

“Everything Is Connected to Everything Else”

An Ecocritical and Psychological Approach to Jane Urquhart’s *The Stone Carvers*

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Abstract

Nature is everywhere. Every day we are in contact with it. Still, many of us do not realize how important it is for our survival. Descriptions of nature have always been present in novels. However, recently the aspect of nature in literature, as well as in other disciplines, has been dealt with in a slightly different way. As a result, an ecocritical approach to literature has been favoured. This essay shows nature's impact on the characters in Jane Urquhart's *The Stone Carvers*. Using this novel as an example, I start by studying how the concept of nature is often constructed through opposition. I then move on to show how stereotypical boundaries between nature and human beings may be challenged. Finally, I study how nature functions as a healing agent in *The Stone Carvers*. In my study I combine the theories of ecocriticism with a psychoanalytical perspective through the concept of 'abjection'.

Keywords: The Stone Carvers, Jane Urquhart, Nature, Environment, Awareness, Ecocriticism, Abjection

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Introduction

In recent years there has been a global focus on the environment. People all over the world are discussing the Greenhouse effect, acid rain and deforestation. Everybody share a sense of growing concern about what is going to happen to our planet. How will nature respond to all the stress it is exposed to? Scientists are envisioning various effects of global warming and explain what will happen if the sea level rises. The negative effects of human exploitation of the planet are increasing and consequences are experienced globally. There are, however, a great many ways to tackle the problem. Politicians with an overall responsibility work with conventional methods while others find new strategies to bring about a sense of awareness.

One example is Yann Arthus-Bertrand who presented his film *Home* in 2009. The film shows the beauty of the Earth and how humans are exploiting its resources. Even if we have not lived here very long, we have disturbed the balance on Earth. One example shown is what happens when big cities like Las Vegas are built in the desert. That city's water supply comes from the Colorado River which is partly dry. In addition, it points at the consequences of overconsumption exposing the mass production of meat. However, the film also emphasizes the efforts made to sustain the environment and thus suggests solutions. Arthus-Bertrand and the director Luc Besson decided to spread their message and therefore made the film available on YouTube.

Concern about the environment and nature is also reflected in the literary world. The issue can be approached in different ways; writing about it is one of them. In the 1980s scholars began to relate to the concept of "ecocriticism." They felt there was a lack of environmental perspective in literary studies. From the 1990s onwards, ecological approaches to literature in essays have become more common. Ecocriticism developed both as an independent approach and a large interdisciplinary concept. Cheryll Glotfelty, for instance,

discusses the environmental interest among scholars of anthropology, psychology, philosophy and theology in *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996). She argues that “scholars throughout the humanities are finding ways to add an environmental dimension to their respective disciplines” (xxi). Moreover, she claims that literary scholars “specialize in questions of value, meaning, tradition, point of view, and language, and it is in these areas that they are making a substantial contribution to environmental thinking”(xxii). When one approaches literary works with an ecocritical perspective, a greater understanding and interest in nature and the environment all over the world will be generated. Thus when analyzing the importance of nature in novels, one is reminded of how essential nature is for humanity. In “Nature Writing and Environmental Psychology” Scott Slovic discusses how nature writers like, for example, Annie Dillard choose to live close to nature in order to increase their own awareness and consciousness: “I do think that the *central* focus of her writing has always been the psychology of awareness” (357). Dillard is a psychologist as well as a nature writer. She belongs to the American tradition of nature writers who search for a sense of self and awareness by close interaction with nature. Other famous writers in this category are David Henry Thoreau and Barry Lopez.

The Canadian Jane Urquhart, author of *The Stone Carvers* (2001), is neither primarily a nature writer, nor a psychologist. Her concern and awareness of nature is obvious, though. She allows her characters to be strongly influenced by nature. Herb Wyile made an interview with Urquhart in 2004. The emphasis in the interview is not explicitly on nature but Urquhart claims that she has “always been very drawn to landscape and particularly landscape where some evidence of human activity is left behind” (16). Moreover, she discusses the damage the British did to Ireland by clear-cutting the forest in the same way they had already clear-cut England and how these actions led to the creation of the moors.

Nature has a strong impact on the characters' minds and lives in *The Stone Carvers*. Generally, nature in novels is considered to be a part of the setting. This essay will prove that nature can be much more influential, like a character in its own right. Moreover, as a character nature strongly affects the other characters as well as the narrative itself. In order to emphasize nature's influence on the characters' minds, this essay uses an interdisciplinary approach combining ecocriticism and psychoanalysis. There will be three main sections discussing nature's influence in *The Stone Carvers*. The first section discusses how nature's contrasting conditions and states of oppositions affect the characters and the narrative. The second analyzes nature's boundaries and emphasizes the effect of restraining a person from being part of nature. The third deals with nature's ability to heal and help the characters. Together these three dimensions will show how nature interacts with the characters and how it affects both them and eventually us.

Nature as opposition

When discussing a subject, we often refer to something contrary in order to clarify our point. Similarly, a writer can use oppositions in order to emphasize certain conditions essential for the narrative. By using a contrasting relation it is possible to generate feelings that strengthen the story. Nature can for example be in a state of opposition when depicting changes within the same landscape. In order to convey a sense of a hostile environment, the writer may choose to present a contradictory image. There are several states of oppositions involving nature in *The Stone Carvers*. This essay will take a closer look at two of them. The intention is to find out how nature is represented and how the representations influence the characters. The aspect first dealt with is nature's conditions in Bavaria contrasted with those of northern Canada. We are given the impression that the landscape of Bavaria is beautiful and idyllic but somewhat tame and harmless. The image of northern Canada, on the other hand, shows us a genuine wilderness with all its inhabitants and an unforgiving climate. Secondly, there is a

romantic episode by the pond where Klara and Eamon spend their late afternoons. The sudden intrusion of an aeroplane changes the situation abruptly and brings dire consequences for the two lovers.

Nature's hostility in Canada

Nature in Bavaria differs greatly from nature in Canada. In Bavaria nature has been domesticated by years of civilization while Canada is a settler's nightmare. Pure wilderness greets the immigrants in the mid-nineteenth-century, challenging them to work hard in order to survive. This unforgiving environment becomes their new home. It is a place where in spite of the hard conditions, they decide to settle down. Jane Urquhart's detailed depiction of the contrast between idyllic Bavaria and the hostile nature of Canada facilitates the visualization of Father Gstir's character traits. It also establishes his transformation from observer to participator.

Pater Archangel Gstir lives a comfortable life in Bavaria in the middle of the nineteenth century. He works as a pastor and spends his days encouraging boys to study. He is a very content young man who, surrounded by devoted parishioners, enjoys his work as well as the beautiful landscape outside the church. During the weekends he takes long walks in the Bavarian hills with amazing views of the scenic Knappensteig. On his walks he plucks flowers and has conversations with God. One day God tells him to go to Canada. Father Gstir obeys God and crosses the Atlantic. During the trip, he has his first encounter with a place very different from his tranquil Bavaria. The Atlantic challenges him with "a six-month-long hellish journey over water" (12).

Father Gstir arrives safely in Canada and has his first encounter with the German settlers. Most of the settlers are respectful and greet him with a smile and held out hands. The nature of Upper Canada, however, offers him pestering blackflies, swamps and humidity. His

first winter is icily cold. He lives in a log shanty embracing a stove to keep warm. Together with mill workers and farmers, Father Gstyr struggles to master resisting nature. In Shoneval and its vicinity farmers are trying to turn deforested wastelands into fields. Urquhart claims that “all of them were trying to force western culture into a place where it undoubtedly had no business to be” (25). The settlers are imposing themselves on nature and nature is doing its best to stop them. Humans generally see themselves as superior to nature.

However, from an ecocritical point of view one can object to the general idea that humans are the most important beings on Earth. In “The Land and Language of Desire” Sueellen Campbell discusses “the traditional humanist view of our importance” (133). She points out that “ecology insists that we pay attention not to the way things have meaning for us, but to the way the rest of the world - the nonhuman part - exists apart from us”(133). Nature in Canada existed before the settlers arrived and it had no reason to change in order to please the humans. As a result, the fight between nature and settlers is sometimes fierce. Nature’s hard resistance challenges the human’s endurance and one can imagine that some of them gave in. Father Gstyr, however, endures nature’s hard conditions. His mission is to implement “procession, church, bell, brewery” (20) in Shoneval. He arouses enthusiasm in his friends and persuades King Ludwig of Bavaria to donate a church bell. He is successful. Father Gstyr’s persistence and dedication to his mission are made visible due to the demands of nature. Nature would not have challenged him, had he still lived in Bavaria. Jane Urquhart uses nature’s hostility in Canada to force Fathers Gstyr to develop into a person full of initiative.

Sueellen Campbell combines various contemporary theories with ecocriticism. When discussing psychoanalytical theorist Jacques Lacan and what happens when we enter “The Symbolic Order,” Campbell argues that “the core of our sense of self, then, is our feeling of loss and the desire for unity that is born of loss” (134). She then links her argument to an

ecocritical approach: “Ecologists also see an experience of lost unity and a desire to regain it as central to our human nature” (134). However, for ecologists the unity that is lost is the unity with the natural world. When applying these theories to Father Gstyr’s situation, we can assume that he has lost his native country, beautiful Bavaria. When settling in Canada he has a desire for a new unity. His oneness with Canadian nature does not come immediately, though; he has to struggle and he is forced to test his boundaries against nature. From the struggle and desire to establish a new unity with nature emerges a development of self. Driven by a desire and challenged by nature he has to participate instead of observe. Urquhart successfully creates a character whose inner journey is as important as the external process.

The Pond

Frederick Turner discusses nature opposed to humans as well as culture and society in “Cultivating the American Garden.” He argues that “for Americans, culture means to a large extent technology” and furthermore; “our ‘gut’ meaning for technology is machines of metal, oil, and electricity” (45). When focusing on the scene by the pond, it is possible to establish the state of opposition between nature and machine. Jane Urquhart’s depiction of the pond where Klara and Eamon swim and are intimate –they do not have sex, however – comes close to that of the Garden of Eden. The romantic episode is intense and emotional, especially for Klara. The pond is surrounded by willows. One of them forms a curtain of hanging leaves which reaches the water. Klara is shy and hides behind this natural wall while Eamon swims on the other side. Klara is relaxed and harmonious in her secluded place. Nature is thus presented here in its most favorable way. The reader visualizes a tranquil beautiful place colored by the growing intimacy between Klara and Eamon. The romantic feeling is abruptly ended, though, when an intruding machine in the form of an aeroplane causes a crack in the couple’s intimacy. Eamon is spellbound by the plane and the power it represents while Klara, on the other hand, is suspicious and a little frightened.

In *Writing for an Endangered World* (2001) Lawrence Buell discusses “the elusiveness of place” (59). According to him “much of this slipperiness derives from ‘place’ having by definition both an objective and a subjective face, pointing outward toward the tangible world and inward to the perceptions one brings to it” (59). The idyllic setting by the pond is not permanent. One can take two pictures in a row of any place. The photos will most certainly not be identical if you study them closely. The perception of place also changes quickly. If we imagine a beach with bright yellow sand and turquoise water, most of us think of vacation, which is associated with relaxation and well-being. Our inward perception of the beach is then positive. If the next sequence, in a film, depicts a shark in the turquoise water or a lifeless body lying at the water’s edge, our feeling changes. It is not only the physical setting that changes; our perception of the place is also altered.

In the pond passage Jane Urquhart suggests an “elusiveness of place” by working with oppositions. She lets the intruder disturb the romantic scene. It changes the actual setting and thereby our perception of place. The change is sudden and unpredictable. The atmosphere at the harmonious beautiful pond is romantic and filled with expectation. One hopes for a relationship between Klara and Eamon to develop. The fact that the situation is altered leads to devastating consequences for their love and future life together. The arrival of the plane conveys a feeling of intrusion and of the outer world imposing itself on the couple. The interruption leads to a conflict between the lovers, separating rather than uniting them, and as a reader, one tends to sympathize with Klara and not Eamon in this episode. Eamon is weak. His attention is irresistibly drawn to the plane while Klara is left behind in the background. When Klara is full of hope for their future together, Eamon’s lack of confidence drives him to follow his desire to fly the aeroplane. His self-confidence is not solid; he needs external input. It becomes evident that they have contrasting personalities. It is Klara, the nature person, who wins the reader’s sympathy and not the technically oriented Eamon.

Nature's boundaries

According to the theory of evolution, humans originate from nature. The concept of nature, however, needs to be defined. What does the word include? Is it the forest outside the cities or perhaps the undisturbed wilderness? Are we still a part of it or has civilization taken its place? Frederick Turner discusses the concept of nature both as an internal and external force from the point of view of humans. He claims that "Nature, according to science, is as much 'in here' as 'out there.'" Our bodies and brains are a result of evolution, which is a natural process so paradigmatic that it could almost be said to be synonymous with nature itself" (42). When accepting Turner's line of arguing, we thus admit that humans are a part of nature. Or nature is a part of us. This aspect will be further developed in my discussion about the migrating birds below. In addition, the question whether a machine made of steel is a part of nature is raised in "Eamon and Klara," which is based on the idea that nature, environment, humans and culture are all linked together.

The migrating birds

When Tilman is a young boy it becomes apparent to his parents that his behavior is different from other children's. He is unable to remain at school and, as a result, he does not learn how to read or write. Tilman also has a strong urge to leave home, to follow a road or path with no particular goal in mind; he just submits to his instinct to wander. Every autumn when the migrating birds arrive, this urge becomes irresistibly strong. He wanders away, trying to follow the birds. Tilman's relation to nature is both strong and evident. When nature calls, he responds. Is he then closer to nature than to humans? In *The Environmental Imagination* (1996) Lawrence Buell discusses "nature's personhood" arguing, for example, that "one of the dramatic developments in post romantic thinking about nature has been the decline and revival of the kinship between nonhuman and human" (180). He finds support for his theory

in the writings of Emerson and Darwin: “Indeed, the evolutionary hypothesis intensified the claim of kinship by blurring the boundary between *Homo sapiens* and other species” (188). The idea of kinship between human and non-human is thus not new. Buell cites Sarah Orne Jewett’s *White Heron* (1886) as an example (198). The protagonist Sylvia protects her alter ego; the heron. She does so “not because the heron is a symbolic extension of her but because she feels herself to be an extension of it” (198). It is possible to see a similar relationship between Tilman and the migrating birds. The first time he leaves home and follows the birds, he ends up in a marshland. It is impossible for him to follow the birds over the adjacent Lake Erie. Tilman is forlorn and sad. He feels that “he had come to the edge, to the end of the world” (61). The birds are moving away from him into another world, which he is unable to reach. His connection with the birds is cut off and that makes him deeply distressed. One could thus assume that he is closer to nature than to humans during certain periods in life.

Tilman’s wandering induces protests in the form of restrictions and punishments from his parents. His father beats him and his mother tries to gain control over him by watching him closely and locking the door to his room. When these punishments and restrictions have no effect, Helga’s fear of losing her son escalates. She goes to the blacksmith and orders an iron harness with a chain attached to it. Helga persuades her husband to put the harness on Tilman and he reluctantly does so. Tillman’s reaction to imprisonment is ferocious. He howls and cries. After approximately a week his mental health has deteriorated and his sister Klara, who cannot stand the situation anymore, releases him. Tilman runs away and lives as a vagabond the following six years. During this period he avoids contact with humans, except when it is absolutely necessary. Tilman does not hunt, so in order to survive, humans have to provide him with food and shelter in the winter. At the age of eighteen, he meets Refuto. The Italian vagabond slowly induces him to regain contact with humans on a more constant basis.

Helga's fear of losing Tilman leads to serious consequences. Discussing the "object relations theory," Michael Ryan argues that "as the child emerges from its primary, close relation to its parents, it must develop a separate sense of self" (96). Tilman's sense of self is strongly developed; he is not afraid to leave his parents. On the contrary, he wants to leave. Before the chaining incident, he always comes back after a period of time. This means that the relation between him and his family is important to him. However, the chaining incident causes a sense of abjection towards humans in Tilman. This abjection can, for example, be expressed as disgust and a rejection of food or a piece of filth.

In "Approaching Abjection" Julia Kristeva claims that "it is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (4). Helga's disrespect of her son's borders, her way of depriving him of his ability to leave generates a severe disorder in their relationship. In addition, the parent's act of chaining Tilman, as one would a dog or other animal, disturbs his sense of identity. Even if Tilman feels an affinity to nature, he sees himself as a human. His parents become traitors and the result is that Tilman's abjection does not only include his mother and father, but all human beings with whom he avoids physical contact for many years. The episode clearly shows how his balance is unsettled and he does not regain it until much later in life. Compared to the members of his family, he is much closer to nature than any of them. When forced to sacrifice his relation with nature, he is seriously disturbed. Still he does not remain in a state of abjection towards humans. He is human, not an animal. When his mother chains him like a dog, he protests ferociously. Helga deprives him of his human identity. Her natural instinct should be to care for him and encourage his self-development instead of dominating him.

Tilman has no instinct to hunt, not even for survival. The fact that he does not hunt could be a sign that he is being attached to nature and that he does not want to hunt animals. It

could be argued, however, that hunting is a natural behavior in animals. In addition, humans have been hunters since the beginning of time for survival reasons as well as for the excitement of it. Just like animals, humans are predators. The instinct to hunt is, however, developed in varying degree among all of us. Some people do not want to hunt for ethical reasons. In addition, there are people who do not hunt because they believe nature itself takes care of the balance. In *Writing for an Endangered World*, Lawrence Buell discusses this issue referring to Aldo Leopold's *Sand County Almanac* (1949): "Into a few pages is packed the lesson that it took Leopold and other outdoorsmen of his generation many years to learn: from a broader ecological perspective, that of the mountain, wolves are needed to control the deer population that will otherwise deforest the slopes" (184). When analyzing Tilman's character, it is fair to believe that he would certainly not hunt as long as he is given food from other humans. He wants to leave nature alone and undisturbed. He strives to be a part of nature without interfering. Yet, when it comes to his relation to the birds, he is almost a part of them. It is impossible to establish whether he is an extension of the migrating birds or them of him. One may thus agree with Buell and claim that the boundaries are blurred between Tilman, other humans and nature. As long as no one interferes with Tilman's strong relation to nature, he is balanced and what cause a disturbance are the restrictions in that relationship.

Eamon and Klara

There is no clear dividing-line between humans and the natural world. Cheryll Glotfelty cites Barry Commoner's first law of ecology that 'Everything is connected to everything else' when arguing that "ecocriticism expands the notion of 'the world' to include the entire ecosphere"(xix). We are a part of nature and some of us sense a stronger relation to it than others. Klara prefers to live in symbiosis with nature. After her parents' death, she lives alone on the farm harvesting apples and raising cows. Throughout her life she works with wood and later with stone when sculpturing pieces of art. Even Eamon attributes animalistic features to

her. On one occasion, for example, “he thought her hands were like white doves” (156) and that “everything about her was birdlike”. Eamon himself, on the other hand, is seduced by technology. He embraces the invention made of steel, which he believes will bring him strength and glory. At the same time, though, he is connected to nature as well. There is an episode when Eamon offers to send Tilman a note with one of his birds: “I’ll talk to him and tell him to look for your brother” (83). Still, Eamon is depicted less of a nature person than Klara.

For centuries humans have strived to develop new inventions. We are constantly changing and improving these devices. Hence, the technological progress never seems to end. Our desire and creativity has led to cities being built on a large scale and to the onset of the industrial revolution. Frederick Turner compares gardening to “the creation and use of technologies, even those of steel and glass and oil and electricity” (50). He argues that if we move a stone or plant a seed in the garden, we have interfered with the natural process. It is the human interference that is the crucial point here. When building an aeroplane, humans also interfere with nature. Plate is made of steel and steel is made from iron and carbon. Oil is a natural resource – however diminishing. Humans develop processes and refine natural material. Turner claims that “it is all gardening, if we see it right” (50). The action is performed by humans no matter whether we crop roses or invent a new electrical device.

There is a link between Turner’s line of arguing and Tilman’s perception of the bridge, which is his home for a period of time: “Made of iron girders and shaped like the back of a large animal, whose skeleton was being presented to the boy in profile, every part of the structure delighted Tilman” (189). One can assume that he likes it because it reminds him of an animal. In Tilman’s eyes the bridge goes through a metamorphosis from a metal bridge to a skeleton of an animal. However, Tilman, who is a nature person, chooses to transform the man made processed metal skeleton into a non human. He makes the loop back to nature.

When discussing nature's boundaries, we may ask ourselves whether it is relevant to consider Eamon and Klara's relations to the natural world. Looking at the issue from a scientific point of view along Turner's lines, it might not be relevant. I would like to argue, though, that it is Klara's interaction and appreciation of nature that gives her a positive feeling because nature is mostly perceived as a beneficial force. Her obvious participation with the natural world conveys a sense of stability and security. She is comfortable with herself and her environment. Eamon, on the other hand, is insecure and needs machines to assert himself. The material one uses to build a machine might come from nature. It is however processed and developed in many steps. It is thus possible to claim that the ordinary connotations of the word machine are not related to nature. One could claim that a cow and an aeroplane are very far away from each other in the natural world. Humans are the mediators between nature and technical inventions. Jane Urquhart uses the positive connotations of nature to support the characterization of Klara. As a protagonist she is supposed to be favored.

Nature as a healer

One may speculate whether nature's interaction with humans may be perceived as a healing force. This part of the essay will discuss nature's ability to comfort and heal Tilman and the emphasis will be on two episodes in particular. First I will take a close look at Tilman's life under the bridge and then I will move on to consider his encounter with Monsieur Recouvrier. As has already been discussed in this essay, Tilman is in an abject condition in relation to humans. As a consequence, when he finds the bridge, he is still avoiding close contact with other human beings. His urge to feel free and live close to nature is obvious at the time. Much later – after World War I - he meets the love of his life. For the first time as an adult, he experiences lust, love and desire. However, first we have to analyze the bridge episode to see why it becomes the turning point on Tilman's way to a better life. I have already dealt briefly with Tilman's first encounter with the bridge in "Nature's boundaries". The present part of the

essay will examine it more extensively in terms of place connectedness and nature as a healing force. The second part in “Nature as healer” is devoted to Tilman and Monsieur Recouvrir.

The bridge

Tilman decides to stay under the bridge. The fact that it is surrounded by forest, and that the villages are not too close, help him make up his mind. Nature provides him with shelter; the bridge and the bushes on either side on the steep river banks create a perfect hideaway. He has found a place where he can relax, feel at home and stay at least for a few months. In this new home of his, Tilman is able to study and “finally to understand the language of the water” (191). He also makes small excursions along the river banks, but prefers the shady shelter: “He loved the bridge with a child’s love, the way a boy will love a tree house in the yard or a clubhouse in a scrub lot. But he loved it too in a way peculiar to his own nature, because it gave him shelter without closing him in” (191). However, when the migrating birds arrive, Tilman, aware of his inner urge to follow them, prepares to leave. The departure is emotional and he cries.

Thus, living under the bridge, and most importantly surrounded by nature which does not confine him, is a prerequisite for Tilman’s ability to feel comfortable and safe: “He had had, though he did not know it, his first encounter with intimacy, his first experience of knowing something, anything, so well and in such proximity that he would never forget it” (192). Nature with its extensible borders and lack of locked doors provides the necessary safe and hidden refuge for Tilman. When he is not confined and thus free to leave whenever he wants, he is able to develop a sense of intimacy. The imprisonment resulting in abjection is still within him but his intimate feelings for the shelter take him one step away from the abjection of near relationships. After the bridge episode Tilman meets Refuto, alias Nicolo

Vigomanti. After spending some time with him, Tilman moves in with the Italian family and stays there for four years.

It is thus essential to sense a connection to a place. According to Buell, “personal experiences of arriving at a place that seems a perfect spiritual fit, even if one has never before set eyes on it, have been recorded by settlers as well as aborigines” (*An Endangered World* 74). This statement sums up Tilman’s experience of home. Many of us have felt the same way when discovering a place where one instinctively feels at home. There is an immediate bond, a sense of place-connectedness. Even if we do not settle down forever in this place, we will most likely return to it over and over again. Tillman does not return, however. Perhaps the time spent in his home under the bridge is enough for him to heal in order to move on with his life. After the bridge episode he meets Refuto and the abjection Tilman has felt towards humans is declining. The fact that he is able to connect to a place and settle for a longer period is essential for his mental health. Buell raises the question “whether there might in fact be some widespread if not universal compulsion for humans to seek to connect themselves with specific places of settlement” (74). He argues that in our time when mobility and displacement is frequent, the lack of connection to a place might “produce in many a pathological effect equivalent to (say) insomnia or seasonal affective disorder” (74). If we apply Buell’s conclusion to *The Stone Carvers*, we may argue that Tilman’s abjection towards humans would most likely not have declined, had he not found this place under the bridge. One can also claim that nature is most important because Tilman would never feel comfortable in a house at this point in life. Living in open nature is an absolute condition for him to find the tranquility he needs. Nature provides him with a perfect home where he can live free as a bird as long as he so desires. He has a chance to settle down, rest and feel connected to a place. This place is not in a house; it is out in the open air. It is thus fair to claim that nature plays the role of a healer.

The author Richard Louv argues that nature can be perceived as a healing force. Louv links a lack of exposure to nature in young people's lives to attention disorders and depression. He coined the term "Nature-Deficit Disorder" when doing research and writing *Last Child in the Woods*. He argues that there is a connection between the rising problems of attention disorders among young people and their decreasing participation with nature. He claims that "as the young spend less and less of their lives in natural surroundings, their senses narrow, physiologically and psychologically, and this reduces the richness of human experience" (3). Moreover, he claims that research suggests "that thoughtful exposure of youngsters to nature can even be a powerful form of therapy for attention-deficit disorders and other maladies." So the absence of nature can reduce a person's senses to such an extent that it causes an attention disorder. By contrast, if the person interacts more with nature, the attention disorder will diminish. If an attention disorder diminishes when a person spends time in the natural world, one may argue that Tilman's abjection also diminishes when he lives in nature. Nature soothes his mental wounds.

Monsieur Recouvrir

France is famous for delicious food, which comes as a pleasant surprise for Tilman. When arriving in Le Havre, Tillman – and Klara – have their first encounter with French food. For Klara it is just a means of nourishment but the experience will change Tilman's life. He has never been particularly interested in food; he eats because he has to in order to survive. However, French dishes such as Jambon d'Alsace à la crème, soupe de poisson, baguette and pâté de Campagne elicit a desire in Tilman, a desire to eat delicious food. Pleasure seeking desires are not familiar to Tilman; his life has rather been governed by exclusions. It may thus be claimed that delicious food, based on excellent natural ingredients, evokes the partially dormant libido in Tilman.

When he meets Monsieur Recouvrier, a chef at the Hotel Picardie, he falls in love for the first time in his life. Recouvrier, who is passionate about food, introduces Tilman to the art of cooking. Both of them suffer from awful experiences and memories of the war. Sharing these memories brings them closer together. When one evening Recouvrier puts his arm around Tilman, he does not sense any repulsion. A moment later he watches Recouvrier standing at the door carrying a tray with pastry, some fruit and a bottle of champagne. “He stood for a moment in the doorway, side-lit by a light from a window that looked out to a small garden, his face soft and unguarded, the tray and its contents gleaming in his hands, a kind of glorious Father Nature, Tilman thought” (327).

Tilman finds his soul mate in Monsieur Recouvrier and he is filled with wonder. He experiences a link between nature and human life in Recouvrier; one might even claim that Monsieur Recouvrier is nature personified for Tilman. Nature has always had a positive impact on Tilman, who could be described as nature personified as well. The mediating link between these two personalities of nature is food. Tilman’s recently acquired passion and Recouvrier’s obvious interest bring them together. Buell claims that for Thoreau, “Walden serves as a multipurpose symbol of steadfastness, calm, purity and – most important - of the speaker’s own better self, his soul’s ideal” (*Environmental* 208). When Thoreau spent time alone by the pond, he did not need humans. Walden filled all his needs, both internal and external. It is possible to apply this line of reasoning to the relationship between Tilman and Recouvrier. If Walden was Thoreau’s soul mate, Recouvrier is Tilman’s.

When they make love, Tilman does not pay any attention to the fact that Recouvrier is a man, not a woman. The pleasure this man excites in his body is new and stunning. Tilman does not think and, therefore, he just follows his instincts. Up to this point Tilman’s sexual desire seems to have been restrained or repressed. This may imply that the unconscious part of his mind is partially dormant. According to Kristeva, “there are lives not sustained by

desire, as desire is always for objects. Such lives are based on *exclusion*”(6). Tilman’s sense of abjection to physical contact, including sex, could thus be related to a lack of desire. He has excluded close relationships involving physical contact for a long time. He is obviously alive so he has not excluded food. Kristeva argues that “food loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection” (29). Thus, eating disorders like anorexia and bulimia originates from abjection. Tilman however, shows no sign of an eating disorder. On the other hand, he has never actually desired food either. His ability to feel desire is evoked by French food. This desire wakes the dormant unconscious mind and enables the development of sexual desire. The fact that it is a man who evokes his sexual desire does not concern Tilman. Jane Urquhart depicts a natural love between two humans. It is a love free of prejudice and other restrictions.

Conservative people may consider a sexual relation between humans of the same sex to be against nature. One of their arguments is that homosexual behaviour does not exist among non-human species. Sexuality is associated with reproduction and homosexuality does not lead to reproducing either humans or animals. However, scientific studies prove them wrong; there are homosexual relationships in the non-human world. Bruce Bagemihl published *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity* (1999) after years of field studies. Bagemihl writes about previous research on homosexuality among animals. He also lists more than 100 species with documented homosexual behaviour. Moreover, in the web material for an exhibition called “Against nature?” at Naturhistorisk Museum in Oslo 2006, the museum argues that “today we know that homosexuality is a common and widespread phenomenon in the animal world. Not only short-lived sexual relationships, but even long-lasting partnerships; partnerships that may last a lifetime.” The museum’s intention was to “help to de-mystify homosexuality among people. - At least, we hope to reject the all too well-known argument that homosexual behavior is a crime against nature.”

Homosexuality is thus not against nature. It exists in the non-human world as well. Sex and reproduction does not necessarily have to be linked together. Moreover, reproduction probably does not enter Tilman's mind; he just feels love and affection for Recouvrier.

Ecocriticism is a broad field and it is possible to study Jane Urquhart's expression of "Father Nature" from a gender perspective. Cheryll Glotfelty calls ecofeminism "a theoretical discourse whose theme is the link between the oppression of women and the domination of nature" (xxiv). Feminist historians claim that men use the concept "Mother Nature" because they want to demonstrate their domination over both women and nature. Tilman has no intention to dominate either Monsieur Recouvrier or nature. He is a part of nature himself and so is the man he loves. Urquhart uses "Father Nature" when visualizing Tilman's thoughts of Recouvrier and thus establishes an alternative to the western tradition of associating nature with woman as in the expression "Mother Nature."

Conclusion

The purpose of this essay has been to draw attention to nature's all-pervasive presence in *The Stone Carvers*. Jane Urquhart's novel is an excellent example of nature being highly present. Moreover, my thesis is built on the idea that nature is a character with the ability to influence and affect other characters as well as the narrative. This essay shows that the contrasting nature settings of Bavaria and Canada are highly essential for Father Gstir's personal journey. The differences and challenges of the new environment force him to act and "he would become, as a result of geological, geographical, and meteorological necessity, a participator" (12). Father Gstir's transformation proves that nature's presence affects his character.

Tilman is nature personified. His relation with the migrating birds shows nature's strong influence on him and, in addition, his reluctance to be apart from it. His bonds to nature are very strong and, as a matter of fact, necessary for his wellbeing. This is proved by nature's healing impact on him when he lives under the bridge. Years later when he goes to France, nature once again shows its power to heal. Some of us are familiar with the thought that food can be comforting. We experience a desire to eat special dishes. Sex is equally important. These desires are finally evoked and satisfied in Tilman and both have their source in nature.

Frederic Turner's discussion of boundaries between nature and culture is intriguing. It is indeed interesting to follow his line of reasoning which ends in the conclusion that everything in our human environment is to some extent a part of nature. In this essay, however, where the focus is on *The Stone Carvers*, it is more relevant to consider cars and aeroplanes a threat rather than a connection to the environment and nature. The most common associations nature evokes in us are those of forest, sea, greenery, and animals. Machines and vehicles are removed from our perception of nature. Moreover, we often believe that nature is

strong, right and eternal. Those inner pictures lead us to like Klara's character and we associate her with the positive sides of nature while Eamon, who is less connected to nature, is depicted in a slightly negative way. The issue of deciding where the limit is between nature and culture is difficult and perhaps it is not necessary to know where exactly the line is. It is discussing the matter that is important. The more we discuss nature, the more difficult it becomes to ignore it. Ecocriticism is a broad field and there are many subjects that can be related to nature and environmental studies.

I have found it most useful to combine the theories of ecocriticism and psychoanalysis in this essay. It would have been much more difficult to explain Tilman's reaction to the chaining incident without the psychoanalytical tool of abjection. Psychoanalysis helps us understand why he acts a certain way and ecocriticism shows how important nature is for his healing and wellbeing. Future interdisciplinary approaches to *The Stone Carvers* could study the connections between ecocriticism, gender and/or post-colonial studies. It would be interesting to focus on the homosexual relationship between Recouvrier and Tilman as well as the settlers in Canada. In addition, Klara would most certainly benefit from a feminist approach. Various theories working together with ecocriticism opens new ways of studying the novel and broaden the awareness and perception.

Barry Commoner's first law of ecology that "everything is connected to everything else" reminds us of our connection to everything in the ecosphere. When applying an ecocritical perspective to a novel, one has to examine nature's various ways of having an impact on its characters as well as the setting and plot. The result is an immediate consciousness of natural features depicted by the writer. Furthermore, this leads to the expected awareness of nature which in turn makes it more difficult to ignore issues like global warming. Hopefully this essay may constitute a small cog that keeps the big ecological wheel

moving. The ultimate goal is to stop humans from destroying our planet, which also happens to be our home.

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