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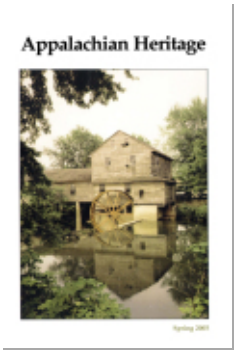
The Tangled Roots of Feminism, Environmentalism, and Appalachian Literature by Elizabeth S. D. Engelhardt (review)



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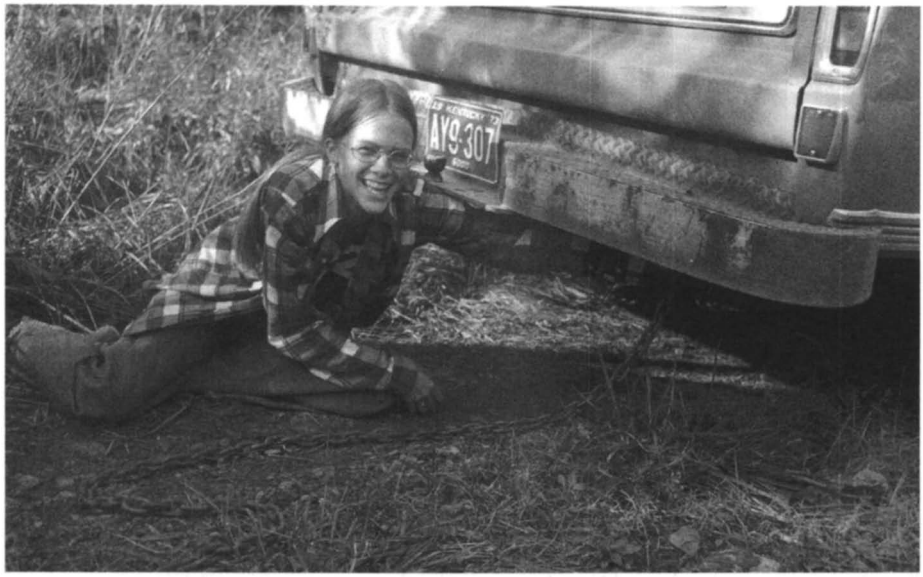
own defense attorney, Gary Lackey, who was alleged to have known Darlene in the past and to have partied with her in bars at night while the trial was being conducted. Lackey had refused to put Glenn on the stand, saying that he might get his facts confused and ruin his credibility.

Billy Summerford, Glenn's second son, sums it up in his monologue, "... [W]e've got with Daddy and talked to Daddy, and he's told us his side of the story. And his side seems as real as what I think her side would be... But as far as knowing what happened between them two, it's just him and her and the Lord."

—Jeanne McDonald



Elizabeth S. D. Engelhardt. *The Tangled Roots of Feminism, Environmentalism, and Appalachian Literature.* Athens: Ohio UP, 2003. 207 pages. Paperback $24.95.

Many have tried, in words and in images, to grasp an elusive truth about Appalachia, fumbling for what it means to be a human resident of a landscape that continues to escape accurate definition. However, in Elizabeth S. D. Engelhardt one senses an author who can traverse both the complicated literary and the physical terrain of Appalachia with equal grace. In her recent book, *The Tangled Roots of Feminism, Environmentalism, and Appalachian Literature,* Engelhardt introduces her readers to a phenomenon that has at times been oversimplified, underestimated, and thoroughly misunderstood: the ecological

feminism of Appalachian women. Engelhardt contemplates her subject through the lens of several early-twentieth-century female authors whose writings helped to record and to publicize a tradition that lives on through mountain women to this day.

A lifelong resident of Appalachia (and currently a professor of Appalachian literature at West Virginia University), Engelhardt shares just enough of her own story to assure her readers that they are in capable, knowledgeable hands. It is in fact through snippets of her experience that we begin to see the complexity of the landscapes she studies; Engelhardt makes clear her distrust of literature portraying Appalachia as a hierarchical, predominantly white, male-dominated landscape. Growing up within diverse communities of mountain peoples, Engelhardt witnessed from an early age the environmental activism of local women. Her search for a literary counterpart for this phenomenon has unearthed an equally diverse group of authors whose subjects (both human and nonhuman) have complex relationships with the natural world.

Prior to introducing the authors in question, Engelhardt devotes her first chapter to the time period during which they wrote. In doing so, she traverses the disciplinary boundary between literature and history (a line crossed more often than those unfamiliar with the fields may recognize). This valuable introduction gives the reader a cultural context in which to evaluate her views, particularly her contention that women's writing in and about Appalachia during the early 1900s can be classified into four broad literary categories: that of the voyeur, that of the tourist, that of the social crusader, and that of the early ecological feminist.

As the title would suggest, the literature of the ecological feminist is the dominant topic of analysis. The four authors Engelhardt examines in detail—Mary Noailles Murfree, Effie Waller Smith, Emma Bell Miles, and Grace MacGowan Cooke—are presented as women worthy of both scholarly and popular attention; their writings may even today "offer possible solutions to ecological and feminist challenges—not only for Appalachia but for the rest of the United States as well" (171). While it could be a stretch to say this book will appeal to a lay audience (Engelhardt often lapses into the prose of an academic), the allure of Appalachia has always been powerful; the glimpses offered into the lives and literatures of several fascinating Appalachian authors may well appeal to readers of diverse backgrounds and interests.

—Amanda Hayes