Article

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Abstract

Jane Urquhart's novel *The Stone Carvers* (2001) portrays the struggles of a community of German immigrants in the nineteenth century, as they attempt to settle in Western Ontario; it also includes a fictionalized account of the construction of the Canadian National Vimy Memorial[1] (for First World War Canadian dead, and missing, presumed dead, in France). The article explores the issues of dealing with loss, and re-living the past, which are interwoven by Urquhart into a larger narrative, forming an ongoing meditation on the experience of 'in-betweenness' – transgressing not only spatial, but also temporal boundaries – and incorporating individual and communal histories as they are passed on through generations. The lives of Urquhart's characters are marked by the ambivalence of belonging – the experience of having more than one homeland, in more than one landscape. They are haunted by lost places, and by the memory of people who perished as a result of war, or who they left behind in the course of their own personal journey. The article explores the issue of 'landscape biography', and also examines Urquhart's employment of the literary topoi of nekuia/katabasis (i.e., encounters with the dead). It demonstrates how the confrontation with the past becomes, in the novel, a prerequisite for regeneration of the present, and the establishment of the future.

Keywords: Canadian fiction, hauntings, katabasis, nekuia, The Stone Carvers, Jane Urquhart

The novelist and poet Jane Urquhart has commented on the quality of in-betweenness pervading Canadian writing, that stems from the ambivalence of belonging, provoked by the experience of having more than one homeland, and more than one landscape. According to the author, with the exception of indigenous peoples, Canada is a nation of immigrants who 'carry in their imaginations . . . an abandoned homeland',[2] accessible only through the dense and fragmented net of memories, which create an ever-changing pattern, a fascinating but confusing kaleidoscopic effect. The result is a permanent sense of displacement and loss, strengthened by the fact that the landscape that has been left behind acquires, in the migrant narrative, a ghost-like quality. It is not forgotten, but not remembered precisely – its contours blurred and diluted; and as such it becomes superimposed on the new landscape, more immediate, but less familiar. As Urquhart observes:

> It's hard to let it [a landscape] go. I believe that it's one of the things that people mourn almost as much as they mourn the loss of a person who's close to them. They may even mourn for a longer time. I know that people who have lost their towns or their villages are just heartbroken, because it will not be possible to introduce this mourned world to their children or their children's children; . . . the chain of inheritance is broken.[3]

In *The Stone Carvers*, Jane Urquhart shows people trying to create roots in the landscape, building structures in space to give them a sense of purchase, commemorating the landscapes and the dead they left behind. The first half of the book follows the growth in the nineteenth century of the fictional town of Shoneval in Canada. Father Gstir, who arrives from Germany, chooses it as a spot to build a stone church. It is perhaps worth mentioning that, in accordance with Urquhart's belief that 'entry into history is always local',[4] this part of the novel recalls the story of an existing town called Farmosa, home of the Church of the Immaculate Conception. Its construction was overseen by Rev. Archangelus Gstir, a priest who arrived in Canada in 1861, to tend to the congregation of the Formosa parish. In the novel, the fictional Gstir organizes a Corpus Christi procession; it is joined by local people carrying carved miniature models of 'structures they either remembered fondly from their pasts or fervently hoped would appear in their futures';[5] Bavarian farms and castles, a convent, an opera house, a tavern, etc. The attachment to the lost landscape persists, but the cultivation of memory proves harder with the passing of years.

In *Memory: An Anthology*, Craig Raine argues that memory is an 'anthology of snapshots',[6] like the series of images at the beginning of James Joyce's *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* (1916): 'a snatch of baby talk, the sensation of wetting the bed; covering and uncovering your ears at refectory'.[7] To reconstruct the whole picture means to fill in the gaps between the fragments, using the power of imagination, at the cost of losing the authenticity of experience. Being aware of this fact will not stop us from striving for completeness, as if continual attempts to give a full story of the past could give it justice. Raine continues: 'Anything fragmented is given a penumbra of suggestion that we mistake and read as vividness of outline'.[8] The person trying to remember is always tempted to fill in the gaps between Wordsworthian 'spots of time'.[9] Raine quotes Milan Kundera's novel *Ignorance* (2000), suggesting that one reason for the need to obtain a continuity of remembrance is nostalgia, 'the suffering caused by an unappeased yearning to return'.[10] The miniature models of an urban landscape in Urquhart's novel can be read as the product of nostalgia. Gaps in the patchwork structure are filled with new ideas, and the result is a memory/dream construction, which helps to sustain the collective memory of the lost landscape.

Because it is dealing with a migrant community, *The Stone Carvers* is in this sense about constructing 'roots' rather than finding them in a landscape which cannot be re-inhabited or even revisited. At the time when Father Gstir is organizing his procession, the immigrants cannot discover traces of their ancestors: there are no footprints that can be followed, no existing outlines that can be copied, to accept the gift of inheritance. However, the story of the building of the church is itself cherished as a founding myth through succeeding generations, which suggests that the roots are at least partially successfully constructed, together with a concomitant sense of community. As Alicia Fahey notes, the first chapter of the novel 'begins with a group of women engaged in an act of storytelling about the origins of their village'.[11] The very first sentence is concerned with 'the production and dissemination of stories across the boundaries of time and space':[12]

> There was a story, a true if slightly embellished story, about how the Ontario village was given its name, its church, its brewery, its tavern, its gardens, its grottoes, its splendid indoor and outdoor altars.[13]

The women who sustain the story (a community of nuns, and the spinster Klara), believed that it connected them 'through ancestry, through *work* and worship and through vocation to the village's

inception'.[14] They clung to it, 'as if by telling the tale they became witnesses, perhaps even participants in the awkward fabrication of matter, the difficult architecture of the new world'.[15]

What enables the 'roots' to emerge are the conscious cultivation of memories, the conjuring of ghosts, faithfulness to the abandoned landscape, and the translation of this landscape into a story. The reader learns that the story is 'true', but this is immediately questioned by the narrator, with the assertion that it is also 'slightly embellished'.[16] The condition of the migrant, Urquhart seems to suggest, is characterized by attachment to ghost-like places without substance, whose images run the constant risk of being erased from the mind-maps of their former inhabitants. If they are not to be forgotten, they have to be sustained through the life-support system of a story.

It seems, also, justifiable to say that in the novel, all landscapes (both past and present) are unfixed, and haunted by the ghosts of the old landscapes, either the ones they replaced, or the ones they were modelled on. At this point it proves interesting to look at Urquhart's landscape narratives from the perspective of the notion of landscape biography, which, as Johannes Renes writes

> is not a hermetic theory but rather an inspiring metaphor used as an umbrella for a number of ideas that have changed the way we look at history of as well as the actual dealing with landscapes. The core of this set of ideas is the vision of landscape as an object that is handed over and over again from generation to the next, in the process undergoing not only physical changes, but also changes in . . . meaning.[17]

Renes sees landscape, similarly to the way it is understood in the novel, as constructed of 'historical layers'. He refers to vertical time-layers, 'distinguished literally by geologists and archaeologists mapping stratified sediments and buried landscapes',[18] and to horizontal layers of artefacts and spatial structures; but he also distinguishes a third form of layer, described as palimpsests, 'when older traces shimmer through a landscape that is dominated by the relics of later developments'.[19] This last type is given a metaphorical rendering in Urquhart's writing, where 'traces from different periods do not just lie . . . on the top of each other, but are also actively given new roles, values and meanings'.[20]

Urquhart makes us aware of the way that one landscape is always superimposed onto another, which continues to 'shimmer' through. The history of a given place is never firmly located in the past, but manifests

itself in the present in the form of spectres, and in 'the production and dissemination of stories'.[21] In constructing her vision of landscape, Urquhart pays close attention to the long-term changes which landscapes undergo, through the actions (both creative and destructive) of the inhabitants, and the imprints they leave behind them, both consciously and unconsciously. Marta Dvorak and Héliane Daziron-Ventura observe that Urquhart's landscape aesthetics are deeply humanistic in their character, and focused on the significance of human presence.[22] Urquhart's own words confirm this view:

> I've always been very drawn to landscape and particularly landscape where some evidence of human activity is left behind. Pure wilderness really doesn't interest me that much, because there are no traces left by human beings. The agricultural landscape, when you can see evidence of the past, interest me more . . . I do believe that there's a kind of presence in landscape . . . It's almost as if every boulder has a particular . . . name, and often there is an associated story.[23]

It is the connection between the landscape and the story, the visual and the verbal, reflecting and informing each other in a continual relationship, which recurs at different levels of Urquhart's fiction. In her 'Address' in the book *Resurgence in Jane Urquhart's Œuvre* (2010), Urquhart refers to a work of art which constitutes an example of this interdependence, and perhaps also an example of aesthetics akin to the one she develops in writing: *The Penitence of Saint Jerome* by fifteenth century Flemish painter Joachim Patinir. Patinir created a series of paintings revolving around the saint, his figure always located in landscapes so full of intricate and vibrant details that 'one might think that Saint Jerome need not be in the scene at all'; and yet this is not the case, since the main story of the painting revolves around him.[24] As Urquhart asserts:

> Arguably any figure in any landscape hints at the telling of a story, but the Patinir that I am thinking of . . . tells many stories at the same time and on the same canvas. In one part of the painting, near a cave, we see Saint Jerome removing the thorn from the lion's paw. In another . . . the lion chases wolfs away from the sheep. In still another, the lion seems to be chatting with a gathering of people in front of the gate of a town miles and miles away.[25]

The viewer is exposed to 'multi-layered, interwoven plot lines'; the act of looking means making sense of the way they connect to the

context they inhabit, the 'environment' in which they are imbedded.[26] What Urquhart says about the painting – namely, that 'without . . . the landscape the stories would have no place to unfold. Alternatively . . . without the stories, landscape itself might never have existed'[27] – proves to be also true about *The Stone Carvers*, in which the landscape simultaneously becomes a vessel which carries multifaceted stories, and continues to be transformed by the personal and communal histories of its inhabitants.

In the book, Urquhart recounts the legend of the origins of the village, as re-told by the women; of how it 'was given its name, its church, its brewery, its tavern. . . . its blacksmith's shop',[28] which is essentially a story about the transformation of the carved miniature models, ghosts of Bavarian structures, carried in Father Gstir's procession, into a real, inhabited place. The litanic enumeration of the structures which make up the village seems to offer no sense of spatial organization; it is as if the buildings are passing one-by-one in front of our eyes, towards nothingness. By this point in time (the 1930s), the rail fences are tattered, the porches collapsing, 'the tannery and blacksmith's shop had disappeared years ago, and though the general store was still a fixture, its counter was so warped and scarred it looked as if it might have once served as a butcher's block'.[29] Even the legend of the founding of the village is threatened with extinction, since it appeals 'to fewer and fewer people'[30] in the depression era. The village itself, with its older parts in a state of decay, and newer parts half-finished, seems to be turning into dust, acquiring a hollow, ghost-like quality. The landscape is withering slowly, either because it is disappearing from memory, or through the disintegrating forces of time and neglect; but it cannot be understood in separation from its former incarnations, the palimpsests of what it may once have been, and the narrations, dreams and histories which participated in its creation.

And so the reference to the 'work'[31] of the women who cling to the legend suggests not only the process of everyday toil, but also the work of mourning, which sustains remembrance. In an interview with Laura Ferri, Urquhart claims that the fact that 'the world is always disappearing from us, it's always moving away from us',[32] is one of the forces which can drive people to create art. Marta Dvorak suggests that Urquhart here aligns herself with Salman Rushdie, who has argued that 'metamorphosis, the knowledge that *nothing holds its form*, is the driving force of art'.[33] In *The Stone Carvers*, the sense that the world is always disappearing is what triggers the creation of stories, and also encourages the villagers to create wooden structures for Father Gstir's procession. The models, like Joseph's carvings, and the actual buildings of the town, will eventually turn to dust;

but, it seems, they will not disappear entirely – they will return as hauntings, recognized by those who believe in the power of a story.

At the climax of the book, Klara, Joseph Becker's granddaughter, goes to France, to work on the Vimy Memorial. The building of the monument in the second half of the novel parallels the building of the church in Shoneval in Ontario – both acts of dedication to community, and setting down roots in place; commemorating landscapes and people, whose images, still vivid, are at risk of falling into oblivion. Ultimately, she chooses to carve the features of her dead lover on one of the statues; she may have been driven by the same impulse that prompted Joseph's creativity: an awareness 'that nothing *holds its form*',[34] and of the transformative experience of loss.

The re-creation of her lover's face on the statue constitutes an act of mourning, through which a ghost, more real to Klara than the living who surround her, obtains a face. The gesture of the stone carver can be read as gesture of silent prosopopeia, a trope which has, in the core of its meaning, the idea of figuration, and more precisely the creation of a face, as the emblem of human identity, carrying with it the notion of individual distinctiveness, but also the notion of identification with others, with humanity as a whole. In a study of Wordsworth's Essays upon Epitaphs, Paul de Man defines prosopopeia as

> the fiction of an apostrophe to an absent, deceased, or voiceless entity, which posits the possibility of the latter's reply and confers upon it the power of speech. Voice assumes mouth, eye, and finally face, a chain that is manifested in the etymology of the trope's name, *prosopon poien*, to confer a mask or a face (*prosopon*).[35]

The statue which Klara works on is not endowed with the power of speech in a literal sense, but it ceases, despite the original intentions of the memorial's designer, Walter Seymour Allward, to be an anonymous figure. Instead, it obtains the particular story of a dead soldier, an individual 'voice' which participates in the larger war-narrative, in the communal, Canadian experience. Allward is initially critical of Klara's work, convinced as he is that indistinctiveness in the statue's features will ensure the clarity of the message he is aiming to convey, but he eventually changes his mind, and allows the identity of one individual soldier to be rescued from the mass grave of war casualties.

Another feature of the trope of prosopopeia is that it functions on the border between the world of the living and the world of the dead, bringing them closer together: it brings the dead back to life, but at the

same time, reminds the survivors of their mortality, and 'shows a necessary inadequacy of our relation to death'.[36] Consequently, it forces the one who remains alive to confront the ghosts whose faces or voices they encounter. Klara's experience – forging the face of her dead lover – can be read in the context of a classic literary topoi: the journey of the protagonist into the realm of the dead, only to emerge again alive, to continue his/her life. As Michael Thurston explains:

> The Underworld descent tradition actually conflates two narrative topoi—the 'nekuia', in which the shades of the dead are invoked and confronted and 'katabasis', in which the protagonist actually enters (literally 'goes down into') the Underworld . . . The protagonist, usually at the nadir of his journey, at a dark moment of exhaustion, confusion or despair, is driven to seek counsel and guidance from the past . . . [S]uch descents appear as a crucial episode or as a large part of entire narrative in many of the classic texts in western literature: Odysseus's encounter with the shade of Tiresias becomes Aeneas's meeting with his father, Anchises, in Virgil's *Aeneid*. Aeneas's trip into the classical Underworld becomes Dante's descent into the medieval Christian's Hell in *Inferno*. Dante's *Inferno* is echoed in by Milton's Satan in *Paradise Lost*. Milton in turn provides a backdrop for Blake in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.[37]

Klara's actions can be seen as the process of conjuring the ghost of her dead lover, Eamon. After the work is finished, she is forced to confront the image of her lover's countenance, transferred from the realm of memory to the realm of the physical, palpable world. In the course of her work, she also utters, and then carves in stone, the name of her lover, invoking the ghost through the use of language, and so she exposes herself, for the first time in many years, to the sound of his name. The visual and verbal are thus closely connected; the dead is brought to life through both word and image. At this point of the narrative, Klara's experience fulfils the conditions of nekuia (invocation and confrontation). Like Odysseus in the 11th book of *The Odyssey*, she interacts with the shade of the dead, without actually descending into the Underworld.[38]

As the one who outlived the war casualties, 'left behind to battle with the pain of remembering',[39] Klara has to deal with the war's aftermath, both as a carver participating in the public enterprise of commemoration, and as an individual dealing with the loss of her lover. Urquhart does not expose the reader to the agony of the battlefield: she 'avoids representing the subaltern experience . . . she is focused on how to make sense of the

war insider's scars'.[40] The face of Eamon carries no scars. The bodies of two of the characters, Tilman and Recouvrir, are marked by the battlefield's brutality, and their presence constitutes a reminder of the past. Eamon, on the other hand, has vanished, in a truly ghostly manner, in the chaos of war, never to return, alive or dead, and so his scars cannot be witnessed. It also means he has no grave other than in Klara's memory, where he remains untouched by violence, unscarred and whole, at least as long as she can sustain his image in her mind's eye. She internalizes the ghost of Eamon through the years, which seems to remain vivid and alive, at the cost of her own self-petrification and feeling of detachment from the world of the living:

> Urquhart considers the possibility that certain forms of remembering may prove to be unsafe . . . Klara's determination to 'train herself in the art of stoic apartness' eventually leads her to feel such rupture between herself and others that she cannot conceive of herself as existing in the present. It is only after her work on the memorial . . . she can participate in life and in love.[41]

The haunting countenance of Eamon binds Klara to a particular moment in history, locking her in the past, until she becomes almost completely frozen, as if she has encountered the gaze of the mythical Gorgon, capable of turning the living into stone. As the narrator suggests, 'no matter how it is cherished, an absent face that is a fixed reference becomes tyrannical and tyranny eventually demands revolt'.[42] It is pertinent to examine, at this point, the connection between the past, and revolt. Julia Kristeva, who conducts an etymological analysis of the word in *Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt*, suggests that 'two semantic shifts mark the evolution of the word: the first implies the notion of movement, the second, that of space and time'.[43]

> The Latin verb *volvere*, which is at the origin of revolt, was initially far removed from politics. It produced derivatives with meanings . . . such as 'curve', 'entourage', 'turn', 'return' . . . [U]nder Italian influence in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, *volutas*, *voluta*—in French *volute* . . . as well as *volta* and *voltare* suggest the idea of circular movement and by extension, temporal return. *Volta* also means 'time'—as in 'one time' or 'once'—hence, 'turning back'.[44]

In Klara's case, revolt is conducted through the experience of nekuia – reaching into the past in order to eventually turn towards the

future. It involves artistic endeavour, and the personification of lifeless matter: by breathing life into stone, she gives an actual shape to previously untamed memory, exerting control over its form. In this respect, Klara's personal experience corresponds to the idea that guided Allward during his own creative process. In real life, as in the novel, the architect conceived the monument as a vessel for communal grief, or (in Jacqueline Hucker's words), a structure which would 'harness the violent and irrational forces released by the war' and 'offer a promise to a return to order and harmony'.[45]

The face brought by Klara from the realm of shadows to the realm of physical reality is probably the last image of Eamon which will ever be made, 'the face that the dead person left behind'.[46] It bears a resemblance to the death mask, which always has absence as its premise, and which is born out of the longing for the lost object, in the hope of preserving it for the eye of the living. As Hans Belting writes, paradoxically 'it represents a presence that can only emerge through the absence of what it represents'.[47] The difference, however, is that Eamon's 'mask' has never been taken off the actual face; it was not separated from the flesh and bone of the human being.[48] This moment in the creation of the death mask is sometimes referred to as 'violent break, *Facies interrupta*';[49] it could never have happened to Eamon, since his body was never found. This lack of closure, and lack of ceremony, the fact that his body was returned to earth directly, unobserved, unattended and without burial, lead to Klara's internalisation of the memory of the face. To free herself from the face's tyranny, she imitates the 'violent break'.[50] The formation of the lover's face leads to the rupture necessary for healing to begin. But first, she has to recall every feature of the young man with astonishing precision, and 'peel back the layers the time had built around her visual memory'.[51] She remembers

> the bones under the skin, the scar on his left temple, the beautiful, full mouth, his upturned glance and radiant expression when searching the sky for a kite, an aeroplane . . . The two graceful wings of his eyebrows. How his hair fell when he threw his head back, the soft, slightly slanted contour of his eye. He had been only a boy, the inquisitive child he had been had never left his face. He must hold the torch aloft. But because this figure would become Eamon and would be looking up towards his beloved ether, his expression must be of astonishment . . . forever reaching toward the sky. His arm illuminating clouds.[52]

The images seem to melt into one another, overlapping, inter-connecting; the stone statue metamorphoses into Eamon, his eyebrows become aeroplane 'wings',[53] his body connects with the sky by a beam of light streaming out of his torch. The softness and sensuousness of this description could be misleading; memories do not simply enter Klara's consciousness in a film-like procession of frames. Rather, they are salvaged from oblivion in a brutal way, obtained with difficulty by the carver who uses tools of her trade not to mould the stone but to mould herself, as though separating the flesh of Eamon from her own flesh, or removing his death mask from the obverse side of her own face: 'She stood on the ladder, eyes squeezed shut, scraping these images from the deepest recesses of her memory as if using the sculpting tool on the inner curve of her skull'.[54] In accordance with the demands of the nekuia/katabasis topoi, Klara undergoes a 'rehearsal' of the past.[55] While carving, she has to 'lean over the upturned face . . . looking down at him as she had so often done as a girl, in haylofts, in orchards, in the sunroom . . . and . . . she felt as if she was falling into the ghost of an embrace'.[56] It seems that all the past instances of closeness between the lovers, now become one moment, relived through the process of carving. Her gesture of leaning over to approach the ghost may be metaphorically understood as a form of descent into the realm of the dead, where 'all pasts are made equally present'.[57] But Klara also descends into the realm of the dead in a more literal sense, when she chooses the network of trench tunnels as a place for love-making, with her new lover Giorgio.

The subterranean imagery in the novel forms part of a metaphoric dimension in the landscape as a whole. Urquhart divides it horizontally, into the space over and under the ground, and the narrative develops in parallel in both realms. The dividing line, however, does not imply a lack of connection. On the contrary, one realm depends on the other, and both create a larger 'interconnecting system',[58] whose description brings to mind a living organism: the tunnels serve as 'extended tangled roots reaching up to the monument above, feeding its construction by their very existence'.[59] This organic metaphor suggests that the world beneath the surface is alive: it is more than a foundation, it spurs the memorial's growth, which springs out of the earth like a tree. The way that Allward's actual construction interacted with the environment was itself not accidental. Architectural historian Jacqueline Hucker claims that 'for Allward it was extremely important that the monument not simply sit on the crest of the ridge but be positioned in such a way that it appeared to grow out of the battle landscape'.[60] In reality and in fiction, the subterranean world,

filled with detritus of war, is the source from which Vimy Memorial stems. Yet, despite its seemingly solid character, the earth does not, according to Urquhart, offer a sturdy foundation; it seems unfixed and fluid. The impression is achieved through water imagery and through references to the way in which loose material, the product of disintegration and war destruction, surges above the ground, reminding the living that what they build on is land occupied by the dead, a mass grave. It is clear, in the following description, that the earth that received war casualties, and which now has to be disturbed, is still fresh; the organic and inorganic debris that saturates it still, as if half alive, unfossilized, untouched by geological forces. This is a time when the war is still raw, both under the thin layer of dust and in the minds of the survivors.

> Body parts and clothing, bibles, family snapshots, letters, buttons, bones and belt buckles were unearthed daily, and under the plot of earth from which the central staircase would one day rise, the fully uniformed skeletal remains of a German general were disinterred . . . Once, a mine half a mile away exploded, unearthing a young oak tree and the carcass of a horse, intact, activated, it would seem, by the fractional movement of the underground growth of roots.[61]

Klara makes her journey into this realm. The trench tunnels, containing the remnants of the soldiers, is where she regularly meets her lover and fellow carver, Giorgio. At one point, he leads her deeper into the maze, to show her traces of the soldiers' lives, preserved in the darkness: 'The whole labyrinth seemed a parody of the world above as soldiers had chiselled into the passageways and underground rooms the names of places they have been fond of, or places they have imagined. One oval space had been called Centreton Ball Park, and another Convocation Hall'.[62] At this moment of exploration, Giorgio's role echoes the one of Virgil and Tiresias, as he, like a psychopomp, guides Klara through the network of tunnels in which she fears to lose herself. '"Are you sure you know where we're going?"',[63] she asks him, '"Will we be able to get back?"'.[64] The underground landscape, with familiar place names carved on the walls, signs of the lost life, can be read, not only as haunted, but also as a haunting in itself, a ghost of the physical world to which it refers. Suddenly, their lantern illuminates a carved portrait of a young soldier, executed by someone who, as Giorgio imagines, must have had 'compassion for the suffering of this face',[65] who must have cared about it the way that Klara cares about the face of the statue she carves above the ground. By association, the

portrait may be seen as a shadow of the effigy of Eamon; the sentiment that inspired its creation is the same. This encounter with this anonymous portrait prompts Giorgio to ask Klara to tell him the name of her dead lover, but she refuses to answer. Disappointed, he walks away towards the entrance, carrying the torch with him:

> The air around Klara grew first dim and then dark . . . Since the day of her departure, Klara had never once said aloud the name of her young lover. She felt that to release the syllables into the air all these years later would be a kind of amputation, a violent removal of a part of the self. To present them to the man she had so recently embraced would betray, she believed, Eamon's bright, eager passion, would for the second time annul it. She wanted to crawl away from Giorgio now, to curl up somewhere in the dark, alone . . . She had only two choices: to stay alone in the dripping shadows of the underground labyrinth or to follow Giorgio, follow his light.[66]

The idea of articulating the name of her lover is described, like the action of carving the face, in terms of the pain which Klara inflicts upon herself. The image of the physical desecration of the body is accompanied by the idea of the obliteration of love, already destroyed once by Eamon's departure. Yet, as the narrative subsequently reveals, this repetition is necessary if Klara is going to participate fully in life. In the passage, she refrains from fulfilling Giorgio's wish, but she already understands that this time, she would be the one to kill the 'eager passion' of Eamon's love. Cruel and bleak as it may be, the act of destruction suggests agency; Klara exerts control over the situation. It is her choice whether to perform the 'violent break', or to refrain from action, and stay 'in the dripping shadows'.[67] She follows the light.

Eventually, Klara discloses Eamon's name to Giorgio, and subsequently carves it on the monument, among the names of other Canadian soldiers who lost their lives in the war. By chiselling it letter by letter, Klara invokes the ghost once more; and this time again, as in her underground journey into the tunnels, she is led by Giorgio, who (in this case) guides her hands. The moment is described as the concluding stage in her journey, the final 'confrontation' with her dead lover: 'Klara knew this would be the last time she touched Eamon, that when they finished carving his name all the confusion and regret of his absence would unravel, just as surely as if she had embraced him with forgiving arms'.[68] Sorrow and passion 'enter' the monument's stone, which becomes, as was planned, 'a

huge urn . . . designed to hold grief'.[69] Eamon's death becomes a part of a broader war narrative, composed of the stories of (to use Primo Levi's term) 'complete witnesses':[70] those who have stared into the face of the Gorgon, and will never return to the world of the living. The litany of names covering the stone surfaces of the Vimy Memorial brings to mind the image of ghost-like silhouettes crossing London Bridge in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, moving in silent procession, not alive and yet not entirely dead either; a multitude of lost lives, embodying Wilfred Owen's 'pity of war'.[71] The gesture of carving the soldiers' names in stone is an attempt at commemoration and individualisation, but also an inscription of the stories that these names represent into the landscape of Vimy.

By fulfilling her artistic potential, Klara not only embeds Eamon's story in the larger story of war, but also inscribes herself into the narrative of her familial history; she sustains the tradition of her grandfather's craft, and equals him in the skills she has mastered. Becoming a carver means she maintains a continuity of experience with her ancestors, whose quiet graves inhabit the ground surrounding the church in Shoneval, the landscape she temporarily abandons to take part in the creation of the Vimy Memorial. On another level, through Urquhart's employment of the topoi of nekuia and katabasis, Klara's journey is situated within the enduring literary tradition of descent to the underworld, and confrontation with the dead. This mythologizes or universalizes Klara's story, even as it remains an intimate personal narrative of love and mourning. In this way, the novel encompasses the idea of eternal return and regeneration; the human need both to salvage and preserve memories from oblivion, and to renew, reconstruct and innovate, 'against the horizon of the past',[72] and in the face of death.

Notes

1   Referred to subsequently as Vimy Memorial in the rest of the article.
2   Jane Urquhart, 'Bringing Landscape Home: An Interview with Jane Urquhart', in *Bringing Landscape Home in the Writings of Jane Urquhart*, ed. Dorota Filipczak et al. (Łódź: Łódź University Press, 2010), 12.
3   Jane Urquhart, 'Confessions of a Historical Geographer', in *Speaking in the Past Tense*, ed. Herb Wyile. (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007), 101.
4   Urquhart, 'Confessions of a Historical Geographer', 100.
5   Jane Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2001), 105.
6   Craig Raine, 'Memories in Literature', in *Memory: An Anthology*, ed. Harriet Harvey Wood et al. (London: Vintage Books, 2009), 30–31.
7   Raine, 'Memories in Literature', 30–31.
8   Raine, 'Memories in Literature', 30–31.
9   William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 257.
10 Milan Kundera, *Ignorance*, trans. Lidia Aster (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 5.

11 Alicia Fahey, 'Voices from the Edge: De-Centering Master Narratives in Jane Urquhart's *The Stone Carvers*', in *The Great War in Post-memory Film and Literature,* ed. Martin Löschnigg et al. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), 411.

12 Fahey, 'Voices from the Edge', 411.

13 Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers*, 5.

14 Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers*, 6. My emphasis.

15 Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers*, 6.

16 Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers*, 6.

17 Johannes Renes, 'Layered Landscape', in *Biographies: Geographical, Historical and Archaeological Perspectives on the Production and Transmission of Landscapes*, ed. Jan Kolen et al. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 404.

18 Renes, 'Layered Landscape', 404.

19 Renes, 'Layered Landscape', 404.

20 Renes, 'Layered Landscape', 404.

21 Fahey, 'Voices from the Edge', 411.

22 Marta Dvorak and Héliane Daziron-Ventura, 'Resurgence', in *Resurgence in Jane Urquhart's Œuvre*, ed. Héliane Daziron-Ventura et al. (Bruxelles: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2010), 13.

23 Jane Urquhart, 'Confessions of a Historical Geographer', 100.

24 Jane Urquhart, 'Address', in *Resurgence in Jane Urquhart's Œuvre*, ed. Héliane Daziron-Ventura et al. (Bruxelles: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2010), 17.

25 Jane Urquhart, 'Address', 17.

26 Urquhart, 'Address', 17.

27 Urquhart, 'Address', 17.

28 Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers*, 5.

29 Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers*, 5.

30 Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers*, 1.

31 Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers*, 6.

32 Jane Urquhart, 'A Conversation with Jane Urquhart by Laura Ferri', in *Jane Urquhart: Essays on Her Works*, ed. Laura Ferri. (Toronto: Guernica, 2005), 19.

33 Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981–91* (London: Granta, 1991), 291. Italics in the original.

34 Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, 291. Italics in the original.

35 Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 75**–**76. Italics in the original.

36 Simon Critchley, *Very Little . . . Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy and Literature* (London: Routledge, 2000), 86.

37 Michael Thurston, *The Underworld in Twentieth-Century Poetry: From Pound and Eliot to Heaney and Walcott* (Palgrave Macmillan US, 2009), 2.

38 Thurston, *The Underworld in Twentieth-Century Poetry*, 4.

39 Neta Gordon, *Catching the Torch* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2014), 113.

40 Gordon, *Catching the Torch*, 106.

41 Gordon, *Catching the Torch*, 114.

42 Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers*, 332.

43 Julia Kristeva, *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 1.

44 Julia Kristeva, *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt*, 2. Italics in the original.

45 Jacqueline Hucker, 'Vimy: A Monument for the Modern World', *Journal of the Society for the Study if Architecture in Canada* 1 (2008): 46, 2017.

46 Hans Belting, *Face and Mask: A Double History*, trans. Thomas S. Hansen et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 77.

47 Belting, *Face and Mask*, 77.

48 Belting, *Face and Mask*, 77.

49 Belting, *Face and Mask*, 77. Italics in the original.

50 Belting, *Face and Mask*, 77.

51 Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers*, 332.

52 Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers*, 332–333.

53 Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers*, 332.

54 Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers*, 333.

55 Thurston, *The Underworld in Twentieth-Century Poetry*, 10–11.

56 Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers*, 333.

57 Thurston, *The Underworld in Twentieth-Century Poetry*, 11.

58 Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers*, 356.

59 Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers*, 356.

60 Hucker, 'Vimy: A Monument for the Modern World', 44.

61 Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers*, 271.

62 Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers*, 358.

63 Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers*, 359.

64 Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers*, 359.

65 Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers*, 360.

66 Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers*, 360–361.

67 Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers*, 360–361.

68 Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers*, 376.

69 Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers*, 377.

70 Primo, Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017), 70.

71 Wilfred Owen, 'Strange Meeting' in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Vol.2, ed. Meyer Howard Abrams. (Norton and Company: London, 1993), l. 25.

72 Thurston, *The Underworld in Twentieth-Century Poetry*, 6.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interests with this work.