that small-scale farmers in the Appalachian region have to face nowadays. It might be argued that the death of Lusa’s husband, Cole, is directly linked to modern agricultural economic developments because he has to work part-time as a delivery driver for a large company in order to keep his farm, which does not provide the couple with enough money (Bone 247). After Cole’s death, Lusa is on her own to find alternatives to growing tobacco and to sustain the farm. Hence, “[t]he novel connects with a much broader process in which agribusiness, often supported by agricultural extension services, push forward so-called ‘agricultural modernization’, which in turn often leads to indebtedness, bankruptcy, and farm-size consolidation” (Fraser 147). In *Prodigal Summer*, however, Lusa manages to find a promising alternative to growing tobacco, which is raising goats.

Lusa is depicted as a character that is very critical of traditional farming techniques. For example, she strongly dislikes the way people in Zebulon county treat animals and plants, as can be seen in the following quote:

It stirred up her impatience with these people who seemed determined to exterminate every living thing in sight. Grubbing out wild roses, shooting blue jays out of cherry trees, knocking phoebe nests out of the porch eaves to keep the fledglings from messing on the stairs: these were the

pastimes of Zebulon County, reliable as the rituals of spring cleaning. (Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer* 35)

It seems that Lusa saw the marriage with Cole and their life on the farm as a chance; a chance to change her life as well as a chance to live an environmentally friendly lifestyle because “Lusa wanted to be different. She’d craved to shock people with her love of crawling things and her sweat [...]. As a woman, she’d jumped at an unexpected chance: to be a farmer’s partner“ (Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer* 45).

Another aspect of Lusa and her innovative farming ideas is that she connects local and global interests. Lusa has a multinational background because her parents did not grow up in the U.S.. She says about herself that she is “Polish-Arab-American” (Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer* 153) and explains, “My mom’s parents were Palestinian, and my dad’s were Jews from Poland. [...] It wasn’t hard on me, being a mix-and-match” (Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer* 153). Lusa’s geographical background is another feature that distinguishes her from the people in Zebulon County, but it also seems to be a resource for her. She comes up with the idea to raise goats and to sell them for Muslim holidays, which eventually helps her gain the respect of the Widener family and to be acknowledged as a successful farmer herself. Also, she combines farming traditions from her own family background with traditions in the Widener family, which could be regarded as bringing a “transnational” perspective to the area (Bone 248). Raising goats seems to be a practical and innovative solution to Lusa’s problem of rejecting to grow tobacco. However, raising goats itself might also be regarded as a problem because “raising animals for slaughter can seem morally problematic” (Leder 238). This shows the ambivalence that ecological decisions might hold, which is a concern Kingsolver often raises in her novels.

A further issue that is addressed is the contrast between people from urban and rural areas. Lusa is the character in the novel who represents this contrast most appropriately. In the beginning of the novel, Lusa sees herself as an outsider in Zebulon County because she comes originally from Lexington and does not consider herself a farmer yet. She describes herself as “a dire outsider from the other side of the mountains, from *Lexington* – a place in the preposterous distance” (Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer* 36). Also, it is said that “she was already known as a Lexington girl who got down on all fours to name the insects in the parlor rather than squashing them” (Kingsolver, *Prodigal*

Summer 42). In addition to her being from Lexington, her great interest in insects seems to be another difference between her and the people from Zebulon County. Lusa stands at the center of the contrast between urban and rural lifestyles. Alistair Fraser is one of the scholars interested in Kingsolver's writing and he has, amongst other issues, examined the concept of the rural in *Prodigal Summer*. He notes that "[t]hroughout her work, Kingsolver takes on and weaves together beautiful stories around significant processes that shape rural space, as well as society more generally" (Fraser 143). In the novel, Kingsolver uses three female characters Lusa, Deanna and Nannie Rawley, to address a number of different ecological concerns, such as

numerous forms of environmental change; the power of agribusiness relative so small-scale farmers; the over-use of agri-chemicals and concomitant worries about pollution and contamination; the challenges facing organic production; and intra-household and intra-family tensions regarding normative practices and the adoption of (what rural studies scholars have referred to as) "farm adjustment strategies". (Fraser 144)

Each one of the three female characters is concerned with their own individual challenge and also addresses a different ecological concern. *Prodigal Summer* might be regarded as "a novel about resistance against normalized practices in rural space, about three women who search for alternative ways of making their lives amidst the sort of structural constraints that many others find difficult to overcome" (Fraser 146). Deanna, for example, is concerned about the Appalachians' ecosystem, in particular about the role of predators, and this leads to tension between her and her love Eddie Bondo, who came to the mountains to hunt coyotes. Eventually, she persuades him not to kill the coyotes but their relationship does not last. Kingsolver uses their interaction to "introduce to readers a broad debate about humans and the environment, the food chain, the virtues of conservation, the perils of over-hunting, and even the possibility of co-existence between farming and predators" (Fraser 146).

The role of predators for an ecosystem is not only mentioned in Deanna's plot line but also in the chapters that feature Lusa and Garnett as focalizers. The connections within a functioning ecosystem are, in different contexts, explained in all of the plot lines. Nannie Rawley, for instance, uses the Japanese beetle as an example for the benefits of predators, whereas Deanna focuses on the role of the coyote in the Appalachians.

For Deanna, the novel ends somewhat ambivalently because, on the one hand, her relationship to Eddie Bondo is over while, on the other hand, her future is going to be a happy one because she expects a baby. Lusa also appears to have a bright future ahead of her at the end of the novel. She seems to have found a way to sustain her farm without following local traditions but using innovative approaches instead. Eventually, she is fully committed to the farm and Cole's family by offering to adopt Jewel's children and by saying that she would add Cole's last name, Widener, to her own because she is "married to a piece of land called Widener" (Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer* 386). From an ecofeminist point of view, Lusa's decision to add Widener to her last name months after Cole's death shows that she is self-determined and not oppressed by patriarchal traditions (Van Tassel 89). Lusa's decision to stay on the farm is described as a commitment because "[i]n all her troubles she had never yet stopped to consider her new position: landholder. Not just a mortgage holder, not just burdened, but also blessed with a piece of the world's trust" (Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer* 415, 416), which could be interpreted as an expression of Kingsolver's appreciation of farming. To summarize Lusa's development, it can be said that "Kingsolver constructs a fictional rural space in which Lusa can resist the pressure to grow tobacco and instead craft a brighter future more attuned to her sensibilities" (Fraser 150, 151).

A further aspect of *Prodigal Summer* which deserves to be analyzed is the influence of ecology that is noticeable in the novel. Ecology regards the ecosystem as a system consisting of almost countless relations of plants and animals that are strongly connected and interwoven (Heise, *Hitchhiker's Guide* 169). According to this concept, "science can help determine what kinds of human interventions into the natural world are acceptable and what types of culture are to be considered superior and inferior, and it can help ecocriticism evaluate texts that engage with nature" (Heise, *Hitchhiker's Guide* 169, 170). The influence of ecology on ecocriticism is an aspect that has been criticized by some scientists and scholars. Some of the reasons for this critique have been that ecology has developed to be a more "analytic, empirical, and mathematical field than it was at its emergence in the late nineteenth century" and that "[h]olistic notions of universal connectedness, stability, and harmony had lost much of their credibility among ecological scientists, for the most part engaged in specialized research" (qtd. in Heise, *Hitchhiker's Guide* 170). Ecocriticism has

been reproached for its alleged “metaphorization, moralization, or spiritualization” (Heise, *Hitchhiker’s Guide* 170). Kingsolver, for instance, addresses the introduction of exotic plants and animals to the regional ecosystem. For example, she refers to honeysuckle or the Japanese beetle, which have been introduced by humans and which disturb the local balance. The main characters in *Prodigal Summer* are critical towards these changes, although their own behavior and opinions are also questionable at times. Garnett, for example, uses pesticides in order to kill the Japanese beetle but the pesticides also kill the beetles’ enemies (Hughes 161). Regarding this ambiguity displayed by the main characters, Hughes states that Kingsolver’s message of the novel in this respect might be that “[i]t is not that we resist change per se, but that we choose the kinds of change that we will force upon nature” (162).

Another interesting aspect worth to be analyzed in *Prodigal Summer* are its inclusion of Darwinist elements and the theory of evolutionary biology. Bert Bender argues that “part of the history of science is still obscured by American culture’s misguided fears that Darwinism is an affront to humanistic values” (107). He further states that ecocriticism is based on scientific discoveries in the field of ecology, including the theory of evolution, and that these discoveries should be more frequently included and considered in ecocritics’ works (Bender 107). Bender states that Darwin’s theory of evolution is frequently referred to in *Prodigal Summer*, most directly in the chapters that focus on Lusa because she reads, for example, Darwin’s *The Descent of Man* (125). All of the characters repeatedly refer to the connections of animals and humans within the environment, which might be regarded as a “mediation on his [Darwin’s] inseparable, fundamental ecological insight – that “all organic beings” “are bound together by a web of complex relations” (qtd. in Bender 125).

In *Prodigal Summer*, the reader learns about some aspects of ecology and the delicate ecosystem in the Appalachian Mountains from one of the main protagonists, Deanna Wolfe. Because of her academic education in biology and her profession as a forest ranger, Deanna can provide detailed insight into her workplace, the Appalachians. She describes in detail, for example, the tracks of a coyote that she finds:

Here were tracks, fresh, and she paused to study them out: front and hind foot alternating single-file in a long, sinuous line, the front foot a little bigger than the hind; this was a canid, all right The claw marks were there, too, clear as could be. [...] This was not a gray fox, and not a red

fox. Coyote. A big one, probably male. Alpha's mate. (Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams* 62)

Deanna is presented as a person who is very interested in her environment; she describes not only coyotes in detail but also other animals, for example insects, and plants that she finds in the woods around her cabin. J. Donald Hughes comments that “[h]ers [Deanna’s] is not love of individual animals, nor indiscriminate love of species, but love of ecosystemic integrity” (159). Although Deanna’s main professional interest in the novel is in coyotes and their possible return to the Appalachians, she does not favor them as a species and is anxious to be viewed as an objective commentator. She expresses her opinion about the role of predators and herbivores in the Appalachians very clearly, emphasizing the priority to retain an overall balance of the ecosystem over the survival of one specific species.

A further aspect of the novel which becomes particularly visible in the chapters that feature Deanna’s plot line is the role of sexuality. Leder argues that the title of Deanna’s chapters, “Predators”, reflects the relationship between Deanna and Eddie because “the spontaneity and intensity of their sexual encounter makes them seem like predators in a sexual sense, out for immediate gratification” (232). Sexuality and eroticism are, to a certain extent, part of all lives of the main characters but this topic is most frequently discussed in Deanna’s chapters, because she has a passionate affair with a younger man. Their relationship is based mostly on their physical attraction and they hardly talk about their feelings. It can be said that “[t]he biology of their relationship exists without language” (Wagner-Martin 118). Numerous symbols of eroticism can be found in the novel, for example, the Luna Moth in connection with Lusa and Cole, or the blooming and opulent summer in the Appalachian Mountains, which develops parallel to Deanna’s relationship. The descriptions of eroticism are always closely linked to biology and, as a consequence, emphasize once more the crucial role of nature within the novel (Leder 229, 230). As Wagner-Martin phrases it, “*Prodigal Summer* surrounds and almost swamps the reader with these accurate yet romantic descriptions” (122) and also, “[s]urrounded by the natural world, where procreation is the *only* primary need, the characters here easily reflect the natural sexual world” (Wagner-Martin 125). In terms of gender roles in the novel, it can be said that the female characters, Deanna and

Lusa, are depicted as self-confident towards their bodies and their sexuality (Wagner-Martin 124).

The relationship between animals and humans is another key issue addressed in the novel. On the one hand, this relationship is portrayed through the character of Deanna, who repeatedly communicates her concern about coyotes and the delicate ecosystem of the Appalachians and, on the other hand by the fact that Lusa is an entomologist who at some point starts breeding goats. Overall, the novel deals with the relationship of people to both, wild animals and farm animals. This is another motif which frequently occurs in Kingsolver's novels. Coyotes, for example, occur in *Animal Dreams* as well as in *Prodigal Summer*. In *Prodigal Summer*, the coyote is described from two perspectives, the perspective of the local farmers as well as that of Deanna's. The farmers, on the one hand, regard the coyote as an enemy because it kills their sheep and other farm animals. Deanna, on the other hand, is intrigued by the return of the coyote to the Appalachians because, in her opinion, it constitutes an important part of the local ecosystem, helping to stabilize it. Amanda Cockrell argues that the coyote can be regarded as a recurring symbol, referring to it as the "juxtaposition of the animal drives of the human body with the yearnings of its heart" (*Fiction of Barbara Kingsolver*). Furthermore, she claims that in Kingsolver's novels, the coyote "often stands for juncture, appearing most often as a female, snapping up one creature's young to feed her own" (Cockrell, *Fiction of Barbara Kingsolver*). Another possible interpretation of the recurring coyote in *Prodigal Summer* is to read it as an illustration of the "sometimes unpredictable variation in biological systems and the complex interconnections among species" (Leder 230).

Lusa does not only begin to raise goats but she also takes care of an extensive vegetable garden which was mostly planted by her departed husband Cole. Leder states that "Lusa's gardening and canning represent the quintessence of this garden ethic, working with nature to sustain life at its most basic and to please the higher sensibilities as well" (240). Kingsolver shows considerable interest in gardening and growing one's own vegetables and fruits, so Lusa might also be regarded as a reflection of this interest.

Another topic that *Prodigal Summer* addresses is religion. While not discussed extensively, it is included in the plot lines of Lusa and Garnett. Garnett is described as a believing Catholic and a religious person in general,

who believes in the beauty of nature as given by God. Lusa's religious background is slightly more complicated; after all, her father's family is from Poland and Jewish, while her mother's family comes from Palestine is Muslim. Lusa says about her background, "I'll grant you we weren't really devout, either way. My dad hated his father and kind of turned his back on his religion. And I'm not a good Muslim, that's for sure" (Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer* 154). For Lusa, her multicultural background turns out to be an advantage because she knows about the need for goats at religious feasts. Lusa's family background is mostly discussed in conversations between her and her nephew Rickie, who becomes her business partner at the end. They do not only talk about her heritage in terms of ethnicity and religion but also about the languages she speaks. Ricky is presented as being mainly unaware and uninformed at the beginning, but he quickly comes to appreciate Lusa's multicultural background.

One of the recurring motifs in *Prodigal Summer* is children. This motif does not only appear in *Prodigal Summer* but in most of Kingsolver's novels (Cockrell, *Fiction of Barbara Kingsolver*). Thus, it can also be observed for example in *Animal Dreams* and *Flight Behavior*. In *Animal Dreams*, Codi moans about her miscarriage at the age of fifteen, in *Prodigal Summer*, Deanna is pregnant at the end of the novel and Lusa plans to adopt the children of her sister-in-law. In *Flight Behavior*, Dellarobia also lost a child when she was a teenager and now has two children, one of whom shares her great interest in science. Cockrell believes that this is one of the main messages in Kingsolver's novels, that "it doesn't matter how we reproduce ourselves, as long as we do" (*Fiction of Barbara Kingsolver*). According to her, Kingsolver chooses reproduction to show similarities of humans and animals because "[w]e are all part of the same pattern". Also, it is supposed to show how closely linked humans are to their environment, to animals as well as to plants, and how fragile this actually system is (Cockrell, *Fiction of Barbara Kingsolver*).

Eventually, *Prodigal Summer* ends on a positive note because all of the main characters seem to get a hold on their lives, having made the right choices through the course of the novel. It seems that this largely optimistic ending, in which all the characters are connected in different ways, underlines one of Kingsolver's overall messages in the novel once more, her firm belief that "[w]e are all linked, to other humans, to other mammals, to birds and blacksnakes and moths" (Cockrell, *Fiction of Barbara Kingsolver*). Not only are the

characters linked in different ways to each other and to nature. Kingsolver argument goes even further, as one of the core messages of the novel is that the ecosystem is based on connections between all kinds of plants, animals and also humans. This connection is also reflected in the language of the novel, as illustrated by a specific sentence used at the very beginning of the novel as well at the end, propagating that “[s]olitude is only a human presumption” (Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer* 446). The use of “only” could be a plea by Kingsolver for people not to overestimate their position in the ecosystem but to acknowledge and also appreciate that we are simply one single part of the universe. Peter Wenz, one of the earlier scholars interested in *Prodigal Summer*, summarizes Kingsolver’s attitude towards the environment under the term “land ethic”, which he defines as “chang[ing] the role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such” (qtd. in Leder 228). This quote illustrates the main message of *Prodigal Summer* accurately. Kingsolver presents the characters not in an isolated way but as part of something bigger and more meaningful, the ecosystem of Zebulon County.

Kristin Van Tassel analyzes *Prodigal Summer* from the perspective of ecofeminism. Kingsolver’s novel seems a very suitable text for this analytical perspective because the main characters in *Prodigal Summer* are mostly women and their interaction with the environment lies at the center of the story. One of the definitions of ecofeminism describes it as “a theory and movement which bridges the gap between feminism and ecology, but which transforms both to create a unified praxis to end all forms of domination” (qtd. in Besthorn and McMillen 225). Van Tassel states that the meaning of place is crucial for the characters in *Prodigal Summer*, while carrying slightly different importances for the characters. Deanna and Nannie grew up in rural areas and feel therefore connected to their environment, whereas Lusa moved to the countryside and made herself a home there. Lusa might be regarded as a representation of the “possibilities for reconciling our urban-dominated culture with agrarianism” (Van Tassel 87). The conclusion of Kingsolver’s novel, which is, amongst others, that nature and people are closely interwoven, correlates with ecocritical as well as ecofeminist ideas (Van Tassel 87). The presence of the environment is essential in *Prodigal Summer*, and nature seems to be almost like an “additional

character”, thus reinforcing the strong connection between the characters and nature (Van Tassel 90).

A final aspect about *Prodigal Summer*, which is worth discussing, is its perception by reviewers. The novel has been criticized by numerous reviewers for being too didactic and too blunt in its educational efforts (Leder 228). On her personal website, Kingsolver directly addresses this criticism, responding that “[s]everal reviewers have completely missed what the book is about, because they paid no attention to anything beyond the human plot on the shallowest level. This novel is not exclusively – or even mainly – about humans” (Kingsolver, *Frequently asked questions*). This shows that Kingsolver is fully aware of the fact that her novels do not only convey a significant message but that they convey this message very openly. Leder, who argues strongly in favor of Kingsolver’s novels, states that “[b]y reading “the human plot” beyond “the shallowest level” to examine how those characters think and act within that system, readers can learn to consider their own actions” (228). Van Tassel agrees with Leder’s arguments and states that “Kingsolver is writing fiction that is intentionally utopian” and that she is “trying to show an alternative vision for the way humans think about their *place* in the world’s ecological systems and, in this way, she encourages us to reform the way we live and the way we think about home” (90). Ultimately, it is up to the individual reader to decide whether *Prodigal Summer* might be regarded as too didactic in its approach or whether it only encourages the readers to think more critically.

5.3. Flight Behavior

Flight Behavior is Kingsolver’s most recent book and once again a very critical novel which addresses different local as well as global environmental issues. Its main concern is climate change and its effects, which are demonstrated through a specific, yet fictional example, namely a change in the flight behavior of the Monarch butterflies.

As indicated in the title of the novel, the main issue of the novel is the unusual flight behavior of an animal, in this case the Monarch butterfly (see illustration below).



Figure 5: Monarch Butterfly

Monarch butterflies are best known for their fascinating mass migration; each year they travel about 3.800 kilometers from the south of Canada to California and Mexico to hibernate (National Geographic, *Monarch Butterfly*). In *Flight Behavior*, Kingsolver describes a fictive scenario in which the Monarchs do not travel to their usual winter places but stay in Tennessee instead – a location where the winters are much too cold for them, tentatively jeopardizing their survival until spring. The reason for this unusual behavior is said to lie in the global climate change, which apparently also affects Monarch butterflies.

In terms of genre, *Flight Behavior* can be described as speculative fiction, because it deals with a fictional event in a rather realistic way. Another possible genre, to which *Flight Behavior* might belong, is climate fiction (Wagner-Martin 193). One of the features of speculative fiction is that “it encourages readers to believe in the reality of the fictional worlds it constructs” (Heise, *Environmental Literature* 31). Environmental literature includes a number of different genres, fictional as well as non-fictional. Generally, speculative fiction has increased progressively during the last years. It seems that “the rise of speculative fiction as a central genre of environmentalist thought seems to lay to rest the idea that environmentalist writing and criticism is overly committed to realism” (Heise, *Environmental Literature* 30). *Flight Behavior* can be regarded as an authentic example for this literary genre because “Kingsolver challenges the reader to dwell upon the cross-border politics of climate change, using the case of the Monarch Butterfly and its extraordinary migratory patterns to connect and write about the similarities in rural changes in the US and in Mexico” (Fraser 143). In the author’s introduction in *Flight Behavior*, Kingsolver includes a statement about the true events that are partly referred to in the novel:

In February 2010, an unprecedented rainfall brought down mudslides and catastrophic flooding on the Mexican mountain town of Angangueo. Thirty people were killed and thousands lost their homes and livelihoods.

To outsiders, the town was mainly known as the entry point for visitors to the spectacular colonies of monarch butterflies that overwinter nearby. The town is rebuilding, and the entire migratory population of North American monarchs still returns every autumn to the same mountaintops in central Mexico. The sudden relocation of these overwintering colonies to southern Appalachia is a fictional event that has occurred only in the pages of this novel. (Kingsolver, *Flight Behavior* 598)

This quote confirms that the events which take place in *Flight Behavior* are of a purely fictional nature, while there are also references to events that actually did happen.

One of the direct references to actual events is through a Mexican family, whose daughter Josefina goes to school with Dellarobia's son Preston, who had to come to Tennessee because their hometown Anganguero was destroyed by a flood. The consequences of climate change are depicted here on a very personal level because the family tells their story to Dellarobia through their daughter, who is the only one of them who speaks English. They also are closely connected to the Monarchs because Anganguero used to profit from the hibernating insects. Josefina's descriptions of the events in Anganguero can, in addition, be interpreted as foreshadowing to the fate of the Monarchs in *Flight Behavior* (Wagner-Martin 8, 9).

Climate change itself is a theme that comes up repeatedly in the course of the novel. Right at the beginning, for example, the reader learns that the crops on Bear's farm have failed due to heavy rain or that Cub has to work harder delivering gravel because the roads are frequently washed out. Also, "[t]rees were getting new diseases now. [...] The wetter summers and mild winters of recent years were bringing in new pests that apparently ate the forest out of house and home" (Kingsolver, *Flight Behavior* 12). All of these incidents can be traced back directly to climate change and thus serve to highlight environmental problems as the story unfolds (Wagner-Martin 6).

Numerous characters in *Flight Behavior* undergo a personal development in the course of the novel. Dellarobia's husband Cub eventually stands up against his father and so contributes to preventing him from logging the trees behind their farm. Hester, Dellarobia's mother-in-law, warms up towards Dellarobia, and as a result they begin to understand each other and gradually become closer. Heise observes that

Kingsolver focalizes the novel through characters who are predisposed to mistrust the scientists, environmentalists, and eco-tourists who

descend upon their village to research and admire the butterflies. Without condescending to climate deniers, Kingsolver nevertheless forcefully defends climate science and scientists through her protagonist's transformation from a stay-at-home mother to a budding conservation biologist. (*Environmental Literature* 29)

The most obvious development is that of Dellarobia, the main protagonist. The reader can experience Dellarobia's development directly because of the narrative situation that focuses on Dellarobia's thoughts and feelings. In the beginning of the novel, for example, she has a very romantic attitude towards the Monarchs, but by getting more involved with Ovid and adopting his scientific approach, she gradually adopts a more objective attitude toward the butterflies (Wagner-Martin 7). Ovid has great influence on Dellarobia's development because she seems to be very attracted by him and, in addition, he promotes her interest in the Monarchs on a scientific level. Ovid provides Dellarobia with basic scientific knowledge, for example about observation techniques and a lot of information about the Monarchs and climate change in general; Dellarobia seems to be "untapped potential" for Ovid (Wagner-Martin 14). On a personal level, it becomes clear that Dellarobia admires Ovid and the open-mindedness and education he represents. Also, his interaction with his wife Dellarobia how harmonic and inspiring a loving marriage can be (Wagner-Martin 11). Not only has Ovid influence on Dellarobia, but Dellarobia also inspires Ovid, although her educational background is entirely different from his. For example, he is interested in her theory about her observation and conclusions of the community members' attitude towards science, in particular in the context of climate change (Wagner-Martin 14). This statement is closely linked to Kingsolver's personal experiences, as she explains in an interview:

I live in southern Appalachia and I'm surrounded, literally, my home is surrounded by farms and by coal mines. Our agriculture here has gone through one disaster year after another, so climate change is not some kind of abstract future threat here. [...] And it strikes me that these [local small-scale farmers] are the same people who are least prepared to understand and believe in climate change and its causes. (qtd. in Wagner-Martin 19)

Farm life is only addressed to a certain extent in the novel. Dellarobia and Cub live on a farm and Cub's parents, Hester and Bear, also live from farming. They raise sheep, for example, and plant different crops. In *Flight Behavior*, some of the substantial difficulties that small-scale farmers have to face nowadays are mentioned. It seems that "[p]overty that seems to be

unmanageable has arrived: plans must be changed, neighbors must admit to needing help from each other, the patriarchal structure of the Tennessee families has been shaken” (Wagner-Martin 5). As a last resort, Cub’s father intends to log the hillside forest behind Dellarobia and Cub’s house, although this would mean to risk mudslides if there was any heavy rain. Eventually, the family can convince him not to cut down the trees. Nevertheless, the difficult financial situation of the Turnbows’ is documented repeatedly in the course of the novel.

A threatened species, the Monarch butterfly, stands at the center of this novel. However, it seems obvious that the relationship between humans and this species only partially also reflects the main concern of Kingsolver as expressed in this novel. Instead, it seems that she uses the Monarchs as a symbol to examine the relationship of people and the environment itself. It is a common feature of environmental literature to discuss “individuals’ and communities’ attitudes and beliefs in facing the loss of a sizable part of the natural world, and on the possibilities for keeping these losses as small as possible” (Heise, *Environmental Literature* 29, 30). Kingsolver does so by presenting various characters that differ in their beliefs and interests. Dellarobia, for example, is presented as a person who is overwhelmed by the appearance of the butterflies and shows a strong interest in understanding the causes and consequences of the animals’ unusual behavior. Her mother-in-law, in contrast, seems to be less interested in understanding than in making money because she begins to charge visitors for seeing the butterflies. Dellarobia’s father-in-law is presented as being not at all interested in the Monarchs because his main interest throughout most of the novel is to lumber the trees and earn money by selling the wood. This shows that Kingsolver tries to present different attitudes towards the fictional scenario in *Flight Behavior*. Climate change and its consequences as such are not questioned but the focus is set on people’s understanding of it and also their attitude towards it.

Another issue raised in *Flight Behavior* is the role of science and scientists in the destruction as well as preservation of the environment. Ovid Byron is the character in the novel who represents the relationship between scientists, nature and the public is. Byron is a university professor who studies the Monarch butterflies, which causes him to stay in Dellarobia’s backyard. He seems to be rather pessimistic regarding the survival of the Monarchs,

commenting rather cynically that “Not everyone has the stomach to watch an extinction” (Kingsolver, *Flight Behavior* 440).

Science and ecocriticism are related in so far, as they are concerned with numerous overlapping issues. Heise argues that

[o]n one hand, science is viewed as a root cause of environmental deterioration, both in that it has cast nature as an object to be analyzed and manipulated and in that it has provided the means of exploiting nature more radically than was possible by premodern means. On the other hand, environmentalists are aware that the social legitimation of environmental politics and their own insights into the state of nature centrally depend on science. In ecocriticism, this ambivalence has translated into divergent perceptions of how the sciences should inform cultural inquiry. (*Hitchhiker’s Guide* 168, 169)

Summarizing this quote, it can be said that most of the theoretical work of ecocritics is greatly influenced by science, albeit more indirectly than directly (Heise, *Hitchhiker’s Guide* 169). As regards Barbara Kingsolver’s work, it shows particularly strong influence by science due to her own academic background, which, obviously, has a large impact on her texts.

A further topic that is addressed to some extent in the novel is the relationship between religion and nature as well as the relationship between the individual and the religious community. Dellarobia and her family go to church regularly. However, it appears that she does not attend church because of her faith but because it is regarded as a social convention and because she does not want to upset Cub’s family. Dellarobia is presented as a very thoughtful and critical person who does not want to blindly believe in something she is not fully convinced of. However, when she sees the Monarchs for the first time, she questions her previous beliefs and morals and tends to consider the butterflies as a sign to change her life. This desire for change lingers on and becomes even stronger in the course of the story, whereas her belief in the role of God through the appearance of the butterflies increases. Instead of turning to God, when the town community takes interest in the Monarchs and especially in the fact that Dellarobia discovered them, she refuses to be symbolized or to be treated differently only because she was the first one to find the animals. Dellarobia is not a religious person and feels rather uncomfortable with all the attention by the church community but she does notice the meaning she has in this course of events (Wagner-Martin 9). Wagner-Martin argues that the “Turnbow’s participation in their church is a stable, consistent link with the

author's belief that saving the earth and its people, its animals, its living organisms is a spiritual act" (9). In *Flight Behavior*, the church seems to be the center of community, where people meet, connect and a large part of the town's social communication and interaction takes place. In terms of narration, it can be observed that Kingsolver includes numerous biblical phrases and references in the novel (Wagner-Martin 10, 12).

The town's pastor, Bobby Ogle, is one of the important characters of the town community. Dellarobia and her mother-in-law Hester approach him to ask for help when Hester's husband Bear does not want to change his plans of logging the woods where the Monarchs hibernate. The church plays a positive role in this argument because Pastor Ogle, who eventually turns out to be Hester's secret son, convinces Bear not to cut down the trees. The pastor is presented as a very down-to-earth and modest person and he actively contributes to finding a solution for the Turnbrows' argument.

The role of the media and its connection to science is another one of the many issues that are addressed in *Flight Behavior*. The media are represented by a reporter who comes to Dellarobia's house twice to conduct interviews, at first with Dellarobia and later with Ovid Byron. The reporter, Tina Ultner, is portrayed as a rather dislikeable person because. While appearing rather nice in the beginning, she neglected the truth and twisted Dellarobia's answers to make the story more interesting for the audience. When Tina comes back to conduct the interview with Ovid, it turns out that he is very unhappy with the way the media describe the events:

"Dr. Byron, you've studied the monarch butterfly for over twenty years, and you say you have never seen anything like this. It seems everyone has a different idea about what's going on here, but certainly we can agree that these butterflies are a beautiful sight". "I don't agree," he said. "I am very distressed." [...] "This is evidence of a disordered system," he said at last. "Obviously we're looking at damage. At the normal roosting sites in Mexico, in the spring range, all over the migratory pathways. To say the takeaway lesson here is beauty, my goodness." (Kingsolver, *Flight Behavior* 503)

As can be observed in this quote, the journalist is described as rather thoughtless, unprepared and unaware of the meaning of the change in the Monarchs' flight behavior. She seems not to be interested in the real meaning of the butterflies but simply in providing a thrilling story for the audience. Once

again, this rather negative portrayal of the journalists' work serves as rather direct criticism of the media and their seemingly twisted perspective.

To conclude, it can be said that Kingsolver addresses in *Flight Behavior* different environmental concerns that are closely linked to climate change and that she tries to examine these concerns from different perspectives.

5.4. Common features and differences

From the angle of ecocriticism, Kingsolver's novels share numerous common features but there are also significant differences to be found. Barbara Kingsolver's great interest in the environment and mankind's relation is a theme permeating all of the selected novels. Although they deal with different environmental concerns, all of the novels share environmental concerns as their common theme, specifically those very problems caused by human beings. To be more specific, they address environmental problems that are caused by people, for example, the pollution of a river, the excessive use of pesticides or global warming. Kingsolver tries to address these issues from different perspectives in order to provide the readers with comprehensive information about the environmental concerns.

Referring to Kingsolver's book *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life*, in which she describes her family's experience of living off their own produce as well as locally produced food, Daniel J. Philippon claims that "[o]f all these writers, Kingsolver seems the most self-aware of her own predicament, though that does not prevent her from sounding preachy at times" (404). The predicament mentioned here is to find the balance between writing about one's own life and providing information about food and the environment to the readers on the one hand, but also creating a piece of writing that is enjoyable to read on the other hand.

As illustrated already, the relationship between people and animals is a recurrent theme in Barbara Kingsolver's novels. In *Animal Dreams*, the story is mostly not directly about animals but it appears that they have a rather symbolic role, for example the coyote and the peacock. In *Prodigal Summer*, in contrast, animals and particularly the way people handle and treat animals is addressed very openly. The novel discusses farming and breeding habits as well as people's attitudes towards local wildlife. In *Flight Behavior*, animals play a

special role, because here they are used as a symbol to illustrate the precarious effects of global warming. The novel also addresses the attitude of the local people towards the Monarchs as the discussion unfolds as to whether or not to charge visitors for seeing the Monarchs. But in general the novel does not focus on the relationship between humans and animals.

Kingsolver's novels not only address environmental but also, to a certain extent, social and political problems. Governmental actions are addressed as well as the failure to act when needed and it can be said that "[a]ll of Kingsolver's books deal in one way or another with her own government's blind determination to run roughshod over the needs and political motivations of other people" (qtd. in Wagner-Martin 61). This leads to another one of the distinctive features, which all of the selected novels have in common. Generally, it can be said that Kingsolver includes numerous topics and concerns in her novels and connects them through the characters in the stories. It might be said that in *Animal Dreams*, connecting the many plot strands and topics have caused the novel to "lack[s] the smooth closing energy readers had come to expect from a Kingsolver work" (Wagner-Martin 62). However, the message that the novel conveys is clear and compelling. *Prodigal Summer* is again a novel, in which numerous different topics are addressed and discussed in the course of the story. In contrast to *Animal Dreams* and *Prodigal Summer*, the most recent novel *Flight Behavior* seems to be more focused on one specific environmental problem, which is global warming and its consequences. Other topics are also included in the novel, such as poverty of small-scale farmers, religion or the relation between scientists and common people, but the focus of the novel seems to be set on global climate change.

Another similarity between two of the novels is the role of the media, which is discussed in *Animal Dreams* as well as in *Flight Behavior*. However, the tone of the description of the media differs strongly in these novels. Whereas in *Animal Dreams*, the media is presented as a helpful tool so convey the protesters' message to a large audience and eventually helps them to shut down the mine, in *Flight Behavior*, the media is represented by a journalist who is uninformed, manipulative and not interested in scientific knowledge at all.

One of the obvious dissimilarities between the novels is that they address different ecological problems. While the main concern in *Animal Dreams* is the pollution of the river, *Prodigal Summer* deals with farming habits,

the use of pesticides and people's attitude towards animal wildlife. In contrast to the other novels, *Flight Behavior* focuses almost exclusively on climate change due to global warming. This variety of themes clearly shows that Kingsolver seeks to address a broad range of environmental concerns in her novels. Although there are certain themes that seem to occur frequently, the main environmental concerns addressed in the selected novels differ strongly.

Also, the ecological concerns that Kingsolver deals with in the novels seem to be addressed more directly and play a more important role in her later novels, *Prodigal Summer* and *Flight Behavior*. In *Animal Dreams*, the pollution of the river in Grace is an important part of the novel; however, the main focus of the novel lies on Codi's personal and emotional development. In *Prodigal Summer*, the environment already plays a crucial role, for example for Garnett, who is interested in reintroducing the extinct chestnut tree, or for Deanna, whose job it is to observe the Appalachian mountains. The main characters and their lives are interwoven in their environment. Ecological concerns are most directly addressed in *Flight Behavior*, in which the consequences of global warming stand in the center of the novel and the story evolves around it. The unusual flight behavior of the Monarch Butterflies stands in the center of the novel and is described as a direct consequence of global warming by one of the main characters, who is presented as highly credible because he is a scientist who does his research mostly about these animals. This leads to a final common feature of Kingsolver's novels.

In all of the selected novels, Kingsolver equips one or more characters with an academic background to provide information about, for example, certain parts of the environment to the readers. The academic education of these characters makes their explanations seem highly plausible and trustworthy. On the one hand, this seems to be done by Kingsolver in order to guide the readers' beliefs towards a certain direction and to make it seem reasonable to believe some of the characters in the novels while not to believe others. On the other hand, one might argue that Kingsolver simply uses these educated characters to be able to include her own academic education into the novels.

6. Conclusion

Barbara Kingsolver is one of the many contemporary authors who have been contributing substantially to the field of Southern literature. She does so by writing about Southern regions, traditions and local ecological problems in her novels and, hence, provides her readers with an insight into fascinating regions. Her key interest seems to be to encourage her readers to critically think about current environmental challenges and to develop their own opinions. She clearly wishes her readers to be critical about the environment and about how people interact with it. Kingsolver tries to find a balance between novels that are enjoyable to read but also critical and challenging at the same time.

While Kingsolver has been criticized for focusing too strongly on the didactic message her novels, she fully acknowledges that her writings are also designed to convey clear messages to the readers. Kingsolver does not conceal her intent to raise readers' awareness about environmental issues so that they become responsible actors who are sensitive to their surroundings. This attitude of hers is possibly best expressed in the final sentence in *Prodigal Summer*, "Every choice is a world made new for the chosen" (Kingsolver 447). In her novels, she shows that change can happen and compromises can be made; for example when Garnett Walker and Nannie Rawley overcome their differences at the end of *Prodigal Summer*. It might be argued that Kingsolver guides her readers towards a certain opinion by leading their attention to a specific angle of a problem or by having an opinion represented by main character or more sympathetic characters. She shows that compromises can be made and that individuals with different opinions can come to mutual understanding, as Garnett Walker and Nannie Rawley do in *Prodigal Summer*. In the end, the individual reader is in a position to choose whether to involve in the thinking process Kingsolver wants to evoke or to ignore the thought-provoking impulses in Kingsolver's novels and enjoy them simply because of their engaging characters and plot lines.

Kingsolver's novels have proven to be very suitable for an analysis from the angle of ecocriticism because they address current environmental concerns very openly. Kingsolver incorporates issues into her novels that appear to be important to her on a personal level and that she clearly draws from personal experiences. An explicit example would be the protest against the mine in her

earliest novel, *Animal Dreams*. Kingsolver's personal academic education in biology and the research areas she was interested in are also integrated into her novels, for example the theory of keystone predators in *Prodigal Summer*.

Animal Dreams, *Prodigal Summer* and *Flight Behavior* share a number of similar features but also show numerous differences, which were discussed extensively in the course of this thesis. In two of the three novels, *Prodigal Summer* and *Flight Behavior*, she includes main characters which have an academic background and therefore have a lot of information about certain aspects of the environment. In *Animal Dreams*, the main character Codi has not studied biology at a university but still has sufficient knowledge to teach biology at a local high school. This choice of characters enables Kingsolver to provide seemingly scientific information to the readers because the characters appear highly credible and trustworthy. For example, Deanna's anger about the killing of coyotes is highly plausible because she is said to have written her thesis about them and, hence, is supposed to know more about this issue than the local farmers. This does not necessarily mean that the concerns and problems raised are addressed in a biased way. Instead, it appears that Kingsolver's own opinion and beliefs are most likely reflected in the opinions and beliefs of the main characters. As a consequence, they come across as more convincing than the other characters in the novels.

Kingsolver's writing appears to have evolved further over the course of time, a fact which may be documented by the various differences that stand out between the selected novels. One such difference concerns the narrative situations in the novels. While in the first novel, *Animal Dreams*, the main protagonist is also the first-person narrator; in the other novels she uses figural narrative situations with one or more focalizers. On the other hand, the choice of narrative situation seems to be, to a certain degree, adapted to the message Kingsolver wants to convey in her novels. Alternating focalizers enable Kingsolver to address concerns from different point of views and, as a consequence, provide the readers with different perspectives of the topics discussed, in particular in *Prodigal Summer*. Also, the tone in her latest novel, *Flight Behavior*, appears to be more pessimistic than in her earlier novels. Indications of this pessimistic tone are, for example, the uncertain survival of the main character Dellarobia at the end of the novel or the numerous hints by scientist Ovid Byron about the inescapable consequences of climate change.

Another distinctive feature is the narrative situation in *Flight Behavior*. It differs from the narrative situations in the other selected novels and seems to be chosen in order to let the readers experience Dellarobia's personal development and to make her change most visible and comprehensible to the readers. Her thoughts and feelings are presented directly to the reader. Dellarobia undergoes a significant development in the course of the novel and transforms from a housewife and mother to a person who is strongly interested in the environment and also in ecological sciences. Dellarobia develops from a person who has not spent much thought on the consequences of global warming, into someone who is very eager to learn about environmental concerns and their consequences for animals as well as people. Although she intends to get divorced at the end of the novel, her development is generally presented as an improvement for her life because she follows her personal interests. It might also be regarded as an example of how someone's life can change in a positive way by becoming more aware of one's environment and showing genuine interest in it.

During the process of writing this thesis, a number of further possible research topics came up. Southern literature is a field of literature that still offers numerous research venues and opportunities for scholars. For example, exploring the concept of Southern identity in literature composed by contemporary women writers would be a highly worthwhile subject for such research. Language in Kingsolver's novels would be another possible object for future research because it has only been discussed very briefly in this thesis. The use of biblical vocabulary in *Flight Behavior* would be an additional example of a possible aspect for closer examination.

To conclude, it can be said that Kingsolver's novels have proven to be interesting subjects for analysis for numerous scholars and they still show potential for further research.

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8. Appendix

8.1. Abstract

Literature written in the US South has been a prospering field of literature for decades and the academic discussion of this specific genre has also been vivid. Specifications and characteristics of Southern literature are varied, which shows how manifold this genre is. Barbara Kingsolver can be regarded as a prominent contemporary representative of Southern women writing and her novels lend themselves for analyses. The aim of this thesis was to analyze several aspects of three selected novels by Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*, *Prodigal Summer* and *Flight Behavior*. The focus was set on the setting of the novels, the narrative perspectives as well as an analysis from the angle of ecocriticism. Kingsolver includes various environmental, political and social concerns in her novels and addresses them from different perspectives by using alternating narrative perspectives. The main focus of the author lies in encouraging the readers to think critically about the environment and the interdependence between humans and nature, which results in the novels appearing as too didactic in their approach at times.

8.2. Zusammenfassung

Literatur des amerikanischen Südens entwickelte sich im Lauf der letzten Jahrzehnte zu einem florierenden Bereich innerhalb der amerikanischen Literatur, was sich auch in der breiten und angeregten Auseinandersetzung von Literaturwissenschaftlerinnen und Literaturwissenschaftlern zeigt. Die Charakteristika der Literatur des amerikanischen Südens sind vielfältig und zeigen, wie umfangreich dieses literarische Feld ist. Barbara Kingsolver ist eine prominente Vertreterin zeitgenössischer Literatur des Südens der USA und ihre Romane bieten vielfältige Möglichkeiten der Analyse. Im Rahmen dieser Diplomarbeit wurden drei Romane von Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*, *Prodigal Summer* und *Flight Behavior*, ausgewählt und verschiedene Aspekte davon untersucht. Der Fokus lag dabei auf den lokalen Verortungen der Romane, den Erzählperspektiven sowie einer Analyse aus der Perspektive von *ecocriticism*. In ihren Romanen spricht Kingsolver eine Vielzahl von ökologischen, politischen und sozialen Themen an und erörtert diese aus verschiedenen Perspektiven, wofür sie häufig wechselnde Erzählperspektiven verwendet. Die Autorin will Leserinnen und Leser zum kritischen Denken über ökologische Fragestellungen anregen und vermittelt dies stark in ihren Romanen, wodurch diese allerdings mitunter lehrhaft erscheinen.