Melting Ice and the Paradoxes of Zeno: Didactic Impulses and Aesthetic Distanciation in German Climate Change Fiction

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Abstract

Although global warming has been a topic of American and British popular fiction since the 1980s, its literary representation has only recently become an object of academic enquiry. Perhaps a score of German novels on the subject have also appeared, and critical analysis of these is now called for. Following a general outline of the socio-political, philosophical, and ethical issues which climate change raises, and of the particular aesthetic challenges which writing about global warming poses, Ilija Trojanow's *EisTau* (*Melting Ice*, 2011) serves as a basis for discussion of the tensions between confessional and didactic impulses on the one hand, and recognition of the need for an aesthetic facilitating detachment on the other.

Keywords: climate change, German literature, Ilija Trojanow, EisTau

Resumen

Aunque el calentamiento global ha aparecido en la literatura popular americana y británica desde los años 80, su representación literaria no se ha converitdo en objeto de investigación académica hasta recientemente. Quizá una veintena de novelas alemanas sobre el tema también han aparecido, requiriendo así un análisis critico. Siguiendo un resumen general de los asuntos socio-políticos, filosóficos y éticos que el cambio climático ha planteado, y de los desafíos estéticos particulares que surgen al escribir sobre el calentamiento global, la novela *EisTau* (*Melting Ice*, 2011) de Ilija Trojanow sirve como base para debatir las tensiones entre los impulsos confesionales y didácticos, por un lado, y sobre el reconocimiento de la necesidad de una estética que facilite el desapego, por otro.

Palabras clave: cambio climático, literatura alemana, Ilija Trojanow, *EisTau*

Literature and the challenge of climate change

There has been a burst of recent research activity on literary representations of climate change in the English-speaking world, with preliminary findings presented at conferences and written up as book chapters and journal articles.[1] The situation is similar for German climate change fiction. Climate change did not feature in the pioneering studies of German environmental criticism published by Jost Hermand, Hartmut Böhme, and Gerhard Kaiser in the early 1990s, nor was it present as an issue in the work of the interdisciplinary working group on the cultural history of the perception of nature led by Klaus Meyer-Abich at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities in Essen, which could be regarded as the first centre of ecocritical work in Germany. Among the few items of German literary criticism on climate change writing until quite recently are a pair of short essays by Peter Morris-Keitel published in 2004, which turn out to be largely concerned with American texts, and the final pages of a book *Natur– Literatur – Kultur: Literatur als kulturelle Ökologie* (*Nature – Literature – Culture: Literature as Cultural Ecology*, 2005), in which the Turkish scholar Nevzat Kaya discusses a novella by Wilhelm Wulf, *Eiszeit in Europa* (*Ice Age in Europe*, on the consequences of a breakdown in the Gulf Stream caused by melting of the polar icecap).

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[1] Conferences in 2010 include 'Changing the Climate,' at the Centre for Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies at Monash University, and 'Green Cultures: Environmental Knowledge, Climate, and Catastrophe,' at the Rachel Carson Centre in Munich. In 2011 a string of papers on climate change were presented at the ASLE biennial conference in Bloomington. Climate change was the focus of one-day conferences convened at Bath Spa University in 2011 and the University of Lund's Centre for Sustainability Studies in 2012. Publications on the topic include Adam Trexler and Adeline Johns-Putra's groundbreaking overview of American and British climate change fiction, "Climate Change in Literature and Literary Criticism"; Hayden Gabriel and Greg Garrard's chapter, "Reading and Writing Climate

In the last two years, however, as in the English-speaking world, things have changed. A working group on 'Climate Culture' led by the sociologist Claus Leggewie at the Essen Institute of Advanced Studies has been researching the perception and social consequences of climate change, exploring questions of social responsibility, cultural memory and intercultural difference. The proceedings from an interdisciplinary conference on 'Atmosphären. Wetter und Klima: Kultur – Wissen – Ästhetik' ('Atmospheres. Weather and Climate: Culture – Knowledge – Aesthetics') held by Georg Braungart and Urs Büttner at the University of Tübingen in 2009 are shortly to appear in print,[2] while a selection of the papers delivered at the International Germanists' Conference in Warsaw in the summer of 2010 in a section devoted to 'Klimachaos und Naturkatastrophen in der deutschen Literatur: Desaster und deren Deutung' ('Climate Chaos and Natural Catastrophes in German Literature: Disasters and their Interpretation') has since appeared in the journal *Ecozon@*.[3]

On the one hand, this recent interest reflects the emergence of global warming as an issue of public concern since the late 1980s, its development into an ideological battlefield, and controversies over the handling of scientific uncertainty by policy makers and the media; on the other, it is a reaction to the presence of these concerns in a growing body of novels, essays, plays and poems. There is growing recognition that it will take more than just the natural sciences to meet the challenge of climate change, because it calls on us to balance our own convenience and pleasure against those of other people and future generations, and the rights of animals and nature. It demands that we reconsider our values and change habits grounded in centuries of cultural tradition and thought which the humanities can throw light on.

Change"; passages and sections in books by Ursula Heise (*Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*), Scott Slovic (*Going Away to Think*) and Patrick Murphy (*Ecocritical Explorations in Literary and Cultural Studies*); essay volumes such as *Changing the Climate: Utopia, Dystopia and Catastrophe* (ed. Andrew Milner et al.) and *American Environments: Climate – Cultures – Catastrophe* (ed. Christof Mauch and Sylvia Mayer); and special numbers of the journals *Oxford Literary Review* (ed. Timothy Clark) and *symplokē* (ed. Adeline Johns-Putra and Ian Buchanan).

[2] Georg Braungart and Urs Büttner, *Wind und Wetter*.

[3] Gabriele Dürbeck, *Writing Catastrophes*. Work in hand at the time of writing (March 2013) includes preparation by Sabine Wilke for a conference on 'Culture and the Anthropocene' at the Rachel Carson Center in June 2013 (as part of a Transatlantic Network in Environmental Humanities sponsored by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation); a DFG-funded network on 'Ethik und Ästhetik in literarischen Repräsentationen ökologischer Transformationen' led by Evi Zemanek in Freiburg im Breisgau; plans for a DVAGL (comparative literature) conference 'Literatur und Ökologie. Neuere literatur- und kulturwissenschaftliche Perspektiven' in Saarbrücken in June 2014; a Habilitation project on literary meteorology (Urs Büttner), and a PhD on German climate change fiction at the University of Potsdam (Nadja Türke).

Climate change stories have become popular vehicles for reflection on our values, prompting readers to think about the right way to live. This rightness starts with the recognition of what is physically sustainable in the longer term, but is also a matter of the balance between material goods and aesthetic/ spiritual benefits, and of that between individual freedom and self-realisation on the one hand and the welfare of others (including future generations) on the other. In America, global warming literature began in the late 1970s, with Arthur Herzog's *Heat* (1977), and grew gradually throughout the 1980s and 1990s (George Turner's *The Sea and the Summer* [1987] and Norman Spinrad's *Greenhouse Summer* [1999] being well-known examples). In an article in the Wiley Interdisciplinary Review, *Climate Change*, Adam Trexler and Adeline Johns-Putra have identified over a hundred American and British novels worthy of critical attention, with something of an explosion in the last ten years. Climate change literature constitutes, they suggest, a new genre characterised by a mix of factual research and speculative imagination. While some popular writing on global warming simply uses the subject as a background for disaster scenarios and conspiracy plots, a significant number of novels have approached the subject more thoughtfully. Complex works rewarding study include novels by T. C. Boyle (*A Friend of the Earth* [2000]), Margaret Atwood (*Oryx and Crake* [2003], *The Year of the Flood* [2009]), Kim Stanley Robinson's "Science in the Capital" trilogy (2004-7), Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2007) and Paolo Baciagalupi's *The Wind-Up Girl* (2009). British writing includes Ben Elton's political satire *This Other Eden* (1993), David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004), Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* (2008), Liz Jensen's *The Rapture*, and Ian McEwan's *Solar* (both 2010).

Since the 1990s, some 15 to 20 popular novels on global warming have appeared in Germany. These range from the elegiac to the satirical, and from passionate indictment to sceptical refutation. Anton-Andreas Guha's *Der Planet schlägt zurück* (*The Planet Strikes Back*, 1993) was an early example of German climate change sci fi. Thrillers and eco-horror novels include Frank Schätzing's phenomenally successful *Der Schwarm* (*The Swarm*, 2004), Ulrich Hefner's *Die dritte Ebene* (*The Third Level*, 2009) and Klaus Lehner's *Natürlich grausam* (*Naturally Cruel*, 2008). Literary treatment of climate change in the German language also includes works of young adult literature, seeking to enlighten readers at the same time as entertaining them,[4] and less readily classifiable works such as Liane Dirks's stream-of-consciousness account of the experience of global warming in an urban environment from a feminist standpoint, *Falsche Himmel* (*False Skies*, 2006), and Christian Kracht's cynical *Metan* (*Methane*, 2007).[5] 2011 saw the publication of three new global warming novels. Dirk Fleck's *Maeva!* (*Maeva!*) was the final part of a trilogy of speculative accounts of the consequences of climate change which had begun with *GO! Die Ökodiktatur* (*GO! The Eco-Dictatorship*) in 1994.[6] Nele Neuhaus's crime novel *Wer Wind sät* (*He Who Sows Wind*, 2011) resembles Michael Crichton's *State of Fear* in interpreting global warming as a conspiracy of scientists seeking funding for their project teams, consequently a matter for healthy scepticism and self-assertion against authority. And Ilija Trojanow's *EisTau* (*Melting Ice*) explores the physical, social and psychological consequences of climate change, through the story of a German climate scientist whose life is thrown into crisis

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[4] Claus-Peter Hutter and Eva Goris's *Die Erde schlägt zurück* is an attractive book in which passages of narrative alternate with summaries of research findings. See also Cornelia Franz, *Ins Nordlicht blicken*.

[5] Liane Dirks, *Falsche Himmel*; Christian Kracht and Ingo Niermann, *Metan*.

[6] Dirk C. Fleck, *GO! Die Ökodiktatur*; *Das Tahiti-Projekt*; and *Maeva!*.

when the Alpine glacier which he has spent his life observing and measuring melts, leaving just a heap of muddy boulders.[7]

What role does such writing play in environmental communication, debates, and education? In his essay, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," Dipesh Chakrabarty has explored the implications for the humanities of the concept of the 'anthropocene' popularised by the atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen. The idea that we have entered a new geological epoch since human activities have acquired a significant global impact on the Earth's ecosystems undermines the traditional distinction between human history and natural history. Chakrabarty argues that the crisis of climate change demands that we create imaginative links between the timescale of geological time and that of human life. This is a challenge which climate change fiction seeks to meet, but at the same time one which presents it with particular difficulties.

In an article written in 2005, the British nature writer Robert Macfarlane suggested that novels can provide the "imaginative repertoire [...] by which the causes and consequences of climate change can be debated, sensed, and communicated."[8] With its special ability to allow us to entertain hypothetical situations, alternative lives, or futures, or landscapes, as though they were real, literature has, Macfarlane argued, a role to play in leading us to alter our habits of consumption and take political action. But climate change presents the literary imagination with a series of difficulties. It must avoid the temptation to indulge in apocalyptic scenarios, and find ways of imagining which remain honest to scientific evidence. Art and science must collaborate, Macfarlane concluded, in fighting anthropogenic global warming.[9] These are then the aspirations against which climate change novels must ultimately be measured.

Questions which climate change raises for literary critics include: How is it made real to the reader? How is the science integrated into the story? How are fictional characters and narratives used to illustrate the ethical challenge of caring for future generations, for instance by experimenting with attitudes and patterns of behaviour? How are we led, for instance by the distribution and development of affective foci, to re-think our relationship with animals and the natural environment? How are 'natural' disasters unpacked, showing the extent to which they are either caused or aggravated by human decisions and actions? Is language used to reconnect us with nature, place, our body and our feelings, and to overcome the alienation of modern urban life? Are readers empowered and mobilised through the presentation of role models or alternative utopian societies? What limitations do modes of writing such as apocalypse and pastoral bring with them? If, for instance, novels offer apocalyptic warnings, where do these leave the reader? And, last but not least, how do authors succeed in moving their readers and communicating new insights without preaching and alienating them in the process? Ilija Trojanow is an author whose books addressing subjects such as migration, Islam and invasions of the private sphere have been described as "Protestaktionen in

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[7] Further titles include Karl-Heinz Tuschel, *Der Mann von IDEA*; Till Bastian, *Tödliches Klima*; Dieter Oesterwind, *Steinerne Glut*. Christa Wolf's *Sommerstück* is arguably an early contribution to the genre.

[8] Robert Macfarlane, "The Burning Question".

[9] The climate scientist and media commentator Mike Hulme has turned this argument on its head, arguing in his book *Why We Disagree About Climate Change* that the idea of climate change constitutes an imaginative resource which can be made to do work for us (359). Stories of climate change can help us to renegotiate wider social goals: "We may no longer see climate as the domain of local gods or a reflection of local (im)moral behaviours, but we can use the idea of global climate change to tell ourselves new stories about our globalised gods and about the consequences of our collective behaviours. [....] We can use the stories we tell about climate change – the myths we construct – to rethink the ways in which we connect our cultural, spiritual and material pursuits"(357).

Prosaform" ("protest demonstrations in prose").[10] In the following, his *Melting Ice*, which is probably the best-known German novel to date focused explicitly on global warming, serves as a basis for discussion of the tensions between confessional and didactic impulses on the one hand, and recognition of the need for an aesthetic facilitating detachment on the other.

The unresolved paradox of Zeno in Trojanow's *Melting Ice*

In December 2008, Ilija Trojanow published an essay in the German weekly *Die Zeit* describing a trip to the Antarctic.[11] It marked the beginning of his work on the novel *Melting Ice*.[12] However, the work progressed slowly. In November 2010 a second essay, entitled "Requiem auf die Zukunft. Wie schreibt man einen Roman über die Klimakatastrophe?" ("Requiem for the Future. How does one write a novel about climate catastrophe?"), appeared in the Austrian paper *Der Standard*. Trojanow began by noting that climate change had effectively prompted him to write his very first literary piece, an account of the terrible consequences of drought he had just experienced in northern Kenya. Growing up in Africa as a privileged foreigner, he felt ashamed at being unable to help when people around him were starving and dying. But for a long time he had been unable to find a literary form capable of doing justice to a catastrophe so overwhelming in size, which involved suffering at such a remove from his readers. As a non-expert, he was dependent on the observations and assurances of others: measurements in parts per million did not fire the imagination.

At first, he could see no solution to the problem facing the writer. However, he started having a recurring nightmare. In his dream, a glaciologist lay on a heap of boulders, all that remained of a melted glacier, mourning the loss of what had for decades been the object of his scientific attention. The more Trojanow's thoughts returned to the glaciologist, the more despairing the man's reflections on the meaning of life and the future of human civilisation became, until they amounted to a total rejection of the principles underlying our economy, our everyday actions, and our intellectual and spiritual life. Relating climate change to a fictional character who combined scientific knowledge of it with such a powerful emotional response to its consequences gave Trojanow the angle he needed to write about it. He decided to set his novel in the Antarctic, where his protagonist, Zeno Hintermeier, seeks comfort in an environment so far largely untouched and intact. Zeno leaves the research institute in Munich where he has been working, and takes a job as lecturer and guide on a cruise ship doing Antarctic tours. However, the impact of climate change is already visible in the melting ice sheets of the Western Antarctic, and Zeno is increasingly alienated by the rich passengers' lack of real respect for nature. He sees the melting ice as a direct consequence of man's destructive consumption of nature, and evidence that it is only a matter of time before humanity brings about its own demise.

The purpose of his novel, Trojanow reflects, will be to make his readers take this seriously, to make them identify with the glaciologist's radical passion. Alongside Zeno's

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[10] Laura Hamdorf, "Trojanow-Roman: Kälter wird's nicht".

[11] Ilija Trojanow, "Antarktis: Die letzte Leere".

[12] References below appear as simple page numbers in brackets in the text. Since the book has not yet appeared in English, the translations are my own. The English title has been taken from the website of *New Books in German* (http://www.new-books-in-german.com/english/948/313/96/_129002/design1.html), which showcases selected works of contemporary German literature and promotes the sale of translation rights.

wounded, angry voice, the book will, however, need a second layer of reality, showing the man as a prophet crying in the wilderness. This will be conveyed partly through the reactions of the other characters, and partly through passages made up of advertising slogans and cynical turns of phrase from the media. Trojanow ends the article by reflecting on the writer's task and the limitations of literature's potential achievement. Global warming sounds comfortingly cosy, but in reality it means famine, war and mass migration. Responsible for it are capitalist consumption and waste. There is no force on Earth powerful enough to change this. Literature can only depict an individual in their seemingly futile effort to resist it, and trust this will move readers to reflect and perhaps draw their own consequences.

How are these intentions, whose sincerity we have no reason to doubt, translated into literary form? At the heart of Trojanow's novel is the conviction that, anaesthetised by consumption (66, 126), we have ceased to see, hear and feel nature: Zeno describes his contemporaries as blind, and as sleepwalkers (104, 116), destroying what is intrinsically valuable in order to produce things they don't need (131). *Melting Ice* came out in an initial print run of 100,000, together with an illustrated edition and an audio book version, and has since been adapted successfully for the stage in Bremerhaven.[13] A melancholic musical accompaniment was composed by Hans Huyssen for a series of 'concert readings' with which Trojanow toured Germany and Austria to launch the book. The author acted out parts of Zeno's narrative in a sort of musical drama,[14] encouraging an understanding of Zeno as a mouthpiece of the author, and privileging moralising and emotional appeal over rational engagement with the problem. Trojanow's message that we must learn to divest ourselves of our sense of human superiority over nature struck a chord with the public, but professional reviewers deplored what they saw as his reliance on alarmist pathos to convey it. Although, as I argue below, the book actually seeks to challenge readers to find a third way between the tourists' indifference to climate change and Zeno's misanthropy, despair, and eventual suicide, some passages read embarrassingly like a straightforward outpouring of the author's feelings. The book was therefore read as a *roman a thèse*, a finger-wagging work of "ecological warning," and described as a "confessional novel for saving the Antarctic".[15] Zeno was, it was claimed, more a vehicle for the author's views than a man of flesh and blood, and the other figures in the book were either projections of politically correct multiculturalism or other one-dimensional stereotypes. A fantasy uneasily located between "ecoterrorism" and "redemption through self-immolation," *Melting Ice* was unlikely to convince readers or empower them to act.[16]

While I would agree that Trojanow's novel is not entirely successful, he can be shown to have adopted a number of strategies in the effort to avoid crude didacticism, which were overlooked by these reviewers. For while the figure of Zeno undoubtedly invites identification from the reader, that does not necessarily mean he is presented as

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[13] The unconventional production (March 2012, adapted by Natalie Driemeyer and Lorenz Langenegger and directed by Till Wyler von Ballmoos) involved the audience directly in the action, and included members of the nearby Alfred Wegener Institute for Polar and Marine Research as members of the cast acting tour guides on board the cruise ship.

[14] See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ELt6OHsZKd0 Accessed 3 March 2013.

[15] See for instance Gabriele von Arnim, "Der Gletscher ruft".

[16] Wolfgang Büscher in *Die Zeit*, Tilman Spreckelsen in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Ulrich Rüdenauer in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Martin Halter in the *Badische Zeitung* and Sibylle Birrer in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* were similarly critical. Laura Hamdorf reached a more positive assessment in the *Spiegel*; the most sympathetic commentary is H. Yurén's somewhat later review of the book and its press reception in *Der Freitag*.

a role model. To start with, there is his name. This may be intended as a reference to Zeno of Citium, founder of the Stoic school of philosophy in Athens, which emphasised the peace of mind gained from living a virtuous life in accordance with nature. At one point Zen Buddhism, with its acceptance of the Tao, or forces of nature, is also alluded to. But Trojanow may on the other hand have been thinking of the eponymous hero of Italo Svevo's 1923 novel, *Zeno's Conscience*, who never quite manages to give up smoking, and resembles the glaciologist in being a quixotic figure, narrating his own life, and generating comic effect through the discrepancy between his subjective perspective on the world and external reality. It is also plausible to assume that Trojanow is consciously referencing Zeno's Paradoxes and thereby hinting at his protagonist's contradictions – perhaps even at unresolved contradictions in the structure of his novel.[17]

On the positive side, Zeno possesses an emotional bond with ice which merges into religious feeling for nature's plenitude and diversity (90), and appreciation of its beauty in poetic passages describing the Antarctic as Earth's last great wilderness (65, 77f., 149f.). He tells us he has been fascinated by glaciers since his childhood, and as a student, he climbed into a glacier, and tobogganed down a cavity inside it (89-90). Among the most memorable passages in the novel are lines describing the shape, colour, sounds, feel, smell, and taste of glaciers and icebergs. Trojanow shifts from endorsement to ridicule, however, when he goes on to present Zeno's relationship with 'his' glacier as that of a lover. Zeno endows it with a unique, quasi-human identity, and implies that it returns his feelings: "Wir waren wie ein altes Liebespaar, einer von uns beiden war schwer erkrankt, und der andere konnte nichts dagegen unternehmen" (51, "We were like a loving old couple, one of us had become seriously ill, and the other could do nothing about it").

The doubts which Zeno's surname, Hintermeier, sows in our minds about whether he can be taken as a role model are confirmed in passages in his diary entries which make up the greater part of the text where he rails against "unsere hochdotierte Verkommenheit" (68, "our highly paid depravity"). We know so much about climate change but fail so miserably to draw practical consequences and change our way of life. The voice of his own and our collective guilty conscience ("Worthalter des eigenen Gewissens," 18), Zeno seeks to change the way people think. But he slips again and again into moral indignation, invectives against his fellow men and women, and Jeremiads predicting the extinction of the human race, based on the premise: "Etwas muss geschehen. Es ist höchste Zeit." (18, "Something must be done. It's our last opportunity.").

Trojanow seeks to distance himself from such environmentalist apocalypticism by presenting Zeno as marked by inconsistency and cowardice. Critical detachment is evident from the opening chapter on, where Zeno's fellow guides greet a remark castigating his contemporaries with a groan: all too often have they heard such statements herald an apocalyptic rant: "Sie wissen aus Erfahrung, wenn Mr. Iceberger apodiktisch loslegt, endet es apokalyptisch" (15, "They know from experience that when Mr. Iceberger get's going apodictically, it will end apocalyptically"). Zeno is put in his place by the barkeeper, who reminds him that he is making his living from guiding rich tourists around the Antarctic (17). Zeno appears, then, to be an alter ego of the author, sharing his views, but demonstrating how untenable they become when taken to a logical extreme. The passage pre-empts the possible accusation by readers that Trojanow is himself guilty of hypocrisy, for writing a travel narrative which may encourage people to go on Antarctic cruises[18] makes him complicit in the destruction of the Antarctic environment. Having used emotion to focus public attention, Trojanow presents no solution to the problems this leads to, but he openly acknowledges that they remain unresolved.

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[17] The Presocratic philosopher Zeno of Elea devised celebrated paradoxes including the 'Arrow Paradox', which denies the possibility of motion, since in any one (durationless) instant of time, the arrow is neither moving in the place it is, nor in one where it is not, and the paradox of Achilles and the Tortoise, which states: "[B]efore Achilles can catch the tortoise he must reach the point where the tortoise started. But in the time he takes to do this the tortoise crawls a little further forward. So next Achilles must reach this new point. But in the time it takes Achilles to achieve this the tortoise crawls forward a tiny bit further. And so on to infinity: every time that Achilles reaches the place where the tortoise was, the tortoise has had enough time to get a little bit further, and so Achilles has another run to make, and so Achilles has in infinite number of finite catch-ups to do before he can catch the tortoise, and so, Zeno concludes, he never catches the tortoise." See Nick Huggett, "Zeno's Paradoxes."

Zeno's unremittingly bleak vision of human beings as 'aliens' in nature (13), destroying the very things they love, is contrasted with the warmth, forgiveness, and laughter of Paulina, the Filipino barmaid he shares his cabin with. Although he expresses moral reprehension over the colonial exploitation of the native people of Patagonia, where the cruise starts, and speaks angrily of the treatment of the Filipinos on board the *Hansen*, Zeno's relationship with Paulina is no less exploitative: at one point he refers dismissively to her relatives as a "menagerie" (10), and he gives no thought to her situation when they are not together, or what might become of her after his death. Zeno's diary of the Antarctic cruise is thus constructed in such a way as to reveal its author's shortcomings, despite inviting us to identify with him.

The elements of detachment from Zeno are, however, undermined by a second aesthetic strategy. Trojanow interleaves his protagonist's twelve diary entries, which are headed by Roman numerals and the ship's position in longitude and latitude, and printed in Times Roman typeface, with shorter chapters printed in a sans serif font, and numbered in Arabic numerals. These consist, as the author hinted in his article in *Der Standard*, of a collage of phrases from the language of advertising, interspersed with news flashes and radio messages exchanged by sea and air controllers and the pilots of ships and aircraft. Through the radio exchanges we gradually learn about the fate of the *Hansen* and its passengers. Chronologically, the messages start at the point where the main narrative ends. They fill the reader in on events which take place after the end of Zeno's account: the loss of radio contact with the *Hansen*, the discovery that it is steaming into the open Atlantic after abandoning the ship's passengers and crew, and how arrangements are made to rescue them. We discover how Zeno converted a simulated emergency into a real one.

This crucial information is provided in disjointed fragments which are buried in verbal material reflecting the commodification of nature in package tourism and of human relations in pornography and prostitution, through ironic paraphrases of advertising slogans such as "raffen Sie, solange der Vorrat reicht" (62, "grab what you can while stocks last") and "Wir graben Ihrer Zukunft ein Zuhause" (93, "We're digging a home for your future"). The alienation from the natural world and our own bodies which this implies is further articulated in allusions to birds falling from the skies which recall Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (109, 129). This all seems to endorse Zeno's apocalyptic worldview, rather implying authorial distance from it.

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[18] Zeno's diary describes the places visited, conveying historical, geographical and scientific information on the Antarctic. His vivid descriptions of the Falkland Islands, an abandoned whaling station of Grytviken in South Georgia, and the coastline of King George Island and Deception Island can be seen in the context of Trojanow's other novels, in which fiction is blended with travel writing.

Passages reflecting implicitly and explicitly on what art, literature and the imagination can realistically do in a world where scientists have become “Makler der Vernichtung” (“brokers of annihilation,” 116), and whose demands overtax people’s moral imagination (“es überfordert den Menschen, im Sinne einer Zukunft zu handeln, die er nicht mehr erleben wird” – “it is asking too much of people to expect them to act as required by a future which they won’t experience themselves,” 152) also fail to resolve the dilemma posed by Trojanow’s concern about climate change and simultaneous recognition of the limitations of alarmism. The action comes to a head during an art installation masterminded by Dan Quentin, a figure loosely modelled on the performance artist Christo (cf. 62). The ship’s 220 passengers are assembled in a giant SOS, and photographed from the air as a call for public attention to the melting of the Antarctic ice and, by implication, the consequences of global warming. For Zeno, this is merely a cheap pseudo-protest, incapable of giving insight or bringing anyone to actually change their attitude. Only a genuine distress signal could do justice to the situation. He manages to get the ship’s crew to join the formation, and sails off alone. When the *Hansen* is eventually located and boarded, the highjacker has jumped overboard. Trojanow thus denigrates the showmanship of artists whom he sees as orchestrating the end of the world for entertainment, peddling indulgences to the guilty public, and ultimately serving the interests of those in power. Yet Zeno’s suicide presents no viable alternative.

Zeno expresses indignation that contemporary writers are discouraged from trying to enlighten the public, while works of classical literature, which have always sought to make their readers think differently, are still being read after centuries. How can one shake up the public? Neither shaming people nor tugging on their heart strings works: only violence can escape commercial instrumentalisation, he muses. And even then, we have to experience the violence ourselves for it to move us (147). Principled but crazy (“Spinner mit Überzeugung,” 140), Zeno is not, as we have seen, a model to be copied: he should rather be understood as a provocative challenge to readers and writers alike. Trojanow comes perilously close to preaching, however, and alienating sceptical readers. “Ich bin immer wieder entsetzt, wenn ich gefragt werde, ob ich denn Literatur für ein Instrument der Aufklärung erachte. Ja, was denn sonst? Der Fernseher etwa? Literatur muss gegenwärtig sein in dem Sinne, dass sie den Irrsinn der eigenen Epoche spiegelt und zu überwinden trachtet” (“I am always flabbergasted when I am asked whether I regard literature as an instrument of enlightenment. Well, what else could play that role? Television? Literature must be timely in the sense of holding a mirror up to the madness of the age and seeking to overcome it”), he remarked in an interview when the book came out.[19] Trojanow would not seem to have found an entirely satisfactory aesthetic form to communicate his environmentalist message and change hearts and minds. Zeno’s direct emotional appeal to the reader undermines the mechanisms through which the author seeks to distance himself from his protagonist’s apocalyptic pessimism. The pathos with which his anger and despair are dramatised runs the risk of compromising Trojanow’s undoubted effort to prompt readers to find other, more constructive ways of responding to the situation. But *Melting Ice* succeeds not merely in drawing attention to the issue, but also in reflecting on the paradoxes of a *littérature engagée*.

Received 6 March 2013 Revised version accepted 19 April 2013

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[19] Stefan Gmünder, “Ilija Trojanow: Vor der Katastrophe”.

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