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Zásady pro vypracování

Autor se ve své práci zaměří na skupinu románů s environmentální tematikou. Jako metodologii využije poznatky a koncepce z oblasti ekokritiky a environmentální etiky, které bude v úvodní části práce charakterizovat. Na tomto základě se ve svých rozborech bude věnovat vybrané současné próze – románům *Strange As This Weather Has Been* (2007) Ann Pancake, *Barkskins* (2016) Annie Proulx a *Overstory* (2018) Richarda Powerse. Soustředit se bude na zobrazování vztahu člověka k životnímu prostředí (např. antropocentrické *versus* biocentrické postoje). Za použití vhodných sekundárních zdrojů se také pokusí vystopovat a kriticky zhodnotit generační posun a proměny ve vnímání vztahu člověka k životnímu prostředí. Práci završí kapitola, která z dílčích zjištění vyvodí obecnější závěry.

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ANNOTATION

This bachelor thesis deals with the depiction of the relation between man and environment in three novels by authors Powers, Proulx, and Pancake. It uses theoretical concepts such as ecocriticism, environmental ethics, and the sociology of generations. These concepts are introduced in the first chapter. All remaining chapters focus on the analysis of the aforementioned novels. The aim of this work is to determine how the characters perceive nature and why they perceive it in a particular way.

KEYWORDS

ecocriticism, anthropocentrism, biocentrism, environmental ethics, sociology of generations

NÁZEV

Člověk a příroda v současné próze

ANOTACE

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá vyobrazením vztahu člověka a přírody ve třech vybraných románech od autorů Powerse, Proulx a Pancake. Používá teoretické koncepty jako ekokriticismus, environmentální etika a generační sociologie. Tyto koncepty jsou představeny v první kapitole. Všechny zbývající kapitoly se soustředí na analýzu již zmíněných románů. Cíl této práce je určit jaký vztah mají postavy v románech k přírodě a proč k ní přistupují daným způsobem.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

ekokriticismus, antropocentrismus, biocentrismus, environmentální etika, generační sociologie

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Introduction

Though humanity's approach towards nature has been changing throughout history, it has always been a crucial element in people's lives – as a partner or a foe. At some point in history, people started to write, create literature, and inevitably include their environment in the literary pieces they made.

Environmental concerns have risen rapidly in the last few decades, especially concerning climate change. There is empirical evidence that the average global temperature is rising quickly. According to the scientific community, that is due to human activities such as burning fossil fuels and deforestation. The consequences of the temperature rise vary – from more frequent extreme weather events that can put millions of people in danger to hundreds of species at risk of extinction.¹ The threats posed by climate change make people scared about their future more than ever before – especially young people. Most of them say that they worry about the future, describing humanity as “doomed.”² Problems that have existed for a longer time, such as deforestation and high numbers of endangered species, are now intensified by accelerating climate change, raising concerns even more. As mentioned earlier, people have always perceived their natural environment somehow, and one way of dealing with it is through literature.

Ecocriticism is the branch of study focusing on how the connection between the environment and humans is depicted in literature. It is also the main methodological framework used in this paper. It is applied together with beliefs such as anthropocentrism and biocentrism or environmental ethics. Next to these, some types of sociology are employed. All of these concepts are introduced in the first chapter.

All other chapters examine the sources selected for the analysis: *Barkskins* by Annie Proulx from 2016, *The Overstory* by Richard Powers from 2018, and *Strange as This Weather Has Been* by Ann Pancake from 2007. Each chapter analyzes all selected novels but from a different perspective. The analysis is conducted using scientific information sources.

As mentioned, the first chapter introduces the basic concepts applied in chapters two to four. The second chapter focuses on how characters perceive nature and the reasons for their attitudes. The chapter uses mainly concepts connected to ecocriticism; anthropocentrism, and

¹ “What is climate change? A really simple guide,” Science, BBC, last modified March 18, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-24021772>

² Roger Harrabin, “Climate change: Young people very worried - survey,” *BBC*, September 14, 2021.

biocentrism. It also tries to determine the historical causes of alienation from the natural world or the reasons for people's affinity to it. The third chapter looks at the novels from an ethical viewpoint, using sources from environmental ethics. The chapter examines why the characters feel in a particular way and if they consider certain behaviors against nature moral. The fourth chapter examines how environmental attitudes develop over time and generations, using knowledge from the sociology of generations and family.

In conclusion, this work aims to determine how the characters perceive nature and examine their attitudes from various angles. It strives to investigate the reasons for their actions – historical, familial, or personal. The aim is also to determine the possible message of the novels.

1. On Relevant Aspects of Environmentalism

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the theoretical foundation for the following parts of this paper. First, the chapter defines some frequently used terms whose meaning could be understood more broadly than desired. Then, the concepts of anthropocentrism, biocentrism, and ecocriticism are explained to create a basis for the second chapter. For the third one, the field of environmental ethics is introduced, and there is an outline of concepts from sociology for the fourth chapter, which focuses on intergenerational differences and relations in an ecological context.

As stated, defining frequently occurring words in this paper is crucial. The first word that needs further explanation and is used in abundance is ‘nature’. There are many sources to look at while trying to clarify the meaning of this word.

It is possible to look at the official meaning stated in dictionaries. According to *The Cambridge Dictionary*, the meaning of the word ‘nature’ (meaning as a living entity, not a characteristic nor type) is as follows:

all the animals, plants, rocks, etc. in the world and all the features, forces, and processes that happen or exist independently of people, such as the weather, the sea, mountains, the production of young animals or plants, and growth³

For comparison, *Oxford English Dictionary* states a similar meaning – “all the plants, animals and things that exist in the universe that are not made by people”.⁴ The lexical definition does not put humans and nature in one group; it treats these two entities separately. Therefore, humans are positioned apart from nature.

On this note, Raymond Williams states that the meaning of the word ‘nature’ has been changing throughout history, but he says that “nature ha[s] to be seen as separate from man”. Despite this, he also mentions that we often see our creations as ‘nature’ today. He says, “[w]e have mixed out labor with the earth, our forces with its forces too deeply to be able to draw back and separate either out.”⁵ Kate Soper discusses whether humans are parts of nature from an evolutionary perspective. Still, she agrees with Williams that recognizing the gap between

³ “Nature,” *The Cambridge Dictionary*, Accessed on March 2, 2023, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/nature>.

⁴ “Nature,” *Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries*, Accessed on March 2, 2023, https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/nature_1.

⁵ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Materialism* (London: Verso, 2005), 76–83.

“the natural and the human” has been self-evident in Western culture.⁶ There are many approaches in the literature and even more subjective opinions that people can have.

So, according to literature, the term ‘nature’ has been changing throughout history, and it settled in today’s definition, which separates it from the human. The dictionary definition corresponds with that. Since the novels selected for the analysis very often describe the clash of “the human” and “the natural”, the meaning of the word ‘nature’ in this paper sticks to the already cited dictionary definition. Synonyms such as ‘wilderness’ and ‘the natural world’ are used in the text, and their meanings concur with ‘nature’.

Another word that should be explained is ‘ethical’. For the third chapter concerns environmental ethics, the phrases like ‘ethically right’ or ‘ethically wrong’ are used frequently. Again, subjectiveness and cultural influences play an important role in establishing the word’s meaning. Michael Boylan outlines two main categories of ethical theories. The realist theories (ethics address elements that exist) and the anti-realist theories (ethics are “merely conventional” and deal with non-existing notions). One of the realist theories is deontology – “a moral theory that emphasizes one’s duty to do a particular action because the action itself is inherently right and not through any other sort of calculations”. He also says that the cornerstone of ethical reasoning is “the personal worldview imperative,” – meaning that every person must acquire a good consistent worldview that they seek to fulfill.⁷ Both of these ideas will be applied further in the text. When discussing ‘ethical’ and ‘non-ethical’ behavior, the deontological definition is the most fitting for this paper. Moreover, as mentioned above, each person (and each character in the novels) has his or her own personal worldview. That is another basis for the analysis.

It is worth mentioning the dictionary definition again. *The Cambridge Dictionary* states that ‘ethical’ means “relating to beliefs about what is morally right and wrong”.⁸ In other words, it depends on the subjective point of view. Each society, each social group, and each person have a different set of values. Returning to the previous paragraph, the dictionary definition matches the description of the deontological theory, and that one is used in the text.

⁶ Kate Soper, *What is Nature?* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 36–42.

⁷ Michael Boylan, “Ethical Reasoning,” in *Environmental Ethics*, ed. Michael Boylan (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 4–8.

⁸ “Nature,” *The Cambridge Dictionary*, Accessed on March 2, 2023, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/ethical>.

Chapter four focuses on the connections between the generations, the intergenerational influences, and the development of their attitudes towards nature over time. There are two words that need an explanation. The first one is the word ‘cohort’. According to Jennie Bristow, cohort means “a group of people born around the same time.”⁹ The usage of this word is closely related to the word clarified in the next paragraph.

Another word that appears quite often is the word ‘generation’. William Strauss and Neil Howe claim that generations are individuals who progress through time, with each group possessing a unique identity. They say that we examine history similarly to how an individual reflects on their own life experiences. Every generation’s development is influenced by the significant events that occur during their lifetime, which we refer to as their “age location”. This age location, particularly during childhood and during the transition from youth to adulthood, gives rise to a “peer personality” – a shared set of behaviors and attitudes that will later manifest throughout the generation’s lifespan.¹⁰ Bristow cites Karl Mannheim, whose interpretation corresponds to the abovementioned definition. Still, he argues that significant events will affect each individual within a generation differently. One’s generational location is only a segment of their overall life narrative, which is also influenced by other societal, cultural, and family elements.¹¹ So, ‘generation’ means a group of people who were born approximately at the same time, experienced similar pivotal moments in history, and share corresponding values. However, as stated, this can differ from person to person, so not all representatives of a certain generation share their values with other members of their cohort groups.

With the unclear terms specified, the theoretical concepts applied to analyzing the selected novels can be introduced. The first field of study is called ecocriticism. Cheryll Glotfelty says it is “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment.” She says ecocritics ask questions about nature’s significance and role in literature. Ecocriticism is founded on the basic idea that human civilization is interlinked with the natural world, has an influence on it, and is influenced by it. Glotfelty also states that while traditional literary theory tends to focus on the connection between writers, texts, and society, ecocriticism extends the idea of “the world” to encompass the entire ecosystem.¹² Lawrence

⁹ Jennie Bristow, *The Sociology of Generations: New Directions and Challenges* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 2.

¹⁰ William Strauss, and Neil Howe, *The History of America’s Future, 1584 to 2069* (New York: Morrow, 1991), 32.

¹¹ Bristow, *The Sociology of Generations*, 3.

¹² Cheryll Glotfelty, “Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis,” in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), XVIII–XIX.

Buell calls the same branch of studies environmental criticism, stating that it is a much more accurate term than ecocriticism. According to him, due to the name “ecocriticism”, some people still perceive it as a superficial nature-loving group, which is a misconception. Also, “environmental” is much more accurate because it acknowledges that all environments are a blend of both natural and human elements. Finally, the term “environmental criticism” stresses the interdisciplinary nature of this field – a blend of literary and environmental studies.¹³ Richard Kerridge claims that “ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis.”¹⁴ Whether called environmental criticism or ecocriticism, this discipline studies the relationship between literature, society, and the natural world. Therefore, it is used as one of the main methodological frameworks in this paper.

A belief that is deeply interlinked with ecocriticism is anthropocentrism. According to Buell, anthropocentrism is “the assumption or view that the interests of humans are of higher priority than those of nonhumans.”¹⁵ Similarly, according to Greg Garrard, it is a “system of beliefs and practices that favours humans over other organisms.” In connection to the concept mentioned in the previous paragraph, Garrard also states that ecocriticism assumes that its objective is to combat anthropocentrism.¹⁶ This ethical belief puts human interest in the center and above all living creatures’ needs.

Such philosophy exists for various, mainly historical, reasons. The historical reasons mentioned later will correspond with the fact that all the novels selected for the analysis were produced in North America. According to Frederick Turner, one of the reasons for the resentment towards nature is Puritanism and its feature to deny the legitimacy and acceptability of pluralistic views.¹⁷ George H. Stankey holds religion responsible as well, stating that the perception of nature brought to the New World by the colonizers was influenced by religious notions that had existed in Europe before.¹⁸ Peter Harrison claims that the Christian belief about creation establishes a separation between humans and nature – it suggests that the natural world

¹³ Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), VIII.

¹⁴ Richard Kerridge, “Introduction,” in *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and literature*, ed. Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells (London: Zed Books, 1998), 5.

¹⁵ Buell, *The Future*, 134.

¹⁶ Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2004), 183.

¹⁷ Frederick Turner, “Cultivating the American Garden,” in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), 45–46.

¹⁸ George H. Stankey, “Beyond the Campfire’s Light: Historical Roots of Wilderness Concept,” *Natural Resources Journal* 29, no. 1 (1989): 16.

was made exclusively for human use.¹⁹ So, religion played an essential role in developing how humans perceive nature. The mindset and sets of values which people possess, among other things, shape their attitudes toward nature.

Another influential factor is the environment in which people are positioned. Turner asserts that apart from the impact of Christianity, the concept of the frontier operated as an element symbolizing a boundary between human and natural.²⁰ According to Stankey, the vastness of the American wilderness was incomprehensible to the newcomers. Contrary to their homeland, nature in America was a never-ending expanse. He also argues that the frontier represented a barrier that needed to be removed. This removal gave settlers and people on the frontier a distinct mission, as they were responsible for leading the charge in transforming the wild into a more civilized landscape.²¹ Also, Bakhtiar Sajjadi and Peyman Amanolahi Baharvand suggest that the European colonizers spread the idea of the inexhaustible natural resources of the New World and infinite land.²² Influences such as this one form human attitudes toward nature. The vastness of the land creates a psychological invincibility of the natural world and makes people apathetic about its destruction.

Nowadays, people generally consider the natural world as vulnerable. Despite that, they still hold anthropocentric values. Glenn Reynolds claims that in the last thousands of years, urban societies have progressively displaced traditional cultures that relied on foraging and that distanced people from the ecosystems that sustained them.²³ Commenting on this development, André Krebber states that the way in which people view nature as a resource for human needs can be traced back to the Enlightenment period – nature started to be seen as a mechanical system, not fully appreciated for its complexity.²⁴ According to Williams, the emergence of the industrial society caused that people began to perceive nature as a collection of objects that humans can manipulate, with a clearly detached view.²⁵ Theodore Roszak agrees and says that damaging nature is easier for individuals since they are profoundly disconnected from it and do

¹⁹ Peter Harrison, "Subduing the Earth: Genesis 1, Early Modern Science, and the Exploitation of Nature," *Journal of Religion* 79 (1999): 86.

²⁰ Turner, "Cultivating the American Garden," 45–46.

²¹ Stankey, "Beyond the Campfire's Light," 16–19.

²² Bakhtiar Sajjadi and Peyman Amanolahi Baharvand, "The Upholders of Anthropocentrism and Biocentrism in Annie Proulx's *Barkskins*," *Anafora* 7, no. 1 (2020): 201.

²³ Glenn C. Reynolds, "A Native American Land Ethic," *Natural Resources & Environment* 21, no. 3 (2007): 16.

²⁴ André Krebber, "Anthropocentrism and Reason in Dialectic of Enlightenment: Environmental Crisis and Animal Subject," in *Anthropocentrism: Humans, Animals, Environments*, ed. Rob Boddice (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 330.

²⁵ Williams, *Culture and Materialism*, 76–77.

not care about its health.²⁶ Harold Fromm illustrates this disconnectedness with the example of a child living in the modern era. He proposes that nature is a mystery for an average child living in the United States – not because it is impossible to understand, but because it is practically absent from their awareness. He also says that since people now have the power to dominate nature, they produce everything on their own, and it seems like everything is created by man, not by the natural world.²⁷ Finally, the last factor mentioned here is residing in cities, distanced from natural areas such as forests. David N. Cole states that direct contact with nature can establish a powerful emotional bond with it.²⁸ Many historical circumstances led to the point at which humans' attitude towards nature is today. The root causes for anthropocentric values are religious factors, the illusion of the infinite land, seeing nature as a set of objects, and separation from nature due to industrial society.

The opposite of anthropocentric belief is biocentrism. Buell states the following definition:

The view that all organisms, including humans, are part of a larger biotic web or network community whose interests must constrain or direct or govern the human interest. Used as a semi-synonym for ecocentrism and in antithesis to anthropocentrism.²⁹

Sueellen Campbell asserts it is “the conviction that humans are neither better nor worse than other creatures (animals, plants, bacteria, rocks, rivers) but simply equal to everything else in the natural world.”³⁰ The first definition emphasizes the interconnectedness of the natural world (all its parts) and the human race. Both descriptions stress the equality of these parts as well. Contrary to anthropocentrism, biocentrism does not recognize humans as superior – it emphasizes treating nature with equity.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, anthropocentrism holds a strong position in human attitudes toward nature. However, some sources suggest that biocentrism is currently gaining momentum. Stankey claims that the idea that wilderness is a wicked, dangerous place has been

²⁶ Theodore Roszak, “Where psyche meet Gaia,” in *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*, ed. Theodore Roszak, M.E. Gomes and A.D. Kanner (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1995). 1–17.

²⁷ Harold Fromm, “From Transcendence to Obsolence,” in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), 33.

²⁸ David N. Cole, “Symbolic Values: The Overlooked Values That Make Wilderness Unique,” *International Journal of Wilderness* 11, no. 2 (2005): 23–28.

²⁹ Buell, *The Future*, 134.

³⁰ Sueellen Campbell, “The Land and Language of Desire: Where Deep Ecology and Post-structuralism Meet,” in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), 128.

challenged, if not replaced, by the notion that wilderness can also be a sanctuary.³¹ David M. Konisky et al. give an insight into the nowadays stance on environmental issues. They demonstrate that, even though they tend to be more concerned with local than global problems, the American public highly supports government efforts to tackle various environmental issues.³² These statements cannot be taken as signs of a complete deviation from anthropocentrism. They surely indicate that biocentric tendencies are still present and that the general public is not utterly ignorant of environmental destruction. Despite the intensity of the historically rooted anthropocentric influences, biocentrism is still present.

Another methodological framework used for the analysis concerns environmental ethics. The concrete definition of the word ‘ethical’ was mentioned earlier in this chapter. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* states that environmental ethics “studies the moral relationship of human beings to, and also the value and moral status of, the environment and its nonhuman contents.” It also states that environmental ethics arose as a novel area of study within philosophy in the early nineteen-seventies, and it presented a challenge to conventional anthropocentric views. It raised doubts about the belief that human beings are morally superior to other living organisms and tried to determine whether it is possible to provide logical justifications for it.³³ According to Joseph R. DesJardins, environmental ethics “is a systematic account of the moral relations between human beings and their natural environment. [It] assumes that ethical norms can and do govern human behavior towards the natural world.”³⁴ To conclude, humanity’s anthropocentric approach generated a response in the form of this branch of ethics. It focuses on the moral questions concerning people’s relationship with the natural world and why they destroy it. Therefore, environmental ethics offers a helpful framework for analyzing the moral rationales behind the characters’ behavior in the selected novels.

Some theories belonging to this branch of studies differentiate two main opinion streams. Alan Gewirth states that there are two types of environmental ethics – humanist and naturalistic. He describes the former as follows:

its basic concern is for the interests of human beings [...] it regards the natural environment as providing means for the fulfillment of those interests [...] The

³¹ Stankey, “Beyond the Campfire’s Light,” 24.

³² David M. Konisky, Jeffrey Milyo, and Lilliard E. Richardson Jr., “Environmental Policy Attitudes: Issues, Geographical Scale, and Political Trust,” *Social Science Quarterly* 89, no. 5 (2008): 1081.

³³ “Environmental Ethics,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last modified December 3, 2021, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-environmental/#IntChaEnvEth>

³⁴ Joseph R. DesJardins, *Environmental Ethics: An Introduction to Environmental Philosophy* (Boston Mass: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2013), 17.

natural environment is to be treated in a way that serves to fulfill human needs of well-being. [...] the environment is the object of human rights, what they are rights to, while the subject of the rights, the right-holder, is humankind.³⁵

Presumably, this concept corresponds to anthropocentrism – it focuses on humans as the center of interest and puts its needs above the needs of other living organisms. The naturalistic concept, on the other hand, follows the biocentric arguments. Gewirth defines the naturalistic type like this:

It regards the natural environment as having value in itself, independent of any contributions it may make to fulfilling human needs. The environment is the subject of environmental rights, and humans are the respondents who have the correlative duty to preserve and enhance the environment.³⁶

So, a person can follow two main mindset concepts when it comes to environmental ethics. One gives more value to human needs. The other highlights the human obligation to preserve a healthy natural environment while acknowledging its rights.

People follow either of those concepts, and there are reasons for their choices. Firstly, the reasons for the naturalistic type of thinking will be introduced. Aldo Leopold states that all ethical systems developed have a fundamental principle in common – individuals are members of a community consisting of interconnected parts. Therefore, considering oneself a part of nature means extending this community to incorporate elements such as soil, water, plants, and animals.³⁷ The ability to integrate the natural world into your own community and feel for it is often associated with aboriginal cultures. According to Christopher Manes, numerous indigenous cultures lack a specific term for wilderness and do not clearly distinguish between the natural and the domesticated.³⁸ Sadjadi and Baharvand take an example of the nomadic cultures and suggest that they never view themselves as separated from nature and, therefore, never overexploit their environment.³⁹ In general, this community concept is the cornerstone for any further analysis – if an individual considers oneself a part of nature, he or she usually also considers nature a part of his or her community. Aboriginal cultures serve as a pure example of the interconnectedness of one's own social group with nature.

³⁵ Alan Gewirth, "Human Rights and Future Generations," in *Environmental Ethics*, ed. Michael Boylan (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 120.

³⁶ Gewirth, "Human Rights," 120.

³⁷ Aldo Leopold, "The Land Ethic," in *Environmental Ethics*, ed. Michael Boylan (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 37.

³⁸ Christopher Manes, "Nature and Silence," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), 18.

³⁹ Sadjadi and Baharvand, "The Upholders," 203.

Another indication of how individuals perceive nature could be how they treat animals (and plants). Treating animals by humans is a wide field of study, but it is mentioned very briefly in this paper. Peter Singer argues that it is morally unjustifiable to consider the pain experienced by animals as less significant than the pain experienced by humans. In this case, the crucial aspect of morality is whether or not creatures can experience pleasure or suffering.⁴⁰ Holmes Rolston adds his perspective, saying that people usually do not separate ethics for humans and ethics for wildlife since animals have traits that are morally significant when humans interact with them (like pain and pleasure). Plants are living creatures as well, but they do not express feelings, frustration, or satisfaction – people, therefore, tend to feel less protective about the flora.⁴¹ On this note, Thomas Hill Jr. argues that humans have a tendency to gauge the importance of things based on their relationship to themselves and one’s identification group.⁴² So, humans are apt to ignore the suffering of plants since they do not see them as equal due to the nature of their seemingly emotionless existence. However, people often feel for the members of the world’s fauna since they carry qualities like humans.

The historical and other reasons for the alienation from nature were mentioned earlier, but individual factors shape one’s approach toward the natural world as well. DesJardins says that changing one’s personality is crucial to transforming one’s perspective on the natural world – people’s values and beliefs are closely linked to their personality.⁴³ Richard Louv ascribes these unfavorable approaches toward nature to patterns people learn in childhood. He says that most children in the United States experience “nature-deficit disorder”. Louv argues that some kinds of sports and games instill a fear of the natural world in children, leading to disconnection from nature.⁴⁴ Louv’s argument could be associated with the historical reasons mentioned above – how societies raise their children is, ultimately, according to their historically rooted patterns. Geoffrey Frasz describes people that are emotionally disconnected from nature as having “a shallow life,” “arrogant,” and that do not “consider the environmental effects or consequences of actions towards nature.”⁴⁵ The personality viewpoint is unique for each person but

⁴⁰ Peter Singer, “All Animals Are Equal,” in *Environmental Ethics*, ed. Michael Boylan (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 282–286.

⁴¹ Holmes Rolston, “Environmental Ethics: Values in and Duties to the Natural World,” in *Environmental Ethics*, ed. Michael Boylan (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 137–141.

⁴² Thomas E. Hill Jr., “Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments,” *Environmental Ethics* 5 (1983): 218.

⁴³ DesJardins, *Environmental Ethics*, 136.

⁴⁴ Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder* (London: Atlantic Books, 2005), 32.

⁴⁵ Geoffrey Frasz, “Environmental Virtue Ethics: Toward a New Direction in Environmental Ethics,” *Environmental Ethics* 15, no. 3 (1993): 270–271.

undoubtedly stems from childhood. Personality is also connected with the individual's approach toward nature because people who choose rude and careless behavior in contact with others are keener to approach nature similarly.

There is a view standing opposite to environmental ethics. DesJardins mentions an anthropocentric ethics field that, besides other extensions, includes future generations of humans as recipients of our moral obligations. So, this view stays anthropocentric because only humans are perceived as worthy of their own moral obligation.⁴⁶ Richard P. Hiskes agrees and cites Edmund Burke saying that people include their hypothetical offspring within their communities.⁴⁷ On this note, Hiskes proposes the idea of "reflexive reciprocity." He explains that the desire to improve the world for future generations reinforces the values of the current generation. That means that the motivation behind this perspective is not solely altruistic but also egocentric.⁴⁸ Onora O'Neill says that sticking to the idea of anthropocentric ethics means threatening the natural environment because people put their own value above the value of other living creatures.⁴⁹ Going back to the definition of 'ethical,' people who follow this set of beliefs act in a morally acceptable manner since they seek to establish the well-being of somebody else. They also do it altruistically, without benefiting from it. From their perspective, they act ethically. However, from an environmental perspective, they are unethical since they destroy nature.

The last segment of this chapter is dedicated to two subfields in sociology. The first one concerns the sociology of generations. Bristow cites Karl Mannheim's definition of this category of sociology:

the sociology of generations is neither a question of numbers nor the introspective study of everyday life. What matters is the interaction between 'new participants in the cultural process' and the society in which these participants are born, develop, and transform their world. [...] how we, as a society, ensure that the world lives on through those whom we leave behind.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ DesJardins, *Environmental Ethics*, 17.

⁴⁷ Richard P. Hiskes, *The Human Right to a Green Future: Environmental Rights and Intergeneration Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 48–49.

⁴⁸ Hiskes, *The Human Right*, 48–49.

⁴⁹ Onora O'Neill, "Environmental Values, Anthropocentrism and Speciesism," in *Environmental Ethics*, ed. Michael Boylan (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 122.

⁵⁰ Bristow, *The Sociology of Generations*, 2.

Bristow also states that a significant amount of knowledge among young individuals originates from regular exchanges between various age groups.⁵¹ Howe and Strauss describe the same mechanism from a different perspective – they state that the midlife phase is primarily characterized by roles such as parenting, teaching, and utilizing values. Conversely, the youth phase mainly involves growing, learning, and acquiring values. And since every person is at some point in the youth phase, we learn from the older generations.⁵² So, the sociology of generations focuses on describing the relationships between the generations and how they influence each other. In this paper, this concept will be applied together with the characters' perspectives on the natural world.

The emergence of industrial society forced profound change within intergenerational and interfamilial relations. Thomas Ledermann et al. state that close relationships are typically affected by both external and internal factors.⁵³ Bristow suggests that generational conflicts have existed in society for a long time, but it became more severe with the emergence of industrial society.⁵⁴ According to Angie Williams and Jon F. Nussbaum, that brought various issues. One of them was that the changes of the twentieth century caused a decrease in the social status of older generations, leading modern society to view them as unproductive or unnecessary.⁵⁵ The number of external stressors rose rapidly after the industrial revolution. Compared to pre-industrial times, the world started to appear quicker and more stressful. The mechanisms of an industrial society caused many abrupt changes in the functioning of a family and intergenerational relationships.

Many variables shape relations within a family. Chris Segrin and Jeanne Flora mention that examining family routines shows that many behaviors become ritualized over time, acquiring symbolic meaning. They argue that the actual interaction is less important than its symbolic meaning.⁵⁶ Jane Jorgenson and Arthur P. Bochner state that sharing stories within a family serves to socialize its members and reinforce relationships within the family and across

⁵¹ Bristow, *The Sociology of Generations*, 67.

⁵² Strauss and Howe, *The History*, 60–61.

⁵³ Thomas Ledermann, Guy Bodenmann, Myriam Rudaz, and Thomas N. Bradbury. "Stress, Communication, and Marital Quality in Couples." *Family Relations* 59, no. 2 (2010): 195.

⁵⁴ Bristow, *The Sociology of Generations*, 67–68.

⁵⁵ Angie Williams and John F. Nussbaum, *Intergenerational Communication Across the Life Span* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc., 2001), 28.

⁵⁶ Chris Segrin and Jeanne Flora, *Family Communication* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc., 2005), 51.

different generations.⁵⁷ Storytelling, therefore, becomes a ritualized pattern over time. It does not carry only a practical value (sharing information) but also an emotional value (strengthening relationships within the family). Numerous types of symbolic behavior can be found in family life.

Since the selected novels explore environmental problems, there is a specific type of symbolism. Trees, forests, and other elements of nature perform the roles of symbols in the books. According to Laura Rival, numerous cultures across the globe utilize a tree as a representation of the life cycle – planting a tree may mark a child’s first tooth, or a piece of a tree may be placed in the grave of a deceased family member.⁵⁸ Contrary to this tradition, John Knight explains that in certain cultures, trees are linked with death. When a woman gets married, a tree is planted, and when she passes away, the tree is cut and used for her cremation.⁵⁹ Rival cites a comparable practice in Europe, where there is an increasing trend to replace cemeteries and graves with forests.⁶⁰ This tree symbolism example is connected with the family structure. The family members decide when, where or if the tree should be planted or if it should be used for the cremation – meaning that it decides whether or not the tradition is kept. And as mentioned above, traditions such as this one are associated with the strengthening of the relationships within the family. Nature can be, therefore, used as a connecting element within a family.

To finish the initial chapter, the main concepts will be summarized. The first methodological framework introduced was ecocriticism (environmental criticism). It could be described as a field that studies the connections and relations between literature and the natural world. It uses knowledge from literary and environmental studies for the analysis. The concepts connected to ecocriticism were anthropocentrism and biocentrism. Anthropocentrism stresses the importance and superiority of human needs above the needs of other living organisms. Contrary to this notion, biocentrism puts humans in one group with all living organisms and highlights the equality of all parts.

⁵⁷ Jane Jorgenson and Arthur P. Bochner, “Imagining Families through Stories and Rituals,” in *Handbook of family communication*, ed. A. L. Vangelisti (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Inc., 2004), 513–538.

⁵⁸ Laura Rival, “Trees, from Symbols of Life and Regeneration to Political Artefacts,” in *The Social Life of Trees: Anthropological Perspectives on Tree Symbolism*, ed. Laura Rival (London: Routledge, 1998), 7.

⁵⁹ John Knight, “The Second Life of Trees: Family Forest in Upland Japan,” in *The Social Life of Trees: Anthropological Perspectives on Tree Symbolism*, ed. Laura Rival (London: Routledge, 1998), 206–207.

⁶⁰ Rival, “Trees, from Symbols,” 9.

The next methodological framework mentioned is called environmental ethics, and it discusses the moral connections between humans and nature. According to some sources, there is a division into the humanistic and naturalistic concepts – humanist corresponding with anthropocentric values, while naturalistic with biocentric ones.

Finally, the sociology of generations was introduced – studying the stream of generations going through time and phenomena associated to it. The sociology of family was also briefly mentioned – studying the relations and mechanisms within the family.

2. Handling of Nature

This chapter focuses on the way in which the characters in the novels selected for analysis perceive nature and wilderness. It aims to name the consequences of their actions on the natural world in which they live. It examines the reasons the characters have for feeling about nature in a particular way.

The colonial period in North America was a time of rapid and vigorous deforestation. The setting of the first chapters of *Barkskins* by Annie Proulx is New France during this particular period. At that time, the whole continent of North America was covered with pure and almost entirely untouched wilderness. Therefore, the colonizers coming from much more civilized Europe probably did not perceive their new environment as friendly but as dangerous. According to Turner, this hostility toward wilderness has two interconnected reasons. Puritanism and the concept of the frontier – Puritanism with “its denial of the validity and permissibility of mediating terms” and the frontier as something that had been steadily creating a boundary between matter (wilderness) and spirit (artificial).⁶¹ Stankey does not blame Puritanism but states that this interpretation of wilderness imported by the settlers into the New World was shaped by religious ideas that had been present in Europe for generations.⁶² Most newcomers portrayed in *Barkskins* are not Puritans, yet they are deeply religious and express the same antagonism toward the untamed world surrounding them. For example, one of the characters, Monsieur Trépagny, who is the master of the place where the early chapters are set, describes the forests as “evil wilderness” and loathes the way in which our nomadic ancestors used to live, calling them “beasts”.⁶³ That corresponds with the assertion that during the colonial period, the consensus among the people was that wilderness is inferior to the humanized world.

Nowadays, there is a protective and melancholic sentiment when it comes to the discussion about nature’s future. Back in the colonial period, the situation was the complete opposite. As mentioned earlier, that could be connected to the frontier concept. From today’s perspective, it seems logical not to harm nature – at least in theory – but back in the days of colonization, natural resources seemed infinite, and the enormity of the natural world beyond the frontier may have seemed unlimited and inexhaustible. Sajdadi and Baharvand state that, among other things, the novel focuses on “the belief in the boundless natural resources of the

⁶¹ Turner, “Cultivating the American Garden,” 45–46.

⁶² Stankey, “Beyond the Campfire’s Light,” 16.

⁶³ Annie Proulx, *Barkskins* (New York: Scribner, 2016), 17.

New World”. They also say that this notion of “infinite of land” was commonly propagated by European colonizers.⁶⁴ Stankey claims that “the sheer immensity of it [the natural world] was beyond anything they could imagine,” and in contrast to settlers’ homeland, “it stretched endlessly”.⁶⁵ At the beginning of *Barkskins*, the immigrants feel this exact way. One example is the character Duquet, who builds his business by exploiting one natural resource – fur.⁶⁶ The following citation is a description of his feelings about nature.

There was one everlasting commodity that Europe lacked: the forest. [...] He remembered Forgeron’s talk. The forest was unimaginably vast and it replaced itself. It could supply timber and wood for ships, houses, warmth. The profits could come forever. Yes, there were many problems of transport and markets, but it was an unexploited business that could expand and dominate.⁶⁷

After a while, Duquet becomes a successful tradesman and travels to China to sell the fur. At one point, he is having a conversation with Wuqua, a Chinese merchant. They discuss forests, and Wuqua tells Duquet that the forests in China are getting smaller because people need to harvest the land and grow food. Duquet is very surprised by this information – he thought that those incredibly deep forests of the New World would last forever.⁶⁸ Duquet’s notion of nature is obviously influenced by its quality to be illusively vast and infinite. When combined with the belief that nature is a foe, Duquet sees nature only as a source of materials and fortune.

The exact opposite can be said about the characters in Richard Powers’ *Overstory*. The novel is set in the modern era – an era characterized by a quick decline of the natural world and rising concerns about the sustainability of our attitude towards the remaining wilderness on the planet. Unlike some characters in *Barkskins*, the characters in *The Overstory* are not only passionate about nature, but they think it is something that is worth dedicating one’s life to. For example, one of the characters, Nick, lies on a platform built on a big redwood tree, protesting against its destruction, and listens to his friend reciting an environmental literary piece. He describes this moment as the peak of his life, and he says that “he lived to see everything he wants”.⁶⁹ Presumably, Nick has a connection with nature because he feels how valuable but also threatened it is.

⁶⁴ Sadjadi and Baharvand, “The Upholders of Anthropocentrism,” 201.

⁶⁵ Stankey, “Beyond the Campfire’s Light,” 16–17.

⁶⁶ Proulx, *Barkskins*, 78.

⁶⁷ Proulx, *Barkskins*, 69.

⁶⁸ Proulx, *Barkskins*, 97–98.

⁶⁹ Richard Powers, *The Overstory* (New York: Norton & Company, 2018), 269.

Another example could be Winston, who planted a mulberry tree when he immigrated to the United States. At one point, the tree is infected by a disease and starts to die. Winston is so terribly devastated that he shoots himself under the tree a few months later.⁷⁰ These situations illustrate that the characters are deeply interconnected with nature and that they feel for it. David M. Konisky et al. show in their study that although interested mainly in local problems rather than global ones, today's American general public strongly supports government intentions to address various environmental issues.⁷¹ For the characters in *Barkskins*, there is no need to feel protective about nature – it is omnipresent, and there is no sign that it could be diminished. On the other side, the characters in *The Overstory* are afraid of losing the last pieces of nature, making them related to it.

Correspondingly, they desperately try to save these last existing fragments of nature. Some of the characters in *The Overstory* are willing to risk their lives to do so. Two characters, Nick and Olivia, almost lose their lives while protesting against cutting giant redwood trees. They reside on the abovementioned tree-top platform to stop woodchoppers from cutting the trees. One morning, they are almost killed when there is a helicopter flying around the tree, rocking the platform. At the same time, bulldozers begin to destroy the base of the tree.⁷² Again, this example of Nick's and Olivia's determination is in stark contrast with the settlers depicted in *Barkskins*. Commenting on this change process since the birth of the American nation, Stankey claims that “the conception of wilderness as the locus of evil has been countered, if not offset, by the conception of wilderness as sanctuary”.⁷³ The scene of Nick and Olivia on the platform trying to save a giant redwood tree signifies that they feel that the state of the environment is so profoundly critical that it is worth sacrificing their lives for it – and saving the sanctuary.

As mentioned earlier, the settlers in *Barkskins* witness the pristine sanctuary of North America waiting to be violated. The characters in *The Overstory* see the natural world around them that is already mostly destroyed. The family of Lace See in *Strange as this Weather Has Been* by Ann Pancake watches its destruction unfolding in front of their eyes. Lace and her family live in a mining town in West Virginia. Mining activities disrupt their quotidian lives, causing catastrophic floods and land devastation.⁷⁴ Assumably, the viewpoint of the characters

⁷⁰ Powers, *The Overstory*, 39–42.

⁷¹ Konisky, Milyo, and Richardson Jr., “Environmental Policy Attitudes,” 1081.

⁷² Powers, *The Overstory*, 325–327.

⁷³ Stankey, “Beyond the Campfire's Light,” 24.

⁷⁴ Ann Pancake, *Strange as this Weather Has Been* (Shoemaker & Hoard, 2007), 14–22.

on wilderness protection is in many cases positive – one example is the protagonist, Lace, who writes letters to her senator, makes calls to agencies,⁷⁵ and marches in a couple of rallies – all this in a try to stop the mining company from destroying the land.⁷⁶ Another example is Lace’s brother Mogey who, when young, feels that a church is not the right place to pray – the woods are. He says that “to walk in woods was a prayer”. When he feels guilty and asks a pastor about that, the pastor replies that “God gave man the earth and its natural resources for our own use. [...], and we have dominion over it...”. However, Mogey thinks he is not “separate from it like that”.⁷⁷ As stated earlier, Konisky et al. discovered in their research that the American public is interested in protecting the environment, but primarily in regard to local issues.⁷⁸ Since the characters all live in a location where their environment is brutally ravaged by strip mining, it is possible that their inner motivation to feel protective about the environment would disappear if they lived further away from the mine.

There are also characters in the novels who have opposite viewpoints on how to treat nature and how to perceive it. There are Native American people opposed to the invading settlers in *Barkskins*,⁷⁹ logging companies against the protestors in *The Overstory*,⁸⁰ and one specific character named Corey who is disputed with members of his family in *Strange as this Weather Has Been*.⁸¹ These opposing views will be discussed in the remaining paragraphs of this chapter.

When the colonizers arrived in North America, they did not have to deal only with severe weather conditions and “evil” wilderness but with the continent’s native inhabitants as well. This clash of cultures is described in Annie Proulx’s *Barkskins*. One of the Natives is Elphège. Even though he is eventually forced to partially follow colonizers’ ways, he and his siblings try to be consistent with Mi’kmaq (a tribe) ways – they live in a forest in a wikuom (a traditional type of shelter), they hunt and gather.⁸² Mari, their mother, obviously does not understand the ways of the colonizers and calls the newcomers “fools who grew gardens instead

⁷⁵ Pancake, *Strange as this*, 275.

⁷⁶ Pancake, *Strange as this*, 302.

⁷⁷ Pancake, *Strange as this*, 168.

⁷⁸ Konisky, Milyo, and Richardson Jr., “Environmental policy,” 1081.

⁷⁹ Proulx, *Barkskins*, 151.

⁸⁰ Powers, *The Overstory*, 212–213.

⁸¹ Pancake, *Strange as this*, 162–164.

⁸² Proulx, *Barkskins*, 153–156.

of gathering the riches of the country”.⁸³ Her perception of nature is described like this in the novel:

They stood opposed on the nature of the forest. To Mari it was a living entity, as vital as the waterways, filled with the gifts of medicine, food, shelter, tool material, which everyone discovered and remembered. One lived with it in harmony and gratitude. She believed the interminable chopping of every tree for the foolish purpose of “clearing the land” was bad.⁸⁴

Reynolds states that in the last thousands of years, modern civilizations continuously succeeded traditional nomadic cultures. They “separated humans from ecosystems that had nurtured them,” and therefore, “natural resources became commodities”. The remaining traditional cultures, however, kept the indigenous view and remained loyal to the conviction that they are parts of the natural world.⁸⁵ Sadjadi and Baharvand assert that Native Americans in *Barkskins* never overuse their environment and “its virginal resources” since they do not deem themselves disconnected from nature.⁸⁶ According to Greg Garrard, aboriginal cultures have been portrayed as in harmony with nature at least since the sixteenth century, and the idea of “indigenous environmental virtue is a foundational belief for deep ecologists and many ecocritics.”⁸⁷ So, Native American characters and the settlers are placed in juxtaposition to each other in *Barkskins*. The former is described as interconnected with nature, sustainably harvesting its resources, while the latter is portrayed as conquerors seeing nature as a source of the material.

The latter also applies to the loggers in *The Overstory*. Opposed to the previously mentioned protestors, they do not perceive nature (in this case, trees in particular) as something valuable or worth saving, and they have no understanding for the protesting individuals.⁸⁸ One illustration of virtually no compassion for them is the situation when two activists handcuff themselves to a loader, the driver accelerates and drags them alongside.⁸⁹ The roots of this inimicality were mentioned earlier in this chapter – it was stated that there is a religious background. Harrison comments on the connection with Christianity, saying that “[t]he Christian doctrine of the creation sets the human being apart from nature, advocates human control over nature, and implies that the natural world was created solely for our use.”⁹⁰ Krebber

⁸³ Proulx, *Barkskins*, 19.

⁸⁴ Proulx, *Barkskins*, 50–51.

⁸⁵ Reynolds, „A Native American,” 16.

⁸⁶ Sadjadi and Baharvand, “The Upholders,” 203.

⁸⁷ Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 120.

⁸⁸ Powers, *The Overstory*, 270–272.

⁸⁹ Powers, *The Overstory*, 271.

⁹⁰ Harrison, “Subduing the Earth,” 86.

adds another perspective saying that the perception of nature as a piece of material ready to be used for human needs was established during the Enlightenment period. People started to see nature only as one mechanism, depriving it of each part's baffling complexity and individuality.⁹¹ Whatever the loggers' motivation, their perception of nature was not the same as the activists', and these two groups were in a perpetual confrontation in the novel.

Protagonists in Richard Powers' *Overstory* did not have to encounter only the loggers but many other obstacles. One of them was the police. Two characters, Mimi and Duggie, join a protest against logging in the Coast Range. At one point, Duggie is humiliated by the police when they cut away his trousers, exposing his war wounds to everybody's sight. After that, they shower Douglass's groin with pepper spray, and he screams in agony.⁹² During another protest, the activists chain themselves into a ring, and they are brutally pepper sprayed by the police.⁹³ Identical to the loggers, the police officers had no compassion for the protesting people or the trees. Again, the cause of the enmity towards nature can be explained by various historical circumstances. According to Williams, God, and Christianity are not the only accountable factors, even though they form a foundation for every following amplification of this bitter attitude. The agricultural and industrial revolutions and their factual consequences stemmed from "seeing nature quite clearly and even coldly as a set of objects, on which men could operate." Williams also says that it is necessary not to forget some of the consequences of this perception of nature – the perception that led to "unforeseen or uncared-for consequences."⁹⁴ To conclude, the activists in *The Overstory* embodied a positive attitude towards nature, and they were portrayed as protagonists. On the other side, there were the loggers and the police officers pictured as antagonists with a negative perception of nature.

In Ann Pancake's *Strange as this Weather Has Been* is (apart from the mining companies) one distinct antagonist. Even though he is the son of the main protagonist, Corey is portrayed as a negative character. As mentioned above, the characters are mostly passionate about nature, and they strive to help it by trying to stop the mining company. Still, a ten-year-old boy named Corey is very enthusiastic about the disaster. He admires Rabbit – a man who collects the metal junk from the flooded brooks that are bloated due to the mining. Corey is thrilled that Rabbit can build machines from the debris, not thinking about other consequences

⁹¹ Krebber, "Anthropocentrism and Reason," 330.

⁹² Powers, *The Overstory*, 273–274.

⁹³ Powers, *The Overstory*, 299–303.

⁹⁴ Williams, *Culture and Materialism*, 76–77.

of the flooding at all.⁹⁵ There is a scene when Corey stands and looks at the ravaged mountain and that sight evokes a feeling of admiration in him. He admires huge bulldozers, how immense the mine seems to be and that the site is “full of sorry-ass piddly things”.⁹⁶ Possible reasons for detestation towards nature in *Barkskins* were stated earlier, but that concerned the colonial period. *Strange as this Weather Has Been* is set in the modern era and Harold Fromm mentions the reasons for the animosity in that era:

To the average child of the United States in the present day Nature is indeed a great mystery, not insofar as it is incomprehensible but insofar as it is virtually nonexistent to his perceptions. Not only do most children obtain without delay the nurturing commodities for a satisfied bodily life, but they are rarely in a position to experience a connection between the commodity that fills their need and its natural source. "Meat" consists of red geometrical shapes obtained in plastic packages at the supermarket, whose relationship to animals is obscure if not wholly invisible.⁹⁷

Fromm also states that in the early times of the existence of the human species, we had no power to restrain nature and therefore, we had to cooperate with it and rely on it. Nowadays, we have such technologies that it seems like everything has been produced by man, not by nature.⁹⁸ Theodore Roszak claims that values such as disconnectedness from nature and practically no bond between self and nature “make it easier for people to damage the environment without feeling guilt”.⁹⁹ In comparison to the Natives in *Barkskins*, the characters situated in the modern era in *Strange as this Weather Has Been* are seemingly not dependent on nature. An aboriginal person must forage and hunt to survive while being in direct contact with the natural world, while a modern person can go to the nearest grocery store without encountering nature whatsoever. Therefore, it is much easier for people nowadays to be disconnected from the natural world and erroneously suppose it is not fundamental to their survival.

To conclude this chapter, every novel depicts juxtaposed groups of people – one of them empathizes with nature, often tries to protect it, and the other sees it only as a source of material or wealth. The consequences of their attitudes are reflected in their environment. In other words, each novel describes a clash of anthropocentric and biocentric views. In *Barkskins*, the colonizers’ anthropocentric perspective leads to a decline of the world of nature, most visibly forests, around them. Similarly, in *Strange as This Weather Has Been*, the mining company

⁹⁵ Pancake, *Strange as this*, 60–68.

⁹⁶ Powers, *The Overstory*, 162–164.

⁹⁷ Fromm, “From Transcendence to Obsolence,” 33.

⁹⁸ Fromm, „From Transcendence to Obsolence,” 35.

⁹⁹ Roszak, “Where psyche meet Gaia,” 1–17.

workers disrupt not only the natural world but also the lives of the locals. Also, there are loggers and police in *The Overstory*. Opposed to them are groups of people with a biocentric perspective – the activists struggling to save the last fragments of nature in *The Overstory*, the Natives in *Barkskins*, and Mogeey in *Strange as This Weather Has Been*. According to the literature, the rationale behind the antagonists' attitudes could be historically rooted in the Puritan period, in the times of the Enlightenment, and in disconnection from nature in the present.

3. Moral Dilemma

This chapter examines the extent to which the characters consider their behavior ethical while acting against or for nature. It aims to determine why they follow such ethics. Also, it compares groups of different opinion in each of the selected novels and describes the disputes originating in these viewpoints.

Annie Proulx's *Barkskins* spans more than three hundred years, and the first few chapters are set in the colonial period. The newcomers start to destroy the forests by which the Natives have been nurtured and in which they have lived for millennia.¹⁰⁰ As mentioned in the preceding chapter, the Native American characters in the novel describe nature as “a living entity [...] filled with gifts of medicine, food, shelter, tool material, which everyone discovered” and as something of which they are a part of.¹⁰¹ Leopold says that all ethics so far have developed on the basis of the fact that the person is part of a community. To consider oneself a part of nature, therefore, means to “enlarge the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land.”¹⁰² As mentioned further in the text, in *Barkskins* the views of the Natives correspond with Leopold's notion.

After years of colonization by European immigrants, the Natives face an unprecedented alteration of their environment – the newcomers bring cows and horses that quickly consume all the medicinal and nutritious plants. They bring domesticated plants that replace the original ones and claim more and more land by cutting the forests.¹⁰³ This situation is vividly described by one of the Natives, Sosep, who has a speech in front of his family:

We are sharing our land with the *Wenuj* and they take more and more. You see how their beasts destroy our food, how their boats and nets take our fish. They bring plants that vanquish our plants. Most do not mean to hurt us, but they are many and we are few. [...] But I wish to tell you that if we Mi'kmaw people are to survive, we must constantly hold to the thought of Mi'kmaw ways in our minds. We will live in two worlds. We must keep our Mi'kmaw world—where we, the plants, animals and birds are all persons together who help each other—fresh in our thoughts and lives. We must renew and revere the vision in our minds so it can stand against this outside force that encroaches. Otherwise, we could not bear it.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Proulx, *Barkskins*, 10–21.

¹⁰¹ Proulx, *Barkskins*, 50–51.

¹⁰² Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” 37.

¹⁰³ Proulx, *Barkskins*, 173–182.

¹⁰⁴ Proulx, *Barkskins*, 181.

Sosep obviously inclines to the idea that his community is not only his closest family or his tribe, but as he says in his speech “the plants, animals and birds”.¹⁰⁵ In that sense, it is logical that he – and, as mentioned above, also the Natives as such – does not consider it to be right or ethical to harm nature for profit or any other reason because it equals harming themselves. Furthermore, Manes states that many aboriginal cultures do not have a term for wilderness and do not see a clear difference between wild and domesticated life.¹⁰⁶ So, for the Natives, cutting forests, harvesting, or keeping livestock would not mean simply damaging their surroundings, but it would mean destroying their community and home.

Although none of the settlers openly protests against the deforestation and brutal alteration of the land, there is a sign of questioning the whole process by one of the settlers. One of the newcomers, René, has been cutting the forest for weeks.¹⁰⁷ At one point, he asks his master a question that has been troubling him, as he reveals at that moment, since the first step into the woods of New England. He does not understand why it is necessary to cut the forest when “there are so many fine clearings”. He believes it would be simpler to use the spaces that have already been cleared.¹⁰⁸ However, his master, Monsieur Trépagny, explains that it is essential to cut the forest, not just for them, but for “posterity” and for what that place would become. He also says that “someday men will grow cabbages here” and that when he cuts the trees, he does not see the trees, but he “see[s] the cabbages” and “vineyards.”¹⁰⁹ It appears that Trépagny’s main motivation to cut the forest is to develop the New World for the next generations. From his same as from the colonizers’ perspective, cutting the forest is not ethically wrong because it serves a good purpose.

In the previous chapter, it was stated that the main culprit of the settlers’ alienation from the natural world around them could be their religion. However, Trépagny’s case demonstrates that there is at least one more reason for it – the duty to build the future world for their descendants. Stankey claims that the shift from religious to secular society provided the newcomers an evidently defined position as the “spearhead[s] of civilization”. It was their duty and obligation to replace the wilderness with the assets of a civilized world. That means “a rural setting populated by farms and agricultural enterprises to foster the nation’s progress.”¹¹⁰ As

¹⁰⁵ Proulx, *Barkskins*, 181.

¹⁰⁶ Manes, “Nature and Silence,” 18.

¹⁰⁷ Proulx, *Barkskins*, 12.

¹⁰⁸ Proulx, *Barkskins*, 16–17.

¹⁰⁹ Proulx, *Barkskins*, 17.

¹¹⁰ Stankey, “Beyond the Campfire’s Light, ” 19.

mentioned in the first chapter, Gewirth states that there are two ways to regard the oppression of nature from an ethical perspective. There are a naturalistic perspective (humans have the “duty to preserve and enhance the environment”) and a humanist perspective. The latter considers human rights to be superior and regards nature as something “providing means for the fulfillment of those [human] interests.”¹¹¹ The humanistic concept mentioned by Gewirth, the same as Stankey’s notion, corresponds with Trépagny’s idea in *Barkskins* – there is an obligation to destroy the forest, replace it with fields and grow plants that will feed the community and all the generations to come.

While Monsieur Trépagny in *Barkskins* is willing to cut the trees without remorse, envisioning the cabbages and vineyards in the future, some characters in *The Overstory* view trees from a strikingly different angle. The most eloquent example is the character of Patricia Westerford. She studies forestry, and after some time in her educational program, she starts to dispute her professors. Contrary to her, they believe that the newly planted forests are “thrifty” and that the ancient ones are “decadent” – they also talk about forestry in financial terms. Despite the unwillingness of her professors, she focuses her dissertation on the way in which trees communicate.¹¹² Later in the story, she publishes a book about trees in which she describes how complex the trees are.

Something marvelous is happening underground, something we’re just learning how to see. Mats of mycorrhizal cabling link trees into gigantic, smart communities [...] they form vast trading networks of goods, services, and information [...] There are no individuals in a forest, no separable events. [...] oaks and hickories synchronize their nut production to baffle the animals that feed on them. [...] Maybe it’s useful to think of forests as enormous spreading, branching, underground super-trees.¹¹³

Apparently, Patricia considers the trees to be something both intelligent and fascinating. She describes them as “smart communities”, “networks of goods” and creatures able to communicate. All this in a way that aims to fascinate the potential readers of Patricia’s book, making them feel connected to these green worlds.

There is a generally accepted idea that animals should not be harmed. If they are, some people suffer unpleasant feelings because of it. Holmes Rolston states that people are not able to divide “an ethics for human beings and an ethics for wildlife” (for example, mammals), one of the reasons being the animals’ ability to enjoy, experience, and feel – traits that “count

¹¹¹ Gewirth, “Human Rights,” 120.

¹¹² Powers, *The Overstory*, 122.

¹¹³ Powers, *The Overstory*, 218.

morally when humans encounter them.” He also states that when it comes to flora, there is no visible ability to express feelings, frustration, or satisfaction. Hence, people have no emotional reason to feel sensitive when it comes to the destruction of it. However, he continues by stating that this premise is wrong because it is rooted in the old paradigm. The new one proposes that there is another “moral landmark” – shift from the humanistic perspective towards the biological one – that it is not correct to judge the moral value of living things according to their human traits. The plants and trees should be treated as elements that struggle to survive and “promote their own realization”.¹¹⁴ This could be partially connected to the idea that Patricia in *The Overstory* seeks to convey. In agreement with Rolston, she proposes that people should treat trees as something intelligent and sentient, despite their nonanimal properties.¹¹⁵ On the other hand, she sticks to the “old paradigm” and describes the trees in terms of human properties. According to Hill Jr., this is due to the human “tendency to measure the significance of everything by its relation to oneself and those with whom one identifies.” He suggests that to master the art of “humility”, it is necessary to improve one’s ability to ignore self-importance and to be able to care about things other than those in one’s circle of interest.¹¹⁶ What is important, however, is the fact that Patricia views deforestation as unethical because she acknowledges that the trees are sentient beings.

Even though Patricia’s research is fact-based, individuals in *The Overstory* who promote this new way of thinking about trees are often misunderstood by other people. One example is the character of Neelay Mehta, a wheelchair-bound programmer of Indian origin. The essence of his work is not associated with nature, but he becomes fascinated by trees during his studies at the university.¹¹⁷ Later in his career, he develops a very successful sci-fi video game,¹¹⁸ but he grows anxious about the way in which the game kills people’s productivity and makes them alienated from the real world. In connection with his fascination by nature, he thinks of an idea. At one of his corporate meetings, he proposes that they implement environmental elements like water quality and finite source materials into the game as well as real-life issues and the concept of permadeath (players could not easily reappear in the game). The game would be more about taking care of the world around them rather than taking care only of themselves. Neelay also reads a passage from the book written by the previously mentioned character, Patricia. The

¹¹⁴ Rolston, “Biocentric Justifications,” 137–141.

¹¹⁵ Powers, *The Overstory*, 450–456.

¹¹⁶ Hill Jr., “Ideals of Human,” 218.

¹¹⁷ Powers, *The Overstory*, 109–110.

¹¹⁸ Powers, *The Overstory*, 193.

project managers, however, all vote against his proposal, saying that it is not going to be entertaining and that the stocks will plummet.¹¹⁹ Contrary to Neelay, the managers do not believe that the global environmental situation is that serious that they would have to act. There are not many clues to determine the main cause of the managers' inactivity, except signs of economic motivation (the fear of the stocks plummeting). Neelay wants to send a message to the users in his video game and make them realize the finiteness of natural resources on Earth.

Various reasons for our alienation from the natural world around us are mentioned earlier, and they are primarily historical. However, some authors ascribe it to an individual's personal traits. DesJardins states that if one wants to change his or her approach toward the non-humanized world, it is necessary to change one's personality because our values and attitudes are deeply interconnected with our personality.¹²⁰ Similarly, Frasz claims the following:

Would not a person who is closed off emotionally to natural entities also live a shallow life of limited love? While there is no guarantee that being open to Nature will also manifest itself in openness to other people, it can be argued that someone who is more open to other people as they are in themselves, could be more likely to expand this sense of openness to nonhumans because there are fewer boundaries between the person and other beings. And as the arrogant person is less likely to consider the consequences of an action except as they impact on him or herself, the environmentally arrogant person, one who is closed off to natural entities as they are in themselves, is less likely to consider the environmental effects or consequences of actions towards nature. It is widely agreed that this insensitivity to environmental effects has led to the environmental crisis facing us today. And contributing to this crisis is the arrogance of perceiving nature only in instrumental terms, to be closed off to natural entities as they are in themselves.¹²¹

There is too little information about the managers in *The Overstory* to say if they truly live "shallow life[s]", but considering the overall environmental situation in *The Overstory* in connection with Frasz's notion, the managers' behavior could be considered as arrogant and selfish. The only thing that they ponder and openly talk about when facing Neelay's proposal is the financial side of the argument – therefore, their own profit. They do not try to understand Neelay's motivation for his steps nor to find the best solution. There is no indication that they perceive the current approach to the natural world as unethical.

¹¹⁹ Powers, *The Overstory*, 410–414.

¹²⁰ DesJardins, *Environmental Ethics*, 136.

¹²¹ Frasz, "Environmental Virtue Ethics," 270–271.

One of the antagonists in *Strange as This Weather Has Been* could be described in a similar way. The character of Corey was mentioned in the previous chapter. He is a ten-year-old boy and the son of the main protagonist, Lace. As mentioned earlier, despite the dire situation in his neighborhood caused by the strip mining,¹²² Corey sees all the catastrophic events like floods and omnipresent pollution as an adventure. Because of the flood, the river is now in his family's backyard, and Corey with his younger brother, Tommy, go picking debris. Corey calls the debris "gold," and the whole experience is "like walking the aisle of a Wal-Mart [...] with all the price tags saying free"¹²³ for him. He is also fascinated by "the monkey" – an animal decayed to such an extent that the boys can't recognize what kind of animal it is. Additionally, Corey is obsessed with the idea of him having a four-wheeler like his neighbor Seth.¹²⁴ The character of Corey does not seem to be connected to nature at all or to feel sorrowful because of the damage done by strip mining. Same as the managers in the previous paragraph, Corey is interested mainly in material possessions.

It is irrelevant in this case to look at Corey's behavior from an ethical perspective since he is only ten years old. It is obvious that he does not assess the strip mining to be unethical, but unlike the managers in *The Overstory*, he is still a child. Louv claims that a majority of children in the US suffer from "nature-deficit disorder". He says that the concepts like "structured games and circumscribed play" teach children that nature is an unknown area full of haunting things. These things inevitably make them disconnected from nature.¹²⁵ Corey's surroundings do not help to achieve a positive attitude or respect towards nature. Throughout his childhood, he sees the mining companies ravaging the mountain forests and polluting the environment with no consequences for their actions. He also sees the aforementioned Seth, whose parents profit from the mining, and Corey is jealous because of not having the four-wheeler. His infantile mind, therefore, sees that there are no consequences for damaging the environment and that people who do that live better lives than his own family. All this contributes to his anti-environmental attitude.

Corey's grandmother views nature from a strikingly different angle. Before she died, Grandma had been stressing the importance of a healthy environment because of its nurturing role – always saying that "[y]ou can live off these mountains [...] And in bad times, we did."¹²⁶

¹²² Pancake, *Strange as this*, 14–22.

¹²³ Pancake, *Strange as this*, 24–25.

¹²⁴ Pancake, *Strange as this*, 29.

¹²⁵ Louv, *Last Child*, 32.

¹²⁶ Pancake, *Strange as this*, 35.

Her attitude could be linked to the notion mentioned earlier in this chapter. Native American characters in Annie Proulx's *Barkskins* also profoundly cared about nature and considered it unethical to hurt it – partially because they relied on it. As mentioned earlier, Leopold describes this as “enlarg[ing] the boundaries of the community [...] to include [...] the land” and calls the idea of an individual feeling as part of a community a cornerstone of all ethics.¹²⁷ Grandma in *Strange as this Weather Has Been* also deeply cares about nature because she is aware of the interconnectedness of her life with it and her reliance on it.

Corey's sister, Bant, used to spend a lot of time with her grandmother. Fifteen-year-old Bant has loved nature since early childhood,¹²⁸ mostly due to Grandma, whom she used to help with harvesting edible plants in the forest. At one point, Bant kills a snake, rolling “the rock back off his head, feeling a scratchy satisfaction watching the juice seep out of his head while the body still thrashed”. To Bant's surprise, Grandma was furious, shocked, and even disappointed in Bant because of what she has just done. Grandma respected all living creatures, saying you should not kill what cannot harm you. She also mentioned the importance of snakes to the health of the forest.¹²⁹ Singer states that there is no moral justification for assessing the pain (or happiness) that animals experience as less serious than the same amount of pain (or happiness) felt by people. The decisive moral factor here is, therefore, if certain creatures have “the capacity for suffering [...] or enjoyment”.¹³⁰ Grandma thinks that killing the snake is unethical because the snake cannot harm anybody. She also feels disappointed in Bant because she obviously enjoys doing it. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, killing a living creature in the forest equals damaging Grandma's own community.

To conclude, each novel shows various ethical viewpoints with its characters. Again, there are two main opinion streams in each novel. As mentioned earlier, they could be called humanistic and naturalistic. The humanistic type is close to the anthropocentric values mentioned in previous chapters, and the naturalistic type resembles the biocentric attitudes. There are characters that consider it ethically wrong to destroy nature because of their reliance on it. Some of them feel so interconnected with nature that they perceive it as a part of their communities and, therefore, cannot see it being destroyed. Characters that are scientifically interested in nature see the destruction of the environment as unethical because they comprehend the complexity of the green world. On the other hand, the causes of the destructive

¹²⁷ Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” 55.

¹²⁸ Pancake, *Strange as this*, 32–34.

¹²⁹ Pancake, *Strange as this*, 38–39.

¹³⁰ Singer, “All Animals Are Equal,” 282–286.

behavior are their upbringing, their distorted personality, immaturity, or the duty to build the world for their descendants.

4. From Father to Son

This chapter centers around generational differences regarding attitudes toward the natural environment. It intends to trace patterns in the development of those viewpoints and to describe the factors influencing their formation. It also presents some of the findings in the context of the sociology of family.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, the story in Annie Proulx's *Barkskins* covers more than three hundred years – from the end of the seventeenth century till the beginning of the twenty-first century. Also, the characters in the novel are divided into two main groups – the Natives and the loggers. Even though these fractions blend at specific points in the story, they generally perform the function of two juxtaposed groups standing against each other. The following paragraphs analyze the two groups in *Barkskins* and their development throughout the generations.

For “the loggers” group, the starting point of their part of the story is the character of Duquet. He escapes from indentured servitude and starts his own business with fur and later with timber.¹³¹ It was already stated in the previous chapters that Duquet built his company on exploiting nature and never felt like it is worth protecting. His descendants mostly follow the family tradition, continue in the timber business, and have the same mindset. Examples could be Duquet's adopted son, Bernard,¹³² or his even more distant relative living in the second half of the eighteenth century, James¹³³ – they both help the family business grow and respect their fathers' wishes. Bristow claims that much of young people's knowledge comes from “everyday interactions between the generations”.¹³⁴ Also, Howe and Strauss mention that the central role of the midlife life phase is “leadership (parenting, teaching, directing intuitions, using values)”. On the other hand, the primary function of the youth phase is “dependence (growing, learning [...] acquiring values).”¹³⁵ At some stage of their lives, Bernard, James, and all other characters were in the youth phase, learning. So, the descendants of Duquet followed the family tradition because they matured in a specific environment which led them to a certain mindset. Therefore, their attitude towards nature stays the same throughout many generations.

¹³¹ Proulx, *Barkskins*, 61–72.

¹³² Proulx, *Barkskins*, 228–239.

¹³³ Proulx, *Barkskins*, 327–332.

¹³⁴ Bristow, *The Sociology of Generations*, 67.

¹³⁵ Strauss and Howe, *The History*, 60–61.

Duquet's family tree is occupied mainly by people who do not respect nature's importance and benefit from its destruction without remorse. However, two family members differ in their viewpoints from the rest of their family. One of them is Charley, who lives at the turn of the twentieth century. Charley studies forestry, loves forests, and has a holistic view of nature:

I am sure that wild natural woodlands are the only true forests. The entire atmosphere—the surrounding air, the intertwined roots, the humble ferns and lichens, insects and diseases, the soil and water, weather. All these parts seem to play together in a kind of grand wild orchestra. A forest living for itself rather than the benefit of humankind.¹³⁶

His attitude is very complex compared to his relatives, and he views nature as a living entity. That is also in stark contrast to almost all his ancestors. According to Strauss and Howe, the generation of people born between 1883 and 1900 is called the Lost generation. They state that this generation was considered “unrestrained”, “exposed to perversion,” and “growing up bad” by some members of the older generation. On the other hand, this generation is described as a very progressive one.¹³⁷ Furthermore, Williams and Nussbaum state that the changes of the twentieth century brought a decline in the status of older generations and that modern society started to perceive old people as useless.¹³⁸ In connection with the cohort concept mentioned in the first chapter, his generation's revolutionary and progressive attitudes could be the reason for Charley's “rebellion” against his family's ways.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, one of the characters in *Barkskins* is Monsieur Trépagny – Duquet's master, while he is in indentured servitude. Trépagny's motivation to cut the forest is partially his need to build the New World for posterity.¹³⁹ Contrary to the example in the previous paragraph, he does not act according to his father's wishes but in the name of his children. According to Hiskes, there is a more egocentric reason for this outlook than simply altruism. He states that a concept of “reflexive reciprocity” can be applied – “an action that rebounds on itself in furthering the interests of both present performer and future recipient”. In other words, the need to develop the world for the next generations supports and strengthens the notion for the age in which the person currently is.¹⁴⁰ So, the loggers diminish nature not

¹³⁶ Proulx, *Barkskins*, 643.

¹³⁷ Strauss and Howe, *The History*, 254–255.

¹³⁸ Williams and Nussbaum, *Intergenerational Communication*, 28.

¹³⁹ Proulx, *Barkskins*, 17.

¹⁴⁰ Hiskes, *The Human Right*, 48–49.

only because they try to respect their family values and want the world of their descendants to thrive but also because they need to justify their current actions.

On the other side of the spectrum stands the family of the Native Americans. As mentioned before, they are deeply interconnected with nature, and most of them are concerned by the logging practices of the newcomers. The family's story begins with René Sel, a logger in indentured servitude, and Mari, a Native American woman – they start a family whose story is told in *Barkskins*. Their children are forced to leave home to work in the lumber industry.¹⁴¹ Some of René's and Mari's grandchildren try to renew the Native ways of life, while some of them still work for the colonizers.¹⁴² These two ways of life alternate in the Sel family throughout the generations.

Their changing lifestyles also repeatedly reveal a pattern of disassembling the family when the members follow the “industrial” way of life and reuniting it when they follow the traditional way of life. Bristow states that the conflicts inside families regarding generational differences have been present in society throughout history, but they became much more intense with the emerging industrial society. The “problem of generations” then seems to transform into “a crisis of interpersonal relations”.¹⁴³ That corresponds with the pattern in the story of Sel's family: Separated by way of an industrial society where individuals must go to work to earn money while being disconnected from their family and nature – reunited by reestablishing the traditional methods while being together, foraging, and living in harmony with nature.

They do not have such a deep connection with nature as the Native Americans, but it is also valuable to them. The characters in Richard Powers' *Overstory* are mostly activists seeking to protect the remaining pieces of nature. Though the novel depicts a much shorter period than *Barkskins*, it is still possible to track intergenerational influences and changes over time.

One part of the story is about the ancestors of Nicholas Hoel. Jørgen Hoel, Nick's direct ancestor living in the nineteenth century, plants six chestnut trees when he proposes to his spouse, Vi. He says, “[o]ne day, my children will shake the trunks and eat for free.”¹⁴⁴ Hiskes cites Edmund Burke and states that a community of people is not only a group of currently living people but also people that are dead and people that will be born in the future. Individuals,

¹⁴¹ Proulx, *Barkskins*, 155.

¹⁴² Proulx, *Barkskins*, 296.

¹⁴³ Bristow, *The Sociology of Generations*, 67–68.

¹⁴⁴ Powers, *The Overstory*, 6.

therefore, incorporate their non-existing children into their communities.¹⁴⁵ Jørgen not only thinks about future generations but is also influenced by it and plants the trees for them.

Ultimately, only one of the trees endures, and when Jørgen dies, he is buried under it. His son, John, then establishes a tradition – he photographs the tree once a month and collects the photos. When dying, John’s son, Frank, promises his father to maintain the practice, and he keeps taking pictures of the chestnut tree.¹⁴⁶ Segrin and Flora claim that the study of routines inside the family reveals that many habits evolve into ritualized patterns – which means they also start having a symbolic value. These acts begin to carry symbolic value if they are repeatedly performed. The authors also state that “the actual interaction is less important than what the interaction symbolizes” and that it can “symbolize [...] bonds of connection” within the family.¹⁴⁷ The tree fulfills this symbolic value for Jørgen, John, and Frank. For Jørgen, it is a symbol of his interest in the well-being of future generations. It serves John as a symbol of interest in the deed of his father (planting the trees) in the past. A similar concept applies in Frank’s case when he continues the tradition, and taking pictures means honoring his deceased father’s wish. So, in the Hoel family, trees symbolize the connection between its members even throughout the generations.

Another character in *The Overstory* is Adam Appich, who becomes an environmental activist later in the novel. Adam’s father starts a family tradition when he plants a tree for every Appich child that is born, and it is a maple tree for Adam. He and his siblings create an emotional bond with their trees.¹⁴⁸ Rival says that many cultures worldwide were observed to use a tree as a symbol of the cycle of life. For example, a tree is “planted when the first-born child cuts his or her first teeth”, a part of it is put in a grave of a deceased loved one, or it symbolizes that the man has reached his matureness.¹⁴⁹ With the support of the argument of Segrin and Flora mentioned in the previous paragraph, tree planting represents the unity of the Appich family. It also affects Adam’s approach to the natural world because he has been emotionally connected with his tree and nature since early childhood.

That also applies to Patricia Westerford – *The Overstory* character that eventually becomes a scientist, studying how trees communicate and behave.¹⁵⁰ Her passion for natural

¹⁴⁵ Hiskes, *The Human Right*, 48–49.

¹⁴⁶ Powers, *The Overstory*, 11.

¹⁴⁷ Segrin and Flora, *Family Communication*, 51.

¹⁴⁸ Powers, *The Overstory*, 47–50.

¹⁴⁹ Rival, “Trees, from Symbols,” 7.

¹⁵⁰ Powers, *The Overstory*, 218.

phenomena is not an accident – when she is a child, her father frequently talks about nature with her. She describes his habit in the following way:

In this way, acorn animism turns bit by bit into its offspring, botany. She becomes her father’s star and only pupil for the simple reason that she alone, of all the family, sees what he knows: plants are willful and crafty and after something, just like people. He tells her, on their drives, about all the oblique miracles that green can devise. People have no corner on curious behavior. Other creatures—bigger, slower, older, more durable— call the shots, make the weather, feed creation, and create the very air.¹⁵¹

He talks about the natural world in very favorable terms. Moreover, Patricia’s father’s facts and stories about nature interest her deeply, and they become a connecting element between her and her father. Jorgenson and Bochner claim that such storytelling times have the functions of socializing family members and strengthening the relationships inside the family as well as between the generations.¹⁵² So, not only that Patricia toughens her relationship with her father by discussing nature, but she also dedicates her life to examining nature due to his addresses.

Later in Patricia’s life, nature and trees play another significant role. When Patricia turns fifteen, her father dies in a car accident.¹⁵³ Since his unexpected death, Patty tends to the trees every time she feels miserable, and it is also stated that “[o]ut in the woods, her father is with her again, all day long.”¹⁵⁴ Knight describes cultures where people associate trees with dying. A tree is planted when a woman gets married, and the same tree is felled and used for her cremation when she dies.¹⁵⁵ Rival adds another example of a similar tradition practiced in Europe – there is a “growing movement in parts of Europe to replace cemeteries and graves with ‘peace forests’.” She also states that graves symbolize death and decline, while trees are distinctively associated with “life and eternity”.¹⁵⁶ Though some cultures connect trees with dying, in Patricia’s case, there is a more positive undertone rather than a negative one. Trees are not symbols of death for her, but they form an environment in which she feels the presence of her deceased father. So, trees perform a role of something that relates her not only intergenerationally but also with somebody who is no longer alive.

There is less symbolism connected to trees in *Strange as this Weather Has Been*, but the intergenerational relationship between the characters and their ancestors through nature is

¹⁵¹ Powers, *The Overstory*, 114.

¹⁵² Jorgenson and Bochner, “Imagining Families,” 513–538.

¹⁵³ Powers, *The Overstory*, 117–118.

¹⁵⁴ Powers, *The Overstory*, 123.

¹⁵⁵ Knight, “The Second Life of Trees,” 206–207.

¹⁵⁶ Rival, “Trees, from Symbols,” 9.

depicted similarly. As described in the previous chapters, one of the characters, Bant See, deeply cherishes nature. Due to this, watching the strip mining happening right next to her town is extremely unpleasant for her. She says that contrary to children her age, the environmental destruction struck her emotionally much more.¹⁵⁷ Also, at one point in the novel, she says she “feels the hurt” while looking at the mine.¹⁵⁸ Her attitude is not coincidence.

Like in *The Overstory* and *Barkskins*, ancestors in Pancake’s novel greatly influence the characters’ approach towards nature. In Bant’s case, there are few people that significantly shape her beliefs. The character mentioned above, Grandma, has the most significant impact on her thoughts and actions, even after she is no longer alive. Bant often thinks about her – she comes to her mind, especially regarding the destruction of the land that Grandma used to love. When she sees the mines¹⁵⁹ or when she starts to have feelings toward one of the miners.¹⁶⁰ According to Williams and Nussbaum, it is beneficial to the family functioning when a grandparent is involved in raising a child. The elderly brings “a rich source of social and emotional support,” a refuge from the restraints of the parents for the child, guidance for the parent, and knowledge mediated to the family by stories.¹⁶¹ Bant’s grandmother performed a role of emotional support and a teacher when she was still alive. As stated in one of the previous paragraphs, Burke, cited by Hiskes, says that individuals tend to “incorporate” their deceased loved ones into their communities.¹⁶² After Grandma dies, Bant still respects her as her mentor and tries to act according to what Grandma would have done.

Bant’s mother and Grandma’s daughter-in-law, Lace See, is another crucial character in Bant’s development. Lace has a positive attitude towards nature and tries to teach Bant its importance. Again, Lace’s approach was formed by intergenerational influences. When young, she used to walk into the woods with her mother and search for edible plants.¹⁶³ Cole states that even though a person does not have to be in direct contact with nature to appreciate it, visiting the wilderness can create a strong emotional connection to it.¹⁶⁴ Earlier in this paper, a similar concept was discussed concerning the Native Americans – they are interconnected with nature because they are in direct contact with it and rely on it. Similarly to them, Lace’s mother takes

¹⁵⁷ Pancake, *Strange as this*, 40.

¹⁵⁸ Pancake, *Strange as this*, 103.

¹⁵⁹ Pancake, *Strange as this*, 166.

¹⁶⁰ Pancake, *Strange as this*, 132–133.

¹⁶¹ Williams and Nussbaum, *Intergenerational Communication*, 179–183.

¹⁶² Hiskes, *The Human Right*, 48–49.

¹⁶³ Pancake, *Strange as this*, 139–140.

¹⁶⁴ Cole, “Symbolic Values,” 23–28.

her daughter into the forest to form a bond between her and nature. When she has a child, Lace mostly leaves this role to her mother-in-law (Grandma) but teaches her daughter how important the natural world is.

As mentioned earlier, Lace begins to resist the mining companies, trying to stop the land alteration – she sends a letter to her senator, calls agencies, and marches in rallies.¹⁶⁵ Her husband, Jimmy, expresses less determination to stop the mining than his wife, calls it useless, and does not support his wife’s effort at all.¹⁶⁶ Bant’s parents often argue about this – Jimmy usually says that it is hopeless to fight back and they should move to another city, and Lace says he is a coward and they should resist.¹⁶⁷ The clash between Lace’s determination and Jimmy’s lethargy becomes a more significant issue in their relationship. The conflict intensifies and results in Lace feeling in the following way:

Hate for his ridiculous boots that he needed on him to make him a man, and for his empty know-it-all-ness, and his spinelessness, and most of all, his I-don’t-care, while there sat Charlie and Anita in the ghost ruin of Tout, having lost almost everything except their will to fight [...] And so many other people I’d met in the past year and a half who were standing up against it, too, and my hate for Jimmy Make at that moment was the purest it had ever been, not a thimbleful of love to dilute it. And all I wanted was to throw something at him, something heavy and throw it hard, not even so much to hurt him as to see it break against him, the relief that would come with that shatter.¹⁶⁸

Though he is the father of her children and her husband, the seriousness of the situation in her neighborhood makes Lace hate her husband. Ledermann et al. state that both outer and inner factors usually influence close relationships. They also cite Bodenmann, saying that stress has an impact on “marital communication” and “the spouses’ psychological and physiological well-being”.¹⁶⁹ Though it is not the only problem in their relationship, the most considerable part of Lace’s anger comes from Jimmy’s apathy for environmental destruction. All this is because of the mining companies and alienation from nature.

This pattern is similar to the one mentioned when discussing the Native American characters in *Barkskins*. The pattern emerges again in *Strange as this Weather Has Been*. The intergenerational family ties are strengthened by spending time in the forest and being in contact

¹⁶⁵ Pancake, *Strange as this*, 275.

¹⁶⁶ Pancake, *Strange as this*, 276–277.

¹⁶⁷ Pancake, *Strange as this*, 84–85.

¹⁶⁸ Pancake, *Strange as this*, 310.

¹⁶⁹ Ledermann, Bodenmann, Rudaz, and Bradbury. “Stress, Communication,” 195.

with nature. They are weakened by the disputes coming from destroying the natural world and separating from it.

To conclude the last chapter, all selected novels have similarities and repeating patterns. The characters usually incline to adopt the mindsets of the older family members, parents, or grandparents. Therefore, the family's set of beliefs is passed to the next generation – no matter the affinity or aversion for nature. However, some of the individuals of the family trees deviate from the mainstream of their ancestry. The reasons vary from the characteristics of the person's generation to encountering different social spheres or the pressure of external circumstances. All novels depict the importance of the trees' symbolism for the characters. They plant a tree in memory of a lost loved one or as a symbol of determination for future generations. The two novels also reveal a scheme where industrial society makes families and generations more distant, and nature brings them together.

Conclusion

The first chapter serves as a guide to the theoretical concepts used for the analysis in chapters two, three, and four. These chapters deal with the novels from different perspectives. The second chapter examines the character's perception of nature and traces its possible reasons. Examining their attitudes from an ethical perspective is an objective of the third chapter. The fourth chapter tries to determine intergenerational development, its impact, and its influences.

The theoretical concepts used for the analysis were mainly ecocriticism, environmental ethics, and intergenerational and family sociology. Ecocriticism was defined as a field that studies the relationship between humans, the natural world, and literature. It is closely connected to the beliefs of anthropocentrism – the idea that humanity should be at the center of interests, no matter the damage to the natural world – and biocentrism – the notion that all living things are equal and connected. To make the analysis more transparent, environmental ethics was divided into two main categories, humanist and naturalistic. These two types correspond with anthropocentrism and biocentrism, respectively. The last section of the first chapter was dedicated to the sociology of generations, focusing on intergenerational development and influences. Finally, some concepts from the sociology of family were introduced.

The first part of the analysis examined the relationship between the characters and their environment (the natural world). The colonizers in *Barkskins* represent the central stream of anthropocentric values in that novel. The analysis reveals possible rationales for their actions – their religiosity or the illusive vastness of the American land. Opposite to them are the Native American characters, representing biocentric views. For them, even the concept of farming is illogical because the forest provides everything they need. In contrast to the colonizers, they do not deplete nature and do not destroy it – they cherish it and take it as a part of their community. 'The anthropocentric against the biocentric' pattern repeats in *Strange as this Weather Has Been*. The story depicts multiple cases of the clash between these two viewpoints. For example, Corey, a character who does not mind nature's destruction, is opposed to Mogeys, who wants to protect nature and feels for it. The reasons for their attitudes might be the infantilism in Corey's case and in Mogeys' case simply fear of losing his home due to the mining. The characters in *The Overstory* deeply admire the natural world and are willing to sacrifice their lives for it. Their activism is the primary realization of their biocentric values. The admiration they feel for nature is connected to the fact that it is vulnerable. In the colonizers' case depicted in *Barkskins*, nature is omnipresent and powerful, but in *The Overstory*, it has already been diminished only

into a few remaining fragments. Against the activists, there is an anthropocentric menace in the form of logging companies.

The second analytic segment addresses the ethical perspective, using literary sources from environmental ethics. It seeks to determine what the characters consider ethical and unethical regarding ecological issues and why. The distinction used in the previous paragraph between the anthropocentric and biocentric opinion groups, in its essence, stays the same. This terminology, however, changes to humanist and naturalistic types of ethics, respectively. The humanist type of ethics considers the interests of human beings as its most vital concern and sees nature simply as a human tool. The naturalistic type stands for the opposite – nature has its own worth, and people should take care of it. The characters in the novels express themselves as naturalistic for various reasons – they include nature in their community, nature feeds them, they value the complexity of the green world, or they cannot distinguish between the suffering of animals and people. The reasons for the humanist mindset are building civilization for posterity, the feeling of duty to develop the civilization, the inability to see plants as sentient creatures, young age, or personal traits of individuals.

The final analytic part examined intergenerational development and influences. This kind of analysis requires a story that spans a longer period of time or at least a story that includes more than one generation of people. All three novels fulfill at least one requirement, with the best analyzing ground in *Barkskins* that spans over three hundred years. The two other novels depict at least two generations of people. The general finding, with only a few exceptions, is that the characters follow their family tradition – they acquire the mindset from their parents and other family members. If they deviate from the mainstream of their social group, it is because of encountering different social spheres or specific traits of their generation. Also, there is a pattern in two of the novels when the family ties are weakened because of alienation from the natural world. In *Barkskins*, the Native American characters are repeatedly divided by the logging practices of the newcomers and by the necessity to work in the lumber industry. They are then reunited when they want to return to their original lifestyle. In *Strange as this Weather Has Been*, nature serves as a connecting element between the family members. The disputes inside the family, on the other hand, stem from the problems generated by the mining practices. The analysis also revealed that some elements of nature serve as symbols for the relationships between family members and between generations.

To conclude, there are various findings in this bachelor thesis. However, the overall message of the novels is tightly interconnected with the facts mentioned in the introductory part of this work. The average temperature on Earth is increasing, the global ecological situation is the worst it has ever been, and environmental concerns have been intensifying for the last couple of decades. There are many signs that all the novels reflect this dire condition, all summarized above. In all the selected books, there are repeating patterns of biocentric characters and behaviors depicted as positive and characters with anthropocentric values depicted as antagonists. Biocentric attitudes bring balance, a sense of belonging, and united families. The anthropocentric ones cause suffering, destruction, and disintegration of families. Each novel illustrates the same opinion groups. One tries to protect the natural environment and fights against the course of history, the other supports anthropocentric tendencies and helps with diminishing the natural world. Like this, each novel sends a signal – or a call for attention – in its own way. However, they all seek to make the reader realize how acute the current situation is. *Barkskins* shows the beginning of humanity's journey toward complete environmental destruction, *Strange as this Weather Has Been* depicts the breaking point in which the characters fail to fight the industrial machine that damages their homeland, and *The Overstory* shows the aftermath – desperate activists that are able to risk their lives to save the last remaining pieces of nature, knowing how crucial it is for everybody's survival.

Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá vyobrazením vztahu člověka a životního prostředí v současné americké próze. Cílem práce je zjistit, jak je tento vztah znázorněn ve vybraných dílech a zjistit možné důvody jednotlivých pohledů. Práce nejprve představuje teoretický rámec vycházející z poznatků odborných zdrojů. Tento rámec je následně aplikován ve třech praktických kapitolách při analýze třech vybraných děl. *Barkskins* od Annie Proulx, *Strange as this Weather Has Been* od Ann Pancake a *The Overstory* od Richarda Powerse. Každá praktická kapitola analyzuje díla současně, s použitím komparativní metody. Každá analytická sekce se zabývá vztahem člověka a přírody z jiného úhlu pohledu. Nejdříve z hlediska obecného, tedy jaké širší názorové skupiny tento problém generuje, následně z pohledu etického, a nakonec se soustředí na mezigenerační vývoj a vlivy. Analytické části dochází k dílčím zjištěním, které jsou následně shrnuty a vyhodnoceny v závěru.

Úvod práce představuje světový kontext, přehledový výčet kapitol a vytyčení cíle práce. Začátek teoretické kapitoly je charakterizován vysvětlením pojmů, které jsou v práci často používány a u kterých je možná širší míra interpretace. Jedná se například o pojmy příroda, etika nebo generace. Další definované termíny se již týkají samotných teoretických východisek pro tuto práci. Primární a zastřešující metodologický rámec je ekokritika, zabývající se vyobrazením životního prostředí v literatuře. Dále jsou představeny filozofické směry zkoumající vztah člověka a přírody jako je antropocentrismus či biocentrismus. Dále je několik odstavců je věnováno možným historickým kořenům obou směrů.

Následující část teoretické kapitoly je věnována oboru environmentální etiky, který se zabývá morálními zákonitostmi ve vztahu člověka s přírodou. Pro přehlednost jsou v této práci definovány dva základní typy environmentální etiky – humanistický a naturalistický. První koresponduje s antropocentrickým pojetím, tedy přikládá větší důležitost lidským potřebám a považuje pocit lidské nadřazenosti za legitimní. Druhý typ je úzce spojen s biocentrickým uvažováním a zdůrazňuje rovnocennost všech organismů a povinnost člověka přírodu ochraňovat. Poté jsou krátce zmíněny důvody pro existenci obou těchto názorových proudů. Následující odstavce jsou věnovány rozdílným přístupům člověka k hodnotě života zvířat a rostlin a poté je stručně popsáno odpojení člověka moderní doby od přírody.

Poslední část teoretické kapitoly se týká sociologie generací a sociologie rodiny. Nejprve jsou vysvětleny zákonitosti mezigenerační problematiky a vlivy moderní doby na fungování mezigeneračních a rodinných vztahů a poté význam symboliky uvnitř rodiny.

První praktická kapitola se věnuje analýze pohledů jednotlivých postav na životní prostředí a důvodům, kvůli kterým postavy jednají daným způsobem. V každém z děl se nachází jak skupina antropocentricky smýšlejících, tak biocentricky smýšlejících charakterů. V kapitole jsou pak za každé dílo analyzovány jednotlivé skupiny a motivace pro jejich jednání. V díle *Barkskins* se jedná o střet dvou skupin – kolonizátorů, kteří reprezentují pokrok směrem k průmyslové společnosti a původních obyvatel držících se tradičních postupů jako je lov a sběr. V *Strange as this Weather Has Been* je popisován střet obyvatel města s těžebními společnostmi, které ničí krajinu povrchovou těžbou a ovlivňují tak životy místních. V *The Overstory* jsou protagonisty převážně environmentální aktivisté, kteří protestují proti ničení lesů, čímž se dostávají se tak do konfliktu s těžaři. Během analýzy jsou zjištěny možné důvody pro antropocentrické postoje charakterů, jako například nábožensky orientované smýšlení, zdánlivě neomezené množství zdrojů nebo mylná představa, že příroda je jeden celistvý a nezranitelný mechanismus. Na druhé straně jsou jmenovány argumenty pro biocentrické vidění světa – představa přírody jako netknuté svatyně, pocit hluboké sounáležitosti s přírodou nebo strach z lokálních následků environmentální destrukce. Kapitola je uzavřena výčtem zjištění a závěrem, který konstatuje, že všechny tři romány zobrazují dvě proti sobě stojící názorové skupiny.

Druhá analytická část se zabývá stejnými názorovými skupinami, avšak z pohledu environmentální etiky. Kapitola zkoumá, co postavy považují za etické a neetické. Mimo jiné se snaží najít pro jednotlivé postoje vysvětlení v odborné literatuře za použití již zmíněného rozdělení. Například konstatuje, že v případě původních obyvatel amerického kontinentu v díle *Barkskins* se jedná o společenství natolik spjaté s přírodou, že ničení přírody by pro tuto kulturu znamenalo ničení sebe samotné. Jednání kolonizátorů tudíž považují za vysoce neetické. Kolonizátoři, na druhé straně, vidí své vlastní jednání jako etické, vzhledem k jejich motivaci vybudovat civilizaci pro jejich potomky. V románu *The Overstory* je popsán příklad postavy, která spatřuje neetické chování v kácení stromů, protože si je vědoma jejich komplexnosti a jejich hodnoty. Z *Strange as this Weather Has Been* je uveden příklad syna hlavní protagonistky, který jeví silně antropocentrické postoje – v souvislosti s tím jsou zmíněny důvody pro humanistické pojetí environmentální etiky, kupříkladu nedostatek kontaktu s přírodou, negativní rysy osobnosti nebo nedostatečná vyspělost člověka. Tato část analýzy je zakončena shrnutím důvodů pro jednání jednotlivých postav.

Třetí a poslední analytická kapitola se zabývá zákonitostmi mezigeneračních a rodinných vztahů ve spojitosti s environmentalismem. Tato část nejdříve ilustruje vzorec,

který se opakuje napříč všemi třemi romány za pomoci příkladu v *Barkskins* – postavy tíhnou spíše k napodobování světonázoru, který se vyskytuje u členů jejich rodiny, včetně pohledu na přírodu. Rodina, která tradičně podniká v těžbě dřeva tedy převážně pokračuje v tomto trendu. Stejně tak členové rodiny původních obyvatel se z velké části snaží pokračovat v přežívání pomocí tradičních způsobů obživy. Dále se kapitola soustředí na postavy, které se od odchylují od názoru typického pro jejich bezprostřední okolí – z *Barkskins* je zmiňována postava z rodiny těžařů, která si hluboce váží lesů a odmítá jít stejnou cestou jako zbylí členové rodiny. Další popisované postavy, které nenásledují rodinnou tradici, jsou na straně původních obyvatel. Situace na kontinentě je donutí se odchýlit od tradičního způsobu života a začít pracovat pro těžební průmysl. Vedlejším efektem jejich konání je pak rozpolcení jejich rodiny. Když se později k nomádské tradici vrátí, rodina je znovu sjednocena. V průběhu románu se několikrát opakuje vzorec, kdy příklon k industriální společnosti znamená rozklad rodiny a návrat k přírodě znamená její sjednocení. Analýza dále zkoumá důležitost symboliky v rodinných i mezigeneračních vztazích v dílech *The Overstory* a *Strange as this Weather Has Been*. V obou dílech slouží jako symbol jednoty stromy – pro jednu postavu znamenají způsob, jakým je možné se alespoň imaginárně spojit se zesnulým otcem, pro další je to spojnice mezi generacemi. Tato kapitola se také zaměřuje na důležitost symbolických aktivit, které spolu provozují členové rodiny, popřípadě členové různých generací, a to i v souvislosti s přírodním světem. Jedna z postav například podniká cesty do lesa se svým prarodičem, což posiluje nejen vztahy mezigenerační, ale i vztah s přírodou. Poslední analytická část je zakončena výčtem nejdůležitějších výstupů a konstatováním zjištění, že příroda ve zvolených románech hraje důležitou roli v mezigeneračních a rodinných vztazích.

Poslední část této práce vyvozuje závěry ze zjištění analytických kapitol a zasazuje je do kontextu dnešní doby. Z provedené analýzy bylo zjištěno, že všechna tři díla obsahují antropocentricky smýšlející postavy, které jsou postaveny do pozice antagonistů. Na druhé straně popisují biocentricky jednající charakterly jako protagonisty. Příroda často slouží jako sjednocující element mezi rodinnými příslušníky a mezi generacemi. V situacích, kdy se postavy odkloní od biocentrického smýšlení, dojde k rozštěpení rodiny. Všechna díla spojuje podobné vyznění – varování čtenáře před blížící se environmentální katastrofou způsobenou odcizením lidstva od přírodního světa. Celkové vyznění díla je pak přímým dopadem tristní environmentální situace, ve které se současný svět nachází.

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