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The Whirlpool and A Map of Glass

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1. Introduction

At first, a few terminological matters have to be clarified. If I write about Canadian literature in the following, I am referring specifically to English Canadian literature. First of all, because the author I am writing about, Jane Urquhart, is an English Canadian writer. Second, because it would go beyond the scope of this thesis if I included other literatures such as French Canadian literature, First Nations literature, Inuit literature, or the literature of any other ethnicity in Canada. Third, because the debate on the role of nature in Canadian literature has primarily been led by English Canadian scholars. Within English Canadian literature, I am referring specifically to that of the Province of Ontario. Writers coming from different parts of the country perceive their environment in differing ways, and the sheer size of Canada evokes diverse literary responses. I am aware of these differences, but for reasons of simplification I cannot emphasize my Ontario-based approach every time. Therefore, I hope to be excused if one or another statement may read like a crude generalization at first glance.

I have chosen to use the term “nature” in the title of my thesis because it encompasses various concepts like landscape, geography, climate, flora and fauna, wilderness and the North. Some scholars only write about a single aspect of nature, emphasizing its importance in the Canadian context while at the same time neglecting other approaches. It can, for example, be argued that landscape and geography, in contrast to nature, are human constructs, that they are nature viewed through the eyes of humans. But this distinction does not apply in a purely anthropocentric approach, which this thesis uses. My nature only exists in a human context, in a Canadian context. In this study, landscape is a part of nature just as geography, the climate, plants, animals, and so on are. The term “nature” refers to the whole environment, to the physical reality of the land with which early explorers were confronted a few centuries ago, and which still continues to haunt the Canadian imagination.

In the following, I will give a general introduction to the theme of nature in Canadian literature and its role in the process of Canadian identity formation. Then I will take a look at the critical discourse of the past forty years, and I will present various theories of nature. Starting off from the thematic criticism of Northrop Frye and Margaret Atwood to more recent theories like that of Sherrill Grace, I will create

a theoretical framework which I will apply to two novels by Jane Urquhart. I have chosen to work on her first novel, *The Whirlpool*, published in 1986, and on her most recent work of fiction, *A Map of Glass*, published in 2005, in order to show a development in the author's perception of nature. I want to show that Urquhart is aware of the critical discourse, and that she contributes to the continuity of the theme in Canadian literature. The historical novel is probably the best medium to participate in the search of identity in Canada, and through the interaction of nature and history in her novels, Urquhart supports the idea that the Canadian self-perception is to a certain extent influenced by nature.

2. Nature in Canadian Literature

2.1. A Curious Triangle

When we look at the history of nature in Canadian literature over the past two decades, a curious triangle of mutual influence presents itself. It is impossible to talk about Canadian nature as it was two hundred years ago without relating to literary accounts by settlers and explorers, simply because they were the only witnesses to a land that was unexplored by western civilization at that time. It is equally impossible to write about Canadian literature without mentioning its emergence in the course of the search for a national identity that started at the end of the nineteenth century. Finally, it does not make sense to talk about national identity without regard to the influence of nature on the Canadian imagination and self-perception. Therefore, excluding identity from a discussion of nature and literature in Canada is just as pointless as isolating nature or literature from the other two elements. It is a curious triangle of mutual influence, a circle where the discussion of one topic inevitably leads to another. It is an integral whole in which none of the three elements is to be left out. In the following, I will give a short overview of the history of the three constituents, showing how they came together.

Nature existed first. It was already there when Jacques Cartier and Samuel de Champlain sailed up the Saint Lawrence River. It was there when the fur trade was established and the *coureurs des bois* explored the frontier. It was there when the first settlers from Europe arrived and tried to establish a colony. All these people encountered a largely unexplored country with a rough climate and unimaginably vast landscapes. They were confronted with an immense presence of nature, and they had to deal with it in various ways. They struggled to survive in an unfriendly environment, they marveled at the unfamiliarity of the landscape, and finally they used its resources to establish an economy that ensured their survival. They farmed the land, and soon they started to exploit and destroy it. Even the people who had never been to the real North must have felt its immense presence outside the community that they lived in. A mere glance at a map must have revealed the vastness of the country they inhabited, and oral reports of adventurers who had been to the frontier, to the North, or to any other unexplored part of the country must have had a strong impact. Even though the country was not as sparsely populated as many early accounts suggest, there were great stretches of land that were uninhabited and

where the explorers were confronted with an unspoiled nature. Even today, Canada is the second largest country in the world with only thirty-three million inhabitants, which makes it one of the least densely populated countries on the planet. The land was there from the beginning, and it was a huge land that presented the settlers with many challenges. Thus, Canadian nature had a strong impact on its inhabitants from the very start.

Literature came second. Inspired by their natural surroundings, people began to write about their experiences on the new continent. The pioneers of English literature in Canada were explorers who came over from Europe and who tried to come to terms with the unknown country by taking notes in their diaries or writing lengthy travel reports. Worth mentioning are Samuel Hearne's *A Journey from Prince of Wales's Fort in Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean*, published in 1795, and Alexander Mackenzie's *Voyages from Montreal on the River St. Laurence Through the Continent of North America to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans in the Years 1789 and 1793*. According to W. J. Keith, the form of these accounts varied significantly, and the former reads more like a narrative whereas the latter takes the form of an official report (*CanLit* 33). A few decades later, Catherine Parr Traill and Susanna Moodie wrote about their experiences as settlers in Upper Canada. Traill seems to have been a curious and adaptable woman who praised pioneer life in *The Backwoods of Canada*, published in 1836 (Groß, *Kolonialliteratur* 43). Moodie, on the other hand, presented Canadian nature as a trap and warned English women of her class of a journey to Canada in her memoir *Roughing It in the Bush*, published in 1852 (Groß, *Kolonialliteratur* 45). Canadian quality fiction developed very slowly in the beginning. For the development of a literature that goes beyond ordinary adventure stories you need an established society that you can write about on the one hand, and a reading public that is interested in what you have to say on the other (Keith, *CanLit* 68). Neither of those existed in Canada before the end of the nineteenth century, therefore the few novels that were written at that time were mostly adventure stories that dealt with garrison life. Naturally, all of these stories responded to Canadian nature in some way. In *The History of Emily Montague*, published in 1769 and usually considered to be the first North American novel, Frances Brooke is "struggling with the difficulty of employing standard artistic terminology in order to describe a new landscape, and discovering in Canadian scenery the Burkean 'great sublime' as well as the merely 'beautiful'" (Keith, *CanLit*

69). Also worth mentioning is John Richardson's 1832 novel *Wacousta* that deals with the opposition of garrison and wilderness, where "a profound fear of nature often seems to override any other response, and nature seems to symbolize all the inscrutable, evil forces of life" (Northey 23). At last, poetry was the genre that may have evoked the most diverse responses to nature. For Charles Sangster the "wilderness is [...] associated with God and religious certitude" (Keith, *CanLit* 51), whereas G. D. Roberts "is attracted to [...] the tides, the rolling hills, and the Canadian backwoods", and presents us with "the power of seasonal changes" (Staines 137). Bliss Carman was a nature poet who explored "the transcendental potentials of the natural world" (Staines 137), whereas Duncan Campbell Scott places his poems in "the wild and savage parts of the country [...] where human beings are part of the landscape [and] where the landscape is distinctly Canadian" (Staines 138). Finally, Archibald Lampman, who was particularly influential and died an untimely death at the age of thirty-eight, described "detailed landscapes of a semicultivated nature somewhere between the urban and the primeval" (Staines 138). Early Canadian literature, no matter whether it was written by Canadian-born authors, immigrants or visitors, was dominated by nature. From the travel reports of Hearne and Mackenzie, the narrations of Brooke and the Strickland sisters, to the masterpieces of the Confederation poets, descriptions of nature and landscape were ubiquitous. In the face of a vast and dangerously unknown territory and due to the absence of other social themes, writers turned towards nature and dealt with their experiences in various ways. This trend continued throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and even today nature figures prominently in many contemporary Canadian novels. In the middle of the twentieth century, literary scholars identified nature as a recurrent theme and tried to explain its role in Canadian literature. Particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, scholars like Northrop Frye, Margaret Atwood, D. G. Jones and John Moss tried to detect a continuity of the theme in Canadian literature. Many of their theories are largely outdated and were heavily criticized in the past, but they also inspired later writers of fiction and literary scholars who wanted to contribute to the notion that nature is a typically Canadian literary theme. But I will come to that later.

The third part of the triangle, the quest for a national identity, began with the British North America Act of 1867, when the Province of Canada, consisting of Ontario and Quebec together with New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, became the

Dominion of Canada. Even though the present boundaries were established as late as 1949, and it was not before 1982 that the Constitution Act finally gave Canada its own constitution, the British North America Act brought with it the desire to detect a distinct Canadian national identity for the first time (Kloöß, *Identität* 71). In 1867, it was clear that a country which was threatened by invasion from the United States and which was still heavily dependent on Great Britain tried to strengthen its own nationhood. The continuous annexation of the western provinces, the establishment of the Northwest Mounted Police in 1873, and the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1885 contributed to this goal (Kloöß, *Identität* 71). In the 1870s, the Canada First movement promoted Canadian nationalism and total independence from the United States while at the same time endorsing Canada's role as a dominion. (Kloöß, *Identität* 72). From the beginning, there were tensions between French and English Canada, and they continued far into the twentieth century. The aspiration for a national identity came mainly from the English side, and the determining factors for a cultural identity were rather ethnic and religious than political (Kloöß, *Identität* 73). This changed after the First World War, in which Canadian troops fought on the side of Great Britain against Germany. The fact that Canada as a country sent its own troops to Europe gave a boost to Canadian confidence. It strengthened Canada's position towards England and resulted in more independence from the mother country. (Kloöß, *Politik* 113). Events like the Battle of Vimy Ridge, which Jane Urquhart treats in her novel *The Stone Carvers*, became an important part of the national history of Canada. In the years following the Great War, Canada became politically more independent from Great Britain in the form of the Statute of Westminster of 1931, which gave legislative independence to Canada and enabled it to make its own decisions in foreign affairs. At the same time, Canada became more and more economically dependent on the United States, which was viewed with skepticism by many people (Kloöß, *Politik* 114). The foundation of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the Governor General's Award in 1936, as well as the formation of the Massey Commission in 1949, were forerunners of the quest for an independent Canadian culture that was to take place in the years following the Second World War (Kloöß, *Politik* 115). The Massey Report, issued in 1951, stated that the development of Canada's culture was held back by the United States because more and more Canadian artists emigrated to the south. Canada's national identity was not threatened by political or economic dependencies any more

but “by the predominance of a commercialized U.S. American mass culture” (Rosenthal 291). The Massey Report as well as the formation of the Canada Council in 1957 led to a significant boom in English Canadian literature in the 1960s. The following years were shaped by the secularization of Quebec in the course of the Quiet Revolution, the “Trudeaumania” caused by the appointment of the charismatic Pierre Elliott Trudeau to Prime Minister, and the Centennial celebrations of 1967. Especially the one hundredth anniversary of the Dominion caused a new kind of national self-confidence in Canada that was unknown until that time (Groß, *Entwicklungen* 225). What has probably shaped the national identity of Canada most significantly in recent years is the policy of multiculturalism. The announcement of the policy by the government in 1971 and the establishment of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act in 1988 led to an increasing immigration from Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa (Groß, *Entwicklungen* 226). A country that had already consisted of many different ethnicities opened its borders in order to celebrate this diversity. The idea was a cultural pluralism instead of one collective identity, the recognition of diverse cultures and races instead of their assimilation, the often cited mosaic in contrast to the American melting pot. The celebration of multiple identities within the country has become a determining factor of Canadian identity. As a result, the concept of a unifying national identity in Canada has become much more complicated in the past years, as Danielle Schaub states: “Once the haven of ‘two solitudes’ and a multitude of minorities, Canada is becoming a country where the naive concept of ‘pure blood’ has lost its stronghold” (1).

The connection between national identity and literature was established as early as 1864, when Edward Hartly Dewart wrote in his introduction to *Selections from Canadian Poets*: “A national literature is an essential element in the formation of national character. It is not merely the record of a country’s mental progress: it is the expression of its intellectual life, the bond of national unity, and the guide of national energy” (IX). Up to that point, there was not enough incentive for the Canadians to come up with a literature of their own because of the close relations with the British Empire. In contrast to the United States that developed a national literature in the years after the American Revolution, Canada had “less reason to break literary connections” with England because it “had not severed political ties” (Keith, *CanLit* 19). Moreover, for a long time there was no need for a Canadian literature because the English speaking population could be easily supplied with

British and American novels that were among the best in the world at that time (Keith, *CanLit* 20). At the end of the nineteenth century, the discussion about the Canadianness of Canadian literature was predominantly thematic, and one prevalent question was whether the climatic and geographical conditions of the country engendered a specific nordicity in Canadian literature (Kloöß, *Identität* 74). This question would haunt the discussion about Canadian literature throughout the twentieth century. Especially in the 1960s and 1970s, when literary studies were dominated by thematic criticism, the notion that there is a connection between nature, identity and literature was particularly strong. The three constituents of the curious triangle have come together throughout the years, either artificially or naturally. Even though some of the theories have been invalidated and have given way to new theories, the triangle still has a place in the Canadian imagination, as fairly recent publications such as Sherrill Grace's *Canada and the Idea of North* prove. In the following, I will take a closer look at some of the theories that have been formulated in the past forty years.

2.2. Thematic Criticism

2.2.1. Northrop Frye

Two years before the Centennial of the Confederation, Carl F. Klinck published the *Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English*. By then, the editors together with twenty-nine other literary scholars had been working on this project for almost ten years. It was meant to “demonstrate [...] what and how much has grown up in Canada” rather than “join[...] in a chauvinistic hunt for ‘the great Canadian novel’ or even for ‘Canadianism’” (Klinck X). But Northrop Frye's conclusion, probably the most remarkable, at least the most often cited part of the collection, is extensively about Canadianism. Thus, he establishes a relation between literature and the Canadian imagination early on: “It is obvious that Canadian literature, whatever its inherent merits, is an indispensable aid to the knowledge of Canada. It records what the Canadian imagination has reacted to, and it tells us things about the environment that nothing else will tell us” (Frye 822). He questions the notion that great literature can only grow under specific social conditions, but he asks nevertheless what these conditions would be in Canada. Frye answers this question by pointing out the cultural differences caused by geography between the United

States and Canada, the latter having had much more trouble to become part of the Western world because of the difficulties to access the mainland from the Atlantic Ocean:

Canada has, for all practical purposes, no Atlantic seabord. The traveller from Europe edges into it like a tiny Jonah entering an inconceivably large whale, slipping past the Straits of Belle Isle into the Gulf of St. Lawrence, where five Canadian provinces surround him, for the most part invisible. [...] To enter the United States is a matter of crossing an ocean; to enter Canada is a matter of being silently swallowed by an alien continent. (824)

Frye emphasizes the influence of the landscape on Canadian history, culture and identity. He indicates that the question of identity in Canada is more concerned with geography than with identity per se: “It seems to me that Canadian sensibility has been profoundly disturbed, not so much by our famous problem of identity, important as that is, as by a series of paradoxes in what confronts that identity. It is less perplexed by the question ‘Who am I?’ than by some such riddle as ‘Where is here?’” (Frye 826). In pointing out the significance of the question “Where is here?” he emphasizes the strong influence of an unknown environment on the formation of a national identity. It is difficult to imagine that the inhabitants of any other country that has developed so quickly were confronted with an equally vast and unknown territory: “To feel ‘Canadian’ was to feel part of a no-man’s-land with huge rivers, lakes, and islands that very few Canadians had ever seen” (Frye 826). Throughout the centuries, Canadians were surrounded by the frontier. In contrast to the Americans who undertook adventurous journeys to the frontier but could return at any moment, the frontier was around them at all times. This ubiquitous frontier separated them from England and the United States, but also from one another (Frye 827). The garrison mentality, Frye’s most famous and most controversial thesis, is a result of this confinement in nature:

Small and isolated communities surrounded with a physical or psychological ‘frontier,’ separated from one another and from their American and British cultural sources: communities that provide all that their members have in the way of distinctively human values, and that are compelled to feel a great respect for the law and order that holds them together, yet confronted with a huge, unthinking, menacing, and formidable physical setting—such communities are bound to develop what we may provisionally call a garrison mentality. (830)

According to Frye, this state of isolation has provoked literary responses throughout the centuries. The dichotomy of civilization and wilderness that occurs frequently in Canadian literature, of order and chaos, of urban and rural, has its origin in the isolated garrisons that dominated the beginnings of European settlement in Canada. Frye states that he has “long been impressed in Canadian poetry by a tone of deep terror in regard to nature” because the “vast unconsciousness of nature [...] seems an unanswerable denial” of the values that developed within the garrison (830). The fear of the unknown on the one side, and the drive to discover something more real in nature on the other, invariably leads to an inner conflict. In the course of the twentieth century, when the center of Canadian life moves to the urban areas, the fortress becomes “a revolutionary garrison within a metropolitan society” (Frye 834). Thus, the individual is looking for creativity and inspiration outside the conventions of society. The wilderness is a place that it is not controlled by the community, where the artist is not constrained by old established beliefs. Urban society becomes the enemy in the individual’s quest for self-realization.

Frye further argues that a pastoral myth developed in Canada although, especially at the beginning of European settlement, nature was harsh and dangerous. “The nostalgia for a world of peace and protection, with a spontaneous response to the nature around it, with a leisure and composure not to be found today” (Frye 840) stands in contrast to a “nature red in tooth and claw” (Frye 843). Frye states that the nineteenth-century poet was confronted with “the riddle of the unconsciousness” in the Canadian landscape which is at the same time “the riddle of death in man” (843). His response to nature was “bound to be elegiac and sombre, full of loneliness and fear, or at least wistful and nostalgic” (Frye 843). According to Frye, this view was completely free from irony because society had not gone far enough in its development to use irony in regard to nature. Therefore, the poet described pure nature with all its beautiful and dangerous elements, and that made his view pastoral (Frye 844). The summer months certainly helped the development of the pastoral myth in contrast to the winter months where the relentless cold and snow dominated the Canadian landscape. According to Frye, the relation between human being and nature changed in the course of time. At one point in Canadian history man became more dangerous for nature than the other way round. As a reaction, the individual tends to bond with nature instead of fearing it. Nature is “the visible representative of an order that man has violated, a spiritual unity that the intellect murders to dissect”

(Frye 845). The growing population and ongoing exploitation of the Canadian landscape leads to a situation where “the conflict of man and nature is expanding into a triangular conflict of nature, society and the individual” (Frye 845). At this point “the individual tends to ally himself with nature against society” (Frye 845). Within early ecocritical writing, the individual becomes nature’s companion in the sentimental fight against the destructive forces of mankind. After this union of individual and nature it is human society that suddenly becomes the harsh wilderness.

According to Robert Lecker, Frye’s conclusion is rather the creation of a literary myth than a true conclusion. It comprises his own notion of the literary history of Canada and creates a romance story in which the reader suddenly becomes the hero (Lecker 192). Especially in his quest for “the peaceable kingdom”, Lecker sees the realization of Frye’s personal dreams. It is a rather utopian notion that ignores the cultural and linguistic division within the country. This assessment by Lecker is not to be understood as negative criticism, but it emphasizes the literary value of Frye’s essay over its cultural value. It is a narrative that is supposed to motivate readers to contribute to the founding myth: “It depicts the creation, through a romance narrative, of the idea of Canada, a metaphoric conception that is transhistorical, autonomous, and distinctly literary before it is cultural” (Lecker 204). In spite of this critical reading in 1995, Frye’s essay was the starting point for Canadian literary criticism. It has earned as much praise as severe criticism, and many people have applied his theories throughout the years. In this way, Frye’s conclusion justifies Daymond and Monkman’s notion that “[n]o essay in Canadian literary criticism has been more influential” (460).

2.2.2. D. G. Jones

In *Butterfly on Rock*, first published in 1970, D. G. Jones discusses different themes and images that have shaped Canadian literature in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He argues that there are certain themes that are shared by many, albeit not all authors, and that these themes are not simply a literary tradition but that they emerge out of the Canadian experience (Jones 5). Part of this experience is a feeling of exile that is caused by the spatial distance to the European countries of origin and the absence of a national identity. Many scholars at that time held the view that Canadian literature was generally negative due to the lack of a national identity, and

Jones states that this is only a partial view. He identifies a duality of negative and positive characteristics, the former reflecting the absence of a national identity, and the latter expressing the confidence that this identity exists and can be discovered (Jones 14). According to Jones, this duality is also represented in the depiction of nature in Canadian literature. Nature is often viewed with a certain suspicion, and the Canadian people fail to take possession of the land. But as long as the people do not feel as though the land they inhabit belongs to them they will not have the sense of identity they are longing for. Jones states that landscape in Canadian literature often works as a mirror, reflecting the inner feelings of the Canadian people. But these feelings are often repressed due to the uneasy relation with the land, and the landscape becomes a symbol of the unconscious and the irrational (Jones 34). Frequently, as Jones argues in the following, the dichotomy of nature and culture is represented by a female character who comes straight out of nature. She carries the qualities of the wilderness and thereby represents a pastoral ideal that is contrasted with the workings of society. She is the embodiment of creativity, passion and a natural idyll in contrast to civilized order. She is often an importunate character who is continually rejected by the people around her (Jones 43). In the end, she is excluded from society, often attacked and driven away. As an image emerging from the mirror of the Canadian landscape she is suppressed by the people who fail to take possession of the land.

Jones further argues that the origin of this dichotomy lies in the utopian ideal of our western society. It is a world dominated by law rather than passion, and the ideal of rationality is incompatible with the irrationality of the wilderness:

Rather than accept the world as it is, western man has sought to transform it, to refashion the world in the image of his ideal. Certainly he has enlarged his understanding of nature to an astonishing degree, but more often than not he has used this understanding to consolidate his power over nature rather than to extend his communion with her. He has persisted in opposing to nature the world of ideas, the world of his ideal, and in his idealism he has tended to become exclusive rather than inclusive, arrogant rather than humble, aggressively masculine rather than passively feminine. (Jones 57)

The attempt to dominate nature will inevitably lead to conflict. Nature will revolt against man's attempt to subjugate it. According to Jones, the Christian church causes opposition to nature as much as industry and technology. By formulating rules and conventions it exerts an influence over its members that is meant to "dominate

and transform the savage in man” (Jones 60). In literature, a perpetual war between church and nature is waged. Heretics and rebels are isolated rather than eliminated, and they are always given a moral high ground against the order of the church. In coming to terms with the savage within themselves they attain a moral victory against conventional society (Jones 71). Man’s attempt to control everything is ultimately futile because nature always prevails.

In describing the antagonism of nature and culture, Jones confirms Frye’s notion of the garrison mentality. He identifies it as a phenomenon that is not restricted to Canadian literature but that appears in many western literatures. What he calls the “Problem of Job” in Canadian literature is the question why nature can be fruitful on the one hand and destructive on the other. The inability to approve of this darker side of nature is the reason why we build garrisons against the wilderness (Jones 87). In literature, the attempt to escape from conventional society in order to discover something more real in nature inevitably leads to destruction and death. Staying inside the garrison means paralysis, plunging into the wilderness means chaos. The attempt to force rationality on an irrational world will lead to struggle and violence. Still, Jones argues, one has to move towards a more inclusive view of nature. The walls of the garrison will have to be torn down in order to let the wilderness in. In confronting nature one has to concentrate on its vital elements and accept its menacing side (Jones 110). It is the real world that is waiting outside, with its lighter and darker aspects. According to Jones, the failure to acknowledge this duality of light and darkness will lead to anxiety and may result in the creation of a garrison culture. It is a flight into religion or another group, the submission to another order that brings with it a loss of authenticity and individuality:

To identify with such a God or such a collectivity may be to escape the threat of mortality or absurdity; yet it also leads to the loss of self and may only increase the burden of guilt. On the other hand, to affirm oneself against the world is a barren defiance, since the individual can realize himself only in participation with the whole. One must accept oneself and the universal nature of which one is a part, affirming both [...]. (Jones 134)

The courage to do this, to accept both sides of nature, is imperative to the well-being of the individual. The flight from the garrison, the confrontation with an omnipotent nature, and the acceptance of the possibility that the wilderness will show its darker side, has been a recurrent theme in Canadian literature.

In *Butterfly on Rock*, Jones ignores the aesthetic values of nature completely. The sublime scenery of Canadian nature, mountain ridges, huge lakes, beautiful winter landscapes are not important to his study. He concentrates rather on the vital elements of nature, on its function as a habitat, on its ability to give birth and take lives. He finds beauty in the creativity of nature as well as in its destructiveness. For him, nature is a kind of omnipotent deity that makes its own decisions. He contrasts culture and nature and their reciprocal influence. In studying the relation of various authors to nature, Jones is looking for an equilibrium between society and wilderness in literature, a perfect harmony between the two. The question of how to deal with the fatal duality of the wilderness has been asked by many authors. If one tries to control or even subjugate nature, he will find himself commanded by it. The only way to escape from the confines of the garrison is to incorporate the two faces of nature and accept one's own mortality. Despite the technological progress of society nature will always gain the upper hand.

2.2.3. Margaret Atwood

Margaret Atwood published *Survival*, a widely contested but equally influential thematic guide to Canadian literature, in 1972. She takes up many ideas mentioned by Frye and specifies them to her needs. She states that Frye's famous question "Where is here?" is appropriate because the Canadian literary landscape is still largely unexplored. Atwood suggests that Canadians will first try to find their place in this vast country, then they will try to trace their origins, and in the end they will settle for the immediate reality they are confronted with, trying to survive (*Survival* 17). They will be lost not only physically, but also mentally, Atwood claims: "I'm talking about Canada as a state of mind, as the space you inhabit not just with your body but with your head. It's that kind of space in which we find ourselves lost" (*Survival* 18). She further suggests that a literary identity will help Canadians to find their place within the country and in the world. It will work as a map, giving directions to the solution of the question posed by Frye: "We need such a map desperately, we need to know about here, because here is where we live" (Atwood, *Survival* 19). With regard to Frye's idea of the garrison mentality, Atwood continues her book with a bold declaration: "The central symbol for Canada – and this is based on numerous instances of its occurrence in both English and French Canadian literature – is undoubtedly *Survival*, *la Survivance*" (*Survival* 32). She identifies two

different facets of the theme: on the one hand, the survival of the settlers in a hostile environment, and on the other hand, a person's survival of a crisis or catastrophe. Atwood also notices a change that has taken place in regard to the obstacles that the potential survivors have to overcome. Earlier writers mostly dealt with physical obstacles such as the wilderness, whereas later writers concentrated more and more on psychological barriers (Atwood, *Survival* 33). The attempt to overcome the latter could lead to a vicious circle: "Sometimes fear of these obstacles becomes itself the obstacle, and a character is paralyzed by terror" (Atwood, *Survival* 33). This leads to another aspect where a character chooses not to survive because he cannot cope with the compulsion to survive, either in nature or society: "Pushed far enough, the obsession with surviving can become the will *not* to survive" (Atwood, *Survival* 34). Thus, the character intentionally chooses to be a victim because the pressure exerted on him is too high. In the following, Atwood describes Canada's role as a victim and elaborates on the four basic victim positions in Canadian literature, something for which she has been severely criticized.

Atwood answers the problem mentioned by Frye, of a dichotomy of harsh wilderness and pastoral idyll, with a chronological explanation. She states that the way landscapes are generally presented in Canadian literature has undergone a change in the past two centuries. The late eighteenth century is dominated by "the cult of the sublime and the picturesque, featuring views and inspirational scenery" (Atwood, *Survival* 49). The sublimity of nature is in the foreground, the visual aspect most important. This changes slightly in the first half of the nineteenth century when "you [are] supposed to feel that Nature [is] a kind Mother or Nurse who would guide man if he would only listen to her" (Atwood, *Survival* 50). Instead of being simply overwhelmed by the beauty and vastness of the landscape, humans bond with nature. The overall presentation of nature in literature at that time is mostly positive. In the middle of the nineteenth century, this changes drastically. Nature becomes "[...] harsh, violent, sharp and jagged, bitter cold in winter and burning hot in summer" (Atwood, *Survival* 53). The beautiful setting and guiding mother becomes a monster. Nature is "actively hostile", and it kills people: "Death by Nature – not to be confused with 'natural deaths' such as heart attacks – is an event of startling frequency in Canadian literature; in fact it seems to polish off far more people in literature than it does in real life" (Atwood, *Survival* 54). Atwood identifies drowning and freezing as the two most common deaths by nature in literature

because they are the most plausible murder weapons of the Canadian environment. Other popular methods would be death by wild animals or by bushing where “a character isolated in Nature goes crazy” (Atwood, *Survival* 55).

Atwood has written a short story called *Death by Landscape* in which one of her characters is killed by nature. Interestingly, as Hammill points out, Atwood does not specify the way in which the main character Lucy is killed (*Haunted* 59). On a canoe trip during a summer camp, Lois and her friend Lucy decide to climb up to a lookout during a lunch break. Lucy wants to be left alone for a while and Lois starts to climb down. After a few moments she hears a shout, and Lucy is never seen again. Atwood gives a few hints at what may have caused her disappearance. The night before, Lucy had uttered the wish not to go back to Chicago after the camp. She also comments on the possibility of a jump off the cliff right before she sends Lois away:

‘It would be quite a dive off here,’ says Lucy.
 ‘You’d have to be nuts,’ says Lois.
 ‘Why?’ says Lucy. ‘It’s really deep. It goes straight down.’
 (Atwood, *Death* 122)

Many things point towards suicide, but Lois remembers that “there had been no sound of falling rock; there had been no splash” (*Death* 124). The key lies in the shout that Lois hears and that she tries to remember years later. Lois is “sure (she is almost positive, she is nearly certain) that it was not a shout of fear” (*Death* 123). The uncertainty expressed in parentheses points towards the limits of human perception and memory against the powers of nature. The real shout “has been obliterated, like a footprint trampled by other footprints” (*Death* 123). The comparison suggests that nature has covered its tracks, that it has concealed the crime. The exact details of Lucy’s disappearance are not important. Whether she committed suicide, was carried away by wild animals or swallowed by the woods, is not relevant. As the title suggests, it was simply *death by landscape*.

Finally, Atwood, like Frye, comments on the destruction of nature by the human being. At one point in Canadian history man became more dangerous for nature than the other way round, and this found expression in Canadian writing: “the problem is no longer how to avoid being swallowed up by a cannibalistic Nature but how to avoid destroying her” (Atwood, *Survival* 60). The human destruction of nature comes close to self mutilation. Man is suddenly equipped with a power

against nature that he can rarely control. As a result, Atwood argues, authors began to identify more and more with nature rather than with their human protagonists.

Survival was heavily criticized after its publication because of its one-dimensional thematic approach, because of the choice of themes and the outrageous generalizations, and because of the “one-sided Ontario” view. Taking Ontario for the whole of Canada caused an outcry by various scholars just as the most infamous theory of the four victim positions and the theme of survival:

Atwood did not see Canada and its literature through the differing perspectives of its regions or the differing aesthetics of its writers, but attempted to explain Canada through a single theory based on a single symbolic image. This image was the wilderness of northern Ontario, which became in *Survival* the ‘Canadian’ wilderness. The indifference and potentially sinister natural force of this wilderness was the same as that experienced by the narrator of *Surfacing* on the Quebec-Ontario border near North Bay, or by Susanna Moodie in Ontario’s Rice Lake district. (Davey, *Atwood* 154-155)

In a speech delivered at Princeton University in 1985 Atwood said that people were outraged, angry, paranoid, hurt and scornful as a reaction to the book (*After Survival* 135). In the same speech she tried to justify writing the book by pointing out that “the book has sold between seventy-five and eighty thousand copies”, and “it reached the average reader” (*After Survival* 134). This is exactly how the book should be seen today. It was highly influential at the time, and although it is certainly flawed it played an important part in the propagation of Canadian literature. Like Frye’s conclusion it “can be most profitably understood today as storymaking, as a narrative, a fiction about Canadian literature” (Bessner 13).

2.2.4. John Moss

In *Patterns of Isolation*, first published in 1974, John Moss argues that various concepts of exile have shaped Canadian literature and thereby influenced the formation of a national identity. He emphasizes that these themes and images do not occur exclusively in Canadian novels, nor are they ubiquitous in Canadian writing, but that there are certain tendencies that may be worth studying. He states that the Canadian mind has always been split in two due to Canada’s colonial history. The country of origin as well as the new world have claimed a place in the minds of many settlers and their descendants (Moss, *Patterns* 12). Their consciousness has been occupied by two conflicting societies, one of them more real, and the other more

alien, depending on various factors. Moss claims that the progress of this split mind has undergone four stages, and that it is paralleled by a development in Canadian literature. The four stages he names are garrison exile, frontier exile, colonial exile, and immigrant exile. The four novels he concentrates on in order to underscore this development are Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague* (1769), John Richardson's *Wacousta* (1832), Sara Jeannette Duncan's *The Imperialist* (1904), and Adele Wiseman's *The Sacrifice* (1956). Even though the four stages correspond to a historical development, the literary works produced at a particular time are not restricted to a certain stage (Moss, *Patterns* 14). Likewise, a work of literature is not limited to one of these stages but may contain various aspects from different periods.

Garrison exile literature, Moss argues, is the product of a foreign writer: "[T]he Canadian materials of the foreign writer transmute [an alien] vision into something that has particular relevance to the Canadian experience" (*Patterns* 24). Garrison exile is not only an exile from the country of origin but also from the world outside the garrison. While the distance from the mother country may not be voluntary, the separation from the environment is deliberate. Moss suggests that only through this separation can the exile be endured and enjoyed (*Patterns* 16). People inside the garrison have taken along the values of another environment and build psychological barriers against the outside world in order to protect those values. Therefore, garrison exile literature is about ambiguity and contrast, about conflicting social orders. Rationality and order on the one side, irrationality and chaos on the other. In *The History of Emily Montague*, this garrison dichotomy occurs over and over again, as Moss argues:

The measure of society is drawn against the measure of the natural phenomena in which it lives: the victors and the vanquished, the indigenous and the alien, are counterpoised; home and exile correlated; urbane and rustic, civilized and savage, juxtaposed; and, of course, the differences between male and female are extensively exploited. (*Patterns* 30)

Frontier exile, in contrast, describes the conflict within a single mind. Garrison exile is about the exile of a closed community from its country of origin as well as the country outside the garrison, whereas frontier exile describes the flight from this community and the exile from the fort. It is the experience of solitude out in the wilderness, the search for identity and meaning (Moss, *Patterns* 36). The frontier presents itself as a menacing but also soothing alternative to society. The struggle for

survival in nature parallels the conflict within the troubled mind. According to Moss, *Wacousta* is the prototypical frontier exile novel because of the main character's immediate and truthful confrontation with the nature outside the garrison: "It is the outer perimeter of reality, a morass of limitless depth, and a man at its centre is in utter isolation, turned in upon himself—his actions and emotions, the self-fulfilling prophecies of his own demise" (*Patterns* 50).

Colonial exile is in many ways the opposite of garrison exile because the community is controlled, in some way, by an order outside the garrison. Colonial exile is not experienced by settlers of the first generation who are more likely to experience garrison or frontier exile, but by a later generation who becomes aware of its colonial status (Moss, *Patterns* 56). This causes a kind of self-consciousness in the people who live in the colony towards the mother country. According to Moss, *The Imperialist* describes this unease about the situation in a very realistic way: "[It] portrays the ambiguous and at times ambivalent conditions of life under a colonial dispensation that disorients and demeans even while it ennobles and provides stability" (*Patterns* 54). The last stage is immigrant exile literature which describes the experience of immigrants in the established nation-state of Canada. Moss argues that most immigrants to Canada were forced to leave their mother country because of famine or similar life-threatening circumstances, and that they never really broke with their past (*Patterns* 80). They brought their traditions and rituals with them and established their own communities within the cities, an exile of a nation within another nation. The exemplary novel mentioned by Moss is *The Sacrifice* where a Jewish family from Ukraine immigrates to Canada and experiences isolation and differing religious and cultural practices.

While these concepts of exile are highly influenced by the vastness of the Canadian landscape, nature itself can also be the cause of exile and isolation. Moss argues that it is mostly the authors of the Maritimes, the Prairies, and of British Columbia who have written about the rough climate, the overwhelming scenery, and the sparsely populated landscape of Canada (*Patterns* 109). With regard to British Columbia, Allan Pritchard would contest this view. He states that "the literature of British Columbia has developed in ways that strikingly contradict the 'survival' thesis about Canadian literature expounded by Margaret Atwood and others" (Pritchard 36). Moss further states that isolation caused by the Canadian landscape is not necessarily the isolation of the individual in the wilderness but rather of a small

town in a rural area of Canada. Inspired by their natural surroundings, the inhabitants try to resist the corrupting influence of modern society coming from the urban areas. According to Moss, only a rural setting enables the Canadian author to present the relation between nature and human morality (*Patterns* 120). Urban settings, in contrast, include too much artificiality in order to present the same relation authentically. Although Moss emphasizes the influence of Canadian nature on its inhabitants in literature over and over again, he rejects Atwood's idea of an actively hostile or conscious nature:

Nature is a pervasive and determining factor in much of the Canadian experience. However, there is a popular myth in our literary criticism that the natural world participates in some cosmic consciousness, that it exhibits motivated behaviour, that it harbours imponderable intentions towards those who live in its midst. As emphatically as I possibly can, I would reject all such anthropocentric notions. Nowhere in our literature, that I can see, is adequate support to be found for these obtrusive assumptions. With few exceptions, Canadian writers have perceived nature itself to be amoral, impassive, indifferent. The landscape and its seasons have no ethics, no consciousness. Nature is neither wilful nor benign, malevolent nor beneficent. (*Patterns* 111)

He argues that a certain quality of nature lies in the author's response to it but never in nature itself. Nature is beautiful, powerful and dangerous, but it remains passive. It serves as a backdrop but does not participate actively. It is witness to the deaths of many characters, but it does not kill them. These deaths are caused by social as much as by natural circumstances because ultimately it is the people's choice to undertake journeys, seek solitude in nature or risk their lives in other ways. Although Moss accepts the contiguity of snow and death in Canadian literature, he claims that these deaths serve some purpose in the story and are not willful acts of malevolence. Even if nature appears to be malignant at one point it is just a reflection of human character traits because, ultimately, malice is human (Moss, *Patterns* 119).

Moss further argues that nature in Canadian literature provides the background for a moral vision. Nature itself does not bring forth moral instructions, but the human vision in a natural environment is likely to be a moral vision (Moss, *Patterns* 122). He states that the regional idyll provides the perfect setting for a moral vision but tends to implement it too blatantly. Almost all Canadian writing is regional because of the vast landscape that isolates one community from another:

Just as the term “mosaic” insinuates its way into discussion of Canadian social patterns, “region” is the epithet most common to explorations of the natural world in Canadian experience. Exile is the cement that binds the mosaic together, and separates each fragment from the others. In exile there is the isolation of distance – from the homeland, from the past, from the surrounding presence. Regional isolation, however, is a matter of place, rather than distance. Like that of exile, it generates a dual vision in our fiction, but one which is primarily moral rather than social or sociological. (Moss, *Patterns* 125)

This duality, according to Moss, consists of the interaction between the authenticity and objectivity of nature and the individuality and subjectivity of human experience. The geography of a particular region influences the imagination of its inhabitants to a high degree. The isolation of individual communities as well as the great diversity of different landscapes therefore leads to a great diversity of imaginations. Moss also mentions the influence of local histories but he indicates clearly that it is the landscape of a particular region that is most influential to the writer’s imagination (*Patterns* 126). Thus, regionalism does not only provoke patterns of isolation within literature but isolation itself is responsible for the significance of regionalism.

2.2.5. Surviving the Paraphrase

In his famous essay *Surviving the Paraphrase*, Frank Davey coins the term “thematic criticism”. He rejects this practice of literary criticism completely, and he attacks Frye, Jones, Atwood, and Moss for making use of it. He states that their thematic approach to Canadian literature does not only cloud their vision on the implicit content of an individual work but may lead to a process of paraphrasing, where authors try to adopt certain themes instead of being creative. Thematic critics have been obsessed with what literary works “‘say’ about Canada and Canadians”, but at the same time “[t]hey have largely overlooked what literary works ‘mean’” (Davey, *Paraphrase* 3). According to Davey, they have concentrated on superficial themes and ignored form, language and style. In their attempt to discover a literary history of Canada they have chosen works that are relevant to their thesis over works of high quality. Thus, thematic criticism leads to paralysis because the choice of authors and works that satisfy the needs of the critics is limited. Moreover, Davey claims that the themes that were identified by the critics as typically Canadian were in fact common themes in world literature at that time (*Paraphrase* 5). The interests of the thematic

critics are cultural rather than literary, and they are too eager in their search for a cultural identity. Therefore, it would have been more sensible to write “books which assumed, rather than argued, a national identity’s existence and a national literature’s significance” (Davey, *Paraphrase* 7). In the end, Davey suggests that literary critics in Canada should concentrate on analytical, phenomenological and archetypal criticism rather than isolate allegedly Canadian themes.

Although Davey’s essay, first published in 1974, has been canonized as a subversive act, a seminal attack and a starting point for new ways of criticism in Canada, it can also be seen as a narrative that contributed to the same objectives that the authors he criticized heavily had been following all along. As Lecker argues, it can be seen as another piece of criticism that established Davey’s position among other literary scholars at that time:

In retrospect, it does not seem as though ‘Surviving the Paraphrase’ is the radical document it is often presented to be. Its appeal lies both in the contradictions it embodies between loyalty and liberation and in the way these contradictions are presented as issues that are relevant to a professional community faced with questions about its own identity and future.
(Lecker 227)

In many ways, the essay contributed to the search for a national identity which it pretends to reject. Nevertheless, Davey was a pioneer of non-thematic criticism in Canada. After Frye, Jones, Atwood and Moss had laid the groundwork for a history of Canadian literature by identifying common themes and images, later critics could pay more attention to individual works and authors (Rosenthal 299). Davey’s essay played a crucial part in this process, and his later works contributed to the flourishing of non-thematic criticism in Canada.

2.3. Concepts of the North

Canada has always been associated with its northern geographical position and climate. The natural conditions of the North – the snow, the cold, the vastness – have led to the creation of various myths that have shaped the Canadian imagination. There are other countries that reach just as far north and where the population meets the same obstacles, such as Russia, Finland and Norway, but the Canadian people have probably identified more strongly with the North. Even in cities like Ottawa or Montreal, which are on the same latitude as Venice in Italy, people may think of themselves as living in the North and feeling its influence at all times. The North has

been taken up and processed by painters, writers, musicians, politicians and filmmakers over many years now. It has been part of the culture for such a long time that it has become an indelible part of Canadian identity. It is not only the actual experience of the geographical North that shapes the imagination, but the mere thought of something that is up there. As Sherrill Grace argues, the North is a mental background that exists in the Canadian's imagination, the thought of an unknown country that could swallow him if he went there (15). It is a human construct that Canadians have internalized and that has become a part of everyday life, even in the southern parts of Canada. Many cultural and literary scholars have commented on this northern condition of Canada, but before I go into more detail I have to mention the extremely problematic connotation of this notion. From the beginning of confederation well into the twentieth century, people have developed racial theories concerned with the Canadian North. "The True North strong and free", as it is called in the national anthem of Canada, has often been described as a place of white male sovereignty. According to Carl Berger, many images of the North did not simply describe climate and landscape, but they associated these conditions with a particular racial character: "The result of life in the northern latitudes was the creation and sustenance of self-reliance, strength, hardness—in short, all the attributes of a dominant race" (Berger 5). The strong, male North was often contrasted with the weak, effeminate south. Canadian nationalists claimed that the northern races have always been superior to the southern races, and this superiority would ensure Canada's prominent role in the future. The challenging climatic conditions of the North would strengthen the brains and muscles of its inhabitants and thereby create a race that is superior to everyone who lives in the south. The north – south dichotomy was repeatedly mentioned in order to make a clear distinction to the United States which was presented as a degenerate country inhabited by immigrants from southern Europe and Africa (Berger 14). There was an ongoing debate on whether the climate of the North would adapt the character of immigrants to its needs, or whether it would limit immigration principally to those who are strong enough to meet its challenges. There were "scholars" who held the view that "the northern climate constituted a national blessing because it excluded 'weaker' races" (Berger 8). In 1966, Berger claimed that the racist rhetoric used at the beginning of the twentieth century has come to an end, but that many ideas still persist: "Though racism and crude environmentalism have now largely been discredited, the effort to explain

Canadian uniqueness in terms of the north has not” (22-23). Many theories have been disproved by modern science, but the history of Canada’s self-perception as a northern nation may continue to carry problematic implications. In the following, I am going to present theories that approach the Canadian North in various ways.

In *The Northern Imagination*, Allison Mitcham goes back to thematic criticism and isolates themes of the Canadian North that have shaped Canadian literature in the past. She claims that the North has been a source of creativity for Canadian novelists not only in recent years but basically from the very beginnings of Canadian literature. Although many authors have seen all of Canada as northern, it is the far North that has become most important for the Canadian literary imagination. The North has become a “dominant Canadian myth”, and Canadian novelists “have focused on the northern wilderness in the belief that it is what makes Canada distinctive and original” (Mitcham 17). Various literary figures enter the vast landscapes of the far North in order to find spiritual equilibrium, and the mental or physical conflicts they have with northern nature have become recurrent themes of Canadian literature. According to Mitcham, the prevalence of these themes has few parallels in other contemporary literatures of the world, but it is also reminiscent of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau who wrote frequently about “returning to a simpler way of life — particularly to a cabin in the woods” (11).

For this study, two of the themes mentioned by Mitcham are worth mentioning. The first one is the theme of a Northern Utopia in which the North represents a retreat from the static conventions of society: “The North – a new Utopia, as many seem to see it – stands out frequently in contemporary Canadian novels as perhaps the only place left, not only in Canada but in all the Western world, where man can yet pursue a personal dream – where he can hope to be individual” (Mitcham 17). The character who suffers from the loss of individuality flees to the North in order to regain his strength and come to terms with his inner self. The South, as the opposite of North, does not only stand for the southern regions of Canada but for Western civilization in general. For Mitcham, the escape from the confines of society means to enter into a harsh wilderness that may threaten your life, but that also provides a means of self-fulfillment. The second theme that is relevant to this study is the isolation of the person who flees into the wilderness. According to Mitcham, this solitude often results in violence caused by the absence of the rules of society, the self realization of a single character, or simply the brutality of nature.

The wilderness creates a “peculiar atmosphere” that “increases the tensions and conflicts of men accustomed to civilization” and makes them commit violent actions (Mitcham 53). A certain amount of violence, either against a fellow human being or against the environment often becomes necessary in the struggle for survival. If nature itself is not responsible for the crime, it provides a perfect setting of secrecy and remains a silent witness to the foul deed: “The Canadian environment frequently appears massive and unresponsive, dominating the individual who, frustrated and terrified, rushes lemming-like to his violent destruction” (Mitcham 62).

This, of course, is reminiscent of Atwood’s *Survival*, the only difference being that man himself becomes aggressive in the face of an overwhelming wilderness. Twenty years after she wrote her controversial work on Canadian literature, Atwood gave a series of lectures at Oxford University that she published later under the title *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature*. At the beginning, she identifies identity as “a collection of clichéd images [which] are usually based on fact or historical reality of some sort” (Atwood, *Strange* 8). These images – she avoids the use of the term “themes” – are displayed by artists in various forms, and one of these images in Canada is the North. The pictures concerning the North have been reproduced numerous times and have shaped the imagination of the people who live in Canada. In *Strange Things*, Atwood explains four images of North that have been taken up by numerous writers and painters, and that have attained mythical status in Canada. The first of these myths is the Franklin expedition where 135 men died under mysterious circumstances in an attempt to discover the North-west passage in 1845. According to Atwood, this story has inspired the imagination of many Canadian authors and has contributed to the notion that the North is beautiful but dangerous: “[P]opular lore, and popular literature, established early that the North was uncanny, awe-inspiring in an almost religious way, hostile to white men, but alluring; that it would lead you on and do you in; that it would drive you crazy, and, finally, would claim you for its own” (*Strange* 19). Atwood repeats some of the notions that she had already uttered in *Survival*, but this time it is not nature but the North that has a strong influence on your physical and psychological condition, that makes you go mad and threatens to kill you if you do not play by its rules. The second myth mentioned by Atwood is more about the wilderness in general than about the North. In presenting the story of Grey Owl, she discusses the complicated relations of Native and non-Native Canadians, and the

desire of the latter to “go Indian” in the longing for more authenticity (Atwood, *Strange* 51). From the start, settlers had to “liv[e] like the Natives in order to survive in the wilderness”, but at the beginning of the twentieth century this turned into the necessity to “liv[e] like the Natives in the wilderness in order to survive” (Atwood, *Strange* 44). The exploitation of the landscape through industrialization and fast growing population results in the need to identify with the wilderness rather than fight against it. In this sense, Atwood demands “a more traditionally Native attitude towards the natural world, a less exploitative and more respectful attitude,” so that white Canadians “might be able to reverse the galloping environmental carnage of the late twentieth century and salvage for themselves some of that wilderness they keep saying they identify with and need” (*Strange* 60).

In the chapter on the Wendigo, Atwood refutes Earle Birney’s notion that Canada is haunted by its lack of ghosts. The Wendigo, initially an indigenous creation living in the eastern woodlands, is a man-eating monster with eyes of blood and a heart of ice (Atwood, *Strange* 66). It appears mostly in the woods, and through the fear that it creates in the characters entering the woods it becomes an extension of the wilderness. Thus, the person who turns into a Wendigo or is eaten by one is as much a victim of nature as the victim of a monster (Atwood, *Strange* 77). It is an indigenous myth that has been adopted by many Western writers, and another expression of a haunted and fearsome wilderness. In her final chapter, Atwood investigates the role of women in the North. She wants to know what happens to female authors and protagonists who enter the imagined North which itself has often been presented as “a sort of icy and savage *femme fatale*” (Atwood, *Strange* 88). In the past, women were excluded from most representations of North. Only the male explorer was strong enough to conquer the unknown wilderness, the woman was secondary at best. Moreover, in an overly sexist tradition, the North was often presented as a female that was penetrated by the male adventurer. Female writers, according to Atwood, responded to the North in two waves. Pioneers and settlers like the Strickland sisters belong to the first wave, whereas twentieth century authors belong to the second wave. The main characters of the second wave are more independent than their predecessors because they are not merely accompanying their husbands but make the deliberate choice to be in the wilderness (Atwood, *Strange* 96). By the middle of the twentieth century, female protagonists become even more emancipated: “Instead of going off into the woods to be with a man, they start going

off into the woods to be by themselves. And sometimes they're even doing it to get away from a man" (Atwood, *Strange* 101). This is something that happens quite often in Jane Urquhart's novels. In *The Whirlpool*, Fleda McDougal flees into the woods from her husband. In *Away*, women of three generations take flight from their men in order to become one with nature. As a result, they are *away*, either physically or mentally. In *A Map of Glass*, the process is reversed. The main character, Sylvia Bradley, escapes from the wilderness to the city, leaving her husband behind. As I will explain later, the city is an unknown jungle for her because she is used to living in the wilderness. Atwood closes her study of North with a warning. The North has shaped the Canadian imagination for a long time and still continues to do so, but in the face of environmental destruction it does not appear as strong as it is often presented in literature. The continuous destruction of nature in Canada threatens, beside other consequences, the continuity of Canada's self-perception as a northern nation: "[If the northern] reality ceases to exist, the imagery, too, will cease to have any resonance or meaning, except as a sort of indecipherable hieroglyphic. The North will be neither female nor male, neither fearful nor health-giving, because it will be dead" (Atwood, *Strange* 116).

John Moss utters a similar idea in the preface to *Echoing Silence*, a collection of essays on Arctic narrative. For him, the Canadian identity is not threatened by ecological destruction but by globalization. He argues that a preoccupation with the North is especially important today because it is an essential part of Canada's identity, and it may fall into oblivion if it is no longer studied: "As we become increasingly a part of the global community, as our history, written by geography, is rewritten by ethnic diversity, we cannot survive as a people without coming to terms with how we imagine ourselves" (Moss, *Silence* 5). Moss has written extensively about the Canadian North. *Enduring Dreams* is probably his most personal response to the Arctic which he has explored intensively, physically as well as mentally. It is a combination of poetry and prose passages in which he expresses his ideas and feelings about the North.

One of the most recent extensive studies on the impact of the North on the Canadian imagination has been done by Sherrill E. Grace. In her book *Canada and the Idea of North*, she interprets North as a discursive formation in the Foucauldian sense. Thus, she investigates various discourses that contribute to the idea of North, and that make the North appear as Pierre Bourdieu's "embodied history, internalized

as a second nature and so forgotten as history” (qtd. in Grace 26). Grace identifies a plurality of voices dealing with the idea of North in the visual arts as well as in literature and film. In trying to come up with an interdisciplinary approach to the topic, she bases her study on Glenn Gould’s *Idea of North* that was first broadcast in 1967 on CBC, where five different voices represent five different ways of approaching the North (Grace 13). Grace very carefully uses the term *idea* in order to avoid denominations like *myth* that would be misleading. This idea of North is maintained, modified and celebrated by the Canadian people through representation in popular culture and everyday life. Grace herself, with the work that is discussed here, has contributed to the proliferation of this notion. The fact that there are far more representations of North by southern artists and scholars than by people who actually live in the north demonstrates the ubiquity of the idea in Canada (Grace 22). There are three categories of critical texts, Grace argues, that have shaped the idea of North in the past. Scholars like Atwood and Frye fall into the first category that presents a northern landscape evoking “complex ambivalent desires of attraction and repulsion, escape and freedom, failure and death”. The second category focuses on problems of ethnography and aesthetics, presenting “the social realities of time and place”. The third category includes “extremely personal and philosophical” contributions that “construct North in order to deconstruct it or to reconstruct it and reimagine it” (Grace 32). Not only is there a variety of disciplines dealing with the idea of North, but also within the discipline of critical writing there is a plurality of ways to describe it. All this contributes to the notion that something about the Canadian Arctic influences the imagination of many southern Canadians.

Grace states that there is a history of lament about the failure of the Canadian people to envision themselves as northerners. Thus, she identifies a “profound ambivalence” where Canadians see the North as their “uniquely defining quality” on the one hand, and “fear and loathe” it on the other (Grace 47). This ambivalence has contributed to the scholarly discussion about the North just as much as the problem of its boundaries. The question where North begins and where it ends, geographically as well as historically, has been a matter of discussion from the beginning. Scholars have tried to confine the idea and explain it in great detail, and through this continuous debate the idea has been kept alive and brought forward. Moreover, as Grace argues, the elusiveness of the concept is part of the attraction that has shaped the Canadian identity:

In the exciting ongoing debate not only over *where* North is but also over *what* its history is and *who* can tell it lies the creation of Canada itself, and North is *neither* synonymous with Canada *nor* different from it [...]: it is a part of the imagined community called Canada and a defining characteristic, a crucial metonymy, for the whole. (Grace 49-50)

Scholars from various disciplines have tried to pin down where North in Canada is situated. It is as much a geographical as a philosophical or sociological question. Whether it is defined by temperature, latitude, province, region, the inhabitants, or the history of its settlement, the discussion has been a fruitful one. Grace concludes that “it is impossible to stabilize the rhetoric or the boundaries of North” (57). The discussion about the limits of North is another example of the many voices contributing to the idea. Grace further argues that North is not the “*only* factor determining the construction of identity”, but that Canadian identity “has always been thought, articulated, and represented as northern” (66). Until the 1970s, Grace argues, North was always associated with national identity, and not with regional identities. Canada as a whole was considered to be northern, and little attention was paid to the regional peculiarities of the places within Canada that were actually part of the mystic North. The urge for a national identity that would hold the country together and distance it from the United States was so strong that northern regional identities were neglected for a long time. According to Grace, it was not before the 1970s that regional Norths became the subject of study again. It is the combination of these regional Norths, together with the national conception of North, that forms “the complex, always changing, imagined community of Canada” (Grace 68).

Grace argues that the novel provides the most effective means to elaborate on the idea of North. It is difficult to trace a consistent method in the presentation of North in fiction, but images of cold, snow, vastness and wild animals are to be found repeatedly. Various authors have used multiple methods to include the idea of North into their novels, and the “sheer quantity” of these representations “has had a major impact on shaping Canadian identity” (Grace 172). According to Grace, the second half of the nineteenth century was dominated by adventure stories about white male explorers. Because of their popularity, the influence of these novels on the Canadian imagination was significant. While the Klondike Gold Rush in the 1890s generated the notion that the North was a place of infinite riches, the beginning of the twentieth century was characterized by the race for the North Pole (Grace 173). In the 1930s,

Grey Owl established the literary tradition in which man does not compete against nature any more but tries to live with it side by side. The literature of the following years still presented a white male explorer, but one who either saw himself as part of the North or who acknowledged the diversity of northern culture (Grace 176). From the 1970s onward there has been such a fruitful discourse on the subject with so many voices contributing to the idea of North that it is difficult to keep track of the development. There is one theme that has been persistent over the course of time, namely the theme of nature that uses violence against man or makes him go mad:

Narratives of starvation, cannibalism, becoming lost in the Barrens [...], freezing to death, or going mad are among the most common and persistent statements in the discursive formation of North; [...] this is a discourse comprising a complex network of statements and tropes that stretches back to the narratives of the earliest explorers, reaches an apotheosis in the mid-nineteenth century context of Franklin, and refuses to go away [...].
(Grace 179)

Although Grace sees a similar development in the depiction of nature throughout the centuries as Atwood, Frye, and other scholars, she insists that nature has never stopped being cruel. Even if Atwood's notion of a hostile nature has often been criticized in the past, the dangerous wilderness where people who are not adequately prepared to enter it lose their lives has been one of the most persistent themes in Canadian literature over the past two centuries.

In presenting these different theories of North, I have thus far neglected their relation to nature, which is the topic of this thesis. Nature and North are not synonymous, of course, but they are contiguous, and in Canada they are sometimes even interchangeable. It is primarily nature that makes the Canadian North mysterious and alluring. It is the vast landscapes and the deadly cold that make the North fascinating. But it is also its northern condition that makes nature so particular in Canada. On the one hand, nature is more general than the North because it involves animals, plants and landscapes that are not part of the northern sphere. On the other hand, the North is more general than nature because it includes mythic creatures such as the Wendigo and mythic stories such as that of the Franklin expedition. I have chosen "nature" to denominate my thesis simply because Jane Urquhart's novels include southern Canadian landscapes that are not full of cold and ice, and because northern Canadian myths do not feature prominently in her work.

Nevertheless, nature is as much part of the Canadian imagination as the North, and together, as discursive formations or simple literary themes, they continue to be constitutive parts of the Canadian identity.

3. Nature in Jane Urquhart's *The Whirlpool* and *A Map of Glass*

3.1. Reflections on the Author

Jane Urquhart was born in 1949 in Little Long Lac, a small mining community in northern Ontario. When she was six years old, she moved to Toronto with her family where she spent her later childhood and adolescence. She attended the University of Guelph where she obtained her B.A. in English Literature in 1971, and another B.A. in Art History in 1976. The same year she married the artist Tony Urquhart. This was already her second marriage after her first husband Paul Keele had been killed in a car accident. In the early 1980s, Jane Urquhart published three books of poetry: *I'm Walking in the Garden of His Imaginary Palace*, *False Shuffles*, and *The Little Flowers of Madame de Montespan*. In 1986, she published her first novel *The Whirlpool* which was followed by *Changing Heaven* (1990), *Away* (1993), *The Underpainter* (1997), *The Stone Carvers* (2001), and *A Map of Glass* (2005). In 1987, she also published *Storm Glass*, a collection of short stories.

Jane Urquhart's books have been translated into numerous languages and were published in many countries. In 1992, she won the Prix du Meilleur Livre Étranger for *The Whirlpool*. It was the first time that a Canadian book won this prestigious French prize. In 1994, she won the Trillium Award for *Away*, and she also received the Marian Engel Award for an outstanding body of prose written by a Canadian woman. In 1996, she was admitted as a Chevalier to France's Order of Arts and Letters. In the same year, *Away* was on the shortlist for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, the largest international prize for a single work of fiction. In 1997, Jane Urquhart won the Governor General's Award for Fiction for *The Underpainter*. In 2001, she was on the shortlist for the Governor General's Award and the Giller Prize as well as on the longlist for the Booker Prize for *The Stone Carvers*. In 2005, she was appointed to the Order of Canada. She has also been writer in residence at several Canadian universities. Today, Jane Urquhart lives in Southwestern Ontario with her husband, and she frequently travels to Ireland, her family's country of origin.

The quantity of secondary literature on Jane Urquhart is growing steadily, and a few literary scholars have already worked on certain aspects of nature and landscape in her novels. In the following, I will summarize shortly what others have

written about her books. In a fairly recent essay, *The Artialisation of Landscape in Jane Urquhart's The Whirlpool*, Claire Omhovère argues that Urquhart's landscapes are not openly described, but that their significance becomes clear through the arrangement of her characters. She states that Urquhart frequently pairs her fictional characters with historical artists, such as Patrick and Robert Browning in *The Whirlpool*, Klara Becker and Walter Allward in *The Stone Carvers*, and Jerome McNaughton and Robert Smithson in *A Map of Glass* (Omhovère, *Artialisation* 1). In *The Whirlpool*, Browning's view of Venice is paralleled by Patrick's notion of landscape, and the poetry of the old world is often related to the language in which the new world can be described. Therefore, Urquhart's landscape is never simply visual, but it is constantly discussed and reinvented by her characters (Omhovère, *Artialisation* 13).

Marlene Goldman, in her essay *Translating the Sublime*, argues that the characters in *The Whirlpool* have problems to translate their old world idea of the sublime to the geography of the new world. Their notion of the sublime is mostly influenced by English poetry, and they fail to adapt this concept to the landscape of Ontario, especially to the Niagara Falls: "Reliant on European modes of categorization to organize aesthetics, landscape, and gender roles, the principal characters in *The Whirlpool* are, for the most part, perplexed when confronted with Canada's distinctly non-European historical and geographical contours" (Goldman 86). This failure to adapt to the new country, according to Goldman, results in Patrick's illness and ultimately his death, in Fleda's inability to live a domestic life, and in McDougal's obsession with an authentic history that ultimately leads to stagnation. Finally, Maud also suffers from an old world attitude because of the English mourning garb she feels compelled to wear for two full years after her husband's death: "[T]he history of the cloth only makes sense when viewed in the light of the text's more general concern regarding the origin of the repressive order which threatens to regulate life in the new world" (Goldman 93).

In her essay *Romancing the Landscape*, Anne Compton identifies Jane Urquhart's novels as romances where the characters have some kind of miraculous power that makes them superior to other human beings. These characters gain their powers "through their close and magical alliance to the natural environment" (Compton, *Romancing* 116). Compton further argues that the "romancing" of the landscape intensifies with every novel that Urquhart writes: "The creative humans of

Whirlpool become aspiring angels in *Changing Heaven*, become the consorts of gods in *Away*” (*Romancing* 124). In the first novel, Patrick and Fleda have to plunge into the landscape in order to reach their goals, namely to achieve poetic voice and freedom. In the second novel, Urquhart presents a landscape that resists progress because it is full of romances, fables and folktales. Finally, in the third novel, Compton suggests that the mourning of an abandoned geography is represented by the women’s relations to their demon lovers.

In the article *An Inner Landscape of Obsessions*, Eleonora Federici investigates nature’s influence on Jane Urquhart’s characters. She states that “[t]he landscape, its images and visual metaphors, translates [...] the characters’ passions and states of mind” (Federici 153). In most of her novels, Urquhart’s characters are driven by an obsession for something. In *The Whirlpool*, the natural phenomenon represents an obsession for each character. McDougal is obsessed with national history, Fleda with poetry, and Patrick with Fleda. In *Changing Heaven*, it is the weather that symbolizes the characters’ obsession with writing, love, and art (Federici 155). Finally, in *The Underpainter*, the protagonist is obsessed with the northern landscape that he wants to paint: “[T]he landscape is translated into art, and the frozen, icy northern landscape becomes a metaphor of the painter’s inability to love and be touched by emotions” (Federici 161). In these novels, the outer landscape “is mirrored in the inner landscape of the characters, a landscape of obsessions, fears and hope” (Federici 162).

Anne Compton, in *Meditations on the House*, identifies Urquhart’s characters as “great dreamers” (13). She explains her dissatisfaction with *Changing Heaven* in arguing that the dreamers in the novel lack an intimate space as a starting point for their poetic journeys. Usually, a house works as such a starting point, but the surroundings of the characters in *Changing Heaven* are insufficiently depicted. In contrast, Fleda McDougal’s tent in *The Whirlpool* works as an intimate space from where she can escape to her dream world. Patrick already “lives in the territory of his dream, the landscape” (Compton, *Meditations* 17), and from there he can plan swimming through the whirlpool. Thus, Compton argues that “the daydream of infinity begins in the felicitous space of the house” (*Meditations* 20) in Urquhart’s novels.

Anna Branach-Kallas, in her essay *Old Environment or New Environment?*, argues that Urquhart’s nature, a regional Ontario nature, is always associated with

the past in her novels. In *Changing Heaven*, the protagonist Ann Frear has a temporal and spatial crisis. Through the loss of her grandmother and the modernization of the country she cannot identify with the Canadian landscape any more: “Ann’s quest for landscape is closely associated with her search for the past; both are crucial for self-definition and remain unfulfilled in Canada” (Branach-Kallas 221). Thus, she goes to England in search of an identity that connects her to the land as well as to the past. Branach-Kallas argues that Urquhart blurs the relation between the old world and the new world by investigating the “there” rather than the “here” that Northrop Frye asked for: “By exploring the new environment, Britain, *Changing Heaven* performs a process of ‘decentralisation’, interrogating the condition of marginality, and challenging the fixity of ‘centre’ and ‘margin’” (224).

One of the most extensive studies was done by Claire Omhovère in 2007. In *Sensing Space*, she investigates the people’s perception of nature as either geography or landscape, the former representing a geological account of its physical reality, the latter representing an embellished and romantic European view. One of the novels Omhovère studies is Jane Urquhart’s *Away*. The characters in the novel experience geography and landscape in Ireland as well as in Ontario, and the transformation of the Canadian landscape is paralleled by their perception of nature. This duality of pastoral landscape and realistic geography supports the main theme of the novel, the building of the Canadian nation. Thus, according to Omhovère, Urquhart presents “a shared vision of the space where various communities coexist, although they may inhabit it differently” (*Sensing Space* 80).

Jane Urquhart has also commented on landscape in various interviews in the past few years, and I would like to quote three passages that may be relevant to an understanding of her novels. In a 2004 interview with Herb Wyile, Urquhart said:

I've always been very drawn to landscape and particularly landscape where some evidence of human activity is left behind. Pure wilderness really doesn't interest me that much because there are no traces left by human beings. The agricultural landscape, where you can see evidence of the past, interests me more. I probably should have been a historical geographer.

This explains why her landscapes are always populated and never just exist as empty space. She never depicts wilderness in her novels but focuses on small communities, even when they have just been established. Inside Canada she never leaves Ontario in her novels, and even when she gets to the very edge of the province, as in *The*

Underpainter, it is a place inhabited by people. At the same time, Urquhart notices that this rural landscape is slowly disappearing, as she reveals in a 1991 interview with Susan Zettell:

And I feel very nostalgic about the Canadian landscape, because I see it disappearing before my eyes...Or at least my Canadian landscape, as I understood it and knew it growing up, and as my ancestors understood it and knew it. And I think that landscape has managed to hold on, that 19th century landscape – rural landscape – has managed to exist in the country up until about two or three years ago, when it really started to disappear. And when I saw it disappearing I suddenly knew that I wanted to capture it somehow, stop it from fragmenting. (qtd. in Compton, *Romancing* 117)

This desire to preserve something can be expressed through different forms of art. In a 2001 interview with Laura Ferri, Urquhart claims that one of the functions of a work of art is to create something permanent:

There is, to a certain extent, the desire to freeze experience, to make it static and solid and that desire can enter the early moments of creation of the work of art. Just the fact that the world is always disappearing from us, it's always moving away from us, that time is passing and things are changing – that can be one of the impulses, I think, which can drive an artist to a work of art. [...] But it's an interesting thing, this desire to preserve. I find it kind of fascinating because it's a big part of my own personality. (18-19)

One way to preserve the landscape is through narration, through the telling of stories and the writing of novels. Especially in her most recent work of fiction, *A Map of Glass*, Urquhart presents different ways of preserving and reconstructing Canadian nature. In the following, I will show how Urquhart uses different aspects of nature in two of her novels.

3.2. The Whirlpool

3.2.1. Plot

Jane Urquhart's first novel *The Whirlpool* begins with a prologue that, together with the epilogue, describes Robert Browning's last days in Venice. Browning walks through the streets of Venice and reflects on his life and his achievements. He knows that he is going to die soon, and he thinks about Percy Bysshe Shelley's violent death in the waves of the sea. Even though he wishes for a similar death, in the end, he dies quietly in his son's Venetian mansion. The prologue and epilogue framing the story had been published before under the title *The Death of Robert Browning* in Urquhart's short story collection *Storm Glass*. After the prologue, the story shifts from Italy to Canada. The main story is set in the city of Niagara Falls in Ontario in the summer of 1889. The whirlpool after which the novel is named is a circular current at the bottom of the Niagara Falls. The stories of three characters whose lives are strongly influenced by the whirlpool are alternately narrated. The perspective switches between Maud Grady, Fleda McDougal and Patrick. A third person narrator reveals not only the actions but also the thoughts of the three protagonists. In addition, Fleda often discloses her thoughts in her diary entries. As the story proceeds, the lives of these characters become intertwined.

Maud Grady has been a widow for two years, since her husband was carried away by an epidemic. After her husband's death, she has taken over the undertaking establishment in the city. She has been wearing black mourning clothes for two full years after her husband's demise because as the owner of the funeral home she felt that she had to pay due respect to the dead. In the summer months, she is regularly confronted with so called floaters, people who meet their deaths in the currents of the Niagara Falls after either committing suicide or trying to prove their courage by performing audacious stunts. Maud carefully notes down the details of the bodies that are brought in, and she has a collection of items that she recovers from the pockets of the floaters. She takes care of her flower garden, which is part of the field where the Battle of Lundy's Lane had taken place seventy-five years earlier. She often remembers her husband who was obsessed with spiders, and she tries to teach her autistic son how to speak.

Fleda McDougal is an avid reader of English poetry, especially that of Robert Browning. Two years before, she moved to Niagara Falls with her husband, the

military historian Major David McDougal. At first, they were staying at Kick's Hotel which is across the street from the undertaking establishment, close to the battlefield that McDougal wants to study. McDougal bought a piece of land close to the whirlpool where he is building a house for his wife. But Fleda feels so constrained in the hotel that she cannot wait for the completion of the house. Therefore, she decides to move out of the hotel and live in a tent on their property. There she can enjoy reading her poetry, feeling the influence of the whirlpool.

Patrick normally lives in Ottawa, working as a clerk. His marriage is unhappy because he does not know what he wants to do with his life. He loves reading the poetry of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Browning, and he has published a few works of poetry himself. In the summer of 1889, he visits his uncle in Niagara Falls in order to recover from an attack of pneumonia. He has been suffering from writer's block for some time, and he goes into the woods in order to observe birds and wildflowers. He seeks inspiration in the beautiful scenery and finds it when he catches sight of Fleda who lives in the forest close to the whirlpool. He becomes obsessed with watching the woman through his field glasses when she is performing her daily rituals.

Their lives become intertwined when Patrick attends a lecture that McDougal gives at the Historical Society. He is introduced to Fleda's husband, and from that moment on they meet regularly and have prolonged conversations over history, Canadian nationalism and poetry. In doing that, Patrick hopes to get more information about the woman he is watching in the woods. McDougal tells Fleda about his meetings with Patrick, and she is fascinated by the poet. When Fleda and Patrick finally meet, he tries to keep distance to her as far as possible. At one point, she finds out that he is observing her in the woods, and she likes the idea of being watched by him. When she finally confronts him with the unspoken tension between them, he turns his back on her in anger because he was only interested in the distanced relationship they have had beforehand. In the meantime, Patrick has also become fascinated by the whirlpool. He attempts to swim through it, but he fails miserably. He dies in the currents of the whirlpool, and his body is recovered by the Old River Man. Fleda, at the same time, runs off into the woods. She goes the way of Laura Secord, the Canadian heroine with whom her husband is obsessed. When Maud is confronted with Patrick's body, she is dressed in another color than black or mauve for the first time since her husband's demise.

3.2.2. Depiction of Nature

Before we turn to Jane Urquhart's depiction of nature in *The Whirlpool*, we have to take a look at the region in which it is placed. The importance of Canadian regionalism has been mentioned by numerous scholars, as Janice Fiamengo argues: "Canada's vast distances, natural barriers, diverse patterns of settlement, and locally specific histories have led many commentators to see regionalism as a defining feature of Canadian culture" (241). Regionalism suggests that the inhabitants of a certain area within the country have a stronger affiliation with their region than with the nation as a whole. Thus, regional writers tend to use local settings, describe local landscapes, and talk about local problems rather than stereotypical national ones. There are multiple theories about regionalism in Canada where social, historical and economic dynamics determine regional differences, but one thing most theories have in common is the assumption that geography, a particular landscape, is the primary determining factor (Fiamengo 242). W. J. Keith states that Ontario is probably the region in Canada that is most difficult to define. The Atlantic Provinces are defined by the closeness to the ocean, Quebec by the French language and culture, the Prairies by their vast landscapes, British Columbia by its climate and the position west of the Rocky Mountains, and the North by its particular geography and extremely rough living conditions (Keith, *Images* 13). Ontario, in contrast, because of its central role in the history of Canada, is often seen as the heartland of Canada but not as a particular region. It is the place where everything started, and where the big cities of Ottawa and Toronto are located. Therefore, it can be said that there are comparatively few writers from Ontario who are distinctively regional (Fiamengo 242).

Jane Urquhart switches forth and back between different locations in her novels, but she places all of her stories at least partly in Ontario. She presents rural as well as urban areas of Ontario, and her locations are as diverse as the topics she covers. She places all of her stories close to Lake Ontario, and the "Great Lake" plays an important part in most of her novels. At the same time, she has a strong affiliation with Europe where all of her novels are partly situated. *The Whirlpool* is set in Venice and in the city of Niagara Falls. *Changing Heaven* switches forth and back between Haworth in West Yorkshire in England and the city of Toronto. *Away* begins on the island of Rathlin, close to the northernmost coast of Ireland, and later moves to Hastings County in Ontario, where the settlers struggle for survival. In the

end, the story moves to Loughbreeze Beach on the northern shore of the “Great Lake”. *The Underpainter* presents such diverse landscapes as those of New York City and Étapes in France, but most of the story again takes place at the great lakes. The environment of Silver Islet Landing, a small settlement on the northern shore of Lake Superior is described as accurately as the small town life of Davenport, situated on Lake Ontario. In *The Stone Carvers*, Urquhart presents the town of Shoneval in Southwestern Ontario, right at the center of the land between Lake Huron, Lake Erie and Lake Ontario. Shoneval is based on a town called Formosa, as Urquhart reveals in an interview with Linda Richards. Later, the story moves to Hamilton, Ontario, and to Vimy in France. Finally, *A Map of Glass* concentrates mostly on a place called Timber Island which is located at the northeastern end of Lake Ontario. It is difficult to say whether Jane Urquhart can be considered a regional writer. Even though she places all of her stories at least partly in a particular part of Ontario, her locations are probably too widespread to pass as regional. Furthermore, she uses universal themes that are not limited to a certain region. The survival of settlers in a harsh environment, the destruction of nature by industry, an artist’s approach to nature, and the repercussions of the First World War are themes that occur frequently in her work, and they are very common in all of Canada. Even though she describes her Ontario landscapes elaborately, Urquhart’s fiction is probably too encompassing to qualify as regional.

The question remains what a typical Ontario landscape looks like. Early accounts always emphasize the sublimity and beauty of the landscape, but compared to other regions of Canada the landscape of Ontario seems to be unspectacular. There are no mountains and no spectacular ravines, no marvellous outlooks and no ocean. Instead, the great lakes and vast forested areas may be most characteristic of the region. And, of course, there is the Niagara Falls, the famous tourist attraction at the southern boundary of Ontario. According to W. H. New, it was impossible for early settlers to describe the Falls in conventional European language: “Breathtaking, the Falls were beyond reach of what conventionally was called ‘beautiful’ – they were neither a fountain nor the kind of cataract that could be contained pictorially *within* a European garden or represented as ‘picturesque.’ So Niagara became an example of nature’s ‘sublimity’ instead” (*Land Sliding* 60). One of the most often cited studies on the sublime was published by Edmund Burke in 1757. In his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Burke associates

natural phenomena with the idea of the sublime. He points out the interrelation between the sublime and the feelings of pain, danger, horror and terror. He associates beauty with pleasure, and the sublime with pain. The former concerns comparatively small objects, and the latter vastness in every respect (Burke 157). Thus, the sight of the Niagara Falls must be overwhelming as well as frightening: “The passion caused by the great and sublime in *nature*, when those causes operate most powerfully, is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror” (Burke 101). The view of the cataract may be beautiful but also awe-inspiring, it will evoke pleasure but also a certain uneasiness. It will fill the mind with a “delightful horror” (Burke 115) and cause a feeling of powerlessness and inadequacy.

This is the way in which early explorers and literary authors reacted to the Niagara Falls. In *Analyses of New Voyages and Travels*, published in 1807, George Heriot describes the Niagara Falls enthusiastically:

The falls of Niagara surpass in sublimity every description which the powers of language can afford of that celebrated scene, the most wonderful and awful which the habitable world presents. Nor can any drawing convey an adequate idea of the magnitude and depth of the precipitating waters. [...] Casting the eye from the Table Rock into the basin beneath, the effect is awfully grand, magnificent, and sublime. No object intervening between the spectator and that profound abyss, he appears suspended in the atmosphere. The lofty banks and immense woods which environ this stupendous scene, the irresistible force, the rapidity of motion displayed by the rolling clouds of foam, the uncommon brilliancy and variety of colours and of shades, the ceaseless intumescence, and swift agitation of the dashing waves below, the solemn and tremendous noise, with the volumes of vapour darting upwards into the air, which the simultaneous report and smoke of a thousand cannon could scarcely equal, irresistibly tend to impress the imagination with such a train of sublime sensations, as few other combinations of natural objects are capable of producing, and which terror lest the treacherous rock crumble beneath the feet by no means contributes to diminish. (Heriot 68)

Heriot, who was primarily a painter, attempted to describe the Niagara Falls in picturesque language. Like many of his contemporaries he tried to convey a romantic image of the scene and emphasized the intensity of feelings that will be evoked by the beauty of the picture. His language is filled with adjectives such as “stupendous”, “immense” and “sublime”. He emphasizes the roaring sound of the Falls and mentions the vapor in the air in such a way that the reader can almost feel the

moisture accumulating on his skin. He repeats the same sensations over many pages in order to emphasize the size and strength of the image he was confronted with. Susanna Moodie, in *Life in the Clearings versus the Bush*, published in 1853 as the sequel of *Roughing It in the Bush*, describes the Niagara Falls in a similar way:

Throwing out of the question the romantic locality, – the rugged wooded banks, the vast blocks of stone scattered at the edge of the torrent, the magic colour of the waters, the overhanging crags, the wild flowers waving from the steep, the glorious hues of the ever-changing rainbow that spans the river, and that soft cloud of silvery brightness for ever flowing upward into the clear air, like the prayer of faith ascending from earth to heaven, – the enormous magnitude of the waters alone, their curbless power, and eternal motion, are sufficient to give rise to feelings of astonishment and admiration such as never were experienced before. Not the least of these sensations is created by the deep roar of the falling torrent, that shakes the solid rocks beneath your feet, and is repeated by the thousand hidden echoes among those stern craggy heights. It is impossible for language to convey any adequate idea of the grandeur of the Falls [...]. (Moodie 299)

Like Heriot, Moodie also mentions the shortcoming of language to describe the phenomenon. She concentrates on the feelings that she had when she first saw the cataract. She describes the “overwhelming sensation in [her] mind which amounted to pain in its immensity” (Moodie 297), again drawing on the idea of the sublime. The vocabulary she uses resembles the one used by Heriot and many other writers who tried to describe their impressions. She repeatedly mentions God as the creator of this natural wonder, and she compares the view of this spectacle with the sight of the Lord.

It is clear that Jane Urquhart’s depiction of the Falls at the end of the twentieth century would be different from these earlier accounts. Naturally, landscape descriptions do not figure as prominently in postmodern fiction as in the Age of Romanticism. As the title of Urquhart’s novel suggests, the whirlpool and the Niagara Falls will play an important part in the story. But the way in which they are depicted has nothing to do with the accounts of Heriot and Moodie. In fact, they are hardly described at all. Due to the narrative technique in *The Whirlpool*, every scene is closely connected to one of the main characters. Even if he or she does not use indirect speech, it is clear that the description of the surroundings is tailored to the individual person. Moss argues that “the imagery we experience [...] comes to us through the minds of [Urquhart’s] characters. She does not create their setting in

pictures; she allows us the experience of their intersecting perceptions” (*Fiction* 80). Urquhart presents the Falls only through the eyes of her characters, and all of them already know the Falls when the narration begins. Therefore, none of them has an overwhelming experience where he is speechless in view of the giant cataract. Nevertheless, Fleda and Patrick associate the natural phenomenon with the idea of the sublime. Fleda calls the scenery close to the water a “sublime geological chaos” (WP 24), whereas Patrick refers specifically to the Falls: “He talked about the Falls, how they were eating their way up the Niagara River. A terrifying image, he announced ... sublime!” (WP 173). Even though they are not paralyzed with fear at the sight of the cataract, their feelings are heavily influenced by the whirlpool and they are irresistibly drawn towards it. Repeatedly, the “strange magnetic pull of the whirlpool” (WP 141) is mentioned to have an influence on the two characters. Their sensations may come close to the idea of the sublime, even though it is not reflected in the language they are using. Maud Grady, in contrast, does not feel the influence of the whirlpool. She knows about the whirlpool because she has to deal with the bodies that are recovered from it, but she does not respond emotionally to it. Therefore, her reaction to the Niagara Falls is rather dispassionate:

Main Street was situated far enough up the hill from the river to be spared any of the garish tourist attractions that dominated the lower town and so, in appearance, it resembled the principal thoroughfare of any other Southern Ontario settlement of a similar size. Its inhabitants, therefore, were able to ignore the presence of the giant waterfall in a way the rest of the world seemed unable to. They were familiar enough with its existence that it aroused in them absolutely no curiosity, and they were too far away from it to use it to their financial advantage. The spray and fog which in winter caused the trees closer to the river to be covered with ice, producing a totally altered landscape, did not reach as far as Main Street. Even the roar of the cataract (which was never as loud as it was purported to be) was very rarely heard. Only on exceptionally still, exceptionally cold nights, when all motion had stopped or was frozen, buried, or asleep—only then could you hear it. And then it sounded like the ghost of some battle, so distant, so forgotten, that the rhythms of the cannon fire were practically lost. (WP 36-37)

This view of the natural phenomenon is not only rational, but even demystifying. The Falls are of no interest to the people who live relatively close to them because they are used to the image. The Falls are dismissed as a “garish tourist attraction” of which the sole purpose is to gain a financial advantage. Traditional accounts of the

sound of the roar are said to be exaggerated, and the thoroughfare creates an image of advanced civilization rather than sublime unspoiled nature. The Falls are viewed in relation to Main Street, avoiding a direct confrontation with them. They are quite far away, and the spatial distance between the two locations indicates also an emotional distance to the natural phenomenon.

Apparently, Niagara Falls has become such a familiar image that a literary depiction nowadays seems redundant. Everyone has an idea of what the Falls look like because they have seen pictures of it or even documentaries. Niagara Falls is one of the main tourist destinations in North America, with millions of people visiting from all over the world every year. The Falls appear on postcards, in films, in television commercials, and in children's books. A picture of the Falls is cultural knowledge that is shared by most people living in the Western world. Everyone has a visual image in his mind, and therefore a literary depiction is not necessary. Jane Urquhart does not give a description that goes beyond what everybody already knows: "The Falls were, as usual, magnificent" (WP 38). She emphasizes the normality of this image and does not get entangled in extravagant language. Instead, she concentrates on other aspects of nature such as trees and flowers. A tree is never merely a tree, but the woods are populated by "poplar [...], maple and ash" (WP 25). Fleda enjoys the view of a "most wonderful collection of young birches" (WP 27), of a "special group of cedars" (WP 28), and of "Scotch pines" (WP 28). Patrick hides "behind a sumac bush" (WP 30), and he also identifies different species of trees surrounding Fleda. The forest is described in great detail because it is a sanctuary for Fleda and Patrick. They are supposed to feel comfortable in this environment, therefore they have to know its inhabitants. They attempt to become familiar with their surroundings by identifying various species of trees and plants. The same can be said of flowers. It is conspicuous how accurately Urquhart names different species of flowers. At first, Fleda "hardly notice[s] the lilacs" (WP 23), but later "she admire[s] the carpet of trilliums" (WP 24). Maud uses "white flowers and pansies" (WP 35) for her funerals, and she further grows "trimmed rose bushes," (WP 36) "marigolds," (WP 65) "chrysanthemums" (WP 136) and "zinnias" (WP 179) in her flower garden. Patrick who collects wildflowers for his album sees "bulrushes near the shore" (WP 69) and is looking for "a tiny wild orchid called Ladies' Tresses" (WP 133). Even McDougal who is rather indifferent to the beauty of nature identifies a "rattlesnake plantain" at one point (WP 90). In the case of Maud Grady's garden,

the flowers symbolize evanescence. The flowers grow on a former battlefield where many soldiers have lost their lives. They flourish on a ground that was shaken by the thunder of cannon seventy-five years ago. On the one hand, they symbolize growth and new life, and on the other, death and decay. Maud decorates the coffins with her flowers, and they are repeatedly associated with death: “Spring and summer at Grady and Son. Dark roses and drowned flesh” (WP 39). At the same time, the flowers show the passing of time. They announce different seasons of the year, and the summer passes by when different species come into bloom. In the end, they droop in the humid air, which is also heavy with emotion. When Fleda is on the brink of running away, and shortly before Patrick enters the whirlpool, everything loses color. The season ends, the flowers disappear, and life passes by. The flowers symbolize the evanescence of time, of the seasons and of life.

In comparison to Urquhart’s other novels, there is not much landscape description to be found in *The Whirlpool*. The way in which the story is narrated does not allow for lengthy passages in which the environment is presented. The narration is focused on the characters, and it jumps quickly from one person to the other. One section is rarely longer than a few pages, and there is not much room for the depiction of landscape. The emphasis lies on the feelings and thoughts of the characters rather than their surroundings. They feel the influence of the whirlpool, and the nature surrounding them reflects their feelings. Even so, Urquhart does not attribute human character traits to nature. There is no strong “pathetic fallacy”, as it was called by John Ruskin in *Modern Painters* (148). Even though the descriptions of nature are rather rare in *The Whirlpool*, there are some interesting points that require closer investigation.

3.2.3. Death by Water

As I have shown above, the deadliness of nature in Canadian literature is a very controversial matter. Northrop Frye merely emphasizes the influence of a harsh wilderness on the Canadian imagination, whereas Margaret Atwood identifies survival in the cruel nature as a recurrent Canadian theme. She describes a landscape that actively kills people, and she names different murder weapons of nature. D.G. Jones elaborates on the notion of a dichotomous nature that is irrational and brutal on the one hand, and vital and life-giving on the other. John Moss rejects the notion of an actively hostile nature and states that death is never induced by it. In his eyes,

death in nature is always caused by humans, and nature remains a passive witness. Gaile McGregor argues that even if there is a dichotomy of good and evil in nature, the human being is always threatened by it: “Whatever the wilderness may be to its own creatures, [...] it is a foolish fancy to believe that for the human it is or ever can be anything but totally alien – and therefore dangerous” (22-23). Sherrill Grace is convinced, even thirty years after Atwood’s *Survival*, that death by nature is still a persistent theme in Canadian literature. I could go on and on about various theories of the deadliness of the Canadian wilderness because every scholar seems to have a distinct opinion on the subject. But at this point, a closer look at Jane Urquhart’s *The Whirlpool* is required.

The title of the book already suggests that the whirlpool will play an important part in the story. It is a natural phenomenon, part of the sublime scenery, but also a place of death. The characters in the story are stunned by the natural power of the whirlpool, and they are drawn towards it just as objects in the water are drawn towards the center of the whirlpool and ultimately swallowed by the strong current. In the summer months, Maud Grady, the local undertaker, has to deal with numerous floaters who have become victims of the relentless water: “Once the river shook off winter, separating into its moods and sequential performances, people began to drown themselves in it, sometimes accidentally, more often not” (WP 38). Accidents, suicides, and audacious stunts keep Maud busy all season long. If Urquhart wants to reiterate the notion of a deadly Canadian nature, she has found an authentic place of death for her story. Atwood suggests that far more people seem to be killed by nature in Canadian literature than in real life, but in the case of the Niagara Falls Urquhart’s narration is historically correct. There is a long history of daredevils who performed incredible stunts at the Niagara Falls and who attracted tourists just as the natural phenomenon itself: “Swimmers who attempted the rapids did not fare well, but others devised vessels of various sorts, and in 1886 the barrel craze at Niagara began. Carlisle Graham’s successful voyage through the lower rapids in that year was followed by countless others, some successful, many fatal” (McKinsey 261). In *The Whirlpool*, the fates of these stuntmen are repeatedly mentioned because Maud has to deal with their bodies. The deadliness of the Niagara Falls is fascinating to the tourists, but the bodies violated by nature are an unpleasant sight. The violence with which the water kills its victims is mentioned more than once. The stuntman Buck O’Connor loses his head when he challenges the rapids in a vehicle made out of

moose antlers and tanned hides. McDougal, who witnessed the accident, is completely shocked: “My God...it was awful. [...] It was horrifying” (WP 111). As a man of the military, he compares the disaster to casualties of war: “I doubt you could see anything so grotesque, [...] even in battle” (WP 111). Although McDougal later admits that he would be no good in battle, it is an unexpected acknowledgment of the powers of nature. Sam, the embalmer, emphasizes the cruelty of water by comparing different modes of death: “[G]ive me train wrecks, carriage accidents, murder victims, disasters of war, but spare me from floaters!” (WP 101). The bodies wounded by weapon, hand or machine are better preserved than the ones that were deformed by the currents. Sam finds death by human hand less nauseating than death by water, murder victims more pleasant than drowned bodies. Nature is cruel, and it is consciously cruel. The river has a mind of its own because it decides when and where it is going to release its victims: “It depended on the original location of the drowning and the currents of the river. At a certain place beyond the falls a decision was made by the water [...]” (WP 143). Sometimes it does not release the bodies at all: “Some summers the river was possessive of its dead and kept the flesh to itself” (WP 145). The river seems to pass judgement on the people who invade its waters. This personification of nature, providing it with the power to make decisions, makes it appear actively hostile. As Atwood suggests, “the result of an actively hostile Nature is usually a dead man” (*Survival* 54). The giant cataract and the whirlpool decide to swallow the men who dare to “challenge the fury of nature, the wrath of [...] [the] rapids” (WP 109). In the face of such an oppressive nature, Patrick’s death becomes inevitable. Nature is an overly powerful opponent that he is not ready to meet. He enters the currents of the whirlpool and is inescapably swallowed by them. The rapids continue to perform “their own special dance of death” (WP 38).

The inevitability of Patrick’s death does not only become clear through the progression of the story but also through the constant intertwining of death and water. Except for a few instances—Maud’s husband Charles who succumbs to an unspecified disease (WP 17) and a girl who dies of pneumonia (WP 120)—death is always associated with water. This is already foreshadowed in the prologue which describes Robert Browning’s last days in Venice. The frame story establishes a connection between water and death early on. Venice, the city of water, has frequently been described as the city of death, as in Thomas Mann’s novella *Der Tod in Venedig*. Thus, Zorzi argues that “Urquhart’s choice of Venice allows her to

superimpose images of water and death” (164). Browning stumbles aimlessly through the city of water, conscious that he will not live much longer, followed by the water of the canal. He knows that he is going to die, and he is “not a man to ignore symbols” (WP 1). The ubiquity of water in Venice parallels his constant thoughts about death. He feels the “Venetian dampness” (WP 2): “Statues appeared to leak and ooze damp soot, window-glass was fogged with moisture, steps which led him over canals slippery, covered with an unhealthy slime” (WP 9). The dampness of the streets and the humidity of the air create a feeling of evanescence. Death slowly closes in on Browning. But the water of the canal is calm, something he does not understand when he thinks of Percy Bysshe Shelley’s violent death:

Outside the ever calm waters of the canal licked the edge of the terrace in a rhythmic, sleep-inducing manner; a restful sound guaranteeing peace of mind. Browning knew, however, that during Shelley’s last days at Lerici, giant waves had crashed into the ground floor of Casa Magni, prefiguring the young poet’s violent death and causing his sleep to be riddled with wonderful nightmares. Therefore, the very lack of activity on the part of the water below irritated the old man. (WP 6)

What Browning does not know is that his death will be completely different from Shelley’s demise. Shelley died at the age of twenty-nine in a tragic boat accident, whereas Browning has had a fulfilled life at the age of seventy-seven. The roaring sea that swallowed Shelley’s boat is contrasted with the calm water of the Venetian canal. While Shelley was tormented by nightmares because of the giant waves, Browning falls asleep peacefully to the onomatopoeic sound of Shelley’s middle name: “The fountain murmured *Bysshe, Bysshe, Bysshe* until the sound finally became soothing to Browning and he dozed [...]” (WP 11). Browning does not feel threatened by water because he is waiting for death to arrive. On the contrary, he is sedated by the sound of it, and he even takes a closer look at it in order to raise his awareness of death: “He leaned to one side, looked into the deep waters of the canal, and saw his own face reflected there. As broad and distinguished and cheerful as ever, health shining vigorously, robustly from his eyes, even in such a dark mirror” (WP 1). The calm water of the Venetian canal enables Browning to see his reflection and thereby supports the notion that his death will be a conscious one. Moreover, the doubling effect through the dark mirror of the water parallels Shelley’s account who claims to have seen his doppelganger before he undertook the fatal voyage. The sight

of one's own doppelganger is traditionally an omen of death, and Browning is even looking for his double at one point: "He peered through the windows into the night, hoping that he, like Shelley, might at least see his double there" (WP 6). But in *The Whirlpool*, it is not the darkness of the night that heralds death but the darkness of the water. The symbols that Browning should be aware of are not "in the air" (WP 1) but in the canal. Browning's double in the calm water of the Venetian canal foreshadows his silent death and emphasizes the connection between water and death in the novel.

In the epilogue, Browning lies on his deathbed in Venice and complains about the insignificance of his "monotonous bedridden death" (WP 212). He idealizes Shelley's death by water: "The absolute grace of this death, that life caught there moving in the arms of the sea. Responding, always responding, to the elements" (WP 213). He glorifies the aesthetic of Shelley's demise and its connection to the element of water. Shelley finds unity with the elemental forces of nature, something that Browning longs for. He wishes "for the drama and the luxury of a death by water" (WP 214), but his wish will not be granted. The frame story taking place far from Canada, in Venice, does not only suggest the relevance of Browning's poetry to the story but also forecasts the recurrent motif of death by water. It signifies the danger and deadliness of water that will play an important part in the main story. In the end, Patrick dies in the way that Browning longed for. His violent death in the currents of the whirlpool is foreshadowed by the connection between water and death that occurs throughout the novel.

In the case of Robert Browning and Patrick, the presence of water heralds death. But there are two other characters in the story who are either threatened or, at least, troubled by water. Fleda is probably the character in the story that is drawn towards the whirlpool in the most obvious way. She wants to spend day and night close to the water, and Patrick discovers the whirlpool only through her guidance. At one point her husband David tells Patrick about the dreams she is having:

They could be nightmares, but she says they're not. She's always falling, or flying down from a great height towards a river at the bottom. [...] Yes, she must be falling because it always ends with her crashing. Death, I suppose. If she had been flying, like a bird, she would have merely settled down. Right? (WP 88)

Fleda seeks the proximity of the whirlpool because she is missing something in her life. She is falling towards the whirlpool, feeling misunderstood, clinging to Robert

Browning and then Patrick. For some time it seems as if it was her who is going to swim the whirlpool. But she is merely concerned with “the wonderful image it makes, [...] the water making everything underneath so precise...rushing up towards her” (WP 88). The whirlpool is an object of clarification for Fleda, it helps her to organize her thoughts and feelings. Her flight into nature is an attempt to escape from the constraints of domesticity and marriage. As soon as Patrick descends into the whirlpool, her descent ceases. Instead of crashing into the water, she spreads her wings and flies off into the woods. She is liberated from the whirlpool as well as from the life she had struggled to cope with: “She followed Laura Secord’s route but she carried with her no deep messages. At the abandoned river the sun slipped behind a cloud. [...] Shadow covered the whirlpool” (WP 211). For a long time, Fleda herself is close to drowning, but through Patrick’s death by water the whirlpool is clouded and falls into oblivion. Major McDougal’s misinterpretation of his wife’s dream becomes clear when he goes to the undertaking establishment immediately after her disappearance: “When he arrived at Grady and Son he was startled to find that it was Patrick, rather than his wife, in the basket” (WP 207). For some time, Fleda is threatened by the whirlpool, but the river decides to take Patrick in her stead. His death is the key to her emancipation.

The other person who is not necessarily threatened, but in some way bothered by water, is Maud Grady. After her husband’s death she decides “to wrap herself in real Courtauld crape” (WP 15) for two full years. Due to this attire she is constantly afraid of water:

Apart from the physical discomfort, there was the accompanying fear of weather; of heat and of precipitation. The smallest bit of moisture, fog, or even minor amounts of perspiration would cause the colour of the fabric to bleed through to her skin until [...] her body looked as if it had been the victim of a severe beating. (WP 16)

Not only is she stigmatized by her profession, having to avoid certain social events where people would regard her as a messenger of death, but her body is also constantly covered with black stains. The patches of black color she suffers from her mourning gown remind her of death just as the objects she collects from the pockets of the floaters. Only through the discovery of Patrick’s perfectly preserved body is Maud able to leave the past behind. The violent death of the poet purifies her of the burden she has been carrying around for a long time. She rids herself of all the items

she had collected from the bodies in the past years and dresses in bright yellow for the first time since her husband's death: "She had discarded everything, all the crape, all the mauve and black and white cotton, all the kept things connected with death" (WP 209). The water washes away the stains she had received through water in the beginning. She is purified of water through water in more than one sense.

Nature, in *The Whirlpool*, is at least partly deadly. It is not always described as menacing, but it is responsible for the deaths of many people. The water is presented as a place of death, and the land as the place of the living. The forest is a sanctuary with many vital elements, but the water is uninhabitable. The connection between water and death is reinforced by the figure of the Old River Man whose function it is to recover bodies from the whirlpool. He constructs various devices in order to rescue the body parts from the river, and he takes these parts to Maud. As a reward, he regularly receives a bottle of Seagram's whiskey from her. Like the ferryman Charon carrying souls over the river Styx he helps the dead on their journey to the grave where they can be laid to rest. He receives payment for every body he recovers, and he is the only link between the world of the living, the land, and the world of the dead, the water. He lives down by the water in another world that is not comprehensible to Fleda, as she writes in her notebook: "He stands at the very edge of the water and looks at that land which, for him, is as unfathomable as the whirlpool is to me, as undecipherable as the upper and lower rapids" (WP 50). He does not feel comfortable on the land, and every step is an exploration for him. He fears horses because they are "such large and obvious beasts of the earth, so foreign to water" (WP 142). He is an uncanny figure that has become part of the river and lives among the dead rather than the living. He is the bridge between two worlds, between two versions of nature that I will explain in the following.

3.2.4. Woman in the Woods

In the beginning, Fleda leaves the city in a streetcar in order to get to her property close by the whirlpool. Contemplating the landscape through the window of the streetcar, she utters a notion that is reminiscent of Frye's garrison mentality: "It was a geography of fierce opposites. Order on one side and, nearer the water, sublime geological chaos" (WP 24). The order that man has forced on nature in the form of flower gardens and orchards is contrasted with the sublime scenery of the Niagara Falls. The city stands in opposition to the nature surrounding the whirlpool. Marlene

Goldman understands this opposition as a “disjunction between the European landscape [Fleda] reads about and the actual landscape she inhabits” (89). However, the world from which Fleda is trying to escape is not the English landscape but an already established Canadian bourgeois society. When Frye formulated his notion of the garrison mentality he referred to small communities that were surrounded by the frontier, but he also states that the garrison has undergone a change in the past centuries: “As the centre of Canadian life moves from the fortress to the metropolis, the garrison mentality changes correspondingly” (*Conclusion* 834). The city of Niagara Falls, of course, was not a metropolis in 1889, nor is it today. But the city already had an established society with social events taking place now and then. It is from the confines of this society that Fleda decides to escape by deciding to live in a tent close to the whirlpool. She turns her back on the garrison in order to look for something more authentic, something more real. She calls herself “an ex-prisoner of the hotel” (WP 28) and prefers the rough living conditions of the forest to the life that she had in the city: “Even if I do feel somewhat like a gypsy it will be better than suffering through another summer in town” (WP 29). The society with all its social implications, with its artificial order, its hierarchy, ends at the city limits of Niagara Falls. Therefore, when the streetcar passes these limits Fleda suddenly enters “into a rougher geography” (WP 24). She crosses the border between garrison and wilderness in order to read her poetry in a suitable setting. The confines of the hotel have become unbearable, and she tries to escape to a place with a more natural order. According to Moss, the wilderness is the unintelligible counterpart of the fortress: “The garrison implies the confrontation of two realities – two social or moral or philosophic visions – one of which is coherent and comprehensible and the other, apparently chaotic and indeterminate in scope” (*Patterns* 35). The society of Niagara Falls represents the former reality, whereas the whirlpool represents the latter. The whirlpool is repeatedly described as a natural phenomenon that is enigmatic and inexplicable. Above all, it is uncontrollable. It takes the lives of the people who enter it at will. The sublime geological chaos stands in contrast to the order of the city.

There are two stages of Fleda’s flight from society. First, she decides to live in a tent on her property close to the whirlpool because she cannot bear life in the city any more. Then, in the end, even the tent on the property becomes too confining for her, and she flees from her husband into the woods. When Fleda first moves to the forest, she still dreams of a domestic life. She carefully plans the details of the

house that her husband will build for her on the property, and she is looking forward to living there with him. She also wants to study Coventry Patmore's poem *The Angel in the House* which describes the perfect Victorian wife: "Fleda was deeply interested in this book, interested in the poet's perception of the perfect wife, his belief in matrimony as the heavenly ideal" (WP 26). At this point, she is still planning to live the life of an average upper class Victorian woman. By moving to the forest, she is looking for "the spiritual marriage of romance and domesticity in her life" (WP 23). Therefore, she wants to combine her desire for romance, nature and poetry with the fulfillment of her domestic duties. She is still confident about her marriage to McDougal, and she wants to run a household outside in nature. But the more time she spends in nature, the less can she imagine life as a housewife. After a fight with her husband that is followed by unsatisfying sexual intercourse, she walks to the bank of the river and decides that she will never fulfill the ideal of a domestic Victorian woman: "She wouldn't ever want to be Patmore's wife, Patmore's angel. Not now, not ever" (WP 44). As she spends more time close to the whirlpool, she is becoming a part of the environment. Even if she does not see herself as an extension of the landscape, she is getting ever closer to nature. She visits the bank of the whirlpool regularly, but she rarely goes back to town. Sometimes she remembers the comforts of her old house, but at the same time she is reminded of its constraints. She is afraid that the new house "would produce a similar fortress and the feeling of caged torpor she was now beginning to associate with her last dwelling" (WP 125). Fleda is getting used to living in nature, and the longer she stays there the smaller the chance that she will return to a "normal" life. She has turned her back on society and is becoming one with the elements of nature:

She had broken out of the world of corners and into the organic in a way that even her beloved poets in their cottages and villas hadn't the power to do, and the acre had become her house. The acre and the whirlpool. Predictable flux, entry and exit of animals, birds, cloud formations, phases of the moon. The arrival and departure of men, returning to their rooms, to rectangles and corners, while she breathed whirlpool and kept her place there and her fire. The tent functioned for her merely as a shelter. And, unlike a real house, it was capable of motion and response—sagging a bit after a storm, billowing and flapping in the wind. (WP 126)

Fleda accepts another order than the one she was used to. She leaves behind the artificial architecture of houses in order to enter a more natural geography. She

internalizes the cycles of nature and wants to feel their influence. She feels herself part of nature and responds to its vital elements. She even cuts her hair “to a spot just below her shoulders” (WP 127) in order to adapt herself to life in the wilderness. Before she finally escapes into the woods, she cuts her hair again, “this time to above her shoulders” (WP 195). The length of Fleda’s hair is symbolic of her metamorphosis. Similar to the narrator in Atwood’s *Surfacing*, she slowly becomes a creature of the wilderness. Even though the transformation is not as drastic as in Atwood’s novel, it is a continuous process that results in her alienation and flight. In her last diary entry, she says that she would prefer the Old River Man’s cave to her house. She wants to drop all customs of society and live in a completely natural environment: “I’ve forgotten which fork is used for what. I couldn’t survive an afternoon tea. It took no time for all of that to fade away. Remember manners? When do you say ‘please’? When do you say ‘thank you’? When, exactly, did I stop wanting to say either?” (WP 196). Everything human becomes alien to Fleda. Customs, traditions, manners – everything is strange to her. She decides to obey the laws of nature rather than those of society. She merges with nature in search of authenticity. Her flight into the wilderness is the emancipation from her husband and the community.

Urquhart meets the “Problem of Job”, as it is called by D.G. Jones, by placing Fleda in the forest, dreaming about the whirlpool. Fleda escapes from the garrison in order to find salvation in nature, and she studies its lighter and darker aspects. She detects the ambiguity of nature in the forest and the whirlpool. The forest in which she reads the poetry of Robert Browning provides mental healing and inspiration. It is a sanctuary where she finds protection from the society which she could no longer bear. She merges with the trees and enjoys feeling the elemental forces of nature. The whirlpool, in contrast, represents a darker aspect of nature. Unlike the forest, it does not work as a habitat. On the contrary, it threatens the lives of the people who get too close to it. Fleda knows about the danger of the whirlpool, and she accepts its menacing side. She refuses to watch the stuntman die in the currents, and she does not believe that Patrick is really going to swim. She wants to preserve the whirlpool as a source of inspiration and ignores its deadly side. Thereby, she does not fear nature and has the courage to flee into the wilderness.

3.2.5. Nature and History

we French&English never lost
 our civil war
 endure it still
 a bloody civil bore

the wounded sired off
 no Whitman wanted
 it's only by our lack of ghosts
 we're haunted

-- Earle Birney, *Can.Lit.* (9-16)

The conclusion of Earle Birney's famous poem *Can.Lit.* has been interpreted in numerous ways. It does not only point towards the absence of myths in Canada but it also suggests that Canada does not have an elaborate history. The lack of an authentic history has often been named as an impediment to the development of a national identity. Yet, Keith states that this notion is outdated because it is limited "to the recent appearance of *white* peoples upon the scene and their reliance upon *written* history" (*CanLit* 20). Nevertheless, many cultural critics have seen the fact that Canada does not have a real founding myth as a constraint. The United States became a nation after they fought in the Revolutionary War against Great Britain. Canada, in contrast, has won its independence from England very slowly after a series of political decisions. Also, as Birney points out, the conflicts between the English and French population have never been fought out, at least not to such an extent as the conflict between North and South in the United States. By calling this conflict a "civil bore", he indicates that Canada does not have a spectacular military history. Instead, history in Canada has often been seen in relation to nature. Moss, for example, sees history as a narrative extension of landscape: "Measured and named, the landscape has become geography; written into narrative, it is history. We are caught between geography and history in Canada, between naming and story" (*Enduring Dreams* 94). Canadian history is deeply ingrained in nature. Every aspect of history can be interpreted through landscape. Stephen Leacock goes as far as comparing the relevance of historic battles in other countries to the impact of the wilderness on the Canadian imagination: "What the English feel about the Armada and the Scottish about Bannockburn, the Canadian, consciously or not, feels about the vast geography of Canada". History, in Canada, is probably less relevant to the

Canadian self-perception than the vast landscape. Also, nature may have been more influential than history to the creation of a national identity. But I have already commented on the relation between nature and identity extensively. In the following, I will show in what way the correlation between history and nature is reiterated in Jane Urquhart's novel.

The search for a Canadian national identity in *The Whirlpool* is represented through Major David McDougal. He comes to Niagara Falls in order to study the Battle of Lundy's Lane, a combat between Canadian and American troops that took place in 1814 in the course of the War of 1812, which turned out to be one of the cruelest battles ever fought on Canadian soil. The outcome of the battle is disputed because both sides have claimed victory in the past. McDougal is upset by the numerous American accounts of the fight and tries to prove that the Americans fled from the battlefield like cowards: "I have incontestable proof that we won the battle regardless of what any American might try to tell you. Why all this running away, why all this casting of baggage into the river, I ask you? Why all this destroying of ammunition? Is that the way a victorious army behaves? Of course not!" (WP 63). His attempt to prove that the Canadian side won the battle is the result of his anti-Americanism that emerges in various scenes in the novel. He does not trust Americans and blames them for everything that goes wrong in his life. He feels a "vague anger" (WP 40) towards them and thinks that "the connection should be broken" (WP 158). He feels that "[t]he Americans are robbing [the Canadians] of [their] victories" (WP 63), and when Patrick is looking for a special kind of flower, he grumbles that "the Americans probably stole every example" (WP 133).

Although McDougal's preoccupation is to prove that Canada won the Battle of Lundy's Lane, and despite his blatant anti-Americanism, there is a deeper meaning to this conflict than just a general aversion to America. He urges people to start to think Canadian rather than adopt the ideas and thoughts of other nations: "Do they think Canadian at the University of Toronto? No, they don't. They think Britain...the Empire and all that nonsense. Do they think Canadian in the churches? No, they don't. They think Scotland, Rome" (WP 62). He fears that the influence of geographically, culturally or politically related countries will be an obstacle to the development of a Canadian identity. People will have to *think* Canadian in order to understand who they are. Therefore, his dislike of the United States is primarily concerned with the fear of a cultural invasion by "an English-speaking, culturally

aggressive nation-state boasting approximately ten times its population” (Keith, *CanLit* 17). With a common border of over five thousand miles the United States is probably the greatest threat to the development of a unique Canadian identity, hence McDougal’s distrust of Americans. He wants to protect Canada from too much American influence, and he is concerned about the Canadianness of its inhabitants. But he is taking the wrong path in his search for a Canadian identity. As a military historian, he is constantly looking for facts. He despises Fleda’s interest in poetry and does not care much about nature surrounding him. His interest in nature is limited to military aspects, and he is completely oblivious of the influence of the whirlpool. He thinks that Canada’s military history is the key to the development of a national identity, and he ignores his natural surroundings completely. But Canada’s short and comparatively unspectacular military history has never had such a great influence on the formation of its national identity, at least not as much as the American Revolutionary War had on the United States. Instead, nature, the wilderness as well as the vastness of the country have often been named as defining features of Canadian identity. Of course, the past plays a certain role in the development of a national identity, but more in the form of settlers struggling against a hostile environment than in the form of battles and wars being fought. But McDougal insists on his military approach to history and rejects any other influence. He complains that “[t]his country buries its history so fast people with memories are considered insane” (WP 72). But what he gets wrong is that Canadian history lies in nature rather than in battles: “In one sense the whirlpool was like memory; like obsession connected to memory, like history that stayed in one spot, moving nowhere and endlessly repeating itself” (WP 40). You have to turn to nature in order to discover a piece of history. Memory is deeply ingrained in nature, and there is far more relevant history to be found in the whirlpool than in the battlefields that McDougal is studying.

McDougal’s obsession with military history started a few years ago with a dream about Laura Secord: “[S]he came to me in a dream, [...] saying *Remind them, remind them*” (WP 72). From that moment on, he feels obliged to remind Canadians of this episode in the War of 1812. Laura Secord is a Canadian heroine who undertook a long journey in order to warn a British lieutenant of an impending attack by the Americans in 1813. She overheard the conversation of American soldiers who had forced their way into her home and then decided to undertake an eighteen hour journey over thirty-two kilometers through the wilderness. In the end, the British

troops were able to fend off the American attack due to Laura Secord's warning. McDougal's obsession with the heroine goes so far that he admits at one point that he has married Fleda partly because "she resembles the Laura Secord that came to [him] in [his] dream" (WP 74). Sometimes, he wants her "to dress up as Laura Secord" (WP 41) in order to study the heroine's character. McDougal is obsessed with Laura Secord, but since he had the dream something must have gone wrong. He used to dream frequently back then but does not dream any more, as he tells Patrick. He misinterpreted the dream about Laura Secord in so far as he concentrated on the historical effect rather than on the physical challenge of her effort. He is more concerned about the outcome of the ensuing battle than the symbolism of Laura Secord's journey. A Canadian woman undertakes an arduous and dangerous journey through the Canadian wilderness in order to warn British-Canadian troops of an American attack. She benefits from her Canadian experience and bonds with nature, and can then preserve the very same nature from an American invasion. Canadian nature has been a physical challenge from the very beginning, and it is self-evident that a Canadian heroine must challenge nature in some way. Even if the outcome of her heroic deed is historically more relevant than the way in which she achieved it, it is an important part of the Canadian myth. It is not the history of the battle that Laura Secord wants McDougal to study, but the role that nature has played in its conclusion. Only Fleda understands the meaning of Laura Secord's journey: "Nobody understood. It wasn't the message that was important. It was the walk. The journey. Setting forth" (WP 197).

The opposition between the United States as an industrial country and Canada as a country dominated by nature occurs more than once in *The Whirlpool*. The Niagara River divides the two countries, and Fleda looks over the river to the opposite shore: "If you avoided looking at the factories on the American side, you could almost believe you were in the wilderness" (WP 24). This opposition recurs when Patrick follows McDougal down to the whirlpool: "It's really rather like a dream, isn't it? I mean all this wild landscape and then the American factories just around the bend where you can't see them" (WP 87). Down at the whirlpool the factories are invisible because they disappear from the scene behind the cliff on the opposite side. The whirlpool becomes a site of Canadian authenticity where nature prevails and civilization vanishes from sight. It is a dream, as Patrick says, and McDougal's response is fairly dry: "I don't dream" (WP 88). His inability to have

dreams equals his inability to see nature as a Canadian phenomenon that is an indispensable part of the national identity he is looking for. Fleda dreams of the whirlpool, but McDougal's lack of interest in the natural phenomenon prevents him from dreaming. The last dream he had, the one about Laura Secord, was meant to encourage him to remind the people what Canada was essentially about, but it has kept him from discovering Canada's true identity because he got lost in studying the War of 1812 and its battles. Moreover, his anti-Americanism is based on historical events rather than environmental issues. While Fleda and Patrick notice the destructive forces of the American factories, McDougal is only afraid of a cultural or military invasion. As Allison Mitcham argues, the "utopian northern dream" is jeopardized by "American forays into Canada [which] result in destruction of the natural environment and disruption of established patterns of life" (20). But McDougal does not notice this threat. He merely wants to keep an eye on the Americans on the other side of the river. When Fleda runs away into the woods he even fears that "[s]omething American ha[s] happened to his wife" (WP 205). He is afraid that Americans may have violated Fleda, but he is oblivious of the American factories violating Canadian nature. His ignorance of this fact even prevents communication with his wife, as she notices: "I spoke about industry ruining landscape, about factories and mines. [...] David talked about the war. We didn't, somehow, seem to be speaking to each other" (WP 93). He is too obsessed with the military history of Canada to accept nature as a defining feature of Canadian identity.

McDougal's exclusion of nature is also apparent in his intention to build a museum of military history. He wants to establish "a pure museum...one where he could place the relics of the thin history of the country where he lived" (WP 151). Although threatening nature, the hostile environment with all its inhabitants has been an important part of Canada's history, McDougal refuses to exhibit anything connected to the natural world: "In his museum there would be no natural history; no stuffed birds, dried lizards, dead fish, pinned butterflies, pickled fetuses, animals worked over by the taxidermist" (WP 153). Incidentally, Canada's oldest museum is located in Niagara Falls, Ontario. In 1827, Thomas Barnett opened the Niagara Falls Museum in a former brewery house. Among the first items on display were bipeds, quadrupeds, birds, fish, insects, reptiles, shells and minerals. These are exactly the items that McDougal did not want to include in his museum. Instead, he would exhibit "[b]ullets and buttons and cannon-balls. The cannons themselves, if he could

find them. And endless scarlet uniforms, empty, no dummies propping them up. Maps, autographs, commissions signed by famous generals” (WP 153). Again, McDougal neglects nature’s part in the history of Canada and concentrates too much on warfare. He is blinded by his obsession with military history in his search for a Canadian identity and ignores other factors completely. When Fleda detects a poem about the Niagara Falls that is allegedly the first poem written in Canada, he is entirely indifferent to it: “He couldn’t imagine why anyone would want to save this anonymous, none too enlightening, piece of verse. It told him absolutely nothing” (WP 153). He does not reflect on the significance of nature poetry because he does not understand it. His interest in poetry is only superficial. He wants to use Patrick’s poetry to make Fleda more Canadian, as he tells him: “Why, I ask, now that I think about it, isn’t she reading *you*? Why not something Canadian?” (WP 75). The fact that it is the first time that this idea has entered his mind shows the limitation of his thoughts. He is a military historian who is obsessed with historical facts. He realizes that poetry can be a means to spread Canadian ideas, but he fails to see the bigger picture.

The juxtaposition of McDougal’s world and the world of nature and poetry occurs several times in *The Whirlpool*. Even Maud Grady is antagonistic to McDougal, although the two of them do not have much interaction before the very end of the novel. Maud buries history in her garden and plants flowers on a former battlefield: “They planted bulbs, trimmed rose bushes, installed arbours and miniature artificial waterways. They gave little thought to the fact that the land they worked was rich with recent history, the Battle of Lundy’s Lane having been fought where the garden was now” (WP 36). The pastoral idyll of Maud’s garden is contrasted with the events that have taken place on the same spot seventy-five years earlier. When Maud finds a bullet or a button in her garden, she puts it in her apron pocket but forgets about it immediately so that it is thrown away soon after by the housekeeper. This is striking because of her collection of objects that she finds in the floaters’ pockets. She notes down meticulously the details of the bodies recovered from the water and collects the possessions of the nameless floaters: “She wanted to enclose and protect the fragmented evidence of these smothered lives, to hold the memories of their memories. This was her museum” (WP 83). Maud is interested in the story of the people who were killed by nature, but she is totally indifferent to the history of the battle that has taken place in her garden. She collects handkerchiefs,

pipes and theater tickets rather than bullets. Her museum is evidence of a cruel nature that has taken many lives rather than a collection of historical artifacts. In many respects, Maud is antagonistic to McDougal. They both deal with death, the former primarily with death by nature and the latter with death by battle. She buries beneath the flowers what he is trying to uncover. When they meet at the undertaking establishment at the end, he has lost his disciple Patrick to the currents and his wife Fleda to the woods. For her, the sight of Patrick's body is a revelation. McDougal's failure is Maud's liberation.

Apart from McDougal, everybody in the novel is in some way influenced by the whirlpool. He contrasts with Fleda, Patrick and Maud in almost every respect. He fails to communicate with his wife because of their different interests. She loves nature and poetry whereas he is interested in history and nationalism. Patrick spends a lot of time with him listening to his stories, but he is really only interested in getting to know more details about Fleda. Patrick finds his inspiration in nature, and he is just as uninterested in history as the two women: "History. [...] Patrick was confused by the word. History, his story, whose story? Collections of facts that were really only documented rumours" (WP 61). He repeats the notion that history is only a narration inscribed on the landscape. He wants to find truth in nature rather than in history. In the end, Fleda flees into the woods and Patrick into the currents, whereas McDougal does the exact opposite. After he has identified Patrick's body and accepted the loss of Fleda, he immediately goes to the museum to look at his artifacts: "There was peace here, and the major knew it. Emptied of drama and emotion these artifacts would not be making any further statements, any further journeys" (WP 208). He flees from nature into the sanctuary of the museum. He feels safe among dead, immovable items. While the other characters are liberated by nature, he feels more constrained than ever before.

3.2.6. View from a Distance

Obviously, one of the first things that explorers encountered in Canada was the vast landscape with its infinite distances. This made an impact on Canadian writing from the very beginning to the present. In his *Conclusion*, Frye states that "[t]he sense of probing into the distance, of fixing the eyes on the skyline, is something that Canadian sensibility has inherited from the *voyageurs*" (828). One can find it in Canadian painting as well as in writing, and Frye wonders "how many Canadian

novels associate nobility of character with a faraway look, or base their perorations on a long-range perspective” (828). Frye also mentions the far-reaching vistas of Canadian landscape painters such as Tom Thomson “whose focus is so often farthest back in the picture, where a river or gorge in the hills twists elusively out of sight” or Emily Carr “whose vision is always [...] deeper into the forest” (828). It seems as if Atwood responds directly to this notion in her story *Death by Landscape* when she describes the change in Lois’ perception of her paintings. At the beginning of the story, the paintings of Tom Thomson and some members of the Group of Seven are described as typical landscape paintings:

They are pictures of convoluted tree trunks on an island of pink wave-smoothed stone, with more islands behind; of a lake with rough, bright, sparsely wooded cliffs; of a vivid river shore with a tangle of bush and two beached canoes, one red, one grey; of a yellow autumn woods with the ice-blue gleam of a pond half-seen through the interlaced branches. (Atwood, *Death* 110)

The importance lies in the background. The islands behind the one in the foreground and the pond that shines through the branches indicate a depth in the pictures that resembles Frye’s description. There is a vista, an outlook that emphasizes the vastness and beauty of the landscape. The observer keeps a certain distance to the picture and enjoys the view. But at the end of the story, when Lois remembers Lucy’s death in nature, she sees the pictures in a different light:

And these paintings are not landscape paintings. Because there aren’t any landscapes up there, not in the old, tidy European sense, with a gentle hill, a curving river, a cottage, a mountain in the background, a golden evening sky. Instead there’s a tangle, a receding maze, in which you can become lost almost as soon as you step off the path. There are no backgrounds in any of these paintings, no vistas; only a great deal of foreground that goes back and back, endlessly, involving you in its twists and turns of tree and branch and rock. (Atwood, *Death* 128-129)

Suddenly, the background vanishes and the picture presents you with an unexpected closeness. Instead of looking at nature from a distance, you find yourself surrounded by it. In Atwood’s story, it is a question of perspective. If you keep a certain distance to nature, it will be enjoyable. If you approach nature, it will become “red in tooth and claw”. At the beginning of the story, the pictures present a stunning panorama,

but after Lois remembers nature's cruelty, the beautiful landscape becomes an uncanny place. Instead of a clear background there is uncertainty. Instead of appreciating the details, the observer becomes lost in them. He is swallowed by the landscape he cannot bear to look at. The sublime view presents its unpleasant side.

Atwood presents a similar notion in *Survival*, when she describes Susanna Moodie's approach to nature in *Roughing It in the Bush*: "Again and again we find her gazing at the sublime natural goings-on in the misty distance – sunsets, mountains, spectacular views – only to be brought up short by disagreeable things in her immediate foreground, such as bugs, swamps, tree roots and other immigrants" (*Survival* 51). Again, the dichotomy of nature, the beautiful setting and harsh wilderness, is described as a question of perspective. The view from a distance provides you with a beautiful outlook, whereas the closeness is primarily disagreeable. According to Gaile McGregor, Catherine Parr Traill's reaction to nature in *The Backwoods of Canada* is similar to her sister's in this respect: "[O]verlooking the panoramic landscape from a distance, she offers a generalized picture in the most glowing terms imaginable [...]. In stark contrast, she describes her actual entrance into this 'parkland' in terms reminiscent of nightmare" (McGregor 42). According to these critics, the two sides of nature in Canadian literature are often contrasted by the viewer's distance to it. If you enter the landscape that you enjoy to look at, you will encounter various problems, and you might not be able to escape from it. Therefore, it would be best to keep a certain distance in order to avoid discomfort.

In *The Whirlpool*, Patrick's and Fleda's relationship is characterized by spatial distance between them. He catches sight of her for the first time through his field glasses when he is in the woods observing birds and collecting wildflowers. He hides behind a pine tree and observes the woman's behavior. He becomes fascinated with her and returns regularly in order to watch her from afar while she reads poetry and performs her daily rituals. She becomes part of a landscape painting for him: "In this setting, surrounded by the yellow-green foliage of late spring and seated in blue shadows, she looked to him like a woman in a painting, as though she had been dropped into the middle of the scene for decorative purposes" (WP 30). For Patrick, she becomes an indispensable part of the landscape. He sees "her environment [as] an extension of herself" (WP 32), and in his vision she is an immovable part of the picture: "She, reading, slowly turning the pages, not moving as the forest moved

around her. The first image. He held to that” (WP 85). Fleda is part of a fixed picture that Patrick does not want to change. He wants her to remain inside the distant landscape and is afraid of any form of approach. When he is invited to McDougal’s tent one evening, he flees from the property after hearing her voice for the first time: “He didn’t want her to have a voice. [...] One more step on his part and she would leave, forever, the territory of his dream and he would lose something—some power, some privacy, some control” (WP 86). The view from a distance provides him with an outlook on a beautiful scene and ensures his control over the picture. The closeness, on the other hand, reveals a more authentic but less controllable image.

Due to his friendship with McDougal an encounter with Fleda is inevitable. After the stuntman Buck O’Connor dies in the currents of the whirlpool, Patrick is confused and disoriented. He runs back to Fleda’s tent in the forest and accidentally meets her for the first time. He is startled by her sudden appearance and regrets their encounter immediately. He barely speaks to her and tries to ignore her as much as possible, and he wants to erase the picture from his mind: “He wanted [...] to put her where she belonged in *his* story, back inside the fieldglasses where he could control the image” (WP 112). He tries to regain the space between them that he has lost through the encounter. From a distance, he is in command of the situation and enjoys the vista. Getting too close to her he will get entangled in a situation for which he is unprepared. From that moment on, whenever he visits McDougal and Fleda is present, Patrick answers her questions briefly and tries not to look at her. But she is always aware of him watching her from the distance, and at some point she addresses the topic. When she tells him that she had hoped that they “might have been able to get close to each other” (WP 160), Patrick is furious: “I don’t *want* to be this close to you. Not now, not ever. Look what happens...when we’re this close we can’t see each other at all...not even each other’s eyes. This close, you’re a blur...and I’m nothing...completely nothing...nothing but a voice. You can’t see me” (WP 161). This furious speech is the result of his fear of losing control by getting too close to her. He puts his emphasis on the visual aspect because the view from a distance is so important to him. If he gets close to her, he might be confronted with an unclear picture, a blurry image. Also, he might see unpleasant details that he would like to repress. The distance ensures his safety as well as his independence. He does not want to get involved for several reasons.

The distance Patrick keeps to Fleda parallels the distance he keeps to the whirlpool. The closer he gets to her, the nearer he comes to the center of the Niagara River. When he spots Fleda for the very first time, he has not yet “been down to the edge of the river” (WP 32). While he is watching her for the second time she comes very close and “his eyes [are] less than two feet away from her blue skirt” (WP 47). Shortly after that he goes down to the river for the first time: “Patrick was standing ankle deep in the mallows at the shore watching, trying to understand the current of the whirlpool” (WP 68). He philosophizes about the qualities of the river just as his mind is occupied by the woman. After this visit to the shore of the river Fleda sees him for the first time when he climbs the banks. He is “astonished to see the woman standing there under a black umbrella, apparently watching him” (WP 70), and at that moment he thinks about swimming the whirlpool for the first time. After McDougal tells him that Fleda dreams about the whirlpool, “he picture[s] himself gliding through the woman’s dream” (WP 89) and repeats the intention to swim the currents. When she finally confronts Patrick with their secret relationship, his swimming seems to become inevitable. She utters what he never wanted to hear, and suddenly they are “shut in together, a closeness concocted by nature” (WP 160). He has got so close to her that the whirlpool also stretches out its hands to pull him in. The closeness to Fleda parallels his intention to swim the whirlpool. He enters the whirlpool just as he has entered her life. He manages to flee from Fleda, but there is no escape from the immense power of the whirlpool. Coquetting with the woman is dangerous, but flirting with nature is deadly.

Time and again, closeness is associated with danger. The view from a distance ensures safety whereas close proximity is perilous. Patrick is afraid of losing control when he approaches Fleda, and getting too close to the whirlpool even means death. When Patrick remembers the lake where he has grown up he says that “he could really only see it from a distance”, and when he got close to it “the sound of the rapids [was] camouflaging all danger” (WP 69). Again, Patrick utters the notion that the distance to the lake ensured his safety whereas the closeness was dangerous. This time, not the water itself but the surroundings were a threat to him when he got too close. In another situation Fleda talks about the Suspension Bridge over the Niagara River that snapped during a violent storm the year before. She tells Patrick that she used to cross the bridge frequently and that she trusted it completely. Again, his answer seems somewhat odd: “[Y]ou allowed yourself to get too close to the

bridge and then you couldn't see it properly. You trusted it, when, in fact, it was completely untrustworthy" (WP 159). Once again, the visual aspect is foregrounded. Seeing the bridge from afar enables you to fully grasp it. The view from a distance is associated with safety, harmony and independence. It guarantees that everything is in order. It creates an inspirational landscape that exists within a certain frame. It is limited insofar as it is always controlled by the observer. The distance guarantees a peaceful, picturesque landscape that has nothing to do with the deadliness of nature that has been described by Atwood and Frye. In *The Whirlpool*, Jane Urquhart defines the dichotomy of the Canadian nature through distance. From afar, you are confronted with an inspirational landscape that you can fully understand. If you get close to nature you may get lost in its details, you will be confronted with a deadly environment that is beyond your grasp. This is indicated in various instances in the novel. Patrick tries to control the landscape around Fleda, the landscape of the whirlpool, and the landscape of the lake. Although he retreats from Fleda in the end, he is swallowed by the currents of the whirlpool. He does not keep the distance, but he gets too close to its center.

3.2.7. Ecocentrism and Anthropocentrism

It has long been a matter of discussion in what way the Canadian man or woman of letters should respond to the Canadian environment. John Moss states that he "reject[s] all [...] anthropocentric notions" of nature (*Patterns* 111), but what he means is that he rejects the idea of an actively hostile nature as it was described by Margaret Atwood. In *Patterns of Isolation*, Moss's view of nature is anthropocentric through and through because his thematic approach presupposes a functional use of nature in literature. The presentation of landscape is related to its population, the human being is the center of attention. Nature is viewed from a certain perspective, namely a human perspective, and it is not seen from a strictly biological or geographical point of view, as what it essentially is. This literary approach to nature is, of course, different from the naturalist approach. According to Christoph Imscher, Canadian nature writers raised the question whether it was appropriate to use a human-centered perspective in such an overwhelming environment as the Canadian landscape:

[C]ritical models of Canadian identity [...] have remained stubbornly anthropocentric rather than ecocentric, focused not on the environment, that

is, but on its human inhabitants. This is a striking limitation, given the rather marginal presence of humans in a territory that includes such vastly different landscapes [...]. (Irmscher 95)

Irmscher identifies various literary pieces of Canadian authors who understood the separation of human and nature and who managed to grasp the essence of the latter, such as David Thompson who described “a landscape not intended for the limited perspective of the human observer” (97), John Keast Lord who acknowledged “the presence of a world that exists apart from all our attempts to understand and commodify it” (98), and Philip Henry Gosse who mocked “the inappropriateness of human concepts and terms in descriptions of nonhuman nature” (100). In contrast, writers of animal stories such as Ernest Thompson Seton, Charles G. D. Roberts and Grey Owl held a typically anthropocentric view of nature (Irmscher 107). They tried to show the merging of humans and animals in the wilderness and the loss of all human characteristics in an extreme environment. But even the focus on the animal world did not manage to keep out the human perspective: “Paradoxically, the more urgently Seton, Roberts, and Grey Owl represent nature as the site of authenticity, as the point where outward appearance and inner truth coincide, the more clearly they identify it also as a human construction, the product of a writer’s lively imagination” (Irmscher 109). Thus, every kind of fictional approach to nature involves an anthropocentric view. Ecocentrism, on the other hand, is limited to cartographers, botanists, and scientists who are more intrigued by the question “*What is here?*” than by Frye’s famous problem (Irmscher 96).

In *The Whirlpool*, the dichotomy between an anthropocentric and an ecocentric view of nature is represented by the different perceptions of Fleda and Patrick. They are both obsessed with studying nature, but in very different ways. Patrick, as I have shown above, attempts to keep a certain distance to nature. On the one hand, the distance ensures safety and protection, and on the other hand, it guarantees independence and objectivity. He tries to grasp the very essence of nature without a human-centered perspective. Patrick is a writer of nature poetry, and although no single poem is quoted in the book, it becomes clear that he writes about a pure, uninhabited nature. He does not use nature metaphorically in order to portray the thoughts and feelings of his characters, but he presents an authentic nature that no human being has ever entered. Fleda complains at one point that Patrick’s poems are void of humans: “There are no people in them, no emotion. Just acres of forest, acres

of rock and unrelenting winter. I read them coldly, as if I were the grey, uncaring sky which covers the bleak landscape he speaks about” (WP 176). This is the key scene that shows the difference in their perceptions. Fleda is eager to identify landscape as a place of human emotions. She complains about the absence of any kind of human interaction in Patrick’s poems, and at the same time she tries to enter his poetry by identifying herself as the sky above his landscapes. She tries to sneak into his imagination, mentally as well as physically, and she wants to make his poetry more emotional, more human.

Patrick goes into the woods in order to observe the details of nature, and later he writes poems about his observations. His poetry is the result of his view of the world. He organizes everything in landscapes. Vistas as well as situations and objects become part of this pattern. He calls his uncle’s farm a “neat, well-ordered landscape” (WP 58), and when he reads poetry he “disappear[s] into the old-world landscape with Wordsworth, Coleridge, or Browning” (WP 59). He says that “the war ha[s] forced exaggerated events into the landscape” (WP 64), and at one point he recalls a “view, the landscape he was now briefly part of” (WP 96). Everything revolves around landscape in his mind. He seems to define every aspect of his life through it. He even remembers through landscape insofar as he sees himself through the eyes of an objective observer who watches the scene from a certain distance. This is one of the few instances when Patrick himself becomes part of a vista. Normally, his landscapes are purely natural and deserted. This changes when Fleda walks into his life: “[I]t had never occurred to him that a figure would enter any of his landscapes. They were fierce places, wild with growth, crazy with weather” (WP 45). Although his typically northern landscapes represent a relentless nature, there seems to be some natural order in them. This order is violated by Fleda when she enters the picture. Due to her presence in the forest she becomes an indispensable part of one of Patrick’s landscapes. She is an important part of the picture, maybe even the center of attention, but at the same time she is inevitably connected to the nature around her. Patrick notices that “[t]he woman ha[s] apparently integrated herself with the terrain around her” (WP 64). The branches of the trees look “like part of her nervous system or electrical impulses suddenly becoming visible outside her brain” (WP 85). She has become “[s]o much a part of the landscape that the foliage in which she [stands] seem[s] to germinate from her” (WP 110). Fleda’s physical appearance literally merges with the forest in Patrick’s eyes. She has integrated herself into the forest to

such an extent that it makes a distinction difficult. For Patrick, she is part of a landscape painting that is accidentally inhabited by her. He is not interested in Fleda as a person but in the way she completes the landscape. She is an addition to the picture, a minor alteration but major distraction. He is distracted by her appearance for some time, but ultimately he finds his way back to nature:

He had dislocated and mixed categories, had confused the woman with the whirlpool, had believed, in some crazy way, that she *was* the landscape that she walked around in every day. It was the landscape that he wanted and needed, uncomplicated setting, its ability to function and endure in a pure, solitary state. (WP 170)

Nature is predictable for him because it is void of human emotions. He understands it in the form of a landscape painting. For him, nature exists inside a frame that he can control from a certain distance. Even when he enters the woods he does not become part of it but just observes it. The only moment when he merges with nature is when he enters the whirlpool. In recent years he has learned to control landscape and keep it inside a frame, but due to the distraction by Fleda and the memory of his childhood lake where “[h]e would bathe with the Indian children from the reservation” (WP 69) Patrick loses control and decides to become one with nature again. He merges with the water of the whirlpool and dies in its currents. He should have stuck to his earlier plan that “[h]e would never again allow a figure to enter his landscapes” (WP 47). Losing control over his landscapes ultimately results in his death.

Fleda’s notion of landscape is completely different from Patrick’s understanding of it. Although she accepts herself as part of his landscapes and sees herself as the woman in the woods being watched by him, it has a different meaning for her. She decides to leave the hotel and “[take] her books with her into the real landscape of her own country” (WP 125). She wants to become part of this real world by living outside in nature but does not see herself merging with it. She is not interested in nature itself but in feeling the influence of the environment while she is reading poetry. She sees herself through Patrick’s eyes, but she understands the picture in a different way: “[I]n reproductions of famous Italian pictures that she had looked at, it was the figure dominating the landscape that caught the attention, held the memory” (WP 141). In her view, the human being is always central, even in an overwhelming natural environment. The person is not simply an extension of nature but an independent entity within the picture. When she sees herself as a part of the

landscape, it is always in relation to her feelings and her mood. Thus, after Patrick has stopped watching her she lives in a “grey landscape” that is “soundless, heavy with anxiety and seemingly endless” (WP 195). Fleda’s nature is never authentic, never pure. She “perceiv[es] whirlpools as metaphors” (WP 91) and wonders “how Wordsworth or Browning would interpret [a certain] landscape” (WP 106). When Patrick is looking for a flower called Ladies’ Tresses she wonders whether “he intentionally make[s] metaphoric reference to his own behaviour” (WP 133), and when they talk about an area that she had named “Windy Poplars” she feels “that their conversation suddenly had nothing whatsoever to do with a spot of grass surrounded by trees (WP 140). For Fleda, everything in nature means something. Nature is either symbolic or metaphoric, and it is definitely inhabited by people. She consciously enters her own as well as Patrick’s landscapes, and she feels that she has a right to be the center of attention. This anthropocentric view of nature is contrasted by Patrick’s ecocentric view. As a Canadian nature poet he wants to present an authentic nature to his audience. He refuses to enter his landscapes and give them a human touch. For Jane Urquhart, on the other hand, an anthropocentric view of nature is inevitable. As a writer of fiction, she has to populate her landscapes and describe them as places of human interaction. Her landscapes are not a simple backdrop, but they create moods and reflect the emotions of her characters. Nevertheless, she puts the question of Canadian ecocentrism up for discussion in *The Whirlpool* by presenting the contrasting notions of Patrick and Fleda.

3.3. A Map of Glass

3.3.1. Plot

Jane Urquhart's most recent novel, *A Map of Glass*, begins with an old man stumbling through the snow on an island. He suffers from Alzheimer's disease, forgetting words and places, past and present. He falls down on the ground and dies, and his body is covered by a blanket of snow. Later, we find out that the old man was Andrew Woodman, a historical geographer who was interested in his family's past. The place of his death is Timber Island, a small island situated at the northeastern end of Lake Ontario, which belonged to his ancestors, who owned a flourishing timber and ship building business in the nineteenth century. The company had broken down generations ago because of the lack of wood and the emergence of steamboats, therefore the island is used as a retreat for visual artists today. Jerome McNaughton, a young artist from Toronto, spends a few weeks on Timber Island where he digs holes in the snow and makes photographs of his excavations. During one of his trips on the island he discovers Andrew's body in the snow.

A year later, in Toronto, Jerome gets a visit from fifty-three-year-old Sylvia Bradley who claims to have been Andrew's lover in the past. She read about Jerome in the newspaper and found his address in the phone book. Sylvia suffers from an unspecified condition due to which she has to cling to familiar things, not being able to adapt to something new. She has spent all of her life in her parents' house, and she has rarely left the county in which she grew up. She married Doctor Malcolm Bradley who agreed to move to her house and take care of her, but they never had an intimate relationship because she has always been afraid of touch. She spends her spare time constructing tactile maps for her blind friend Julia. With the help of these maps, Julia is able to "see" landscapes, something that is usually utterly impossible for someone who is sightless. Because of her condition, traveling to Toronto on her own is a big step for Sylvia, but she has to undertake the journey in order to come to terms with Andrew's death. She leaves at dawn, when her husband is asleep, without telling him the destination of her journey.

At first, Jerome is reluctant to listen to Sylvia's stories because finding the body has been an excruciating experience, but then he agrees to meet her on a regular basis. During these meetings, Sylvia tells Jerome and his girlfriend Mira about her affair with Andrew, the only man with whom she could have a physical relationship.

She talks about how she got to know him in town when he saved her from an approaching car, how she saw him again when he came to the museum where she worked, and how they spent their days together when Malcolm was at the clinic. Most importantly, she tells Jerome about Andrew's fascination with the land and his family's history. She gives Andrew's journals to Jerome which he will read together with Mira. These journals, a detailed story of his ancestors and their business on Timber Island, make up the middle section of the novel.

The narration starts with Andrew's great-great-grandfather Joseph Woodman, a bog commissioner from England who came to Canada in the nineteenth century. He settled on Timber Island and worked as a timber merchant, building up a big company that shipped timber on the Saint Lawrence River. He had two children, Branwell and Annabelle, whose lives were strongly influenced by the orphan Marie who was appointed to help in the kitchen when they were still young. In the beginning, Marie ignored the two children, but later she became Annabelle's best friend and Branwell's lover. When they had an illegitimate child, Joseph sent Marie back to the orphanage and Branwell to Paris. He stayed there for two years, studying painting, but then his father wanted him back on Timber Island to work for the company. One day, Annabelle took Branwell with her to Orphan Island where they reunited with Marie. Branwell married her instantly and brought her back to Timber Island, together with their son Maurice. Naturally, Joseph was not enthusiastic about Marie's return, but he soon bonded with Maurice and gave him the nickname "Badger". Branwell and Annabelle had always been more interested in painting than in the timber business, and they did not want to take over the company from their father. Therefore, Joseph had high hopes of Maurice and sent him to boarding school in Toronto.

In the meantime, Branwell and Marie acquired a hotel at a sandy beach in a nearby county. They called it "The Ballagh Oisin", named after a mountain pass in Ireland. Branwell painted the hallways of the hotel, and after that he also got commissions to paint the houses of wealthy families in the vicinity. One day, he received a letter from a Mr. Fryfogel who lived on the Huron Road, some distance away, and who wanted him to paint his tavern. Branwell agreed to do the job, but due to the weather conditions he got stuck in a town called Baden. There he met a Slovakian stableman who was called "Ghost" because of his unpronounceable first name. After some unsuccessful attempts to reach Fryfogel's Tavern, Branwell

decided to return to his inn, and Ghost insisted on coming with him. Ghost became a very close friend, and he worked at the hotel as a stableman. By the time Maurice would have been able to take over the timber and ship building company, the fortunes of the family had already declined, and the company went out of business. Therefore, he concentrated on growing barley instead and purchased a big plot of land close to his parents' hotel. He married Caroline Gilderson, the daughter of his grandfather's adversary Oran Gilderson, who, with his steamboats, had been responsible for the decline of the Woodman Empire. Maurice and Caroline built a house close to "The Ballagh Oisin" and had a son whom they called Thomas Jefferson, and who was to be Andrew Woodman's father. Maurice made a small fortune with the barley trade and became a politician. In the meantime, the hotel of his parents was slowly devoured by the sand dunes. Marie did not survive the loss of the hotel to the sand and the loss of her son to capitalism, and Branwell decided to finally paint the walls of Fryfogel's Tavern. Annabelle stayed on Timber Island for the rest of her life, taking care of her father's legacy and Marie's grave.

Back in Toronto, Jerome and Mira are absorbed in Andrew Woodman's journals, and they sympathize with Sylvia's fate. Inspired by the accounts of Sylvia's and Andrew's past, Jerome remembers the difficulties of his own childhood. He thinks about his father who lost his job as a mining engineer after an accident and became an alcoholic as a consequence. Meanwhile, Sylvia's husband Malcolm arrives in Toronto and wants to take her home instantly. She persuades him to stay for a few more days until Jerome has finished reading the journals. When Malcolm meets Jerome for the first time, he tells him that Sylvia has invented her affair with Andrew, and that she wrote the journals herself. Jerome does not believe him, and it is up to the reader to decide which version is true. In the end, Sylvia returns to her normal life, leaving Jerome a letter in which she tells him the rest of the story: Branwell finally moved to his son's pretentious house in the city, where he was allowed to paint the hallways. One night, lightning struck the house and it was immediately on fire. Suddenly, Ghost appeared on a white horse and rescued Branwell and his grandson Thomas Jefferson from the burning house. That night, he also saved Andrew and all future Woodman generations who would have a significant influence on Sylvia's and Jerome's lives.

3.3.2. Death by Nature

As Northrop Frye and Margaret Atwood explained in their books, the process of nature threatening man was reversed in the course of time. Man became dangerous for nature because he started to exploit and destroy it. This development is mirrored in Jane Urquhart's novels. In her debut novel *The Whirlpool*, environmental destruction is mentioned as "something American" and does not feature prominently in the book. In her third novel *Away*, the change of the landscape due to mining is an important part of the story, especially in the second part of the book. Her most recent novel *A Map of Glass* is all about the exploitation of the Canadian landscape, about nature's reaction, but also about some people's intimate relation to the vulnerable land. The very beginning of the novel seems to introduce a traditional Canadian theme. An old man stumbles through the snow, exhausted, on a deserted island far from civilization. He seems to have gone crazy in the wilderness because he is not capable of using language any more. He lies down on the ground, falls asleep, and ultimately he dies of exhaustion. Atwood could have used this scene in order to confirm her theory of a deadly nature that makes people go crazy and often claims their lives. But even if nature is the place of the man's death, it is certainly not responsible for his death. As we find out later, the old man suffered from Alzheimer's disease, and he wanted to return to the place where his ancestors lived, merging with the soil that was violated by them. Therefore, his surroundings are described as comforting rather than menacing. He lies down "on the smooth bed of ice and snow", and he is "covered by a thick, drifting blanket that is soft and cold and white" (MG 4). Nature makes a bed for him and welcomes him into its realm instead of threatening him. He becomes part of the land he has studied for all of his life. Because of his intimate relation with the landscape, nature does not pose a threat to him, nor does it attempt to kill him. Similarly, Jerome and Branwell are spared by nature even though they challenge its fury. When Jerome visits Timber Island for the first time, he is looking for "[g]rimness, uncertainty, [and] difficulty of access", but he perceives nature in the form of colors, viewing himself as a "figure concentrated and small against the cold blues and whites and greys that made up the atmosphere of the landscape" (MG 10). He is looking for danger that does not really exist, for the romantic ideal of solitude in the harsh wilderness. But due to the repeated use of his cellular phone it becomes clear that he is not really exposed to nature, and that he could be rescued any moment. Jerome's wilderness is as unreal as the dangers that

Branwell fears before his journey to the Huron Road: “[H]e had heard the rumours (broken axels, mud, and malaria in summer, overturned sleighs, ghastly blizzards, frostbite, and pneumonia in winter) that circulated about this distant road” (MG 215). Except for a snowstorm that prevents him from reaching Fryfogel’s Tavern, none of these threats become real. They are merely rumors that fail to materialize because Branwell has turned his back on the exploitation of nature, on his father’s ship building business. Nature is never cruel to those who treat her with respect. Andrew, Branwell, Jerome and Sylvia are never threatened by nature. Instead, they have an intimate relation to the land and cherish it as a sanctuary, a mirror of history, or as a source of inspiration.

At the same time, the continuous violation of nature by human hand is portrayed in the novel. As in her previous novels *Away* and *The Stone Carvers*, Urquhart tells the story of immigrants from Europe settling in Ontario. As opposed to the former two accounts where the settlers struggle against a harsh environment, the immigrants in *A Map of Glass* tame nature and immediately start to exploit it. Joseph Woodman, as the owner of a timber and ship building business, is responsible for the clearing of the forest along the Saint Lawrence River. He exploits the land until there is not a single tree left in the range of hundreds of miles. He destroys the habitat of thousands of animals and spoils the balance of the ecosystem. The deforestation results in a drastic change in the landscape, and it leaves a scar from which the land will not recover for a long time. But Joseph’s relation to nature is not as unambiguous as it seems. When details of his past are revealed it becomes clear that his motivation to exploit the landscape is not exclusively financial. He used to work as a bog commissioner in Ireland, and when he visited the country for the first time he was shocked by “the very size and scope of a landscape so undeveloped that it supported only scattered potato patches and hard-won fields occupied by few very poor cows” (MG 154). He was enchanted by the geography of Ireland, but he was also surprised by the lack of infrastructure. He fell in love with the landscape, but instead of leaving it the way it was he wanted to change it in order to make it habitable. He wanted to wield power over the land by draining the bogs and cultivating the land, but his request was denied by the English authorities. Instead, they offered him a small island on Lake Ontario in Canada. Joseph’s notion of a perfect union between man and nature is a landscape inhabited and utilized by humans. When he fails to realize this quest in Ireland, he attempts to tame the

Canadian landscape, this time more successfully. But at this point, his attitude towards nature has changed: “[H]e immigrated to Canada in a full-blown fit of pique, a man still young enough – and ambitious enough [...] – to cause serious damage” (MG 98). When he arrives on Timber Island, he is still disappointed by his failure in Ireland, and his approach to taming the landscape is more radical. His business provides people with wood and clears areas for future settlements, but it also constitutes a violent intrusion into the ecosystem of the country. This time, the drastic change of the landscape does not serve a purely philanthropic purpose, but it contributes to his wealth.

Joseph Woodman’s relation to nature is strongly connected to his experiences in Ireland, and it is as ambiguous as his relation to Ireland. The Irish landscape has “never lost its hold on his imagination” (MG 155), and he gives his son an Irish name. But at the same time, he equates “all betrayals [...] with Ireland” (MG 196), and he accuses his daughter “of high treason and ‘Irish behaviour’” (MG 207). When Joseph speaks about Ireland it is always in a derogatory way, but after his death another side of him is revealed when Annabelle discovers the maps of the bogs that he has drawn in Ireland:

Executed in what must have been hundreds of shades of brown that bled at the edges of the bog in question into infinitely varied shades of green, and occasionally criss-crossed by the tiniest of blue lines, intended, she supposed, to represent streams, these territories were drafted with such exquisite care they could only have been made with love. (MG 228)

Apparently, he was obsessed with the Irish landscape, but the English authorities upset his plans. In defiance, he turned his back on Ireland and on nature in general, starting to destroy it instead of developing it. He lost his appreciation of the beauty of nature, concentrating on its practical purposes, oblivious to the fact that taming nature may also mean destroying it. Only in weak moments does he give a hint of his former attachment to nature. When he tells Branwell a story from Ireland, the ambiguity of his feelings towards nature becomes clear: “Who but a fool would choose to live in such a wild, inhospitable place? No one but an Irishman would endeavour to haul furniture to such a grey, destitute, though [...] in certain lights, beautiful mountain” (MG 257). Joseph’s voice softens for a moment, he becomes dreamy and remembers his former devotion to the Irish landscape. He criticizes that the uncultivated land is unfriendly to humans, but at the same time he recognizes the

beauty of untouched nature. After he has failed to tame the Irish landscape he decides to destroy the Canadian woods. He has “a complicated relationship with Ireland – the people, the landscape” (MG 98), as Andrew suggests. It is a relationship that goes back to his experiences as a bog commissioner in Ireland and that he takes with him to Canada where he clears the landscape of trees. But at least he reflects on what he is doing to the landscape, and it is the expression of his complicated, ambiguous relation to nature.

His grandson Maurice, who wants to make a fortune with the barley trade, exploits the land in a similar way. Out of greed, he refuses to rotate crops and continues to grow barley which earns him the most money. As a result, the soil is depleted after a few seasons, and the farmers have to give up the land. These two generations of the Woodman family ravish the Canadian landscape with their greed. But in contrast to his grandfather, Maurice does not reflect on the exploitation of the landscape at all. He is driven solely by financial interest and his greedy wife Caroline. Before he starts growing barley he showed “not the slightest interest in the natural world” (MG 233). Even after he has broken into the barley market he continues to be uninterested in nature. His only concern is how many cents a bushel he will get from the Americans. After he fails to rotate crops and the soil is depleted, he turns his back on farming and decides to become a politician. He moves to Ottawa and builds a pretentious house with a ballroom floor made of glass. There is no place for nature left in his life, everything is artificial. When Branwell is appointed to paint the walls of the great downstairs hall, he decides that this avaricious place does not deserve his landscape paintings: “The dusky, fortified European cities were reproduced there [...], as were the sins of the artist’s son, in a horrifying array of colours [...]. There was absolutely no trace of the distant blue landscapes of his early works” (MG 364-365). He decides to paint an *Allegory of Bad Government* instead of natural sceneries in order to denounce his son’s mistakes. With his indifference towards nature, Maurice embodies the growth of modern civilization and its increasing destructiveness. While his grandfather was at least aware of what he was doing to the land, Maurice is blinded by his greed and aspiration for power. Joseph Woodman bequeaths his economic ambition to his grandson, but with the passing of generations man’s attitude towards nature changes as well, making Maurice even more threatening to his natural environment.

The last character who abuses nature in some way is Jerome's father who used to work as a mining engineer. The company that he worked for expected to find more gold at the lower levels of the mine, and they dug too deep in the end. The mine collapsed, and a worker from Iceland died in the shaft. Jerome's father, who was responsible for the accident, could not cope with this responsibility. As a result, he became an alcoholic and ruined his marriage as well as his son's childhood. Out of greed, he had penetrated the ground too far, which led to the horrible accident. Even though nature is neither overly harsh nor vengeful in *A Map of Glass*, it always shows some kind of reaction. The collapse of the mine is a reaction to the engineer's excessive ambition. The drowning of young men is the result of the heavy traffic on the lakes and rivers: "[T]here was scarcely a pioneer family in her county that hadn't lost one or two of their young men to the whims of the Great Lake as boy after boy joined the crews of schooners that carried goods from settlement to settlement along the Canadian shores" (MG 104). The decline of the timber company is a result of the fast clearing of the forests. The depleted soil and the accumulating sand is a reaction to the ruthless planting of barley. At last, the lightning striking Maurice's house is nature's response to his pompous lifestyle regardless of his environment. The lightning strikes the pretentious glass ballroom floor and melts it completely, setting the rest of the house on fire. Branwell and Thomas Jefferson are saved by Ghost while Maurice and Caroline seem to die in the flames. Again, nature is only harmful to those who participate in its exploitation. At one point, Sylvia summarizes the mistakes made by humans in the past and the present: "'People do what they have to do,' [...] she said, recalling the story of the timber, the barley, the sand, 'and they almost always go too far'" (MG 335). Driven by greed and blind ambition, these three characters exploit the Canadian landscape in the novel. Their insatiable hunger for wealth and power induces them to enter into a battle with nature that they can only lose in the end. Jane Urquhart does not only depict the fragility of nature but also its capability of self-defense. It is not malevolent from the beginning, but it shows a reaction to every assault. Eventually, as the novel shows, it will always gain the upper hand.

3.3.3. Identification with Nature

The destructive characters in *A Map of Glass* are frequently contrasted with those who care about their environment or even bond with nature. They can be seen as a reaction to the increasing environmental destruction inflicted by their ancestors and contemporaries. Branwell Woodman, Joseph's son and Maurice's father, is the first one to rebel against the exploitation of nature. Even though he does not condemn his father's doings openly, he nevertheless refuses to take over the company. In the beginning, he is "quite impervious to the beauty that surround[s] him" (MG 198), but a painting that he once saw in the Louvre in Paris has taken hold of his imagination: "There were great distances in the painting [...], rivers winding off and around, mountains and towns and many caves [...]. There were fields too, and orchards, all miles and miles away. At first I thought that there was nothing but air in the painting but, in fact everything was in it, the whole world" (MG 164). Even though it is the painting of a sixteenth century Dutch painter, the picture seems to represent a stereotypical Canadian vista. The repeated emphasis on distance and background points towards a depiction of unrealistic beauty instead of realistic closeness, as I have shown in my discussion of *The Whirlpool*. Branwell perceives this pure scene of nature as a contrast to the artificiality of the human presence and its destructive forces, which he experiences regularly on Timber Island. In the course of time, his desire to reproduce landscapes himself in the form of frescoes becomes ever stronger, and at one point Annabelle confronts their father with Branwell's wish:

'He wants to make frescoes, to paint landscapes in hallways.'

'Landscapes? Hallways?' Joseph Woodman removed his reading spectacles and peered at his daughter. 'For heaven's sake, why?'

'To give the people here more scenery [...]. Some trees, perhaps...'

'I'll show them trees,' said her father testily.

'Live trees,' continued Annabelle. 'Mountains...waterfalls.' (MG 170)

In a region that has become the victim of human exploitation in recent years, Branwell wants to provide the people with purely natural landscapes. He wants to paint the trees that his father has removed from the ground. According to Annabelle, the trees in his paintings will be more alive than the ones his father has killed. In his frescoes, Branwell wants to reconstruct artistically what his father has destroyed. He finally manages to rid himself of his father's influence when he marries Marie and moves to another county where he runs the "Ballagh Oisin". He names his hotel after

an Irish mountain pass, and he enjoys the “open view of the lake uncluttered by islands of commerce” (MG 212). Nature becomes ever more important to him, and he can give full scope to his imagination at last. The more land his father destroys, the more landscapes he will reconstruct. Decorating the hallways of various houses with pristine scenery works as a therapy for him. Only through the artistic reanimation of landscape will he be able to digest the environmental carnage that he experienced throughout his childhood.

Branwell’s grandson Thomas Jefferson has inherited his grandfather’s “interest in colour and shape” (MG 364), but the narration reveals little about his relation to nature. Therefore, the next Woodman to denounce his ancestors’ destructiveness is Andrew, Branwell’s great-grandson. As a historical geographer, he studies the changes in the landscape that have occurred throughout the centuries. He is especially interested in his own family’s history, in what way the activities of his ancestors have altered the landscape. According to Sylvia, this is the only way in which he can cope with the wrongdoings of his forebears: “Andrew felt that he had been destined to become a historical geographer [...]. He told me that the mistakes of his ancestors had made this a kind of dynastic necessity. Unlike his forebears [...], he paid careful attention to landscape, to its present and to the past embedded in its present” (MG 77). When he is looking at a piece of land, he does not only see its present condition but also the history that is inscribed on it. He thinks that memory is something fixed, that it is branded on the ground as well as in the person’s mind. He sees himself as an indelible part of the chain of events, as the center of everything that has happened: “Andrew thought he *was* the history that his forebears created, he felt responsible for that history [...] and for those people” (MG 75). He bears the weight of his family’s mistakes, and he tries to come to terms with his past by mapping the ground at the scene of the “crime”. While Branwell tries to reconstruct landscape by painting it, Andrew records remnants of the past and narrates the story of the landscape that was exploited by his ancestors. His primary places of study are Timber Island and the site where the “Ballagh Oisin” once stood. He is looking for traces of his family’s past in the ground as well as in abandoned objects:

[E]verywhere he went he found evidence of the behaviour of his forebears: rail fences, limestone foundations, lilac bushes blooming on otherwise abandoned farmsteads, an arcade of trees leading to a house that is no longer there [...]. He recorded everything that was left behind there, each sunken wreck, the remains of pilings, iron pulleys, cables, broken axles. (MG 96-97)

He claims that every human who enters a landscape leaves a mark of one kind or another. His presence is marked on the soil, and it remains there forever. Andrew's task is to find and interpret these traces, and to narrate the story of the land and its inhabitants. He spends his whole life uncovering the crimes of his forebears, it is his vocation but also his affliction. This is another way of reconstructing landscape, and for Andrew it is the only way in which he can cope with his "inherited memory of destruction" (MG 99).

The third character who is concerned about the environment because of the mistakes of his forebears is Jerome. Even though he is more concerned with his father's alcoholism than with his role in the exploitation of the land, he nevertheless suffers from his family's past. Similarly to Andrew and Branwell, he wants to study and recreate nature in an artistic way: "He himself would never be a painter, considered himself instead a sort of chronicler. He wanted to document a series of natural environments changed by the moods of the long winter" (MG 11). His approach is a mixture of Andrew's and Branwell's, combining the observation and documentation of the former with the artistic workmanship of the latter. While Andrew investigates the changes of the landscape over many generations, Jerome is merely interested in the alteration that occurs throughout the winter season. In contrast to Branwell, he does not paint landscapes but he creates three-dimensional arrangements of photographs and drawings. He looks out for places where the snow is still pristine, even at the end of the winter season, and then he digs holes in the snow and uncovers the ground that has remained unchanged due to its cover. He makes photographs and draws outlines of his "excavations", and later he arranges these pictures to what he calls "Conceptual Fragments" (MG 45). From his father, he has inherited "the solid knowledge of the mutability of a world that came into being and then dissolved around him before he was able to fully grasp what it was trying to be, what it had been" (MG 16). He is afraid that he cannot control change, that something may go unnoticed. The landscape changes through human impact as well as through the sequence of seasons, and he wants to record both developments. On the one hand, he is interested in "[t]he moment between seasons, nature in transition, full of possibilities" (MG 47), and on the other, he is "fascinated [...] by the idea of built things going back to nature [...], at least the beginnings of nature ... germination" (MG 106-107). While Andrew studies the footprint that man has left on the Canadian landscape, Jerome is more interested in purely natural processes. Even

more, he is concerned with the reverse process, nature taking over remnants of human civilization. He examines these cycles, documents them and makes them into works of art. This is his way of recreating landscape and coming to terms with his family's past. At one point he wonders why Robert Smithson constructed his *Map of Broken Glass* with glass rather than with mirrors, "as if he had decided to exclude rather than to reflect the natural world" (MG 19). Even though he is intrigued by the artist's work, Jerome himself would never exclude the natural world. His work is all about nature, and he tries to reconstruct small pieces of landscape with his installations.

Sylvia, finally, does not have ancestors who destroyed the Canadian landscape deliberately. Even so, she has a special relation to nature, which I will explain in the following. Jane Urquhart likes to use speaking names in her novels, and this is also the case in *A Map of Glass*. It is self-explanatory that the owner of a timber business is called "Woodman", the artist Jerome is frequently mentioned in relation to Saint Jerome, and Mira (lat. *mirus* – wonderful, astonishing, extraordinary) is a miraculous performance artist and the sunshine in Jerome's life. But for this study, Sylvia's name is most interesting because it explains her place in nature. Sylvia has lived in the same house for all of her life, and she has rarely left Prince Edward County. She is "emplaced" (MG 325), the opposite of displaced, as Andrew told her once. Through all of her life, she has lived in her own world, physically as well as mentally. She has never had many social relations because of her condition, or disability, as her father used to call it. She is afraid of any form of touch, again, physically as well as mentally. At the same time, change is something that she cannot bear. She has to remain in the same place just as the objects that she collects. She is convinced that touch causes change, as she tells Malcolm when he touches one of her china horses: "They don't like to be touched, to be changed" (MG 82). She does not want Malcolm to move the horses because she is incapable of moving herself. Moreover, she is afraid that the horses might break if someone touches them: "Touch, Sylvia knew, caused fracture, and horses should never, never fracture" (MG 87). Her china collection is as vulnerable as herself, and she is afraid that she might get hurt if anyone dared to touch her: "All accidents, all injuries, involve contact, impact, don't they? What is the difference, really, between touch and collision?" (MG 69-70). Accordingly, Sylvia cannot have a physical relationship with her husband, and Andrew is the first person whom she allows to touch her. The

question arises why, of all the people she has met in her life, is Andrew Woodman the one she allows to get close to her. Why can she have sexual intercourse with him when she is afraid to shake hands with anyone else? Part of the answer to this question lies in Sylvia's name. Sylvia (lat. *silva* – woods, forest, grove) is the queen of the woods, and she lives in her own little forest that surrounds her house. Trees have always played an important part in her life: “She loved the trees, their reliability, the fact that they had always been there on the boundaries of fields or along the edges of roads” (MG 37). She feels safe among trees because she has known them for all of her life. The woods are so much part of her that her relation to other people matches nature's relation to humans. She is afraid that contact with another person will lead to change and possibly to fracture, just as the landscape is threatened by alteration and destruction by human hand.

At one point, Sylvia tells Jerome about one of Andrew's ideas: “He [...] told me that there was always a mark left on a landscape by anyone who entered it. Even if it is just a trace – all but invisible – it is there for those willing to look hard enough” (MG 326). In the next second, she wonders: “But what about his own trace?” (MG 326). Even though she refers to the mark that Andrew has left on the landscape, she may also mean the trace he has left on her. According to an Irish triad that Jane Urquhart quotes at the beginning of *Away*, “the trace of a man on a woman” is one of the “three most short-lived traces” (*Away* 1). But the love affair with Andrew has a lasting effect on Sylvia that even makes her travel to Toronto and visit Jerome. He has left a trace on her, something that she has always been afraid of. The reason why he was able to get close to her in the first place was his special relationship to landscape. He dedicated his whole life to the study of nature, and he paid careful attention to every detail of it. If Sylvia is the personification of the woods, and Andrew the most nature-loving person imaginable, it becomes clear that he is the only person who can touch her. Even though Sylvia sequesters herself in her house, she has a very intimate relationship to the woods. Like a tree, she is rooted in her surroundings. Nature is part of her inner self, part of her body. She does not want anyone to touch and change her body, just as the woods are supposed to remain unharmed. Through his stories and his sensitivity towards nature, Andrew becomes the love of her life. He gives lessons about his notion of landscape and introduces her to new aspects of nature, and thereby he helps her to discover her own body. Thanks to him, she becomes more aware of nature surrounding her, and at the same time she

becomes more conscious of herself. In this sense, Sylvia's condition has nothing to do with autism or unsocial behavior, but she is the personification of nature that wants to be left alone, remain unchanged and unharmed.

Like Branwell, Andrew and Jerome, Sylvia also reconstructs nature in an artistic way. She uses various materials to construct tactile maps for her friend Julia who has been blind since birth. Landscapes, vistas and distances are inconceivable for someone without sight, but through a three-dimensional construction Julia can suddenly touch landscape and thereby imagine it. Sylvia uses materials like rhinestones, tinsel, aluminum foil, string, twine and sequins that she arranges and glues together to form a map. Julia discusses the use of certain materials with her, and she can choose the location for which Sylvia will construct a tactile map. She has already built the "view across Barley Bay from the wharf at Cutnersville" and "the route from the bus station to the end of the wharf" (MG 69). When she visits Jerome in Toronto she is working on "an abandoned lighthouse on a seldom-used road at the very tip of the County" (MG 34). Julia wants to feel these locations, and she wants to get to know the whole county. Sylvia opens up a world to Julia that she would never have been able to experience without her help. She literally constructs landscape for her, enabling her to "see" views and distances. For Sylvia, who is afraid of change, maps embody permanence, as Nancy Schiefer has noted in her review of the book. In contrast to those who have to come to terms with the destructiveness of their forebears, Sylvia studies the past in order to determine change:

I know about the past, all about the past. I can list from memory the entire genealogy of my father's family and have been able to do so since I was six, seven years old [...]. I can tell you where each Georgian house in the County is situated and I can describe what it looked like when it was in its prime – what was cultivated in its flower beds and vegetable gardens, whether the clapboard was painted, where the original log house was placed, when the magnificent barns were built, the full name of the earliest settler and that of his wife, and how many children died during the first winter, and where they are buried. (MG 128-129)

She studies the past of her family and her county meticulously, but at the same time she fears any form of change. Therefore, the construction of tactile maps is a form of preservation for her. She does not reconstruct nature like the others, but she tries to preserve the present state by reproducing the landscape of her county.

3.3.4. Nature and Art

It has often been noted that Jane Urquhart likes to write about artists in her novels. Her husband Tony Urquhart is an influential visual artist, and her books are full of painters, poets, and wood carvers. Many of her characters have an artistic ability of some sort, or at least they are deeply interested in art. In *The Whirlpool*, Robert Browning appears in the frame narrative, and Patrick is a modern Canadian poet. Fleda, on the other hand, is completely obsessed with poetry and spends her days reading the works of Wordsworth and Browning. In *Changing Heaven*, Polly Smith takes on the stage name Arianna Ether when she becomes a balloon artist. After an accident she becomes a ghost and converses with Emily Brontë about the love between men and women. In a parallel story, Ann Frear, a professor of English literature from Toronto, has to cope with an unhappy affair with the art historian Arthur Woodruff, who, since his childhood, is obsessed with Tintoretto. *Away* is the only novel in which none of the main characters has a deep attachment to art. Granville Sedgewick is an Irish would-be poet, and Aidan Lanighan is an outstanding dancer, but both of them are only minor characters in the book. In contrast, as the title suggests, *The Underpainter* is all about art. The protagonists are Austin Fraser, a painter from New York City, and George Kearns, a china painter from Davenport, Ontario. In addition, a number of historical artists like Rockwell Kent and Robert Henri appear in the novel. In *The Stone Carvers*, the theme of art is also ubiquitous. Joseph Becker teaches wood carving to his grandchildren Klara and Tilman. Klara is also instructed in the art of sewing by her mother, and she is eager to practice both crafts, whereas Tilman prefers to run away and explore the country. On his travels, he meets Giorgio Vigamonti, a very talented tombstone-maker. In the end, Giorgio, Tilman and Klara end up as stone carvers at the Vimy Memorial in France where they meet Walter Allward, the rigid and perfectionist sculptor who designed the monument. It is quite interesting that the titles of Urquhart's first three novels *The Whirlpool*, *Changing Heaven*, and *Away* do not suggest an artistic content whereas her later novels *The Underpainter*, *The Stone Carvers*, and *A Map of Glass* indicate the examination of art in one way or another from the very beginning.

This study focuses on Urquhart's first novel, *The Whirlpool*, and on her most recent book, *A Map of Glass*. In both works, there is a strong correlation between nature and art. Originally, art was seen as the opposite of nature, the man-made against the natural phenomenon. At the same time, nature has always been an

important theme of art, maybe even the most often depicted subject. In the two novels, the connection between nature and art is particularly strong. As I have shown in my discussion of Urquhart's first novel, Fleda McDougal and Patrick are under the influence of the whirlpool, and they have an intimate relation to nature. They both see nature as a source of inspiration for the reading and writing of poetry, and they enter nature in order to feel her influence. David McDougal, in contrast, is the antagonist who concentrates on historical facts and is completely indifferent to nature as well as to art. In *A Map of Glass*, the linking of nature and art is even more obvious. With the exception of Mira, whose artistry is practical rather than abstract, and who is deeply rooted in the city, all the other characters' relations to nature are reflected in their interest for art. Moreover, those characters who are concerned with their natural surroundings reproduce nature in their works of art, as I have shown above. Sylvia, the queen of the woods, constructs tactile maps of natural sceneries. Jerome is an earth artist whose installations consist of drawings and photographs of small pieces of nature. Andrew writes journals and draws historical maps of the land that his forebears inhabited. Branwell reconstructs the landscapes in his paintings that his father destroyed through his business. While these four characters openly display their works of art, and partly even make a living out of it, Joseph Woodman conceals his devotion to art. His relation to art is as ambiguous as his relation to nature. On the one hand he condemns Branwell's artistic aspiration, and on the other hand he secretly keeps his artistic drawings of the Irish bogs. Even his children have no idea what their father was like before he came to Canada, and Annabelle is surprised when she finds his maps: "She realized that the artist in him was someone he had never permitted her to meet" (MG 228). His love for art dies together with his love for nature, and his inner struggle is revealed through his artwork as well as through his comments about Ireland. Finally, Maurice is the character who is least interested in nature. At the same time, he is totally indifferent to art, even though his father and his son are both dedicated painters: "Minister Badger Woodman, as he was now famously called, had apparently wondered about the subject of the mural his father was painting in the front hall, but, having a literal mind, was completely unable to interpret the symbolism that Branwell was striving so diligently to convey" (MG 365). His lack of interest in art equals his indifference to nature, similarly to David McDougal in *The Whirlpool*. The correlation between nature and art in the abilities and interests of Urquhart's characters is striking in these two novels.

3.3.5. Decay and Change

After they have read Andrew's journal, Mira says to Jerome: "Decay and change. [...] People moving from place to place, leaving things behind" (MG 303). This can be taken as a very short summary of the journal and of Urquhart's novel as a whole. Decay and change are probably the two strongest themes in *A Map of Glass*, and they are identified by the most objective person. Mira is the only character who is not involved in the story about the Woodman Empire. She is not related to the family in any way, nor has she spent time on Timber Island like her husband. She is an accidental witness to the conversations between Sylvia and Jerome. In contrast to the other characters she is "strong [...] and rooted [...] in the changing world" (MG 62). She is unimpressed by the changes taking place around her whereas all others are affected by them. Sylvia, the personification of nature, is afraid of change because she fears that changes made by human hand may harm her body as well as the land. Andrew, as a historical geographer, studies and records the changes of the landscape. Finally, Jerome, the artist, "want[s] to mark the moment of metamorphosis, when something change[s] from what it ha[s] been in the past" (MG 11). Jane Urquhart generally likes to portray changes that take place at a particular location over the course of time, as she has already shown in *Away*, *The Underpainter*, and *The Stone Carvers*. But the changes that take place in *A Map of Glass* are mostly negative changes which occur in the form of decay, as I will show in the following.

Decay is the second strong theme in the novel. The destruction of the landscape, the decline of the Woodman Empire, and the disappearance of the hotel that is devoured by sand constitute a big part of the plot. Even though images of decay are conveyed to the reader throughout the novel, the theme features most prominently in Andrew Woodman's journal. I have already commented on the immediate reaction of nature to the wrongdoings of Joseph and Maurice Woodman. However, decay in the form of decomposition can be seen as another kind of response to exploitation. It is a more passive, long-term reaction that does not respond to a sudden attack but to human civilization in general. It is nature's way of regaining its original shape, the way it was before it was harmed by human impact. Objects of human construction suffer from "the assault of a century of winters" (MG 13), and they slowly fall apart. Everything that is artificial will turn to dust one day. Andrew's journal covers a long time span that goes back to the nineteenth century, to the generation of his great-great-grandfather. He concentrates on three generations of

his ancestors, describing their lives accurately. When he accelerates the story and skips a few years, he often describes the changes in the architecture that have taken place. In the case of Joseph Woodman, the fall of the business goes together with the decay of the buildings and the decline of his health:

One by one, the outbuildings on the island began to fall into disrepair. [...] The empty smithy was next to show signs of succumbing to January's howling winds and an unusually heavy weight of snow, and at this point Annabelle saw that her father's arthritis had worsened, making it difficult for him to stand erect. When the huge, splendid building where the ships had been born was blown down by a March gale, and the beams of its vaulted ceiling lay scattered like the bones of a huge extinct animal, Annabelle knew that her father's collapse would likely follow suit. (MG 226)

Here, nature's response in the form of decomposition is almost lethal. In contrast to Marie who dies because she is "depleted along with the soil" (MG 251) after the barley disaster, Joseph dies together with the decay of his empire. The disintegration of the company buildings accompanies the decline of his will to live.

Andrew closes his journal with another description of decay. This time, it is Branwell's wall paintings in the Fryfogel Tavern that disappear in the course of time: "And so, time, it seems, will always apply its patina to human effort, and paintings completed on walls are destined to be altered, damaged, or erased. Stains blossom, cracks appear, and the men of maintenance arrive with trowels and plaster" (MG 291). At the end of his journal, after describing the way in which his forebears have scarred the landscape, Andrew goes back to the image of decay. He shows that even Branwell's beautiful landscapes cannot escape the progression of time. In an earlier discussion, Branwell was convinced that steamships would go on forever. But in the end, Annabelle was right when she said: "I doubt it [...]. Nothing goes on forever" (MG 253). Everything ceases to be at one point. Human constructions go back to nature, or they are replaced by other, more advanced human constructions.

In addition, decay occurs frequently as a motif in the novel. From the very beginning, images of decay are conveyed to the reader, and most characters are concerned with the idea. On the one hand, decay can be seen as nature's response to human civilization, and on the other, decay is frequently associated with loss. There are three characters in the novel who become fascinated with the idea of decay after they have lost an important person in their lives. Jerome, the artist, is "drawn to the

abandoned scraps of any material: peeling paint, worn surfaces, sun bleaching, rust, rot, the effects of prolonged moisture, as well as to the larger shifts of erosion and weather and season” (MG 11-12). One of his first successful works of art was called “Fence Lines”, for which he gathered “remnants of rails, boulders, and stumps, [...] decaying posts, [and] rusting, broken, wire” (MG 17). He is fascinated by the idea of decaying objects, and he likes to include them in his artwork. When he is on the island, he studies the “declining season” (MG 19) of winter as well as the “remnants of abandoned architecture” (MG 13) that was constructed at the time of the Woodman Empire. But he always feels a “sense of loss [...] in the face of decay, of disappearance” (MG 18). The worsening condition of his father because of his alcoholism, the breakup of his family, and the death of both his parents may have induced him to focus on decay in his artwork. The loss of his parents and the end to his childhood results in his preoccupation with decomposing objects.

Similar to Jerome’s interest in the declining season, Sylvia associates the end of winter with decay. Before she leaves for Toronto, she notices the melting icicles and droplets outside her kitchen window, and she says to herself: “This is the anniversary of sorrow [...] – everything moist, transitory, draining away, everything disappearing” (MG 34). Instead of looking forward to the beginning of spring, she mourns the end of winter and connects it with her personal grief. Like Jerome, she is concerned with deterioration and disappearance. When she drives to the train station, the only objects she notices at the side of the road are “old architecture” that is “sad, neglected, [...] completely abandoned” (MG 36), and “scarred, decaying stones” (MG 37) on a graveyard. She is convinced that all things will disappear one day, and that everything is already expiring. At one point, she reveals the connection between Andrew’s disappearance and her negative mindset:

She told Jerome that after Andrew had gone from her life, there was a period during which she became convinced that almost everything was poisoned: the colossal dark chambers of rotting barns, the ghosts of vanished forests, polluted water flowing under roads through culverts, sand dunes comprising smashed shells and the bones of deformed fish pushing inland from the lake. ‘So this was my known, my benign world,’ she said. ‘Everything was in a state of decay.’ (MG 135)

Again, her view of a disintegrating world is influenced by the loss of an important person. Like Jerome, she concentrates on rotting things after Andrew has vanished from her life.

Annabelle is the next character who is obsessed with decay. She does not care about her father's ship building business, but she is fond of "burning hulks and smashed schooners" (MG 162). In Back Bay on Timber Island she finds "broken masts, frayed ropes, ragged sails, and water-stained hulls in varying stages of decay and levels of submersion" (MG 173). She likes to spend time at this place, and later it becomes a hobby for her to reproduce the remnants of ships on canvas. Similarly to Jerome, she expresses her interest for decaying objects in an artistic way. She is a more talented painter than her brother Branwell who even goes to Paris to study painting, but she is only interested in reproducing shipwrecks on Timber Island. Even though she paints these abandoned vessels through all of her life, she is especially drawn to them after her best friend Marie is sent away by her father. In one scene, her thoughts about Marie are paralleled by images of broken ships:

Booms groaned in the increasing wind, chains clanked and knocked against rotting timbers, but Annabelle took no notice of these sounds. She was thinking about Marie. [...] It is a sad fact that into any individual's life there will stroll only very few irreplaceable fellow creatures, friends who, when they are absent, leave one bereft, awash in one's own solitariness. [...] Annabelle had been left behind in the silent, empty house. This echoing, vacant region, she had concluded, was to be her territory, her prison. She would bang up against its walls as long as she breathed while, mere steps from her window, all those wonderful cathedral-like ships moved soundlessly, like floating works of art, away from her shore. It is sometimes difficult to believe in Annabelle's fondness for all the schooners and sloops and privateers that were moored at the docks of Timber Island, or which cut through the waves of the lake, or whose sails dipped and flashed on the horizon, and yet, despite all the paintings she made of the demise of such vessels, she couldn't help but be affected by their beauty. (MG 173-174)

The sight of the abandoned ships induces Annabelle to think about the loss of Marie. After a passage where she mourns the absence of her friend, the description goes back to her relation with ships. She is impressed with the beauty of new schooners, just as she was affected by Marie's beauty in the beginning. But now that her best friend is gone, she is more concerned with shipwrecks. Her relation to new and old

ships is paralleled by her feelings for Marie. Once again, decay is associated with the loss of a beloved person.

3.3.6. Woman in the City

I have already mentioned Margaret Atwood's notion that more and more women in late-twentieth-century literature flee into the woods in order to get away from a man. This is what happens in Jane Urquhart's novels *The Whirlpool* and *Away*. In *A Map of Glass*, the process is reversed. Sylvia escapes from the woods and from her husband Malcolm to the city in order to come to terms with her past. While Sylvia is the personification of the woods, Mira is deeply rooted in the city: "She was fiercely urban, wasn't interested in trees in the wild unless they had somehow to do with Jerome, with one of his 'pieces'" (MG 301). Her artwork, in contrast to Jerome and Sylvia, has nothing to do with nature. Quite the opposite, the "cosies" that she used to make are very practicable, and they belong to artificial objects made by human hand. They are "soft protective coverings for a variety of solid objects: toasters, books, bicycle pumps, even [...] her father's lawn mower" (MG 62). She has no interest in nature, and she never leaves the city. For her, "the wild [...] [is] located anywhere beyond the city limits" (MG 25). Even though she pays much attention to her surroundings, which Jerome mentions more than once, she concentrates rather on her immediate environment in the city, on her family and the neighbors. In this way, she is antagonistic to Sylvia, who also pays close attention to objects and people in her proximity, but in a totally different environment. Even though Mira treats Sylvia in a very respectful way and is always friendly to her, Sylvia seems to be irritated by her urbanity at times. She is curious about Mira's urban life, but she also feels a bit uncomfortable when Mira enters the room. When Mira comes back from work one evening Sylvia immediately tightens her scarf and puts on her coat, saying: "I should probably go now" (MG 78). She only feels comfortable talking about Andrew when she is alone with Jerome, who has a similar relation to nature.

The trip to Toronto is a real challenge for Sylvia because she has never been to a big city on her own. Only once in her childhood had her mother taken her to the city in order to see a number of doctors because of her "condition". Since then, Sylvia has managed to avoid big cities and stay in her county in Eastern Ontario for almost fifty years. Interestingly, she never calls Toronto by its name, nor does the narrator when the story focuses on her. We know that Jerome's studio, which is the

destination of her journey, is located in Toronto. This is mentioned at the very beginning when Jerome travels “from his Toronto studio to the sail loft” (MG 9) on Timber Island, and in numerous other instances in the novel when the narration focuses on him. But for Sylvia, Toronto remains without a name, which is already indicated when the train arrives: “A uniformed man careered down the aisle shouting the name of the city as if, without this announcement, no one would notice it was there, as if it would slip by, ignored. The city was not something she was going to be able to ignore” (MG 39). Sylvia does not refer to a specific city but to “the city” as an unknown entity. Toronto is always referred to as “the city”, emphasizing her unfamiliarity with the place. Similar to her literary predecessors who escaped simply into “the wild”, Sylvia flees to “the city” without identifying the name of the place. The repeated use of “the city” instead of Toronto can be seen as an emphasis on the opposition between city and wilderness, even though the traditional conflict is reversed this time: “The word *city* had hissed in her mind all week long, first as an idea, then as a possibility, and, finally, now as a certain destination” (MG 33). She is lured by the idea of the city, and she cannot resist its pull. She flees from the garrison, her peninsula, the woods, her house, where she lives according to her own moral values, to the unknown jungle of the city. Her condition has prevented her from leaving the garrison for a long time, but in the end, neither the stability of her china collection nor her husband could stop her, as she tells Malcolm in an imagined conversation: “They couldn’t prevent me from leaving the room, walking down the hall, out the door. Neither you, nor your goodness, nor china horses could keep me forever away from the arms of the world” (MG 89). During the time of their affair, Andrew introduced Sylvia to various aspects of life that were unfamiliar to her, and even after his death he continues to haunt her and induces her to experience something new.

When Sylvia enters the city, she whispers to herself: “I am now in the world” (MG 41). She travels from the wilderness to civilization, but she seems to experience the city as the former rather than the latter. The only thing she can rely on is a map that leads her “in a westerly direction” (MG 41). She thinks in cardinal directions rather than streets and blocks, and she encounters numerous unfamiliar objects that irritate her. At the same time, she wonders whether she is “too fragile to *survive* in the outside world” (MG 42; emphasis added). The question of survival has traditionally been associated with the wilderness in Canadian literature, but Sylvia is

unsure whether she will survive in the city. Likewise, the vastness of the Canadian landscape has been mentioned countless times, but for Sylvia it is “the vastness of the city” (MG 49) that is menacing. When she enters Jerome’s apartment, she “wonder[s] whether she [will] be able to cope with the cavernous space” (MG 45) that opens up before her. She compares the apartment with a cave, and she is not able to identify specific rooms when she is inside. Instead of naming the rooms after their purpose, like living room, kitchen and bedroom, she merely identifies single pieces of furniture:

There were stacking chairs placed randomly, it seemed, around the room, a long chipped counter with a sink in it and a toaster on it, a low table on which rested a few stained cups, an ancient refrigerator growling in the corner, and one old sofa covered by a blanket as well as by a considerable amount of orange cat hair. In a further room, created by a partition, she could see part of a mattress on the floor, and the dim flicker of a computer sitting against the opposite wall. (MG 45)

Even though the furnishing of Jerome’s apartment appears to be rather provisional, Sylvia’s failure to identify the rooms is paradigmatic for her unfamiliarity with the city. When Mira enters the apartment at one point, Sylvia sees her merely “walk[ing] into the space” (MG 78), thus underlining her ignorance of this habitat. The apartment, as the city, is an unfamiliar space to her, a vast, unknown landscape. She repeatedly encounters sounds and objects that she does not know, and she tries to survive in this urban jungle of cars, traffic lights, apartment buildings and sky scrapers. Her description of the city is to some extent reminiscent of early travel reports which described the unexplored wilderness. She spends most of the time inside in order to flee from the menacing power of the metropolis. Since it is the first time that she stays at a hotel she describes her hotel room meticulously, similar to the way in which she depicted Jerome’s apartment. She is happy when she notices that there is a brick wall behind the window of her room because thereby “there would be no view to contend with” (MG 53). But even when she is inside a building she cannot escape the city’s grasp: “Outside was the constant hum of the city, the unknown world” (MG 74).

3.3.7. The Mapmakers

Mapping the country has always played an important part in Canada. From the very beginning, when explorers tried to make sense of a vast unknown landscape, to the more recent past, when the search for a national identity dominated the Canadian literary scene, people have always been involved in a kind of mapping. Northrop Frye's famous question "Where is here?" implied that the problem could only be solved with a map of a certain kind. Margaret Atwood was even more precise and suggested that a literary identity will work as a map and help Canadians to know more about "here" (*Survival* 19). Gaile McGregor also comments on the importance of maps in Canada, and she states that "the whole of fiction is in a sense a map, and its primary task the task of orienting us in our newfound world" (351). Thus, every work of fiction contributes to the mapping of the country and to the search for a national identity. Aritha van Herk takes the same position and argues that every writer in Canada uses his or her own language to map the unknown, and that the undefined place suddenly becomes somewhere when somebody writes about it (*Space* 25). In her essay *Space and Landscape: A Personal Mapping*, she describes in what way maps have become important in her life. She remembers her childhood when her parents brought her to an unknown country that meant nothing to her. She listened to children's stories from Holland and became so familiar with her family's country of origin that she thought she knew everything about it when she first got there. Canada, on the other hand, "remained shadowy and indistinct" (van Herk, *Space* 28) to her for a long time. Throughout her childhood she was looking for literary maps of Canada, something that would explain to her the place where she had spent her entire life: "I began to read frantically, knowing that language was the key to the world I did not know and that it was the only map that would help me in the outside world" (van Herk, *Space* 32). In the end, the novels of Robert Kroetsch, who grew up close to her, and her own writings provided a map and gave her an understanding of the space she inhabited. In her essay *Mapping as Metaphor: The Cartographer's Revision*, van Herk defends the use of the mapping metaphor to describe the process of Canadian self-discovery. Like Frye and Atwood before her, she states that the vast landscape makes a kind of mapping necessary: "The sheer immensity of the country underscores the importance of measuring and charting, of imposing some kind of order on this overwhelming space" (van Herk, *Mapping* 54). She further argues that maps are not simple representations of landscape, but that

they have a language of their own through which they symbolize and abstract space: “Clearly mapping, like language, is creation more than representation, and so it is not illogical to think of fiction as cartography” (van Herk, *Mapping* 58). She concludes that Canadian writers frequently include maps in their novels, either in a concrete or in an abstract way.

As the title already suggests, maps play a major role in *A Map of Glass*. Jane Urquhart has done her personal mapping in her earlier novels by writing extensively about the Canadian landscape, its history and its development. In her most recent novel, four people are involved in some kind of mapping. Joseph Woodman, as a bog commissioner, draws maps of the Irish bogs. He is trying to tame the Irish landscape, to make it habitable, and drawing maps is a part of this process. His artistic drawings are the key to the bogs’ destruction, on the one hand, and to the settlement of the region, on the other. However, he does not succeed in this project, and the land remains undeveloped. Even though he seems to be fond of the bogs, and he draws the maps with much love, they nevertheless serve a practical purpose: “People do what they have to do [...], and sometimes things are destroyed in the process” (MG 247). According to W. H. New, the process of mapping and naming a country always contains a certain attitude towards the land. In the case of the English explorers, it was an attitude of taking control and seizing it (New, *Land Sliding* 28). When it comes to the Irish bogs which he secretly loved, Joseph did not exert his cultural power, but he preserved the indigenous names on his maps: “Coomaspeara, Coomavoher, Coomnahorna, Coomnakilla, Coomshana, and Knocknagantee, Knockmoyle, Knocknacusha, Knocklomena” (MG 228). Timber Island, on the other hand, bears the name of his business and shows his role as a typical colonizer. As an Englishman in Ireland and later in Canada, his preoccupation is to conquer the land, and his maps are a means to reach this goal.

His great-great-grandson Andrew is involved in a completely different form of mapping. As a historical geographer, he wants to document the development of the landscape. He draws historical maps and narrates the story of the land. He traces the impact that humans have had on the landscape. For him, mapping is a form of self-discovery and a process of coming to terms with his family’s past. While his great-great-grandfather Joseph named and subjugated the land, Andrew was ultimately defeated by it. This does not only refer to his death in the wilderness but also to his inability to name things in the end: “He gropes for the word *island*, and

has almost conquered it by the time he is back on his feet. But the shape and sound of it slips away again before he can grasp the meaning, slips away and is replaced by a phrase, and the phrase is *the place the water touches all around*" (MG 2-3). Due to Alzheimer's disease he is unable to name the place he has been studying for so many years. The island that was named by Joseph Woodman loses its human name, and it finally goes back to nature. We have come full circle. The Woodman reign over Timber Island dies with Andrew.

Sylvia's tactile maps serve a slightly different purpose. The construction of three-dimensional space is also a form of self-discovery for her, but in a more physical sense. She discovers a landscape that you can actually touch, and thereby she becomes more aware of her physical self. At one point she notes that her surroundings have been mapped and cultivated before: "Each aspect of the County – her own territory – had been named, filled, emptied, ploughed and planted long ago" (MG 147). At the same time, she declares that "[l]andscapes are unreliable," that they "are subject to change" (MG 146). Sylvia is deeply rooted in her surroundings, and she needs to conserve the scenery of her own county in order to find out more about herself. At the end, Jerome comments: "[M]aybe landscape – place – makes people more knowable. Or it did, in the past. It seems there's not much of that left now. Everyone's moving, and the landscape, well, the landscape is disappearing" (MG 336). Jane Urquhart has mentioned her worries over a disappearing Canadian landscape in her interviews with Susan Zettell and Laura Ferri. What Urquhart does in her fiction, namely try to preserve the changing landscape, Sylvia does with her maps. She can only understand something that is stable, and her maps give permanence to the landscape.

The fourth person who is involved in mapping does not appear in the narration, but he is mentioned a few times by Jerome. Robert Smithson is a twentieth century American earthwork artist who is best known for his Spiral Jetty which he constructed in 1970 at the Great Salt Lake in Utah. The work that Jerome talks about repeatedly is Smithson's *Map of Broken Glass*, an assembly of shards of glass in the shape of the lost continent of Atlantis. For Jerome, the work of art reflects the experiences of his own childhood: "[He] was drawn to the brilliance and the feeling of danger in the piece: the shattering of experience and the sense that one cannot play with life without being cut, injured" (MG 18). Moreover, it reminds him of his father's shattered life: "Each shard reflected something he remembered about his

father: a signet ring, a belt buckle, a dark green package of cigarettes, an eye, a cufflink, the back of his hand, and Jerome knew his father was broken, smashed” (MG 145). In this sense, Smithson’s *Map of Broken Glass* represents his own fragility and the instability of his childhood. Even though Smithson’s work of art does not feature prominently in the book, Urquhart’s title *A Map of Glass* indicates that there is a deeper meaning to it. In his 1973 essay *Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape*, Smithson states that “the best sites for ‘earth art’ are sites that have been disrupted by industry, reckless urbanization, or nature’s own devastation” (165). This sounds exactly like the place where Urquhart has set her scene. Even though, according to van Herk, a map is only an abstract concept of the true landscape, the title *A Map of Glass* indicates the fragility of the land. Man has left his traces on the ground, and it is slowly disappearing, like the lost continent of Atlantis. Like glass, the landscape has to be treated with care, because otherwise it will be shattered into pieces.

4. Conclusion

The first part of this study is meant to show the development of nature in Canadian literature, how it entered the scholarly debate, and in what way it functioned to define Canadianness. The abundance of secondary literature dealing with a variety of works of fiction indicates the ubiquity of the theme. Its role in the context of Canadian identity formation is still disputed, but the persistence of the theme in the past forty years is conspicuous. Literary scholars are still fascinated by nature and continue to publish books on various aspects of the theme. Even though they may come up with new approaches to nature, a reference to the beginnings of Canadian literary criticism with Northrop Frye and Margaret Atwood, and a refinement of their ideas, is almost always included. At the same time, many contemporary writers still show a strong affiliation with nature in their fiction, and one of these authors is Jane Urquhart.

The second part of the study is an investigation of two novels by Jane Urquhart, namely her first novel, *The Whirlpool*, and her most recent work of fiction, *A Map of Glass*. It seems as if Urquhart's approach to the environment changes in tune with the progress of the scholarly debate and the change of the Canadian landscape. Even though she published her first novel more than fifteen years after Frye and Atwood wrote about a development that had taken place in the course of the twentieth century, this development seems to be mirrored in her novels. In the course of time, she seems to move from a more or less stereotypical depiction of Canadian nature towards ecocritical themes. In *The Whirlpool*, Urquhart presents a sublime and deadly nature in the form of the Niagara Falls. Environmental issues are hardly mentioned, and the characters' response to nature is primarily philosophical and emotional. In *Away*, Urquhart goes a step further and presents a landscape that is changing due to human intrusion. In *The Underpainter*, she shows the construction and deconstruction of nature in Austin Fraser's paintings. Finally, in *A Map of Glass*, Urquhart presents a populated, fragile nature that is in constant interaction with its inhabitants. The novel is all about human's relation to the physical landscape. The exploitation and destruction by former generations is contrasted with various attempts to reconstruct nature artistically. Nature does not appear to be hostile any more, but it becomes a companion to man, a contemporary with whom we have to negotiate the space we inhabit.

I have chosen these two novels for my study because they most clearly show a development in Jane Urquhart's depiction of nature. In the nineteen years that lie in between the publications of the two books, much has been said about the theme of nature in Canadian literature. Urquhart is definitely aware of the critical discourse that has been going on in the past decades, and through her role as an author she automatically joins in the debate. She contributes to the ongoing process of identity formation by including typical Canadian themes in her historical novels, such as the colonization of the continent, Canada's role in the First World War, and, of course, the immense presence of nature. A closer investigation of Jane Urquhart's other four novels in the context of this development would be desirable. Unfortunately, this would go beyond the scope of this thesis.

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7. Appendix

Abstract (German)

Die vorliegende Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit der Rolle der Natur in zwei Romanen von Jane Urquhart. Die Natur hatte in der kanadischen Literatur von Anfang an eine wichtige Funktion, und auch heute noch setzen sich viele Autoren mit ihr auseinander. Der Einfluss der Natur auf die kanadische Identitätsbildung ist bis heute umstritten, aber die fortlaufende Beschäftigung mit dem Thema in der Literatur lässt eine gewisse Einwirkung vermuten. Im ersten Teil dieser Arbeit wird der Zusammenhang zwischen Literatur, Identität und Natur in Kanada dargestellt, und die einflussreichen Theorien von Northrop Frye, Margaret Atwood und anderen Literaturkritikern erläutert. Der zweite Teil der Arbeit ist eine genauere Analyse von Jane Urquharts 1986 publiziertem Debütroman, *The Whirlpool (Im Strudel)*, und von ihrem bis dato letzten Roman, *A Map of Glass (Die gläserne Karte)*, erschienen im Jahre 2005. Unter Anwendung von unterschiedlichen theoretischen Ansätzen wird die Rolle der Natur in den beiden Werken untersucht. Durch die Einbeziehung von Jane Urquharts anderen vier Romanen wird eine Entwicklung ersichtlich, die sich chronologisch durch ihr Werk zieht. Während sich Urquhart anfangs einer traditionellen, wenn nicht veralteten Darstellung der Natur bedient, entwickelt sie im Laufe ihres literarischen Schaffens mehr und mehr ökokritische Ansätze. Vor allem in ihrem letzten Werk, *A Map of Glass*, präsentiert sie eine Natur, die auf Augenhöhe mit dem Menschen ist. Das Miteinander spielt eine größere Rolle als das Gegeneinander, und die innige Beziehung des Menschen mit der Natur wird mit seiner zerstörerischen Vergangenheit kontrastiert. Das Ergebnis ist eine fragile Natur, die unter der fortschreitenden Industrialisierung und Besiedlung zu zerbrechen droht, die sich aber auch immer wieder aufbäumen und gegen den Eindringling Mensch wehren kann. Die vorliegende Arbeit versucht, diese Entwicklung bei Jane Urquhart nachzuvollziehen, und die Rolle der Natur in ihrem Werk in den Kontext der kanadischen Literaturkritik zu stellen.

Curriculum Vitae

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