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DIPLOMARBEIT

ALASKAN LITERATURE

Female Voices on the Last Frontier

Verfasserin

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angestrebter akademischer Grad

Magistra der Philosophie (Mag.phil.)

Wien, September 2009

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt:

A 343

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt:

Anglistik und Amerikanistik

Betreuerin ODER Betreuer:

Univ.-Doz. Mag^a. D^{rn}. Astrid M. Fellner

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1 Introduction

The state of Alaska comprises about 580.000 square miles and is inhabited by approximately 680.000 people.¹ The first associations that most people have when it comes to Alaska are nature and landscape. And indeed, nature and landscape are also extremely significant in Alaskan literature. The vast majority of Alaskan literature is non-fiction, predominately nature writing but also historical or cultural-anthropological studies of natives, and wilderness adventure stories or memoirs of wilderness types. In bookstores most of Alaska's fiction can be found under the genre of detective and mystery but literary fiction and poetry are also represented in Alaskan literature. Whether poetry, fiction or non-fiction, nature, landscape and wilderness are almost always part of the story.

When I noticed that almost every genre of Alaskan literature includes in one way or another nature and landscape, I was wondering in how far nature and landscape influence Alaskan identity. On a theoretical level, the question has arisen, whether nature and landscape contribute to an *Alaskaness*, if indeed such a term exists. The argument underlying this work is that Alaskan identity is most dominantly shaped by nature and landscape. Therefore, the aim of this study is to work out a definition of Alaskan identity and of *Alaskaness* by analysing two contemporary pieces of non-fiction Alaskan literature; Carolyn Servid's *Of Landscape and Longing: Finding a Home at the Water's Edge* (2000) and Marybeth Holleman's *The Heart of the Sound: An Alaskan Paradise Found and Nearly Lost* (2004). Whereas the literary landscape of Alaska seems to be overloaded with stories by visitors, these authors provide an insight into life and development in Alaska from a very personal perspective. The

¹ Cf. numbers taken from
<http://www.commerce.state.ak.us/oed/student_info/learn/aboutgeography.htm>

books tell stories about Alaska's nature and landscape, the influence of the spatial phenomena of Alaska on the characters and their eventual development of personal identity. Both books belong to the genre of nature writing, a genre that I have chosen because it generally deals with the relationship between humans and nature.

In order to be able to define Alaskan identity by analysing the two contemporary books, I will use certain concepts that are part of what is called cultural geography. Broadly speaking, cultural geography deals with the relationship between humans and the physical environment, noticeably a parallel to nature writing. Thus, it seems obvious that concepts of cultural geography could serve very well for my purpose to analyse nature writing in order to arrive at a definition of Alaskan identity. The theoretical concepts applied to the texts are space and place, nature being a subcategory of these.

The study of cultural geography includes not only how space and place influence people but also how people create places. This influence shapes individuals as well as societies, their understanding of the world, and their personal and collective identity. Individuals and cultures are investigated in relation to specific areas, may that be a city, a region, a state, etc.

Identity, in turn, refers to the character or personality of an individual. An individual identity is in fact an accumulation of several different influences. To be precise, outside influences shape what we consider something highly personal. One way of investigating the construction of identity is in its relation to place. People identify with places because they attach significant meaning to them. This meaning evolves from memories, conceptions, interpretations, ideas and feelings. One of the most important aspects of identity based on place is a sense of belonging. Human beings desire to be rooted in a place. This sense of belonging is closely connected to sense of place, referring to subjective feelings for a particular place.

Consequently, this thesis will be structured as follows: first of all, an overview of Alaska's geography and history will be given. The third chapter will deal with the genre of nature writing in general and Alaska nature writing in particular. In chapter four, cultural geography and its underlying concepts will be introduced since these concepts will be used as theoretic framework for analysing my primary texts. The fifth part will analyse the two texts with the aim of defining the concept of Alaskan identity. In the final conclusion I will summarize the results of my study and attempt to define the characteristics of Alaskan identity and *Alaskaness*.

2 Alaska

Alaska is the 49th and largest state of the United States of America. Often referred to as the Last Frontier, Alaska is situated on the northwest extremity of the North American continent, surrounded by the Yukon Territory and British Columbia to the east, the Gulf of Alaska and the Pacific Ocean to the south, the Bering Sea, Bering Strait and Chukchi Sea to the west and the Beaufort Sea and the Arctic Ocean to the north. Among Hawaii, Alaska is the second state not contiguous to the other states, which Alaskans call the Lower 48s. The massive landmass is enclosed within a coastline that exceeds the coastline of all other states of the United States combined.

The name “Alaska” derived from the Aleut word meaning “great land” or “that which the sea breaks against”. Allegedly, the word also stood for “mainland” and was used by the native residents of the Alaska Peninsula. Today’s name came from the original word Alakshak or Alayeksa, developed into Alaksa, Alashka, Aliaska and eventually became Alaska. Today Alaska applies to the entire state as well as the Peninsula. The word “Alyeska” only refers to a ski resort in Girdwood.

Besides being called the Last Frontier, Alaska is also nicknamed Land of the Midnight Sun, which indicates that because Alaska is located that far north, the sun never completely sets during a certain period of summer time and the sun can be observed even at midnight. Alaska’s state motto “North to the Future” was proposed in 1967 during the Alaska Purchase Centennial and represents Alaska as land of promise.²

² Cf. information given on <<http://fairbanks-alaska.com/alaska-history.htm>>.

2.1 Geography

2.1.1 Facts

Compared to the 48 other United States, Alaska is by far the largest one in land area.³ The entire landmass comprises 586.412 square miles, which constitutes about 17 percent of the total area of the United States, consists of about 66 percent land area and 14 percent inland water area, and is surrounded by approximately 6.640 miles of rugged coastline. Alaska is sparsely inhabited and has a population of about 683.478 (2007 estimate) people. Nearly half of the residents live in Anchorage, Alaska's biggest city. The capital Juneau is situated in the southeast and is only third of Alaska's ten largest communities.

Alaska features 17 out of the 20 highest peaks of the United States and Alaska's Mount McKinley, 20.320 feet above sea level, is North America's highest peak. Alaska offers more than 3.000 rivers and over 3 million lakes. The Yukon river, the third longest river of the United States, is Alaska's major river and runs from the Canadian border in the east to the Bering Sea in the west of Alaska. Counting approximately 100.000 glaciers, which cover about 5 percent of the state, Alaska has more glaciers and ice fields than any other part of the populated world. Furthermore, Alaska has roughly 70 volcanoes, several active even in recent times.

2.1.2 Regions

Alaska can be divided into 5 different regions. The *Far North* is surrounded by the Arctic Ocean and the Bering Strait. It features Brooks Range just

³ Cf. <http://www.commerce.state.ak.us/oed/student_info/learn/aboutgeography.htm>, <http://www.commerce.state.ak.us/oed/student_info/learn/facts.htm>, <http://www.commerce.state.ak.us/oed/student_info/learn/population.htm>, <<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/02000.html>>, <<http://www.akhistorycourse.org/>>, providing information, facts, figures and maps of Alaska.

above Yukon River. In the *Southwest* the Bering Sea meets the Pacific Ocean. The region includes the Aleutian Islands, Kodiak Island and Katmai National Park. The *Interior* is the area around the Yukon River with its major city Fairbanks and partly Denali National Park. *Southcentral* also covers Denali National Park, Anchorage as well as the areas around Kenai Peninsula and Prince William Sound. The fifth region runs along the *Southeastern* coast bordered by the Pacific Ocean. Alaska's capital Juneau and various national parks are important features of this region.

The region of the *Far North* can be characterized as home of the Northern Lights⁴ and the Midnight Sun. The area between the Yukon River and the Arctic Ocean includes Brooks Range, the Arctic National Park, Noatak National Preserve and Kobuk Valley National Park. The main towns are Barrow, Alaska's northern most point, and Nome. The territory offers a broad range of wildflowers and wildlife, especially migrating birds, marine mammals and wild caribou herds. The tundra, as the far north is called, accommodates the Inupiat Eskimos, who still keep their tradition and way of life. Besides, an advanced technology of oil production has developed over years. In 1968, oil was found at Prudhoe Bay and the Trans-Alaskan Pipeline System (TAPS) was built to convey oil from the northern oil fields down to the southern seaports for shipping it to the Lower 48s⁵.

The *Southwest* accommodates important harbours like Kodiak, Dillingham, Dutch Harbour and King Salmon. The Aleutian Islands and Katmai National Park are also part of southwest. The scenery ranges from rich grassland of the Aleutian Islands to the massive volcanic environment of

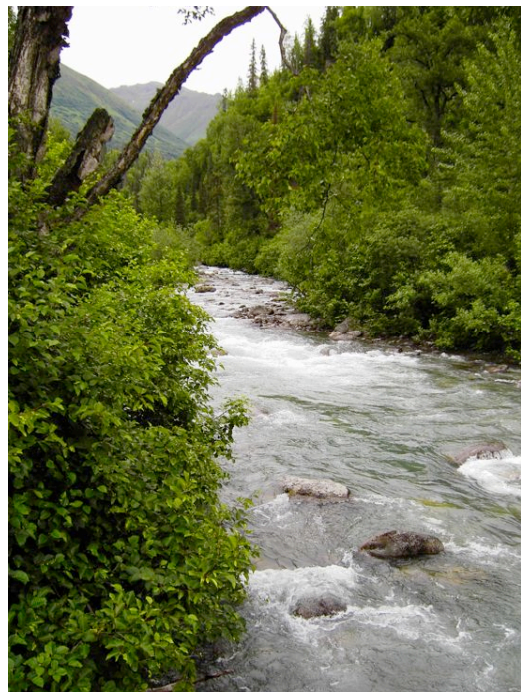
⁴ The Northern Lights are also called aurora borealis. Oxford's *Advanced Learner's Encyclopedic Dictionary* defines aurora borealis as "bands of coloured light, mainly red and green, seen in the sky at night near the North Pole and caused by electrical radiation" (Crowther, 54). The best time to get a glimpse of the Northern Lights is late at night or early in the morning and a single spectacle lasts about 10-15 seconds. The colour display can be perceived best at new moon and is most intensive from December to May. These Northern Lights can be seen anywhere above 60 degrees north latitude.

⁵ Alaskans generally call the rest of the United States the Lower 48s.

Katmai National Park. Wildlife offers brown bears feeding on salmon during summer, sea birds and fur seals, and an amazing marine life along the Aleutian chain. Yupik Eskimos and Aleut are settled in the southwest and are very well known for their brilliant basketry.

The most characteristic feature of the *Interior* is the Yukon River. Mount McKinley is situated in Denali National Park and offers the picturesque scenery of an extraordinary mountain range. The territory is especially known for its rich occurrence of different kinds of berries, its tundra and its diversity of wildlife such as caribou, moose, Dall sheep and grizzly bears. Fairbanks, Alaska's second largest city, was established during the gold rush and developed into an important centre for trade and transportation. Besides, Fairbanks hosts a military base and a University of Alaska campus. Native people of the interior mainly pursue the trade of beadwork.

The *Southcentral* is inhabited by more than 50 percent of Alaska's people. Anchorage, the largest and most modern city, is important for businesses and transportation. It is the base for all main highways, Alaska Railroad and the Marine Highway System. Kenai Peninsula, Kenai Fjords and Prince William Sound, south of Anchorage, offer a landscape full of glaciers, fjords, lakes, beaches and salmon streams. The region has farmlands and fishing towns as well as national parks and a ski resort for recreation. Further west, nine of the highest peaks of the United States can be admired at Wrangell – St. Elias National Park.



Hatcher Pass, Alaska, my picture

The coastal area around Juneau, Alaska's capital born during the gold rush, defines the *Southeastern* part of Alaska. The narrow region between Canada's border and the Pacific Ocean offers snowy mountains, glaciers, fjords, cliffs and islands covered with coniferous trees. Tongass National Forest encompasses most of southeastern Alaska with millions of acres of rainforest. This part is characterised by its wet, mild, maritime weather, which offers ideal conditions for bald eagles, sea lions, porpoise and whales. Historically seen the southeastern area combines native heritage with Russian American and Norwegian tradition, which can be perceived in the cities, such as Sitka, Petersburg, Ketchikan and Haines, along the coast.

2.2 History

In 1741 Vitus Bering, a Dane working for Tzar Peter, and Alexei Chirikof discovered the south and southeast of Alaska.⁶ Subsequently Spain, Britain and France became interested in the new land and also sent out explorers to investigate the coast of Alaska. All of them were attracted by the great fur resources, which eventually led to exploitation beyond control. Consequently, the Russian American Company, managed by Alexander Baranov, was established in 1799, enabling the Russians to exclusively trade with fur and control the fur resources. By 1824 the Russians set out again to explore Alaska's mainland. However, strong rivalry with Europeans and Americans threatening the fur trade monopoly of Russia, elaborate administration, and constant operations of forcing natives out, led to Russia's declining interest in Alaska. In 1859 Russia and the United States of America started negotiations of Russia's sale of

⁶ Cf. information on
<http://www.commerce.state.ak.us/oed/student_info/learn/chronology.htm>,
<<http://www.akhistorycourse.org/>>, and Hans-Georg Bandi's book titled *Alaska: Urgeschichte, Geschichte, Gegenwart* (1967).

Alaska. Finally, in 1867 the Treaty of Purchase was signed in Washington and the United States bought Alaska for 7.200.000 dollars, which was about two cents an acre. Secretary of State William Seward put a special effort into the purchase, which was considered ridiculous and useless, and was often referred to as "Seward's Folly". A repeatedly changing government coined the following years of Alaska. First controlled by the United States Army, it was passed on to customs officials for a couple of years and eventually ruled by the United States Navy. The institution of a local administration and a governor was later triggered by the discovery of gold in 1880. A gold rush started with the Klondike strike in Canada in 1896 and eventually lasted until 1900. Thousands of people started seeking gold, moving along the Yukon Territory into Alaska, which led to the establishment of Fairbanks in 1902.

In 1900, Juneau replaced Sitka as capital but it took the governor six years to move his office to Juneau. In the same year, in 1906, Alaska was, for the first time in history, allowed to send a territorial representative to Congress. This representative had no right to vote in Congress until 1912 when Alaska gained official territorial status and was finally allowed to have its own Territorial Legislature. The following years were coined by a decline of economy and population. The fishing industry, which only slowly developed during the gold era, finally replaced the business of gold mining.

World War II caused an enormous economic boom and flood of military personnel in Alaska. In 1942 Japan attacked Dutch Harbour with bombs and occupied the Aleutian Islands but capitulated one year later. Subsequently, Dutch Harbour became a key position in the defence system of the United States. The population of Alaska increased enormously between 1950 and 1960 due to the growing air traffic and the military influx.

In 1959 Alaska's statehood was officially proclaimed after campaigning it almost ten years. The slogan "We're in!" represented Alaska becoming the 49th state of the United States of America. In the following years until to the

present, Alaska has grown economically with timber, oil and seafood. The tourism industry has also developed but within this period Alaska had to also witness some natural disasters. In 1964, a terrible earthquake that demanded many deaths and caused widespread damage of properties and environment hit Alaska. The so-called Good Friday Earthquake destroyed most cities around Prince William Sound and affected especially the fishing industry. Only with federal aid was reconstruction possible within a short time. In 1967 Fairbanks was flooded and again homes and industries were damaged and thousands of people were expelled from their homes.

In 1989 Alaska suffered from another catastrophe, when the oil tanker Exxon Valdez grounded at Prince William Sound and lost eleven million gallons of oil. Considered the worst oil spill in the history of the United States, it severely damaged the ecosystem and threatened the survival of many commercial fishermen. Millions of dollars were invested for the restoration of the environment and the wild life at Prince William Sound.

Alaska's geography and history are foundation of almost all literary genres in Alaskan literature. Nature and landscape are particularly important and catastrophes such as the Good Friday Earthquake or the oil spill at Prince William Sound often form part of the story. Alaska's literary landscape is quite wide ranging, featuring poetry, fiction and historical or cultural-anthropological studies, but above all the majority of Alaskan literature is non-fiction, predominately nature writing.

3 Nature Writing

3.1 *The Development of Nature Writing*

Nature writing is an important and progressively growing genre of American literature and depicts and deals with the relationship between humans and nature. The natural environment and its perception by people have attracted more and more writers and readers over the last decades. Generally defined as non-fiction, nature writing relies on scientific information and facts about nature, as well as personal observation. Hence, science offers an approach to a writer's observation of the environment and provides the necessary terms to describe nature. In this partnership between science and literature, the report of feelings and personal reflection is as important as scientific information. This does not mean that nature writers can be considered scientists but they rather aim at comprehending the meaning of nature. Rebecca Raglon states in one of her articles:

Although readers expect nature writers to display traits associated with a scientific viewpoint, such as attention to detail, or a penchant for accuracy, they do not expect authors to be, strictly speaking, "objective." One of the most interesting features of nature writing, in fact, is that it is a genre that has persistently offered a view of nature which is an alternative to the scientific viewpoint. (Raglon, 8)

Therefore, a nature writer successfully combines scientific facts and personal interpretation. Philip Marchall Hicks was one of the first American academics to define American nature writing as "literary expression of scientifically accurate observations of the life history of the lower orders of nature, or of other natural objects" (Hicks, 6). This was in the early 1920s. The way of characterizing nature writing in connection with science is still used by twentieth century critics, editors and publishers. John Murray, a contemporary author and editor of various American nature writing books, thinks that sciences offer information and insight necessary for nature writing. On the other hand, David Raines Wallace, an American naturalist

and scientific writer, emphasizes the aesthetic relevance of nature writing, and Edward Hoagland, in turn, author of nature and travel writing, includes rhapsody as substantial feature of nature writing (Cf. Raglon, 2). Henry David Thoreau (1817-62), who is generally considered the spiritual father of American nature writing, delineates, like modern nature writers, the relationship of human beings to their physical environment.

Since the nineteenth century, nature writing has been an important category of American literature. Thoreau wrote his famous book *Walden* (1854) after experiencing two years of simple living at Walden Pond.

Karen E. Waldron supports the general assumption that:

[b]etween the dawn of the conversation movement, the travel literature and regionalism that accompanied westward expansion, modern environmentalism and American studies, Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* has been variously but repeatedly considered the touchstone of a body of writing defining and expressing the American experience of and with land and landscape, wilderness and nature. (Waldron, 178-179)

English settlers and writers preceding Thoreau were heavily influenced by the European and Christian tradition of nature's perception often excluding individual thoughts and feelings. Thoreau, by contrast, "includes ecstatic, focused, nature-based individual attention" (Waldron, 179) in his writing. Nature writing is not just about describing landscapes, animals and plants but also constitutes the skill to comprehend the connection between humans and their environment. In *Walden*, Thoreau depicts human's closeness to nature in the following way:

The indescribable innocence and beneficence of Nature, – of sun and wind and rain, of summer and winter, – such health, such cheer, they afford forever! and such sympathy have they ever with our race, that all Nature would be affected, and the sun's brightness fade, and the winds would sigh humanely, and the clouds rain tears, and the woods shed their leaves and put on mourning in midsummer, if any man should ever for a just cause grieve. Shall I not have intelligence with the earth? Am I not partly leaves and vegetable mould myself? (Thoreau, 138)

3.2 Contemporary Nature Writing

Since the 1970s, nature writing “has steadily grown in structure and popularity, attracting more and more writers and an ever-larger portion of the reading public” (Murray, *Nature Writing*, vi). According to Murray, this growing interest in nature writing in American Literature is caused by various reasons. First of all, American life and landscape have been persistently urbanized and mechanized, which has given rise to an anxiety about the natural world. This anxiety “manifests itself in a growing demand for nature writing” (Murray, *Nature Writing*, vii). In addition, Environmentalism has become significant in the politics of the United States, Western Europe, Asia and Russia since the 1980s. The conservation of nature has turned into a central issue of political affairs. Moreover, poetry and fiction have dropped in demand since the 1970s because people became interested in alternative genres and art forms and new ways of entertainment have developed.

Nature writing gains reputation and at the same time influences other fields of literature. In his preface to the book *American Nature Writing* (1999), John Murray states:

The nature-writing phenomenon currently shows no signs of losing momentum, and it is entirely possible that the genre will continue to enjoy something like its current popularity well into the next century. The nonfiction travel and nature writing will eventually cross-fertilize both poetry and fiction, revivifying genres that have grown dangerously estranged from popular audiences. (Murray, *Nature Writing*, vii)

He argues that Romantic poets like William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge were influenced by nature writing of the eighteenth century. Wordsworth’s famous ballad “The Solitary Reaper” is greatly affected by Thomas Wilkinson’s *A Tour of Scotland* and the Scottish Highlands. The well-known poem “Kubla Khan” was written after Coleridge read part of William Bartram’s *Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia and East and West Florida* (Cf. Murray, *Nature Writing*, vii).

Especially the contemporary prose genre and Romantic nature lyrics have in common that they represent a certain speaker in a particular outdoor setting. Both literary genres start with a description of landscape and it follows that:

[...] an aspect or change of aspect in the landscape evokes a varied but integral process of memory, thought, anticipation, and feeling which remains closely intervolved with the outdoor scene. (Abrams, 201)

The result of human interaction with nature is that the narrator “achieves an insight, faces up to a tragic loss, comes to a moral decision, or resolves an emotional problem” (Abrams, 201). Whether contemporary prose or nature lyrics of the Romantic period, both depict the experience with wilderness as well as human interaction with landscape.

3.3 Nature Writing in Alaska



Anchorage, Alaska, my picture

In Alaska nature writing has a tradition of about three centuries. A very good overview on the history and diverse contents of Alaska nature writing is provided in the book *A Republic of Rivers: Three Centuries of Nature Writing from Alaska and the Yukon* (1990). Edited by John Murray, the

book contains articles of various authors concentrating on works from the middle of the eighteenth century until the end of the twentieth.

According to Murray, Alaskan nature writing is quite wide-ranging and covers classic American themes such as “the quest for self-reliance, for communion and for accomplishment” (Murray, *Republic of Rivers*, 3). Self-reliance is a theme closely connected to the “American experience” in general. Simple life in the far north is portrayed with all its difficulties and joys and often follows the question of what people are actually capable of. The quest for communion refers to people’s contact with nature, and Alaskan nature writing depicts how people commune with a region or landscape. The fascination with the land’s simple and pure nature is a common topic of Alaskan nature writing and allows people ways of establishing a close connection with nature and places. The third theme discussed in Alaskan nature writing is the quest for accomplishment, which stretches from the “Age of Exploration (1741-1866)” to the “Age of Exploitation (1867-1958)” and to the present-day “Age of Environmentalism (starting 1959)” (Murray, *Republic of Rivers*, 6):

Given the American preoccupation with material achievement, particularly insofar as it asserts the value of the New World over the Old World, it is perhaps not surprising that so many of these quintessentially American selections are infused with the spirit of hard-earned conquest: acquiring commercially or scientifically useful information, extracting natural resources, climbing mountains, killing bears, overcoming wild rivers. [...], the Arctic promised not only new adventures and new horizons, but also the possibility of worldly riches and fame on their return to civilization. (Murray, *Republic of Rivers*, 6)

Wealth and fame could be reached by showing that the explorer was capable of dealing with new adventures and came home with significant knowledge of the newly found and investigated land.

Alaskan nature writing features various literary genres. According to Murray, the first category is the official expedition narrative, and comprises, with some exceptions like the writings of Henry Allen, John Muir, John Burroughs or Knud Rasmussen, expedition literature from the

Russian-American period. In general, these expeditions were commissioned by the governments and financed by different corporations. “[T]he Enlightenment” (Murray, *Republic of Rivers*, 7) greatly influenced the writings that developed from these expeditions. Rational perspectives, scientific principles and methods, and the practical benefits of the newly found land are the main characteristics of the official expedition narrative. Later writers, such as John Muir and John Burroughs, refrain from the objective writings of the Age of Reason and those scientific reports and turn towards the Post-Romantic Age and the early Modern Age, writing from a rather subjective point of view.

The second category, the individual adventure narrative, developed from explorations of individuals and small groups. Writers, such as Ella Higginson, Robert Dunn, Dave Bohn or David Cooper use a rather informal structure, exclude the scientific perspective of the first category and exercise a more private style in their narratives.

The scientific influence on nature writing can still be noticed in Alaska’s nature writing of the twentieth century because, as Murray argues:

[...] many of the better-known nature writers have either been professional scientists who have mastered the craft of writing – Robert Marshall, Adolph Murie, Richard Nelson – or professional writers who have become self-educated scientists – Barry Lopez, Annie Dillard, Edward Abbey. (Murray, *Republic of Rivers*, 8)

The third category refers to personal journals and memoirs, which primarily deal with the reflection of nature. Libby Beaman, May Wynne Lamb, Thomas Merton or Richard Proenneke, just to mention some, give a rather detailed description of nature in their writings. Besides, they not only deal with wild nature but also concentrate on human nature and include subjects such as the difficulty of life or the deep interaction with landscape.

The “familiar essay” (Murray, *Republic of Rivers*, 9) is the fourth category of Alaska nature writing and bears a close similarity to the Romantic nature lyric. Both forms begin with a portrayal of landscape, lead towards a certain interaction between the narrator and landscape, nature and

wilderness, and come up with a result that is based on this interaction. Authors such as Barry Lopez, Annie Dillard or David Rains Wallace represent the category of the “familiar essay”.

Poetry and fiction are genres not yet as much embodied in Alaskan literature. Authors like Jack London or Knud Rasmussen have already, but only little, contributed to the genres poetry and fiction. However, according to Murray, a considerable increase in both genres might occur and “part of the reason for this is that there is such a rich tradition in non-fiction” (Murray, *Republic of Rivers*, 10). Murray argues that the influence of nature writing on fiction and poetry had already been proved in various literary studies on European literature, such as the eighteenth century nature writing’s influence on Romantic poets like William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. “In fact, it often seems in the “literary food chain” that the higher-order genres of poetry and fiction “feed” on or at least partially draw their sustenance from the lower-order non-fiction genres” (Murray, *Republic of Rivers*, 10). Future writers might therefore increasingly turn to poetry and fiction.

An alternative form of nature’s representation is the oral tradition, which has its origin in the Asian oral tradition. This tradition is also considered the origin of written literatures in western cultures and dates back thousands of years. “Alaska and the Yukon have been continuously occupied by the descendents of Asian immigrants” (Murray, *Republic of Rivers*, 10); hence, the oral tradition has also developed within Alaskan literature. Works of the Asian oral tradition generally depict the intimate connection of humans with nature and are generally quite different to European and American immigrants’ oral traditions. Furthermore, Murray notices:

Inevitably, many of these Native American lyrics, personal narratives, and fictional stories lose something of their original vitality in translation, and are further diminished as they are read silently on the printed page, instead of being heard, as intended, with the modulations and the moods that can be expressed by the

spoken word. Very often these works are infused with a profound respect for the land, and describe the interdependence of life forms. (Murray, *Republic of Rivers*, 10)

Alaskan writers such as George Hamilton, Anna Harry or Johnny Jack, who contributed to this genre, focus on the unity between humans and nature, as well as on concerns and forces of wild nature, and challenge ideas about nature.

John Haines, an Alaskan poet and critic, has claimed that he often misses the author's closeness to the land in the literature of Alaska because he considers a lot of Alaskan literature as mere "sensation or bald news report[s]" (Haines, 14). He argues that intimate knowledge and experience are required for an adequate portrayal of Alaska, but instead, clichés are commonly represented in the literature. He criticizes authors that are only on a "literary excursion through the 'Great Land'" and therefore considers them "sightseer[s] in a strange land" (Haines, 25). An Alaskan writer, according to Haines, should know a place well in order to write about experiences with the land and its nature and this can only be achieved by calling this place home. "[K]nowledge acquired for the moment" (Haines, 25) should not characterize authors of Alaskan literature. Murray only partly agrees with Haines' critical propositions and claims that some of the best Alaska writings come from people who only visited Alaska for a short time.

Finally, Murray gives three reasons why Alaskan literature, especially writings of the last few decades, should be considered significant contributors to English and World literature. Firstly, the literature of Alaska shows similarities to the colonial and immigrant literatures of other parts of the English-speaking world, such as India, Africa or Australia. Especially in the more recent past (1959-1989) changes have taken place all over the world that have contributed to the rise of importance of Alaska and its writing. Destruction and deterioration of various environments around the

world attract a particular interest in Arctic America “as the last secure repository of wild nature on Earth” (Murray, *Republic of Rivers*, 15). The growing importance of this region consequently increases a demand of its writings, particularly nature writings.

Secondly, nature writing becomes more and more important because of growing awareness of the worldwide environments. Nature writing encourages environmental consciousness, and works that concentrate on the depiction of Alaska and the Yukon are important contributors to this global revolution. The fundamental aim in Alaskan texts is to establish a worldview that is conscious of nature, and to mature a certain land ethics. Lastly, Alaska’s nature writing can said to be significant “simply for its own sake” because it expresses “the thoughts, aspirations, feelings, and impressions of the residents and travellers of this wild and beautiful realm at the top of the world” (Murray, *Republic of Rivers*, 16).⁷

The cross-fertilization mentioned earlier – the influence of nature writing on other genres of literature - is especially true for Alaska literature where the natural world plays a crucial role in most genres. Dana Stabenow, a famous Alaskan writer of mystery novels, constantly depicts Alaska’s wilderness and nature in her writing. On the one hand, she creates considerable suspense in her novels by relying on humans’ respect and fear of wilderness, and on the other hand, she also touches crucial themes of the natural environment, which profoundly shape the characters of her novels. Nature has a significant impact on Alaskan literature because nature is an important feature of the land. Alaska is mostly defined in terms of nature, its variety of nature, its natural resources and the culture of its inhabitants adjusted to nature. What nature writing and cultural geography have in common is that both deal with the relationship between humans and nature. Therefore it seems obvious that nature writing can

⁷ The whole chapter is based on John Murray’s introduction to his book *A Republic of Rivers: Three Centuries of Nature Writing from Alaska and the Yukon* (1990).

best be approached and analyzed by referring to theoretical concepts developed in the field of cultural geography.



Hatcher Pass, Alaska, my picture

3.4 Women, Wilderness and Wilderness Protection – A Feminist Approach

Environmentalism and sustainable development have become significant issues all over the world and the conservation of nature has turned into a central subject in terms of social, economic and political affairs. The persistent urbanization and mechanization of life and landscape has given rise to anxiety about the natural world and a growing demand of environment protection in general.

Alaska features one of the world's last remaining wilderness areas and its wild landscape has long influenced the Alaskan sense of place. Besides, wilderness is an important feature of Alaska's national identity. Although, Americans in general, and Alaskans in particular, are known for their exploitation of nature and natural resources, a characteristic that has evolved from the frontier experience, there is a growing demand to protect Alaska's heritage of undeveloped, wild areas.



Anchorage, Alaska, my picture

According to John Murray, the growing demand for nature writing can be attributed to the increasing interest in environmental protection and the anxiety about wilderness, too. Similar to nature writing in general, Alaskan

nature writing is dominated by male authors and therefore the perceptions and experiences of nature and wilderness are presented from a masculine point of view. Thus, it is male authors that primarily mediate objectives of environmental protection. Melody Hessing states:

The movement to celebrate wilderness has been developed, [...], from a white, middle-class, male perspective by writers such as Thoreau, Muir, Abbey, Leopold, and Snyder. (Hessing, 283)

I will base my thesis on the works of two contemporary female Alaskan authors. Both books are pieces of nature writing and reflect female perspectives of protecting the environment because the authors address wilderness protection in ways that are actually deeply rooted in womanhood.

The Heart of the Sound and *Of Landscape and Longing* not only deal with female perception of landscape but also offer a female perspective of wilderness protection. Studies of environmental protection usually exclude acknowledging social differences, especially gendered differences, in regards to wilderness protection (Cf. Hessing, 281). Therefore, I would like to approach gender as a possibly noteworthy factor in the protection of Alaska's wilderness preservation.

In this chapter I will look at conventional definitions of wilderness and their gendered character, the need of wilderness protection in regards to national identity, and the connection between women and wilderness from a feminist point of view.

3.4.1 Wilderness and Gender

Conventional definitions of wilderness define it as an uninhabited place that is not affected by human settlement or modification. Whereas the connection between wilderness and humans might have been quite harmonious in prehistoric times, agrarian societies perceived nature rather as a threat to human society and promoted natural exploitation. By the

nineteenth century, limits of natural resources were recognized and the exploitation of habitat, wildlife and other resources turned towards a conservational thinking in terms of future use (Cf. Hessing, 282). However, according to Max Öhschläger, there has been a shift in society

[...] from viewing wild nature as merely a valuable resource (as a means to economic ends) and obstacle (wilderness must be conquered for a civilization to advance) towards a conception of wilderness as an end in its own right and an endangered species in need of preservation. (Öhschläger, 4)

The reasons for wilderness protection reflect diverse ethical, economic, and environmental objectives but have been mainly anthropocentric focusing on human interests. Wilderness preservation from a biocentric perspective has only had little increase and human economic and recreational interests are still considered more important than the needs of other species. Furthermore, social differences, such as gender, class, race, and nationality, are often ignored in relation to wilderness protection. However, these differences have a great impact on the perceptions and experiences of wild places, and therefore these differences should also be taken into consideration when it comes to wilderness protection (Cf. Hessing, 283).

Wilderness areas are commonly regarded as grounds of male activity, either through exploration, warfare or suppression. Women are traditionally not represented or acknowledged regarding concepts of wilderness (Cf. Peterson, 144-152; Birke, 107-125; Carr, 15-25). Furthermore, the influence of gender on environmental preservation has received only little, probably even no, attention in studies of Alaska's wilderness protection and Alaska's nature writing.

3.4.2 Protecting the Wild – Protecting National Identity

The protection of wilderness means to protect what constitutes Alaska's national identity. Alaska's unlimited wilderness areas are Alaska's great pride and they attract migrants as well as tourists and inhabitants. Furthermore, Alaskans consider themselves tough, resilient and independent, as well as optimistic and orientated towards future. These characteristics have more likely evolved out of people's close connection to the environment and wilderness, and they all shape Alaska's national identity. If Alaska will surrender its wild heritage, it will at the same time surrender much of what distinguishes them as Alaskans (Cf. Hessing, 285).

3.4.3 Ecofeminist Approaches

Ecological feminism, or ecofeminism, deals with the connection between women and the natural environment and offers a foundation that helps investigating wilderness protection as a gendered construct. Carolyn Merchant states "[...] women and nature have an age-old association – an affiliation that has persisted throughout culture, language, and history" (Merchant, xv). Some ecofeminists consider women's oppression and nature's degradation connected through the patriarchal system. Woman and nature share biological, psychological and spiritual characteristics, and the linkage between them has been addressed by many ecofeminist writers. Ecofeminist studies compare activities of the ecological system such as biotic regeneration and habitat protection, with women's reproductive and nurturing activities and see women's biology (sexuality, menstruation, birthing) as a source of empowerment.

The connection between wild landscapes and women is also an important part of ecofeminism. The perception of wilderness is viewed as gendered

because, in comparison to men, women perceive and approach wilderness in significantly different ways (Hessing, 289-299). Women tend to walk more slowly and see more than men and often find extended meaning in natural objects. In Carolyn Servid's *Of Landscape and Longing* she describes how she explores the natural environment around her house only little by little – in a slow way. On the contrary, her travel companion Tim wants to explore nature immediately and is even disappointed when Servid resigns. The extended meaning in natural objects can in both books be assigned to the meaning Carolyn Servid and Marybeth Holleman develop in relation to trees, beaches, inlets, etc. of Alaska's landscape. The extended meaning is then that both authors develop a sense of belonging and a feeling of rootedness that they base their personal identity on.

Women often feel entrapped in domesticity and family identities and experiencing the wilderness offers them a way to escape. Furthermore, wilderness contributes to the physical and mental development of women (Cf. Hessing, 286). In her book *The Heart of the Sound*, Marybeth Holleman's mental development is affected by the oil spill as well as her divorce and her experience of wilderness has helped her to cope with both situations and develop her own personality. However, the proposition that all women share physiological, psychological, and economic characteristics is viewed by some contemporary ecofeminists as essentialist. As Hessing states:

Essentialism universalizes women's experience and attributes it to biological and genetic forces, reinforcing reproductive capacity and affective behaviour as a preferred natural order. (Hessing, 287)

Besides, women's exploring the wild often parallels the exploration of their personality and includes personal growth and fulfilment. They experience their closeness to nature as foundation of their identity that is based on rootedness in a place. The nurturing character of women is also represented in both books. The nature of Alaska has become as important to them as a child to a mother. The nurturing character of a mother is therefore similar to the nurturing character of women when it comes to

nature. It is reflected by the ways in which Servid and Holleman think about future developments in nature and in what ways humans can contribute to preserve nature. Both fear that Alaska's nature and landscape are threatened and need protection because the destruction of the wilderness will also mean the destruction of their home and the places they feel deeply connected to. In this sense, they approach wilderness protection from a female point of view conducted by their female nurturing character. Holleman even draws parallel between being connected to Prince William Sound and being the mother of her son Jamie:

I would not give up parenting him and loving him absolutely unconditionally. Come what may, I am his mother, and I will love and protect him to the end of my days. Come what may, I will love and protect the Sound to the end of my days, as well. (*Sound*, 182)

This passage strongly represents that Holleman's nurturing feelings towards her son are the same nurturing feelings towards Prince William Sound. Whether natural aptitude or learned trait, the nurturing character of women cannot be denied and contributes to the ways in which women think about wilderness protection. They care about wilderness and nature and want to protect the environment, and their beloved places in particular, in a sustainable way.

4 Literature and Cultural Geography

Since various concepts rooted in cultural geography have become important tools in cultural studies, it is also necessary to look at the development of cultural geography and the development of the different concepts over time.

4.1 General Assumptions

As mentioned above, cultural geography forms part of cultural studies and generally focuses on the relationship between humans, space and place:

One increasingly important aspect of cultural studies is what can be called the geographies (or, indeed, topographies) of culture: the ways in which matters of meaning are bound up with spaces, places and landscapes. (Longhurst et. al., 107)

Cultural geography combines traditional and more recent concepts and is connected to other fields of geography such as social, economic, political and physical geography, academic disciplines like history, anthropology, sociology and psychology. As an interdisciplinary approach, it also draws on women's and ethnic studies.

Cultural geography is concerned with making sense of people and the places that they occupy, an aim that is achieved through analyses and understandings of cultural processes, cultural landscapes and cultural identities. (Norton, 3)

It is a rapidly increasing sub-discipline of geography, as well as of cultural studies, and "its subject-matter is so wide-ranging both in location, issues raised and the type of material involved" (Crang, 2).

Generally, the wide-ranging subject-matter of cultural geography could be summarized as follows: cultural geography deals with the ways cultures live in various parts of the world, at least that is what people commonly

associate with the discipline. The diversity of people all over the world results from their different clothes, ornament, lifestyles, but also from their worldviews, priorities, beliefs and ways of making sense of the world. Thus, cultural geography is concerned with “how cultures are spread over space” and “how cultures make sense of space” (Crang, 2). Ideas, practices and objects shape cultures and cultures form identities. Cultural geography investigates how these processes interact in certain spaces and places and how those generate meanings for people. The interrelation between cultures and space is therefore a product of how people use and interpret different spaces and places.

Products and expressions of a society's culture are mainly symbolic activities such as theatre, opera, art, literature and poetry. Therefore, cultural geography also comprises the analysis of different institutions such as libraries, museum or galleries that allow the preservation and reproduction of these forms. The study of modern symbolic activities must also be included in cultural geography. Rituals and ceremonies, such as the 4th of July in the USA or Bastille Day in France, are even promoted by the states. Cultural geographies may ask why certain rituals and ceremonies are promoted whereas others are denied and in what way these activities influence the different cultures. Religious rituals and festivals, such as Christmas, Thanksgiving or Ramadan, should be included as well as commercial and popular festivals like Valentine's Day in Western countries or Guy Fawkes Night in Great Britain. Besides, “culture is not confined to festivals and holidays; it pervades everyday life” (Crang, 4). Therefore, folk culture, dialects and architecture, just to mention some, are also of interest for the field of cultural geography.

4.2 The Development and Aim of Cultural Geography

Cultural geography is a discipline that has undergone many discussions of how it should be studied and what it should include. Basically there are two different ways of cultural geographic analysis, which both represent the variety of concerns in contemporary studies of cultural geography. The first approach is concerned with the description of a landscape created by a cultural group whereas the second approach rather concentrates on landscape's influence on cultural identity and developed in relation to criticism and discussion of the first approach.

Carl Ortwin Sauer, a famous American geographer, is considered the founding father of the so-called *landscape* or *Sauerian School*. In his work "The Morphology of Landscape", published in 1925, Sauer criticised the school of environmental determinism, which argued that:

the causal mechanisms for cultural behavior were to be found in the environment. Certain environmental conditions created certain habits; and, crucially, these habits were then transmitted *naturally* to successive generations. Environmental determinism, [...], thus held that the environment – nature – *caused* cultural difference by providing varying conditions under which cultures "grew" and were transmitted from generation to generation. (Sauer quoted in Mitchell, 18)

Sauer offered a different perspective on cultural geography, which was rather concerned with the interaction between humans and nature and how this interaction makes a landscape particular. More precisely, Sauer concentrated on "field patterns, hedgerows and distinct types of houses, barns and bridges" (Longhurst et. al., 109) in rural areas and investigated their influence on regional landscape. For Sauer there was "a strictly geographic way of thinking of culture; namely, as the impress of the works of man upon the area" (Sauer, 362). The context of life was produced by people's work with and on nature. As Mitchell claims:

Sauer was especially concerned with material aspects of culture, particularly the landscape, which he saw as manifestations of culture's traffic with nature. The evidence of this cultural variation, to

Sauer, was most clearly right there in the landscape: the landscape was a manifestation of the culture that made it. (Mitchell, 21)

Major criticism of Sauer's *landscape school* developed in the 1980s. Scholars like Peter Jackson (1980) and Denis Cosgrove (1983) argued that Sauer reified culture and that his approach was outdated and limited, all in all deficient in many ways. Instead of only concentrating on the rural, antiquarian and material landscapes, as Sauer did, they rather asked for a more complex and interpretive analysis of landscapes as cultural construction (Cf. Norton, 13). Therefore new guidelines were established that should include the past and the present, take space as well as landscape into consideration, focus on urban and rural areas, include domination and resistance and their relationship, make culture central to human life, and use 'representation' as well as 'reality'.

The critique on Sauer's landscape school was not the only factor in developing a new cultural geography. The transformation was also heavily influenced by progresses in the field of cultural studies. Specific subjects, as, for example, surveys of working-class culture, of new cultural types, of otherness, of principles of domination and oppression, and of Eurocentric thoughts, had a significant and continuing impact on cultural geography (Cf. Norton, 15). The "new cultural geography," promoted by Jackson and Cosgrove, should also include other fields of social life:

[...], such as ideologies of race, the role of language and discourse in producing cultural spaces, the development and maintenance of subcultures, issues of gender, sexuality, and identity, and the way in which landscapes and places are more than just congeries of material artefacts or empty containers awaiting social action. (Mitchell, 57)

One of the most influential theories originating from the area of cultural studies might be the view of cultures as maps of meaning – the construction, conveyance and understanding of meaning. Social interactions and relations establish meanings. The aim of new cultural geography is to study those meanings in relation to space, place and landscape. Power and resistance influence the cultural meanings of space, place and landscape. New cultural geographers are therefore

concerned with the question of who has the power to establish meanings, how they are contested and how successful they are. Furthermore, new cultural geography should concentrate on 'representations' of space, place and landscape in writing, painting, music, film or photography (Cf. Longhurst et.al., 110).

Generally, the transformation of the discipline promoted humanistic studies of behaviour and landscape and aroused interest in unequal groups and unequal landscapes as well as symbolic landscapes. The new cultural geography was eventually institutionalized by the end of the 1980s and can be defined as follows:

Cultural geography positions human beings at the centre of geographical knowledge – human beings, with their beliefs, their passions, and their life experiences. Cultural geography is meant to be a human science, a specific approach to the lives of people. It investigates the relevance of culture throughout today's world; it deals with symbols as much as with facts, and emotions as much as reason. (Bonnemaison, 1)

4.3 Concepts of Cultural Geography Relevant for this Thesis

The analysis of the two primary texts of Alaskan nature writing will be based only on certain concepts of cultural geography. Precisely speaking, the representation of space, place and landscape will be analyzed in these texts to show in how far nature and landscape shape Alaskan identity.

Space and place are commonly used terms within cultural geography and other disciplines. Before the 1970s space and place were rarely investigated in terms of what they mean and if they are synonymous with each other. Simultaneously with the development of the new cultural geography, a debate about the theoretical specification of both terms

opened up. Generally speaking, research was based on the connection between space and place, taking into consideration that people live in a world of meaning. Therefore the meaning of space, place and landscape became important components of investigation. Greater focus was put on how space and place interact and how meaning and value are uttered in relation to space, place and landscape.

4.3.1 The Concepts of Space and Place

Geographers in the 1960s approached space and place in two different ways: the so-called positivists worked out spatial science and Carl Sauer generated the study of uniqueness of place. Positivists considered space the subject to scientific laws, which ought to be established:

This version worked on spatial models, quantitative studies and so forth, looking for regularities and patterns in spatial phenomena that might reveal general processes for distributing activities over space or even lead to discovering spatial 'laws'. (Crang, 101)

The major aim of the positivists' approach was to find out regular patterns over space. This version was eventually driven into the dominant position by the end of the 1960s. The contrasting version focused on the individuality of places and the reasons behind it. Describing the specifics of places aimed at explaining areal differentiation. In the late 1970s concepts of humanistic geography developed new ways of studying places and their meaning. The focus was shifted towards questions of people's relation to places. The concept of place dealt with attachments to specific places and the settings of social relations and identity construction.

Since the 1970s most approaches to the concepts of space and place have concentrated on the relation of space and place. In his introduction to *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (2001), Yi-Fu Tuan claims "[t]he ideas "space" and "place" require each other for definition"

and “the meaning of space often merges with that of place” (Tuan, 6). Space is considered the more abstract, objective element whereas place is rather concrete and subjective. The shift from undifferentiated space to place occurs when humans get to know it better and consequently attach meaning and value to it. Places, according to Tuan, offer security and stability whereas spaces provide feelings of openness, infinity and freedom. Likewise Alan Gussow in *A Sense of Place: The Artist and the American Land* (1997) emphasizes:

The catalyst that converts any physical location – any environment if you will – into a place, is the process of experiencing deeply. A place is a piece of the whole environment that has been claimed by feelings. Viewed simply as a life-support system, the earth is an environment. Viewed as a resource that sustains our humanity, the earth is a collection of places. We never speak, for example, of an environment we have known; it is always places we have known – and recall. (Gussow, 27)

Meaning and value are generated by deep experience of a location and are the vital elements that convert abstract space into concrete place.

In geography, space is considered a central concept. Space can be distinguished into various forms such as absolute, relative and relational or cognitive space. Absolute space refers to distinct, physical, real or empirical entities, such as points, lines, areas, planes and configurations. Relative space relates to locations, distances and connections. Relative space can be differentiated between socioeconomic space, such as sites, situations, routes, regions and distributions, and experiential or cultural space, as for example places, ways, territories, domains or worlds. Lastly, relational or cognitive space refers to behavioural space based on people’s perceptions, beliefs, feelings and values, such as landmarks, paths, districts, environments and spatial layouts.⁸ Space is then the structure, the environment with certain objects and events and their relative position and direction. Space refers to location whereas place covers action.

⁸ Based on table 10.1 in Councleris, 231, and Holt-Jensens, 216, 226, 227, and Knox & Marston’s, 505, approaches to space.

Place can be defined as valued space because generally social meaning, conventions, cultural understanding and function are added. “The distinction is rather like that between a “house” and a “home”; a house might keep out the wind and the rain, but a home is where we live” (Harrison and Dourish, 4). According to Tuan, place refers to an area to which people have strong emotional feelings. Outside this place starts space of which people have some knowledge but they do not develop any affections or feelings towards it (Cf. Tuan, 6). Each individual identifies differently with a place and has a distinct connection to various places. This connection to place is also an important part of identity construction. People make sense of themselves by their subjective feelings and thus by their attachment to places.

In his book *Cultural Geography: Themes, Concepts, Analyses* (2000), William Norton considers five different aspects in connection with place as used in cultural geography. Firstly, place is considered a territory of meaning instead of just a container of things or a term used to refer to the location of something. Secondly, place implicates “being known and knowing others” (Norton 274) which differentiates place from other terms such as landscape, space and region. Thirdly, the construction of places takes place in our memories and affections. Landscapes and spaces, by contrast, are just there, irrespective of their purpose and meaning. Fourthly, “place is intersubjective” (Norton, 274) because the meaning of place can be shared between and communicated to other people. Lastly, people create places by occupying spaces for a certain period of time. This means that place is the combination of space and time. Mike Crang treats the connection between space and time similarly. A place not only constitutes where a person lives but also who this person is. Cultural characteristics provide a place and guide people in their interaction and behaviour in particular places. Each place determines specific interaction and behaviour:

The result is places provide an anchor of shared experiences between people and continuity over time. Spaces become places

as they become 'time-thickened'. They have a past and a future that binds people together round them. (Crang, 103)

Space and place are also treated as inseparable in Edward S. Casey's essay "How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time" (1996). "It is sensible, perhaps even irresistible, to assume that human experience begins with space and time and then proceeds to place" (Casey, 13). Space is considered absolute, infinite, empty and priori in status and place is regarded as posterior to space, something that develops from space:

By "space" is meant a neutral, pre-given medium, a tabula rasa onto which the particularities of culture and history come to be inscribed, with place as the presumed result. (Casey, 14)

Space might then be a sheer physical terrain or blank environment, which transforms into place when meaning is attached or it becomes 'culturalized'. Immanuel Kant insisted that human knowledge begins with experience and he distinguished between general and local knowledge, whereby the former precedes the latter. General knowledge refers to space whereas local knowledge is associated with place, which promotes the idea that place follows space.

In *The Power of Place: Bringing Together Geographical and Sociological Imaginations* (1989), John A. Agnew and James S. Duncan base the geographical meaning of place on the combination of what they call 'geographical imagination' and 'sociological imagination' (Agnew and Duncan, 1). Geographical imagination is considered concrete and descriptive and concentrates on the nature and classification of places and in what ways they are linked. Sociological imagination refers to human behaviour and activities. Rather than viewing these imaginations as competing ones, they suggest to combine them. Furthermore, they notice three different geographical concepts of place, which have rarely been considered complementary:

Firstly, economists and economic geographers have emphasized *location*, or *space sui generis*, the spatial distribution of social and economic activities resulting from between-place factor cost and market price differentials. Secondly, microsociologists and humanistic geographers have concerned themselves with *locale*, the settings for everyday routine social interaction provided in a place. Thirdly, anthropologists and cultural geographers have shown interest in the *sense of place* or identification with a place engendered by living in it. (Agnew and Duncan, 2)

These definitions of place should not be viewed as incompatible and competing, but they should rather be related to each other.

Longhurst et. al. define space as follows:

Considering space means considering the ways in which, in “reality” or “representation”, the distribution of things and activities, the formation of boundaries and patterns of movements are both culturally produced and part of the construction of culture. The spaces that we inhabit, whether they are the sacred and profane spaces of an African village or of Wall Street, are intimately bound up with the ways in which we live out our lives. (Longhurst et. al., 108)

In their definition, Longhurst et. al. include people’s influence on space and space’s influence on people. Places are significant to the production of cultural worlds:

Considering place means considering the ways in which particular locations are important in the making of a cultural world. Our understandings of the world are tied closely to the ways in which we construct and contest the meanings of particular, often named, places. For example, the ways in which certain meanings of “home” are used to support specific understandings of how families should work, of how positive or negative understandings of “New York” capture the different political and economic relations between the USA and other parts of the world. (Longhurst et. al., 108)

The different meanings of places inform different worldviews. The diverse perceptions of places contribute to a diversity of cultural worlds.

The concepts of space and place have also become important in theories about identity formation. The concept of place identity focuses on the influence of the physical environment on identity.

4.3.2 Concept of Place Identity

Cultural studies is concerned with the interdisciplinary study of cultures, cultural phenomena and cultural conflicts and their connection to socio-cultural criteria such as race, gender, class, etc. In his book *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice* (2003), Chris Barker defines cultural studies as an “interdisciplinary field in which perspectives from different disciplines can be selectively drawn on to examine the relations of culture and power” (Barker, 7). Furthermore, societies have different values, beliefs, competences, routines and habits. Cultural studies draws on “those practices, institutions and systems of classification” (Barker, 7) from which those societal characteristics have evolved. Different powers such as class, race, gender, colonialism, etc. are taken into consideration to “explore the connections between these forms of power and to develop ways of thinking about culture and power” (Barker, 7). Besides, cultural studies is an academic discipline that includes fields outside the academy such as “social and political movements, workers in cultural institutions, and cultural management” (Barker, 7).

Identity can be defined as the unique character or personality of an individual. Identity construction refers to the orientation of a self, shaped by varying aspects such as gender, race, class, social and cultural influences and many more. Different disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, geography, etc. deal with the complex scope of identity construction and numerous theories have been established. The borders between those disciplines are often quite vague and they usually share common features among each other.

The influence of the physical environment on identity construction has often been missing in theories about identity formation. Only within the last thirty years have concepts of space and place in relation to identity construction gained prominence, especially in fields such as cultural

geography or philosophy but also in urban geography, urban planning or transportation geography (Cf. Mitchell, 57-65).

Places are more and more perceived as dynamic arenas, which are significant for creating and sustaining a sense of self. They are not only socially constituted but also constitutive of the social. More and more attention is given to the influences of places on identity and recent studies increasingly focus on the dynamics of places within identity formation. "Questions of 'who we are' are often intimately related to questions of 'where we are'," (Dixon and Durrheim, 27) a thought depicted in the concept of place identity. Various investigations have shown that social categories are intimately bound to the notion of place.

Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff offer a description of place identity as

pot-pourri of memories, conceptions, interpretations, ideas and related feelings about specific physical settings as well as types of settings. (Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff, 60)

Place identity, they suggest, might have the function of supporting personal identity, make actions and activities of people comprehensible, utter tastes and preferences and attempt to environmental change. Korpela argues that place identity refers to individuals' aim at regulating their environment through usage, which helps to create and sustain a sense of self (Cf. Korpela, 246). The sense of belonging plays an important role because "place-belongingness is not only one aspect of place-identity, but a necessary *basis* for it" (Korpela, 246, emphasis in the original). Human beings desire a sense of belonging. They use their environment and arrange themselves according to the physical contexts in such a way that they are able to generate "a space of attachment and rootedness, a space of being" (Dixon and Durrheim, 29).

Rowles' research on place identity as an important aspect of self-definition offers three different senses of what he calls 'insideness'. 'Physical insideness' refers to people's connection between body and place, knowing physical details of the environment. 'Social insideness' means the relationship to the local community, being integrated in the social world.

‘Autobiographical insideness’ signifies rootedness, being attached to a place. Rowles considers this third kind of ‘insideness’ to be the most important one and notices that it evolves out of people’s experience of a place over time (Cf. Rowles, 302).

4.3.3 Sense of Place

Sense of place can be defined as “subjective feeling for and/or attachment to a particular place” (Larkin, 217). A sense of place develops not only from a place’s characteristics, but also from the perception of places by different individuals and groups. Susanne K. Langer distinguishes between place and sense of place as follows:

As *scene* is the basic abstraction of pictorial art, and *kinetic volume* of sculpture, that of architecture is an ethnic domain. Actually of course, a domain is not a “thing” among other “things”; it is the sphere of influence of a function, or functions; it may have physical effects on some geographical locality or it may not. Nomadic cultures, or cultural phenomena like the seafaring life, do not inscribe themselves on any fixed place on earth. Yet a ship, constantly changing its location, is nonetheless a self-contained place, and so is a Gypsy camp, and Indian camp, or a circus camp, however often it shifts its geodetic bearings. Literally, we say the camp is in a place, culturally, it is a place. A Gypsy camp is a different place from an Indian camp, though it may be geographically where the Indian camp used to be. A place, in this nongeographical sense, is a created thing, an ethnic domain made visible, tangible, sensible. As such it is, of course, an illusion. Like any other plastic symbol, it is primarily an illusion of self-contained, self-sufficient, perceptual space. But the principle of organization is its own: for it is organized as a functional realm made visible – the centre of a virtual world, the “ethnic domain,” and itself a geographical semblance. (Langer, 94-95, emphasis in the original)

In cultural geography place then signifies much more than just geographic location. A place’s literature, its arts and its sciences help us know a place. On the other hand, we need the knowledge of geography to understand the importance of place in literature, art and science. The knowledge of

places contributes to human's general knowledge. The uniqueness of a place as well as that of a person is based on individual qualities and in those qualities their essential character can be found. This essential character is the fundamental idea of sense of place analysis (Cf. Prince, 22-25). Attention is put on the personality of place but an essential argument here is that different individuals and groups perceive and experience the same environment differently. M. E. Eliot Hurst points out:

Every place has a special character for its residents, its visitors, and those who "know" it only second-hand. Each place has a personality of its own, buried perhaps beneath prejudice and emotion, derived not just from buildings, but also from contours, street patterns, drama, colour, surprises, smells, noises, and so on. (Hurst, 4)

Perception is a significant scope within the field of sense of place surveys. People perceive and experience places in different ways and through their experience places become meaningful and tangible. A sense of place not only develops from place experience but also from the relationship between space and place, people's and place's identities and attachment to place which furthermore contributes to the making of places. "To be attached to places and have profound ties with them is an important human need" (Relph, 38). Attachment to a place, being rooted in a place, is part of our human identity.

A further component in the study of sense of place is time. Places and the character of places may persist or change over time. Time is necessary in connection with the experience of places but places may also change over time. Time and place are significant features of literature; hence literature acts as an important informant of geography:

The search for meaning and order in the landscape – that is, the desire to see landscape more clearly and completely – is a primary concern of geography. This search leads to landscape description that looks beyond the more obvious forms and functions into deeper human implications of the world around us. When we apply creative writing to support our geographic vision, we have gained a powerful ally toward our goal of communicating a sensitive, articulate image of the phenomenon we call landscape. (Salter and Lloyd, 2)

A sense of place is essentially based on experience. Personality, emotion, subjectivity and idiosyncrasy are the major characteristics of this experience.

4.3.4 The Concept of Landscape

Landscape can be defined in three different ways: the first definition comes from Old English *landscipe* and refers to “[a] district owned by a single person, especially a lord, or by a specified group of people”. Later, influenced by Dutch painters, a more modern meaning developed, which defined landscape as “[a] representation of scenery, especially rural scenery”. The third, and most recent and general definition, depicts landscape as “[a]ll that can be seen on the earth’s surface from a particular place” (Larkin, 139).

Carl O. Sauer⁹ was the first American geographer to focus on the study of landscape. He was concerned with content, form and function of landscapes and concentrated on the concept of cultural landscape, developing the character of a place by combining natural and man-made aspects. In Sauer’s opinion, the relationship between humans and physical landscape is the main reason for changes of landscapes. Other geographers’ exploration of landscape is rather concerned with experience. This is a matter of perception, which varies from one person to another and generates certain attitudes towards landscape. Different landscapes have different meanings to people, based on their attitudes and values. “Human beings invest the landscapes they experience with symbolic value” (Gold, 117). An industrial landscape, for example, might be considered ugly and polluted by one person, whereas the same industrial landscape might be symbolic for power and jobs to another person. Landscapes produce a variety of feelings and thoughts, from

⁹ See also chapter 4.2 “The Development of Cultural Geography.”

anxiety to delight but consecutively these attitudes are mirrored in people's way of use of and adaptation to the landscapes.

Conclusions and assumptions about a landscape are also dependent on cultural attitudes. Societies with different cultural backgrounds perceive and interpret environments, and thus landscapes, quite differently. At the same time societies may be represented by different reflections of landscape. Representations not only reflect but also constitute reality. Longhurst et. al. state:

Considering landscape means considering how both an area and the look of that area are laden with meaning. 'Reality' and 'representation' are not easily separated here and the object of study can be a city skyline or a country scene in oils. What is at issue is the ways in which areas and representations of them are part of our cultural worlds. That means that the Los Angeles' skyline can be read as an assertion of the power of big money and that depictions of certain sorts of rural landscapes have been made to represent a particular notion of Englishness. (Longhurst et. al., 108)

On the one hand, cultural worlds define landscapes and on the other hand, cultural worlds are defined by landscapes. Representations can differ in many ways but should not be considered as competing reflections of reality. There is no better or worse representation of reality. Instead it is a question of what version of reality each representation offers. The representation of landscape in English landscape paintings of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, especially those ordered by landowners, had not only the purpose of depicting the picturesque English landscape. Many pictures portrayed the landowners in the front and their estate in the back.¹⁰ The representation of their land had various purposes. Land represented individual and national economic prosperity and political power within the nation. Land and the representation of land therefore defined national identity. Furthermore, these paintings were also the foundation of personal identity and reflected the relationship of the landowners to their land. These paintings, however, only depict the

¹⁰ See, for example, Thomas Gainsborough's *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews* (1748), as both a portray of Robert Andrews and his wife Frances and a painting of their estate, the Auburies at Bulmer in Essex.

English landscape in such a way that they only represent a certain society - that of the landowners. At the same time the paintings also show the influence of the landowners on their land.

Similarly, Alaskan landscape paintings also have more than one function. The representation of landscape in Alaskan landscape paintings does not only aim at depicting the harsh, rough and beautiful Alaskan landscape. Many of these paintings include the presence of humans, who, for example, work under hard conditions or face wild creatures such as bears or wolves. Therefore, the motifs also represent characteristics of an Alaskan identity. They reflect people's courage to face wilderness, their ability to tame the wild and their skills to adapt to the environment.

4.3.5 National identity

National identity is also concerned with the relationship between geography and identity. Identity is based on self-definition and the imposed definition of others. People identify with places and since nations are places, national identity is constructed in relation to places. Nation means a group of people who share certain characteristics among each other or imagine doing so. These characteristics can be based on historical, political, cultural, territorial and psychological elements. Generally, these characteristics are closely connected to each other and help to create an image of community. Nations can therefore be defined as 'imagined communities' because they are shaped in people's collective imagination. In his book *Imagined Communities* (1991), Benedict Anderson defines the nation as "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson, 6). The nation is 'imagined' because people have an image of their communion in their minds although they will never know, meet or hear all members of this communion. Therefore, "all communities larger than primordial villages

of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined” (Anderson, 6). Moreover, the nation is imagined as ‘limited’ because each nation, even the largest, has fixed boundaries and is surrounded by other nations. And the nation is imagined as ‘sovereign’ because:

[...] the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic real. Coming to maturity at a stage of human history when even the most devout adherents of any universal religion were inescapably confronted with the living *pluralism* of such religions, and the allomorphism between each faith’s ontological claims and territorial stretch, nations dream of being free, and, if under God, directly so. The gage and emblem of this freedom is the sovereign state. (Anderson, 7)

Lastly, the nation is imagined as a ‘community’ because people of one nation will always be bound by a profound companionship, irrespective of inequality and exploitation. Therefore, rootedness in place is considered an important part of these imagined communities:

The imagining of a nation as a community also imagines it in relation to a particular, and particularly meaningful, part of the world: the homeland. This is imagined as a territory with specific borders and boundaries, so representations on maps become very important. It is also imagined as a certain sort of landscape with distinctive national characteristics. (Longhurst et. al., 118)

National identity is based on belonging to a nation but at the same time it is also based on the exclusion of those not liked and on identification in the sense of “who you are not” (Mitchell, 262).

Alaska’s national identity is certainly influenced by two main factors. Firstly, Alaska is geographically detached from the continental United States, and secondly, Alaska’s unique landscape is very different from the landscape of the rest of the United States. While certain characteristics are shared between Alaska and the rest of the United States, others make Alaska very unique, such as the harsh weather conditions or the fact that Alaska features one of the last remaining wilderness areas within the United States.

Alaska's national identity is considered very much influenced by the American concept of the frontier. Therefore, the next chapter will deal with the concept of the frontier in general and the concept of the last frontier in particular.

4.3.6 The “Last Frontier”

Alaska is often referred to as the Last Frontier. In order to understand why Alaska is called a frontier and, moreover, the last one of its kind, it is necessary to investigate Turner's frontier thesis in general and find out the meaning of it in relation to Alaska. The concept of the frontier is generally known to have had a great impact on Americans' national identity. Therefore, it seems very likely that the concept of the last frontier has also influenced the identity of Alaskans.



Hatcher Pass, Alaska, my picture

4.3.6.1 The Concept of the “Frontier”

‘Frontier’ in America generally refers to the “outer edge of the wave – the meeting point between savagery and civilization” (Turner, 3). The frontier is an important domain of American history and is quite characteristic of the national development of the United States. Frederick Jackson Turner, an American historian, was the first to recognize the impact of the frontier on American identity. Turner’s work is very well known and there was hardly any historian of nineteenth century America who did not comment on Turner’s thesis. Some agreed with Turner, others strongly disapproved of his opinion but most tried to adapt it in some way or another. In his thesis, Turner focused on the comparison between frontiers of Europe and America.

Turner was saying something that Americans were eager to hear, that the differences between themselves and Europeans were inherently tied to the colonization of the United States. The hardships that confronted the American settlers were, at least in part, the demands required to tame a hostile wilderness. (Cuba, 12)

When the first European settlers arrived on North America’s east coast in the seventeenth century, they were confronted with a new environment that was very different from what they were used to in Europe. The settlers adjusted according to the new environmental challenges, most importantly to the new cultivable land. This process of adaptation is considered ‘Americanization’ and is, according to Turner, the reason why American people developed so differently from the Europeans (Cf. Cuba, 12). The expansion of settlement presented a sense of endless possibilities, which consequently shaped a specific American identity. American character traits such as optimism, orientation towards future and exploitation of natural resources originate from the frontier experience. Dealing with the wild, motivated American’s strong, individual and unique identity, which, in turn, affected the social, political and economic development of the United States. Turner was mainly concerned with the westward expansion and its

influence on American identity. Although the expansion to the west ended, according to Turner, at the end of the nineteenth century, its influence on the American character has continued long after.

4.3.6.2 Types of Frontiers

Controversy developed among historians because of Turner's loose description of the frontier in his many essays. According to Cuba, Turner was using three different types of frontier (Cf. Cuba, 5-21). First, he used the frontier in reference to a geographic region with distinguishable physical features; second, the frontier applied as combination of social conditions caused by human beings interacting with the natural world; and third, the frontier considered "a *subjective response to place* as manifested in individual attitudes and beliefs (e.g., "a state of mind")" (Cuba, 14).

In Europe, the term frontier was originally used by the military to refer to the front line of an army but gradually developed into a more generally used political term meaning boundary between two states. The American frontier as geographic region described an area at the edge of settlement, which Turner specified with distinct physical features. On the one hand, settlers faced wilderness associated with danger; on the other hand, they found cultivable land with plenty of natural resources. Flora and fauna were risky but at the same time exploitable, which generated the representation of the frontier.

Turner's central focus was, however, on the influence of the environmental challenges on the development of the American character, which eventually led to a distinct form of society. Turner argued that the pioneers had to adjust to the natural conditions and therefore also had to organize themselves socially differently. The unique American frontier character is determined by self-reliance and individualism. Frontier settlement demanded a "certain amount of courage, determination, and practical

inventiveness on the part of newcomers” (Cuba, 17). Turner’s critics often challenged this idea about frontier characterization, arguing that courage, determination and inventiveness are character traits valid for migration in general. Turner’s characterization was based on a specific place whereas critics rather viewed these characteristics as outcome of a general process.

The notion of the frontier as a “state of mind” (Cuba, 14) is a type of frontier almost ignored by Turner. While he mainly concentrated on the effect of the environment on the pioneers, this type of frontier refers to the impact of the pioneers on the environment. Humans’ perceptions of the world influence the way people create, shape, and distort their environment. It is the phenomenon of culture which:

[...] is not determined by ecology, biology social structure, or any combination of these. It is a product of the interaction of these with personal or collective expectations of and responses to a place. As such, “frontier” has come to symbolize a way of life that forms and established part of American culture. (Cuba, 18)

The end of the nineteenth century marked the end of frontier experience but Turner did not recognize that the image of the frontier had already had such a deep impact on the American people that it became an ideology of American culture. Geographers, psychologists and sociologists, by contrast, have noticed and dealt with the strong image defining Americans’ past and present and altered the perspective from portraying a frontier region to characterizing personal traits related to the frontier experience.

Turner’s frontier generally referred to the westward expansion and its significance on the development of the United States. Whereas the frontier in connection with the American West implied adapting to the new environment and subduing the wild, the Alaskan frontier meant adapting to the untameable wilderness only. The agricultural tradition represented by the frontier of the West could not be equalled with any agrarian production of Alaska, which was hardly possible under such different and harsh conditions. However, the general idea of the frontier, namely challenging

wilderness, exploiting natural resources and searching for a new life, can easily be applied to Alaska.

4.3.6.3 Alaska – The Last Frontier

The closing of America's westward expansion at the end of the nineteenth century, although often considered a myth by historians, called for locating a new frontier. The position in the far north made Alaska a strategic frontier in the expansionist projects of the United States. When Alaska was purchased from Russia in 1867, it was considered an important base for America's overseas markets. Furthermore, Secretary of State William Henry Seward and other nation builders aimed at continental control:

Alaska was envisioned as the first in a long line of territorial conquests that would include Canada and Latin America. As the gap on the charts indicates, however, efforts to expand the nation's border up through Canada were defeated. The separation between Alaska and the rest of the country thus points to a failed moment in this particular expansionist project and signals a disruption in the nation's efforts to gain continental control. (Kollin, 7)

The purchase of the Alaskan territory became a significant foundation of national pride and America's national development. Today Alaska as the Last Frontier replaces the western American frontier and contributes to the national identity of the United States, offering commercial opportunities like previous American frontiers. Alaska's history has yet to be written, Alaska as a "virgin land" (Kollin, 2) has yet to be explored and the great natural resources present infinite commercial possibilities (Cf. Kollin, 2-5). This also contributes to the development of a distinctive Alaskan identity:

The common idiom that Alaska is "the last frontier" suggests that the relative remoteness and unsettled character of Alaska create a unique Alaskan identity, one that is both a "frontier" and the "last" of its kind. The frontier idiom portrays the place and people of Alaska as exceptional or different from the places and people who reside in the lower 48 states, especially in regards to human perception and interaction with the surrounding landscape. (Brown, 14)

Alaskans view themselves as tough, resilient and independent people, which are “virtues accruing from the physical attributes of the place” (Brice, xii). Alaska offers an opportunity of personal and economic renewal and conveys a sense of state without boundaries. Firstly, the sense of state without boundaries refers to Alaska’s tremendous size. Alaska is the least densely populated state of the United States at approximately 1.1 people per square mile. There is enough space to be inhabited and there are no boundaries of possible places to live. Secondly, it refers to the Alaska’s economic dimension because of its natural resources:

With its vast timber, fishing, oil, and mineral reserves, Alaska is thought of as a land endowed with great natural wealth, a terrain offering unlimited commercial opportunities. (Kollin, 5)

People may come to Alaska for different economic reasons, such as long-term economic opportunities, immediate income gains, the chance to be independent or to start something new.

Non-economic personal reasons are often related to the frontier image and Alaska’s wilderness. These reasons may comprise the closeness to wilderness, the curiosity about Alaska, an escape from urban problems or the aim at living a pioneer’s life and being self-reliant.

4.4 Literature – A Source of Cultural Geography

Literature has become very important to cultural geography serving as source or data. Besides other forms of art, such as writing, painting, music, film and photography, literature offers a great variety of representing space, place, nature, and landscape:

Over the last twenty years geographers have become increasingly interested in various forms of literature as ways of investigating the meaning of landscapes. Literature is replete with poems, novels, stories and sagas that describe, strive to understand and illuminate spatial phenomena. (Crang, 43)

Compared to scientific literature, literary genres, such as poems, novels and many others, offer a perspective of how people experience the world and make sense of space and place.¹¹ Literature is considered a 'subjective' form of representation because it is full of emotions and affections about individual and collective experiences of places. People understand spaces and places in several ways and develop different relationships to them. Furthermore, spaces, places, nature and landscape carry different meanings to each individual or group. "Literature is not flawed by its subjectivity; instead that subjectivity speaks about the social meanings of places and spaces" (Crang, 44).

Any literary form may be inherently geographical. Characters in a novel, for example, occupy several places and spaces; hence a novel carries geographical meaning. Therefore, literature does not merely describe places but also creates geographies and fulfils the function of constructing people's geographical imagination. Of course, "different modes of writing express different relationships to space and mobility" and "spatial relationships within literature can be invested with different meanings" (Crang, 44). Thus, literary works not only reveal information about places but also display the spatial construction of individuals and society. The subjective value of literature combined with the objective knowledge in geography contributes tremendously to the field of cultural geography.

¹¹ Cf. Tuan, *Literature and Geography*

5 Analysis of Contemporary Alaskan Literature

Characteristically, Alaskan literature deals with nature and landscape. Therefore, it seems obvious that nature and landscape must also have a great influence on Alaskan identity. In this chapter I will analyse two pieces of nature writing of contemporary Alaskan authors by applying the concepts of cultural geography introduced in the previous chapters. The books deal with Alaska's nature and landscape, life and development in Alaska and the personal identity of the authors.

5.1 Carolyn Servid – Of Landscape and Longing

Carolyn Servid was born into a missionary's family and spent most of her childhood in India with occasional long-term visits of about a year to America's West Coast. Servid spent her early childhood in Vengurla, a town situated on India's west coast just south of Mumbai. At the age of seven, Servid was sent to Kodaikanal School, a Christian boarding school for children of missionary families in India, located on the southern tip of India. When she was thirteen her family moved back to the United States and Servid spent her youth in northwest Washington. After college and several temporary jobs she went on a journey to Alaska and eventually decided to stay in the northernmost state of the United States. Today, Servid and her husband live in Sitka, a town on Baranof Island in Southeast Alaska. They have lived there almost thirty years. She is cofounder and co-director of a non-profit organization called "The Island Institute", which focuses on people's life together in community and place, and works as editor, author and essayist.

Of Landscape and Longing: Finding a Home at the Water's Edge is considered a memoir and focuses on various phases of Carolyn Servid's life. The book is a collection of essays that were written over a period of ten years and were published in various journals and reviews. It can be classified as nature writing and describes how Servid established a sense of connection between herself and the land of Alaska. The development of a strong sense of belonging eventually makes her feel home in Alaska, a feeling that she was missing all the time during her childhood in India and her sporadic visits to the United States. Along Servid's individual development, the story questions the different ways of people's connection to a land and reflects on her very personal, intimate relationship to the environment around Sitka.

5.1.1 An Imposed Childhood Identity

Carolyn Servid's *Of Landscape and Longing* depicts her own life in three different places and focuses on how only one of them eventually becomes home. Born into a missionary's family, Servid spent most of her childhood in India. When Servid reflects on her childhood in her book, it becomes clear that, although she was born and raised in India, this is not the place that she really feels attached to, the place that she will call home:

Or maybe it was twelve thousand miles away from home if you consider that we were an American family living in small coastal village in western India, Vengurla, a place where we didn't really belong. Not that we weren't welcomed and appreciated at the Presbyterian mission hospital there. We were. And not that we weren't comfortable. We lived in an ample house, had a cook, a woman who cleaned for us, and an ayah who took care of us as young children. But our time in India was grounded in the assumption that at some point we would return *home*. Back then *home* was a nebulous place in California or Washington, near one of the spots my parents knew from their own childhoods and college years. *Home* would never finally be Vengurla, even after twelve years there, even for me, though that warm air afforded me my first

breath, though it was the first place on earth I came to love.
(*Longing*, 7, emphasis in the original)

Home is then America, which implies that Servid's sense of self during her childhood is based on national identity that is imposed on her by her parents' background. Nation refers to a territory that is shared by a set of people who are related by historical and cultural characteristics. Nations are imagined communities meaning, "nations are *represented* as spaces in which members of the nation have a strong bond with each other" (Mitchell, 269, emphasis in the original). Nationality means the state of belonging to a nation. Although Servid does not know the nation she belongs to very well, she claims to be American. National identity can also be considered relational. Being American means not being European or Asian, which is a result of people identifying themselves in relation to others. Servid "was not one of them" and recognizes to be different and that difference "is very often understood as otherness" (Norton, 286). National identities tend to be very much defined by otherness.

America, although considered home, is, however, an unfamiliar place:

Every five years we escaped for a year's leave of absence *at home*—somewhere on the American west coast. For me, those were trips to a foreign country. (*Longing*, 8, emphasis in the original)

Uncertainty arises because she is used and taught to call America home but actually it is an unknown "foreign country" (*Longing*, 8). Compared to the time living in India during her childhood, the time she spends in America is rather short. Naturally "affections for Vengurla", the village situated in west India where Servid spends her childhood, grow because Servid longs for "what was familiar, for people with whom [she] felt safe, for a place where [she] could be [her]self" (*Longing*, 10). Meaning is assigned to that place of childhood, meaning that she then "couldn't imagine that it was incomplete, that it wouldn't last" (*Longing*, 19). That meaning influences her future life but is still questioned:

I have yet to understand all the ways in which that tropical village can be meaningful to me these many years later, but its place in the treasury of remembrance is steadfast. Its light and warmth, the ripe fragrance of its fruits and flowers, the rust red earth skirting the

green of palms and rice fields, the turquoise water tumbling over white sands were all primary truths – first realities, first intimacies, first inklings of the meaning of my life. What became woven between and behind and around them was the other primary truth that anchored an early ache of longing in an uncomprehending young heart. I could not call this place home; this was not where I belonged. (*Longing*, 24)

Servid certainly develops love for India but never really feels connected to this place in such a strong way that she will ever feel to belong there. When Servid is thirteen, her family leaves India and moves to Lynden, a small rural town in northwest Washington, where she eventually spends her teenage years and starts an unconventional adult life. The first two decades of her life, Servid seems to be very uncertain of where to belong. A trip to Alaska eventually changes everything.

5.1.2 When Space Becomes Place

When Servid and her travel companion start their trip in Alaska, they are first of all confronted with Alaska's vast landscape. The environment that she faces while driving is described as follows:

We were driving the wide country between lodges and gas stations along the Alaska Highway. The road stretches off to become a thin line that disappeared over the horizon, [...]. An immense green rolled away from us – the dense forest of spiky black spruce broken up by the hillock and bog of the tundra. Those verdant reaches gradually rose to foothills, then the low peaks that courted the high snowy summit of the Wrangell Mountains south of us and the Alaska Range north. The land and sky met in a boundless circle around us. We drove and seemed to go nowhere. The mountains loomed closer, only to extend their ranges into the distance. Rivers cut sweeping valleys, giving shape to the land for miles around. (*Longing*, 37)

Considering that space is the structure, the environment with certain objects and their relative position and direction, then the environment refers to the landscape that lies in front of them and certain objects refer to

the road, the green, the forest, the mountains, the rivers and valleys. The spatial relations given in the description indicate the landscape's vastness. Servid is impressed by the "immensity of the scene" and the "enormousness of the space" but at the same time feels a certain "uneasiness perpetuated by that vast landscape" (*Longing*, 38). The vastness of Alaska's landscape is defined by its own terms and is not at all adequate with the human scale that Servid is familiar with. Soon she notices that she "found it difficult to establish a sense of proximity" because "everything close at hand got lost in a scale so grand it defied an appropriate response" (*Longing*, 38).



Hatcher Pass, Alaska, my picture

Space transforms into place when meaning is attached. But why is there such a quest for meaning? Servid offers the following perspective:

The verb *to mean* has Saxon, Frisian, and German derivations according to the Oxford English Dictionary, among them "to signify; to have in mind, hence also, to love." Our search for meaning comes from a yearning to love, to encounter those things beyond ourselves that take hold of our hearts. (*Longing*, 33, emphasis in the original)

Feeling a little uneasy in that environment in the beginning, there is one characteristic of Alaska's vastness that provokes a certain feeling in Servid:

Its lack of humanness offered a curious comfort, a perspective that let me imagine, for the first time, the boundaries of my life being defined and supported by the earth. (*Longing*, 37)

Servid recognizes that there is something larger behind the space that she is confronted with. Places carry different meanings for each individual and each place has a distinct influence on an individual. People feel comfortable in some places but not in others. Whereas one might need a city's crowdedness to be happy, another one might consider the countryside his very personal comfort. In Servid's case it is the earth – "its land, its waters, its vegetation, its skies, its elemental force and power, its complexity and grace" (*Longing*, 39) – that offers her comfort. It is, however, not just any place on earth but it is Alaska, and, although she is not prepared for those new feelings, she recognizes:

I had not considered the possibility that the earth itself could pull me toward understanding. I had not expected the sense of calling, the longing to have the wholeness that encompassed such a grand horizon find a place within. (*Longing*, 39)

It seems as if Servid underestimated the influence a place can have on an individual and on an individual's identity. Although she does not yet recognize that her very own identity will be shaped by this place, she notices that the "Alaskan landscape had set something in motion in [her] life" (*Longing*, 45). Although she does not fully understand the deep feelings towards this land, she cannot ignore them. The shift from space to place occurs when humans get to know a certain place better or, as Servid states, when "the line and space of an unfamiliar landscape touched and comforted me like someone who loved and knew me well" (*Longing*, 50). The attachment to place is influenced by the different ways people experience each place. Servid recognizes the diverse understanding of places each time she goes on a trip to explore new place:

[...] I remind myself that these mountains and points and islands have been guiding people for thousands of years. The land gives shape to these waters at the ocean's edge. It changes vastness into defined space, named traits and bays and inlets that map the course of human passage. I go where others have gone, though my experience is particular – the lonesome warble of a loon in this spot,

the first catch of a salmon in that, the deer bones resting on a grassy ledge above the water. With each trip, this place where I live expands to become more specific. (*Longing*, 126)

Servid's experience is as unique as every other human's experience with the same place and although she shares the names of the traits, bays and inlets with other people, each one of them is beheld in an individual way.

5.1.3 Establishing a Sense of Place

When Servid lives in India, she is impressed by various characteristics of the land:

Its light and warmth, the ripe fragrance of its fruits and flowers, the rust red earth skirting the green of palms and rice fields, the turquoise water tumbling over white sands [...]. (*Longing*, 24)

The personality of the places is very much influenced by its physical characteristics because these physical characteristics carry different meanings to each individual. As M. E. Eliot Hurst states:

Every place has a special character for its residents, its visitors, and those who "know" it only second-hand. Each place has a personality of its own, buried perhaps beneath prejudice and emotion, derived not just from buildings, but also from contours, street patterns, drama, colour, surprise, smells, noises, and so on. (Hurst, 41, emphasis in the original)

When Servid starts her trip in Alaska, she is immediately impressed by nature and landscape. Of course, it is vast landscape that Alaska has to offer and for Servid it has a startling originality:

That journey took me to places I could not have imagined beforehand. I had never seen retreating blue caverns of glacial ice. I had not sat face-to-face with a mountain range that rose three miles high out of the sea. (*Longing*, 36)

It is not only the picture of nature and landscape itself that fascinates her but also the special character that these places present – "powerful, indifferent, complex, staggering, sublime" (*Longing*, 37). However, a sense

of place not only develops from fascination and various characteristics of a place but also from the individual's perception of the place. Servid perceives and experiences places in a different way than other people do and through the experience places become meaningful and tangible in various ways. The processes of experiencing deeply and of getting a profound knowledge of the land are essential to the making of a place:

Eskimo people are known to have been able to produce accurate maps of their homeland working simply from memory. That ability to translate the physical landscape into an abstract one requires an intimate knowledge of the land that comes to people grounded where they live. (*Longing*, 89)

Detailed knowledge of a place can only be gained by occupying space a certain amount of time. Hence, the development of a place is the combination of space and time because "human experience begins with space and time and then proceeds to place" (Casey, 13).

The intimate knowledge of a place is also connected to the sense of belonging, which is an important human need. Being attached to a place and having profound ties with it is part of a human's identity. When Servid refers to home, it is not only the house that she refers to, but also the whole area around her house – the forest, the road, the trail down to the water's edge – that makes her feel comfortable:

A house contains important comforts, but here those expand to a sense of belonging that can provide good company from the road all the way down to the water's edge. That sense comes only with a willingness to accept what is here, to know the place on its own terms, and it has more to do with familiarity than ownership. Years of walking over the same ground, knowing it by night and day, in the moonlight and shadow, rain and wind, mist and snow, in the brilliance of a clear summer morning. This feeling of belonging welcomes me each time I walk the trail. (*Longing*, 75)

5.1.4 Rooted in a Place

In today's society, Servid states in her autobiography, it is "seldom our childhood grounds stay secure" (*Longing*, 99). The sense of belonging, or rootedness as it is often called, is, however, a crucial part of people's identity because:

[r]ootedness in place provides an essential context and coherence that allows us to know who we are by way of where we are, that allows us to act, to move our lives into our own significance." (*Longing*, 18)

Although this view has been shared among geographers, psychologists, historians, anthropologists and many others, it is not necessarily something that people are immediately aware of but may find out in the course of their life. Generally speaking, there are places that people love, dislike, feel comfortable and uncomfortable with or have even deeper attachments to. If people develop deeper attachments to a place, they most likely develop a sense of belonging. This sense of belonging does not necessarily refer to the place that people are born into, but is often established when people experience other places in the course of their life. The first time Servid recognizes the significance of rootedness to her personal life is when her friend and later husband Dorik tells his parents' story of how they had settled in Redstone, Colorado, a place that became the centre of their life and family home:

I listened with both heart and mind, recognizing elements of a sensibility I ached to be able to call my own: knowing a landscape like the back of my hand, knowing a place that was lodged deeply enough that it pulled my life into focus, knowing the continuity of a life lived from childhood through middle age with the linked and constant center point of place and family. (*Longing*, 99)

Servid's longing for stability and being rooted in a place might be amplified by her experiences of different places during her childhood. Born and raised in India, Servid also spends some long-time visits in the Lower 48s of the United States. Although she feels love for both places and calls them home at some point, she is missing a sense of belonging to those

places. The aim at being rooted in a place is an important part of people's identity construction. It lies in the nature of people that they want to belong to a certain place, but Servid notices that "[f]or years [she] ignored the human hunger [...] for a sense of place" (*Longing*, 24-25).

Today people increasingly "belong to more than one world, speak more than one language (literally and metaphorically), inhabit more than one identity, have more than one home" (Hall, 206). This is certainly true but, especially in relation to the concept of place identity, I argue that there needs to be made a clear distinction between home, in the sense of living in a place, and home, in the sense of belonging to a place. Servid lives in India during her childhood but then moves to the United States, adopting this national identity. Both places are, in some way or another, called home, at least for some period. This does, however, not necessarily mean that Servid feels a sense of belonging in those places. Home in India or on America's West Coast can be considered a functional home only. Servid clearly states that she considers home the place where she belongs:

Home is not a place where we are uncomfortable. Home is a place that nurtures us, a place that reassures us of ourselves, a place to which we feel obligated, a place we are willing to protect, a place where relationships are fast and true. Home is a place where we know we belong. Home is place infused with love. (*Longing* 175)

Home is considered more than just a roof over one's head. Home functions as a place where a person develops an identity and personality. Servid sees her home as a habitat that is "used to describe an ecological home range that allows a given species to thrive" (*Longing*, 175). The species refers to humans and humans yearn for a place they belong to. There are various factors in connection with habitat that help people grow into home. These factors evolve, according to Servid, among other things, from the word itself:

For those of us who use the English language, it is interesting to note that *habitat* is related to a cluster of other words – *habit*, *ability*, *rehabilitate*, *inhabit*, and *prohibit*. They all come from a common Latin root, *habere*, and spin off a fundamental concept of relationship: "to hold, hence to occupy or possess, hence to have." They constitute a family of words that ground us by describing where we live, how we

live, what we are able to do, how we heal ourselves, what our connections are to the landscape around us, what the boundaries are for our behaviour. Together, they offer a set of parameters that might allow us to thrive in a place we think of as home. (*Longing*, 175, emphasis in the original)

The set of parameters is then defined by a place's location, the ways of life in that place, the ways that make people feel better, people's relationship to the landscape and the ways people behave in the place. The relation between the words also constitutes the relation between people and habitat.

5.1.5 “The Last Frontier”

In general, American identity is, according to Turner and others, greatly influenced by the frontier experience. Character traits such as optimism, orientation towards future and exploitation of natural resources have developed from the frontier experience. Settlers faced wilderness and at the same time arable land and adjusted according to these new environmental challenge. The closing of America's westward expansion required locating a new frontier. The position in the far north, the unexplored regions and the great natural resources made Alaska become the Last Frontier. The importance of an Alaskan identity is not only that it is shaped by the frontier experience but also that it is often considered the last of its kind.¹²

Whereas some of the ideas associated with the frontier experience of western expansion could not be applied to the frontier concept of Alaska, others are quite present. The settlers adapting to the new environment and taming the wild characterized America's western expansion. Arable land and good weather conditions in the West made agrarian production possible. Alaska's harsh conditions render an agricultural tradition

¹² See chapter 4.3.4 “Alaska – The Last Frontier“.

impossible and leave settlers only with the chance of adapting to the wild. Thus, people today rather aim at the ability to survive in the wilderness and this ability is considered an important character trait of Alaskans. The development of this character trait is also present in Servid's book.

Servid's first confrontation with the wild at the beginning of their trip is characterized "by a fear that haunted [her]" (*Longing*, 42). Their first attempt to climb an icy mountain "had become an adversary, a test of [her] confidence and strength, of [her] courage and sensibilities" (*Longing*, 42). Her travel companion Tim already makes his way uphill when Servid starts with an uneasy feeling:

He was waiting. I fought to steady myself as I scanned the slope again. The dread I had tried to hold down pounded in my chest. I cursed my cowardice and Tim's expectations, cursed the snow slope itself. Then something put my feet in motion. They began to find the steps Tim had made. Using the icy handholds for balance, I crept out onto the slope. I tried not to think about where I was, concentrating instead on just going forward, but every movement trembled. My feet quivered into each step while I fought the panic and tears, knowing I couldn't founder in the middle of the crossing. A will I seemed to have no control over worked to close the gaping distance of snow between Tim and me, but by the time I reached him, I couldn't stop shaking. (*Longing*, 43)

Servid is, however, not so much frightened by the wild itself but rather by her inability to cope with the situation. Based on her failure she decides not to join Tim in any future climbing adventures, although she "hated the sense of feminine inadequacy that trapped [her], but could not find the self that knew composure and dignity" (*Longing*, 43).

The ability to survive in the wilderness is very much anchored in the frontier concept in general and is reckoned an important attribute of being a real Alaskan. The skills and strength needed must not necessarily be inherent but can be developed over time. Servid approaches her failure with optimism and learns to cope with the wild in her own way. Motivated by her 'can-do' mentality, a characteristic that seems quite important to Alaskans, she does not force herself into an activity that she does not feel

capable of, but rather explores the wild little by little. She buys a little rowing boat that helps her discover all the places and islands around her house. Every trip draws Servid closer to the wild and her fear gradually fades away and matures to intimacy:

With each trip, this place where I live expands to become more specific. And the dory affords me this growing intimacy, riding reliably over the water, its planks tight, its hull secure, its bow rising to whatever wave it meets. Each trip I entrust myself to its safekeeping. (*Longing*, 126)

Although Servid's fear of wilderness diminishes with every trip that she makes in her little dory, she is still aware that the wild always carries risk. Sometimes people underestimate this risk, as three young men from Sitka do, when they decide to go on a weekend hunting trip but only one of them returns. The other two men die in the accident that is caused by the ocean. Even though these men were surely quite familiar with the wild, they face an unpleasant surprise because:

Sitka's watered boundary is a border on uncertainty. People here court the ocean and its inner waters, read its moods, test themselves against it, stand to watch it roil in its own wildness. Its lessons go with the territory. The water's cold is more than most anyone can bear. (*Longing*, 129)

The local inhabitants of Sitka know the power of the ocean quite well; know how to live with the ocean and take up the challenge. Nevertheless, there is always some hidden or unexpected danger that people are aware of. The accident does not stop Servid to continue her trips in her little boat. It seems as if this aim to challenge her fears gives her motivation to continue exploring nature and the wild.

Compared to America's west, arable farming is not possible in Alaska. Nevertheless, Alaska offers many other natural resources, such as oil and gas, fishing or mining, that have become an essential part of Alaska's economy. The exploitation of natural resources is commonly accepted in America's society and considered an important character trait of the frontier identity.



Anchorage, Alaska, my picture

Forestry is also an important part of Alaska's economy because trees are a significant attribute of Alaska's landscape. Trees also play an important role in Servid's life. Trees surround her house and they cover the neighbouring islands and inlets. In the course of time, Servid develops a connection to those trees that makes her think about their meaning and use more seriously. When she reflects on her personal connection to trees, she notices:

I am a practiced user of trees. I am a reader and writer dependent on books whose paper comes from the forest. I eat at a wooden table, sleep on a wooden bed, find shelter within walls and a ceiling of wood. Each step I take across our wooden floor is dependent on the inherent strength of trees. (*Longing*, 161)

The raw materials of these goods are trees that are still visible in the product itself. However, as Servid claims, there are many products where the tree as basic material is not as evident, and it makes it hard to see the connection:

I would like to be able to acknowledge the trees that are enfolded in a number of things I use and enjoy, but in many cases, it is easy to overlook their presence. I forget that the film in my camera is made of celluloid, a by-product of trees. The music I enjoy is played on a variety of wooden instruments, but I rarely take account of the tree whose wood allows such resonance. A favorite Eskimo-style mask that hangs on one of our walls is carved out of alder. I don't often think about where the tree might have grown and who cut it down. Another wall in our house displays a thirty-year-old set of Breughel

reproductions from Holland, printed on fine paper. It is hard to imagine the trees whose lives are forgotten in those smooth thin sheets colored now with landscapes and human forms. (*Longing*, 161)

People, and Servid does not exclude herself, tend to forget where the goods they use to satisfy their needs and joys in everyday life come from.

The Alaska Pulp Corporation mill lies just around the corner of Servid's house. Before the mill closes after thirty years of operation, Servid often watches the transformation that alters the trees in such a way, that in the end they cannot even be recognized as trees any more:

They would be changed from sustainers of life, the lungs of the planet, to consumer goods that mask any possible resemblance to their original form – rayon dresses and skirts and blouses, for example, featured in endless fashion catalogs and department stores. Paging through those catalogs I try and try to make a connection between those elegant clothes and the forest that graces the Alaska Pulp Corporation's front yard, my front yard, the whole archipelago that makes up Southeast Alaska. I cannot make that connection. The transformation has been too severe. Those trees have been too completely consumed. (*Longing*, 153)

Servid approaches the exploitation of nature and natural resources from a rather critical point of view. We live in a consumer society and most of the production of goods is generated from and based on the exploitation of nature and natural resources.

5.1.6 Conclusion

Of Landscape and Longing: Finding a Home at the Water's Edge depicts the development of Carolyn Servid's identity in Alaska and illustrates that identity is not necessarily something given but can also be influenced by outside factors. The construction of Servid's identity is based on the growing attachment to the place in Alaska that she finally calls home. Along with the experience of place, Servid develops certain character

traits that distinguish an Alaskan identity. Although she fears Alaska's wilderness in the beginning of her time in Alaska, Servid challenges the situations of fear and is optimistic about any future situations in terms of wilderness. The development of courage and fortitude help her cope with life in the far north. Furthermore, Servid represents a 'can-do' mentality - she learns how to cope with Alaska's wilderness and develops toughness and resilience. These characteristics - optimism, 'can-do' mentality, toughness, resilience, courage and fortitude - are influenced by life in Alaska's harsh and rough environment and Servid's close connection to wilderness. Servid's decision to start a completely new life in Alaska represents self-reliance and orientation towards future. Although she does not know what to expect, she takes up the challenge. She relies on herself which is certainly also connected with her deep attachment to the place. A further characteristic representing Servid's development of an Alaskan identity is the conflict of protecting and using the environment. This conflict evolves from her feeling of rootedness in the place. Wilderness has become an important feature of Servid's identity but at the same time, wilderness is threatened by being destructed. Therefore, the protection of wilderness also means the protection of what characterizes Alaskans. Servid's attachment to place and her feeling of rootedness in place as represented in the book, have contributed the development of Servid's personal identity in such a way that she can finally be called a real Alaskan.

5.2 Marybeth Holleman – *The Heart of the Sound*

Marybeth Holleman was born in Cleveland, Ohio, and grew up in the mountains of Asheville, North Carolina. More than twenty years ago she moved to Alaska, working in Denali and on the train between Portage and Whittier for the first years. Today she lives in Anchorage with her husband and son and teaches creative writing, women's studies, and literature at the University of Alaska at Anchorage, and other institutions. Holleman is the author of essays, poetry and articles that have been published in several journals, magazines and anthologies. Her writings are often concerned with environmental issues such as global warming or oil spills. Her love and intimate knowledge of Prince William Sound motivated her to publish a traveller's guide of the region, too.

The Heart of the Sound: An Alaskan Paradise Found and Nearly Lost belongs to the genre of nature writing and features memories of Marybeth Holleman's life. It covers a period of about fifteen years and is divided into three parts, the first part dealing with the period between 1986 and 1988, part two reflecting the time between 1989 and 1996, and part three concentrating on the period between 1996 and 1999. *The Heart of the Sound* deals with the author's resettlement in Alaska after she developed great fascination for Alaska's nature and landscape. Born and raised in North Carolina, Holleman left home for a working holiday in Alaska during which she fell in love with Prince William Sound, a large inlet of the Gulf of Alaska. Prince Williams Sound is situated south of Anchorage and has many bays, harbours and little islands. She reflects on a paradise found, which was threatened by the catastrophe of the Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989 and the perfect landscape seems to be lost. Dealing with the destruction of an ecosystem, Holleman at the same time explores her emotional world concerning her marriage and her new role as mother. It is

the story about love, loss and learning and the establishment of a true sense of place.



Prince William Sound, Alaska, my picture

5.2.1 Falling In Love

The book starts out by depicting Holleman's childhood in North Carolina. When she is ten, she wants to live in Argentina because "[she] wanted mountains like the Appalachians [she] lived in now, but [she] wanted ocean, too" (*Sound*, 14). According to the *World Book*, her favourite book during her childhood, in Argentina one could enjoy both within half an hours drive. "[Her] family would just tell [her] that it's jobs and families that decided where you lived, not mountains and oceans" (*Sound*, 14) – an attitude that will be proven wrong some years later.

When Holleman and her husband Andy decide to move to Alaska, her family members, and especially her grandfather, are quite disappointed. The disappointment causes a lack of understanding in Holleman because since her grandfather emigrated from Italy to the United States in his early twenties, she expects that the "adventurous spirit" (*Sound*, 10) of her family should rather approve of her intentions. Her grandfather's move

was, however, driven by economic reasons and once he found land and work, he never migrated again:

I knew the experience of our generations, and our lives, were very different; I knew that the Italian sense of rootedness in land ran deep; I knew that an Italian's emotions, both good and bad, were sharply chiseled onto the surface of a life. All this made his disappointment in me only harder to bear. (*Sound*, 11)

The rootedness in land of Holleman's family seems to be not so much based on love for the land's nature and landscape but rather on economic reasons and the matter of fact that they own land. They might have established the same rootedness in land everywhere in the country. The idea that the physical beauty of a place appeals to Holleman in such a way that she decides to spend her life in that place, is not shared by her family.



Prince William Sound, Alaska, my picture

When Holleman faces Prince William Sound for the first time, she immediately feels a deep sense of connection, a feeling that she is quite surprised of because it is “so sudden and sustained” (*Sound*, 14). Watching Prince William Sound with its ice fields, mountains, forests, and sea from the train between Portage and Whittier, she absorbs the beauty the space that lies in front of her, noticing that “[t]here was nothing between [her] and this new place, and the beauty of it all rolled by [her]” (*Sound*, 4). Immediately she feels the need to explore the place that she

starts to fall in love with because she “couldn’t bear standing on the threshold of such a magnificent place and not venturing out into it” (*Sound*, 6). The space of Prince William Sound has already become meaningful to Holleman by her very first sight of it and the more often she ventures out into Prince William Sound to get to know the place deeply, the bigger her attachment to this place grows, which eventually develops into a feeling of rootedness. “It was the extremes [she] found in Prince William Sound that most appealed to [her] – extremes of weather, landscape, wildlife” (*Sound*, 23). These extremes characterize Alaska and demand toughness and resilience from Holleman because it is not always easy to cope with those extremes.

On her first visit back to North Carolina, which at that time is still considered home, Holleman notices that her love of wild places is not shared among her family and friends and even much less her love of Prince William Sound. Her own enthusiasm and the apathy among the others make her notice the chasm between herself and the place she still calls home. Eventually, Holleman and her husband decide to give up their former life in North Carolina and move to Alaska, as close to Prince William Sound as possible because “the pull of Alaska, of Prince William Sound, was too strong to resist” (*Sound*, 24). Holleman notices that her love for Prince William Sound carries deeper meaning such as fulfilling a need:

It’s been said that the face of a new love is like a mirror in which one sees the divine light of oneself. Perhaps the Sound showed me that self I was most in need of finding Perhaps my experience in this new place, the images I held in my heart, reflected back out into the world, throwing light on that which I needed. (*Sound*, 25)

Holleman’s need is to find out about her personality, about her identity and to realize where to belong. Prince William Sound has become the place where Holleman feels comfortable and home. Her attachment to the ice field, glaciers, fjord, waterfalls and its wildlife – nature and landscape of

Prince William Sound – has grown so strong that she now knows where she belongs. This place has a major influence on Holleman's identity.

5.2.2 Home Destructed

In 1989 Prince William Sound suffered from one of the biggest catastrophes in Alaska. The oil tanker Exxon Valdez grounded at Prince William Sound, lost eleven million gallons of oil and damaged the environment and wildlife severely. Of course, the disaster did not only have an impact on Prince William Sound but also affected Holleman. In her book Holleman therefore devotes a large section to this environmental disaster. The place that she feels to belong to, her home and her identity seem to be threatened. Holleman's strong attachment to the place is reflected in her feelings about the catastrophe because Prince William Sound "was the reason [she] had stayed in Alaska" (*Sound*, 33). The first feelings that strike Holleman when she hears about the disaster are feelings of sickness and despair:

I emerged, tried to work, headed for the bathroom again. And again. My chest ached, threatening to burst from the tidal wave inside, and I couldn't think. My throat burned as if it were on fire, and I couldn't speak. Couldn't comprehend this truth. Couldn't push it away, couldn't take it in. I told my office mate I was sick, I had to go home. (*Sound*, 34)

Holleman's reaction to the damage that has been done to Prince William Sound results in physical and mental pain. The effects on the place's physical setting are reflected in Holleman's emotions:

Poisoning, suffocating, dying all around. All the places I loved. All the animals I'd met there. And inside me, too, a poisoning, a suffocating, a dying. [...] I feared my heart was breaking. (*Sound*, 34-35)

Holleman feels rooted in Prince William Sound and her attachment has grown so strong that she identifies with the place. Consequently, Holleman identifies with the place's damage. She has trouble sleeping at night

because the horrible pictures of oil-covered beaches and animals come to her mind again and again, and she feels lost. After a while, Holleman recovers from the first shock and her feelings of despair gradually turn into feelings of anger:

Anger: at Andy for waking me with such horrible news. Anger: that this could have happened. That one of those oil tankers traversing the Sound every day could wreck and kill. Anger: that I could have been so naive as to not suspect this possibility. That this place I loved could be so defiled. (*Sound*, 40)

When people are in love with someone or something, they often see things through rose-coloured glasses. Holleman feels angry because she has ignored the fact that damage can be done to her beloved Prince William Sound and that this may have a great influence on her feelings. The fact that the disaster has been caused by humans and is not a natural one makes it even worse because it could have been prevented. Feeling “restless and angry” (*Sound*, 39), Holleman decides to go to Prince William Sound because she “was desperate to do something, anything, to stanch the flow of death and destruction” (*Sound*, 46). Enthusiastically, she joins veterinarians and volunteers to rescue animals such as sea otters, murre or cormorants on the oil-drenched beaches. Like other helpers, she is driven by feelings of guilt. As she reflects on in her memoir:

Oh, how I wanted, how we all wanted, to fix what we had broken, to make it all right. We wanted to save sea otters and murre and all the animals we possibly could from an oily death. We wanted to clean up their homes, sweep it all away, and then back away with murmured apologies. We wanted to undo the oil spill. (*Sound*, 58)

Humans have caused the oil spill and it seems as if she felt guilty of her species and tried to make amends for the terrible mistake. But the more time Holleman spends out there in Prince William Sound to rescue the wildlife, the more doubts arise whether the attempts at rescue really help the environment:

When I looked at the faces of the other volunteers, when we talked in low voices around drugged sea otters and dying birds, I wondered if they felt doubt, too. I wondered if they were figuring out, as I was, that this wasn't working. That not with all the technology at our disposal, all the money from Exxon and governments and

foundations, all the volunteers pouring in every day could we even begin to fix what we had broken. I wondered if they, too, laid awake at night feeling as I did, that our rescue efforts were more about entertaining ourselves, keeping ourselves busy, making ourselves feel good. That we were living a lie. (*Sound*, 58)

Holleman knows that the oil spill cannot be undone and believes that the attempts to heal the wounds of the environment are rather attempts to heal the wounds of the disaster in people's mind. Again and again the question arises whether the rescue efforts will do more harm than good to the wildlife. Unsure if the environment really benefits from her help, Holleman decides to withdraw:

This was why I had to quit this job and head for Perry Island. I didn't want to capture oiled birds or clean oiled animals again. This time would be different. I would be there two weeks, not trying to do anything except observe. Not trying to fix anything. (*Sound*, 60)

Instead, Holleman chooses only to bear witness of what was going on, to record the development and leave it to time to heal all the wounds.

5.2.3 Emotional Struggle

Holleman's deep connection to Prince William Sound is also important in regards to the personal struggle with her life, when she falls in love with another man and her marriage is heading towards a break-up. The year the oil spill takes place Holleman goes to Perry Island to help cleaning and saving animals from the oil spill and make them feel more comfortable. Now that she was hit by a couple of events in her personal life she returns to that place seeking for comfort, too. The feelings that were evoked in her with the oil spill have now returned with her personal struggle. "Five years ago, for the week [she] camped in this same spot, [she] had seen no rain. No waves. No clouds." (*Sound*, 83) Sun and warmth have been replaced by rain, waves and clouds, which exactly represent Holleman's mood:

Now I dwelled on the torrent of events that had arisen this spring.
Now I sought not only solace but also clarity. Somehow I sensed
they were connected – the spill, this place, my conflicting desires.
(*Sound*, 84)

The conflict in Holleman refers to the life she has lived the past fifteen years, her marriage and her family, which she now seems to lose because she has fallen in love with another man. The time at Perry Island should help her to find out about her feelings:

What did surprise me was the turmoil and the fear. An here I faced both: the turmoil of a storm brewing around me, wind whipping up waves, water pouring from the dark sky; and the fear of being alone in the wilderness, on an island twenty-six miles by water from the nearest town. Why had I thrown myself back into this place alone? And why now, when such a storm ranted inside me as well?
(*Sound*, 84)

The fear of being alone might also refer to the fear of actually finding out what she is feeling. A decision cannot always be based on rationality and it seems as if Holleman had already instinctively made a decision but she is too much of a coward to admit that she has based her decision on her feelings. The reason why she has chosen Prince William Sound to retrieve on such essential questions about her life is that it “had grown its way into [her] heart like roots of a tree embedding themselves into soil.” (*Sound*, 85) Although Holleman lives in Anchorage for work-related reasons and educational reasons for her son, she feels such strong attachment to and rootedness in this place that she chooses Prince William Sound to seek for comfort. And besides this place “was a beautiful place, a vast and surprising place, but it was not an easy place” (*Sound*, 85), which also refers to her life. Life is beautiful, too, but it can sometimes be surprising and hard:

For moths I had been in a wave, caught up in it, unable to control its directions, its force. I could only hope to ride it rather than drown in it. I could only hope it would not dash me against a rock cliff or throw me, lifeless, onto a beach. The boat that had been my life had capsized, strewing all the contents around me. I didn't know which pieces would sink, which pieces would make it to shore, which pieces would end up with me. (*Sound*, 86)

The discrepancy of her life is compared to the wild where it is always uncertain in what direction things will go. She has similar feelings concerning her personal life. She is torn between two possibilities, between two men, one showing “stability and devoted love and a smooth path through a tended meadow,” the other one revealing “passion and amazement and a trail disappearing into thick forest” (*Sound*, 87). Holleman wants the place to help her find solace, clarity and answers. The question is not so much which man she shall choose but rather who she shall be. There was neither the right nor the wrong decision, or at least Holleman will never find out which one will be right and which one wrong. The wilderness teaches her that she cannot always choose what to have and what to lose. Events happen in nature as they do in people’s lives and often they cannot be undone. Sometimes a decision must be based on intuition and faith:

As this trees held through storms – every storm recorded in its every branch, its every bend – so the Sound held the spill. So did I hold my past. I couldn’t choose to lose that which was already a part of me. I could only trust my heart as the tree trusted the bluff to hold it, as the loons trusted the lakes they nested upon. They were all acts of faith. All I could do was take my chances with life and hope I weathered them as gracefully as this hemlock. (*Sound*, 94-95)

Eventually she makes a decision, based on her feelings, chooses to get divorced and continue her life with all the challenges of a new love. However, the inner struggle concerning her divorce continues for quite a while.

5.2.4 Finding an Explanation

Doubtlessly, the oil spill near Prince William Sound has influenced Holleman’s personality and identity in regards to her deep connection to the place. But there is also a deeper meaning to this place and its alteration over years, which has an influence on the way Holleman’s life

changes over years. She draws parallels between the oil spill and her break-up and wonders whether the disaster has contributed to the events that took place:

I wondered what the spill caused and what it only exacerbated. I wondered whether the spill created or magnified [...] problems. I would never know. That my own marriage ended five years after it – was there a connection, or was I using it as an excuse? (*Sound*, 100)

One psychological approach to find a connection between the oil spill and her break-up is offered by her counsellor, who suggests that “[she] was feeling smothered” and “when the oil spill happened, [she] could relate to it because the literal smothering of animals by oil mirrored the smothering [she] was feeling in [her] own life” (*Sound*, 99). Another theory suggests that the connection can be based on the social and psychological damage a technological disaster can cause. According to Dr. Steven Picou and Dr. Kai Erikson of Yale University (Cf. *Sound*, 101), there is a big difference between the effects of a natural disaster and those of a technological one. Whereas a natural disaster strengthens a community and an individual, a technological disaster rather pulls people apart. This can lead to conflicts within a community, which, in turn, can result in suicides, break-ups, lost friendships, and exoduses (Cf. *Sound*, 101-103). Holleman is uncertain about both theories but the more she thinks about it, the more she can see a connection between the oil spill and the break-up of her marriage:

Maybe it was coincidence, the oil spill and the breakup of my marriage. But that’s not how it felt. I could trace back quite clearly the path of an uneasiness, trace it right back to that shattering event when something I had taken for granted blew apart. (*Sound*, 103-104)

The connection is represented in her feelings about both events. They are the same. In both incidents the damage causes a knot in her stomach and she wishes to go back to the state where everything is still in order:

The oil spill caused collateral damage in the same way that an accidental death could destroy a family. It was the kind of disaster that made people lost to each other, unable to reconnect no matter how much they might want to. I felt that way about my marriage. So many times over so many years I just wanted us to go back to the

way things were, to before we split up, only to feel this great this great expanse between us, this bottomless chasm. (*Sound*, 105)

As she has struggled with the sense of the oil spill, she now struggles with the sense of her divorce. But some events do not make sense. They just happen and people have to live with the results and changes they cause. People are always in search to explain certain happenings but sometimes it seems better to just let go and Holleman “wanted more than anything, to just let go” (*Sound*, 109).

5.2.5 Restoration

The exploitation of nature and natural resources is one of the main characteristics of the depiction of frontier society. People who move to Alaska generally come with the intention to use nature or natural resources for their personal benefits. Many people come for economic reasons. They represent what I would like to call the gold rush mentality, which means that they plunder, take and get rich, irrespective of the damage that may be done to the environment.

Holleman, like others, uses nature to satisfy her love of and affections for the land. She benefits psychologically from Alaska’s nature. The fact that she almost loses her beloved Prince William Sound promotes a different way of thinking in her. In some way a conflict develops between protecting the natural world and using it for your personal benefit. On the one hand, Holleman wants to spend as much time as possible at Prince William Sound because it “was more dear to [her] than anywhere else on earth, and [she] craved time in it” (*Sound*, 145). On the other hand, her nature conservationist mentality that she has developed makes her think in terms of what is in the best interest of the ecosystem. She knows too well, as she has experienced with her divorce, that “[w]ounds needed time, undisturbed time, to heal” and she actually believes that now, eight years

after the oil spill, “the Sound was finally getting that undisturbed time to restore” (*Sound*, 134). Instead, more and more people and boats can be found in Prince Williams Sound and Holleman questions whether all those efforts by researchers and clean-up crews will actually help to restore nature:

If the Sound was to have a chance at recovery, I now believed, the best restoration would be simply let it be. Limit the number of people in the Sound, the number of boats and camps – a permit system, like in Denali National Park. I’d be willing, even if it meant I couldn’t go there every summer. In the name of restoration, I’d be willing. (*Sound*, 137)

Holleman’s attachment to Prince William Sound has grown so strong that its restoration means more to her than satisfying her personal needs. She is willing to make a sacrifice, even if it means that she cannot spend as much time in the place she deeply feels connected to. Attentive love means respect, maintenance and care, even if it means to disregard action:

This is the way of attentive love: action based on the love that comes from being aware of what the place and its inhabitants need and desire. Attentive love requires an ethic of humility; it requires faith in ourselves and in the beloved. Rejecting excessive control, it reveres the process of life. At times the way of attentive love is inaction: sometimes it’s best to do nothing. (*Sound*, 140)

Some developments are just beyond humans’ power and instead of heading towards the wrong direction people should have faith in just doing nothing. The restoration of the natural world can in certain cases be done best by itself. Human interference can sometimes do more harm than good.

The conflict between protecting and using the natural world is also displayed in Holleman’s trip to southwestern Prince William Sound looking for orcas. She joins a group of researchers on board who are well-known for studying killer whales and educating boaters on viewing whales. Together with several other small boats they finally get to see a pod of whales but all the sudden the whale watching she has longed for so many times did not feel right any more. This feeling becomes even stronger

when the small boats leave and one of the scientists takes out his gun, which is used to dart the whales for biopsies. The dart samples are used for DNA testing. She feels “uncomfortable about the intrusiveness of the biopsy work” (*Sound*, 167) and wonders why the whales could not be just observed. She would prefer to learn about the whales by observation rather than darting and DNA tests. But it seems to be a human desire to learn about things in a way that cannot exclude human input. Holleman finds herself caught in conflicting desires:

We wanted to see the whales as predictably as we could in zoos, but without walls; we wanted to know everything about them, and we wanted to know now; we wanted them wild and healthy, full of the mystery and grace that were the very pulls of our desire. But we were impatient and insatiable, unwilling to place limits on ourselves [...]. (*Sound*, 172)

It is hard to fulfil those desires because they head in opposite directions. On the one hand, people want to gain intimate knowledge about whales, but, on the other hand, they do not want to harm them. They want to see the whales in their full originality but do not want to follow limits and, of course, these desires are somehow not compatible.

5.2.6 Valuable Lesson

Holleman learns much by recognizing her strong attachment to Prince William Sound. Her intimate connection to the place teaches her about love, care and her personal life more than any other place could probably ever have. She finds out that “[t]here is a cemented bond, a current thick as blood between this place and [her].” And “[t]here is no letting go or giving up” (*Sound*, 182). This place has become part of her life and she has become part of Prince William Sound. And the oil spill has even strengthened her devotion to this place:

I was learning to love in the way that only feeling of loss of the beloved could provide. I was learning to pay attention, to take care,

and to take nothing for granted. The lesson inside me now, just as the waters of glaciers and snow were inside us. (*Sound*, 201)

Furthermore, Holleman has learned that changes in life can happen as disasters in nature can happen, and the experience with nature helps her to cope with and understand her life. Although she often wished to go back in time and revert what had happened, she now knows that there are some things in life, such as the oil spill or the break-up of her marriage, that are irreversible. And she learns that the best way to cope with undesired happenings is to develop along with them instead of wishing to turn back time and getting lost in old memories:

Perhaps what I was learning was this: loving a place unconditionally required a willingness not just to fight for its protection, but also to change along with it. (*Sound*, 192)

The strong bond between Holleman and Prince William Sound is also represented in the way she cares about the place's future. After the oil spill, Prince William Sound has become a popular place for many people. The visitor numbers increase enormously and Holleman worries about these developments and their negative effects on Prince William Sound:

Why do we call things disasters only when they happen swiftly? These incremental, cumulative damages are an irreversible erosion of the place. The permanent degradation of a place by increased access and overuse could, in long run, be far worse than a catastrophic event like the oil spill. [...] We accommodate these incremental damages, adjust ourselves to them, learn to ignore them, just as we adjust to the poisoning of our own air and water, to the noise pollution that deafens us. (*Sound*, 180)

Holleman wants to protect Prince William Sound even if it means that she cannot spend as much time, or no time at all, in her beloved place. The nature and landscape of Prince William Sound have become so important to her that she will put their wellbeing above her personal needs and desires. "Come what may, [she] will love and protect the Sound to the end of [her] days, [...]. Even if [she] never sees it again." (*Sound*, 182) Undeniably, Holleman is deeply rooted in this place.

5.2.7 Conclusion

The Heart of the Sound: An Alaskan Paradise Found and Nearly Lost focuses on Marybeth Holleman's resettlement in Alaska evoked by the development of a close attachment to a place called Prince William Sound. Her continuing experience of the place leads to the construction of an Alaskan identity. Holleman, like Carolyn Servid, develops certain character traits that identify her Alaskan. Fascinated by Alaska's rough and harsh environment, Holleman becomes a tough, resilient and independent woman who learns to cope with different situations in Alaska's wilderness as well as the situations in her personal life. When Prince William Sound, the beloved place that constitutes her personal identity, is threatened of being destroyed by an oil spill, she learns to be optimistic and develops a positive orientation towards future to protect the place that has such an important meaning in her life. These characteristics also help her cope with her personal development in regards to marriage and divorce. Although sometimes beset with worries about her personal future, Holleman develops self-reliance and courage to accept the changes in her life.

The characteristics that constitute Holleman's Alaskan identity are clearly not hereditary characteristics but have developed over time. Life and experience in the far north has made Holleman become an Alaskan.

6 Conclusion

Alaska is the northernmost and largest state by area of the United States, and the most sparsely populated one at about 1.1 people per square mile. Alaska features one of the world's last remaining wilderness areas and it is therefore not surprising that nature and landscape heavily influence Alaskan literature. The majority of what is considered Alaskan literature is non-fiction, mainly nature writing but also historical or cultural-anthropological studies of natives, wilderness adventure stories or memoirs of wilderness types. Alaskan fiction is well known for its detective and mystery stories, such as the novels written by Dana Stabenow, but literary fiction and poetry are also represented in Alaskan literature. Whether poetry, fiction or non-fiction, most books include descriptions of nature and landscape in their stories.

Nature writing is an important and progressively growing genre of American literature in general. It is a combination of scientific information and personal interpretation and depicts and deals with the relationship between humans and nature. Since the nineteenth century and Henry David Thoreau, who is considered the spiritual father of American nature writing, the genre has continuously gained prominence. Contemporary nature writing has grown in popularity since the 1970s. The rising demand for the genre is generated by the persistent urbanization and mechanization of American life and landscape and the resulting anxiety about the natural world. Furthermore, Environmentalism has become more and more important all over the world. Lastly, poetry and fiction have dropped in demand, which, in turn, has promoted alternative genres such as nature writing. In Alaska, nature writing has a tradition of about three centuries and features classic American themes such as the quest for self-reliance (what people are actually capable of), the quest for communion (people's communion and connection to nature), and the quest for

accomplishment (people's wealth and fame after new adventures). Alaskan nature writing represents various literary genres, such as the official expedition narrative, the individual adventure narrative, personal journals and memoirs and the "familiar essay" and should be considered a significant contributor to English and World literature. When I noticed that Alaska's nature and landscape play such an important role in Alaska and its literature, I assumed that nature and landscape must also have a great influence on Alaskan identity. Therefore, I have argued that the construction of Alaskan identity in the two books that I have chosen for analysis is most dominantly shaped by nature and landscape.

Environmental protection is an important theme in nature writing. Both books that I have chosen for analysis are written by female authors and depict female perspectives of protecting the environment because the authors show their connection to wilderness in ways that are deeply rooted in womanhood. I came to the conclusion that gender must be an important factor in terms of wilderness protection. Therefore I have approached wilderness protection from an ecofeminist point of view that suggests that women approach wilderness quite differently to men. Women find extended meaning in natural objects and wilderness contributes to their physical and mental development. The nurturing character of women also plays an important role. Servid's, as well as Holleman's, exploration of wilderness parallels the exploration of their personality and reflect their personal growth. Their approach to wilderness protection is therefore deeply influenced by their close attachment to Alaska's nature and landscape.

Similar to nature writing, the study of cultural geography also deals with the relationship between humans and the physical environment. Cultural geography is an important aspect of cultural studies and deals with matters of meaning in relation to spaces, places and landscape. Therefore, it seemed obvious to use certain concepts of cultural

geography for the analysis of the two contemporary books. The concepts of space and place generally concentrate on the relation of space and place and are assumed to require each other for definition. Most definitions consider space the more abstract, objective element and place the concrete, subjective element. The shift from space to place occurs when humans get to know it better and attach meaning and value to it. Furthermore, the study of cultural geography is also concerned with the ways people create places. Individuals and cultures are investigated in relation to specific areas and their influence on individuals and societies, their understanding of the world, and their personal and collective identity. The construction of identity can be studied in relation to various aspects such as gender, race, class, social and cultural influences and many more. Within the discipline of cultural geography, identities are studied in their relation to space and place. People identify with places because they attach significant meaning to them, and this meaning evolves from memories, conceptions, interpretations, ideas and feelings. An important aspect of identities based on place is a sense of belonging. Human beings desire to be rooted in a place, and, therefore, the notion of belonging is closely connected to a sense of place, which refers to the subjective feelings for a particular place.

Alaska is generally referred to as the “Last Frontier”. In order to be able to understand why Alaska is called a frontier and, moreover, the last one of its kind, it was also necessary to investigate the frontier thesis in general and to find out the meaning in relation to Alaska. The concept of the frontier is generally known to have a great impact on American’s national identity. Therefore, it seemed likely that the concept of the last frontier heavily influences Alaskan identity. The human perception and interaction with Alaska’s landscape creates a unique Alaskan identity. The physical attributes of places and the sense of state without boundaries are considered to promote certain characteristics, which will be mentioned later in regards to the concept of *Alaskaness*.

The analysis is based on two contemporary works of nature writing, Carolyn Servid's *Of Landscape and Longing: Finding a Home at the Water's Edge* and Marybeth Holleman's *The Heart of the Sound: An Alaskan Paradise Found and Nearly Lost*. In these books I have tried to find characteristics that help me define Alaskan identity and *Alaskaness*. Both books deal with the relationship between humans and nature and depict the influence of the spatial phenomena of Alaska on the characters and on their development of personal identity.

Servid depicts the development of rootedness in Sitka, a town on Baranof Island in southeast Alaska and Holleman developed a sense of belonging to Prince William Sound. Interestingly, neither of these two writers was born in Alaska. Yet both characters consider these places in Alaska home and refer to themselves as Alaskans. Servid spent her childhood in India, a place that she likes but never feels to belong to. In Alaska she develops a sense of rootedness and recognizes that she has long ignored her longing for stability and being rooted in a place. Various characteristics of the place and the meaning she attaches to the place help her construct her personal identity. It becomes clear that the physical environment of Alaska influences Servid's identity. Holleman's sense of belonging is reflected by her personal growth along with a place. She falls in love with Prince William Sound, a place that is threatened to being destroyed by an oil spill. The disaster causes changes at Prince Williams Sound and alters the environment in different ways. At the same time, Holleman has to face changes in her life, such as her divorce and her love for a new man, that alter her personal identity in positive and negative ways. The deep attachment to Prince William Sound helps her cope with the alterations in her life. Holleman collates the developments at Prince William Sound with the happenings in her life and the growth of her personal identity.

Furthermore, I believe that there is such a concept as *Alaskaness* because, although Alaska belongs to the United States, Alaskans generally refer to themselves as Alaskans and not Americans. This

indicates that there must be certain characteristics that distinguish Alaskans from people of the Lower 48s in a unique way. The concept of the last frontier also contributes to the definition of Alaskan identity.

The main attribute of Alaska's landscape is wilderness, which influences the Alaskan sense of place and functions as an important feature of Alaska's national identity. Alaska is known for its harsh and rough environment and demands certain characteristics from Alaskans to live under these conditions. Therefore, *Alaskaness* refers to the ability to survive in the wilderness. Certain skills and strength are needed to cope with the environment. Alaskans are tough, resilient and independent people and these characteristics come from their close connection to wilderness. Great courage and fortitude are required to cope with the difficulties of life in the far north. Alaskans do not need any help to handle Alaska's extremes and this ability offers them a feeling of independence. Furthermore, *Alaskaness* means optimism and orientation towards future. Optimism refers to the so-called 'can-do' mentality that Alaskans possess. They like challenges and do not just give up when the situation seems too difficult. Servid's toughness and resilience are represented by the way she handles her fear of the wild. At her first confrontation with wilderness, Servid attempts to climb a mountain, which becomes a test of her confidence and strength and of her courage. She is not able to cope with the situation but she approaches her failure with optimism. This represents the 'can-do' mentality of Servid, meaning she does not give up but challenges her fears. Toughness and resilience are also represented in the ways Holleman copes with the disaster at Prince William Sound and her personal struggle. Sometimes the situation of both instances seems hopeless but Holleman is tough and resilient enough to not give up. She is optimistic that at some point everything will turn towards a positive end.

Moreover, *Alaskaness* signifies orientation towards future on a personal and economic level. Alaska is considered a state without boundaries, which refers to Alaska's tremendous size and its large wilderness areas, as well as its natural resources. People come and live in Alaska for

economic and personal development. Self-reliance is a further attribute of *Alaskaness* and is closely connected to orientation towards future. Self-reliance is needed if people want to start a new life, aim at personal renewal or want to start a new job, and it is needed to survive in the wilderness. Orientation towards future and self-reliance are represented in the books because both authors come from the Lower 48s and start a completely new life in Alaska. Especially Holleman's decision to stay in Alaska is questioned by her family and her self-reliance helps her cope with her family's worries and strengthens her decision to live in the far north.

Lastly, *Alaskaness* refers to the conflict of protecting and using the environment. The exploitation of nature and natural resources is a characteristic deeply rooted in the concept of the frontier in general. Alaskans use nature and its resources for their economic and recreational interests but at the same time they are deeply rooted in the natural world. The destruction of nature implies the destruction of their rootedness. In regards to areal measures, humans only lightly affect Alaska's land and there is still a feeling of endlessness of nature and natural resources. But at the same time, Alaska's nature and landscape are affected by natural and technological disasters that threatened to destroy what is so important to Alaskan people. This conflict has contributed to a growing awareness of environmental protection. Environmental protection is part of the story in both books. Both authors have established a feeling of rootedness in Alaska's nature and landscape and they recognize that the causes that make them feel rooted in the place need to be protected. This feeling of protection deviates from the characteristic that is usually considered Alaskan. Although the exploitation of nature and natural resources is a characteristic that is apparently quite valid in Alaskan identity, Servid and Holleman develop a growing demand to protect Alaska's heritage of wild areas. Both authors consider wilderness as an important feature of their identities that are threatened of being destroyed if people do not take environmental protection into consideration. At the same time the

protection of wilderness means the protection of what characterizes Alaskans.

The analysis of Carolyn Servid's *Of Landscape and Longing* and Marybeth Holleman's *The Heart of the Sound* has shown that the sense of belonging and feeling rooted in a place have a great impact on the characters' identities. Furthermore, both books focus on the construction of Alaskan identity and show that identity in general, and, in both texts Alaskan identity in particular, is not something given but is constructed by the influence of the physical environment on both characters.

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GERMAN ABSTRACT

Alaska ist ein Land in dem etwa 680.000 Menschen auf 1.5 Millionen Quadratkilometer leben. Natur und Landschaft ist nicht nur das Erste, was man mit diesem Land assoziiert, sondern nimmt auch in der Literatur Alaskas einen wichtigen Stellenwert ein. Ein Großteil der Literatur in Alaska fällt unter die Kategorie „non-fiction“; davon überwiegend Werke, die als „nature writing“ bezeichnet werden, aber auch historische oder kulturanthropologische Studien, Abendteuergeschichten oder Memoiren. Die bekanntesten Werke der Kategorie „fiction“ ist der Kriminalroman, aber auch andere Formen des Romans und Dichtungen sind in der Literatur Alaskas vertreten. Natur, Landschaft und Wildnis sind oft Thema in den verschiedenen Literaturgenres.

Die vielfältige Repräsentation von Natur und Landschaft in Alaskas Literatur hat mich zu der Annahme geführt, dass Natur und Landschaft auch in Bezug auf Identität in Alaska einen wichtigen Stellenwert einnimmt. Basierend auf meinem Argument, dass die Identität in Alaska vorherrschend von Natur und Landschaft geprägt ist, war das Ziel meiner Diplomarbeit, Merkmale der Identität in Alaska zu definieren. Zudem sollte der Frage nachgegangen werden, ob – und wenn ja, wie – sich der Begriff *Alaskaness* definieren ließe. Zu diesem Zweck wurden zwei Werke des Genres „nature writing“ herangezogen, Carolyn Servids *Of Landscape and Longing: Finding a Home at the Water's Edge* (2000) und Marybeth Hollemans *The Heart of the Sound: A Paradise Found and Nearly Lost* (2004), die Einsicht in ihr Leben und ihre Entwicklung in Alaska gewähren. Die Bücher erzählen die Geschichten der Autorinnen in Zusammenhang mit Alaskas Natur und Landschaft, den Einfluss der räumlichen Phänomene in Alaska und die Entwicklung ihrer persönlichen Identität.

Zur Analyse der zwei Werke wurden Konzepte der Kulturgeographie herangezogen. Im Allgemeinen beschäftigt sich die Kulturgeographie mit

der Beziehung zwischen Menschen und deren physischer Umgebung. Daher schien es naheliegend, Konzepte der Räumlichkeit bei der Analyse der zwei Bücher anzuwenden.

Identität kann in vielerlei Hinsicht erforscht werden, unter anderem auch in Bezug auf ihre Beziehung zu Räumlichkeit, Natur und Landschaft. Menschen identifizieren sich oft mit dem Raum der sie umgibt, weil sie ihm große Bedeutung beimessen. Diese Bedeutung wird durch Erinnerungen, Vorstellungen, Interpretationen, Ideen und Gefühle der Menschen in Bezug auf den Raum entwickelt. Einer der wichtigsten Aspekte von Identität ist das Gefühl der Zugehörigkeit. Menschen möchten sich zugehörig und verwurzelt fühlen.

Die Arbeit wurde daher folgendermaßen strukturiert: Kapitel zwei gibt einen kurzen Einblick in die Geographie und Geschichte Alaskas, da sie oft als Grundlage für Alaskas Literatur dienen. Kapitel drei beschäftigt sich mit dem Genre „nature writing“, da die beiden Werke unter dieses Genre fallen und als Grundlage zur Analyse dienen. Kapitel vier beschreibt, was man unter Kulturgeographie versteht und definiert die Konzepte der Räumlichkeit, die für die Arbeit von Bedeutung sind und bei der Analyse angewandt werden. In Kapitel fünf wurden dann die Werke anhand der ausgearbeiteten Konzepte analysiert und Charakteristika herausgearbeitet, die zur Definition von Identität in Alaska und *Alaskaness* beitragen. In Kapitel sechs wird eine Zusammenfassung gegeben, bei der unter anderem die Definition von Identität in Alaska und *Alaskaness* herausgearbeitet wird.

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1999/2000 2 Semester Universität Wien
Studienrichtung Medizin

2000-2008 Universität Wien
Studienrichtung Anglistik und Amerikanistik

Sonstiges: Führerschein der Gruppe A+B
EDV-Kenntnisse Windows 2000, Microsoft
Office
Fremdsprache – Englisch fließend

Berufliche Tätigkeit: Liberty Incentives and Congreses Vienna
Project Manager

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