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Identity in the Poetry of Margaret Atwood

Bakalářská práce

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Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci na téma 'Identity in the Poetry of Margaret Atwood' vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

V Olomouci dne

Podpis.....

Poděkování

Děkuji Mgr. Jiřímu Flajšarovi, Ph.D., za odborné vedení práce, poskytování rad a materiálových podkladů k práci.

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INTRODUCTION

Margaret (Eleanor) Atwood (1939) is considered to be one of the most significant Canadian female writers of the twenty-first century. In addition to this, she is an active supporter of women's rights, Native rights and she is also involved in the struggle for a better environment. All in all, Margaret Atwood is a very favourite person in Canadian society.

Generally speaking, Margaret Atwood is more famous as a novelist rather than the writer of poems. Moreover, virtually all other bachelor theses aim at analysis of various Atwood's novels rather than at her poetry. Nevertheless, thanks to the fact that Atwood's poetry has definitely the same importance and quality as her prose, this bachelor thesis deals with acquaintance and the following analysis of the different themes in Margaret Atwood's poems. The individual poems are described according to several critical approaches to literature, such as biographical, historical and gender criticism.

To make the bachelor thesis clearer, it has been subdivided into three chapters. The first one provides some basic information about Canadian literature in general and specifies different groups of people who might be regarded as potential writers of Canadian literature. Also, it reveals particular features which make Canadian literature different from others and describes a short history of Canadian writings. Furthermore, this chapter also focuses on the biography of Margaret Atwood as well as on her personal perception of Canadian literature. Last but not least, the final part aims at Margaret Atwood's collections of poetry or more precisely at the *Selected Poems I* (1976) and the *Selected Poems II* (1986). They are an essential part of the thesis because they function as the primary source of information for the entire work.

The following chapter presents the main goal of the bachelor thesis that is to analyse the major themes and motifs throughout Atwood's *Selected Poems I* and the *Selected Poems II*. Although Margaret Atwood has written more collections of poetry than those included in the *Selected Poems*, such a representative sample seems to be sufficient. In addition, the individual themes are illustrated and described along with the number of corresponding poems from different volumes.

The last chapter focuses on one specific collection of poetry called *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970) belonging to the *Selected Poems I*. Since it is widely regarded as Margaret Atwood's literary masterpiece, the whole chapter is dedicated only to it. The very beginning of the chapter is connected with an introduction to the historical personality of Susanna Strickland Moodie (1803-85) and to her brief biography. It also proposes the answers to the questions about how Margaret Atwood learnt of Susanna Moodie and why she decided to devote the whole collection of poetry just to her. Subsequently the chapter continues with the analysis of individual themes occurring in this volume, which are again supplemented and described on concrete examples.

The last part of the bachelor thesis is devoted to the final conclusions and remarks.

1 SHORT ACQUAINTANCE WITH

1.1 Canadian Literature

Although Canadian literature as a whole does not seem to be as famous as its British or American counterparts, it is something quite different and definitely worth reading. In addition, Canadian authors themselves are conscious of this fact and they fully exploit it: ‘Canadian writers have not been trying to write American or English literature and failing; they’ve been writing Canadian literature’.¹

Focusing on the neutral term such as ‘Canadian literature’, it generally refers to ‘all anglophone literary writing produced in what is now Canada, including the work of immigrant writers and certain temporary residents, as well as literature from regions which in the past were politically separate from Canada, such as Newfoundland’.² Put another way, Canadian literature is not restricted only to the works of writers who were born there, but it also includes the books issued by immigrants.

Interestingly, Canada is a bilingual nation with English and French as the two official languages and because of this fact also its literature ‘incorporates writing in French and in the languages of Aboriginal or diasporic groups, as well as English translations of such texts’.³ According to this, bilingualism in Canadian literature is a unique feature which is very common neither in European nor in American literature.

Dealing with the major themes and motifs occurring in the works of Canadian authors, they are directly linked with a unique Canadian environment and its colonial past: ‘Canadian literature from all periods is shaped by Canada’s particular social and physical landscapes, and by its history’.⁴ Typically, the views of Canadian landscape are negative, which is another peculiarity of Canadian literature. However, this is described in the next sections at length.

The first works of Canadian literature are closely connected with individual people who settled there or passed through Canada at that time, which insinuates that ‘Canadian literary history starts with the narratives of explorers,

¹ Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1972): 237.

² Faye Hammill, *Canadian Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 4.

³ Hammill, *Canadian Literature*, 3.

⁴ Hammill, *Canadian Literature*, 3.

missionaries, and fur-traders in the early seventeenth century; the majority of this writing is in French'.⁵ Nevertheless, it is not so much surprising, because it was just France which colonised Canada since the late 15th century.

Significantly, *The History of Emily Montague* (1769) became the first novel written in and dealing with Canada. It was written by Englishwoman, Frances Brooke.⁶ Later, in the nineteenth century 'Oliver Goldsmith [...] was the first Canadian-born writer to publish a volume of verse, an epic of settlement entitled *The Rising Village* (1825)'.⁷ Since that time the works of Canadian writers began to rise quickly, however, they are still in a minority in comparison with the works of foreign authors: 'Publishers are more disposed to publish and distribute Canadian books, though the book market is still largely foreign-dominated'.⁸

Gradually, due to fluctuations in Canada's population along with the development of other writing styles also the themes of literary works began to change: 'Migration, exile and diasporic experience are the subjects of a substantial proportion of late twentieth- and twenty-first-century Canadian texts, especially in the important genres of life writing'.⁹

Moreover, the current Canadian writers such as Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje, Alice Munro and Yann Martel are well-known not only in Canada, but they gained a worldwide reputation.¹⁰

To sum it up, Canadian literature with its famous contemporary writers plays a very important role in the literary world that can successfully compete with the writers from other nations.

1.2 Margaret Atwood's Biography

As mentioned above, Margaret Atwood is one of the most favourite modern Canadian writers, 'but there is also Atwood the literary celebrity, media star, and public performer, Atwood the cultural critic, social historian, environmentalist, and human rights spokeswoman, and Atwood the political

⁵ Hammill, *Canadian Literature*, 5.

⁶ Hammill, *Canadian Literature*, 6.

⁷ Hammill, *Canadian Literature*, 7.

⁸ Atwood, *Survival*, 192.

⁹ Hammill, *Canadian Literature*, 12.

¹⁰ Hammill, *Canadian Literature*, 12.

satirist and cartoonist'.¹¹ According to the previous statement, this remarkable woman occupies a very significant place in contemporary society and Canadians themselves 'seem conscious of Atwood as a visual spectacle, not least among them Atwood herself. Canadians, of course, see her face printed frequently in magazines and newspapers, as a spokesperson for various causes or political positions, as an award-winning writer, and as a public personality generally'.¹² Simply expressed, Margaret Atwood is so popular not only because of her brilliant writing skills, but also thanks to her public commitment to various social issues.

Margaret Eleanor Atwood was born on 18 November 1939 and 'she spent her childhood years in Ottawa, Canada, the city of her birth, and in the northern woods of Ontario and Quebec'.¹³ Atwood's positive attitude towards nature, which is apparent in her works, is connected both with the place of her birth and with Atwood's father. He was an entomologist who 'often took his family on field trips, producing in Atwood an early and abiding interest in the wilderness'.¹⁴ A depiction of nature and environment is apparent in many Atwood's even current works.

Regarding Atwood's education, after primary school she concentrated on secondary education and then 'in 1957 Atwood entered Victoria College, University of Toronto, graduating with honours in 1961. In 1962 she received her MA in English from Radcliffe College, USA, going on to further graduate work at Harvard University, 1962-63 and 1965-67'.¹⁵

Interestingly, she issued her first collection of poems even before her graduation from university: 'Before Atwood graduated in the spring of 1961, she won the E. J. Pratt Medal for her small collection of poems, *Double Persephone*,

¹¹ Coral Ann Howells, 'Introduction,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, ed. Coral Ann Howells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1.

¹² Lorraine York, 'Biography/Autobiography,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, ed. Coral Ann Howells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 33.

¹³ Timothy Findley and Eugene Benson, 'Atwood, Margaret (1939-),' in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English*, eds. Eugene Benson and L.W. Conolly (London:Routledge,2005),ch.66,

http://gateway.proquest.com.ez.statsbiblioteket.dk:2048/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&xri:pqil:res_ver=0.2&res_id=xri:lion&rft_id=xri:lion:contents/showPage.do.

¹⁴ Findley and Benson, 'Atwood, Margaret (1939-),' ch. 66.

¹⁵ Findley and Benson, 'Atwood, Margaret (1939-),' ch. 66.

which was privately printed by John Robert Colombo's Hawkshead Press.¹⁶ Nevertheless, nowadays Margaret Atwood does not regard this collection of poetry as a very successful, which is very apparent from the interview with her quoted in the last section of this chapter.

During her life, Atwood has visited and lived in different, but mainly European countries: 'Until 1970, Margaret lived throughout Canada with two short periods in Boston. From 1970 until today, she has lived in England and Germany, although Canada, specifically Toronto, remains her primary residence'.¹⁷ In addition, she has also taught at various universities in North America 'including the University of British Columbia, the University of Alberta, Sir George Williams (now Concordia) University, Montreal, and York University, Toronto'.¹⁸

However, she was not satisfied only with writing and teaching, so except for these two activities 'she continues to be an effective spokesperson and energetic activist on behalf of Canadian writers and writing, and of women's rights, Native rights and the environment'.¹⁹ It is not surprising then that Margaret Atwood is very popular among various groups of people.

Regarding Atwood's family life, she has had a lot of ups and downs. She 'married Jim Polk in 1968, divorcing in 1973. Later, she married author Graeme Gibson; they have three children—their daughter, Eleanor Jess Atwood Gibson, and two sons from Gibson's earlier marriage, Matt and Gate'.²⁰

1.3 Margaret Atwood's Perception of Canadian Literature

To comprehend not only Margaret Atwood's poetry, but also Canadian literature as a whole, it is very helpful to know how Atwood herself understands the various works of different Canadian writers. In order to help the readers, she wrote the *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972), in which

¹⁶ David Staines, 'Margaret Atwood in Her Canadian Context,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, ed. Coral Ann Howells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 14.

¹⁷ P.L.Thomas, *Reading, Learning, Teaching Margaret Atwood* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2007), 6.

¹⁸ Findley and Benson, 'Atwood, Margaret (1939-),' ch. 66.

¹⁹ Findley and Benson, 'Atwood, Margaret (1939-),' ch. 66.

²⁰ Thomas, *Reading, Learning, Teaching Margaret Atwood*, 7.

she analyses various themes and features of Canadian literature she met with. Firstly, she argues that:

the central symbol for Canada [...] is undoubtedly Survival, *la Surviance*. [...] For early explorers and settlers, it meant bare survival in the face of “hostile” elements and/or natives: carving out a place and a way of keeping alive. But the word can also suggest survival of a crisis or disaster, like a hurricane or a wreck, and many Canadian poems have this kind of survival as a theme; what you might call ‘grim’ survival as opposed to ‘bare’ survival. For French Canada after the English took over it became cultural survival, hanging on as a people, retaining a religion and a language under an alien government. And in English Canada now while the Americans are taking over it is acquiring a similar meaning. [...] But the main idea is the first one: hanging on, staying alive.²¹

From this short extract it is clearly apparent that Canadian literature differentiates from other literatures and its content probably is not very optimistic.

Moreover, in the following analysis Atwood aims at Nature (written with a capital letter N), which is presented in a great number of works written by Canadian writers and her herself, however, its perception is totally different from what the readers are ordinarily used to: ‘Canadian writers as a whole do not trust Nature, they are always suspecting some dirty trick’.²² Because of this fact, the overall perception of Nature in Canadian literature is that it is ‘seen as dead, or alive but indifferent, or alive and actively hostile towards man’.²³ In other words, there are very few examples of positive attitudes towards Nature in Canadian literature.

Another negativity is seen in connection with animals, where animal stories ‘are almost invariably failure stories, ending with the death of the animal’.²⁴ However, Margaret Atwood justifies this choice by arguing that ‘Canadians themselves feel threatened and nearly extinct as a nation, and suffer also from life-denying experience as individuals [...] and that their identification with animals is the expression of a deep-seated cultural fear’.²⁵

Similarly, this animal-as-victim perception in Canadian literature can be also applied to the depiction of Indians: ‘Indians seen as animals once free, wild

²¹ Atwood, *Survival*, 32-3.

²² Atwood, *Survival*, 49.

²³ Atwood, *Survival*, 54.

²⁴ Atwood, *Survival*, 74.

²⁵ Atwood, *Survival*, 79.

and beautiful, now caged, captive and sickly'.²⁶ Put another way, negative aspects in Canadian literature are also linked with the portrayal of animals as well as with Indians.

On the basis of the above analysis, the overall perception of Canadian literature seems to be rather negative than positive: 'The tone of Canadian literature as a whole is, of course, the dark background: a reader must face the fact that Canadian literature is undeniably sombre and negative, and that this to a large extent is both a reflection and a chosen definition of the national sensibility'.²⁷ Nonetheless, these negative features in the works of Canadian writers point again to its uniqueness and originality.

Although Margaret Atwood depicts many other themes and motifs in her *Survival*, it is simply impossible to introduce all of them. Nevertheless, there are two more topics which frequently occur in Canadian literature, or more precisely, in the works of Margaret Atwood. These themes focus on settlers and explorers, who are again described in a negative way: 'Explorers who fail or die, Settlers whose suffering and effort is futile'.²⁸

All of the topics introduced above are chosen according to the fact that they are frequently used in the poetry of Margaret Atwood. In addition, a direct connection of these themes with particular poems is described in the following chapters.

1.4 Margaret Atwood's Poetry

Margaret Atwood gained a worldwide reputation because of both her successful novels and the numerous collections of poetry: 'Atwood has published eleven collections of poetry, including the *Selected Poems*, which appeared in two separate volumes (1976 and 1986)'.²⁹ This bachelor thesis is mainly based on them, which is the reason for their further investigation.

The *Selected Poems I* (1976) and the *Selected Poems II* (1986) consist of the collections of poetry which Margaret Atwood had written so far. It insinuates

²⁶ Atwood, *Survival*, 99.

²⁷ Atwood, *Survival*, 245.

²⁸ Atwood, *Survival*, 125.

²⁹ Branko Gorjup, 'Margaret Atwood's Poetry and Poetics,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, ed. Coral Ann Howells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 133.

that the first one includes *The Circle Game* (1966), *The Animals in That Country* (1968), *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970), *Procedures for Underground* (1970), *Power Politics* (1971) and *You Are Happy* (1974), while *Selected Poems II* consists of volumes such as *Two-Headed Poems* (1978), *True Stories* (1981), *Murder in the Dark* (1983), *Interlunar* (1984) and *New Poems* (1985-1986).

Nevertheless, it is somewhat surprising that Atwood's very first collection of poetry *Double Persephone* (1961) was included neither in the *Selected Poem I* nor in the *Selected Poems II*. Margaret Atwood explains this in one of the interviews:

TS: Any particular reason for leaving out *Double Persephone*?

MA: Ohh. Have you read it lately? (laughter)

TS: Just because it's so early, eh?

MA: When I get really old or dead ...

TS: No one seems to acknowledge it except George Woodcock and Frank Davey.

MA: Well, you know how many copies there were of it.

TS: No, I don't.

MA: There were only two hundred copies. It only had seven poems in it. I printed it myself. I did the cover myself, I stapled it myself, I glued it myself, and I distributed it myself. It sold for fifty cents. I mean it's not exactly your major work. Or my major work. (laughter)³⁰

According to this part of the interview, Margaret Atwood does not consider her very first work as a real success, but she excuses it by her youth and inexperience. Still, to write the first collection of poems while attending the university is respectable.

Margaret Atwood has received many awards for her works, but the most valuable is probably the Governor-General's Award for *The Circle Game* in 1967. As this is the highest Canadian award for poetry, it helped Atwood establish contact with editorial director of Oxford University Press Canada who finally published her further collections of poetry and their collaboration continued even until the early nineties.³¹

³⁰ Margaret Atwood, 'An Interview with Margaret Atwood,' interview by J.R. (Tim) Struthers, *Essays on Canadian Writing* 6 (1977): 18.

³¹ Staines, 'Margaret Atwood in Her Canadian Context,' 15.

Regarding Margaret Atwood's writing phases, like many other not only Canadian writers she has developed and changed the ways of writing in the course of time, which now can be subdivided into three different stages:

In the first phase of her career Canada was, for Atwood, a country to be explored, examined, and explained, and she set about doing this. In the second phase she moved beyond the discovery of "our existence as Canadians" to a confrontation with the larger world in which we live, and her growing stature as a writer made her explorations important to the world. And in the third phase of her career she is placing Canada and its literature on a level with the other literatures of the world.³²

However, this bachelor thesis deals only with the first and second phases of Margaret Atwood's writing careers. The first phase is represented by 'Environment and Places' portrayed in section 2.1 and by the whole chapter three which deals with a real historical character named Susanna Moodie. The second writing phase is represented by 'Women's Issues' that are described in section 2.2.

Nonetheless, also the style of Atwood's poetry can be divided into different stages: 'Whereas the early poetry was characterized by irony, emotional detachment, and a lethally precise vocabulary, there are shifts in her later poetry towards a multiplicity of voices and corresponding changes in tone towards compassion and elegy'.³³ Although the style of Atwood's early poetry is connected with the poems from her first volumes (especially the *Selected Poems*), the change is apparent in Atwood's later collections, which are grouped in the *Selected Poems II* and further.

Significantly, there are certain themes which occur in almost every writing phase: 'Recurring images include reflective elements such as mirrors or water; images of desire; and birth; and recurring motifs include concern with landscape and ecology; a fascination with myth, legends and fairy tales; and objectified women'.³⁴ Most of these themes are described in the following chapter along with the supportive examples.

³² Staines, 'Margaret Atwood in Her Canadian Context,' 12.

³³ Coral Ann Howells, 'Introduction,' 4-5.

³⁴ Heidi Slettedahl Macpherson, *The Cambridge Introduction to Margaret Atwood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 104.

In addition, regarding the different themes in the poetry of Margaret Atwood, they predominantly make her poetry so exceptional: 'Her poetry succeeds not by masterly technique or style but by a peculiar force of content'.³⁵ According to this view, the semantic content of Atwood's poetry is described in the rest of the bachelor thesis.

³⁵ John Wilson Foster, 'The Poetry of Margaret Atwood,' *Canadian Literature* 74 (1977): 5.

2 IDENTITY IN THE POETRY OF MARGARET ATWOOD

2.1 Environment and Places

A great number of Margaret Atwood's poems deal with different environmental issues. She focuses on ecology as well as on a depiction of animals or on a very specific Canadian nature: 'Atwood's concern for the natural world—tenuous in the hands of humans—can be traced to her upbringing. Her poems [...] throughout her career have consistently addressed the delicate balance of nature'.³⁶

Nevertheless, the purpose of such descriptions of environment has much deeper implications by which Atwood tries to point to some environmental problems: 'Environmentalism in the works of Atwood and the biologists becomes a concern with the urgent preservation of a human place in a natural world in which the term "human" does not imply "superior," or "alone," and in which what is fabricated or artificial is less satisfying than what has originally occurred'.³⁷ In other words, Margaret Atwood has always been interested in the environment and throughout her poems she wants to promote its protection. Moreover, she is conscious of the fact that people are responsible for its destruction, but still it is nature which should predominate.

Nonetheless, there is no one collection of poetry, in which Margaret Atwood deals only with environmental issues and does not touch anything else. Her poems are more complicated and in many cases she cleverly connects her own view of the world with nature:

Poems which contain descriptions of landscapes and natural objects are often dismissed as being mere Nature poetry. But Nature poetry is seldom just about Nature; it is usually about the poet's *attitude* towards the external natural universe. That is, landscapes in poems are often interior landscapes; they are maps of a state of mind.³⁸

Regarding the individual poems, they are therefore chosen from different collections of poetry. The first one is called 'Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer'

³⁶ Thomas, *Reading, Learning, Teaching Margaret Atwood*, 15.

³⁷ Shannon Hengen, 'Margaret Atwood and Environmentalism,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, ed. Coral Ann Howells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 74.

³⁸ Atwood, *Survival*, 49.

that was published in Atwood's second collection *The Animals in That Country* (1968):

The house pitched
the plot staked
in the middle of nowhere.

At night the mind
inside, in the middle
of nowhere.

The idea of an animal
patters across the roof.

In the darkness the fields
defend themselves with fences
in vain:
 everything
 is getting in.³⁹

In this short extract the settler built the house and staked the plot 'in the middle of nowhere' indicating that he eagerly seized a part of nature which originally belonged to nobody to himself. However, later he recognized that it was totally unnecessary to do it because 'everything / is getting in' and no obstacle can avoid it: 'The settler makes a division between himself with his straight-line house and fence and the Nature on which he is trying to impose his own ideas of order. He fails, and in the end his head is invaded by the Nature which he has identified as chaos, refusing to recognize that it has its own kind of order'.⁴⁰ He simply cannot outsmart nature, because it has greater power and authority.

Additionally, the wild nature is also portrayed in other parts of this quite a long poem, nevertheless, as in the previous example its depiction is rather negative:

If he had known unstructured
space is a deluge
and stocked his log house-
boat with all the animals

even the wolves,

³⁹ Margaret Atwood, *Selected Poems* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1976), 61.

⁴⁰ Atwood, *Survival*, 124.

he might have floated.⁴¹

Although the harsh Canadian ‘unstructured’ nature is described as ‘a deluge’, there still was a flicker of hope for the settler that ‘he might have floated’. However, as the settler did not understand it he was unable to escape and finally was captured by nature forever: ‘The settler and his descendants at best merely float on top of the unseen forces of the wilderness’.⁴² ‘If he had known’, the results might have been completely different.

A total failure of the settler along with the signs of madness graduates in the very last stanza of the poem in which ‘the green / vision, the unnamed / whale invaded’.⁴³ According to these last lines as well as the title of the poem it is apparent that ‘he is insane by the end of the poem’.⁴⁴ ‘The green’ Canadian nature ruthlessly devoured him and like in many other cases it has won.

Very similar depiction of nature is connected with another famous poem ‘This Is a Photograph of Me’, which belongs to the first collection of poetry called *The Circle Game* (1966):

then, as you scan
it, you see in the left-hand corner
a thing that is like a branch: part of a tree
(balsam or spruce) emerging
and, to the right, halfway up
what ought to be a gentle
slope, a small frame house.

In the background there is a lake,
and beyond that, some low hills.

(The photograph was taken
the day after I drowned.⁴⁵

From this extract it is obvious that a great tragedy took place in the wild nature with ‘some low hills’, ‘a tree / (balsam or spruce)’ and ‘a lake’: ‘The serene natural setting presents a startling contrast to the human tragedy it masks. Atwood

⁴¹ Atwood, *SP*, 62.

⁴² Foster, ‘The Poetry of Margaret Atwood,’ 8.

⁴³ Atwood, *SP*, 63.

⁴⁴ Atwood, *Survival*, 124.

⁴⁵ Atwood, *SP*, 8.

uses the subject “I” to show the presence of the speaker in the photograph and offers the picture of the speaker “drowned” in the “lake”.⁴⁶ Interestingly, also in this example the nature is viewed in rather negative way, because it has caused the death of a person by drowning in the lake. Nevertheless, according to Margaret Atwood’s *Survival* discussed above, this is a very important and recurring theme of Canadian literature.

A harsh Canadian winter is depicted in the poem ‘Midwinter, Presolstice’ from the collection *Procedures for Underground* (1970):

The cold rises around
our house, the wind
drives through the wall in
splinters; on the inside
of the window, behind
the blanket we have hung
a white mould thickens.⁴⁷

The icy coldness is overt in this extract ‘in which two lovers had been snowed in together by a Canadian winter’.⁴⁸ The weather is really awful —‘the cold rises around’ and ‘the wind / drives through the wall’. Moreover, such weather does not strengthen the relationships among two lovers at all, which is underlined by wife’s statement ‘I dream of departures, meetings’⁴⁹ later in the poem. She would like to escape in order to enjoy her life again, but she cannot. The reason for that confession is probably the strange behaviour of the husband towards her:

All night my gentle husband
sits alone in the corner
of a grey arena, guarding
a paper bag
which holds
turnips and apples and my
head, the eyes closed⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Pyeaam Abbassi and Omid Amani, ‘Atwood’s Female Writing: A Reading of “This is a Photograph of Me”’, *Studies in Literature and Language* 4 (2012): 91.

⁴⁷ Atwood, *SP*, 121.

⁴⁸ Jane Lilienfeld, ‘Silence and Scorn in a Lyric of Intimacy: The Progress of Margaret Atwood’s Poetry,’ *Women’s Studies* 7 (1980): 192.

⁴⁹ Atwood, *SP*, 121.

⁵⁰ Atwood, *SP*, 121.

This is definitely not an example of the peaceful coexistence, which is additionally emphasized by a severe winter thwarting the couple to simply depart. Furthermore, the wife is largely neglected by her husband who ‘sits alone in the corner’ and treats her the same way as ‘turnips and apples’: ‘Their relation had not ended in an embrace for the “gentle husband” had put his wife’s head in a bag along with his other necessities’.⁵¹

Except for the description of the inhospitable Canadian winter outside, there is also evident a significant feature of man’s superiority. Nevertheless, this is discussed in the following section in detail.

The last poem describing the unpredictable Canadian bush is called ‘Interlunar’ from the volume *Interlunar* (1984), which belongs to the *Selected Poems II*:

The lake, vast and dimensionless,
doubles everything, the stars,
the boulders, itself, even the darkness
that you can walk so long in
it becomes light.⁵²

Also in this extract Margaret Atwood used the motif of the lake, however, its description is contextually ambiguous, because the lake is ‘vast and dimensionless’ at the same time. Another contrasting motif occurs with ‘the darkness’ which finally ‘becomes light’ or ‘the lake’ in contrast with ‘the boulders’.

All in all, by this poem Margaret Atwood wants to point to the fact that everything has the two opposite sides, which can be applied to both the relationships and the wilderness.⁵³

Dealing with the environment, it inherently includes the portrayal of animals. The example of it can be the poem ‘The Animals in That Country’ which belongs to the collection of the same name:

In that country the animals
have the faces of people:

⁵¹ Lilienfeld, ‘Silence and Scorn,’ 192-3.

⁵² Margaret Atwood, *Selected Poems II* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1986), 150.

⁵³ Charlotte Beyer, ‘Feminist Revisionist Mythology and Female Identity in Margaret Atwood’s Recent Poetry,’ *Literature and Theology* 14 (2000): 292.

the ceremonial
cats possessing the streets

the fox run
politely to earth, the huntsmen
standing around him, fixed
in their tapestry of manners

the bull, embroidered
with blood and given
an elegant death, trumpets, his name
stamped on him, heraldic brand
because

(when he rolled
on the sand, sword in his heart, the teeth
in his blue mouth were human)

he is really a man

even the wolves, holding resonant
conversations in their
forests thickened with legend.⁵⁴

This is the first and more optimistic part of the poem focusing on a treatment of the animals by people in different countries and which ‘address the “ceremonial” and mythic through fox hunts, bull-fights, and legends of werewolves’.⁵⁵ Although the animals die ‘in that country’, they die like human beings because they ‘have the faces of people’. For example the bull that has ‘given / an elegant death, trumpets, his name / stamped on him, heraldic brand’. He is treated as human individual, ‘he is really a man’.

Nonetheless, the poem continues in quite a different manner:

In this country the animals
have the faces of
animals.

Their eyes
flash once in car headlights
and are gone.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Atwood, *SP*, 48-9.

⁵⁵ Thomas, *Reading, Learning, Teaching Margaret Atwood*, 123.

⁵⁶ Atwood, *SP*, 49.

As Margaret Atwood argues in her *Survival*, animal stories are hardly ever positive in Canadian literature, which is also the case of the second part of this poem: ‘In “this country,” animals die in the headlights of careless cars’.⁵⁷ They only ‘have the faces of / animals’ and if they die, they ‘are gone’ and nobody will pity them. The animals in ‘this country’ are treated as inanimate objects.

Moreover, negative description is intensified by the last three lines of the poem which state that ‘Their deaths are not elegant. / They have the faces of / no-one.’⁵⁸ They are nobody.

Interestingly, there is quite a different interpretation on animals depicted in Atwood’s later collection called *You Are Happy* (1974), or more precisely ‘in “Songs of the Transformed,” the second section, in which animals take back their power’.⁵⁹ As the representative sample of this can be the poem ‘Song of the Worms’:

We have been underground too long,
we have done our work,
we are many and one,
we remember when we were human

We have lived among roots and stones,
we have sung but no one has listened,
we come into the open air
at night only to love

which disgusts the soles of boots,
their leather strict religion.⁶⁰

According to this short example, the worms stayed out of sight ‘too long’ so they decided to ‘come into the open air’. Moreover, they ‘reveal that their underground existence will lead to the true heroic’,⁶¹ but the people to whom they want to come probably would not be happy about their presence at all. In addition, this assumption is underlined by the last stanza in which the worms declare: ‘When we say Attack / you will hear nothing / at first’.⁶² As people do not expect

⁵⁷ Thomas, *Reading, Learning, Teaching Margaret Atwood*, 123.

⁵⁸ Atwood, *SP*, 49.

⁵⁹ Lilienfeld, ‘Silence and Scorn,’ 191.

⁶⁰ Atwood, *SP*, 192.

⁶¹ Lilienfeld, ‘Silence and Scorn,’ 191.

⁶² Atwood, *SP*, 193.

such enemies, they will be probably very surprised at their presence. Nevertheless, it will be too late then.

2.2 Women's Issues

Another very important and recurring theme which occurs in a great number of Margaret Atwood's poems is feminism, or more precisely the analysis of position of women in society: 'Margaret Atwood represents both the feminine subject, feminist revision of myth, and spirituality in terms of metaphors and strategies of process and desire'.⁶³

However, there is a slight disagreement between some contemporary writers whether Margaret Atwood is or is not a feminist in person:

What feminism means in Atwood's writing is that she is keenly aware that gender does matter, that much of history and of the contemporary world revolves around the sex of any person—more often than not to the disadvantage of females. I would argue that Atwood, however, is not an ideologue for radical feminism although some may try to discount her as such, but her works reveals a writer exploring the ambiguity in issues of gender.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, focusing on Atwood's collection of poetry called *Power Politics* (1971), the others argue that 'the violent imagery of *Power Politics* is predicated on the oppression of women by men, as well as on the entrapment of the female within social, cultural, and linguistic constructions',⁶⁵ which suggests that she must be a feminist to a certain degree. Anyway, it is not so crucial if Margaret Atwood personally is feminist or not, but what matters is the fact that her poems definitely deal with this topic.

The first example proving Atwood's interest in women and their suffering depicts the introductory and very popular poem 'You Fit into Me' from the collection of poetry *Power Politics*:

you fit into me
like a hook into an eye

⁶³ Beyer, 'Feminist Revisionist Mythology and Female Identity,' 281.

⁶⁴ Thomas, *Reading, Learning, Teaching Margaret Atwood*, 16.

⁶⁵ Gorjup, 'Margaret Atwood's Poetry and Poetics,' 139.

a fish hook
an open eye⁶⁶

This minimalist and probably the shortest poem by Margaret Atwood is divided into two parts with completely different focuses: ‘The first two lines of Atwood’s poem refer to a domestic, “feminine” image: sewing. [...] The image that follows is more “masculine”: fishing. It is also graphically violent, suggesting death and destruction’.⁶⁷ In other words, the woman is occupied with typically household tasks which are completed in non-violent and friendly way, however, the man in order to fulfil his goal uses the way full of pain. Then, it exactly resembles the relationship between man and woman: ‘The ambiguity provoked by the pun “eye” / “I” suggests that the woman is aware of the aggression and accepts it, thus turning the poem into a caustic comment on sadomasochistic relationships’.⁶⁸ The woman is hooked on the man and there is no possibility how to change it. Unfortunately, Margaret Atwood’s poems are in most cases based on reality, so such a treatment of women is definitely not an invented story, but a matter of fact.

Very similar theme also occurs in the poem ‘My Beautiful Wooden Leader’ from the same collection of poetry:

My beautiful wooden leader
with your heartful of medals
made of wood, fixing it
each time so you almost win⁶⁹

According to this introductory stanza it is apparent that there is a successful male ‘leader’, with ‘heartful of medals’, nevertheless, the resumption of the poem with the declaration that the medals are ‘made of wood’ as well as the ending with words ‘you almost win’ does not indicate a complete man’s superiority like in the previous example: ‘The “beautiful wooden leader” is, in

⁶⁶ Atwood, *SP*, 141.

⁶⁷ Macpherson, *The Cambridge Introduction to Margaret Atwood*, 105-6.

⁶⁸ Pilar Somacarrera, ‘Power Politics: Power and Identity,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, ed. Coral Ann Howells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 46.

⁶⁹ Atwood, *SP*, 147.

fact, unreal and scorned'.⁷⁰ Additionally, it is more obvious in the last two stanzas:

There are hordes of me now, alike
and paralyzed, we follow you
scattering floral tributes
under your hooves.

Magnificent on your wooden horse
you point with you fringed hand;
the sun sets, and the people all
ride off in the other direction.⁷¹

Even though a great number of 'alike / and paralyzed' women pretend to follow their 'wooden leader', they finally 'ride off in the other direction': 'The "hordes" of women he has rescued follow him in a parodic procession, but his attempt to impose his authority is ineffective'.⁷² Significantly, in this poem the women are strong enough to escape a male predominance and choose the way of their own.

As was said at the beginning, Margaret Atwood often uses various kinds of reflective surfaces in her poetry on which the poems are built. Nevertheless, these types of poems seem to be even more complicated and their interpretations can differ. The example of such surface is the mirror which occurs in the poem 'Tricks with Mirrors' from the collection *You Are Happy* (1974):

It's no coincidence
this is a used
furniture warehouse.

I enter with you
and become a mirror.

Mirrors
are the perfect lovers,

that's it, carry me up the stairs
by the edges, don't drop me,⁷³

⁷⁰ Somacarrera, 'Power Politics: Power and Identity,' 47.

⁷¹ Atwood, *SP*, 147.

⁷² Somacarrera, 'Power Politics: Power and Identity,' 47.

⁷³ Atwood, *SP*, 183.

According to this short extract, Margaret Atwood cleverly used ‘mirrors’ which represent ‘the perfect lovers’ ‘reflecting the viewer to him or herself’.⁷⁴ However, it is not obvious from the poem whether the lover inside the mirror is a man or a woman, because the only thing mentioned is that somebody ‘become a mirror’. Moreover, the poem goes even further:

Think about the frame.
The frame is carved, it is important,

it exists, it does not reflect you,
it does not recede and recede, it has limits⁷⁵

Atwood directs the reader also to ‘think about the frame’ because ‘it does not reflect you’ which insinuates that the lover on the one side and the loved on the other are two real and physically different persons. Nonetheless, the pair of lovers does not have to be separated forever, as the continuation of the poem indicates:

I am trapped behind.
I wanted you to see me here,

say the releasing word, whatever
that may be, open the wall.

Instead you stand in front of me
combing your hair.⁷⁶

If the person in front of the mirror knew about who is inside, he or she would definitely ‘say the releasing word’ without any hesitation. Due to the ignorance and a preference for ‘combing your hair’, they will never ever meet each other: ‘The loved one is forever trapped behind the narcissistic reflection of the lover’.⁷⁷

Further, the poem ‘Backdrop Addresses Cowboy’ from *The Animals in That Country* deals with a difficult question about how to actually define woman:

⁷⁴ Macpherson, *The Cambridge Introduction to Margaret Atwood*, 106.

⁷⁵ Atwood, *SP*, 184.

⁷⁶ Atwood, *SP*, 186.

⁷⁷ Foster, ‘The Poetry of Margaret Atwood,’ 13.

I am the horizon
 you ride towards, the thing you can never lasso

I am also what surrounds you:
 my brain
 scattered with your
 tincans, bones, empty shells,
 the litter of your invasions.

I am the space you desecrate
 as you pass through.⁷⁸

To characterize a woman in general is according to Margaret Atwood and this final part of the poem a mammoth task. A woman is a very special kind of human being who can occur everywhere and even in different forms—in this example she is ‘the horizon’, ‘the space’, but the man ‘can never lasso’ her. Woman is simply inscrutable and penetrating: ‘Trying to say something universally definitive about woman is like trying to say something universally definitive about existential reality. According to Margaret Atwood, it seems to be a fairly hopeless project’.⁷⁹

The last poem dealing with a feminine role has somewhat dark name such as ‘Torture’. The poem belongs to the volume with the paradoxical title *True Stories* (1981) which is included in the *Selected Poems II*. ‘Torture’ symbolically concludes with the questions about how women are treated and what is their position in society:

Just this: I think of the woman
 they did not kill.
 Instead they sewed her face
 shut, closed her mouth
 to a hole the size of a straw,
 and put her back on the streets,
 a mute symbol.⁸⁰

This goblet describes a horrifying story of the woman ‘they did not kill’ but rather she was put in prison which resemblance to ‘a hole the size of a straw’.

⁷⁸ Atwood, *SP*, 71.

⁷⁹ David R. Jarraway, “‘Com [ing] Through Darkness’: Margaret Atwood’s “I”-Opening Lyricism,” in *Margaret Atwood: The Open Eye*, eds. John Moss and Tobi Kozakewich (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2006), 286.

⁸⁰ Atwood, *Selected Poems II*, 74.

They ‘closed her mouth’ so that she will never speak about this frightening experience to anybody and in this condition they simply ‘put her back on the streets’ like ‘a mute symbol’.

Nevertheless, the following part reveals other disconcerting details:

It doesn't matter where
 this was done or why or whether
 by one side or the other;
 such things are done as soon
 as there are sides
 and I don't know if good men
 living crisp lives exist
 because of this woman or in spite
 of her.⁸¹

A continuation of the poem seems to be even more terrifying, because it notifies that it is absolutely unimportant whether the cause of the accident was done ‘by one side or the other’. The only thing that matters is the fact that ‘such things are done as soon / as there are sides’. Put another way, if there is a woman together with man, it is only and only woman who is always guilty, ‘noting that it does not matter which side was responsible’.⁸² The guilt is inherently connected with women in this society.

What is really remarkable about this poem, however, is that such a discovery was made by Margaret Atwood already in the eighties, when the poem was written, but the term feminism was still in its infancy.

⁸¹ Atwood, *Selected Poems II*, 74-5.

⁸² Macpherson, *The Cambridge Introduction to Margaret Atwood*, 107.

3 THE JOURNALS OF SUSANNA MOODIE

3.1 The Personality of Susanna Moodie

In 1970 Margaret Atwood finished the third and probably the most famous collection of poetry called *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*. Nevertheless, there raise a question about why was Margaret Atwood so fascinated by a nineteenth-century English pioneer Susanna Moodie that she decided to devote the entire volume just to her?

To answer this question it is perfectly reasonable to explain who actually was Susanna Moodie and why did she immigrate to Canada:

Susanna Strickland Moodie (1803-85) grew up in a decaying mansion in Suffolk, and was obliged to emigrate to Canada because her husband was a half-pay officer with an insufficient income to support a genteel life in England. On arrival in 1832, the Moodies settled in the Upper Canadian backwoods and attempted to farm, with little success. Later they moved to the growing town of Belleville.⁸³

What is important to note, however, is the fact that Susanna Moodie did not want to forget about the initial setbacks and frustrations in the new country, but she preferred sharing what had happened to her publicly. Such a determination led Moodie to write ‘two books about her experiences: *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852) and *Life in the Clearings* (1853)’.⁸⁴

Significantly, Margaret Atwood was familiarized with the first novel already during her childhood, however, she expressed greater interest in the personality of Susanna Moodie while studying at Harvard University.⁸⁵

3.2 Atwood’s Susanna Moodie

Although Margaret Atwood read both *Roughing It in the Bush* and *Life in the Clearings*, she did not agree with their contents at all, but she was rather ‘disappointed in them as texts’.⁸⁶ Because of this fact it is important to realize that

⁸³ Hammill, *Canadian Literature*, 143.

⁸⁴ Erin Smith, ‘Gender and National Identity in *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* and *Tamsen Donner: A Woman’s Journey*,’ *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 13 (1993): 75.

⁸⁵ David Staines, ‘Margaret Atwood in Her Canadian Context,’ 16.

⁸⁶ Erin Smith, ‘Gender and National Identity,’ 76.

The Journals of Susanna Moodie is not a personal biography of Susanna Moodie, which is based on her novels, but an independent work of Margaret Atwood: ‘Atwood’s sequence of poetry, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970), however, should not necessarily be viewed solely in conjunction with these novels since it stands as a self-contained literary piece on its own’.⁸⁷ A few of the dates are based on the real life of Susanna Moodie, however, the rest is the result of Atwood’s imagination as well as of her own observation: ‘Some of the poems are inspired by Moodie’s autobiographical fictions, and others by pictures of her and of the places where she lived’.⁸⁸

Nonetheless, there is still an unanswered question about why Margaret Atwood chose specifically Susanna Moodie. One of the possible answers is that ‘the personality of Moodie was striking to Atwood because she believed it revealed many traits that persist in the Canadian character’.⁸⁹ According to this statement, the whole volume *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* with Susanna Moodie as the main character represents a very Canadian literary work by which Margaret Atwood wants to point to the major difficulties connected with the immigration to Canada from various countries: ‘Atwood uses Moodie as a mask and her voice represents a national consciousness saying that the Canadian psyche as such has something to share with Moodie. [...] Moodie is an archetype of the Canadian immigrant’,⁹⁰ which means that Moodie herself expresses feelings and represents behaviour of all immigrants to Canada in general: ‘Atwood confronts the somewhat poisonous legacy of immigrants such as Moodie, for whom England remained an ideal while Canada was illegible, incomprehensible, hostile’.⁹¹

Additionally, in her book Margaret Atwood also refers to the historical significance of Moodie’s acts: ‘Yet in resurrecting Moodie, Atwood also reinscribes her colonising vision, extends her influence and affirms her significance to Canadian history’.⁹² In other words, English-born Susanna Moodie

⁸⁷ Judit Molnár, ‘The Coalescence of Natural and Mental Landscapes in Margaret Atwood’s *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*,’ *Hungarian Studies in English* 22 (1991): 127.

⁸⁸ Hammill, *Canadian Literature*, 136.

⁸⁹ Erin Smith, ‘Gender and National Identity,’ 76.

⁹⁰ Molnár, ‘The Coalescence of Natural and Mental Landscapes,’ 127.

⁹¹ Hammill, *Canadian Literature*, 136.

⁹² Hammill, *Canadian Literature*, 136.

throughout her pioneering efforts finally became a very important Canadian symbol.

Focusing on the protagonist herself, Susanna Moodie is portrayed as a person with rather ambivalent attitude in the volume, ‘which is observable in her contradictory responses to the Canadian landscape, to the settlers who are already there, and indeed to the whole ethos of colonization in which she herself was participating’.⁹³ From one point of view she loves everything around her, but at the same time she hates it and would rather depart. Such ambivalent feelings together with the most important themes of *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* are clearly described on the examples in the following sections.

3.3 The Analysis of *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*

There is no better way how to commence the study of such a popular volume which *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* definitely is than by adducing clear evidence of its success: ‘*The Journals of Susanna Moodie* has never been out of print, having gone through a total of twenty-four reprintings until now’.⁹⁴ The following analysis will then try to explain why it is so.

Regarding the structure, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* consists of twenty-seven poems, which are subdivided into three sections named ‘Journal I 1832-1840’, ‘Journal II 1840-1871’ and ‘Journal III 1871-1969’. Despite being different from one another, they together describe Susanna Moodie’s life story from the immigration to Quebec to her death:

‘Journal I 1832–1840’ narrates the arrival of Moodie and her husband at Quebec, their journey up the St Lawrence to Upper Canada [...], and their settlement in the backwoods, or bush. ‘Journal II 1840–1871’ takes Moodie to Belleville, but several of the poems in this section recount her disturbing dreams about the bush years, or her recollections of the deaths of several of her children there.⁹⁵

⁹³ Coomi S. Vevaina, ‘Margaret Atwood and History,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, ed. Coral Ann Howells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 91.

⁹⁴ David Staines, ‘Margaret Atwood in Her Canadian Context,’ 17.

⁹⁵ Hammill, *Canadian Literature*, 145.

Apparently, in 'Journal III' Susanna Moodie is getting old and she 'discovers her longing for union with the natural world'.⁹⁶ It suggests that finally she understands the natural laws and nature itself. Nonetheless, it is obvious that it has been a very long way to achieve this.

3.3.1 The Colonization of the Canadian Wilderness

One of the most significant themes of the entire volume *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* is the colonization of the Canadian landscape, or more precisely of the Canadian wilderness. It is important to realize, however, that to settle in a totally new country is definitely not an easy task for anybody and it lasts quite a long time before the settlers finally get used to it, if ever. Moreover, the newcomers are also responsible for any changes they make in the landscape, which are not always viewed positively, but still they are an integral part of the colonization:

The clearing represents the settler's negative and unintelligible signature upon the wilderness, the displacement of its prior occupants. But soon it signifies a new phase in the scenario of inhabitation: the *immigrant* upon landing who became a *pioneer* upon striking for the backwoods has upon clearing become a *settler*. The pioneer has become a new person as the clearing is a new feature of the landscape.⁹⁷

The whole process of colonization along with the depiction of the Canadian wilderness Margaret Atwood presents throughout *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* and the opening poem 'Disembarking at Quebec' fulfils its purpose very well:

this space cannot hear

or is it my own lack
of conviction which makes
these vistas of desolation,
long hills, the swamps, the barren sand, the glare
of sun on the bone-white
driftlogs, omens of winter,
the moon alien in day-

⁹⁶ Erin Smith, 'Gender and National Identity,' 82.

⁹⁷ Foster, 'The Poetry of Margaret Atwood,' 7.

time a thin refusal⁹⁸

According to this extract, Susanna Moodie is left behind in the Canadian bush equalling the space which ‘cannot hear’ anything and similarly anybody can hear her. She is surrounded by ‘long hills, the swamps, the barren sand, the glare / of sun’ and the ‘moon alien’. The concept of time is absolutely useless and presents only ‘a thin refusal’. In other words, this poem portrays Moodie’s ‘total alienation from the land’⁹⁹ and from the things which are very typical of British urban society.

Furthermore, at the end of the poem Susanna Moodie admits: ‘I am a word / in a foreign language’¹⁰⁰ insinuating that she is an absolutely insignificant part in reference to the surrounding wilderness to which she does not understand at all. The reason for it is that she speaks a different language that cannot be applied there and it is only up to her to learn the new one.

In addition, the next poem ‘Further Arrivals’ continues in quite the same way:

We left behind one by one
the cities rotting with cholera,
one by one our civilized
distinctions

and entered a large darkness.

It was our own
ignorance we entered.¹⁰¹

In this extract Atwood’s Moodie together with her husband finally ‘left behind one by one the cities’ which were the last civilized stops before they ‘entered a large darkness’ that they link with their new home somewhere in the of the Canadian wilderness. Additionally, they did not know anything about the place they just arrived in, but they realize that: ‘It was our own / ignorance we entered’.

⁹⁸ Atwood, *SP*, 80.

⁹⁹ R.P.Bilan, ‘Margaret Atwood’s *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*,’ *Canadian Poetry* 2 (1978): 2.

¹⁰⁰ Atwood, *SP*, 80.

¹⁰¹ Atwood, *SP*, 81.

Moreover, Moodie experiences anxiety and frustration in the course of time:

My brain gropes nervous
tentacles in the night, sends out
fears hairy as bears,
demands lamps;¹⁰²

Susanna Moodie is terribly afraid since her own ‘brain gropes nervous / tentacles in the night’ and ‘sends out / fears hairy as bears’. She does not know what to expect from the future, which also seems to be the main topic of the entire poem: ‘The central theme of the poem is fear, fear that is self-created and wilfully perpetuated through ignorance’.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, Atwood’s Moodie is not the only one who due to ignorance of the environment feels absolutely lost, but this is a typical feature of many newcomers.

Consequently, a very clear example of the inhospitable Canadian wilderness especially in relation to the settlers presents the poem ‘The Planters’ still belonging to ‘Journal I’:

They deny the ground they stand on,

pretend this dirt is the future.
And they are right. If they let go
of that illusion solid to them as a shovel,

open their eyes even for a moment
to these trees, to this particular sun
they would be surrounded, stormed, broken

in upon by branches, roots, tendrils, the dark
side of light
as I am.¹⁰⁴

As this poem depicts one of the first moments of Susanna Moodie and her husband on the new continent, which is so much different from their hometown, ‘they deny the ground they stand on’. They are not accustomed to such

¹⁰² Atwood, *SP*, 81.

¹⁰³ Patrick Murray, “‘These Vistas of Desolation’: Image and Poetry in Margaret Atwood and Charles Pachter’s *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*,” *British Journal of Canadian Studies* 24 (2011): 74.

¹⁰⁴ Atwood, *SP*, 84.

inhospitable conditions for living located in the middle of nowhere and therefore they find themselves ‘surrounded, stormed, broken / in upon by branches, roots, tendrils’. All in all, they are frustrated by a desolate wilderness: ‘The wilderness at this point is an assault on Moodie’s body, an unwanted invader’.¹⁰⁵ It totally destroys Susanna Moodie’s ideals and the meaning of life itself.

Nevertheless, the final statement ‘the dark / side of light / as I am’ betokens the hope for better future. Now Atwood’s Moodie is battling through hard times, but it can be possibly changed in the very near future.

Moreover, Moodie does not surrender, but rather she tries to understand the visible signs of nature, which is clearly apparent in the poem ‘Paths and Thingscape’:

the trail was not
among the trees but
the trees

and there are some who have dreams
of birds flying in the shapes
of letters; the sky’s
codes;

and dream also
the significance of numbers (count
petals of certain flowers)¹⁰⁶

Atwood’s Moodie endeavours to comprehend ‘the trees’ as well as the ‘birds flying in the shapes / of letter; the sky’s / codes’ and the overall ‘significance of numbers’ which should definitely help her understand the Canadian wilderness better and live more harmoniously there: ‘Moodie attempts to apply the languages that order the man-made world (words, numbers) to the natural world. [...] Moodie wants to learn the meaning of these signs—words in a language she does not yet know’.¹⁰⁷ The earlier experiences with urban life do not help her at all, because the nature is organised according to completely different rules which Moodie has to learn.

¹⁰⁵ Erin Smith, ‘Gender and National Identity,’ 80.

¹⁰⁶ Atwood, *SP*, 86.

¹⁰⁷ Erin Smith, ‘Gender and National Identity,’ 79-80.

Naturally, such an objective cannot be achieved overnight, but it might last for decades or even the whole life. Nevertheless, the most important thing is that Moodie finally came to this decision and now she has to attempt to fulfil it and learn the new language of nature on her own. According to the last stanza of the poem, Atwood's Moodie honestly believes that it will happen once: 'When will be / that union and each / thing ... into its place'.¹⁰⁸

In the final poem of 'Journal I' called 'Departure from the Bush' Atwood's Moodie realizes that her change has not been completed yet: 'I was not ready / altogether to be moved into'.¹⁰⁹ Although she has learnt the new language partially, it is still not enough to understand nature well: 'I was not completed; at night / I could not see without lanterns'.¹¹⁰

All in all, 'Moodie has not yet, however, mastered the language of nature and nonrationality'.¹¹¹ Nevertheless, she knows that she has almost succeeded: 'There was something they almost taught me / I came away not having learned'.¹¹² Significantly, Moodie honestly believes that she will learn it all next time.

3.3.2 A Revealing Insight into the Canadian Wilderness

Throughout 'Journal II 1840-1871' now older Susanna Moodie does not occur in the Canadian bush anymore, but she lives in the town of Belleville instead. However, she still reminisces about nature and she gradually reveals how she came to terms with it.

The opening poem 'Death of a Young Son by Drowning' represents Atwood's first traces of her transformation:

His feet slid on the bank,
the currents took him;
he swirled with ice and trees in the swollen water

and plunged into distant regions,
his head a bathysphere;

¹⁰⁸ Atwood, *SP*, 86.

¹⁰⁹ Atwood, *SP*, 92.

¹¹⁰ Atwood, *SP*, 93.

¹¹¹ Erin Smith, 'Gender and National Identity,' 81.

¹¹² Atwood, *SP*, 93.

through his eyes' thin glass bubbles¹¹³

In this extract Susanna Moodie describes a real accident that happened to her son when he 'slid on the bank' and 'the currents took him'. Unfortunately, he died and 'plunged into distant regions'.

Nevertheless, this incident opened Moodie's eyes and wholly changed her attitude towards nature:

My foot hit rock. The dreamed sails
collapsed, ragged.

I planted him in this country
like a flag.¹¹⁴

Atwood's Moodie realizes that she is connected with this land forever and 'the dreamed sails / collapsed, ragged'. Put another way, she will have to stay in this country until her death: 'The dream of returning to England is ended, and her son's death gives her new roots'.¹¹⁵ Now she will perceive the Canadian nature from a different point of view.

This is apparent especially in the last poem of the second journal called 'The Double Voice' which commences with the statement 'Two voices / took turns using my eyes'¹¹⁶ suggesting that the poem is narrated by Susanna Moodie, but from two different perspectives (at the beginning it has already been said that Atwood's Moodie is famous for her contradictory responses, which is also this example):

One had manners,
painted in watercolours,
used hushed tones when speaking
of mountains or Niagara Falls,
composed uplifting verse
and expended sentiment upon the poor.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Atwood, *SP*, 94.

¹¹⁴ Atwood, *SP*, 95.

¹¹⁵ Bilan, 'Atwood's *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*,' 4.

¹¹⁶ Atwood, *SP*, 104.

¹¹⁷ Atwood, *SP*, 104.

This gobbet represents the first and rather poetic voice, which ‘used hushed tones when speaking’ and ‘composed uplifting verse’.

On the other hand, the second voice is described in a totally different way:

The other voice
 had other knowledge:
 that men sweat
 always and drink often,
 that pigs are pigs
 but must be eaten
 anyway, that unborn babies
 fester like wounds in the body,
 that there is nothing to be done
 about mosquitoes;¹¹⁸

Conversely, ‘the other voice’ seems to be ruder, but more realistic at the same time, because it ‘had other knowledge’ about how the wilderness really works: ‘While the first appears ethereal, lacking outline, the second, in its harsh clarity, reflects the sense of realness evoked in Atwood’s lines. It is a real face to accompany a real voice, and the very real physical manifestation of a rural immigrant life’.¹¹⁹ Now Susanna Moodie knows ‘that men sweat / always and drink often’, ‘that pigs are pigs / but must be eaten’ or ‘that there is nothing to be done / about mosquitoes’. In short, she understands these pieces of knowledge thanks to the living in the nature and through observing it.

Significantly, in the third and final journal Atwood’s Moodie even wants to return to the wilderness so her ‘transformation finally occurs’.¹²⁰ Such a change is depicted in the poem with quite a strange name ‘Wish: Metamorphosis to Heraldic Emblem’:

On my skin the wrinkles branch
 out, overlapping like hair or feathers.

In this parlour my grandchildren
 uneasy on sunday chairs
 with my deafness, ma cameo brooch
 my puckered mind

¹¹⁸ Atwood, *SP*, 104.

¹¹⁹ Patrick Murray, “‘These Vistas of Desolation’,” 78.

¹²⁰ Bilan, ‘Atwood’s *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*,’ 5.

scurrying in its old burrows¹²¹

According to this extract Moodie is very old now, but she realizes that and does not blush for it at all. She admits that ‘the wrinkles branch / out’ on her skin, she is conscious of her ‘deafness’ and ‘puckered mind’.

Unfortunately for her, Moodie does not occur in the Canadian wilderness, but merely in ‘this parlour’ with her ‘grandchildren’ in the town or in another urban area.

Nonetheless, still she wishes she could be rather somewhere else—in the wilderness, where she really belongs to:

I will prowl and slink
in crystal darkness
among the stalactite roots, with new
formed plumage
uncorroded¹²²

Susanna Moodie would ‘prowl and slink’ back into the wilderness, where she has spent a considerable part of her life ‘among the stalactite roots’. Moreover, she wishes she had ‘new / formed plumage / uncorroded’ and could be as free as a bird again. Put another way, now Moodie understands the wilderness completely differently, because she was transformed by it and ‘no longer is the wilderness a hostile invader; it is a longed-for escape from civilization and everyday rationality’.¹²³ Such a comprehension of the Canadian bush is the crucial moment of the entire volume. Atwood’s Moodie does not want to escape from the wilderness, but on the contrary, she would rather return there for the rest of her life.

Interestingly, the volume does not end with the death of Susanna Moodie, but it continues even afterwards in the form of Moodie’s recollections: ‘Mrs. Moodie posthumously recalls the agonizing dilemma of wanting to love Canada and actually hating it’.¹²⁴ This exactly occurs in the poem ‘Thoughts from Underground’ in which Moodie reminisces of her mixed feelings about a new hometown since her arrival there:

¹²¹ Atwood, *SP*, 107.

¹²² Atwood, *SP*, 107.

¹²³ Erin Smith, ‘Gender and National Identity,’ 82.

¹²⁴ Foster, ‘The Poetry of Margaret Atwood,’ 9.

When I first reached this country
I hated it
and I hated it more each year:

in summer the light a
violent blur, the heat
thick as a swamp,
the green things fiercely
shoving themselves upwards, the
eyelids bitten by insects

In winter our teeth were brittle
with cold. We fed on squirrels.
At night the house cracked.
In the mornings, we thawed
the bad bread over the stove.¹²⁵

Atwood's Moodie does not recollect her first years in a new country with any enthusiasm, but rather she literally 'hated it' and 'hated it more each year'. She was satisfied neither with summer, because there was 'the heat / thick as a swamp' nor with winter where her 'teeth were brittle / with cold'.

Gradually, the things started to change: 'I began to forget myself / in the middle / of sentences'.¹²⁶ Susanna Moodie finally commenced to adapt herself to the new environment which is the main reason for confusing one language with another.¹²⁷

Nevertheless, in the course of time she successively succeeded in understanding of the new environment:

Then we were made successful
and I felt I ought to love
this country.
I said I loved it
and my mind saw double.¹²⁸

Moodie's change in attitude towards the country she lived in could be accounted for her sympathy for nature as well as its understanding since her 'mind

¹²⁵ Atwood, *SP*, 111.

¹²⁶ Atwood, *SP*, 111.

¹²⁷ Molnár, 'The Coalescence of Natural and Mental Landscapes,' 129.

¹²⁸ Atwood, *SP*, 111.

saw double'. Moodie finally learnt the new language and now she masters both of them.

Moreover, she was 'made successful' in the Canadian wilderness and warmed to it. After this experience Moodie realized that she 'ought to love / this country'.

Significantly, this new and positive image persisted in Atwood's Moodie until the last days of her life and even then. She used to love the enigmatic Canadian wilderness: 'Finally, however, she turns back to nature, which is closer to her than the modern world. She is more terrified by civilization than she used to be by nature'.¹²⁹

The last analysed poem 'Resurrection' symbolically concludes the whole life of Atwood's Susanna Moodie:

I hear now
 the rustle of the snow
 the angels listening above me
 thistles bright with sleet
 gathering¹³⁰

Finally, Susanna Moodie has understood everything, since she admits that 'I hear now / the rustle of the snow' so 'the final transformation of Mrs. Moodie's attitudes occurs in "Resurrection"'.¹³¹

Nevertheless, this poem has nothing to do with the Christian concept of resurrection, which is apparent in the final part of the poem:

god is not
 the voice in the whirlwind
 god is the whirlwind
 at the last
 judgement we will all be trees¹³²

¹²⁹ Molnár, 'The Coalescence of Natural and Mental Landscapes,' 130.

¹³⁰ Atwood, *SP*, 114.

¹³¹ Bilan, 'Atwood's *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*,' 7.

¹³² Atwood, *SP*, 115.

Atwood's Moodie does not think of god in the heaven, because 'god is not / the voice in the whirlwind' but rather 'god is the whirlwind'. She betokens that god is present in nature: 'She rejects the notion of god as the Logos, or Word existing outside of, apart from nature'.¹³³ Atwood's Moodie permits that 'we will all be trees' in the end.

As was said at the beginning of this chapter, Atwood's *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* does not describe the personal story of Susanna Moodie, but it focuses on the immigrants to Canada in general who have to cope with the problems and pitfalls of this inscrutable country.

¹³³ Bilan, 'Atwood's *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*,' 7.

CONCLUSION

The bachelor thesis deals with a well-known contemporary Canadian writer of both prose and poetry, Margaret Atwood who is not only in Canada regarded as a real literary celebrity. Atwood's biography and works, together with her comprehension of Canadian literature are described in the first chapter.

Nevertheless, the main goal of this thesis was to analyse the various collections of Atwood's poetry and then specify the most important and recurring themes. However, it is important to note that the analysis was restricted only to the *Selected Poems I* (1976) and the *Selected Poems II* (1986) which are wholly sufficient as the representative samples for the thesis.

According to this, one of the most frequently used motifs is environment and different places in nature. It is perfectly obvious that Margaret Atwood grew up in the Canadian countryside, which is also reflected in the number of her poems. Nonetheless, it is very important to stress that Atwood's perception of the Canadian nature is negative in almost all cases. She refers to its unpredictability as well as ruthlessness. In Atwood's poems people often die or the relationships are broken on account of nature.

In addition, also the depiction of animals belongs to the category dealing with environment. Nevertheless, animals living in the Canadian nature are presented in rather negative way, too. They have to die because of people who treat them as things, but not as living creatures which they are. People do not like them, however, such a feeling is the same at animals.

Another frequently used theme are women. Margaret Atwood explores how the women are treated by men and what is their position in society. Again, the results are not very optimistic. She reveals that women in general are subordinated to men, or to their husbands. A wife has to serve her husband, but he is the only one who dominates and controls everything. They are women who have to listen to men and satisfy their requirements anytime.

This bachelor thesis also analyses the themes occurring in Margaret Atwood's probably the most famous collection of poetry called *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970). Significantly, Susanna Moodie was a real historical character, who settled in the Canadian wilderness and struggled with the hostile nature. Margaret Atwood chose this personality and wrote a partly biographical

volume of poetry about the setbacks of the immigrants in connection with the Canadian wilderness on her account.

The first motif of *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* is the process of colonization of the Canadian wilderness. Atwood's Moodie is rendered as a settler arriving at Quebec together with her husband. They settled in solitude surrounded by wilderness which is the beginning of their long struggle with it. Throughout the personality of Susanna Moodie Margaret Atwood refers to the difficulties of the newcomers and their subsequent adaptation, which of course might last for many years or does not have to be achieved at all.

The second theme deals with a final insight into the Canadian wilderness, where Atwood's Moodie after many years of failures begins to understand the signs of nature and is able to live there in harmony. Moreover, while back in town she wants to return to nature. She used to live there and does not want to change it.

In addition, after her death Moodie still thinks of living in the Canadian wilderness where she would love to revert. Atwood's Susanna Moodie is finally transformed by the nature.

RESUMÉ

Margaret Eleanor Atwoodová (1939) je považována za jednu z nejvýznamnějších a zároveň nejoblíbenějších kanadských spisovatelek současnosti. Její tvorba zahrnuje poezii i prózu, avšak kromě literární činnosti se také angažuje v boji za práva žen, lepší životní prostředí či za práva původních obyvatel Kanady.

Cílem této bakalářské práce je analyzovat poezii Margaret Atwoodové a určit nejdůležitější témata, která se v jejích básních nacházejí za pomoci kritických přístupů. Především se jedná o feministickou, biografickou a historickou kritiku. V neposlední řadě je nutno podotknout, že se práce soustřeďuje pouze na dvě sbírky, a to na *Selected Poems I* (1976), v překladu *Vybrané básně I* a *Selected Poems II* (1986), *Vybrané básně II*. Obě tato díla obsahují všechny básnické sbírky, které Margaret Atwoodová do té doby napsala a coby reprezentativní vzorek jsou pro tuto práci naprosto dostačující.

Z důvodů přehlednosti je bakalářská práce rozčleněna na tři kapitoly a několik podkapitol. První kapitola pojednává o kanadské literatuře z obecného hlediska, což zahrnuje samotnou definici pojmu, potenciální autory, témata, typické rysy a historii kanadské literatury od jejího zrodu na počátku 17. století. Další sekce popisuje stručný životopis Margaret Atwoodové včetně jejích literárních úspěchů. Následně se bakalářská práce zaměřuje na porozumění kanadské literatury očima Margaret Atwoodové. Hlavní zdroj informací v této podkapitole poskytuje především kniha *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972), v překladu *Přežití*, jejíž autorkou je samotná Atwoodová a ve které rozebírá typická témata kanadské literatury. Nejprve uvádí, že hlavním tématem celé kanadské literatury je pojem přežití, který je používán v odlišných kontextech. Dále se zaměřuje na zobrazování kanadské přírody či spíše divočiny, která je ovšem shodně popisována v negativním slova smyslu. Obdobně je to pak se zobrazováním zvířat, původních obyvatel a dokonce i přistěhovalců a osadníků. Jelikož kniha *Přežití* obsahuje mnoho dalších zajímavých témat, s ohledem na poezii Atwoodové jsou motivy uvedené výše a tedy i v práci naprosto dostačující. Poslední sekce se zabývá analýzou *Vybraných básní I a II* a poté již následuje samotný rozbor básní.

Kapitola číslo dva nese stejný název jako bakalářská práce samotná, tedy *Identita* v poezii Margaret Atwoodové a tudíž se dostává k jádru celé práce. Prvním tématem a zároveň i názvem podkapitoly je životní prostředí a různá místa v kanadské přírodě. Margaret Atwoodová se ve svých básních neustále potýká s nevypočitatelnou kanadskou divočinou, ovšem jak již kniha *Přežití* napovídá, její vyobrazení je ve většině případů negativní. Kanadská divočina totiž způsobuje problémy či dokonce smrt člověka. To je i případ slavné básně 'This Is a Photograph of Me', která zobrazuje nešťastnou událost, při které došlo k utonutí člověka v místním rybníce. Mimo to ovšem báseň také zachycuje detaily krajiny, v níž k nehodě došlo.

Jiným příkladem je báseň 'Midwinter, Presolstice', která nejenomže popisuje nehostinnost kanadské zimy, ale zároveň i vypráví příběh mladého páru uvězněného na chatě v horách. Jelikož jsou oba odkázáni pouze na pobyt uvnitř bez možnosti jakéhokoliv úniku, jejich partnerský vztah rychle upadá. I v tomto případě je strůjcem problému drsná kanadská divočina.

Nedílnou součástí životního prostředí jsou také zvířata, která Margaret Atwoodová opět zachycuje v negativním slova smyslu. Zvířata jsou chápána jako pouhé věci, nad jejichž smrtí nikdo nebude truchlit. Přesně takovým tématem se zabývá báseň 'The Animals in That Country'.

Druhá podkapitola a zároveň i další oblíbené téma Atwoodové pojednává o postavení žen ve společnosti. Margaret Atwoodová je dlouholetou členkou boje za práva žen a také její básně se hojně věnují dané problematice. V nich především poukazuje na to, jakou úlohu hrají ženy v manželství či jak se k nim muži chovají. Postavení ženy v manželství zachycuje také minimalistická báseň 'You Fit into Me', ve které je úloha partnerů jasně rozdělena. Žena zastává typicky domácí práce, které ovšem vykonává v klidu a bez zbytečných emocí. V manželství je pak svému muži naprosto oddaná. Oproti tomu muž k dosažení svého cíle využívá násilí a zlobu, kterou poté uplatňuje i v partnerském vztahu.

Celá kapitola je symbolicky ukončena básní s názvem 'Torture'. Ta zachycuje příběh ženy vsazené do žaláře, která zažila kruté násilí a poté byla propuštěna. V důsledku toho co prožila, bylo věznilům jasné, že o svých zážitcích nebude schopna veřejně promluvit. Báseň následně také přiznává, že je zcela jedno, která strana je vinna. Důležité je, že za všechno vždycky může žena a to i v takových případech, kdy chyba nebyla na její straně.

Celá poslední kapitola se zabývá nejslavnější sbírkou básní Margaret Atwoodové nazvanou *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970), která je do češtiny přeložena jako *Deníky Susanny Moodieové*. Susanna Strickland Moodieová (1803-85) je skutečná historická postava, která imigrovala do Kanady z Velké Británie. O svých prvotních neúspěších v novém bydlišti pak napsala dvě knihy, díky nimž se Atwoodová seznámila s touto osobností. Stručný životopis Moodieové je popsán v úvodní podkapitole.

Následující část se věnuje vztahu Atwoodové a Moodieové, respektive tomu, jak Margaret Atwoodová ve svém *Deníku Susanny Moodieové* chápe právě postavu Susanny Moodieové. V žádném případě se totiž nejedná o pouhý životopis, ale za postavou Moodieové je potřeba hledat něco víc. Její postava je jakoby mluvčím či přímo archetypem všech imigrantů do Kanady, kteří se musí vypořádat s těžkými podmínkami a nástrahami kanadské divočiny.

Poslední sekce se pak zaměřuje na jednotlivá témata *Deníku Susanny Moodieové*. Nejdůležitějším motivem celé sbírky je bezpochyby kolonizace kanadské divočiny. *Deník Susanny Moodieové* začíná příjezdem Moodieové a jejího manžela do Québecu a následném usídlení v kanadské přírodě. Jasně zachycuje jejich prvotní nezdary, které jsou nutně spjaté s pobytem ve zcela nové zemi a jsou typickým rysem všech přistěhovalců.

S postupem času ovšem dochází k určitému uvědomění a od toho okamžiku se věci pro přistěhovalce mění k lepšímu. Proto také dalším tématem sbírky je konečné pochopení kanadské přírody, které ovšem může trvat několik let a někdy k němu nemusí dojít vůbec. V případě Susanny Moodieové k takovému porozumění došlo a nakonec, prakticky na smrtelné posteli se chce vrátit do kanadské divočiny. Podle ní to je totiž jediné místo, kam patří a které ještě moderní svět zcela nepohltil. Takové myšlenky si Moodieová zachovává dokonce i po své smrti, což je patrné v poslední básni se symbolickým názvem 'Resurrection'. V ní je také přeměna Susanny Moodieové úspěšně dokonána.

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ANOTACE

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Abstrakt

Cílem bakalářské práce je najít a provést rozbor jednotlivých témat, která se nacházejí v poezii současné kanadské spisovatelky Margaret Atwoodové (1939). Práce je ovšem zaměřena pouze na *Vybrané básně I* (1976) a *Vybrané básně II* (1986), které jsou jako reprezentační vzorek zcela dostačující. Na základě analýzy bylo zjištěno, že jedním z nejčastěji se opakujících témat je životní prostředí, které je ovšem v básních Atwoodové vnímáno spíše negativně. Výsledek byl stejný také při zobrazování zvířat. Dalším důležitým tématem je postavení žen ve společnosti. Ovšem i v tomto případě nejsou výsledky příliš optimistické. Žena je ve většině případů podřízena muži, který s ní zachází, jak se mu zlíbí. Závěrečná kapitola se pak zabývá různými tématy obsaženými v nejslavnější sbírce básní Margaret Atwoodové s názvem *Deníky Susanny Moodieové* (1970). Nejdůležitějším motivem je kolonizace kanadské divočiny přistěhovalci a problémy s tím spojené. Hlavní postavu zde sehrává historická osobnost Susanna Moodieová, která v očích Atwoodové slouží jako typický příklad všech přistěhovalců. Posledním tématem je pak konečné pochopení kanadské divočiny, kdy dochází k určité přeměně člověka způsobené životem v divočině a jejím pozorováním.

Klíčová slova: Margaret Atwoodová, kanadská poezie, básně, životní prostředí, feminismus, Susanna Moodieová, přeměna.

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Abstract

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to present and analyse the poems of a well-known contemporary Canadian writer Margaret Atwood (1939). Nevertheless, the work is limited only to the *Selected Poems I* (1976) and the *Selected Poems II* (1986), which are wholly sufficient for the analysis. According to the results, the most favourite and recurring theme in the poems of Margaret Atwood is a depiction of the environment. However, its portrayal is negative in most cases which is the same as a presentation of animals. Another important theme is a position of women in society. Nonetheless, also women are rendered in rather negative way. Women are fully subordinated to men who decide about everything. The last chapter is devoted to the analysis of Atwood's most famous collection of poetry called *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970). The most significant theme in this collection of poetry is the colonization of the Canadian wilderness by immigrants and a depiction of various problems which are an integral part of it. The protagonist is a historical personality of Susanna Moodie who presents something like a speaker of all immigrants to Canada. The last theme in this chapter is connected with the final insight into the Canadian wilderness. Such a transformation is caused by a permanent living and observing of the nature.

Key words: Margaret Atwood, Canadian poetry, poems, environment, feminism, Susanna Moodie, transformation.