

THE ASSERTION OF BODY FOR A SENSE OF PLACE IN BARBARA KINGSOLVER'S *ANIMAL DREAMS**

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ABSTRACT

Mainly integrating the theories of Edward S. Casey, the phenomenologist, and Karan Barad, the feminist, this essay argues that the assertion of body is significantly helpful for Codi, the protagonist in Barbara Kingsolver's *Animal Dreams*, in acquiring a sense of place. Through an understanding of her father's interpretation of the body, a dynamic interaction between the body and the memory, Codi can eventually find herself a part of the community instead of feeling displaced in her own hometown.

KEYWORDS

Animal Dreams; Barbara Kingsolver; ecofiction; southern literature; body; memory

Animal Dreams (1990), by the southern writer Barbara Kingsolver, winner of the 1991 Edward Abbey Award for Ecofiction, relates the homecoming experience of Codi, who, after years of uprooted life, comes back to the small town of Grace, where she spent her childhood and her early girlhood. Frustrated with her lack of a sense of belonging, Codi longs for reinhabitation so that she can feel at home with her “awkward” height and auburn hair. Eventually, by engaging herself in the activities of the community, Codi succeeds in becoming an insider who knows where her roots are.

The novel has received much critical attention in the West. One of the critical foci is how the protagonist Codi gains a sense of place. Rinda West regards *Animal Dreams* as “a novel of reinhabitation” underscoring “a psychological trauma with a damaged land” in pursuit of recovery.¹ Her ecopsychological approach to the novel is insightful in that one's trauma is an indissoluble result of displacement, and that reinhabitation is a desirable means for the disoriented to walk out of the shadows. Ceri Gorton, on the other hand, points out that Codi's reengagement with the people of Grace and connection with her ancestry has provided her with the “ground orientation” that “grounds her life in Grace.”² However, although these critics are concerned with trauma and memory in their analysis of how Codi wins

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1. Rinda West, *Out of the Shadow: Ecopsychology, Story, and Encounters with the Land* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 150.

2. Ceri Gorton, “The Things That Attach People’: A Critical Literary Analysis of the Fiction of Barbara Kingsolver” (PhD diss, University of Nottingham, 2009), 157.

a sense of place, they have not yet directly pointed out how the assertion of body can contribute to a sense of belonging for the protagonist. As body and place are inseparable from each other, this essay proposes an analysis of the role of body in the acquisition of a sense of place in *Animal Dreams*.

According to the phenomenologist Edward S. Casey, “[j]ust as there is no place without body—without the physical or psychical traces of body—so there is no body without place.”³ To prove that place and body interanimate each other, Casey incorporates the theory of “corporeal intentionality” of Merleau-Ponty⁴ and reveals that a corporeal subject lives in a place through perception. With intentionality, the lived body can integrate itself with its immediate environment. In turn, place has its own “‘operative intentionality’ that elicits and responds to the corporeal intentionality of the perceiving subject.”⁵ To Casey, it is the lived body that serves as “the locatory agent of lived places.”⁶ There is no place devoid of the wisdom of bodies. It is bodies that “put culture back in place,”⁷ that make possible the porosity of a place, and that interact to make empty space a home-place. It is bodies that help to constitute, sustain, and vivify places. The close association of bodies and places invokes unavoidable responsibilities on the part of humanity for the sustenance of places, for the welfare of nature, and for the health of our own bodies.

Moreover, bodies are a social site where discursive forces of gender, race, and class are inscribed differently in different places. From the perspective of Karan Barad, a representative of the emerging material feminists, we all have material-discursive bodies on which “local determinations of boundaries, properties, and meanings are differently enacted.”⁸ So, another reason to account for the intertwining relationship between bodies and places is that bodies depend on places to be given meanings, boundaries, and properties. However, to assert the body is not to passively accept those meanings, boundaries, and properties, but to carefully make choices on the way to becoming a subject. For example, the red skin of Native Americans is inscribed with the meaning of inferiority in a place dominated by Western culture. In this case, Native Americans need to resist inferiorizing meanings and realize their own subjectivity by involving themselves in the community

3. Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 104.

4. In his book *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty argues that “phenomenology is the study of essences,” and that it is also “a philosophy which puts essences back into existence.” Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), vii. Undeniably, body and place are an indispensable part of the essences that interest many scholars such as David Abram, Edward S. Casey, Tom Lynch etc.

5. Casey, *Getting*, 325.

6. Casey, *Getting*, 105.

7. Casey, *Getting*, 335.

8. Karen Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter,” in *Material Feminisms*, ed. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 138.

life of a place. By doing so, they also find one of the desirable remedies for the sense of displacement which has long been haunting them in their deterritorializational struggles. Therefore, because bodies and places are intimately related, to assert one's body is to engage with a place where one can find the power to be a subject well capable of agency.

In *Animal Dreams*, Codi's anxiety results from the discrepancies between her body and the place, which seem, to her, not to be suitable for each other. Early in her childhood, her body was defined by the discursive forces in her hometown of Grace, Arizona. In her hometown, where the majority are characterized by "pale blue eyes and black hair" and small size, Codi interprets herself, along with her tall father and sister, as an outsider with "unreasonable height," radically separated from the larger group.⁹ In early childhood, Codi and her sister are called "forty percent of a basketball team" even though they never play sports (*AD*, 46). She thinks it very humiliating that a tall girl is expected to take advantage of her height for a definitely practical purpose. She envies her friend Emelina for her petite figure, assuming that "small women were better put together somehow, more in control of their bodies" (*AD*, 29). Admittedly, a body is inscribed differently in different places. For example, Codi's height ironically turns from a disadvantage in her hometown to a seeming advantage in the dominant society. Her long legs become an object of the male gaze and men "act like you've ordered those legs out of a catalogue" (*AD*, 201). The similarity in both cases is that neither guarantees a sense of place for Codi. In the former, her failure to fit in in her hometown is interpreted as a consequence of her awkward height, and in the latter, being the object of men's sexual desire is even worse for Codi in asserting her body as a subject. In addition to her annoyance about her height, Codi is irritated by the orthopedic shoes imposed by her domineering father, who goes to great lengths to take the measurements before he orders the shoes for his two daughters. In those appalling shoes, Codi feels herself to be defined outside the majority and becomes more alienated.

To a certain degree, Codi's vexation about her bodily appearance is a reflection of the writer's own consciousness during her early experiences. In her first collection of essays, *High Tide in Tucson* (1995), Kingsolver relates how she is still haunted by the memory of those days when, in the hand-me-downs of her cousin, she is called "the Bride of Frankenstein" by her classmates.¹⁰ She still remembers how she longs for a pair of boots that can flatter her vanity for fashion. Indeed, Codi, just like her creator, also has a passion for cowboy boots. She protests against her father when she is prevented from wearing the boots which are a gift from their neighbor and

9. Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), 13. Hereafter cited in text as *AD*.

10. Barbara Kingsolver, *High Tide in Tucson: Essays from Now or Never* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 55. Hereafter cited in text as *HTT*.

now, as an adult, she wears cowboy boots, which her father Homero thinks “are damaging her arches” (*AD*, 169). Codi’s denial of her own body misleads her into a belief that a change in her physical appearance might promote compatibility between her body and place. She even says that she would submit her stylish hair to “butchery” in the local barber’s if this could admit her to “the club” (*AD*, 30).

In addition to her anxiety about her physical appearance, which she thinks is a disadvantage hindering her from fitting into her hometown community, her blood genealogy becomes the critical issue that thwarts her reconnection with place. According to David Abram, the human body is “our *own* inheritance, our *own* rootedness in an evolutionary history and a particular ancestry.”¹¹ Unluckily for Codi, she does not know where her body comes from and this uncertainty about the historical dimension causes her anguish. Virtually, Codi, along with her sister, is more than an orphan who has lost her mother and detached herself from an emotionally unavailable father. Burdened with the rupture between her body and her genealogy, Codi is also an orphan who has no claim to the heritage of ancestral genes. As Roberta Rubenstein notices, Codi’s surname, Noline, signals “no line,” referring to her “separation from generational continuity.”¹² Since her childhood, Codi has been told by her father that their family came from Illinois and the myth of the Gracela sisters in Grace has nothing to do with her ancestry. It is said that those small-sized people with pale blue eyes are the descendants of the nine Gracela sisters who came from Spain and married poor miners in the village. Codi has lived her whole life with her younger sister as “the Nothing Tribe,” uprooted genetically from her ancestors (*AD*, 213). Codi’s father undertakes research into the genetic anomaly in the eyes of newborn babies. In the first few hours after birth, the babies are marble-eyed, which is a common trait in the pure Gracela offspring. Actually, eyes themselves do not have inherent meanings but when they are invested with the myth of the Gracela sisters in the novel, they become a boundary-making device. Those who are born with pale blue eyes are insiders, while Codi, because of her father’s story about her ancestors in Illinois, views herself as being outside the “gene pool” of Gracela ancestry (*AD*, 71). The fear of the disconnection between herself and her ancestors causes Codi much disturbance. She is haunted by nightmares of sudden blindness and later realizes that her nightmares reflect her fear of the loss of “the space around you, the place where you are, and without that you might not exist” (*AD*, 204). Codi’s epiphany reveals that the loss of her blood genealogy is closely

11. David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 50. Abram’s italics. Integrating the theories of ecology and phenomenology, David Abram conceives that it is necessary for human beings to renew our acquaintance with the sensuous world by means of acknowledging the intertwining of our body and the landscape.

12. Roberta Rubenstein, *Home Matters: Longing and Belonging, Nostalgia and Mourning in Women’s Fiction* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 40.

linked with her lack of a sense of place. If she wants to attain a place in which she is able to ground herself, she needs to reassert her body as part of her evolutionary history and social ancestry.

A part of the journey of Codi's asserting her body is to have a renewed understanding of her father which will further help her walk out of the shadow of the social constructions of the body. This process does not mean that she can live in a vacuum, free from the inscriptions of discursive practices. Instead, this alludes to her transformation from an object defined by the social construction of her body to a subject adaptable enough for a new beginning. To acquire a place attachment to her hometown, Codi needs to walk out of the shadow, not by changing her appearance, but by changing her attitude toward her body through her interaction with others and with nature. In this evolution, her reinterpretation of her father's interference in her footwear and interpolation of their ancestry is of paramount significance for her acquisition of ground orientation. Besides, this process of reasserting her body is made complicated by her father's own understanding of the social constructions of our appearance and the ways our bodies behave.

Codi's father, Homer Noline, used to be considered by his daughter as a domineering patriarch. He is a disembodied father who provides emotionally absent parenthood, whereas his daughter is "the Empress of the Universe" going back to "a cold castle where the king stomped around saying hugs are for puppy dogs" (*AD*, 184). Her father distances himself from his daughters, with no kisses and hugs, implementing the control of his daughters' bodies with scientific accuracy and rationality. For one thing, he has enacted a lot of rules for the control of the physical bodies of his daughters. He is said to be "obsessed with the bones of the foot" (*AD*, 85). He takes great trouble in measuring the feet of his daughters and forces them to wear ugly orthopedic shoes instead of fancy boots, never knowing how humiliated Codi feels when she wears them to school. He orders his daughters to sleep alone, to drink no Cokes, and to respect the privacy behind a closed door. He also forbids them to participate in the local ritual of paying tributes to dead relatives, dismissing it as superstition. Thus, Doc Homer is the "boss" in the family who enacts and implements the rules to control the physical bodies of his daughters (*AD*, 160). Homer also attempts to turn his daughters into disembodied minds just like himself. According to Christine Battersby, "the dominant model of the human in western modernity is disembodied: a 'spirit', 'soul', 'consciousness' or '*cogito*' whose 'personhood' is bound up with rationality and soul, rather than with flesh."¹³ In the eyes of Codi, her father stands for rationality, subjecting his daughters "in the dispassionate shadow" (*AD*, 49). He raises his daughters above common people so that they will be "untouched" by Grace (*AD*, 115). Under his guidance, Codi becomes a well-educated intellectual at the cost of her suppressed passion for nature and her

13. Christine Battersby, *The Phenomenal Woman: Feminist Metaphysics and the Patterns of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 10. Battersby's italics.

subdued contentment with the communal care of Grace. Codi is by no means happy with herself. She is victimized by the division between her rational mind and emotional body because in reality one can never transcend the body disconnected from the emotions and feelings. What such a person can do is to suppress their emotions and feelings and put on a veneer of invulnerable rationality. However hard Codi tries to be a rational woman, she has to face the fact that “we are bodies, body and soul” just as McFague has claimed.¹⁴ For example, fear is one kind of emotion and feeling that she cannot subdue. Three months before Codi can obtain her license to be a doctor, she just abandons her career because of her insurmountable fear of being unable to save a baby. Tortured by the demarcation between her mind and body, she tells her father dolefully that she is “a bag lady with an education” (*AD*, 259). Additionally, Homer’s imposition of his own disembodied “slavish self-sufficiency” on his daughters aggravates Codi’s bodily alienation from others (*AD*, 69). To Nizalowski, Homer stands for “the individualistic, patriarchal mainstream American” values.¹⁵ For many years, he denies his dependence on his neighbors, who have actually taken good care of his daughters and prepared food for him during his years of suffering from Alzheimer’s disease. Influenced by the disembodied values of her father, Codi becomes a typical individualistic woman who refuses to make any commitment in her life.

To judge from the above, Codi’s father has exerted considerable influence on his daughter by controlling her physical body and imposing on her his disembodied value of individualism or self-sufficiency. Indeed, his manipulation demonstrates his own assimilation of the social constructions of the body, as well as his resistance to them, which, once understood, facilitates Codi’s assertion of her own body.

It turns out that Doc Homer does care for his daughters, albeit in a strange and unique way. He himself is also a victim suffering from the total separation of mind and body. On the surface, he conforms to the dominant Western model of a rational and individualistic man. In reality, he suppresses all his tenderness for his daughters. His repressed love is just like his collection of shoes, which are concealed neatly in the shadow of the attic rather than exposed in a disorderly manner in the family living room. Up in the attic, Homer has preserved around thirty pairs of black orthopedic shoes “stacked from small to large, toes up, neat as eggs in a crate” (*AD*, 281). In this way, he tries to prevent his daughters from falling into the trap of pursuing the bodily ideal constructed by social discourse. He cannot understand why youngsters “devote slavish attention” to their bodily appearances when one of Codi’s students visits him with her left ear pierced with six small gold rings

14. Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 81.

15. John Nizalowski, “The Political Is Personal: Sociocultural Realities and the Writings of Barbara Kingsolver,” in *Barbara Kingsolver*, ed. Thomas Austenfeld (Pasadena, CA: Salem Press, 2010), 26.

(*AD*, 97). For the same reason, he gives his daughters comfortable orthopedic shoes, hating to see them blindly follow the social fashion of wearing heels, which will lead to their bodily suffering. In this sense, those well-preserved shoes are a token of his love for his children. By controlling their physical bodies for practical reasons of comfort, Homer tries his best to stop them from conforming to the social constructions of a desirable female body. Near the end of the novel, Codi manages to come to terms with her conflict with her father concerning this issue when she witnesses the failed communication between two traditional parents and their fashion-wise adolescent daughter who wears three watches and is busy with her makeup. She also knows that parents' fight against children's grooming behaviors is a lost cause because children have to learn their lesson themselves. Codi's "sympathy for adolescence" indicates her predicament, that bodies can never be free from social constructions (*AD*, 318). What matters is whether one is learning to abide by or protest against those discursive forces in a sensible way. This is actually the opinion of the writer herself. With the help of her mother, who instilled in her a dismissive attitude towards fashion, the then-adolescent Kingsolver was eventually able to walk out of the shadow of her past as the laughing-stock of her classmates. But she also reveals her anxiety that some day her own daughter will "beg to be a slave of conventional fashion," which can be witnessed all around her (*HTT*, 58). To Kingsolver, "the ghosts of past anguish compel us to live through our children" and a girl has to "find her own path" and be "more valued for inward individuality than outward conformity" (*HTT*, 58). If it is impossible for us to escape from the social constructions of our body, it is desirable for us to view the body as a subject capable of resistance rather than an object susceptible to the discursive practices of society through blind conformity. Such is an integral part of the assertion of body which explains why Codi suddenly feels "disgusted" with her flirting with a voyeuristic man in a coffee shop (*AD*, 201).

Besides, Homer's scientific research on the genetic anomaly of colorless irises in babies born to those pure Gracela descendants casts a new light on Codi's identity as an insider once the true meaning is invested into her body. Just as Stacy Alaimo contends, "bracketing the biological body, and thereby severing its evolutionary, historical, and ongoing interconnections with the material world, may not be ethically, politically, or theoretically desirable."¹⁶ It seems that Homer only cared about whether the body is healthy enough and how to understand it in terms of genetics during all the years of his dispassionate taking care of his daughters and professional career as a devoted doctor. Moreover, he seems to dismiss the historical dimension of the biological body. As the novel reveals, Homer attempts to make up a story concerning his ancestry because he used to be looked down upon just

16. Stacy Alaimo, "Trans-corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature," in *Material Feminisms*, ed. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 238.

because his ancestor Nolina is considered inferior to others. To protect his daughter from the stigma associated with their despised ancestor, he tries to invent another ancestry far away in Illinois. However, Codi's discovery of the reality concealed behind her father's research on the marble-eyed newborns awakens her to a new understanding of the historical dimension of her body in a scientifically sound manner. Of all the photos of newborn babies' eyes, there are the ones of Codi and her sister with "unearthly" eyes, the anomaly of pigmentation that is "genetic proof of Gracela heritage on both sides" of the parents (*AD*, 283–34). This revelation of her ancestry enables Codi to realize that her father is doing "exactly the opposite of setting himself apart," and that he is proving that "we belonged here, were as pure as anybody in Grace" (*AD*, 284). So instead of severing the biological body from the historical interconnection with the material world, Codi's father has been engaged in a reconnection of the body with his ancestry. The belated understanding of her father proves that Homer has difficulty in showing his love to his daughters because he himself is tortured by the division between mind and body. His internalized dominant ideology prevents him from touching and hugging his beloved children. While he is suffering from the total separation of his rationality and his emotions, he is also subverting the dualism between mind and body by showing his unique way of expressing his tender affection to Codi and her sister. Moreover, the discrepancy between his denial of the ancestry and his experiment also illustrates the dilemma of Homer. On the one hand, he pretends to be an outsider. On the other, he has this irresistible desire to belong to Grace, where he can feel really at home. For Codi, she delves deep into the heart of her father and finds, to her own surprise, that her father shares with her a sense of displacement and a longing to belong.

Indeed, behind Homer's interpolation of his genealogy is concealed the family mortification of being despised. Homer changes his surname from Nolina to Noline because his family is not accepted in Grace. He is one of the "legacy of trash" produced by the red-haired and hot-tempered Nolina, whereas Codi's mother came from an allegedly superior family in Grace (*AD*, 260). To avoid humiliation, Homer comes back after the war as a "mighty prodigal doctor," living "in exile" in his hometown (*AD*, 260). So if Homer has done an injustice by misleading his daughters in terms of their ancestry and causing Codi's overwhelming bodily anguish and her displacement, he intends to take revenge on the community for the wrongs committed against his family. His story reflects the other side of the myth of the Gracela sisters. While Codi embraces her ancestry, she has to realize that the history of Grace is not one of pure and harmonious integration. Instead, it is one of hierarchical domination—her Nolina progenitors are devalued as "beasts" with "no souls" (*AD*, 287). In this sense, Homer's denial of the true ancestry is a testimony to his love of his daughters: he intends to shelter them from the humiliation that he once experienced as one of the underprivileged in his hometown. So instead of the masculinist "spider" at the center of the web in control of the female bodies in the family, he moves between the center and the margin to

help deliver “the trapped life” (*AD*, 98). As a doctor, he has delivered many babies for his fellow-townpeople, which eventually wins him reverence and facilitates the reintegration of the family. As a father, Homer suppresses his tender emotions behind his mask of rationality, which, as Swartz aptly noticed, in reverse proves the fact that the “soul is an integral part of the body, of thought, and of action.”¹⁷ Rather than wearing his heart on the surface, he bleeds with his liver, which, “with the consistency of layer upon layer of wet Kleenex,” is almost beyond cure since “every attempt at repair just opens new holes that tear and bleed” (*AD*, 261).

Therefore, Codi’s renewed understanding of her father is immensely helpful for her in adopting a new identity in Grace. Rather than “an outsider not only by belief but by flesh and bone,” she comes to terms with herself as an integral part of the Gracela myth (*AD*, 291). She has learned the lesson that social constructions of the body are an indispensable part of the human world and that what is important is how to respond to those discursive forces on the body without losing the self. Though it is a wishful thought to erase the historical body as one of “the wrong breed” and to wish that everybody in Grace were “identically marked,” the interactions between her and her father help her partly to come out of the shadow of her bodily uncertainty (*AD*, 290). Before she obtains a sense of place, Codi also has to assert her body by grappling with her individual memory of loss and the cultural memory of the Gracela myth.

If the interpretation of the other side of her father is partly conducive to Codi’s assertion of her body, Codi’s own recovery of personal and cultural memory helps her considerably in struggling out of the shadow. According to Mortimer-Sandilands, in the act of remembering something, the world is “written into our brain structure” and “memory allows the body to greet the world with greater physical ease the more often we have a particular sensory experience.”¹⁸ Seemingly, memory belongs to what the mind is capable of. However, the mind is always embodied and the body is what Casey calls “the corporeal basis of remembering.”¹⁹

Animal Dreams is often considered as a book of the loss and recovery of memory, which is one of the recurrent themes that have generated “provocative conversations” in Kingsolver’s critics.²⁰ Rinda West says that Codi’s shadow results to a large extent from “an absence of memory.”²¹

17. Patti Capel Swartz, “‘Saving Grace’: Political and Environmental Issues and the Role of Connections in Barbara Kingsolver’s *Animal Dreams*,” *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 1, no. 1 (1993): 66.

18. Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands, “Landscape, Memory, and Forgetting: Thinking Through (My Mother’s) Body and Place,” in *Material Feminisms*, ed. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 273.

19. Edward S. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 184.

20. Christine Cusick, “Remembering Our Ecological Place: Environmental Engagement in Kingsolver’s Nonfiction,” in *Seeds of Change: Critical Essays on Barbara Kingsolver*, ed. Priscilla Leder (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2010), 213.

21. West, *Shadow*, 154.

Carolyn Cooke illustrates that *Animal Dreams* gives readers an insight on “how to live rightly and sweetly . . . with memory like a badly wired lamp, spitting sparks and shorting out.”²² For Sheryl Stevenson, the book becomes Codi’s “crisis autobiography” about her “numbed inability to remember and sudden overpowering flood of memory and feeling.”²³ Though these critics analyze memory as a narrative tool that is important in Codi’s healing, they fail to discern the embodiment of memory which enhances a more affirmative understanding of the self for the protagonist.

First, memory is empowering for Codi in coming to terms with the deaths of her loved ones. The inevitable encounter with death is an overwhelmingly painful experience in Codi’s life which also prevents her from obtaining a sense of place in her hometown. During her years in Grace, her life is “peculiarly bracketed by [the] death” of her mother and her child (*AD*, 50). When Codi is three years old, her mother dies half a year after the birth of Hallie. Though she has “no visual memory” of her deceased mother, Codi has a vague image in her mind about how a helicopter lands before it can take her seriously ill mother to hospital (*AD*, 49). However, people in Grace contradict her version of the story by saying that she has made it up because Codi then stays with her babysitter rather than go outside to witness the last moments of her mother, who is afraid of flying. So Codi professes:

This is my problem—I clearly remember things I haven’t seen, sometimes things that never happened. And draw a blank on the things I’ve lived through. . . . Memory is a complicated thing, a relative to truth but not its twin. (*AD*, 48)

The gap between Codi’s “fiction” about her mother’s death and the reality revealed by other people has something in common with Codi’s insecurity about her ancestry. Neither can give the protagonist a sense of generational continuity in terms of her body. While everybody else in Grace has a claim to the communal myth with their mothers as descendants of the Gracela sisters, Codi, with her sister, has to invent the story of her mother as “the Queen of Potatoes” (*AD*, 268). The absence of knowledge about where she comes from genetically accounts for the trauma that Codi has suffered from. What is worse, Codi has no clear memory of her miscarried child. When she is fifteen, she conceives a baby with Loyd after a few dates with the then promiscuous Native American boy. After the miscarriage, Codi also detaches herself from her past. To her, the first fifteen years in her life are erased except for her unsettling experiences of being taken care of by her dispassionate father. She is visited in a nightmare by the ghost of her seventeen-year-old girl child who is too heavy for her to carry. For Codi, Grace is “a boneyard” that conjures up “the familiar, blunt pressure of old grief” (*AD*, 50). If Codi was a coward when

22. Carolyn Cooke, “Arizona Dreaming,” review of *Animal Dreams*, by Barbara Kingsolver, *Nation*, November 26, 1990: 654.

23. Sheryl Stevenson, “Trauma and Memory in *Animal Dreams*,” in *Seeds of Change: Critical Essays on Barbara Kingsolver*, ed. Priscilla Leder (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2010), 89.

she escaped from Grace in the hope of repressing her misery, she has to turn herself into a heroine now if she wants to face up to her past distress after her homecoming journey. Her interactions with other living bodies help her recover her memory and come to terms with her past.

For one thing, Codi's retrieval of the cultural memory in Grace awakens in her a sense of generational continuity, and her engagement with the local community facilitates her healing toward the assertion of her body. If Codi's father used his research on the marble-eyed newborns as scientific proof that the family is actually part of the community, Codi's interaction with the women in Grace and her father helps her recover her memory of her mother and her miscarried child, as well as the almost erased history of her family. During one of the local customs to celebrate the Day of the Dead, Codi comes across a grave marked "Homero Nolina," which is almost the same as the name of her father "Homer Noline." At this moment, Codi is overwhelmed by a wish that "I belonged to one of these living, celebrated families, lush as plants, with bones in the ground for roots" (*AD*, 165). So instead of rejecting the idea of death, as she used to do, for fear of the anguish caused by the deaths of her most beloved, her mother and her child, Codi now hopes that she is in one way or another related to the dead bodies in the graveyard, to whom she could pay tributes every year and who ensure her a sense of belonging. Later, Codi knows more about her mother through her communication with Viola, one of the respectable mothers in Grace. Through her conversation with the respectable old lady, Codi gains a visual image of her mother as a beautiful woman with "real little hands and feet," who she herself resembles (*AD*, 174). What is most important, Codi realizes that the real name of her mother is not Alice but Althea. The name Alice is said to belong to a woman who impresses people with her nobility, but Althea means "the truth": it is a name referring to an "honorary member of the Dona Althea family," who are the descendants of the Gracela sisters (*AD*, 174). This implies to Codi that her mother was not an outsider but also an insider. The more concrete image of her mother and the interconnectedness of her parents with the Gracela myth give Codi a better understanding of her body, not as an individual delivered from "nowhere" but as a body with a socially evolutionary history delivered to "now here" (*AD*, 57).

As for her miscarried child, Codi has tried to repress her anguish by forgetting the details and making it only an abstract loss. Ironically, it is her father who has Alzheimer's disease, which turns his body into a repository of the memory that has been forgotten or erased. The problem with Homer's memory is that it is a mess with no time sequence. When Codi's adolescent student Rita visits him during her pregnancy, Homer mistakes her for the still fifteen-year-old Codi by raving against her for her stupidity in getting pregnant. Still, ironically, he used to repress his rage and anxiety when he noticed the first traces of his daughter's pregnancy, "the deepened pigmentation under her eyes and across the bridge of her nose" (*AD*, 98). Though he cannot tell the past from the present, he has registered the whole process of Codi's miscarriage in which she flushes the toilet two dozen times

to erase the traces of blood, how she takes a small bundle outside with her spine hunched, and how she buries the dead child in the riverbed. As a man who suffers from a division of mind and body in the dominant society, he does not know how to integrate them in a more caring manner for his beloved daughter. Still he has his rationality to prove his tenderness toward Codi. To save the miscarried child from animals, Homer puts the heaviest stones that he can carry onto the spot where it is buried. To alleviate Codi's post-delivery symptoms, Homer gives her medication other than the aspirin Codi has asked for to relieve her pain: at this critical moment any medicine that contains aspirin will increase the bleeding. For him, the four pills are "the full measure of love he is qualified to dispense" (*AD*, 142). Thus, the abstract loss of her child becomes a concrete secret guarded by Codi's father and it is not until seventeen years later that it is revealed to the protagonist. Through her further interaction with Loyd, the Indian man with whom she conceived the child, Codi can eventually relieve the burden of her troubled memory. In her nightmare in which she carries the ghost of her daughter, she revisits the riverbed where she buried the child, with the voice of her sister reverberating in her ears: "Let her go. Let go. She'll rise" (*AD*, 301).

Therefore, by recovering the memory of her mother and her miscarried child, which is intermingled with the memory of her father and the community, Codi can come to terms with their deaths, which used to cause her inconsolable grief. Besides, if Codi has suffered from the amnesia caused by the uncertainty of her body from a social and historical dimension, she is also afflicted with what McCallum calls "ecological amnesia."²⁴

By ecological amnesia, McCallum means our forgotten "wild heritage, of where we have come from and of who we are—the human animal."²⁵ So apart from the layers of social and historical meanings inscribed on the body, there is the biological body, which cannot be ignored. The biological body does not refer to something controllable and manageable in science. Instead, it is "changing and changeable" and it is part of nature²⁶. Lynda Birke reveals that the biological body has been relegated to the periphery of feminism, which, in its overemphasis on social constructionism as opposed to biological determinism, has "perpetuated the dualism" and "played down the importance of the biological body itself."²⁷

In *Animal Dreams*, Codi's assertion of the body is related not only to her adoption of the discursive forces but also to the acknowledgement of its biological dimension. In the process of her assertion, Codi's remembrance of her former intimacy with nature is helpful for her in healing her ecological

24. Ian McCallum, "A Sense of Place—A Sense of Self," in *Hope beneath Our Feet: Restoring Our Place in the Natural World; An Anthology*, ed. Martin Keogh (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2010), 146.

25. McCallum, "Sense," 146.

26. Lynda I. A. Birke, *Feminism and the Biological Body* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 44.

27. Birke, *Feminism*, 25.

amnesia and regaining a sense of bodily embeddedness in nature. Codi's identity crisis results to a certain extent from her confusion between herself and her younger sister Hallie, and gives further rise to her befuddled memory about who she really is. The two sisters are so attached to one another that they are like "keenly mismatched Siamese twins conjoined at the back of the mind" (*AD*, 8). Codi always has the mistaken notion that it is Hallie who is more engaged than she is with nature. The rupture between her memory and the reality can be seen in several cases. The first one is the incident when the two sisters are stranded in an arroyo. Codi remembers that it was Hallie who insisted on saving the abandoned coyote pups but Hallie tells her in a letter that actually it was Codi herself who would rather save the pups at the cost of getting spanked by her father than give them up. Another incident is Codi's boycott for the sake of the well-being of animals when she was still a teenager. On the first day of her homecoming stay in Grace, Codi witnesses how her delicate friend Emelina raises an ax to kill a rooster. Emelina is very surprised that Codi can tolerate the bloody scene without any disturbance because the adolescent Codi had organized a boycott against killing chickens in her hometown. But Codi has no memory of her past self being involved in the welfare of animals. For her, it should be her sister Hallie who has such a "soft heart" that she would cry "if she stepped on a bug" (*AD*, 29).

Codi's loss of her memory regarding her former intimacy with nature indicates that she is losing her sense of bodily embeddedness in nature. She has chosen to transcend her biological body to rationality, hoping to disentangle herself from any commitment which requires the investment of emotions and feelings, except for her sister. In this sense, she chooses what Rinda West calls "anesthesia," which is one of the ways for a "trauma victim" to protect herself from worries and pains.²⁸ To put it simply, Codi chooses mind over body by means of amnesia and anesthesia. In this sense, she is similar to her father: by wrapping herself in the armor of rationality, she tries to guard herself against anything that might cause her anguish. However, the recovery of her memory about her biological body facilitates the bond between body and soul, and awakens Codi's forgotten ecological self.

First, her roused bodily desire for Loyd enables her to realize that human beings are "born like every other mammal and we live our whole lives around disguised animal thoughts" (*AD*, 118). Her sex with Loyd makes her body feel "renewed" and Codi feels like "a patch of dry ground that had been rained on" (*AD*, 130). The notion that humans are animals is not unfamiliar in Kingsolver's non-fiction writing. For example, in *High Tide in Tucson* the writer bemoans the fact that "the most shameful tradition of Western civilization is our need to deny we are animals" (*HTT*, 8). She thinks that it is time for us to renew "our membership in the Animal Kingdom" rather than set ourselves "apart as landlords of the Garden of Eden" (*HTT*, 8). In this regard, the title of the novel *Animal Dreams* is invested with rich meanings. Just

28. West, *Shadow*, 150.

as Loyd puts it, human beings are similar to animals in that they “dream about what they do when they’re awake” (AD, 133). It implies that people cannot take flight away from their embodied experiences or what Loyd calls “our ordinary lives” (AD, 133). For example, Codi’s nightmare about the ghost of her miscarried child reflects her troubled life. However hard Codi wants to dispel the negative influences that act on her by moving through space, she cannot walk out of the shadow until she can integrate her body and mind.

If Codi’s acknowledgement of animality in human beings indicates the possibility of human beings accepting “desire and yawning and fear and the will to live” as “animal instinct,” her remembrance of her childhood experiences helps her reassert her interconnectedness with nature (AD, 319). Take the incident of the coyote pups, for example; it is not until later, when Codi talks with her boyfriend about the death of animals, that she is suddenly overwhelmed by the memory of her desperate efforts to rescue the pups:

My ears filled with the roar of the flooded river and my nose with the strong stench of mud. I gripped the armrest of Loyd’s truck to keep the memory from drowning my senses. I heard my own high voice commanding Hallie to stay with me. And then, later, asking Doc Homer, “Will they go to heaven?” (AD, 191)

Codi’s remembrance helps her realize that she used to live in an intimate relationship with nature. Instead of Hallie taking the lead in appealing for the welfare of animals, it is she herself that calls on people to protest against the slaughter of chickens. In this sense, as F. Marina Schaufler points out, her remembrance reawakens in her “a long dormant sense of belonging to the natural whole, an intimate connection experienced before our identities calcified in adulthood.”²⁹ Codi’s renewed understanding of her biological body in terms of her embeddedness in nature is of paramount significance for her in engaging herself in the fight for her hometown against the degradation of the environment caused by industrial capitalism.

Codi’s memories about her mother and her daughter and her former intimacy with nature prove that “the human body with its various predilections is . . . our *own* inheritance, our *own* rootedness in an evolutionary history and a particular ancestry.”³⁰ For Codi, memory is empowering rather than debilitating. Through remembrance, she is not weighed down by her past traumatic experiences. Meanwhile, she also confirms the social dimension of her body, understanding her generational continuity with her ancestry. Her assertion of her body indicates that human beings are, in Peterson’s words, “natural and ecological, as well as social, animals, partially constituted by historical and social relations and conditions.”³¹

29. F. Marina Schaufler, *Turning to Earth: Stories of Ecological Conversion* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 44.

30. Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 50. Abram’s italics.

31. Anna L. Peterson, *Being Human: Ethics, Environment, and Our Place in the World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 149.

As regards the important role of memory in Codi's assertion of her body, it might be argued that the rejuvenation of Codi's memory implies her nostalgic yearning to go back to the past, when the Gracela sisters created an Eden-like place where humanity and nature co-existed harmoniously. And this argument seems verified in the conclusion, in which the caring matriarchal community seems to be recreated: just as in the past she is taken care of by the fifty mothers in Grace who she has forgotten; Codi is now returning to the embrace of her hometown, being loved by the community. Besides, nature comes back to life after many years of despoliation, and humanity and nature live in a harmonious relationship. So does the denouement imply that to recreate the past through nostalgia is a desirable way for a body to be placed in the home of "(Mother) Earth?"³² To answer the question, it is necessary to distinguish remembrance from nostalgia. According to Iris Young, the differences are as follows:

Where nostalgia can be constructed as a longing flight from the ambiguities and disappointments of everyday life, remembrance faces the open negativity of the future by knitting a steady confidence in who one is from the pains and joys of the past retained in the things among which one dwells. Nostalgic longing is always for an elsewhere. Remembrance is the affirmation of what brought us here.³³

For Codi, her recovery of her memory does not mean that she wants to retrieve the past of a matriarchal community, as Niazlowski has hinted by saying that "the matriarchal structure of the Hispanic community opens her to a family structure different from the individualistic, patriarchal mainstream American one."³⁴ Just as has been indicated, Grace was by no means a heaven of harmony in the past: it used to be a place of hierarchical domination because the family of Codi's father was looked down upon by others. Unfortunately, this dark side of the Gracela myth is not further elaborated and instead gives way to how the community tries to redress the wrongs that were done by taking care of the once-despised family.

In this sense, Codi's remembrance does not mean that she wants to go back to the past, since the past is not as desirable as imagined. Instead, her memory is guiding her toward the future. Now she can walk out of the shadow of her past as a motherless child and a childless mother. Just as her revelation indicates, her body is "a skeleton with flesh and clothes and thoughts" (*AD*, 302). Eventually, Codi can reassert her body as a social and historical phenomenon encoded in her apparel and her thoughts with a sense of generational continuity, and as a biological flesh-and-blood body embedded in nature. By thus asserting her body embedded both in nature and culture, Codi begins to feel a sense of place.

32. Rubenstein, *Home*, 37.

33. Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: Throwing Like a Girl, and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 143.

34. Niazlowski, "Political," 26.

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