



# **The Tangled Roots of Feminism, Environmentalism, and Appalachian Literature (Ethnicity & Gender In Appalach)**

*Elizabeth S.D. Engelhardt*

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Contemporaries were shocked when author Mary Noailles Murfree revealed she was a woman, but modern readers may be more surprised by her cogent discussion of community responses to unwanted development. Effie Waller Smith, an African American woman writing of her love for the Appalachian mountains, wove discussions of women's rights, racial tension, and cultural difference into her Appalachian poetry. Grace MacGowan Cooke participated in avant-garde writers' colonies with the era's literary lights and applied their progressive ideals to her fiction about the Appalachia of her youth. Emma Bell Miles, witness to poverty, industrialization, and violence against women, wrote poignant and insightful critiques of her Appalachian home.

In *The Tangled Roots of Feminism, Environmentalism, and Appalachian Literature* Elizabeth Engelhardt finds in all four women's writings the origins of what we recognize today as ecological feminism—a wide-reaching philosophy that values the connections between humans and nonhumans and works for social and environmental justice.

People and the land in Appalachia were also the subject of women authors with radically different approaches to mountains and their residents. Authors with progressive ideas about women's rights did not always respect the Appalachian places they were writing about or apply their ideas to all of the women in those places—but they did create hundreds of short stories, novels, letters, diaries, photographs, sketches, and poems about the mountains.

While *The Tangled Roots of Feminism, Environmentalism, and Appalachian Literature* ascribes much that is noble to the beginnings of the ecological feminism movement as it developed in Appalachia, it is also unyielding in its assessment of the literatures of the voyeur, tourist, and social crusader who supported status quo systems of oppression in Appalachia.

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