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Zásady pro vypracování

Závěrečná bakalářská práce se zaměří na zobrazení života mimo civilizaci v povídce *A White Heron* (1886) a v novele *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896) od Sarah Orne Jewett. V teoretické části autorka stručně charakterizuje stát Maine a zasadí dílo Sarah Orne Jewett do literárně-kulturního kontextu (studentka především pojedná o důležitosti regionalismu v druhé polovině 19. století). Dále se autorka zaměří na relevantní aspekty ekokritiky a vymezí soubor koncepcí a otázek, na jejichž základě vystaví analytické kapitoly, které budou studovat, jakou roli hraje ve výše zmíněných dílech fyzické prostředí a život mimo civilizaci a jakým způsobem jsou obavy o přírodu a životní prostředí zobrazeny. Srovnávací analýza bude založena na primární literatuře, kvalitních sekundárních zdrojích a na autorčině vlastním rozboru. Práci zakončí přehledné shrnutí daných zjištění.

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ANNOTATION

This bachelor thesis examines the depiction of nature and life away from civilization in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* and “A White Heron” by Sarah Orne Jewett, focusing on contemporary environmental issues. It introduces the historical and cultural background of Jewett’s writing, particularly industrialization and regionalism in the 19th-century United States. The work also discusses ecocriticism, whose concepts define the approach to the analysis of the literary works mentioned above.

KEYWORDS

nature, natural environment, regionalism, ecocriticism, industrialization, countryside

NÁZEV

Zobrazení života mimo civilizaci v díle Sary Orne Jewettové

ANOTACE

Tato bakalářská práce zkoumá zobrazení přírody a života mimo civilizaci se zaměřením na soudobé environmentální problémy v *The Country of the Pointed Firs* a „A White Heron“ od Sary Orne Jewettové. Práce také představuje historické a kulturní pozadí autorčiny tvorby, a to především industrializaci a regionalismus ve Spojených státech amerických v 19. století. Práce se dále zabývá ekokritikou, na jejíž konceptech je založený přístup k analýze výše zmíněných literárních děl.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

příroda, životní prostředí, regionalismus, ekokritika, industrializace, venkov

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INTRODUCTION

Due to industrialization and urbanization, the United States in the 19th century was facing ecological issues that significantly affected the environment and living conditions in rural areas. This bachelor thesis examines the portrayal of nature and life in wilderness with its virtues and hardships in the novella *The Country of the Pointed Firs* and the short story “A White Heron” by Sarah Orne Jewett. Wilderness, in this work, is understood to be the natural environment that has not been interfered with in a transformative way, such as by being turned into farmland, towns, or roads.¹

The primary aim of this thesis is to study how the above-mentioned literary works convey contemporary environmental concerns through depictions of the natural environment and the characters’ relationship with it. More specifically, it focuses on the importance of the physical setting and identifies the threats posed to nature as well as the forms of protest against its impending disappearance.

The theoretical part consists of three chapters that introduce the background of the work of Sarah Orne Jewett. The first two chapters incorporate a few examples from Jewett’s stories in order to better illustrate some of the key concepts that do not fall within the scope of the analytical part. The paper begins by characterizing the American state of Maine and its historical, geographical, and economic features that are relevant to the central topic of the thesis. Followingly, the literary-cultural context of Jewett’s writing is presented through a discussion of the principal ideas of regionalism, which reflect the circumstances of the late 19th century in the United States. The third section of the thesis is devoted to ecocriticism and the defining points of its approach to the study of literature, several of which have been selected as the framework for the analytical part.

The following three chapters apply the theoretical concepts of ecocriticism to the analysis of *The Country of the Pointed Firs* and “A White Heron.” Firstly, attention is paid to the role of the physical setting, namely to its constant proximity, active participation in the story events, and influence on the inhabitants. Secondly, the paper addresses the danger that the natural environment might diminish, the probable causes of this issue, and its manifestations in the composition of the setting and the local demography. The last chapter studies the various ways in which the narratives object to the disappearance of the natural environment and how they communicate arguments for its preservation.

¹ “Wilderness,” Cambridge Dictionary, accessed March 19, 2025, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/wilderness>.

Jewett's literary work covers aspects of contemporary ecological problems in Maine. *The Country of the Pointed Firs* is narrated by a woman who is spending the summer in the house of Mrs. Todd in Dunnet Landing, a small town on the coast of Maine. The story progresses as she explores the environment and the beauty of the traditional ways of the locals, who are struggling with the detrimental impact of industrialization. "A White Heron" is set on a small secluded farmstead in Maine inhabited by eight-year-old Sylvia and her grandmother, Mrs. Tilley. Their mutual friendship with nature is disrupted by the arrival of a young ornithologist who requires the girl's help with finding a rare bird. Both narratives reflect the concerns related to the natural environment and rural ways of life that were prominent in the 19th-century United States.

Over a century later, the environmental issues that Jewett expressed in her writing remain highly relevant as a frequent subject of global debate.

1. CHARACTERIZATION OF MAINE

Sarah Orne Jewett's narratives are typically set in Maine, a state located in New England, the northeastern region of the United States. Despite its relatively small size, the region held a significant position not only in historical events but also in the nation's economy. Although its importance in these aspects has declined since, its natural environment, historical sites, and heritage in arts may be still highly regarded.

The population of Maine has never, in history known to man, been particularly diverse. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, some of the Native Americans who used to live there have died as a consequence of the European settlement, while others have been driven into reservations or assimilated to the newcomers. Traces of the former cultures remain, however, for example in toponyms, ancient trails, or their burial grounds.² Their former presence is also acknowledged in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, where Shell-heap Island is described as a site of frequent discoveries of the Indians' stone tools and their shell-heap, after which the island was named.³ Although Native American peoples could hardly be encountered in Maine today, their impact on the land still lasts.

Starting in the early 17th century, settlement in Maine has been dominated by white immigrants. It is stated in Britannica that the largest group consisted of Protestants from today's United Kingdom, whose descendants form the majority of the present inhabitants and their character can be described as serious, closed-off, and hard-working.⁴ The Puritan heritage of strong faith in God can be perceived in Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* when Joanna explains her self-imposed isolation on Shell-heap Island by confessing to having committed an "unpardonable sin,"⁵ which has rendered her unworthy of the company of people. Most of the current inhabitants of Maine are the descendants of the Protestants who immigrated centuries ago.

Alongside the English, Irish, and Scottish Protestants, there were also other, minor streams of immigration. According to Britannica, French and Irish Catholics contribute to the predominant, white portion of the society, whereas there are very few African-American, Hispanic, or Asian people. It is interesting to note that nearly none of them head inland, preferring to stay on the coast. Maine is overall sparsely inhabited, with the vast majority of the

² "Maine," History, Encyclopedia Britannica, last modified March 7, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Maine-state/Health-and-welfare#ref78092>.

³ Sarah O. Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1896), 31.

⁴ "Maine," People, Encyclopedia Britannica, last modified last modified March 7, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Maine-state/Plant-and-animal-life#ref78082>.

⁵ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 38.

population concentrated in the southwest.⁶ This phenomenon may be ascribed to the geographical features of the state.

The topography of Maine is varied, resulting in a diversity of fauna and flora. As Britannica says, the surface of the state ranges from high Appalachian Mountains in the north, over smaller hills, to a rugged coastline consisting of peninsulas, estuaries, and bays, and a multiplicity of islands offshore. The land is dominated by forests, and in the sea, there live whales, lobsters, clams, haddock, and many more species.⁷ Both flora and fauna play an essential role in the lives of the inhabitants.

The environment has had both a cultural and an economic impact. Britannica mentions that it has provided inspiration for folktales, many of which talk about the impossibility of taming the natural forces. Furthermore, one can find homages to shipbuilders and sailors in the form of wood carving and foreign goods brought from seafaring voyages.⁸ The forest and the sea have been crucial features in the formation of the community.

Aside from influencing local culture, the geography of the state determines also its economic activities. According to Britannica, the limited soil fertility makes farming unsustainable on a large scale. The plentiful trees and sealife, on the other hand, facilitated the past flourishing of the timber industry, shipbuilding, and fishing.⁹ The economy experienced the greatest growth during the Industrial Revolution in the years prior to the Civil War, when Maine engaged in international trade. However, the 20th century witnessed a decline in the economy and a transfer from the until then profitable industries to tourism, which remains a key sector today.¹⁰

The recession happened primarily because of the depletion of resources resulting from their continuous exploitation. Having examined this issue in more detail, Eves shares the finding that building, export, and the need for firewood and space for farmland and pastures were among the main reasons for the extensive felling of trees and, consequently, the causes of deforestation that afflicted Maine in the 19th century.¹¹ The state's pursuits of economic prosperity eventually led to its decline.

⁶ Encyclopedia Britannica, "Maine," People.

⁷ "Maine," Land, Encyclopedia Britannica, last modified March 7, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Maine-state#ref78076>.

⁸ "Maine," Cultural Life, Encyclopedia Britannica, last modified March 7, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Maine-state/Health-and-welfare#ref78091>.

⁹ "Maine," Economy, Encyclopedia Britannica, last modified March 7, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Maine-state/Economy>.

¹⁰ Encyclopedia Britannica, "Maine," History.

¹¹ Jamie H. Eves, "'Shrunk to a Comparative Rivulet': Deforestation, Stream Flow, and Rural Milling in 19th-Century Maine," *Technology and Culture* 33, no. 1 (January 1992): 48–51.

It was not only flora but also fauna that suffered owing to industrial development. For instance, Joseph shows that in the late 19th century, white herons were in imminent danger of extinction due to hunters who engaged in the plume trade.¹² Some economic pursuits, although profitable at the time, had to be abandoned in favor of preserving the natural environment, which, in turn, aided the development of the tourist sector.

Some of the defining circumstances in the history of Maine were European settlement, economic growth as well as decline, and environmental issues. Today's population of the state and its lack of heterogeneity have been largely defined by white Protestants, who first arrived in the 17th century. Thanks to the varied topography, which determines the unbalanced density of settlement, a large number of different animal and plant species can be found in the area. Although the forests and the sea enabled Maine's economy to prosper in the past, due to exploitation, its focus has shifted to another sector.

¹² Sheri Joseph, "Sarah Orne Jewett's White Heron: An Imported Metaphor," *American Literary Realism* 27, no. 3 (1995): 81.

2. LITERARY-CULTURAL BACKGROUND

In terms of the literary-cultural context, the work of Sarah Orne Jewett belongs in American regionalism of the late 19th century. Foote describes regionalism as a genre that portrays particular places remote from modernizing processes, their inhabitants, and their ways of life. Some of its primary concerns are the position of the local within the national, the representation of the marginal, and the disappearance of the traditional. In the era of its greatest prominence, the second half of the 19th century, regionalist writing sought to preserve the rural communities and regional differences that were being eradicated by contemporary issues such as the American Civil War and industrialization.¹³ Regionalism typically addressed some of the major concerns of American citizens caused by the disturbing aspects of the period.

Before examining the topic further, since various sources approach the terms “regionalism” and “local color” differently, it is crucial to establish their role in this thesis. According to Campbell, although the two genres were not treated separately in the 19th century, regionalism is now, owing to the influence of Fetterley and Pryse, considered to provide a more insightful representation of the locale, whereas local color describes it superficially.¹⁴ Another conclusion of Fetterley and Pryse, quoted by Dowdell, is that local color is a genre that renders the specific regions and their inhabitants inferior to the nation as a whole. Regionalism, on the other hand, is supposedly more inclusive, presenting the local characters as figures of importance equal to the narrator’s.¹⁵ Howard studies the issue from another angle, saying that while regionalism reveals matters that concern areas of a larger scope, local color’s attention is restricted to the particular region.¹⁶ There are a number of differences between regionalism and local color that should be observed in certain contexts. However, as this paper focuses on the general characteristics of regional fiction and such distinctions are not necessary, the terms will be treated interchangeably.

Life in the late 19th-century United States was strongly marked by westward expansion and the Civil War, to the consequences of which regionalist writers responded in their work. According to Foote, the diversity of the country’s population increased due to acquiring more

¹³ Stephanie Foote, “The Cultural Work of American Regionalism,” in *A Companion to the Regional Literatures of America*, ed. Charles L. Crow (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003), 25–30.

¹⁴ Donna Campbell, “Realism and Regionalism,” in *A Companion to the Regional Literatures of America*, ed. Charles L. Crow (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 93.

¹⁵ Coby Dowdell, “Withdrawing from the Nation: Regionalist Literature as Ascetic Practice in Jewett’s *The Country of the Pointed Firs*,” *Legacy* 21, no. 2 (2004): 212.

¹⁶ June Howard, “American Regionalism: Local Color, National Literature, Global Circuits,” in *A Companion to American Fiction, 1865-1914*, ed. Robert Paul Lamb and G. R. Thompson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 123.

territories and becoming a target of migration, which resulted in a growth of the racial, regional, and ethnic diversity of the nation, exacerbated by the north-south division during the war. Facing the conflicts and complexity within their country, Americans began to long for reunification.¹⁷

Regionalism provided a sense of unity and wholeness by placing close-knit communities in its center. This trend can be exemplified by Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs*. A great emphasis is put on family ties, namely in the case of the Bowdens, which makes the welcoming of the narrator into their circle particularly impactful. The act of inclusion is symbolized at the family's reunion when an apple pie is presented with an inscription in frosting and one of the family members, Mrs. Todd, offers the narrator a slice bearing the word "Bowden."¹⁸ Since most readers of the novella were presumably urban dwellers¹⁹ and, as such, were likely to identify with the narrator, they may have experienced a sense of connection vicariously.

At the same time, the villagers appear to dislike other characters, especially those of distant roots. There is a minor character, Mari' Harris, who seems to be generally regarded as a stranger owing to her resemblance to a foreign race.²⁰ If generalized, her treatment as an outsider may be interpreted as a rejection of people of a different origin and may thus reassure the white reading audience about the security of their position within the society.

On a similar note, another strategy that regionalism adopted was the emphasis on the qualities shared by the audience. According to Robinson, the stories would frequently feature an "other" representing a type of culture in comparison to which the readers could perceive the attributes that identified them as a group. This applied significantly in terms of language, with a local dialect marking the speech of the rural communities whereas the narrator would speak the standard language. The larger part of the audience related to the unmarked voice and came to consider themselves a civilized elite in contrast to the inferior, dialect-speaking characters.²¹ Thus, by marginalizing the rural communities, regionalist authors provided their readers with an idea of a superior, cohesive group into which they inextricably belonged.

¹⁷ Foote, "The Cultural Work of American Regionalism," 28–29.

¹⁸ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 54.

¹⁹ Stephanie Foote, "Introduction: What Difference Does Regional Writing Make?" in *Regional Fictions: Culture and Identity in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 3.

²⁰ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 52.

²¹ Lori Robinson, "Region and Race: National Identity and the Southern Past," in *A Companion to the Regional Literatures of America*, ed. Charles L. Crow (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003), 62.

Regionalism attempted to counter the effects of the influx of immigrants into cities. Ryden claims that for this purpose, regional narratives created simple worlds with virtually homogeneous populations,²² which might have been a source of comfort to those who were afflicted with the complexity pervading the urban areas. By omitting the unpleasant aspects of the time period, regionalists encouraged the feeling of unity in the reading audience while excluding others.

However, striving to provide the feeling of mutual connectedness and sameness, the authors seemed to construct a new history of the regions. McCullough draws attention to the contrast between the real population, which consists of immigrants from multiple states and continents, and the fictional one, which offers a misleading image of common origin of the community.²³ People of foreign roots might not appear in the texts at all, or they would be depicted in a negative light as though they did not belong. Having concealed the variety that regions contained, the writers portrayed an illusion of a homogeneous identity.

A similar outcome was being approached by some of the main trends in the post-Civil War United States. One of the factors was the transformation of social hierarchy. As Robinson notes, the living conditions of African Americans registered an improvement after the war, for instance in terms of gaining access to the same products as the white citizens purchased, which fueled the blurring of the distinctions between different classes and races.²⁴ Howard highlights transportation development, most prominently the construction of the transcontinental railroad, as another powerful influence.²⁵ It became much simpler to travel from one region to another and adopt the local ways of life in place of one's own. It is indubitable that this process of national integration played a major role in obliterating the unique features of its constituent spaces.

Later, however, regionalists strongly opposed the view of a nation as homogeneous. According to Harris, they believed it to be a collection of distinct subunits (regions) that, although together creating a larger whole, did not erase their differences to accommodate the idea of uniformity. As a matter of fact, regionalists insisted that each region with its own characteristics held an essential position in the formation of the nation.²⁶

²² Kent C. Ryden, "New England Literature and Regional Identity," in *A Companion to the Regional Literatures of America*, ed. Charles L. Crow (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 196.

²³ Kate McCullough, "Introduction," in *Regions of Identity: The Construction of America in Women's Fiction, 1885-1914* (California: Stanford University Press, 1999), 1-2.

²⁴ Robinson, "Region and Race," 69.

²⁵ Howard, "American Regionalism," 124.

²⁶ Susan K. Harris, "American Regionalism," in *A Companion to American Literature and Culture*, ed. Paul Lauter (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 336-338.

It is reasonable to assume that the same applies to the constitution of regions themselves. In addition to the considerable vagueness of their boundaries,²⁷ each contained such a variety of peoples and natural features that no single book could represent a whole region. After all, as is evidenced by Howard's overview of regionalists, the works of the numerous authors cannot be described as identical even if they are set in the same geographical area. Taking Northeastern writers as an example, we could name Rose Terry Cooke, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, Sarah Orne Jewett, Alice Brown, and many more. Even if their narratives were concerned with the same general subjects, such as village communities, connections between places, or commemoration of the past, they oftentimes treated those topics from a different perspective, unveiling another layer of the region's multifaceted character.²⁸ Only the combination of all these narratives might provide a more complete picture of the region. This heterogeneity was one of the focal points of regionalism in the latter half of the 19th century.

To counter the looming threat of assimilation, regionalist authors aimed to preserve the gradually disappearing differences within regions by depicting them faithfully in literature. This inclination can be observed in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*. Upon leaving Dunnet Landing by sea, the narrator watches as the small town "sank back into the uniformity of the coast, and became indistinguishable from the other towns."²⁹ From a distance, the whole area appears monolithic, with no distinguishing features for its distinct parts. Jewett might have meant to express her worry about the narrator's forgetting the unique character of Dunnet Landing once she returned to the city. This view corresponds with the homogenizing tendencies of the period. In contrast, the novella opens with: "There was something about the coast town of Dunnet which made it seem more attractive than other maritime villages of eastern Maine."³⁰ Although it is not known who these lines belong to, they indicate a distinctiveness that pervades the small town, making it stand out from its surroundings and thus rejecting the idea of the region as an unvaried mass.

A similar sentiment is expressed during the visit of Mrs. Fosdick, an old friend of Mrs. Todd. Engaged in a wistful recollection of the past, she claims that "Everybody's just like everybody else, now." The narrator disagrees, however, thinking that there still are "peculiarities of character" in Dunnet Landing.³¹ Spoken by someone who has been long absent, Mrs. Fosdick's words may be inaccurate. The narrator, on the other hand, is more reliable

²⁷ Howard, "American Regionalism," 127.

²⁸ Howard, "American Regionalism," 128–130.

²⁹ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 2.

³⁰ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 66.

³¹ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 32.

because she has already been in Dunnet Landing for several consecutive weeks and has become more intimately acquainted with the distinct qualities of its inhabitants. Although individual regions might appear homogeneous to a distant bystander, regionalists protested against this approach and aimed to preserve the remaining intraregional differences.

Due to some of its most characteristic features, several of which have been outlined in this chapter, regionalism in the 19th century did not receive nearly as wide critical acclaim as other genres. Crow explains that unlike the more dominant narratives, which were typically national in scope, regionalist works were regarded as “narrow” in their focus on smaller, specific areas of the nation.³² Moreover, writers would be criticized for disregarding the contemporary complications of immigration, racism, or urbanization, and replacing them with a simplified, preindustrial past.³³ Another contrasting point between the master and regional narratives was the gender association. Whereas, as Storey says, the popular stories were written by men,³⁴ Webb shows that it was female writers who played an essential role in the advancement of regionalism, such as Sarah Orne Jewett, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, or Harriet Beecher Stowe.³⁵ For the reasons listed above (narrow scope, avoidance of complexities, and the gender of the writers), regionalism in the 19th century acquired an image of a minor genre.

American regionalism developed significantly in the second half of the 19th century. It addressed the issues stemming from the Civil War and industrialization and soothed people’s worries by providing a sense of unity and portraying communities and environments unaffected by urbanizing trends. Although criticized for its concentration on limited areas, it aided in the preservation of regions and their unique features.

³² Charles L. Crow, “Introduction,” in *A Companion to the Regional Literatures of America*, ed. Charles L. Crow (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 1.

³³ Stephanie Foote, “I Feared to Find Myself a Foreigner: Sarah Orne Jewett’s *The Country of the Pointed Firs*,” in *Regional Fictions: Culture and Identity in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 17.

³⁴ Mark Storey, “Country Matters: Rural Fiction, Urban Modernity, and the Problem of American Regionalism,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 65, no. 2 (September 2010): 198.

³⁵ Dorothy Ann Webb, “Particular Places: Local Color Writing in the United States 1870–1910” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1997), 1.

3. ECOCRITICISM

The literary work of Sarah Orne Jewett proves to be a subject interesting to analyze from an ecocritical perspective. Ecocriticism as an academic field emerged in the late 1980s³⁶ and, according to Glotfelty, it can be understood as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment.”³⁷ She also quotes William Rueckert, who coined the term “ecocriticism” and considered it to be “the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature.”³⁸ The involvement of ecology restricts the scope to “the interactions between organisms and the environment”³⁹ with emphasis on their mutual influence.⁴⁰ This thesis works primarily with Rueckert’s definition, viewing ecocriticism as a field that merges literary studies with ecological concerns.

This chapter outlines some of the key concepts that ecocriticism studies in literary texts. Glotfelty lists the following among the most important ones: how the concept of wilderness has changed over the course of time, how nature is represented in writing, what role the environment plays, and how the environmental crisis is reflected in literature.⁴¹ With the aid of this overview, the following three points have been selected as central to this thesis: the role of the physical setting, the disappearance of nature, and the protest against the disappearance of nature. Each of them will be briefly introduced in this chapter and their portrayal in literature will be further discussed in the analytical part.

One of the fundamental concepts of ecocritical thinking is wilderness, which is, however, difficult to define. Brault claims that it was described in the past as “land untainted by humanity’s touch.”⁴² Nonetheless, scholars insist that this view denies the existence of wilderness. For instance, Cronon counters this definition with the proposition that although nature retains a large body of nonhuman aspects, it has been shaped significantly by the

³⁶ Adrienne Bernhard, “11. Topographies Real and Imagined in Sarah Orne Jewett’s *A White Heron*,” *Spatial Practices*, no. 14 (2012): 219.

³⁷ 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 and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), xviii.

³⁸ Glotfelty, “Introduction,” xx.

³⁹ Lawrence Buell, “Glossary of Selected Terms,” in *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 139.

⁴⁰ Neil Evernden, “Beyond Ecology: Self, Place, and the Pathetic Fallacy,” in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 93.

⁴¹ Glotfelty, “Introduction,” xviii–xix.

⁴² Robert Joseph Brault, “Writing Wilderness: Conserving, Preserving, and Inhabiting the Land in Nineteenth-Century American Literature” (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2000), 9.

influence of people.⁴³ Even the parts of the United States that are generally considered free of human interference used to be inhabited by Native Americans, whose traces on the land could not be erased despite the Indians' removal.⁴⁴ Since no part of previously inhabited nature remains in its original state, it would be vain to try and apply the definition quoted above to today's environment. Therefore, any future mentions of wilderness in this paper refer to either people's past understanding of it, or, as inspired by the Cambridge Dictionary definition of the term, to the natural environment that has not been interfered with in a transformative way, such as by being turned into farmland, towns, or roads.⁴⁵

It is interesting to note the shift in the public perception of the environment. Cronon observes a development from a largely negative image to a positive one. Up to the 18th century, wilderness was associated with danger, fear, and desolation, bearing seemingly nothing that might benefit civilized cultures. In contrast, beginning in the 19th century, wilderness was considered invaluable in relation to the preservation of the world.⁴⁶ People's opinion of nature transformed from a negative to a favorable one at the turn of the 19th century.

One of the roots of this transition was related to religion. The Romantic concept of the sublime promoted wilderness as a place permeated with the divine, thus not only offering the closest possible connection to God but also evoking terror because it positioned God's eternal, powerful presence against human mortality and frailty.⁴⁷ As such, the sublime might be considered a stage halfway between the two above-mentioned attitudes to nature, combining the dangerous with the blissful. Cronon lists the American frontier as another factor contributing to the change. Each new settlement on uninhabited land meant a return from an overly civilized to a more primitive world and consequently bolstered the independence and creativity that are highly valued by Americans. Nevertheless, towards the end of the 19th century, the frontier was believed to be vanishing together with the true, natural world (as opposed to artificial civilization), resulting in some of the first initiatives to preserve wilderness.⁴⁸ The idea of nature as a link to the divine and the frontier as a means of acquiring typical American traits encouraged people to view the environment positively.

⁴³ William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1996), 69–70.

⁴⁴ Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," 79.

⁴⁵ Cambridge Dictionary, "Wilderness."

⁴⁶ Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," 70–72.

⁴⁷ Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," 70–72.

⁴⁸ Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," 76–77.

The transformation of the perception of nature can be followed further along the time axis. Fromm's theory corresponds with Cronon's in that wilderness was, prior to the 19th century, seen as an adversary out of human control, imposing on people so difficult living conditions that they sought relief in God. Later, in contrast, their religious devotion declined due to the advancement of industrialization. They were enabled to face the adversities of wilderness with new technologies, gaining the false conviction that they possessed more power than natural forces and forgetting the fact that human beings are heavily dependent on their environment.⁴⁹ Brault adds the observation that whereas during industrialization, people aimed to shape nature to their own (mostly commercial) benefit, more recent tendencies are oriented towards its protection.⁵⁰ Historically, nature developed in people's eyes from a lethal enemy, over a resource facilitating economic progress, to an endangered entity that must be saved from destruction.

The movement of ecocriticism expresses concern about the natural environment, namely about its decline under the influence of modernization. Among its subjects of study is the 19th-century ecologically oriented writing, such as that of Jewett. Characterizing this genre, Brault emphasizes its appeal for the preservation of wilderness as opposed to its exploitation by the growing industry.⁵¹ Glotfelty says that in studying these works, ecocritics note particularly the harmful effects of industrialization and urbanization on nature and the significant environmental loss that might ensue.⁵² Mishra adds that to avoid the pending crisis, ecocritics seek to spread awareness of the issues by drawing attention to the interconnectedness of people with their nonhuman surroundings.⁵³ One of the aims of ecocriticism is to make the public realize the extent of their ecological impact and to limit the negative implications of their actions.

It has already been said that people have been manipulating their environment since as far in the past as their existence can be traced. According to Slepov, the relationship between humans and nature is one of mutual impact. It may be both beneficial and detrimental from either side.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Harold Fromm, "From Transcendence to Obsolescence: A Route Map," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 31–35.

⁵⁰ Brault, "Writing Wilderness," 1.

⁵¹ Brault, "Writing Wilderness," 9–10.

⁵² Glotfelty, "Introduction," xx.

⁵³ Sandip Kumar Mishra, "Ecocriticism: A Study of Environmental Issues in Literature," *BRICS Journal of Educational Research* 6, no. 4 (2016): 168.

⁵⁴ Eugene Slepov, "A Study of Geo-Regional Place-Consciousness in American Literature" (PhD diss., The City University of New York, 2023), 42.

The negative effect of people on nature is a frequent subject of ecocritical debate. Buell perceives that while communities in the past used to be much closer to and more reliant on nature, this connection has been severed by modernizing tendencies and an orientation toward economic activities.⁵⁵ The spread of technologies and their overtaking of traditional ways has been captured in a multiplicity of literary works, oftentimes as a warning about the covert and irreversible process. This kind of motif tends to appear in regionalist writing, alerting people to the loss of the simple rural life, which draws the attention of ecocritics.

Another strategy that writers employ in response to the threats to nature is pathetic fallacy. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, it is a literary device involving the “use [...] of words that give human feelings or qualities to objects, nature, or animals.”⁵⁶ McMurry notes that the portrayal of the environment carrying qualities that are typically associated with people might help society relate to it and understand nature’s message that it needs their protection.⁵⁷ Some authors tried to depict nature with human traits, hoping to evoke sympathy in the readers.

Having discussed the influence of humans on their environment, the opposite side of the relationship must not be omitted. It is especially in regionalist texts where nature does not serve merely as the physical setting but plays its own role of great significance. Duner uses Philbrick’s theory that the characters’ relationship with the setting is supposed to reflect their personality traits. Those who navigate the place well appear to possess positive qualities and tend to be successful in social connections, whereas those who struggle in the environment are typically awkward in communicating with others, unable to empathize or to say the right thing. By observing how people in literary works interact with their surroundings, it is possible to discover some of their qualities.

Aside from providing the description of characters, nature may also be the force that molds them. Harris repeats Austin’s claim that the environment defines a person’s lifestyle, habits, and the way they perform all their activities.⁵⁸ Due to this link, Evernden believes that in order for one to discover who they are, they must first know where they are from.⁵⁹ In addition, Nail suggests that it is the rural people who feel the closest connection to nature, for

⁵⁵ Lawrence Buell, “Space, Place, and Imagination from Local to Global,” in *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 64.

⁵⁶ “Pathetic fallacy,” Cambridge Dictionary, accessed March 12, 2025, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/pathetic-fallacy>.

⁵⁷ Andrew McMurry, “‘In Their Own Language’: Sarah Orne Jewett and the Question of Non-human Speaking Subjects,” *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 6, no. 1 (1999): 54.

⁵⁸ Harris, “American Regionalism,” 329.

⁵⁹ Evernden, “Beyond Ecology,” 101.

it is the source of their sustenance, values, and sense of identity. They are aware of the fact that they and their surroundings are each a defining component of the other.⁶⁰ Knowledge of one's environment as a fundamental influence contributes to the full picture of their personality.

It may be inferred that by shaping each inhabitant, the specific environment determines a certain identity for the community as a whole. Steinecke expresses the opinion that for this reason, it is necessary that inhabitants adjust to the land and accept its formative impact because those who refuse to conform might be expelled so that the group identity can be maintained.⁶¹ In order to secure the cohesion of a community, each member must fulfill the requirements decided by nature.

The environment has the ability to affect its inhabitants in both a positive and a negative way. Nail suggests that uncultivated nature, for instance the sea and forests, may represent danger in its uncontrollability and power that would easily dominate human civilization.⁶² This perspective recalls the concerns from before the 19th century when the unsettled environment was perceived as a formidable enemy. Another kind of harm that it might impose is, in Nail's words, the hardships and loneliness of rural life. Since farmsteads in New England stand far apart, the opportunities to meet other people are scarce, resulting in a deprivation of human contact.⁶³ However, country life also has a lot to offer and may, in some aspects, compensate for its shortcomings.

Some of the benefits that nature yields are moral influence, companionship, and sustenance. Nail highlights rural areas as the setting where people stay the closest to human values, in particular those who work with land directly and develop an intimate relationship with it. The connection between rural people and nature frequently plays a significant role in regionalist texts, where flora and fauna may be depicted as possessing human attributes and thus seemingly substituting the presence of people in the sparsely populated places. In the aspect of moral impact, the countryside is often portrayed in contrast to the city, which, despite providing better economic circumstances, is more detrimental than beneficial to one's morality.⁶⁴ Furthermore, Webb says that one of the typical features of the local color movement was the depiction of the countryside as a welcoming refuge from the complicated life in the

⁶⁰ Rebecca Wall Nail, "Place and Setting in the Work of Sarah Orne Jewett" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1980), 108–111.

⁶¹ Ann Steinecke, "'Revolt from the Village': Place and Anxiety in Modern American Fiction" (PhD diss., University of Maryland at College Park, 1996), 15.

⁶² Nail, "Place and Setting," 157–158.

⁶³ Nail, "Place and Setting," 101.

⁶⁴ Nail, "Place and Setting," 108–112.

urbanized areas.⁶⁵ Those who live in harmony with nature might find a friend in it, one of a salutary influence on their personality.

Aside from psychological needs, nature helps fulfill the physical ones, too. Farmers use the land to sow and harvest their own food, but they might also gather what grows around naturally, such as mushrooms, fruit, or herbs. One can raise animals, be it for milk, meat, or eggs, or they can hunt those who live around freely. It is crucial to note that while doing so, they must show consideration for the limits of nature's resources. In regionalist texts, most countryside dwellers avoid doing damage to their environment not only because it is their home but also, as Nail says, because of their genuine love for the place.⁶⁶ So long as people respect the environment, it can provide for nearly all their necessities.

Several of the main concepts of ecocriticism have been discussed in this chapter. The role of nature may be examined through its impact on the identity of the inhabitants and the traces it imprints on their lifestyle. The disappearance of nature is frequently portrayed as caused by human interference, particularly as a result of industrialization and exploitation. The protest against its disappearance is represented by the beneficial influence of the natural environment on people, as well as by its human-like qualities frequently conveyed by figurative language. These three points of ecocritical studies determine the structure of the following analysis.

⁶⁵ Webb, "Particular Places," 140.

⁶⁶ Nail, "Place and Setting," 108.

4. ROLE OF THE PHYSICAL SETTING

The natural environment pervades the narratives of both *The Country of the Pointed Firs* and “A White Heron”. Instead of being a passive setting in which only the characters act, it functions as an agent itself, often with a defining influence on the attitudes and behavior of the inhabitants. The first part of the analysis employs a framework of five areas to compare how the role of the physical setting is portrayed in the novella and in the short story.

In *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, nature possesses a strong presence at all times, be it indoors or outdoors. On an early-morning walk through the small town, the narrator finds herself fully immersed in the peaceful company of the surrounding fauna and flora, undisturbed by any of the human residents:

The world was filled with a fragrance of fir-balsam and the faintest flavor of seaweed [...]. I could hear no voices but those of the birds, small and great,-- the constant song sparrows, the clink of a yellow-hammer over in the woods, and the far conversation of some deliberate crows.⁶⁷

Her perception of the natural scents and noises as filling the whole “world” stresses the way they absorb her completely, pulling her into a space apart from the one built by humans.

It is not only outside that one might have such an immersive experience. Even if the narrator never looked around the house, she would soon learn that her landlady tends a garden full of sundry herbs: “[...] the sea breezes blew into the low end-window of the house laden with not only sweet-brier and sweet-mary, but balm and sage and borage and mint, wormwood and southernwood.”⁶⁸ Seeing as similar depictions recur throughout the narrative, it is reasonable to assume that the herbal scent makes a constant component of every scene inside the room. The awareness of nature’s presence intensifies when Mrs. Todd begins to make cough drops. The narrator observes her landlady’s work followingly: “[...] she had been bringing forth herbs from dark and dry hiding-places, until now the pungent dust and odor of them had resolved themselves into one mighty flavor of spearmint [...].”⁶⁹ This excerpt evokes an image of a house whose every crevice stores herbs, allowing their odor to fill the dwelling and captivate the narrator’s senses.

Walls never separate the narrator from the environment. Even in the schoolhouse above Dunnet Landing, the sea breeze carries through the windows the sound of birdsongs or bells

⁶⁷ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 44.

⁶⁸ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 2.

⁶⁹ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 31.

worn by the wandering sheep, and one day, even a swallow flies in. Nature, in its various forms, is present everywhere.

In “A White Heron,” contact with the environment is maintained constantly as well, although its influence at specific moments feels more subdued compared to the novella. As a matter of fact, the entire setting of the short story is nature, varying only between a forest, pasture, and the top of a tree. Mrs. Tilley’s house can hardly be excluded from this category, for it stands amid trees and their animal dwellers. Since nature is affecting the characters’ senses unremittingly from all directions, they are seldom described to feel, on an ordinary day, as impressed by its presence as the narrator of the novella in the selected passages above.

There are, however, scenes that accentuate the permanent proximity of fauna and flora. Waiting for the cow to finish drinking at a brook, not only is Sylvia completely surrounded by greenery, but even “the great twilight moths struck softly against her,”⁷⁰ becoming a part of her personal space. Later that evening, Sylvia, her grandmother, and the ornithologist sit talking in the doorway instead of inside the house, and they leave the door open when going to sleep. Thus, no matter the activity or the time of day, the characters never part from the natural environment.

As an indispensable part of life in the countryside, the environment inevitably leaves an imprint on the locals’ features and behavior. An example from *The Country of the Pointed Firs* would be Captain Littlepage, a former but ardent sailor, who has the same “‘cant to leeward’ as the wind-bent trees.”⁷¹ In describing him so, the narrator combines the flora that surrounds them on land with sailing terminology (the Cambridge Dictionary defines “leeward” as a term that means “facing away from the wind” and is often used on ships⁷²). Having adapted to the movement of ships over the decades of sailing, Littlepage seems to have adopted their trait of following the direction of the wind when it fills the sails. Another case of being defined by a long time spent on the sea is Elijah Tilley, an old fisherman, who himself admits that he goes “shufflin’ round the house same’s if ‘twas a bo’t.”⁷³ The effect of fishing on his behavior is noticed by other characters as well. The narrator perceives his knitting thus: “He handled [the yarn] and threw it off at arm’s length as if it were a cod line.”⁷⁴ The habits of both Littlepage

⁷⁰ Sarah O. Jewett, *A White Heron* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1886), 52.

⁷¹ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 6.

⁷² “Leeward,” Cambridge Dictionary, accessed February 2, 2025, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/leeward>.

⁷³ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 63.

⁷⁴ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 63.

and Tilley have undeniably been shaped by their work close to the natural environment, namely the sea, which continues to inform their behavior on dry land.

In “A White Heron,” instances in which nature has marked the characters’ behavior are more difficult to identify. Perhaps Sylvia’s skill in climbing trees may be interpreted as something learned from the fauna, for one would hardly see a child reach such an overwhelming height where only birds and squirrels can be seen otherwise. This inference is supported by the manner in which she progresses upward: “[...] with her bare feet and fingers, that pinched and held like bird’s claws [...]”⁷⁵ The similarity between the girl’s motions and those of birds might be viewed as a result of her being constantly in their company.

Aside from this achievement, however, the characters do not appear to have any uncommon habits that would be the effects of living surrounded by nature. Presumably, the reason is that Sylvia and her grandmother have not been removed from the environment that has had a transformative influence on them and therefore, any peculiar habits blend in. In contrast, in the cases of Littlepage and Tilley from the novella, the narrator notices their characteristics easily because they are untypical for the given context. It may be expected that if Sylvia or her grandma left the farmstead, some of the traits they have acquired there would draw attention as well.

The place where the characters live also helps them develop certain qualities based on the specific challenges of the locale. Slepov shares the view that seclusion from society heightens the self-reliance and industriousness of people living on an island,⁷⁶ which is a belief proven by *The Country of the Pointed Firs*. Mrs. Blackett and her son William, the only two people living on Green Island, indeed possess a high degree of self-sufficiency, willingness to work hard, and a harmonious relationship with nature. They tend fields with various crops like potatoes and beans, they keep sheep and chickens,⁷⁷ and in the surrounding waters, one can encounter William’s trawls for catching fish.⁷⁸ It is a combination of their personal qualities and the appreciation of nature’s gifts that enables them to live a fairly comfortable life on an island away from the rest of the community.

Moreover, it is essential for everyone in Dunnet Landing and on the islands to be able to negotiate the sea. Since water separates the mainland from the off-coast dwellings, Steinecke explains that boats are the means of maintaining contact between one place and the other.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 57.

⁷⁶ Slepov, “A Study of Geo-Regional Place-Consciousness,” 42.

⁷⁷ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 19–21.

⁷⁸ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 17.

⁷⁹ Steinecke, “Revolt from the Village,” 59.

Mrs. Todd's experience with sailing becomes evident on a number of occasions, particularly on the day of her journey to Green Island to visit her mother and brother. Examining the morning air, she notes confidently: "The wind's light northeast,--'twill take us right straight out, an' this time o' year it's liable to change round southwest [...]"⁸⁰ In addition, she assumes a leading position on board, deciding how to row according to the tidal movements. Mrs. Blackett displays a similar understanding of the wind, including the ability to foretell its direction, and with William, they manage to cross over the expanse of water at the earliest signs of light.⁸¹ The women's detailed knowledge of the tide and wind currents and their effect on the boats must come from a place of experience and capability, both of which are crucial in order for them to meet the requirements of the environment.

The lives of Mrs. Tilley and Sylvia in "A White Heron" are similarly isolated as those of islanders, furnishing them with the same qualities. By means of self-reliance and hard work, they are able to provide for their basic needs despite there being only two of them. Neither the elderly grandma nor her little granddaughter are exempted from their duties, which involve, for instance, raising geese or driving the cow home. Their way of life is thus dependent not only on their traits but also on their relationship and cooperation with the natural environment.

As was discussed in the theoretical part, if the environment determines the qualities and comportment of individuals, from a broader perspective it must affect the identity of the whole community. Therefore, those who differ in some way tend to be depicted as a figure apart from others. One of those figures in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* is Parson Dimmick, with whom Mrs. Todd has once sailed to Shell-heap Island. Mrs. Fosdick criticizes his inability to adjust to the boat and categorizes him unflatteringly as one of the "landlocked folks."⁸² She might refer the same way to another of the characters, Asa, who tries to advise Mrs. Todd on how to best conduct her sailing trip to Green Island. However, Mrs. Todd dismisses his words by referring to his inland origin, which makes the local onlookers laugh.⁸³ Both Mr. Dimmick and Asa, living away from the shore, are treated as outsiders for their lack of the skills that nature makes indispensable in the particular place.

The rejection of some people as members of the community is not always due to the lack of seafaring skills. Steinecke suggests that even Captain Littlepage, who is known to have been a shipmaster, is portrayed as an isolated character.⁸⁴ Indeed, the narrator rarely spots him

⁸⁰ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 16.

⁸¹ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 44.

⁸² Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 35.

⁸³ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 16–17.

⁸⁴ Steinecke, "Revolt from the Village," 40.

elsewhere than behind his closed window⁸⁵ and even perceives him as “the one strange and unrelated person”⁸⁶ when he does join the company of the other inhabitants. One of the reasons for his separation might be his refusal to accept the current state of the town, for he is oftentimes heard mourning the decline of sea trade and its regrettable consequences on the community. The others, on the other hand, seem to embrace the given conditions as they are, tending their gardens or devoting themselves to various kinds of craft using what the environment offers. Furthermore, the man’s discontent clashes with the happiness of nature, particularly when he is complaining to the narrator at the same time as a “golden robin, with the most joyful and eager of voices, was singing close by in a thicket of wild roses.”⁸⁷ The fact that Littlepage is so disconsolate in a situation in which the natural environment thrives renders him detached from the community.

Since it is essential for those who live on a farmstead to value nature, anyone who does not do so will not be accepted by the rest. In “A White Heron,” this case is presented by the figure of the ornithologist, who is excluded for his exploitation of nature. However, Brault suggests that “the gun is not the problem, but the way the man uses it.”⁸⁸ It is a logical assumption, seeing as Mrs. Tilley herself says that her son “was a great hand to go gunning [...],”⁸⁹ and seems to consider it perfectly acceptable. The key difference from the ornithologist is that Mrs. Tilley’s son used to hunt animals for sustenance and he is not said to have pursued any endangered species. The visiting young man, on the other hand, is motivated chiefly by enjoyment and wishes to kill the white heron specifically for its rarity, not out of necessity. Although the grandmother welcomes him warmly, it becomes evident that at that time, she is not aware of the full scope of his actions. It is not until later that she begins to doubt his love for nature, asking with uncertainty: “Do you cage ’em up?”⁹⁰ in reference to his bird collection. He responds that he stuffs them, and even though the grandmother’s reaction is not described, one can imagine the shocking effect of the revelation considering her close relationship with fauna and flora. Ultimately, it is Sylvia’s uncooperativeness in searching for the heron that makes him leave, marking him as an outsider for his values that clash with the locals’ respect for and peaceful coexistence with the animals.

⁸⁵ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 6.

⁸⁶ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 6.

⁸⁷ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 10.

⁸⁸ Brault, “Writing Wilderness,” 214.

⁸⁹ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 54.

⁹⁰ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 54.

Beyond pervading one's life at all times and forming one's personality and skillset, the natural environment plays an active role, which may be noticed in the power it holds over the human inhabitants. One evening, the narrator retells, a mysterious herb fills the air with a scent so powerful that it makes Mrs. Todd share "all that lay deepest in her heart."⁹¹ The fact that both women "fell under the spell"⁹² of the fragrance shows its irresistible force, one that they have no choice but to submit to. Thus, the plant becomes a controlling entity thanks to which the landlady and her lodger are able to deepen their bond.

The narrator draws attention to a certain superiority of nature when she has the opportunity to observe the Dunnet Landing community from a distance. Witnessing a funeral march from a window, she gains the impression that: "the great sea beyond stretched away to the far horizon southward and eastward; the little procession in the foreground looked futile and helpless on the edge of the rocky shore."⁹³ It is crucial to realize that the environment is not greater only in terms of expanse, but especially in its endurance and strength. In this passage, the author contrasts the transience of human life (represented by the funeral gathering) with the "unchanged"⁹⁴ shore, which will remain virtually the same while the people around will age and pass away at a comparatively rapid rate.

The dominance of nature over humans plays a vital role when traveling by sea. On the way to Green Island, Mrs. Todd waits for the wind and tide to "take" her boat to the destination instead of having her companions row themselves.⁹⁵ She seems to perceive the natural forces as animate beings that act on their own will and possess the ability to transport people from one place to another. A similar incident occurs when Captain Bowden takes the narrator to Shell-heap Island and his boat runs aground on the shoals. Trying to push it back into deeper waters, the narrator notes that "the wind veered round a little as if on purpose and helped with the sail."⁹⁶ This episode exemplifies the characters' dependence on the beneficence of the environment.

In "A White Heron," one can also encounter signs indicating the inferiority of humans to the natural environment. When Sylvia is sent to drive the cow home, no matter how much she calls and searches the pasture, the animal is nowhere to be found because she does not *want*

⁹¹ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 4.

⁹² Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 4.

⁹³ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 6.

⁹⁴ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 2.

⁹⁵ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 16.

⁹⁶ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 40.

to be discovered. It is not until “she was quite ready to be milked,”⁹⁷ and thus feels her own need to return to the farm, that the cow reveals her location to the girl. Even as the cow stops on the way at a brook, Sylvia simply stands waiting, not trying to urge the animal to continue walking although it is getting late.⁹⁸ The fact that “Mrs. Tilley had chased the horned torment too many summer evenings herself”⁹⁹ shows that the cow cannot be made to cooperate by anyone, regardless of their age or experience. It is the animal who always decides when they leave the pasture and whether they are delayed on the way.

Another instance consists in the matter of boundaries between the animals’ and the humans’ homes. Whereas the door of Mrs. Tilley’s house is left open the whole night, when Sylvia ventures up the trunk of the pine, “[...] a red squirrel ran to and fro and scolded pettishly at the harmless housebreaker.”¹⁰⁰ Any forest-dwelling creature is welcome to enter the house at any time they like, but when Sylvia enters the “home” of the animals, they protest against the disruption. It gives the impression of fauna being entitled to more rights than humans. Where in the novella, it was the wind and sea acting based on their own preferences, here, it is the fauna that follows its own will, either to the benefit or disadvantage of people.

“A White Heron” also portrays a contrast between the mortality of humans and the longevity of nature. Of what was once a whole forest, only one pine tree remains standing, but “the woodchoppers who had felled its mates were dead and gone long ago, and a whole forest of sturdy trees [...] had grown again.” The men responsible for the past loss of multiple trees have all died without a chance of return, whereas the forest has recovered and grown strong anew.

The physical setting in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* and “A White Heron” represents an active force, the impact of which has been analyzed in five areas of focus. It has been found that the characters can never be completely divided from the natural environment, even though in the novella, it is occasionally perceived in waves of heightened intensity, while in the short story, it is experienced on a more stable level. Nature’s impact on the characters’ behavior appears more pronounced in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, presumably because it is observed in a setting where such habits are untypical. To meet the challenges posed by the environment, the characters also develop specific skills and qualities that stress the importance of working harmoniously with nature. Cooperation with the environment is a dominant factor in defining

⁹⁷ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 52.

⁹⁸ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 52.

⁹⁹ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 52.

¹⁰⁰ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 57.

the local communities, the members of which tend to shun those who do not display the required abilities or respect. The natural environment is depicted as an active force with its own will that is, on several occasions, seen to exercise a degree of control over the human inhabitants. By means of specific passages from the analyzed literary works, the physical setting has been proven to be an all-pervading, transformative influence of importance greater than that of a mere background.

5. DISAPPEARANCE OF NATURE

The second chapter of the analysis examines the disappearance of nature in the work of Sarah Orne Jewett. The portrayal of the central issue is studied via a structure of more specific subtopics in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* and “A White Heron” respectively. The analysis also discusses the possible causes of the problem and its effects on the traditional ways of life.

Perhaps the most direct portrayal of the disappearance of nature would be in the form of deforestation. Although in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, there is no direct mention of exploiting the forests, Roudeau is of the opinion that the title of the book itself alludes to deforestation. According to her, “firs” appear in the title because those were the trees whose “pointed” tops became visible as a result of the other types having been felled in economic and other pursuits.¹⁰¹ Her theory is supported by the fact that the narrative does reveal a past in which Maine seafarers undertook voyages in “lumber-laden ships”¹⁰² in order to sell the cargo abroad.

Furthermore, aside from export, wood also serves as an indispensable resource to many locals in their daily lives. The narrator observes that the houses in the small town are made of wood¹⁰³ and the same applies to their interior, as may be seen in Mrs. Blackett’s bedroom, where one can admire the “brown unpainted paneling of its woodwork.”¹⁰⁴ Similarly, Roudeau adds that trees were used extensively for shipbuilding,¹⁰⁵ which, taking into account the town’s seafaring tradition, must have had a considerable effect on the composition of the landscape. Even though the narration does not overtly express concerns about any exploitation of the forests, the emphasis on firs by including them in the title might be a reference to the impact of economic and housing needs on the local flora.

In “A White Heron,” the portrayal of vanishing nature is more explicit. It might not be so obvious at first since the whole story takes place in a wooded area, but the issue of deforestation is presented in the passage, “a great pine-tree stood, the last of its generation.”¹⁰⁶ A long time ago, humans felled a nearly whole forest, leaving a single tree standing as the remainder of what used to grow there. Compared to the novella, the short story offers a more direct portrait of past deforestation.

¹⁰¹ Cécile Roudeau, “Jewett’s Trees,” *Études Anglaises* 74, no. 4 (2021): 403.

¹⁰² Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 6.

¹⁰³ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 5.

¹⁰⁴ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 26.

¹⁰⁵ Roudeau, “Jewett’s Trees,” 403.

¹⁰⁶ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 56.

In addition to the flora, fauna is also depicted in a precarious position. The young ornithologist's gun and "heavy game-bag"¹⁰⁷ are themselves clear indicators of the danger he presents, but it becomes more pronounced when one discovers his attitude to his hunting achievements. The man appears proud of his collection of birds, particularly when he stresses that he has "shot or snared every one [himself]."¹⁰⁸ There is no sign of remorse on his part while the "thrushes and sparrows [drop] silent to the ground, their songs hushed and their pretty feathers stained and wet with blood."¹⁰⁹ The same pleasant songs that fill the forest on a daily basis are being silenced forever. In addition to the shooting itself, the man's lack of compassion for the lives that he ends is a worrying indication of the harm he might yet do.

A significant peril lies in the ornithologist's interest in the white heron. He is aware that members of this species "have never been found in this district at all,"¹¹⁰ and yet it does not deter him from endeavoring to add one of the last survivors to his collection; on the contrary, the rarity of the bird fuels his desire to capture it. He is willing to eradicate a whole species for his own gain.

Sylvia seems to sense the danger already before she meets him and learns about his hobby. Hearing a strange whistle in the forest, she "left the cow to whatever sad fate might await her,"¹¹¹ and attempted to hide herself. Neither does she try to stop the hunter from shooting the birds as she accompanies him through the forest on the following days. In addition to the birds' deaths, it is the girl's lack of protest that reinforces one's notion of the threat posed to the animals. The short story increases the worry about the environment by involving the threat of extinction of some animals.

It is not only the natural environment that is in decline, but also the number of human inhabitants in the countryside is diminishing. In *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, one of the manners in which they depart, the most irreversible one, is by passing away. Mrs. Blackett reflects on the Bowden reunion in these words: "There wa'n't many old folks, [...]. There ain't so many to come as there used to be [...]."¹¹² Relatives from the older generation did not arrive at the gathering, presumably because they had died already. Following this utterance, the narrator notices that Mrs. Todd "made some excuse to turn and steal an anxious look at her

¹⁰⁷ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 53.

¹⁰⁸ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 54.

¹⁰⁹ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 59.

¹¹⁰ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 55.

¹¹¹ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 53.

¹¹² Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 56.

mother,”¹¹³ concerned about Mrs. Blackett’s well-being due to her old age. Elijah Tilley represents a very similar case, being one of the last four “survivors of an earlier and more vigorous generation”¹¹⁴ of fishermen in Dunnet Landing. He himself predicts that he “sha’n’t trouble the fish a great sight more,”¹¹⁵ meaning that he does not expect to continue fishing much longer because he is likely to die soon. The population of the coastal town is gradually declining in number.

The notion of the locals dying becomes even more worrying when combined with the near-absence of the young. Except for one or two brief mentions of children, virtually none of the characters are younger than middle-aged. This demographic feature might be the result of their moving to the city in search of jobs or adventures that the village does not offer. This assumption is supported by the narrator’s observation at the reunion: “[...] only opportunity and stimulus were lacking,--a narrow set of circumstances had caged a fine able character.”¹¹⁶ Nail takes a similar approach, reading this passage as the narrator’s meditation on the “abilities that are wasted in rural life.”¹¹⁷ The narrator can see that the countryside does not allow people to fulfill their potential, which most likely causes them to seek more promising conditions elsewhere.

On a similar note, there is the issue of industrialization replacing the products of traditional work as well as the lifestyle and values connected to it. Wendell Berry, quoted by Buell, voices the proposition that the national economy destroys the self-sufficiency of rural communities both in the economic and cultural aspects.¹¹⁸ The detrimental impact of the national on the local economy is portrayed clearly in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* in Mr. Tilley’s confession to the narrator: “I’ve always been called a pretty hand to do nettin’, but seines is master cheap to what they used to be when they was all hand worked.”¹¹⁹ Since machine-made nets are more affordable than handmade ones, his admirable skill no longer earns him money. Duneer, despite discussing this issue as part of a different field of study, also draws attention to the decline in the value of fishermen’s netting due to the proliferation of machine production.¹²⁰ It may be assumed that fishing has lost some of its profitability too, for Mr. Tilley

¹¹³ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 57.

¹¹⁴ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 58.

¹¹⁵ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 61.

¹¹⁶ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 54.

¹¹⁷ Nail, “Place and Setting,” 163.

¹¹⁸ Buell, “Space, Place, and Imagination,” 78.

¹¹⁹ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 63.

¹²⁰ Anita Duneer, “Sarah Orne Jewett and (Maritime) Literary Tradition: Coastal and Narrative Navigations in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*,” *American Literary Realism* 39, no. 3 (2007): 222–240.

uses his buoys as stakes on the field instead of their original purpose on the water.¹²¹ Other sea-related activities have been markedly affected as well, which shows, for instance, in the “dilapidated wharf”¹²² or the “disabled schooners”¹²³ that the narrator sees as she sails away from Dunnet Landing. Duneer also interprets this passage as a portrait of a community that had to abandon its seafaring pursuits and will have to rely on tourism instead.¹²⁴ As modernization and mass production in the cities accelerate, they reduce the interest in rural products and exacerbate the decline of smaller economies and the depopulation of the countryside.

The farmstead in “A White Heron” is sparsely populated and there is little probability of the situation improving. One evening, Mrs. Tilley tells the ornithologist that four of her children have died, the only ones still alive being Sylvia’s mother and one son, who might have passed away as well.¹²⁵ Therefore, like in the novella, death is one of the reasons for the lack of people in the countryside, although here it is not because of old age.

The other cause is also similar – the search for opportunities and excitement. Since the secluded farm has little to offer to young and aspiring people, it is unsurprising that they have moved to the city or to another state altogether. Even Sylvia’s grandmother admits that if it had been possible, she would have left to see the world herself.¹²⁶ The desire to experience more than the forest and pasture does not evade anyone regardless of how close a relationship they have developed with the natural environment.

With all of Mrs. Tilley’s children gone, Sylvia remains the only hope for the future of the farm. However, the little girl has already been introduced to the temptation of exploring the wider world. She “wondered and dreamed about”¹²⁷ the sea, which can be interpreted as a symbol of freedom, as a link to what lies beyond the limited space of her current home. Moreover, the fact that the “great voice [of the sea] could often be heard above the noise of the woods,”¹²⁸ implies that the pull of the world beyond could overpower her connection to the forest. When Sylvia finally sees the expanse of water, the “golden dazzle”¹²⁹ of the dawn on its surface multiplies its appeal and, watching a pair of hawks soaring through the air nearby, she gains the impression that she could fly away just as they do. The possibility of freedom enters

¹²¹ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 59–60.

¹²² Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 16.

¹²³ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 66.

¹²⁴ Duneer, “Sarah Orne Jewett and (Maritime) Literary Tradition,” 238.

¹²⁵ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 54.

¹²⁶ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 54.

¹²⁷ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 55.

¹²⁸ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 55.

¹²⁹ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 58.

her fairly restricted world, encouraging her desire to leave and discover more of what life has to offer.

Sylvia's attraction to the outside world is increased by the ornithologist's presence. Seeing as the only person she meets on an ordinary day is her grandma, the company of a "handsome stranger"¹³⁰ must be thrilling in its novelty, and she is overcome with a "dream of love,"¹³¹ which seems to be one of the influences that make her wish to help him. Another reason is the man's promise to give money to anyone who aids him in finding the white heron. Being poor, Sylvia is presented with an unprecedented chance to obtain some "wished-for treasures"¹³² that she might never afford otherwise. According to Brault, already the first mention of trading an animal for money is the root of Sylvia's "emotional separation from nonhuman nature," which is an issue that becomes central to the plot.¹³³ The two nearly unimaginable rewards – the money and the young man's friendship – begin to overpower the little girl's appreciation of nature.

The promise of something more than the modest benefits of the countryside threatens to break Sylvia's bond with the environment. When walking with the hunter through the forest, "she grieved because the longed-for white heron was elusive"¹³⁴ despite not actively participating in the search. She is already beginning to wish for his success, although so far her relationship with nature does not allow her to support him directly. Later, having climbed into the crown of the tallest pine tree, Sylvia does not seem satisfied with the breathtaking view of the landscape: "[...] was this wonderful sight and pageant of the world the only reward for having climbed to such a giddy height?"¹³⁵ She is already conscious of the possibility of a seemingly more fulfilling, materialistic reward that, in her mind, outweighs the virtues of nature. Furthermore, once she commences her descent, she is already wondering "what the stranger would say to her [...] when she told him how to find his way straight to the heron's nest."¹³⁶ The attachment she might have felt to the heron has already gone and now, Sylvia fully intends to exchange the bird's life for money and the ornithologist's company. The intimate relationship with nature that she has established on the farmstead is gradually dissipating in favor of financial and social gains.

¹³⁰ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 55.

¹³¹ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 56.

¹³² Jewett, *A White Heron*, 55.

¹³³ Brault, "Writing Wilderness," 217.

¹³⁴ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 56.

¹³⁵ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 58.

¹³⁶ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 58.

Both *The Country of the Pointed Firs* and “A White Heron” depict the gradual disappearance of nature and its effects on the population that remains in the countryside. One of the forms that the issue takes is the depletion of fauna and flora, namely deforestation and the possible extinction of some animal species, which is addressed more explicitly in the short story. Another way in which the decline of nature manifests itself is the reduction of population in the countryside. In both narratives, most members of the young generation head to the city in search of livelier and economically beneficial conditions. This phenomenon may also indicate a loss of appreciation for the natural environment and the rural ways of life. The preference of urban areas might be the result of industrialization and the financial advantage of machine-made products over handmade ones, which also causes a lack of profitability of the local trade. In the short story, the desirability of the city is particularly pronounced, frequently alluding to the longing for a wider and more dynamic world. Nature and the related traditions are threatened by economic and technological development as well as by an observable decrease in the value of the countryside in the eyes of the young.

6. PROTEST AGAINST THE DISAPPEARANCE OF NATURE

The final chapter of the analytical part is devoted to the depiction of protest against the vanishing of nature and the traditional ways of life in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* and “A White Heron.” The various ways in which the protection of the environment is being promoted have been divided into more specific areas, each of which has been examined in the novella and the short story respectively. The focus is primarily on the importance of nature in the characters’ lives and their relationship with it, which illustrates why it would be a great loss if the presence of the natural environment were to diminish.

The advocacy of preserving nature can manifest itself in the characters’ attitude to it. The environment in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* is frequently described in fond terms, such as when the narrator is enjoying the “warm, sunshiny air [...] of some ethereal northern sort”¹³⁷ or expresses admiration of the “noble landscape”¹³⁸ consisting of fields, hills, and a bay that unveils in front of her eyes on the way to the Bowden reunion. For Mrs. Blackett, it is the sight of the field, sea, and the sky that makes “the prettiest view in the house”¹³⁹ and that allows her to repose in peace and quiet. The beauty and, most importantly, the characters’ love of nature serve as arguments for its protection.

Aside from affection for the flora, the desire to preserve nature is shown also in the treatment of the local fauna. Mrs. Todd recalls Joanna’s decision to send the sheep from her island to the mainland as winter approached because “There wa’n’t no proper pasture for sheep after the June grass was past, and she [...] couldn’t bear to see them suffer.”¹⁴⁰ Joanna’s act of consideration for the animals fortifies the notion that they are highly valued in the countryside, not only for pragmatic reasons but also as living beings that deserve to be cared for.

The narrative of “A White Heron” displays the characters’ great fondness for their surroundings as well. On her walks through the forest, Sylvia listens to the twitters of birds which make her heart “beat fast with pleasure”¹⁴¹ and give her a “sense of comfort and companionship.”¹⁴² Her affection for the avian residents of the forest becomes even clearer when her grandma says that “[Sylvia]’d ’a’scanted herself of her own meals to have plenty to

¹³⁷ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 44.

¹³⁸ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 47.

¹³⁹ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 26.

¹⁴⁰ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 34.

¹⁴¹ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 52.

¹⁴² Jewett, *A White Heron*, 57.

throw out amongst'em [...]."¹⁴³ The girl's love of the environment is evident in the pleasure she takes in the birds' songs and her willingness to provide them with food at her own expense.

The most intimate bond that Sylvia achieves is with the white heron. Her perception of the bird seems full of admiration and respect as she watches it rise "like a single floating feather [...] and [go] by the landmark pine with steady sweep of wing and outstretched slender neck and crested head."¹⁴⁴ The impression gains in significance particularly when contrasted with the ornithologists' simple-worded description. Moreover, an impactful part comes when Sylvia does not tell the ornithologist where to find the heron:

The murmur of the pine's green branches is in her ears, she remembers how the white heron came flying through the golden air and how they watched the sea and the morning together, and Sylvia cannot speak; she cannot tell the heron's secret and give its life away.¹⁴⁵

Having shared an intimate moment with the heron, Sylvia is unable to trade its life for money as she originally planned. Brault interprets this experience as the strengthening of Sylvia's "connection to nonhuman nature,"¹⁴⁶ which she achieved only thanks to respecting her environment. The fact that it is not her deliberate decision to protect the bird suggests that it is the heart that stops her, indicating the depth of her relationship with nature.

The objections to the disappearance of nature may be also perceived in the comparison of the countryside and rural occupations with the city and industry. *The Country of the Pointed Firs* depicts life in Dunnet Landing, which might be considered plain and limited but, according to the narrator, "the ease that belongs to simplicity is charming enough to make up for whatever a simple life may lack."¹⁴⁷ This claim alone denies any superiority of the city to the small town based on its modesty, maintaining that the latter is at least equivalent to, if not better than, the former. Nail agrees that the narrator is clearly attracted to life in Dunnet Landing on account of the peace and simplicity that belong, in addition to other factors, among the advantages of the coastal town.¹⁴⁸ A similar sentiment appears in the narrator's opinion that "There is all the pleasure that one can have in gold-digging in finding one's hopes satisfied in the riches of a good hill of potatoes."¹⁴⁹ She considers the harvest of agricultural products to be no less rewarding than the acquisition of precious metals.

¹⁴³ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 54.

¹⁴⁴ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 58.

¹⁴⁵ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 59.

¹⁴⁶ Brault, "Writing Wilderness," 186.

¹⁴⁷ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 64.

¹⁴⁸ Nail, "Place and Setting," 165.

¹⁴⁹ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 22.

Furthermore, the results of rural work are oftentimes considered to be of a better quality than those of more industrially-oriented pursuits. The narrator says so herself in commenting on the appearance of Mr. Tilley's field: "[...] hardly a stray pebble showed itself. This was most surprising in that country of firm ledges, and scattered stones which all the walls that industry could devise had hardly begun to clear away off the land."¹⁵⁰ With his own hands, patience, and hard work, the old fisherman has done a better job than the inventions of the industry. Another instance in which the countryside surpasses the city is the knitting work, as Mr. Tilley tells the narrator: "[...] our Dunnet stockin's is getting' to be celebrated up to Boston,--good quality o' wool an' even knittin [...]."¹⁵¹ Even urban dwellers acknowledge the superiority of rural products, which is contributed to by both the quality of the material and the skill in handling it.

The characters in "A White Heron" express a preference for the countryside as well. Having lived in a "crowded manufacturing town"¹⁵² prior to moving to her grandma's, it seems "as if [Sylvia] never had been alive at all before she came to live at the farm."¹⁵³ In addition, upon arriving at the farmstead and being welcomed by a stray cat, "Sylvia whispered that this was a beautiful place to live in, and she never should wish to go home."¹⁵⁴ She appears much happier at the prospect of living in direct contact with nature in the peaceful forest instead of being surrounded by people in a noisy city. Brault develops the notion of the goodness of the countryside even further, claiming that industrialized cities are "places from which some people need to escape"¹⁵⁵ and from which they seek refuge in nature. Sylvia's impression of the farmstead does correspond with his opinion, especially when contrasted with her unfavorable feelings towards the town.

Another form of promoting the preservation of nature is the usage of pathetic fallacy. According to McMurry, if the environment is portrayed as possessing qualities that are typically associated with people, it is more likely for society to sympathize with the nonspeaking flora and fauna.¹⁵⁶ In *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, Mrs. Todd's manner of treating and talking about trees and herbs indeed seems as if she considered them human. On the way to the Bowden reunion, she "suddenly reined in the horse as if somebody had stood on the roadside and stopped her. She even gave that quick reassuring nod of her head which was usually made to answer for

¹⁵⁰ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 59.

¹⁵¹ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 63.

¹⁵² Jewett, *A White Heron*, 52.

¹⁵³ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 52.

¹⁵⁴ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 52.

¹⁵⁵ Brault, "Writing Wilderness," 211.

¹⁵⁶ McMurry, "In Their Own Language," 54.

a bow [...].”¹⁵⁷ While Mrs. Todd seems to have spotted an acquaintance, it is discovered that she is, in fact, inspecting nearby a tree. She explains that the last time she saw the tree, it looked “kind of drooping and discouraged,”¹⁵⁸ and proceeds to describe how trees tend to act the same way as people. The woman’s caring attitude towards plants and her explicit comparison of them to humans makes her bond with flora resemble an interpersonal relationship.

Animals are also frequently likened to human beings, especially in their interactions with people. Joanna had developed a close bond with fauna, as is revealed through other characters’ reminiscences. Mrs. Fosdick holds the belief that, for lack of company, Joanna “soon came to makin’ folks”¹⁵⁹ of the hens that lived with her on Shell-heap Island. Isolated from her friends and family, she had presumably established some communication with the animals around her. Mrs. Todd recalls that “Joanna’d got most o’ the wild sparrows as tame as could be, livin’ out there so long among ‘em, and one flew right in and lit on the coffin an’ begun to sing [...].”¹⁶⁰ In addition to the domesticated poultry, Joanna was also close with the birds that lived there freely, and since one of the birds came to sing on top of her coffin at the funeral, it is evident that the relationship was reciprocal.

Mr. Tilley represents another figure who has built a special bond with animals. Having worked as a fisherman for a significant part of his life, he seems to ascribe human emotions to fish. When discussing the day’s catch with the narrator, he says: “I don’t expect they feel like bitin’ every day; we l’arn to humor ‘em a little, an’ let ‘em have their way ‘bout it. These plaguey dog-fish kind of worry ‘em.”¹⁶¹ Noting the sympathy in his voice, even the narrator feels that he speaks “as if he looked upon himself as a true friend of all the haddock and codfish that lived on the fishing grounds.”¹⁶² Mr. Tilley’s speaking about the fish and his concern about their living conditions prove the sincerity of his care for them.

The fauna and flora in “A White Heron” are also regarded as fellow human beings. Similarly to Mrs. Todd in the novella, Sylvia worries about the well-being of plants and often thinks “with wistful compassion of a wretched dry geranium that belonged to a town neighbor.”¹⁶³ Sylvia wonders about the flower and feels sorry about its poor condition as if it were a good friend of hers. In discussing this passage, Brault quotes Gayle’s observation that

¹⁵⁷ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 46.

¹⁵⁸ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 47.

¹⁵⁹ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 35.

¹⁶⁰ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 39.

¹⁶¹ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 59.

¹⁶² Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 59.

¹⁶³ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 52.

the word “compassion” typically applies only to people or animals.¹⁶⁴ Thus, its usage in relation to a plant seems to promote the notion that humans, flora, and fauna have more in common than one might imagine.

Moreover, the pine that the girl climbs is described as having feelings as well as its own will. Firstly, the tree is said to be “asleep”¹⁶⁵ when Sylvia approaches, and then the narrator claims that it “must truly have been amazed”¹⁶⁶ to feel the little girl trying to conquer its height. When she begins to ascend higher on its trunk, the tree seems to be defending itself against the intrusion: “the sharp dry twigs caught and held her and scratched her like angry talons, the pitch made her thin little fingers clumsy and stiff.”¹⁶⁷ It may be assumed that the pine is trying to protect itself from being felled as the rest of the old forest, and possibly it also wishes to prevent the discovery of the heron. Later, however, it appears to realize that Sylvia is a harmless child with no intention to hurt the tree: “[...] how steadily the least twigs held themselves to advantage this light, weak creature on her way!”¹⁶⁸ The way in which the pine is depicted makes it seem like it has a heart, brain, and the ability to act on its own accord, which are qualities hardly associated with plants. From Brault’s perspective, the tree’s attempt to hinder Sylvia’s progress stems from the fear of weakening her closeness to nonhuman nature. However, he continues to say that this closeness becomes stronger as Sylvia climbs higher, which is when the pine begins helping her advance,¹⁶⁹ so as she reaches a new height, her relationship with the tree deepens. The portrayal of nature as conscious and sentient might help readers relate to the environment and show more respect for it.

Due to the loneliness at the farmstead, animals are sometimes placed into the role of companions. Brault borrows Gayle’s idea that by making the cow appear as an intelligent and playful being, the story “emphasize[s] the relationship between human and nonhuman as one of companionship.”¹⁷⁰ The cow not only has a name, “Mistress Moolly,”¹⁷¹ but she also demonstrates awareness of the girl’s lack of playmates and makes “pranks [that the girl sees] as an intelligent attempt to play hide and seek.”¹⁷² It might also be debated whether the animal understands humans to a degree because the cow “gave a loud moo by way of explanation”¹⁷³

¹⁶⁴ Brault, “Writing Wilderness,” 212.

¹⁶⁵ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 57.

¹⁶⁶ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 57.

¹⁶⁷ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 57.

¹⁶⁸ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 57.

¹⁶⁹ Brault, “Writing Wilderness,” 222.

¹⁷⁰ Brault, “Writing Wilderness,” 211.

¹⁷¹ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 51.

¹⁷² Jewett, *A White Heron*, 51.

¹⁷³ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 53.

when Mrs. Tilley was seen awaiting the return of her granddaughter from the pasture. Engaging in reciprocal interactions with the human inhabitants and imitating some of their activities, animals can be considered to substitute the presence of people.

In addition to offering companionship to those who are lonely, nature is also useful thanks to its salutary properties. Those are best demonstrated in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* in Mrs. Todd's business. She devotes much of her time to herb-gathering and brewing "soothing syrups and elixirs,"¹⁷⁴ which she then distributes among the inhabitants of Dunnet Landing as well as visitors from inland. Even though the small town has a professional doctor, the herbs are "much counted upon to ease [the residents'] winter ails."¹⁷⁵ Herbs are largely regarded as a solution for any health issues, and they appear to be more desirable than modern forms of medicine.

A more implicit manifestation of the healing effects of the environment is the general condition of locals. Mrs. Blackett is able to participate in physically demanding activities, such as managing a household, sailing, and tilling fields with amazing energy despite being eighty-six years old. Moreover, Mrs. Blackett and her two children are all in a better physical condition than the narrator, who is younger than each of them. When climbing uphill on Green Island, the narrator notes that she is "more out of breath than either of my companions"¹⁷⁶ and needs to rest. The island and coastal dwellers, in spite of being elderly, possess a greater amount of strength and endurance than the younger, urban visitor. It is reasonable to assume that it is the natural environment that helps the characters maintain their health.

Some rejuvenating qualities of nature can also be observed in "A White Heron." Bernhard identifies a certain "restorative effect" of the environment on Sylvia, who, having lived for eight years in a city, does not feel alive until she moves to the countryside.¹⁷⁷ It may be the clear air, prevailing peace, and close proximity of animals, all of which are lacking in urban areas, that give her a sense of leading a better life. What is more, Sylvia's grandmother appears to be in great shape, managing a farmstead with only the help of a little girl. As in the novella, the healthful properties of nature are noticeable both in the physical and mental condition of the inhabitants.

The usefulness of the environment manifests itself in other ways as well. The characters in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* are frequently said to rely on plants and animals for the

¹⁷⁴ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 3.

¹⁷⁵ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 4.

¹⁷⁶ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 18.

¹⁷⁷ Bernhard, "Topographies Real and Imagined," 220.

fulfillment of their needs. The sea is an indispensable source of sustenance on the islands, which is evidenced by, for instance, William's trawls in the water or the clams, fish, and lobsters around Shell-heap Island where Joanna used to live. The mainlanders also secure the ingredients for their meals in the sea, as is suggested not only by the presence of fishermen but also by the narrator, "who might sometimes be seen hurrying down the road, late in the day, with cunner line in hand,"¹⁷⁸ to provide for a hot supper. The sea supplies the residents with a variety of food, which they gladly receive.

The land represents another source that yields necessary provisions. There are fields and gardens for growing crops, pastures to keep domesticated animals, and forests where one can find berries. In addition to satisfying hunger, people can also devise various tools or household goods using what they encounter in nature. Joanna, for example, gathered some rushes growing on her island and "braided some beautiful mats for the floor and a thick cushion for the long bunk"¹⁷⁹ and made herself sandal shoes. Rather than traveling to the city to purchase food and other necessities, Dunnet Landing inhabitants find what they need in their natural environment.

"A White Heron" depicts characters dependent on their environment, too. Mrs. Tilley and her granddaughter keep a cow that "[gives] good milk and plenty of it,"¹⁸⁰ which is the first thing that the ornithologist receives for refreshment. Other animals that help satisfy the locals' needs are the forest birds that Mrs. Tilley's son used to hunt for their meat and the geese that the grandma raises, whose feathers they sleep on. Although the farmstead appears isolated from the city and the opportunity to shop, the inhabitants do not miss anything essential thanks to nature.

One of the strategies employed by *The Country of the Pointed Firs* and "A White Heron" to express the desire to protect nature is the depiction of the characters' love of the environment, which is observable in their care and respect for it as well as in their enjoyment of spending time outside. Both narratives also accentuate the merits of the simple life in the countryside as opposed to the city. Rural areas are much more peaceful and welcoming than the noisy urban ones and, as the novella shows, the traditional hand-made products are of a higher quality than the results of industrialized manufacturing. There appears to be an attempt at awakening sympathy for nature in the readers by means of portraying the fauna and flora as similar to them. The plants and animals in both stories are often given human-like qualities and they even seem to communicate and develop relationships with the characters. Furthermore, nature offers health

¹⁷⁸ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 3.

¹⁷⁹ Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 37.

¹⁸⁰ Jewett, *A White Heron*, 51.

benefits to the inhabitants, lending an aspect of youth even to the elderly, and in the novella it allows the preparation of potent medicine. The environment is also valued for providing sustenance and materials for articles of clothing or necessities for making a home more comfortable. The two literary works object to the disappearance of the natural environment by emphasizing its pleasantness, usefulness, and significance in the characters' lives.

CONCLUSION

This bachelor thesis explored the topic of environmental issues in the 19th-century United States, specifically as they are portrayed in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* and “A White Heron” by Sarah Orne Jewett. The aim was to identify the reflection of contemporary concerns about nature in these two works by analyzing them from an ecocritical perspective and focusing primarily on the role of the physical setting, the disappearance of nature, and the protest against its disappearance.

The theoretical part introduced the context, namely the situation in the United States in the 19th century, which is crucial for a fuller comprehension of Jewett’s writing. It outlined the contemporary circumstances of Maine, which, having exploited much of the natural resources, was undergoing an economic transition from trade reliant on wood to tourism. At that time, one of the widespread literary genres in the United States was regionalism, representing an effort to counter the worrying consequences of the American Civil War and modernization, such as the homogenizing effects of industrial advances. Jewett is considered one of the most important regionalist authors, who endeavored to preserve the distinctiveness of regions in their literary works. The paper also discussed ecocriticism as a field applying ecological concepts to the study of literature, particularly of those texts that depict the mutual impact between the environment and human beings, which was a frequent theme of regionalism. By emphasizing the potentially destructive effects of people on the environment, ecocritics sought to prevent further harm to nature.

The analytical part applied the acquired theoretical knowledge to the examination of Sarah Orne Jewett’s *The Country of the Pointed Firs* and “A White Heron,” which was centered around ecocritical concepts. It was found that the physical setting, especially the natural environment, actively impacts the characters and story events. This was demonstrated in the unremitting effect of nature on the characters’ senses, skills, and qualities, including the requirement to live in harmony with nature, which is indispensable for survival in the given conditions. There is also a perceivable superiority of the natural forces, which do not have to act to the characters’ benefit unless they choose to, as can be seen in the ability of the sea to either complicate or facilitate the passage of the boats, or in the tendency of Mrs. Tilley’s cow to delay until she herself is ready to return home. In addition, the environment possesses the power to control people’s behavior, such as when Mrs. Todd is made, by the influence of herbal aroma, to share her most personal secret with the narrator.

Furthermore, the thesis proved the looming threat of losing the natural environment and the related traditional ways of life. The evidence is more visible in the short story in the form of deforestation and extinction, the latter being a consequence of the ornithologist's selfish pursuit of personal enjoyment in his bird collection. The novella treats the depletion of resources more implicitly, portraying rather its cause, which was the shipping trade that used to dominate the industry. The issue was also illustrated in the attraction of the young to the thrill and prosperity of the city as opposed to the seemingly limited rewards of the countryside. The resulting depopulation of the countryside is contributed to by the degrading effect of industrialization on the profitability of rural work perceivable in Mr. Tilley's commentary on the greater affordability of machine-made nets.

Lastly, this paper discovered the appeal for the preservation of nature in Jewett's narratives. The novella and short story express this sentiment through the characters' love of the fauna and flora, which is most notable in Sylvia's protection of the white heron. The affection for nature is encouraged by the portrayal of plants and animals as sentient beings, primarily in Mrs. Todd's interpretation of the trees' condition as reflecting their mood in the same way that can be observed in humans. Moreover, the countryside is favored as a peaceful refuge for those who need to escape the noisy city, namely for Sylvia, who had never been as happy as on the farmstead, and the narrator of *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, who finally finds a peaceful place for writing in the small town. Neither of them wishes to return to the city where they came from. Nature should also be preserved for its usefulness in the lives of rural inhabitants, specifically for providing them with sustenance and helping them maintain their fitness and health, which is presented, for example, in Mrs. Todd's herbal medicine.

This bachelor thesis has proven the presence of ecological concerns in the writing of Sarah Orne Jewett. Her literary work presents issues and attitudes that can be encountered in environmental debates even today.

RESUMÉ

Tato bakalářská práce studuje zobrazení života mimo civilizaci v novele *The Country of the Pointed Firs* a povídce „A White Heron“ od americké spisovatelky Sary Orne Jewettové. Životem mimo civilizaci se rozumí život v přírodě, která nebyla zásadním způsobem přetvořena člověkem. Tvorba Jewettové spadá do druhé poloviny 19. století ve Spojených státech a často se zabývá venkovským způsobem života a jeho změnami pod vlivem industrializace a urbanizace. Cílem této práce je analyzovat výše zmíněná díla z pohledu ekokritiky a identifikovat v nich soudobé environmentální problémy Spojených států, a to s důrazem na vyobrazení role životního prostředí v textu, nebezpečí vymizení přírody a apelu na její ochranu.

Teoretická část práce prezentuje historické pozadí zkoumaných děl, příležitostně začleňuje konkrétní ukázky z primárních děl pro dokreslení zásadních informací a představuje i koncepty, na nichž je založena analýza. První kapitola se soustředí stát Maine, kde se příběhy Jewettové odehrávají. V prvé řadě se zabývá původem a složením tamější populace, v níž převládají bělošští potomci puritánů, kteří začali imigrovat z Anglie v 17. století. Dále je popsána topografie státu, která má na svědomí nepravdělnou hustotu osídlení a různorodost fauny a flóry, které hrají zásadní roli v životě obyvatel. Environmentální podmínky jsou úzce spjaty s ekonomickými, zejména v případě těžby dřeva, jejíž intenzita v 19. století zapříčinila deforestaci a nutnost přechodu na turismus. Podobná situace tehdy postihla volavky bílé, které byly na pokraji vyhynutí v důsledku obchodu s ptačím peřím.

Druhá kapitola je věnována literárně-kulturnímu kontextu Sary Orne Jewettové. Její tvorba se řadí do regionalismu, který zpravidla vyobrazuje lokality nedotčené modernizací a tamější způsob života. Spisovatelé tohoto žánru v 19. století reagovali na soudobé problémy, mezi něž patřilo rozdělení společnosti způsobené expanzí na západ, imigrací a občanskou válkou. Práce ukazuje, jak se regionalisté snažili poskytnout pocit solidarity prostřednictvím fiktivních komunit, které reprezentovaly homogenní celky uzavřené proti vnějším vlivům. Dalším způsobem navození pocitu sounáležitosti bylo zobrazení kontrastu mezi venkovany hovořícími dialektem a vypravěčem, který mluvil standardní variantou jazyka a se kterým se většinová část čtenářů mohla identifikovat jako skupina. Ve snaze limitovat rozdíly ve společnosti však spisovatelé občas vytvořili dojem příliš zjednodušeného světa, což byl jeden z faktorů, za které byli kritizováni. Tato kapitola také rozebírá, jak rozvoj dopravy urychlil asimilaci charakteristických znaků do té doby oddělených regionů. Hlavním cílem regionalismu v 19. století se následně stalo zachovat odlišnosti mezi regiony a jejich obyvateli prostřednictvím jejich autentických zachycení v příbězích.

Ve třetí kapitole se pojednává o ekokritice, neboli studiu literatury z ekologického hlediska, které se zaměřuje na vztahy mezi organismy a jejich prostředím. Sleduje vývoj pohledu lidí na životní prostředí včetně tendence z 19. století nahlížet na přírodu jako na ekonomický zdroj a pozdější orientace na její ochranu. Ekokritici se do značné míry zajímají o vzájemný vztah mezi člověkem a přírodou a jejich primárním cílem je omezit negativní dopad industrializace a urbanizace na životní prostředí. Toho se mimo jiné snaží dosáhnout prostřednictvím studií regionalistických děl, ve kterých mohou na tento dopad upozornit. Dalším klíčovým bodem je silný vliv přírody na člověka, ať už v pozitivním či negativním slova smyslu, jelikož dokáže formovat jeho osobnostní rysy a uzpůsobit jeho chování daným podmínkám, ale také pro něj může představovat nebezpečí. V této kapitole jsou dále vymezeny určité ekokritické koncepce, na kterých je založena analýza primárních zdrojů této práce.

Následující tři kapitoly se věnují analýze novely *The Country of the Pointed Firs* a povídky „A White Heron,“ v rámci tří zvolených otázek z oblasti ekokritiky. První část se zaměřuje na roli fyzického prostředí v textech a dokazuje, že příroda není pouhým pozadím, ale také plní úlohu aktivního účastníka děje. Ve studovaných příbězích se toto projevuje neustálou blízkostí přírody a jejím působením na vnímání i chování postav. Její vliv je zřetelný především v novele na postavách Captain Littlepage a Mr. Tilley, jejichž dlouhý čas strávený na moři se promítá do jejich počínání na souši. Kapitola také ukazuje, jak život v určitém prostředí vyžaduje od obyvatel jistou míru adaptace, a proto u většiny z nich vyniká hluboká znalost přírody a schopnost spolupracovat s ní. Na druhou stranu, ti, kdo se jí nepřizpůsobí nebo jí dokonce škodí, jsou vnímáni v negativním světle a mohou být i vyloučeni z komunity, jako v případě mladého ornitologa v „A White Heron.“ Dále je v obou dílech životní prostředí zobrazeno jako nadřazené lidem, jednak ve své odolnosti a schopnosti regenerace, a jednak ve své moci ovládat jejich emoce a činy a rozhodovat o jejich osudu.

Druhá analytická kapitola pojednává o ohrožení přírody a života na venkově. Studuje mimo jiné motiv deforestation a vymírání zvířat, který vyniká v „A White Heron“ nejvýznamněji v postavě ornitologa a jeho snaze ulovit bílou volavku, která je jednou z posledních svého druhu. Jasným projevem zkoumaného problému je také depopulace venkova kvůli limitovaným příležitostem především v oblasti ekonomiky. Za slibnějšími podmínkami lidé míří do industrializovaného města, které však zároveň způsobuje pokles výdělečnosti tradičních venkovských řemesel. Vzhledem k tomu, že odchází hlavně mladí, na venkově za sebou zanechávají stárnoucí populaci, což vyniká v *The Country of the Pointed Firs* například v obavách postarší Mrs. Blackett o příbuzné z její generace. Práce poukazuje i na nebezpečí, že

tato situace bude pokračovat, jelikož i Sylvia a její babička jeví zájem poznávat svět a získat výhody, které jejich prostý život na farmě postrádá.

Poslední kapitola identifikuje různé formy argumentů pro ochranu přírody, které jsou v textech vyjádřeny. Jednou z těchto forem je pozitivní vztah postav k jejich prostředí a péče o něj, což je snad nejpůsobivěji zobrazeno v rozhodující scéně v „A White Heron“, kdy Sylvia odmítne obětovat život volavky pro vlastní materiální zisk. Další argument spočívá ve vykreslení venkova jako klidného útočiště, kam se mohou lidé z rušného města uchýlit a vést klidný život bez větších starostí. Analýza zjišťuje, že ochrana životního prostředí je silně podpořena i personifikací, jejímž prostřednictvím je lidem umožněno lépe porozumět rostlinám a zvířatům. Personifikace vyniká obzvláště v soucitném přístupu Mrs. Todd ke stromům a dále v nemalém množství situací, kdy zvířata vystupují jako společníci rovní lidem. Tato kapitola také ukazuje, jak je příroda pro lidi užitečná v mnoha ohledech, ať už se jedná o zdravotní účinky či poskytování potravy. V „A White Heron“ je významným prvkem borovice, do jejíž koruny Sylvia šplhá. Strom vykazuje nejen lidské rysy ve svém úsilí předejít pádu holčičky, ale i snahu zabránit ohrožení přírody svým počátečním vzdorem proti dosažení Sylviina cíle, a stává se tak důrazným představitelem nutnosti zachování životního prostředí.

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